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Prologue

We all have wish to find never ending joy and happiness. I find that doing things your own way is the only way that can be possible. Well doing things my own way has made my parents view me as a failure. A person who settled for mediocrity instead of reaching for the best life has to offer. "You have passed your matric with seven distinctions. Passed top of your class in mathematics and science. You have companies begging to sponsor your tertiary education in real careers yet you want to go teach primary school brats. You obtained your matric qualification at the age of sixteen. Why would you want to waste such a great mind in a career that won't even challenge you? Well good luck in finding someone to fund your education because I am not", my father said the day I told him that I want to study BEd (Foundation Phase). His words are embedded in my mind and they still hurts me whenever I think of them. I made it even worse when I told them that I'm going to have a

child at just 22 years old. You see, the fact that I was having a child was not the most shocking part about the news. What shocked them most was that I would be adopting my best friend's then two year old daughter, Talia Swarez. I met Tatiana Swarez when I was 18 years old. When I was 20 we decided to be flatmates and share living costs. She was already pregnant then but I didn't mind having a child in the flat. The baby was born. I was in Talia's life since the day she was born but I never expected that her mother would die just two years after having her. What shocked me was when Tatiana's lawyer called me for a meeting for a will reading. I was the only one present since she left her belongings to me. I didn't even know she had a lawyer. The will stated that she leaves R500 000 to me. A shocker it was because she was just a waitress who had no family since she was abandoned by her parents and grew up in an orphanage. She was beautiful. Long black hair with caramel colour skin. Talia's face is a bit darker than her mother's and she has a soft, curly afro instead of sleek hair but she looks like Tatiana. I thought she'd only leave clothing and other important things she gathered but never that amount of money. "Miss Swarez, also places her daughter Talia Swarez in your care and asked that you be the legal guardian of the little girl. If not she will be placed into the system and be given to foster parents", he calmly said while I was still shocked by the amount of money Tatiana left me. I remember storming out of the lawyer's offices

thinking that there's no way I can adopt a child at just 22 years. Well I changed my mind later because I didn't want Talia growing up going from one foster mother to another. The lawyer helped and I fostered her for a while until the law finally allowed me to adopt her legally. My young age and the fact that I'm not married made the process a bit difficult but since there was a will with Tatiana's wishes for a daughter's future the adoption got approved. I changed her name to Talia Chulumanco Zweni. "You gave the child my surname? How stupid can you be, Othunyiweyo? Who the hell adopts a baby at age 22?, my father said with anger in his voice the day that I told them the adoption was approved. I could see the look of disappointment in his eyes and it was more intense than with any other day he expressed his disappointment in me. "Do you even know who the father of this child is? Why doesn't he look after his child? Did that girl tell you?", my mother said in support of her husband as usual. "Tatiana made a mistake so she didn't know who the father was."

I remember saying softly. "You are more stupid than I thought then", My dad shouted. "To raise a child of a woman who had no family and now we know she was also a slut who didn't know the father of her child. You are a stupid, stupid girl. Don't expect us to be a part of that child's life", my mother hissed. So my relationship with my parents became even more broken and perhaps even non-existent. My name is Othunyiweyo

Zweni, a 26 year old primary school teacher at one of Cape Town's multiracial schools. My grade three's are my joy and I do not regret choosing this career. I'm also a single mother to Chulu who is going to turn six soon. Four years of being her mom and I still have no regrets no matter how difficult it gets at times. My father, 56 year old Kumkani Zweni is a profound businessman with construction businesses. A millionaire and I've lost count of the number of companies he is a shareholder in. My mother, 50 year old Unathi Zweni is a social worker by profession but retired herself soon after she met my father. Now she is a social butterfly instead of a social worker. My brother, 28 year old Langa Zweni. He studied BSc (Construction Economics) and is an executive in one of our father's companies. Needless to say he's my father's pride and joy unlike me. Then last but not least my wonderful grandmother Nomhle Zweni, a 73 year old retired nurse. She is my rock. I have four friends. Nozuko Hans, Poppy "La it girl" Thonga. Felicia Potter and Yandisa Dudumashe. I lead a pretty "normal" life but hey life is full of unpredictable moments because we don't know what the future holds.

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Othu

I woke up with early and with great excitement today and that's unusual for me on a Monday morning. Not only will I see my lovely class soon but my paternal grandma is coming later today to visit from the rural areas. I got up and had my morning tea and went to get ready for the day. I went to Chulu's room and found her sleeping in the most uncomfortable position ever. Good thing she has a bed of her own. I first just looked at her for a while and felt grateful for having her in my life. I shook her lightly and she opened her eyes slowly. "It's time to get ready for school, bhabha", I said softly and carried her.

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Chulu: Mommy but I thought we aren't going to school today.
(she said softly and I laughed)

Me: I never made you that promise, Chulz.

Chulu: Makhulu is coming so it won't be nice if she finds us gone. She will be sad.

Me: Her bus is only arriving later. By the time she comes we will be home already. Come on, I thought you're excited about school because you said you'll be doing finger painting. (she smiled)

Chulu: Yes I'm excited about that. I'll bring you my work if my teacher allows it, okay mommy.

Me: I'd love that so much and makhulu will be able to see it too but for now let's get you ready so we can go. Good morning by the way. (she smiled and hugged me)

Chulu: Good morning, mommy.

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We went to the bathroom and I helped get ready. They don't wear uniform yet so I have to pick out clothes everyday. She is in grade "R" at the school I'm working at and it makes both our lives so much better. I got her dressed and after we were decent enough I made her cereal and she ate while I made our lunch boxes . I packed our lunch and snacks in separate cooler bags and when everything was done we our took my bags and we left the apartment in a hurry hoping to beat the morning traffic. I still drive the car my grandmother gave me when I was just 20 years old. It was actually bought for her by my dad but she decided that I'm in much more need of it than her. I got onto the road and the traffic was not so bad. I listened to my favourite breakfast show on the radio and we would occasionally sing along when a nice song is played. I finally arrived and parked underneath a tree because it's a hot and humid day. I stepped out, open the door and unbuckled her car seat. She stepped out and I grabbed our bags heading straight

to her part of the school area. They have a play area for them so that's where they go early mornings when the day is beautiful enough. We greeted her teacher. I knelt down, kissed her forehead, wished her a good day and watched as she ran to where her friends were playing. She turned to give one last wave as she usually does when I bring her to her class. I waved back with a big smile on my face. I went put her stuff in her box inside her classroom and left that section of the school. I made my way to the staff room. Yandi is not here yet. I greeted all who were present already and put my juice and salad in the fridge. I made a cup of coffee while eating my cereal. Most of the teachers also joined. Yandisa finally made an appearance looking rather exhausted. I poured coffee for her and offered it to her with a smile.

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Yandi: You are a lifesaver, my friend. Good morning by the way. (she smiled and hugged me)

Me: Good morning, Mam. You look exhausted already and it's not even 10'o clock yet. (she exhaled loudly)

Yandi: The ancestors do not know when it's time for me to sleep. I had confusing dreams all night long and only got about an hour of proper sleep.

Me: I'm sorry, friend. I'm sure it's not easy. Drink you coffee and hopefully you'll feel a bit more awake.

Yandi: I at times hate my life, Othu. Who is going to marry me when I toss and turn most nights? I'm surprised that Vuyo is still around. (I laughed)

Me: He's a very good man who is not bothered by things beyond our control and he understands that your gift is a part of who we are as Africans. Hold on to that man of yours.

Yandi: I sometimes don't believe that he chose me, friend. When we met I was still in the process of being a traditional healer and it was not easy because I had a lot of anger to the ancestors for choosing me and would take it out of him but he stuck it out. I don't deserve him because even now my life is not easy. Enough about me though. How are you and the little princess?

Me: Being a single mother is not easy, Yandi but we are good thanks. Here comes Mr Thorn.

Yandi: Arg I hope he keeps it brief today with just a prayer. I want to go sit in my class already before the bell rings.

Me: You know that there's no "brief meeting" with Mr Thorn. (we laughed)

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The principle finally walked in and greeted all his teachers. A few were late and I'm sure it's the crazy traffic. That's why I come to work earlier because traffic becomes crazy by the minute. "Miss Zweni, I ask that you please say a prayer to get the day started on the right note", Mr Thorn said while looking at me with a smile. It's a shock to us all that he asked one of us to lead the prayer because usually he prefers to do it himself. I'm most definitely not afraid of praying in front of many because my grandmother taught me how to pray at a very young age. We all bowed our heads and closed our eyes.

"Dear heavenly Father, thank for yet another beautiful day. I ask that you please continue giving us the strength and wisdom to inspire the young minds that we are so blessed to be teachers to. Help us to be kind and gentle with each and every single learner and also to bring peace to our classrooms. In Jesus Christ name. Amen", I prayed softly yet loud enough for all to hear. All said amen at the end of the prayer and we lifted our heads to look at Mr Thorn. "Thank you very much, Mam", he said. I smiled and nodded and he proceeded with today's brief. It was short and to the point and we were all surprised.

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Yandi: Heee! I wonder why the headmaster behaved so differently today. (we laughed)

Me: Maybe he has some new awakening in his life.

Yandi: Or maybe he discovered viagra and got it all last night. (I laughed loudly and it drew attention)

Me: Stop it! We are not going to gossip about our poor old headmaster like that. Excuse me because the children are already flooding in.

Yandi: I do not know how you manage to stand at the gate and wait for your class to arrive. I am going straight to my class. They will find me sitting there and hopefully I'll be awake. (I laughed)

Me: I'll see you at break time. Come to my class because it has better air conditioning.

Yandi: Will do. I love you. (she made kissing sounds and I made them back)

Me: I love you too.

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Usually most teachers prefer going to their classrooms after the usual staff meeting in the mornings but I'm not one of them. I usually stand by the gate and wait for the parents of my little sun shines to drop them off. "Morning, teacher" most would usually shout while running towards me and give me a hug. The bell would usually go off at just the right time and they would all run ahead of me to form an almost decent line. I stood in front of the two lines. Boys on one side and girl on the other.

My girls walked inside first and the boys followed soon after. I walked in and all sat in their usual seats. Two volunteered to wipe off the board and I agreed. They did that why I set the air conditioner. I let all sit and greeted them all and I asked them what they had for dinner last night. It's not an important part of the lesson but it enables them to interact with me in an informal way. I would laugh at the some exaggerations and would be fascinated by the different types of foods they ate because they are from different cultures and background. After I got them nice and comfortable it was reading time. They all read so good even if some do it too softly. The class went on until it was finally break time. Each taking their lunches out and walked out neatly. One row at a time. Yandisa and Sarah who is also one of the teachers here walked in.

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Sarah: Othu, how on earth do you get your bunch to be so disciplined?

Yandi: And it's not that this group are naturally well behaved. Each year her students are like this.

Sarah: Mine just run out of the classroom when the bell rings. (I laughed)

Me: I guess I just get blessed with calm children each year. Let me go get my juice and salad first.

Yandi: I got them for you, babe. I know what you eat so it was not difficult to figure out that it's yours. (I smiled)

Me: You are life. Find a seat.

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They sat on the little chairs and we all started to dig into our light meals. Sarah has just come with school gossip and Yandi and I got annoyed very fast. I think she noticed that we are not the gossiping type because she excused herself.

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Yandi: When last have you heard from Pops?

Me: You know it's difficult to keep up with her and she has not been on any social media for a while now. I thought you or the others would have heard something.

Yandi: Her phone is off and you know her man does not like having us at her place. Apparently we are bad company.

Me: I don't like the man and I hope Pops sees that he does not deserve her.

Yandi: We must go out on Saturday and catch up. I'll let Zuko know and you Licia. When is your grandmother arriving?

Me: Tonight at 6pm. I can't wait to get her at the bus station.

Yandi: I'll come greet tomorrow vha. Today I just want to get home, put on the TV and fall asleep on the couch. Not even my man is welcome today. I want to be left alone. (I laughed)

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We ate and the bell rang and it was time to get back to work. My learners stood in a line again and walked inside. It seems like they had a good break and played even in this heat because some shirts already have dirt marks on them. The day went on as usual and until it was finally time to go home. I went to get my daughter from the after school programme and she ran to me as soon as she saw me. We took her stuff and said goodbye to the teachers. Our first stop will be the shopping center to get ready made food for dinner. We walked down each aisle not really knowing what to get.

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Chulu: I'm tired now, mommy.

Me: All you are doing is sitting in the trolley like a madam while I push you around. What could possibly be making you tired? (she laughed)

Chulu: I was playing a lot today that's why.

Me: Lucky you, Chulz. What do you feel like having for dinner?

Chulu: Chocolate mushmellows. (I laughed)

Me: In your dreams, girl. Uhm, let's go for macaroni and cheese. Chulu: Can I please go and sleep over at Khloe's house this weekend? She invited the other girls too and their mommies agreed.

Me: I'll think about it.

Chulu: Pretty please, mommy. (she said in a begging tone)

Me: Let me speak to Khloe's mommy first and get some details about it.

Chulu: Mommy, why do all my friends have daddies and I don't? (my heart sank)

Me: Remember when we spoke about this?

Chulu: Yes you said that I have another mommy before you but she went to heaven and did not tell you who my daddy was. (she looked down)

Me: I'm sorry that you have to hear your friends speak about their dads, my Chulz and I wish that you could too but unfortunately it's not the case. We have been doing okay on our own, right? (she looked up)

Chulu: And I love having you as my mommy even if I did have a mommy before you.

Me: I love being your mommy too, happiness. Not having a daddy doesn't make you any less special than those who have one.

Chulu: If you get married I'll have a daddy. (I coughed)

Me: Well that's all up to God. Let us wait and see that He has in store for us in future but for now we need to hurry up and get makhulu from the bus station. (she hugged and I held her tightly too)

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We got some decent meal and drove home. We finally arrived in our to my three bedroom apartment and took my heels off as soon as I entered. The coolness of the tiles on the floor felt so amazing. Chulu ran straight to the television and put on her cartoons. I locked the door and took my dress off heading straight to the shower. I took a long cool shower and got dressed casually when I finished. I called my granny to ask how the bus trip is so far and I'd get an ear full about wasting airtime on things that are not important. I would laugh so much at that. I started to unpack the food we got for our dinner and I know she is not a fan of salads so I got "proper food". Hours went by and it was time to drive to the bus station and get the love of my life. Chulu ran ahead in excitement and I strapped her up and and drove to the place. I asked around about the time the bus my grandma is in and was told that it got delayed in one of

the small towns. I started to panic. Why is it delayed? I decided to not let my imagination think the worst and went back to my car and waited. My phone rang, I checked the screen and "Makhulu" was written on the screen. I answered immediately. "I have arrived, my child", she said and dropped the phone. The greyhound bus made it's way to the parking area and I got out of my car heading towards it. I looked at the widows while it slowly moved to the right spot hoping I would spot her and wave. "Mommy there she is", Chulu shouted while pointing and jumped up and down in excitement. I finally saw her too and she waved while smiling and I raised both arms and waves back in excitement. The bus finally stood and people slowly walked out. She finally appeared wearing her blue and white African print dress. We ran to her and hugged her tightly. Her scent just made me miss home so much. We stood like that for a long while.

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Makhulu: Othu

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what are you feeding my grandchild. She has grown so much.

Chulu: She feeds me rise crispies, makhulu. (we laughed)

Me: How are you, Makhulu?

Makhulu: Tired, my child but great and you? Why do you look so thin, Othunyiweyo? (I sighed)

Me: I have never been full figured, Ma.

Makhulu: Yes, but you've always had hips and a full behind. Now they are fading.

Me: I'm eating healthier now. (she just shook her head)

Makhulu: As long as you aren't starving my little one. (she kissed Chulu's cheeks)

Driver: Zweli! Can Zweli please come her his/her bags because it says they get off at Cape Town. (he shouted).

Me: It's ours. (I rushed off to him taking care of the luggage issue)

Makhulu: Why did you shout like that as if we are deaf? I was greeting my grandchild that I have not seen in months and you interrupted. Where are your manners, young man? Shame on you and it is Makhulu Zweni to you not just Zweni. If I was not tired I'd have taught you respect. (she said in a stern voice while pointing at him)

Driver: I'm sorry, Gogo. I meant no disrespect.

Me: It's okay, bhuti. Makhulu let us go home. I'm sure the gentleman wants to get on the road.

Makhulu: And it's Zweni and not Zweli. Next time you decide to shout make sure you are shouting the correct details. Come, my children let us go home please . (they walked to the car holding hands)

Me: Bye-bye and thank you for being a good driver and ensuring my grandmother gets here safely. (he smiled and nodded)

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I pulled the handles of the bag out and pushed the to the direction of the car. My grandmother and Chulu already inside. I opened the boot and carefully placed them inside because she might have some fragile items in there. I went to check that my daughter is strapped in properly before I joined them in the car. I got in and Chulu was just talking non stop. My poor child is excited to have someone else with us.

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Makhulu: Why do you never lock your car, Othu? This is not the village. I have seen horrible stories of hijacking on the news in these big cities. Lock the car now. (I did as ordered).

Me: I lock it all the time, Makhulu because I'd never put Chulumanco's life in such danger.

Makhulu: Good and I hope you two cooked for me. (she looked back at Chulu)

Chulu: We went to the food shop and got food already prepared by someone else. (I laughed)

Me: What happened to keeping that detail out? (she put her hands over her mouth and laughed)

Makhulu: My beautiful honest baby. Makhulu will buy you sweets for being honest. Othunyiweyo, I hope you don't feed the child ready made food all the time. We don't even know what they add in those stuff. That's why people die of cancer these days. (she said in a stern voice)

Me: I know I'll get shouted at a lot but I'm happy to have you here, Makhulu. Our family is already so all over so I'm alone here. (I held her hand)

Makhulu: I will be staying until December. When you go on holiday we will drive to the Eastern Cape together.

Me: We first have to have a nice holiday. Maybe go somewhere we have never been before. There are travel sites that make it all easier so I'll check that out.

Makhuku: Speak while driving, Othu. I want to put my feet in warm epsom salt water. (I laughed and started the car)

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We spoke about our mini holiday before we drive to the Eastern Cape. She was worried about my budget. I swear most

people think a teacher is a starving person. I saved up enough through the year to afford some down time. We finally arrived at my apartment and luckily it had an outside lift for people with disabilities. Neither of us has a disability but the stairs would be too much for her and I refused to carry bags up the stairs. We got to my place and she sat on one of the kitchen chairs. I went to put her bags down in the guest room and poured water in a basin and added epsom salt. I walked back to the kitchen and put the basin down and put her feet in. She closed her eyes and I could see the relief she felt.

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Makhulu: Thank you, my little one. (I smiled)

Me: Let me make you something to drink. Tea, coffee, juice or wine? (she laughed)

Makhulu: Stop being silly. You know that this mouth has never tasted alcohol. Make me some tea.

Me: Herbal tea or the normal kind? (her forehead frowned)

Makhulu: If I wanted herbs I'd have gone and seen the herbalist at the village before coming here. Make normal black tea, Othu. (I laughed)

Me: I don't think a herbalist stocks tea, Makhulu.

Makhulu: Well maybe they must and sell it to you city people. When last did you speak to your parents? (I started to make her tea)

Me: I last saw them two months ago and I last spoke to them on the phone a week ago. I do not like being with them. They always make me feel like I'm second to Langa, Ma.

Makhulu: The only thing that makes you second to Langa is your birth order. All else you can do just as well as him if not better. How many children passed matric at 16 years? You chose a profession dear to your heart not like that daddy pleaser. I love that you went for teaching. Your father undermines your career choice but forgets that he is where he is because of dedicated teachers during his school career. I'm grateful for young people like you, mzukulu. You are an important part of society. Never let anyone make you think otherwise. (I wrapped my arms around her shoulders and held on tightly)

Me: Thank you for the beautiful words of encouragement, Makhulu wam. It means a lot to hear you say them.

Makhulu: I would fight the devil himself if it means protecting you against harm.

Me: Yho let's hope it won't come to that because the devil would not stand a chance against you. (we laughed)

Makhulu: Langa said he'll come and see me because he is in Cape Town. I hope you have enough food for us all.

Me: You taught me to always prepare extra food for unexpected guests so yes, I did. (she brushed my hands)

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I finished her tea and put it on the table. I opened the fridge and usually I'd go for the wine but because she's here I'll settle for juice. She asked that I put in more warm water in the basin and I did. We sat and spoke about a lot of things. She later dried her feet and went to bath and I bathed Chulu and got her in her pink nightdress and gown. I wonder when Langa is planning to come because soon we will eat and go to sleep. I dialed his number.

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Langa: Zweni. (he said in a serious tone of voice)

Me: Bhuti, our grandmother is waiting for you to come and see her.

Langa: Shit, Othu! I forgot about that. I can't make it to your place now and we both know you live in an unsafe area and my car is not cheap so it will attract criminals.

Me: Mxm (I clicked my tongue)

Langa: Don't you dare be rude to me. I'm still your older brother. I am a busy man so I can't leave important meetings to say hello to someone I'll see this December anyway.

Me: Are you hearing yourself? It's only August yet you make it sound as if it's November already. You know that Langa do what you want. uMakhulu will be here until December so when you have time to schedule her a visit in your busy life you'll find her here.

Langa: Will do. (he said calmly)

Me: Bye.

(I ended the call)

Chulu: You don't look happy, mommy. What's wrong?

Me: I'm fine, bhabha. I hope you are hungry because I'm about to dish up. (I tickled her and she laughed)

Chulu: I am.

Me: Good. (I smiled)

Chulu: Mommy, why does the other family not visit us like makhulu does? (I know she's talking about my parents and brother)

Me: They are very busy people. Come, sit down and the food will be ready soon. (the sat)

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I can not believe that Langa promised our grandma a visit but does not even have the decency to call and tell her he's not going to make it. Langa sounds like our dad day by day. My parents don't visit because they really always seem busy all the time and there is the fact that they do not like how I choose to live my life. Makhulu finished and i told her about Langa not coming. She did not look too disappointed. I warmed the food and dished up for us. She thanked me and we said grace and started to eat. She looked at me while eating.

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Me: You are making me uncomfortable, Ma.

Makhulu: I am your grandma. I have a right to look. How is life?
(I looked at Chulu)

Me: Challenging at times but I can't complain and yours?

Makhulu: Good, my child. Now I'll be able to cook you two proper food so that you can get those curves back. (I laughed)

Me: I'll have to start exercising then. Maybe jog after work.

Makhulu: Do you know that there is a saying that says only the wicked run when nothing is chasing them? (I laughed so much)

Me: I guess I'll be a wicked person soon and so are most of today's youth because many jog too.

Makhulu: Do you have a handsome man friend yet?

Me: No, I don't. Men are trouble.

Makhulu: So you still have your pride?

Me: Yes even when I've been teased by some who I have told.
Let us not speak about my virginity, Ma. It is uncomfortable.
(she laughed softly)

Chulu: What is vilinity? (she means viginity)

Me: I'll explain it to you when you are old enough to understand, baby.

Chulu: But I'm old now. (we laughed)

Makhulu: You have a lot of years left before you can say that.

Me: That's true. (we ate in silence after that)

Makhulu: I think you must be a part of this land claim issue. (she finally and I shook my head quickly)

Me: uTata has made it clear that I'll make no relevant contribution to it. He said Langa has it all under control. I don't even know anything about land claiming.

Makhulu: You will goo-goo net it. (I looked at her confused)

Me: What is that?

Makhulu: The thing you children claim have all information. The one you go to on the computer.

Me: Oh, you mean Google? (I laughed so much). I do not want to get involved, Ma.

Makhulu: You are far better at handling issues than Langa. Soon he'll be bored with this project. You on the other hand never starts something you can't finish. You commit and see it though.

Me: My life is uncomplicated and I love it that way. If I do this ill have to deal with power hungry men and I don't have the strength for that.

Makhulu: Think about it please. (I looked at her and nodded)

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I do not have to think about it because I know I don't want to involve myself in something my dad and brother are involved in. I do not need an adventure rush in my life. Makhulu will have to forgive me but I can not. She finished eating and I could see she's exhausted so she went to bed. I watched as she walked down the passage slowly with her one hand behind her back. I felt so blessed to still have her. She then called us to her room and I found her on her knees next to her bed. "Join me in prayer, my children", she said. We knelt down beside her and held her hands. She started to pray thanking God for keeping

her safe on the road and for blessing us with good health and many more thanks were given. She said amen and we said so too. We hugged her and Chulu said she'll sleep next to her great grandmother tonight so I kissed her and left them. I could hear my granny tell her a story and it reminded me of when I was little and she'd tell me her stories. I went to wash the dirty dishes I finished getting my kitchen in order and poured that glass of wine and went to my room. I started to read the next chapter of my novel while sipping on my cool glass of red wine. I felt too sleepy to continue and I stood to rinse the glass. I took off my clothes and went to bed. I decided to not bother with sleepwear tonight.

Chulu -Narrated

Little Chulu went to her bedroom to put her shoes on. "Hurry, bhaba or we'll be late" her mother shouted from the kitchen. She could not see her favourite shoes where they usually are so she got on her knees and checked under her bed. She spotted them and slid under her bed to reach them. She grabbed them and got back up. She suddenly remember that her mother said that they must wait on God to see what the future holds. She immediately went on her knees, put her hands together and said a little prayer. "Good morning, God. It's me Talia Chulumanco Zweni. I ask that you please bless me with a daddy. All my friends have daddies who lift them in the air to make them fly but I don't. He must be a nice daddy because my mommy is a nice mommy. Amen. She stood and looked up hoping that her prayer got to heaven. She knelt down and closed her eyes again. "Oh sorry to disturb again God. Please make my daddy strong enough to lift me up in the air too. Amen for the last time". Her mom shouted her name and her great grandmother appeared. She grabbed her shoes and ran out. Her mom already standing by the door with their bags ready to go to school.

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Mom: What took you so long, ladybug?

Me: My shoes were deep under the bed, mommy.

Makhulu: You two go before you are late.

Mom: Bye-bye, makhulu.

Makhulu: Bye and have a good day. Chulu, come kiss makhulu goodbye. (she kissed my forehead and I have her a tight hug)

Me: We will see you later, makhulu.

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Chulu blew kisses to her granny and makhulu laughed and blew them back. Her mom held her hand as they walked down the stairs to the parking area. She looked up to the blue sky that was partly cloudy and wished that God would give her the date He would give her a father. She decided that she will be patient because the Sunday school teacher said that some miracles require patience. She hopped into the back seat and onto her car seat and watched as her mommy strapped it. Mommy went to her seat and put her belt over and the car started to move out of the parking area to the road. Her mother put on the radio as usual.

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Chulu: Mommy, how long does it take for God to answer a prayer?

Othu: Well that depends on a lot of things, bhabha.

Chulu: Like what?

Mom: Uhm, like if you are ready to receive the blessing you have prayed for.

Chulu: I'm ready. (she shouted in excitement)

Me: So that's why you took so long to get those shoes, you were praying? (her mom looked in the mirror to look at at her)

Chulu: Yes and I hope God heard my prayer because I am ready for the blessing. I wish it could come before or on my birthday.

Mom: I'm sure he will answer, my love because you are a good child. Wow, you'll be turning six soon. (Chulu smiled in excitement)

Chulu: I can not wait. Makhulu said she'll get me a gift. Maybe a new doll with hair like mine.

Mom: You'll have to wait and see. (they laughed)

Chulu: Mommy, can we get back home at 10' o clock today? (Othu briefly looked back at her daughter while she waited for the robots to turn green)

Mom: Why would you want to get back that early?

Chulu: To go home and be with makhulu. She is old and gets bored.

Mom: But 10am is too early. Your class only ends at 12 and that's early.

Chulu: But I still have to wait for you. Makhulu said she is baking a cake and I can lick the bowl. I can't if I get there late.

Mom: I'll ask her to put it in the fridge until you get home.

Chulu: But I wanted to help. (she sulked)

Me: I'm sorry, Chulu but my hands are tied. I can't drive all the way home to drop you off at home and come back to work again.

Chulu: Okay. (she said softly)

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Othunyiweyo's heart sunk when she heard the hurt tone in her voice but she can't agree to everything Chulu wants. The last thing she wants is a spoilt child. "Chulu has to learn that she can't have everything she wants", she thought to herself. They finally arrived at school and the car stood. Othu looked at her daughter. "Time to get the day started", she said in a cheery voice hoping she'll cheer her daughter up but nothing. They got out of the car and went to Chulu's class first. Her mother said goodbye to her and kissed her. Chulu does not cry after her mother because she had come to understand why they have to go their separate ways on a daily basis. She took comfort in

knowing that her mom is never far. She went to play on the swings with her friends, Khloe and Buhle.

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Chulu: I prayed to God for a daddy today.

Khloe: What did He say? (she looked at her friend)

Chulu: He did not give me an answer.

Buhle: My mother said that He hears all prayers even if He does not speak back.

Chulu: I hope he gives me a daddy like he has you guys.

Khloe: I'm sure he will, Chulu. He gave us daddies and he will give you one too. (Chulu gave a hopeful smile)

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The three of them gave each other a group hug. All three hopeful that Chulu will soon get a daddy as a gift from God. The teacher called them all into the class and they ran to form an imperfect line. Today Chulu's mind is on the chocolate cake baking she hoped to do with her grandmother. The day went on and she forgot about the baking as soon as something else got her attention.

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#Makhulu

Being in the city is not something that I enjoy much but I missed my granddaughter and great granddaughter so much. So far I'm the only one in the family that has welcomed and accepted Chulu as Othu's child. When she told me that she'll be adopting a two year old child at age 22 I was just as shocked and even against it at first. I offered to raise Chulu as my own so she can have a life but my poor child was already attached to the child. I decided to let her do things her way and I'm glad because she is a great mother to a sweet child. Othu's parents have been absent in most parts of her life. The only thing they did was throw money at each problem. I lived in Cape Town until my grandchildren were finished with school and returned to my house when they both were in university. I'm glad that I did that. I started to clean the flat from top to bottom. It was not even that dirty but I just wanted something to keep me busy. I dialed my son's number hoping he'll visit us. It rang and rang until he finally answered.

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Kumkani: Hello.

Me: Kumkani, it's me your mother. I told you that I am in Cape Town but you have not come to see me.

Kumkani: If you wanted to see me you should have come and stay at my house for the duration of your stay, Mama.

Me: Why have you not come to see your daughter and gra...

Kumkani: Do not even finish that sentence, Mama. That child is not my granddaughter. (he cut me short)

Me: You are cold hearted. I did not raise you like that.

Othunyiweyo took the child and gave her a home and love but you can't see the beauty in that?

Kumkani: Othunyiweyo must get married and make sure she changes that child's last name because she is not a Zweni.

Me: Mxm

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it's not like you are royalty so stop acting as if this surname id the most important. (I clicked my tongue)

Kumkani: I'm about to go to a meeting. I'll get a driver to get you when Nathi and I are free.

Me: Do not bother, I'm having a nice stay here. I hope you do not regret being so unloving to your own daughter. Money is not going to console you during dark moments. You tell that excuse of a mother you call a wife the same thing. You are a disgrace.

Kumkani: Bye, Mama. I'll call you when I'm in town. (he dropped the phone)

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"Hello", I said and looked at the phone. I put the phone on the counter and clapped once. How can people live in the same city as their daughter haven't seen her in months? I can't believe this is the son that was raised by my own two hands. Money changes a people so much. I started to cook dinner because I want my child to not be bothered with such when she returns from work tired. Hours went by and they finally arrived home. They greeted and I hugged them both.

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Chulu: Makhulu, did you finish baking the cake?

Me: No, we don't have all the ingredients.

Othu: Why didn't you call, Ma. We would have gotten what you need.

Me: Well dinner is done so we can still go and buy those ingredients.

Othu: Let me put my bags in my room first.

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She disappeared down the passage and returned after a while. The three of us drove off to the mall and started to do some mini grocery shopping. We thought it be best that we rather buy a cake but Chulu wanted non of that because I promised that she'd lick the bowl. She saw some toy that she wanted but Othu told her she has more than enough toys. She started to cry and threw a big tantrum. We tried to calm her but all it did was bring about attention. Othu knelt down and held Chulu up straight. "Talia Chulumanco Zweni, I am not going to buy you a toy that you do not need. Stop this right now because I am not going to tolerate it. The answer is no and I won't change my mind", she said in a stern voice. Chulu stopped crying and fiddled with her fingers. She then ran to me and held onto my dress. Othu pushed the trolley out of the store leaving us standing there. I brushed Chulu's back gently and followed behind her mother. Othu packed the food in her boot while I put Chulu in her chair. We all got into the car and drove in silence. "Sorry, mommy", a soft voice said from the backseat. Othu exhaled loudly.

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Othu: Apology accepted, my love. I just want you to learn that you don't have to have everything that you see in stores.

Me: Plus your birthday is around the corner. You'll get many presents. (I stretched my arm to the back and played with her toes and she giggled)

Chulu: That is ticklish, makhulu. (she wiggled her toes)

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Suddenly the mood was much better and we all looked forward to baking cake. We got home and did just that. The excitement a child gets when you involve them in something even if it's not something big is amazing. We put the batter in the oven and all licked the bowl. We waited for the cake to finish baking and it finally did. We left it to cool before applying icing. I warmed the food and dishes up while we wait. We sat and enjoyed our dinner. I did not tell Othu about her father's call. We finished and then decorated the cake and finally enjoyed it. I went to bath Chulu while Othu took care of the dishes. We thought all that sugar will keep Chulu up all night but it did not because she fell asleep on the couch and her mother took her to bed. She returned with a stack of books and I'm sure it's her learners home work books. She sat and would mark and put stars on each book after finishing.

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Me: My child, I know that you are tired but I ask to bother you with something. (she looked at me)

Othu: You could never bother me. I'm listening, Ma.

Me: It's about the land issue. (she sighed loudly)

Othu: Ma, isn't uTata handling this?

Me: If he did then he would have asked for all the documents that he'll need for such a claim but he did not once do it. It just shows that he could not be bothered.

Othu: Maybe you must let this go too.

Me: How can I when my grand father's land was stolen from him?

Othu: Makhulu the chances of you getting it back are slim. Usually people who lost their land during the apartheid era only get financial compensation and rarely do they get the land back.

Me: I do not want their money. (I folded my arms)

Othu: I have so much going on in my life with work and raising a child alone.

Me: And I feel bad for asking you this but you are the only person that I can count on. I do not know much about these things. It needs someone with a better understanding and for me that's you. I'll help you with Chulu with joy because I love being with her. We can even get a lawyer to do it.

Othu: I do not have money to afford one. (she looked down)

Me: I have money. Your father sends me money each month and you know I lead a simple life so I do not need to use it. You've showed me how to save and I've been putting it away.

Othu: Still remember when you put it under a mattress? (we both laughed)

Me: You see why I need you? Had you not shown me ways to save and invest I'd still be banking with my mattress. (she laughed)

Othu: Why is this land so important. Your son has offered to buy you a plot many times.

Me: Because my forefathers lived on this one. Their graves are still on it and because it was stolen from us. My grandfather bought a big piece of land and my family build houses and had livestock on it so that we may have means to live. My father once said they were shocked when they were evicted violently and even the livestock was stolen. My family was left with nothing. It was then suddenly owned by a farmer. The place later stopped being under traditional rule but we still have the agreement my father made with that chief who he bought the land from and title deeds. They are old but we still see the details. We of course could not do much since the apartheid regime limited us in many ways but my grandfather kept the

documents and gave it to my father for safe keeping. My father also failed to get it back but he left the documents with me. I have them here. Nothing about what those people did to my family was honourable. That's why it's so important to me.

Othu: Okay I'll do some research on this and see what is our next step.

Me: I might not know much about law and all but I'm sure that it is not right to take something that was not yours to in the first place. I read somewhere that the government is doing a land reclaiming project. To return the land to those who lost it during the apartheid regime. If we are lucky we will be one of those families.

Othu: uTata has so many resources and could easily help you with this. His name hold much more value than mine but if he doesn't let's do it ourselves then. Even if we fail we at least would have tried. What's the name of the place?

Me: Mhlabomhle, it's a village on the east side of East London.

Othu: I've never heard of it but then again I don't know everything. I'll research it.

Makhulu: Thank you, thank you for agreeing to this, my baby.
(she smiled and nodded)

Othu: I'll look for a good lawyer that deals with such cases. (I hugged and kissed her)

Me: Thank you I'll give you the documents when you need them. Now tell me how you are. How you really are.

Othu: I'm exhausted and I at times feel like I'm not succeeding in this motherhood thing. Like that tantrum she had earlier. People looked at me like I'm a monster and it always happens. Should I give in and give her what she wants?

Me: Firstly you are doing a great job as mother and there's no instruction book about motherhood. Those people look because most of them relate and feel sorry for the situation because they know it's not easy. You handled it great and Chulu knows that she can not have all the wants. They do that to push your buttons and attention. Maybe tomorrow you must go out with your friends and enjoy some "young people" time.

Othu: You're right. I'll call them and ask that they come or we meet at some place.

Me: Good. (I smiled)

Othu: I wish I could give Chulu a proper family, Ma. With extended family and such. Something that I never gotten because our family is not close and well my parents and brother could not care less about that happens I'm my life

Me: And they will regret it someday. You just focus on yourself. Keep yourself healthy in all ways so that you can be good to be a good mother to Chulu. (she put her head on my lap)

Othu: Thank you for being here, Makhulu. (she wiped her tears off)

Me: And I will stay for as long as you want me to. You are not alone. I love you and Chulu so much and would do anything for you. If Kumkani and Unathi are too busy building an empire to be parents that's their problem because they are missing out on the chance of being in your life.

Othu: As long as you are in my life I'm fine. I've always felt safe because I know you are not so far. I'm able to be a single mother because of you and your words of encouragements even in moments when I doubt myself.

Me: I'm sure you don't regret taking Chulu though.

Othu: Never, she is the main reason I go on. My inspiration and motivation. It's not easy, yho it's not easy doing it all without a partner to lean on but I don't regret it. I want to give her the love and attention my parents never gave me.

Me: You are doing great. I'm proud of you, nunu. (I kissed her cheek)

Othu: I sometimes fear that her biological father will want her back someday.

Me: If he was around he'd have come for her long ago. Didn't Tatiana say to the lawyer that he is not a part of their lives?

Othu: She did but you never know. People change their minds all the time. If he hears of her existence he might come.

Me: We will deal with it when/if it happens. You have adopted her legally so he can't just come and claim her.

Othu: It's sad that Tatiana had no family to leave her baby with.

Me: She saw you as her family and saw something in you that made her know that Chulu would be in good hands. Let's not question how God decided to shape our lives. Come let's pray so that you can go to bed. I can see that you are exhausted.
(she sat up straight)

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We both went on our knees and I started to pray. After we were finished we stood and hugged and I watched as she went to her room. I switched off the lights and made sure all is locked before I went to bed myself. It seems I'll have to get used to having Chulu next to me for a while. I moved her to her side of the bed and I got into bed. I opened my bible and read a few verses. I put it on the side of my bed while still open and switched off the lights and fell asleep.

3

Othu

Days have gone by and I've been doing so much research about land reclaiming. I told uMakhulu what documents she needs to put in the claim and she had everything ready for me as if she knew. We had the copies of everything certified and I scanned it and emailed it to the departments that deal with such issues. I googled the location of the land and found that there is a lodge there that offers various outdoors activities to their visitors too. The owner's name is Hans Thomas. I asked Nozuko for a good lawyer that she can recommend that deal with such and she gave me his details. Well I guess there is no turning back now. I'm going to try and help my grandmother. It's the least I could do for the woman who cared for me when my own mother was too busy to. I can't believe my father is not interested in helping his own mother with this but then again. Why am I even surprised? I told Yandisa everything and she is a said that this is important so I must help my Gran. She also said that doing this is good because it will make my ancestors be at peace. I am a christian and have been for all my life never really given much attention to traditional ways but ever since my friend got her calling and went to train to be a healer I was willing to learn. My grandmother told me that the two world can co-exist because we all believe in one God. The only

difference is the way we honour and give praise to that God. It's Friday today and I agreed to let Chulu spend the weekend at Khloe's and Buhle's mother also agreed. I dropped her off at Khloe's. We took her little bag and knocked on the big door. It flung open and Kathy appeared. Khloe and Buhle ran to hug their friend.

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Buhle: We are busy putting a puzzle together. Come and join us Chulu. (she looked at me she I knelt down)

Me: You can go and enjoy the time with your friends. Be good and don't give Mrs Balls any trouble. I'll come pick you up Sunday afternoon. I love you. (I gave her a kiss)

Chulu: I'll be a good girl, I promise. I love you too, mommy. (she hugged me, her friends held her hands and they ran off)

Me: Kathy you have my numbers and also my granny's so if anything happens don't even hesitate to call us.

Kat: We will be fine and you've given me the list of foods shed allergic to and does not like. Should anything happen I'll call. I promise you. (she smiled)

Me: Good luck with three toddlers. (we laughed)

Kat: Khloe nagged me for this for weeks and Mark is away so they will take away the boredom.

Me: Let me go give her one last kiss. (she laughed)

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I rushed to the lounge where they sat and put the puzzle together. I kissed her so many times on her cheeks that the room was filled with her giggles. Her friends laughed too. It's not the first time that she is sleeping over at a friend because they have come to sleep over at my place too a few times but I miss her when she's not around. I said bye to everyone and drove back to my place. My friends and I finally managed to come together for a get together after failing to reconnect for weeks due to our busy schedules. I got dressed to go out and found my grandmother knitting. She looked up and smiled.

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Makhulu: You look beautiful, nunu.

Me: Thank you, Ma. Are you sure you'll be fine on your own?

Makhulu: I'll lock the door and close the windows. Go out you've been with me since I've arrived.

Me: Okay, I love you. (I kissed her cheeks)

Makhulu: I'll wait for you.

Me: No, sleep because I'm not sure when I'll be back. I'll leave my car because I called a cab.

Makhulu: Take care of yourself, Othunyiweyo. Did you send the documents to the department of Rural developments and that of land claims?

Me: I did all that you asked, Ma. Now we wait to hear what they have to say about it. Bye the taxi driver sent me a message saying he's outside.

Makhulu: Bye, baby. I love you.

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I rushed out the door and made sure I locked it. The driver greeted me and I got into the backseat. I told him where I'm going and he knew the place well. We arrived and I paid and headed inside the restaurant. I was not surprised to find Yandi sitting already. We saw each other earlier at work but I gave her a hug anyway. I sat and ordered something to drink.

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Yandi: Look at you yummy mommy. (I laughed)

Me: Stop playing with me.

Yandi: I need to come visit the princess. I'm the most horrible godmother ever. I'll pop in tomorrow.

Me: Sorry, friend but she's having a sleepover at a friend's place. I don't often agree to such but she has been down lately. I think she really wants a dad.

Yandi: Then give the child a dad. You haven't been on a date in a long while.

Me: Don't start. (she laughed)

Yandi: Okay, I'll stop but you have to get out there and meet people. You've only gone on a few awkward dates as you always described them. You need happiness and excitement.

Me: It's not easy for me. I don't just want to introduce different men in Chulu's life and confuse my daughter. (she looked at me for a while). What? (she smiled)

Yandi: You are a natural at this motherhood thing. One would swear Chulu is biologically yours. She's even started to look like you a bit now.

Me: Really?(I smiled)

Yandi: Yes, really and seeing you with her is beautiful. Clearly her mother made no mistake by leaving her with you.

Me: She had one of her tantrums the other day. It was hell but it's a part of it all.

Yandi: She's an angel. The time I see her at school is just not enough. I'll take her out properly someday. I promise.

Me: She'd love that.

Yabdi: I'm glad that you are open to her about the fact that she's adopted.

Me: Well the child psychologist said that it is best that she grows up knowing. She taught me the best ways to do it without making Chulu feel like an outcast and it has been working. She knows that Tatiana was her biological mother and that she was sick and is now in heaven but she also knows that I'm also her mother and that I love her.

Yandi: You are too amazing and I know it's not ask sunshine and roses. There are stormy moments but you are just so good at dealing with everything.

Me: I gave her pictures of her late mother and there are letters and other stuff Tatiana had that are in a cute memory box but I'll give them to her when she's a bit older and understands more.

Yandi: Proud of you. (she hugged me)

Me: I surprise myself sometimes. Thank you, friend.

Yandi: Any developments regarding the land claim?

Me: I'm still waiting to hear from the departments. I th...

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I did not finish because our friend Poppy came to us singing and dancing. This one is just so unpredictable. "Virgin Mary", she

said to me and I made a serious face. She calls me that because I'm still a virgin but have a child. She hugged us and sat and told us all about her glam life. Zuko and Licia joined soon after. We all had drinks and food. Zuko took out something from her bag.

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Zuko: So dear lovers, I got us these. It's all expenses paid trip to some luxurious lodge by the name of Okuhle, it's in a place called Mhlabomhle in the Eastern Cape. Never been there but I love what I see on these brochures and it offers spa treatments, game drives and so much more.

Licia: You don't know what to spend your fat salary on, do you?

Zuko: These were actually gifts from my company for the great work I do for them. I did not spend a single cent.

Poppy: I'm game. When are we going?

Zuko: We are flying out tomorrow morning. (we all gave her the "are you crazy look")

Yandi: I have some marking to do so I'll spend the long weekend doing that and spending time with Vuyo.

Poppy: I'm going. All expenses paid is my type of vibe. As long as I do not have to cover those expenses myself. (we laughed)

Licia: You must learn to stand on your own two feet, Pops. Depending on men when you have a degree that can take you places is just not on.

Poppy: Who died and made you an angel, Felicia? (she pointed her long nails and Licia)

Me: Stop before we say what we will regret. We haven't seen each other in weeks so please let's not claw at each other. Now yet anyway.

Zuko: Let us go to this long weekend get away and watch wild animals claw at each other so we don't have to do it to one another. (we laughed)

Yandi: Are there even any wild animals there? (Zuko shrugged)

Me: I'm in as long as we return Sunday because some of us have little people who depend on us and I promised my daughter to fetch her Sunday from her friend's home. Poppy and I are in. (I held her arm)

Poppy: Ouch! (she got out of my grip)

Me: I'm sorry, friend.

Licia: It's not your fault, Othu. Clearly that no good boyfriend of hers hit her again. Just look at the bruise on her neck that she's trying so hard to hide. That man does not deserve you man,

Poppy: Leave the damn bastard. (Poppy stood and went to the bathroom in anger)

Zuko: I'm going to smoke. (she stood)

Licia: I'm going to go and apologise for my bluntness. (she also stood)

Yandi: How did we end up with such friends? (I laughed)

Me: We love them.

Yandi: Oh my goodness, Othu. This lodge is the same one you put the land claim against. Wow! Just look at this place. You are actually a part of this. The bodies of your forefathers are resting here

Othu. Okay, now I'm going as well. My man will understand. I'll just dedicate the Monday to him and only him. Plus he is not a clingy person.

Me: It is beautiful and I'd love to see it with my own eyes. I'll need you there for real because those three would drive me crazy. (the rest joined us)

Poppy: Look ladies, I know you are all secretly judging my life.

Yandi: We are not. We are just concerned about you.

Licia: If you need a place to stay you have us until you find a way to stand on your own two feet.

Poppy: I love my life as is. I love my man too.

I'm sure Brandon won't appreciate sharing his space with your friend, Licia.

Licia: I have a great husband so I know he won't mind.

Zuko: Well just know you can depend on us for whatever. So what have you all decided?

Poppy: Jacob is away on business so that gives me some freedom to play and we'll only sleep over for one night. What he does not know won't hurt him. So like I've said, count me in. (she screamed and all looked at us and we laughed)

Yandi: We are also in. We will mark home works Sunday night.

Me: All night if we must but we can not let a free trip pass.

Licia: I'm all for celebrating women. And since tomorrow is Women's day I'm in. Let's go celebrate our strengths by just relaxing and doing nothing. (we laughed and Zuko screamed in excitement)

Zuko: Yes, yes and yes! I can't wait. Here are the details of all our travel plans. You can read when you get home later. (she gave each detailed plan)

Me: Well it seems you knew we would agree to go. Thank you for thinking about us, friend. I can't wait to get a nice full body massage.

Poppy: Oh my word, it's going to be awkward if we get massaged by ladies who just end up making Zuko horny. (we laughed)

Zuko: Just because I'm lesbian it doesn't mean I fancy every woman I meet. If that was the case I'd have declared my feelings to one or all of you long ago.

Yandi: She's just playing.

Zuko: I know and that's why I want to do this with you guys. Asking my colleagues was just not an option. So let's go have fun and they are expecting us. Maybe even thinking that we are all lawyers since we got booked under the company name.

Licia: I can pretend to be a lawyer for a day. (laughter)

Waiter: Excuse me ladies but the other tables have complained about a noise disturbance over here. We ask that...

Poppy: Is it because we are black? (she shouted before he could finish and we knew she's pulling his leg)

Waiter: Oh no, mam. It's just the noise and this lady is not black. (he pointed at Licia)

Licia: I'm not black? No, tell me it's a lie. I've always thought I am. (she fake cried)

Poppy: Now you upset my friend. (she screamed so loud)

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Well we got thrown out in a decent way because it's an upmarket restaurant but instead of being upset we just laughed. I have crazy friends but I wouldn't trade them for anything. We decided to go to a club to dance a bit and we enjoyed each moment. Poppy would occasionally go to the table of some older men and socialise. What are old men even doing here? Men offered to buy us drinks but we refused. Poppy came back dancing and being her wild self.

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Poppy: Why are you ladies rejecting drinks from my friends?

Licia: Because we are capable of buying them ourselves. Stay away from those old men who are old enough to be your father.

Poppy: If only you guys knew that it's possible that your own fathers are entertaining sugar babies as we speak. Especially Othu's hot, rich father.

Me: Gross. (we laughed)

Zuko: Let's call it a night, guys. We leave early tomorrow. It looks like this club is fun of men and that's a turn off for me.

Yandi: That's true and I'm already so sleep deprived.

Poppy: I'll stay and have more fun but best believe that's I'll be at our meeting spot on time tomorrow.

Me: Okay, love and please take care of yourself. (I hugged her)

Poppy: I always do, babe. Tomorrow I'll be fresher than all of you. (she snapped her fingers)

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We all hugged her left her there. She will be fine because this is a norm for her. We all got a cab to drive us home because we are all tipsy. I finally got home and tried to be a quiet as possible. "Oh thank goodness now I can go sleep in peace", Makhulu said behind me.

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Me: Haibo, I did say do not wait up.

Makhulu: I can't just sleep when you are out at night. You'll know what I'm talking about when Chulu is a bit grown. I also called the Kathy woman and spoke to Chulu. She is having fun.

Me: I'm going to a one night stay trip with my friends tomorrow. To Umhlabomhle. Zuko got complimentary vouchers from her work. (her eyes widened)

Makhulu: This is a sign. Of all places that is the one her bosses chose. God wants you to go there, my child. He wants you to

see for yourself what we are fighting for. You have my blessings to go baby.

Me: Thank you, Ma but I'm not going there to start some riot. I'm going to relax.

Makhulu: You'll also be stepping on the soil of your ancestors for the first time. (I nodded)

Me: Night night, Ma. (she smiled)

Makhulu: Drink water first or coffee. (I shook my head slowly)

Me: I'm not drunk, Ma. (she laughed softly)

Makhulu: Do you think I'm born yesterday? I might not drink alcohol but I'm clued on on how a person who is intoxicated looks like. But let's stop because I don't want you to think that I'm scolding. I'm just happy that you went out and had fun. (I nodded)

Me: I'll see you tomorrow. (I waved at her)

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I had alcohol so I didn't kiss her goodnight. I went to my bedroom and took my clothes off and got to bed. I took my bag and took out the travelling details Zuko gave me. I could at least make out what's written on it. I'll have to get up early and get ready. I took my phone and set the alarm so I don't oversleep. I

looked at the clock and it's already past midnight. I put my bag on the floor and immediately fell asleep.

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MEANWHILE IN MHLABALOMHLE

#Hans Thomas.

I'm Hans the owner of one of Africa's most successful lodges. My lodge Okuhle lodge and game reserve has made it onto most international travel magazines. My family has been in the farming business for many generations but I decided that I'll do something different with the land I inherited from my father. I have a wife Merisa Thomas and we don't have any children yet. I do have one from my previous wife who doesn't even live anywhere on the African continent. My lawyer walked in and that's odd because I don't remember having a meeting with him. If the bastard thinks he can charge me for this unexpected meeting he has another thing coming.

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Me: What do you want? (I took a sip of my whiskey)

Him: I have just got some important news that might...

Me: Just get to the damn point, Den. (I shouted).

Him: Someone has put in a land claim with the department of rural affairs.

Me: What business is that of mine?

Him: It's your business because they are claiming this land that you call yours. (my jaw clenched)

Me: This land has belonged to my family for many years. It is now mine and I'll be damned to let anyone take it from me. Who is the fucken bastard who put in the claim?

Him: A Zweni, Nomhle Zweni with the help of a Othu-something Zweni. I'll need all the documents that will claim that your family purchased this land lawfully. The country is now starting to take this land redistribution a bit more seriously. More and more black people are putting in claims that whites stole the lands of their forefathers and now they want it back.

Me: Well that is good for them but this is my land. I am not going to give it to anyone. I have legal documents proving that.

Him: This might go to the land claims court and if they are wealthy they might even get good lawyers to put up a good fight.

Me: Then you put on an even better fight. I do not pay you so much money for nothing.

Him: I'll need all the documents of ownership for this place. From who first owned it in your family up to now. Make sure that I get those so that I can be ready should this go to court.

Me: Get out of my sight and come back when you have news that will make me happy. Offer these people money. Money talks no matter who you are and I have plenty of that.

Him: Things aren't that simple. These kind of cases can drag on for years and a lot of money gets lost.

Me: Then make sure it is not my money that is lost dammit. (I shouted)

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He walked out slowly and I threw the glass against the wall. It broke and I shouted in frustration. Melisa walked into my office quickly and I could see she's drunk.

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Mel: What is wrong, darling?

Me: Some people want my land. I have spent years making this lodge a success and I'll be damned if I let anyone take my way of living from me.

Mel: Oh I know that tone, Hansie. I hope you are not planning on harming these people.

Me: If they do not back up I'll use anything to my advantage. I need to call my private investigator to get me as much information about these people as possible.

Mel: If you have the lawful rights to the place you don't have to do that. Must you always complicate a simple situation?

Me: Go to bed. You reek of booze so you are going to come here and speak total crap.

Mel: Screw you, Hans. You drink too.

Me: I'm no drunk, sweetheart. No get the hell out. I have business to take care of.

Mel: I don't even know why I'm still with you.

Me: I ask myself the same question each day. You are a barren drunk so I'm the one who is most disadvantaged in this marriage. (She raised her hand to slap me but I stopped her)

Mel: Damn bastard. You see my faults but don't even make an effort to know the son that you have with your previous wife. No wonder she left you and took her boy because you are heartless. (she shouted)

Me: I'm the same bastard that gives you means to live so I'd be careful if I was you.

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She shook herself free of my grip and walked out. I laughed and watched her disappear from my sight. She's nothing without me and she knows it. It's time I call in some favours from old friends. I checked the names of the people who want what's mine. I called my private investigator and gave their details to them. He said he'll get on it as soon as possible. My life has just gone from good to stressful. I emailed the documents my lawyer asked for and hope that it is going to help me as far as the law is concerned. If not I'll just have to make use of some more not so kind ways to keep my place. I poured a double shot of whiskey without ice because I now need something to calm me down.

4

Othu

The loud annoying sound of my alarm went off. I picked up my phone, opened only one eye and pressed the off button. I layed on my bed filled with regret. I should not have had that much to drink last night. I've got a terrible headache and feeling nausea. My breath smelled even worse. I'm never going to drink that much again, well not anytime soon anyway. I got up and my first stop was the bathroom to brush my teeth. I went back to my bedroom, put on my gown and dragged myself to the kitchen. I opened the first aid cabinet and took out two pain pills. I was about to pop them in my mouth. "Not on an empty stomach", my granny said in a stern voice. I sulked and put the pills back in their little container.

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Me: It's only 5am, makhulu. I don't eat breakfast this early and my headache is getting worse by the minute.

Makhulu: Well next time set a limit to your fun, my girl. Sit, I'll make you some bacon.

Me: But I don't want food. (I said in a sulky tone and she laughed)

Makhulu: We only have one child in this house and she is not here at the moment. I'll make you a slice of toast then. You can't drink pills on an empty stomach.

Me: Okay. I still need to pack but luckily I still have a few hours of preparation time left. I also need to call Kat and speak to Chulu. I hope she didn't give any problems so far. That one has her moments. Oh Ma, Zuko managed to secure a meeting for us with her lawyer friend. He did her a favour by giving us a meeting on Tuesday.

Makhulu: Thank Nozu for me but aren't you going to be at work Tuesday?

Me: I'll try to get an extended break so we can go to the man's offices. You can get a cab to there and I'll meet you there.

Makhulu: So you children are only going to spend the one night at that place? (I nodded). Why not sleep over the Sunday as well and come back Monday?

Me: I have promised my daughter to get her Sunday. I was hoping the three of us would celebrate Women's day together. (she smiled).

Makhulu: I'd like that very much. Here is your toast. Eat it and then take those pills. (she gave me my toast)

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I finished with difficulty because I didn't have an appetite. I then drank a glass of ice cold water and also downed the pills. I put my head on the table until I felt a bit better. I got up and started to pack my clothes for the get away. After some time I went to shower and got myself fresh and ready for the day. I wore one of the five African print dresses my granny made for me. It looks so beautiful. I checked the time it's 7am and knowing Chulu she's already up by now. I dialed Kathy's number, she answered and I asked her to give Chulu the phone.

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Chulu: Morning, mom. (I smiled when I heard her happy little voice)

Me: Good morning, sunshine. How are you?

Chulu: I'm good. Mrs Balls made us pancakes for breakfast. They are not as good as yours though. (she whispered the last part and I laughed)

Me: I'm glad to hear that I'm irreplaceable. Are you still having fun?

Chulu: I miss you and makhulu but I'm having lots of fun with my friends. Will you still get me tomorrow?

Me: I promised to do so, didn't I? I'll come pick you up later in the afternoon.

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She told me all about what they have done so far and Kathy must have planned this well. They have all types of activities planned and I'm just glad that my baby is having fun. We said goodbye and I love you too each other. I smiled at the phone after I ended the call. Most people think they I burdened myself by taking her but they actually don't know that she is my lifeline. I still remember the day Tatiana made me promise that I'd look after her in the letter she wrote to me. My first instinct was to say no but I had already been attached to Chulu but as an aunt. I made a silent promise to her and hoped that she could hear me wherever she is. Most of the money she left is growing because I invested it smartly for Chulu's future. I still hold some fear that some man is going to claim Chulu someday. "Her father is not important, Othu. He wants nothing to do with me and Talia", Tatiana said one time when I asked about Chulu's father. If he does come I hope he is a good man who won't take her away from me. If he is a good man then I won't stop him from being a part of her life because my baby really wishes she had a daddy. Something I'm afraid to give her because I've read about men molesting children and all the other horror stories involving the boyfriends of some mothers. Child protection services was sceptical so I was at first under strict supervision but I passed the assessment and she was my little girl by law and all the other important ways it counts. My

phone rang and I snapped out of my deep thoughts. I checked the screen and exhaled loudly. It's my dad.

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Me: Hello.

Dad: Hello...Othu can you hear me?

Me: I hear you.

Dad: I hear you what? You are so disrespectful. (he raised his voice)

Me: Tata, why are you calling me? Is it to brag about Langa's new achievement? To tell me what I could have had if I had studies what you wanted or maybe is it to tell me that I'm a fool for adopting Chulu?

Dad: I don't have time for your nonsense. I do think that taking in a child that you aren't even related to makes you a fool. You know nothing about her mother's past. You are just 26 and you've burdened yourself with...

Me: I'm dropping the phone now. If you want to insult me and my child do it away from me because I do not have time for negativity. All you and my so called mother bring to my life is negativity.

Dad: Okay fine let's talk about the real reason why I called. We are coming over tonight. Make sure you are home.

Me: I'm going on a one night stay getaway with friends and my flight is in a few hours. Come on Tuesday or whatever time after Monday.

Dad: What we want to talk to you about is important make sure that you are home tonight. You are not going to burden my mother with your child and go gallivanting with friends. You wanted to keep this child so you take care of her.

Me: Unlike you and your family Makhulu is not cold hearted. She sees Chulu as my child even if I didn't give birth to her. Why the sudden concern for your mother when you can't even help her when she asks for your help? I am living my life and I'm not bothering you, Tata. Stop being a thorn in my side because I do not owe you anything. Like I've said If you want to see me call some time after Monday and make an appointment.

Tata: Hey, Othu I...(I cut the call)

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He called again and again until he finally decided to give up. My father thinks that we all are afraid of him and will dance to his tune. Well I'm not my mother nor am I my brother. He can control them but definitely not me. I let out a soft scream of frustration. I continued to do my packing until I was done and had everything that I'll need. I pushed the small suitcase to the kitchen and found my granny making breakfast. We held hands

and she prayed for travelling mercies for me and my friends. We said our goodbyes and I love you. She walked to the taxi with me. I put my stuff in the boot and turned to look at her.

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Me: Are you sur...

Makhulu: I live alone at my house so I'm used to being alone. This place is safe. The old lady next door offered to take me with her to her church on Sunday since we can't go to our usual one. (the cut me short)

Me: You have a driver's license, Ma. Take my car and drive yourself to church.

Makhulu: That thing expired long ago and I'm not intending on renewing it. My sight is not as good as it used to be. Don't worry I'm sure I'll enjoy visiting another congregation. Go before you miss your flight. (she gave me a peck on the lips)

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I said goodbye, got into the car and waved until she was out of sight. We finally arrived at the airport and it seems I'm first to arrive. The girl followed soon after. Poppy with a huge suitcase and looks so fresh you'd swear she didn't party the hardest last night. We gave each other hello hugs and proceeded to go through all airport processes and after a while we were finally in the air. It won't be a long flight. We landed in before we

knew it. We hired a car to drive to our destination. It was about an hour's drive from East London. I looked at the direction on the map and would give Zuko all the needed directions. We got lost a few times but we finally saw a board written "MHLABOMHLE". We took the turn and drove up a long dirt road. I think a bigger car would have been best suited for this trip but there's no turning back. We finally got to a beautiful African style lodge. We all stepped out and looked around. I honestly never knew this place even exists. A handsome man who looks like he's in his late thirties appeared.

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Poppy: That is not even a handsome man. That's a beautiful man. (we laughed)

Licia: I'm married to a great man but I agree that is a fine looking man.

Zuko: Don't let Brandon hear you say that. You both are in relationships so shame on you.

Yandi: Tell them, chomee. This one is for Othu since Zuko prefers women and the rest of us are in relationships.

Me: Leave me out of this. He's a handsome man though and judging by the smile he might even be friendly too.

Poppy: I just knew you'd say that. You need some action girl. Get your itches scratched.

Guy: Good morning, ladies. I'm Ndalo, manager of this beautiful place and also tour guide. (he said with a smile)

Poppy: You can take me on any tour you wish and manage any part of me that you please as long as it's going to be a wild adventure. (she flirted and Phindile laughed softly)

Ndalo: Uhm, okay let us go inside so you can check in.

Zuko: Oh, we got vouchers from Buthelezi and partners. I'm sure you were expecting us.

Ndalo: The lawyers? (she nodded). We indeed are expecting you. Come through. Oh and welcome to Okuhle Lodge. We hope that you will enjoy your stay here with us even if it will be a short stay.

Me: Thank you. (he smiled and nodded)

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He led the way and our luggage was carried in by the workers. We found a group singing at the entrance and the waiters served us drinks as we walked in. Talk about great service!

Ndalo showed us our rooms and said there will be a game drive later on when it's cooled off a bit out. The room I entered was breathtaking. Pure white bedding and shiny wooden flooring. Beautiful African sculptures all over. The guy put my bags down and I tipped him. It also had a beautiful en suite bathroom. I

freshened up a bit and went out to the general area to join the ladies. I found them all standing there already.

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Yandi: I think you should ask Ndalo were the old graves are. I'm sure there are names on the stones.

Me: I'll have to look for makhulu's maiden surname then.

Poppy: I never complimented you on that beautiful dress, Othu. Where did you get it?

Me: My grandmother made it for me.

Poppy: It's beautiful. Do you think she can make me a jumpsuit with similar fabric?

Me: I'll ask her. (she nodded)

Licia: So Brandon and I have decided to try the IVF route to get pregnant. (she said unexpectedly and we all looked at her)

Zuko: Those things are expensive.

Licia: We have been struggling for years now so clearly the natural way is not working for us.

Yandi: But you've gotten pregnant once.

Licia: And ended up losing the baby because it was an ectopic pregnancy. We have struggled since and we really want this baby. He has been supportive but not his family.

Poppy: He is a journalist. Will he afford the treatment? (we all gave her the "really" look). What? They don't get paid much. Much like Othu and her teaching.

Lucia: I'm no housewife. So we have been saving for this. I just wanted to tell you all because we don't keep things from each other.

Me: Thank you for trusting us with your news. We will support you in whatever you need. We will keep you in our prayers so that this can be a success.

Yandi: Yes we will. (we shares a group hug)

Zuko: Well since we are on the being open talk. I'm trying online dating. (we all laughed)

Yandi: That's great that's how I met my ex and he was a decent guy. The internet is not just full of trolls. All the best, girlfriend.

Poppy: Are you even allowed to do that since you are a songoma?

Zuko: Yandisa is the one with a traditional gift not me. Do you even listen to us when we speak?

Poppy: Yandi looks so normal. So shoot me for forgetting. I thought she'd always go with her sack of bones, dressed in a traditional wrap and beads all over her body. My bad guys

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I'm sorry. (we all laughed)

Yandi: And it's healer and prophet not sangoma.

Poppy: Do it, girl. Any potential ladies on that the site so far?

Zuko: So, so but I'm just doing it for fun anyway.

Poppy: Get Othu on it as well. At least Zuko dates casually but this one has never even been kissed.

Me: I hate being hooked up so no. I'll find love whenever it happens and I've kissed a few men.

Licia: Enjoy being single, girl. Being married is nice but it has it's moments. (Poppy's phone rang)

Poppy: Oh shit, it's Jacob. What should I say?

Licia: The truth. If he can go on "business trips" all the time then you are allowed down time with your girls.

Poppy: Hey baby. (she answered and walked away)

Licia: That man has a wife and family I'm telling you.

Yandi: It's her life to live, Licia. The more we point out the rag flags in her relationship to this man the more we push her away.

Licia: What future does she have? She has a degree in social work. She must make use of that because the country needs more social workers. This man is going to maintain her but drop

her as soon as he finds a new girl. I'm sorry but I can not keep shut while I watch our friend throw her future away.

Zuko: You have always been the straight talker so we are not surprised. (Poppy walked back)

Poppy: He seems to have bought my lie.

Me: Why must you lie about your whereabouts? You are with friends not strange men.

Poppy: Let's go and enjoy that view. (she rushed away)

Yandi: Avoiding the subject. (we all exhaled loudly)

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We followed her out and to the balcony. The view was breathtaking. I called my grandma to tell her that I've arrived safely and she was waiting for me to call and tell her that. I also told her that I'll go and visit the graves of her family members. She told me where I'll find them and how to identify them. I memorised the details as best as possible. Hours went by and Ndalo told us that it's time for that game drive. We all got onto the Jeep and the car started to move. We would see a few animals on the way and Ndalo explained everything so well. I asked if it was possible to get out and to the old graves that are here. I explained why it's so important to me and they agreed to take me. We drove to a part that had a few very old graves.

Some were not even visible. My friends and I got out and made our way there.

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Zuko: Some of these must be about a hundred years old.

Me: I'm sure because others are so flat. I wonder if their families still visit these graves.

Licia: Does your grandma visit that of her grandfather?

Me: No, she says it makes her feel like a failure because she failed to get back what was stolen from them.

Yandi: Look there is a Mzoxolo Tyini. Tyini is her maiden surname right?

Me: Yup. (I walked to it)

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I knelt down and took the grass off the lame excuse of a tombstone. Mzoxolo Tyini it read but the other details were unclear. I knew it's my grandmother's grandfather who lies here. I spoke a few words to say who I am and who's child I am. I resisted my clan names and those of my granny. I put a stone on top when I finished. We spotted more graves of with the Tyini surname and it must be more of her family members. I suddenly felt at peace and we headed back to the car. We did some more fun activities and later went for a relaxing all

inclusive spa treatment. Feeling the hands of the lady massage my back was great. My body felt so good and relaxed afterwards. We were sitting and enjoying our dinner when Ndalo came to our table.

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Ndalo: I hope you ladies are enjoying your stay. (he smiled)

Poppy: We are thanks. (she winked)

Ndalo: I'm sorry but Othi can I please speak to you for a moment?

Licia: It's Othu dude. (he laughed in embarrassment)

Ndalo: I'm sorry. So?

Me: Uhm, yeah okay. Excuse me guys. (I stood and followed him)

Ndalo: Uhm, I'm going to get into trouble for this because I'm not suppose to do it. Can I please have your number? I'd like to get to know you better.

Me: How are you going to do that? I live in Cape Town and you are here.

Ndalo: I'm sure we can work something out.

Me: I have a daughter, Ndalo. I'm not up for casual dating because I've got other priorities.

Ndalo: Wow I was not expecting that. Of all your friends your the last one I would have thought has a baby. (I raised my brow)

Me: What's that suppose to mean?

Ndalo: I've made you angry, haven't I? Okay that came out the wrong way. You just look like the no children until I'm married type. (he laughed awkwardly)

Me: I've got to go back to my table. (I was about to walk away but he stopped me)

Ndalo: I'm terrible at talking to ladies so I'm sorry, let's start over. I don't mind that you have a child. Hopefully someday I can get to know her too. Can I please have that number?. (he smiled)

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I'm in no mood to be begged so I gave him my number knowing that I'll most probably never even see him again. I went back to the table and the girls wanted to know what that was all about. I told them and they laughed. They told me to be a bit more open minded about the matter. I'm surprised that a man hit on me and not one of my friends. I'm usually the girl who crushes on a man only to have him ask me for one of my friends number. I called my Chulu to say goodnight and I put it on loudspeaker so that everyone can say hi. She might not see

much of them lately but she adores her aunts. My day was suddenly complete after hearing her voice. I miss her so much. We had a few drinks and the others went to bed. Yandi and I enjoyed the cool breeze. She stood and went out to the bathroom and after a while returned looking panicked. I stood to check if she is fine. "Look what I found by the bin", she said and gave me a creased paper. I ironed it out with my fingers and I almost fainted. It's a picture of me.

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Yandi: I know your not so full of yourself that you'd actually print out a picture of yourself to bring here.

Me: Who would do this? One of the girls maybe?.

Yandi: Or Ndalo.

Me: No but I just got here. How would he even know me and that I was coming here?

Yandi: I have a confession to make. I opened an account for you with the dating site. I did not give personal information though.

Me: I can't believe that you would expose me without my consent, Yandisa! People get stalked by psycho's these days.

Yandi: No one would go through so much trouble. It's a safe and discreet site. If you have a stalker the chances of him/her being from that site are slim.

Me: But not impossible. Delete that profile right away.

Yandi: I will do it now. I'm so sorry, friend. I just thought we'd meet a few new people for some fun. I deleted my profile after I met my ex but kept yours on but I'm sure the site deactivated it since there is no action happening on it but I'll double check and delete it if it's still there.

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She took her phone and deleted all traces of the account but it still makes me a bit afraid. Who would have a picture of me? I started thinking about my daughter's safety too and I started to worry even more. I looked around trying to see if there are any suspicious looking person around. I felt like a fool for doing that because no one has "stalker" written on their forehead. Who could it be?

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#Hans

My private investigator, Ben finally got me the information about the people who put in the claims early this morning. He also told me something that I didn't expect to hear.

Othunyiweyo Zweni, one of the names that came up in the

report from Ben will be visiting my lodge. I had an uneasy morning since he told me that. I looked at the pictures of her he emailed. When Ndalo told me the lawyers have arrived I went out to see if I can spot her and I did. She looked younger in person than on the picture. She and the women she was with were laughing endlessly. Could this girl be a threat? That's what I have been asking myself since this morning. I have been busy with the day to day running of my place and also the other businesses that I have. I decided to call Ndalo in since he is the one who had been making sure our special guests are taken care of. He walked in and took off his hat .

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Me: Sit, Ndalo. My chair is not made of spikes. (he sat)

Ndalo: I was not planning on staying long, boss. I've just knocked off so I wanted to go straight to bed.

Me: I won't keep you long. Tell me more about our lady guests that arrived today.

Ndalo: Well it turned out they aren't all lawyers. There's a teacher, social worker...

Me: Tell me more about the teacher. (I cut him short and he suddenly smiled)

Ndalo: She is lovely. She's 26 and has a six year old daughter.

Me: Why has she come?

Ndalo: To get the best that this place has to offer. Why else would she be here? (I looked at him)

Me: It seems she has impressed you, dear friend. (I gave him a glass of my finest whiskey)

Ndalo: Thank you. Well I can see a quality woman when I see one. It's a shame that she has a child but it's no train smash. (I laughed sarcastically)

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It seems he has nothing new to tell me about this girl. I let him drink his and told him I'd see him the next day. Perhaps if he could get her to be his girlfriend I might use him to change her mind. They are only staying one night. I organised my desk, took the last sip of my drink and walked out of my office to my private living area. I saw the girl with only one of her friends. I thought I'd go over and introduce myself to them. I walked up to them and they both looked at me. I managed to fake a smile as I was walking towards them. They looked at each other briefly and then back at me.

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Me: Good evening, ladies. (they both turned to look at me)

Othu: Evening, may we help you?

Me: Oh dammit where are my manners? I'm Hans Thomas, the owner of all that you see here.

Yandi: Are you sure about that? (she asked in a sarcastic tone)

Me: Pardon?

Othu: Nothing. I'm Othunyiweyo Zweli and this is my friend Yandisa Dudumashe. Beautiful place you have here.

Me: Thank you and I hope you're stay here is a good one.

Othu: How long have you had this place?

Me: It's been a part of my family for years now. It's a family inheritance.

Othu: One your family got during the apartheid times?

Me: Let us not speak about that terrible time. I'm glad it is all over and we can not live together in harmony regardless of skin colour. (I faked a smile and her friend whispered something to her)

Othu: Nice to meet you, Mr Thomas. We will make sure we enjoy each and every single spot of this place. I have a feeling that it won't be the last time I come here. Excuse us please. It's been a long and exhausting day. (they walked away).

Me: You don't happen to be the same Miss O. Zweni who had put in a land claim against me, are you? (she turned and looked at me intensely)

Othu: Now it all makes sense. I'm sure you already know the answer to that because you've already done your homework. I'm sure that you wanted to put a face to the name so you decided to get this. (she held up the picture of herself)

Me: I don't know what the hell you are talking about Ms Zweni.

Othu: Look, Mr Thomas I'm no threat to you if you have proof that this lodge is built on land that rightfully belongs to your family.

Me: You think I'll just part with what's rightfully mine? I do not like sharing my toys.

Othu: Well I don't either. (she turned and walked away)

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I stood there thinking of ways that I can stop this girl and her family. I called my contact at the department and told him to make the documents that they sent disappear. I know that their lawyer can just resend them but at least it will delay the process of their claim a bit until I have a detailed plan of action because I was not expecting this. I'm still waiting to hear from my lawyer. My guy said he'll see what he can do. I went to my office and made a few other calls. I hope that I won't have to

resort to drastic measures to deal with this but I must protect what is mine at all costs as I have done all this time. Later I went to my bedroom and found my dear wife passed out. I don't know why I bother with this woman. It's not like I have any children to worry about. When I've dealt with this issue at hand I'll move on to my damaged marriage and divorce my damaged, useless wife. A younger doll would be a much better option anyway. I still look good for a man who is in his mid fifties. I laid on my back and slowly fell asleep. I wonder what the story with the picture Ms Zweni showed me is? I did not have a picture of her printed out any of the pictures Ben sent me of her. I'd be an even bigger fool if I threw it away in a public bin. It seems this girl has the attention of someone else. If that someone else is an enemy of her then they can be a friend to me. Well I first need to find out who the picture originally belongs to and our CCTV footage is my first start. I'll do it all tomorrow though. Suddenly I am feeling hopeful.

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Hans

Today is the last day of the "lawyers" stay at my lodge and I'm planning on making it memorable for them. I got up and rushed to get ready because I have some CCTV footage to go and watch. I'm sure my security guys will be shocked to have me in their little territory because there's hardly any reason for me to check our cameras. I'm hoping that whoever printed that picture is still here and that they aren't a fan of the Zweni family. Melisa got up and sat up looking at me. I'm sure the woman no longer gets hangovers. She looked at me as I was busy pacing up and down getting myself ready to start the day.

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Mel: I don't know why you are going through all this trouble to scare off a school teacher. Let the law deal with this.

Me: Good morning to you too, sweetheart. (I said in a sarcastic tone)

Mel: You can't always be above the law, Hansie. Why not focus this energy you tend to spend on useless things on finding your son? You remind me of my inability to have kids every chance you get so one would think you'd give a damn about the child you already have. (I looked at her)

Me: You don't get to tell me what to do, Melisa. If I knew where that women took my son I'd have searched that place long ago. I have spent a lot of money on looking for them and I'm not spending a single dime on it.

Mel: Well you go on about an heir to take over your empire when you die. He is your best chance at that. (she got out of bed)

Me: Why do I get the feeling that you know something that I don't? You and my first wife were friends before you seduced me. (she laughed)

Mel: And here I thought I was seducing a man but boy was I wrong. I don't know where Patricia is and even if she was back in the country I'm sure I'm the last person she would call.

Me: I'm sure she started a new life with a new identity.

Mel: Well I'm thinking of doing the exact same thing. (she mumbled)

Me: You would not survive alone. You'd be back in my life a day after your attempt at independence.

Mel: You'd be surprised, dear hubby. (she laughed)

Me: I'm going out to make some money. Don't go drink at the public bar area again. It's embarrassing to say the least. What are my guests going to think?

Mel: Some people actually mind their own business. You must learn to do the same thing. Leave your long nose out of my business. Also keep it out of this young lady's business and let the lawyers deal with this. (I kept quiet)

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She looked at me, shook her head while laughing softly. Almost as if she's thinking "pathetic man". Well she can think what she wants but it won't change the fact that I am the same pathetic man who feeds her. She can go out and leave me but I'm sure she'll be back. I watched as my dear wife walked to the bathroom slowly. I now regret the day I cheated on my first wife with my current one. I mistook lust for love and now I'm paying the price by being in a loveless marriage.

"Oh Hansie, I can't wait for the day you file for that divorce so that I can take half of what you have. Don't forget, darling we are married in community of property", she said while leaning against the bathroom door. I clenched my jaw in frustration and decided to not give in to her attempt to start an argument. I need to focus my energy on other things today. I finished getting dressed and made my way out of the private living area section to the lodge. My staff is already here so we gathered to sort of today's working plan. I called Keth one of my game rangers to the side. I want him to give our lady guests the full experience today before their flight later. I told him what I want

him to do and he's one of my loyal personnel so I'm sure he will do as I instructed. I was on my way to the security room when Ndalo called out my name. I turned to face him. He ran towards me.

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Ndalo: Good morning, boss. (we shook hands)

Me: Morning, man.

Ndalo: I just heard from Keith that he would be the one taking the "lawyers" on their last adventure. That team was assigned to me so why would you give him my work?

Me: Because I know that you have a little crush on that teacher and a little bird told me that you asked for her number. That is against our policy and you know that. The last thing I want is other staff members thinking that I give you special treatment.

Ndalo: But I had already knocked off by the time I asked for her number. It was not a Okuhle Lodge time.

Me: Sorry, Ndalo but rules are rules. Stop complaining and do whatever Keith was suppose to do today. You can get to know this girl on your own time. Excuse me I have a lot to do.

Ndalo: Come on, boss. (he pleaded)

Me: Later, now get back to work. I'm sure you have plenty to do. (he looked aside and shook his head)

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I patted his right shoulder and left him. I know he is a disappointed man at the moment but my business does not have match making service. Plus he would most probably not even have done what I asked Keith to do. I went to the security room and greeted the men. I asked for yesterday's footage because there is no way that paper was on the floor for days. If so than I'll have to have a serious talk to my cleaning staff. I scan watched the footage hoping to find something. I then realised that I'll have to watch it properly because I might miss something important. I guess I'll be here for a while. I sat and watched the boring daily activities of my lodge until I fell a bit sleepy. Just when I thought I'd end up falling asleep I saw something. It's an older man holding a piece of paper. He scratched his bald head and then proceeded to crumble the paper into a little ball. He threw it in the bin, well so he thought anyway. The paper bounced on the edge of the bin and landed on the floor instead of inside the bin. He looked so preoccupied with something else that he did not even notice his mistake. Could he be a stalker? A serial killer? One never knows what to expect these days. I took my laptop to one of my receptionist and asked if she checked the man in. The footage was a bit blurry so she had to really focus.

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Her: Yes, I remember him now, sir. He checked in yesterday morning.

Me: And did he check out?

Her: Not with me but maybe Thembi the other receptionist might have checked him out. Let me look if he has checked out. (she started to be busy with her desk computer). No, he hasn't checked out. (I smiled)

Me: What's his name?

Her: He checked in as Dr Flinch. He even requested that I accommodate him in one of the rodavels and not in the main building.

Me: Mmm that's interesting. He is either a man who loves his solitude or perhaps he does not want to be seen. Give me the number of the hut he's occupying. He sounds important so I want to go give him a complimentary gift from the lodge so that he will return.

Her: I can do that for you. I'll have...

Me: I prefer to do it myself. Guests must at times see that the owner cares about them. It makes the stay even more pleasant. (she smiled)

Her: I understand, sir. (she gave me the number of the hut)

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I thanked her and left her desk. A doctor? What kind of doctor and why would he have a picture of one of my guests. My curiosity suddenly became more intense. I went to put my laptop in my office and took some free spa treatment vouchers with me. I walked to the back of the main building and I felt proud of myself for all the hard work I've put into this place. I went to the luxurious hut that I'm told he is in. I got to the door but instead of knocking first I put my ear against the door. I not sure why I did that girl perhaps I'm hoping to eavesdrop on a secret conversation. I started to knock and knock. There was complete silence. Perhaps he has gone for a walk. The door finally flung open. I stood there with my most cheerful looking smile ever.

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Him: May I help you? (he looked at me intensely)

Me: Good morning, I'm Hans Thomas owner of Okuhle.

Him: And why exactly should I care about that, Mr Thomas? I specifically asked for privacy to avoid such things from happening.

Me: I'm sorry doctor. I have just come to welcome you to my place and give you these. Free all inclusive spa treatment. We all need some down time, right? (I fake laughed)

Him: Not interested. Thank you but give them to someone else.
(he was about to close the door but I stopped it)

Me: Fine, you might not be interested in these but I do know that you are interested in one of my guests. A Miss O. Zweni.
(he opened the door fully again)

Him: What is it that you want, Mr Thomas?

Me: Well let me in first. We don't want the trees to overhear what we are about to discuss. (he stood aside and I walked in)

Him: Why do you care about my interest in the young lady?

Me: Honestly I don't care what you do. All I want to know is why you are stalking her. Think before you send me off, Dr Flinch. I have footage proving that you had a picture of her. She doesn't know who had that picture of her so I'm sure she's unaware of who you are. If I show her the footage she'll know and most probably call the cops on you.

Him: I'll be out of this place before you can even reach her. So I owe you no explanation.

Me: How disappointing. Here I thought we could work together and help each other solve the problems we have with her together.

Him: I don't have a problem with Miss Zweni. Now go out before I throw you out. (I laughed)

Me: You almost sound tough but I'm sure your bark is worse than your bite. I'll just have to deal with the threat myself then.

Him: You stay away from her. (he suddenly became aggressive)

Me: Now it's getting interesting. So you'd actually miss her if she were to get into a little accident? (he pinned me against the wall)

Him: You keep your filthy hands off my daughter or you'll regret it. (I was shocked)

Me: Daughter? (I laughed)

Him: Get the hell out! (he pushed out the door and I laughed)

Me: You are delusional. That girl has a father. I'm sorry to be the one to tell you this but you can not be her father. You see she does not look mixed to me. She has pure African ancestry running through her veins I'm sure.

Him: Do not mess with her, Mr Thomas. You might not like the outcomes of it. Word of advice to you. Give her what she wants volunteerily. Who know? She might even let you keep this little lodge of yours and allow you to sign a lease contract. (he closed the door in my face)

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I stood and laughed at what I have just heard. This man is crazy and I have to get him out of my place as soon as possible.

There's no way that girl could be his daughter. He is as white as they come and she has no hint of being mixed. I walked back to my office and called in my security guys. They rushed in and I ordered them to take that man off my property. They went but came back soon after saying that he is gone and that there is not trace of him anywhere. How the hell could he have upped and left so quickly? I hit the table with my fist. Clearly he has some sick overprotective nature towards her. Could I have made a new enemy for myself? Just when I thought I'd be making a alliance with the man and now I have to find that he thinks she's his daughter. It seems the teacher has friends that even she is unaware of. That still won't make me give my property to this girl. I'll leave it to the law for now but if that fails I'll have to use other means.

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#Othu

The picture issue did not really frighten me that much anymore. Maybe I would have done the same if I was Hans. I'd want to put a face to the name too. What freaks me out is the fact that he had me followed to take that picture. That could put Chulu's life in danger because I'm always with her. Makhulu's life too. I

don't know what this machine is capable of. I decided to call Kathy. Her phone rang for a long time and I started to panic. "Kathy, hello", she finally answered and I sighed.

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Me: Hey Kat, I know it's early but I just wanted to check if you guys are still good.

Kat: We are fine. Sorry I took so long to answer. The phone is in the lounge and I'm busy in the kitchen.

Me: It's fine. I just ask that you please not let Chulu out of your sight.

Kat: Why? Is something wrong? (she sounded concerned)

Me: No, everything is fine but I know my daughter. She has a curious mind and might just wonder off if she sees something interesting. (I faked a laugh to put her at ease)

Kat: They are all like that. Don't worry I'll keep them all close. We are going to church soon. Do you want to speak to her? (I smiled)

Me: Yes please. (I heard her call Chulu)

Chulu: Hello, mommy. I miss you.

Me: Morning

bhabha. I miss you too. Are you still having a good time?

Chulu: Yes but I want to come home later. Are you still going to come fetch me?

Me: I am going to be there later in the afternoon. You stay close to Mrs Balls and don't go out wandering around by yourself, okay.

Chulu: Okay, we are going to church and I'll be good. Makhulu also called she says she misses me.

Me: We will be having dinner together tonight and tomorrow I'm taking the two of you out since it's no school.

Chulu: I can not wait for tomorrow to come. (she said in excitement)

Me: Neither can I. Let me say goodbye for now so you don't become late for church. I love you.

Chulu: I love you too, mommy. I'll see you later. I drew you and Makhulu a beautiful picture. It's in my bag already so that I don't forget it. (I smiled)

Me: Now I'm even more excited to see you. (she giggled)

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She spoke about what else they would do after church. I am just glad she didn't cry for home or something like that. I said goodbye and promised to call again later. My mood suddenly

just became much better. I dialed Makhulu's number and she answered after the first ring.

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Makhulu: Othunyiweyo. (she said loudly)

Me: Ma, you answered so quickly. One would swear you've been waiting for my call.

Makhulu: I was waiting for it. I would call you first but I don't want you to feel like I'm treating you like a child by checking up on you all the time. How are you?

Me: I'm good, Ma and you?

Makhulu: Not good now because I can hear the change in your tone of voice and something is wrong. Talk to me. Did something happen?

Me: The Hans m as n knows who we are.

Makhulu: Well we weren't trying to keep our identities secret. I hope he did not threaten you.

Me: No, Ma. I'm fine and I'll be home soon. Are you ready for church?

Makhulu: It starts in an hour. Your father was also here shouting as always.

Me: He is always shouting. That man will burst a vein someday.

Makhulu: I can handle him so don't worry. Have a good day, nunu. I must finish getting ready and you know how slow I am. I don't want to keep my new friend waiting.

Me: Have a great day. I love you.

Makhulu: I love you more.

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I ended the call and started to get ready. After I was done I took my bag and made my way to the door. I opened it and stepped on a small piece of paper. I got it from under my feet and looked at it. "Go back home", it read. I crumbled it and threw it in the bin. I'm sure the message was meant for someone else because I didn't even recognise the handwriting. Or perhaps it's Mr Thomas trying to get me away. Well tough luck for him because I'm here to enjoy time away with my girls. We all went to the general area to give some breakfast. Suddenly a guy came running to us just as we were about to fill our plates.

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Keith: Good morning ladies. I'm Keith one of the staff here. Today I'll be the one taking care of you because Ndalo is busy with other stuff at the moment.

Licia: Damn, do you always say so much early in the morning?

Yandi: Don't mind her. She's not a morning person. (he smiled)

Poppy: But I enjoyed having the beautiful man look after us.

Keith: I'm not Ndalo but I promise I'm not bad at what I do. In fact I'm glad I caught you guys before you've had something to eat. We offer a beautiful sunrise breakfast at a beautiful spot not far from here.

Licia: Hello, the sun is already up! Why take us far when we have food now. No, man some people. (she said clearly annoyed)

Zuko: Ladies, we did say we want the best experiences. It's our last day so why not go and enjoy breakfast out in fresh air.

Keith: It's a beautiful experience. I promise you. (Licia exhaled loudly)

Licia: Okay but I'm not going to change my clothes. These tracksuit pants and T-shirt are as glamorous as I'm willing to go. (we laughed)

Me: Poppy looks glamorous enough for all of us.

Poppy: You tell them, girl. (she twirled)

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We decided to go and explore. It is why we are here after all. We first all went to wear some sneakers because Keith said we will have to walk a distance. Poppy decided she is going to go for a wedge sneaker. My friend loves being lady like. We got

into the jeep and drove a distance. It's still early morning so the sun is not as hot yet. The sky looked so beautiful. Blue and orange with a hint of yellow. After we drove out for some time we got off the jeep and started to walk a distance. I'm glad I'm wearing flat shoes. Suddenly we were greeted by a beautiful setting. There was a table just filled with yummy treats and it has shade at least.

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Keith: We are here, ladies. This is the breakfast special for guests who want the full experience.

Poppy: It's breathtaking. I've been all over the world but this is just so amazing. (she took her shades off)

Licia: Still don't get why we had to leave the lodge to come and have the same food we would have there. (she rolled her eyes)

Zuko: Girlfriend, you need coffee.

Keith: Okay, I'll leave you ladies alone to enjoy. I won't be far out but have this communication device when you are ready to go just press the red button and speak into the speaker. I'll be here before you know it.

Me: Wait, what about wild animals?

Keith: This is a safe zone. We rarely have any roaming around here but like I've said I won't be far. I just don't want you ladies

to be uncomfortable by having me hang over you all the time. Is that okay?

Yandi: We are not alone. You can go. (he nodded and left)

Poppy: What did you mean by we aren't alone? (she looked at Yandi)

Yandi: I'm not sure but I just have a feeling that we aren't.

Licia: Let's eat. (we sat down and started to eat)

Yandi: You must be careful with that Hans man. The man makes me uneasy.

Zuko: He is just trying to mark his territory.

Licia: Only thing is that it's not his to mark.

Zuko: That's why all parting involved should leave this to the lawyers. Othunyiweyo has an appointment with Mr Sonki on Tuesday so he'll deal with it on her behalf.

Yandi: Not everyone is a law abiding citizen, Zuko.

Me: She is right though. I know nothing about this so it's best we get someone like this Sonki man to deal with it.

Poppy: Why doesn't your father just offer the man money to buy this place. He has the means I'm sure.

Me: Well so far he has been dragging his feet.

Poppy: These men with money can be ruthless, Othu. Trust me I spend a lot of time around them so I've heard a few spine chilling conversations.

Licia: And that is why you should leave your man because he is in the same circle.

Poppy: I'm not even going to allow you to spoil my day today. It's not worth my peace. (she took a sip of her juice)

Zuko: Beautiful place but no signal. I wanted to take a picture and post it on Facebook.

Poppy: Oh shit! I hope Jacob won't call me.

Me: You'll just explain to him that it was out of your control.

Yandi: I'm so glad my man is not clingy. I'd have died if he was. (we laughed)

Zuko: Othu, have you spoken to Ndalo?

Me: He sent a good morning text today.

Licia: Awww that's so sweet. Mr nice guy.

Poppy: She needs a Mr adventure guy who is going to introduce her to new stuff. Imagine how boring a relationship between her and Ndalo will be. They are both just too good.

Zuko: Are you saying that because you crave the handsome man?

Me: You can have him.

Poppy: I'm just looking but I don't go where my friend has intentions.

Me: But I don't so go for it.

Poppy: No, friend. I respect you guys and he is not my type anyway. (we laughed)

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We sat and enjoyed the lovely morning. I've never had such a special start to my day. I must take Makhulu and Chulu to something similar but not here. I don't have any feelings for Ndalo. I'm starting to wonder if I'll ever have any feelings for someone. I guess I'm comfortable with my life as it is. We ate until we could no longer get anything down. We realised that we none of us said our morning prayer. Well it's never too late so we held hands and started to pray. Yandi looked so uneasy. I asked her if she's fine and she said yes. I guess it's one of her prophet moments. We stood to get back since we still have some packing to do. Zuko took the hokkie-tokkie thing and told Keith we are ready to go. There was completed silence. "Try again", Yandi said. She did but still nothing.

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Poppy: I knew we should not have gone with the new guy.

Me: Does anyone remember the way to the jeep. The last thing we want is to be out here when the sun starts being too hot.

Zuko: We definitely came from this side. (she pointed at her left)

Licia: Well then let's start walking because none of our phones are working.

Yandi: Othu's on her family land so her ancestors will definitely lead us to safety.

Poppy: Is that what you meant by we are not alone? You are depending on the dead and buried?

Zuko: I'd expect Felicia to say that but not you. You know our parents and grandparents believe in them so let's not act as if we don't know. Let's just move out please.

Me: I think that all of this was planned. We walked right into the trap.

Yandi: I knew that man can not be trusted. Let's get back to the lodge and go home.

Poppy: It might not even be him. What if Othu really has a stalker and he paid that guy to leave us here. Oh my word, what if he is actually watching us.

Licia: Girl, lay off those horror movies for a while. (we laughed)

Me: I can't believe that we are laughing at this.

Yandi: No use in crying. We will get back and if that stalker wants to get at you he must go through us too.

Poppy: Good thing I had my nails done extra long. I'll scratch that face. (laughter again)

Licia: Let's just get going. Put some juice and water bottles in your bags. It might be a long walk to freedom.

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We did that and slowly made our way to the direction we remember coming from. Suddenly felt terrible for being the one who might have put their lives in danger. If this is Hans's doing than the man has some serious issues. There was no real thing that could make us feel like we're going the right direction. We were just surrounded by grass and the place looks beautiful I must say. After a while we got to where the jeep stood. We know it's the place because there was a huge rock next to it. Well the rock was still there but no jeep. We looked at each other. We decided to try this communication device again but nothing. Our phones still had no signal.

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Poppy: I'm too young to die and these shoes are killing me.

Zuko: You had a chance to put on flats but no not you miss glam.

Poppy: I have no flat shoes.

Me: Wear these. (I took out slippers from my bag)

Yandi: You actually keep slippers in your bag? (they laughed)

Me: They are coming in handy right now.

Poppy: I'll take them, girl. Thank you.

Licia: Well ladies. The journey continues. (we all exhaled loudly)

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We marched forward on the dirt road hoping that a car will come by. I just can't believe some people are do spiteful. After a while we were just so exhausted. I can't afford to be out here all day when I promised my child that I'd spend time with her. We rested but went one again. Finally there was some hope when a car came towards us. We stopped it and asked the man if he could please take us back to the lodge. He did not seem to mind but I think we all feared that we might be putting our lives in danger. No one sat in the passenger seat. So all five of us sat uncomfortably at the back. He actually took us to the direction of the lodge but refused to park close. He looked at me as if he knows me but hasn't seen me in a while. Which made it

uncomfortable for me because I did not know him. We thanked him and went out.

"Take care of yourselves", he said. I somehow got a feeling that he said it to me specifically. I'm starting to get paranoid now I guess We went to the lodge and demanded to see Mr Thomas. Zuko threatened to sue him for the service. He looked worried and he should be because anything could have happened. Apparently Keith went to get us where he left us but could not find us anywhere. The girl went to pack.

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Me: I know you did this deliberately. You might think that you have spited me but what you did was discredit your establishment. My friend will really sue because she knows how the justice system works. My other friend has thousands of followers on social media and I know she will make her experience public. I might have lost a pair of my good sneakers due to the damage your dirt road caused them but you are going to lose much more. (his jaw clenched)

Hans: If I were you I'd go to mommy and ask her who your real father is. You see that picture you showed me was not printed by me. Your real daddy did.

Me: So pathetic shame. (I smiled)

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I left him standing there and went to pack my bags. I can't believe he just stood so low that he'd make me doubt my own paternity. I might not feel like I'm a part of the Zweni family most times but I know I look like them. My father might not act like a father but I know I'm his daughter. I don't know why this man does not make me scared. I'm surprised myself. Maybe I have some fighting spirit that I knew nothing about. After packing and freshening up we went to the airport. I'm not more determined to get back at this man. We sat at the airport for a long, long time because we were too early for our flight. No one spoke while we waited and that is strange. I hope no one is angry at me. We finally went through all airport processes and we were in the air soon after. I can't believe that my life has gotten so dramatic overnight. We landed in Cape Town and all took different cabs to our places. Promising to get together soon. I felt so relieved when I walked into my apartment and saw my granny. My first instinct was to rush to her and give her the tightest hug ever. She laughed and brushed my back gently.

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Makhulu: One would swear that you've been gone for months. I'm glad you're back safely.

Me: I almost didn't. (I said softly)

Makhulu: What was that?

Me: Nothing. Ma. Let me go and put my stuff down so that I can go get Chulu.

Makhulu: I miss my baby so much. (I smiled and walked to my room but turned to face her again)

Me: Ma, what are the chances of me not being a Zweni? (she broke eyes contact)

Makhulu: You are a true Zweni. Now go and put those down. Chulu must be waiting.

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I decided not to ask further questions. I'm secretly hoping that I'm not a Zweni actually. But I know my grandma would not hide something so important from me. I can't believe I'm actually allowing Hans to fill my mind with such nonsense. I'm sure the man would enjoy seeing me go crazy. I put my bags down and walked out. The road was nice and quiet and it made the drive a breeze. I finally reached my destination. Chulu came running and I picked her up and hugged her. I've missed her a lot. Kathy put her bag in the car and I thanked her for making sure my child had a great time. Buhle will be spending the night again but my girl just wants to go home. We got into the car and drove off. She told me all about her weekend with such excitement. We arrived and she greeted makhulu. I took her bag to the room and started to put her dirty clothing in the

laundry basket. I saw the picture she drew. I took it to the kitchen and she explained that it's the three of us. Makhulu smiled and kissed the paper so much. She even said she'll have it framed. Well we put it on the fridge door for now. Later on we had dinner and she asked me why I doubt my identity so I told her. As expected she told me to not let such nonsense fill my mind. We ate, washed the dishes, prayed and went to bed. Chulu fell asleep fast. I kissed her forehead and got under the covers too. I looked up at the ceiling and had one of those very rare lonely moments. I wished to have someone to speak to. Someone special. I quickly snapped out of my thoughts and decided to sleep. My cellphone vibrated briefly. It's a goodnight message from Yandi. I replied and another came through but it's not her. It's my father saying that they are going to come over tomorrow. I wonder why he wants to see me so badly. I'm sure he heard about me helping Makhulu and will come to tell me to stop whatever I'm doing. I guess I'll have to gather some strength for tomorrow's day. I took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. My eyes finally closed and I fell asleep. What a day it's been and I have a feeling that tomorrow won't be any less exhausting.

6

Othu

I've been mentally preparing myself for my parents visit. I'll need all the strength to deal with them and it just proves how broken our relationship truly is. Most people would be counting down the hours until they see their parents again but I'm hoping that they call and cancel. Today is Monday and it's a public holiday so I can mark my learners homework later on. Yandi called asking to take Chulu out while my parents are here. I don't know what I have done to deserve such a friend like her. God blessed me the day he made my path cross with hers. She knows everything about me yet never judges me. We got up a bit later than usual today. Well I did anyway because by the time I got up Chulu and makhulu had already eaten breakfast and were watching cartoons. I find myself enjoying some of her toons though. Especially the ones that has lessons in them. I did some chores but it was a waste of time because there's not a sign of dust. It seems someone did some spring cleaning while we were away. I wish she would just relax and rest. I later got Chulu ready and dressed her warmly. It feels a bit cold out today. Yandi finally came to get her and I promised to join them later on. I watched as Chulu spoke all the way until they got to the car. I suddenly remembered that her seat is in my car so I ran down quickly. I took it out and put it in Yandi's

car. Kissed my princess again and watched as the car pulled out of the parking area and out of the gate. I stood for a while and suddenly got a feeling that I'm being watched. I got goosebumps so decided to rush to my apartment quickly. I got myself ready for the day and knew my mother will go on about the way I'm dressed. Makhulu and I sat in silence and it seems she's not herself today. I guess it's unfair of me to expect her to be happy all the time. She said the weather is making her knees sore so she won't go out with me later. I went to get some gel and rubbed her knees. Old age had better not do strange things to my grandma because I'd be lost without her. A loud knock came from the door and I knew Mr Zweni and his family are here. I took a deep breath and walked to the door slowly. It's indeed them. My mother gave me a brief hug and so did Langa. I let them in and we all walked to the lounge. They greeted Makhulu and sat down. We all just sat in awkward silence looking at each other. I hope they don't think I'll start a conversation. My father shifted forward in his chair and cleared his throat.

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Tata: So how was your weekend away? (is he trying to be nice? I asked myself)

Me: It was good thank you.

Makhulu: Oh Kumkani just have your say. I'm sure we all know that you aren't here to make small talk with your daughter when you can't even pick up the phone to have a decent conversation with her. (she looked at her son)

Mama: Is it a crime for a father to ask his child how her weekend was?

Me: It is when the father doesn't do it often, Ma. Makhulu is right. I'm sure you all aren't here to socialise. So what is it?

Langa: There's no need to be rude, sis.

Me: Says the favourite. Is today the day you'll finally tell me that I'm adopted? (they all looked at me confused)

Tata: I'm not in the mood for all of this, Othunyiweyo. And sorry to say but we are as good as it gets so you aren't adopted.

Me: What a pity.

Mama: We are here to tell you that Langa is getting married. (I looked at him)

Tata: Yes, we found him a nice girl from a good family. Soon you'll have a sister. Tell her how happy you are, son. (he smiled and looked at Langa)

Me: He does not look too happy to me. What have they arranged a marriage for you? (I joked and laughed softly)

Langa: I trust Tata's choice. I'm indeed very happy. (my jaw dropped to the floor)

Me: So I'm right? You are about to marry a girl chosen by them, bhuti?

Makhulu: I wonder who arranged a bride for Kumkani because I don't remember going out and finding Nolitha for him. Langa, it's okay to say no to certain things, my child.

Tata: What part of he is happy didn't you get, Ma?

Makhulu: The part where his face says he's not happy.

Langa: I'm happy, Makhulu.

Me: You're not happy, Langa. Dammit put your foot down for once. Is inheritance that important to you?

Mama: We have not come here so you can try and change his mind, Othunyiweyo. He is getting married and that's final.

Me: When will you ever stand up to your husband in defence of your children, Mama?

Tata: Stop it! (he shouted)

Makhulu: Let's keep our noses out of it, nunu. Congratulations, my boy. I hope she is a good girl.

Langa: Thank you, Makhulu. I'm sure she is. (he clenched his jaw)

Me: So you don't know her? What if they chose an alien for you would you still marry it just beca...

Tata: I said that's enough. (he stood and shouted). Unlike you he is interested in growing the family name. If you don't have anything nice to say keep it shut.

Mama: Sit down, Zweni. (he sat while looking at me intensely)

Tata: We have other news as well. It's about your land issue, Mama.

Makhulu: My granddaughter and I have already found a way to deal with it. We have sent the documents to the department of rural affairs and tomorrow we are going to see a lawyer.

Tata: You did what? You think a man like Thomas will just hand it over to you on a silver platter because a judge might tell him to? You both are clearly way in over your heads. I said I'd take care of it.

Langa: Thomas is not the only owner of the place. He has a silent partner. Tata and I have been negotiating with the man since he has a bigger share than Thomas. He owns 55% of that place. He gave us a price. (Makhulu sat forward looking hopeful)

Makhulu: Will he convince his partner to also sell?

Tata: He just might.

Makhulu: How much does he want?

Tata: (clears his Throat) He has all the money he could want and that's why letting go of this land is no issue to him. I'm sure he'll be able to buy Thomas out and give 100% ownership to you.

Makhulu: Give me an amount, Kumkani. Stop beating around the bush I'm too old for that.

Tata: On condition that Othunyiweyo marries his son. (I looked at him shocked)

Makhulu: I hope you did not go and promise that man my granddaughter. Tell him to keep the land because I'm not willing to pay such a dear price for something that won't give me as much meaning to my life as my child does.

Mama: We are speaking about a good man. Their families are big deals in the political world.

Makhulu: Hey, I don't care what they are. If I had to choose between that land and my Othu I'd choose her over anything and anyone. If I had to choose between my own son and granddaughter I'd choose her.

Me: I'm sure you all came here knowing my answer. It's a no from me. We will find a way to get it.

Tata: You are messing with dangerous people here,
Othunyiweyo.

Me: You don't care, Tata. Of I were to die tomorrow you would not shed a single tear and neither would uMama. Langa might shame but not you. I'm not going to marry a stranger. You've already disowned me in my view so I've been living without you for all my life now.

Tata: I knew that I should have chosen the boy instead of you.
(he shouted)

Me: What boy?

Mama: We have said more than enough.

Tata: Let me tell...

Makhulu: Hey, hey Kumkani don't you dare. (she cut him short while pointing at him)

Tata: I don't know why Othunyiweyo hates me so much when all I've given her is the best that life has to offer. Do you still blame me for driving drunk that night when you were a little girl and we had that accident. Yes, you were paralysed but I spent my money on the best doctors in the world to get you walking again. What else do you want me to do dammit? I've apologised for that mistake and made sure you got fixed. (he shouted and stood in anger)

Makhulu: I suggest that you all go and come back when you are calmer. My daughter is not going to marry that boy. Tell his father to go find someone else. My precious gift from God is not up for sale for some land.

Tata: She is not even created by God. (my heart felt a pain that it never ever felt before after he said that)

Me: Please get out of my house. (I said softly)

Mama: Your father did not mean that.

Makhulu: That is the most cruel thing a parent could say to a child.

Tata: Let's go.

Me: What did you even mean by that, Tata? Do you think that I'm made by the devil just because I don't do things your way?

Tata: I said let's go. (he walked out)

Makhulu: Get out of here, you ugliness. (she shouted)

Mama: I'm sorry, Othu. (she tried to hug me but I moved back)

Me: Go, Mama. Why would you want to hug the devil's child.
(Makhulu started to cry)

Makhulu: Do not say that

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Othunyiweyo. Please my, baby. You are one of the biggest gifts that I got from God.

Me: Go, Mama. Your husband doesn't like to be kept waiting.
(she walked out slowly)

Langa: He is just angry, sis. He didn't mean it.

Me: Follow your parents. You have put yourself in a prison by giving in to everything he wants. You are not happy with this arrangement but yet you are willing to wake up next to a girl you feel nothing for just because your father said so. You might be wealthy in terms of money and all other materialistic things but you are poor when it comes to things that matter. All the best. I love you believe it or not.

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I watched as he slowly made his way out. My dad just said I'm not made by God so that could only mean that he thinks I'm from the devil. Makhulu cried so much whenever I'd say that. She took her phone and spoke on the phone briefly. She told me that someone is on the way to see me. I thought she called my friends so that they can try and cheer me up. We sat in silence and after a long, long while there was a knock on the door. She stood up to open the door. I sat waiting for her guest to appear and a white man appeared. I hope it's not Thomas's partner. Well I'm guessing not because Tata would never be

happy with me marrying a white man. I suddenly recognised the man. He is the one who gave us a lift when that guy left without us. He introduced himself as a Dr Flinch.

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Dr: I'm glad to finally be able to sit and speak to you.

Makhulu: Before you start Flinch I want to speak to my granddaughter. Othu, he is about to tell you something that we have kept from you all these years. This does not mean that you are less loved, my nunu. I love you with my entire heart. Do you hear, my baby?

Me: Please just tell me, Ma. (she sighed)

Makhulu: He will explain it better.

Flinch: I'm actually not a medical doctor. I'm a scientist and I'm sure you are wondering why you should care about who or what I am. Like you...

Me: Doctor please just come out with it. (I cut him short)

Dr: Uhm, years ago there was a certain project, a very secret one. I got called in since I'm an expert in anything genetic related. This private organization funded this project. It was called "The perfect human".

Me: How am I related to all of this? Please don't give me history. Tell me why I'm suppose to care. Was my father one of the sponsors who gave money and now he angered people?

Dr: I'll explain in simple summarised term. We needed donors to create these perfect babies. Men to donate sperm and women to donate eggs so that we can form embryo's. These embryo's were different from ordinary ones because they were genetically modified. Some genetics were injected into them. These were to ensure that they are "perfect". They were suppose to have a high IQ and have more special advance ways of seeing life. This project was started so that those who were created would mate so that the world could be filled with a smarter generation.

Me: So you just mess up the futures of innocent babies that's what you saying? Why am I being told this again?

Dr: Well when the embryo is developed enough we would then put it in the woman's body so that she can carry it to term. We obviously monitor the pregnancy carefully but our first six attempts failed because all the women miscarried. We decided to shut down the project but decided to try again. A young couple from South Africa heard of it and signed up to be donors. We then started again and took some sperm from the man and eggs from the woman to create an embryo and like the ones before we injected them with genetic cells. We

implanted two embryo's in this donor hoping for the best. The pregnancy was not easy so the couple had to choose one twin. Either the boy or girl.

Me: What?

Dr: They chose the girl because they already had a boy. The child would be theirs of course but we just wanted to see if it's possible to create a perfect child. (I looked at my granny)

Me: What happened to that child? Did she die like all the failed experiments?

Dr: No, she lived. We noticed the mistake we made. We told the women who were volunteers to not interact with the child. Usually mother's communicate with their unborn children and it's believed the child responds to that. Non of the previous donors did that but with the last one I decided to do things differently. I asked the woman to bond with the unborn child but she had difficulty doing so. That's when I made plan B. I approached the gr...

Me: Doctor, you are saying so much and it confuses me. I'm still asking why I'm being told all of this?

Dr: Because you were the last and only surviving embryo. (I almost collapsed)

Makhulu: Flinch came to tell me what your parents signed up for after your mother could not bond with you while she was

pregnant with you. I was just shocked and disgusted with how they played God. He told me to speak to you and sing for you while you were in your mother's womb. I did just that whenever she would fall asleep and that's when you'd kick the most. (she started to cry)

Dr: Your grandmother was the first person who showed you love. I think you heard the soothing sounds of her voice that was filled with love and because you were a special fetus you knew that's love and I think that's why you are so attached to your granny.

Me: Well your project failed again because I'm not a perfect child.

Dr: And that's what we learnt that maybe such a thing will never exist. I'm just glad that you survived. Your IQ is high but you'll never be perfect so yes, we failed.

Me: No wonder my dad said I'm not created by God. He's right because I was made in a lab for selfish reasons. How could you be so cruel? I'm a defect too because clearly you didn't get the results you were hoping for. (I stood)

Makhulu: You are no such thing, Othunyiweyo. They might have been able to form your physical being and manipulate it with their medicine but it is only God that can breath life and soul to

a human being. He wanted you to be a part of this world or else he would not have given you life.

Me: So I'm biologically my current parents child?

Dr: Yes, but I've always seen you as my child in a way too since I formed you.

Me: I'm not your child. Don't you dare even say that to me. What did my parents get for being a part of this? I have a feeling that they didn't do it just to get a bouncing bundle of joy.

Dr: They got paid a lot of money. A lot of it and in dollars and something about having a perfect daughter fascinated your father.

Me: It explains why he hates me so much. I'm a disappointment because he expected a daughter who was perfect and would do all that daddy wants.

Makhulu: I love you and even when your parents returned to South Africa and the doctor told me about how they conceived you I was still in love with you. You are my gift. That's why I named you Othunyiweyo because I believe that God sent you to bring some hope to this evil world. I'm not saying you must save the world but you bring love and joy in your own little way. Do not mind how you were created.

Me: I must go. (I left them)

Makhulu: Don't drive when you are like this please. (she shouted behind me)

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I rushed out while breathing heavily. I stood outside and the cool wind came with great relief because I was struggling to breath a bit. I rushed down the stairs while wiping my tears off. I'm an experiment that went wrong. I'm not perfect so it has gone wrong. My parents did not sit down and plan me. They saw we an opportunity to have money and they took it. I was just a part of the package. A part that they never wanted. How could these scientists do this? There will never be a perfect baby. Yes, I've always known I'm smarter than most my age. I still remember my therapist training me to slow my mind down when I was four because a four year old was not suppose to read, write and speak like I did. I also remember listening to my father begging my principle to keep me in the same grade when my then principle told him I'm too smart for the grade. I thought I'm just smart but never did I think it's because some scientists made me that way. I'm a factory fault. I'm like that car that came from the factory broken. Only with a car you can return it to the factory to get fixed. I can't turn back time and make my existence disappear. So that's how my parents got rich. Tata didn't have to work hard as he claimed. All he had to do was donate sperm and ensure that his wife is willing to carry

me. I got into my car anyway and drove off. I was crying but I can't be here. Makhulu kept all of this from me? I called Yandi and asked where she was and she replied. I drove there and parked. Chulu ran to me and I hoped I look decent enough. I told Yandi that we are leaving. She was concerned but let me go. I held Chulu's hand firmly and made our way to the car. She spoke so much.

"O", someone said behind us. We turned to look at the person. He walked towards us. I suddenly realised that it is an old friend. Craigh Knights. The only black man I know with a western name and surname. He looked so handsome and grown.

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Craig: Othunyiweyo "O" Zweni! (he smiled and hugged me)

Me: Hi Craig, it's been a while.

Craig: Over ten years, O. You are walking again. (he looked at my legs)

Me: Yeah, after a year of physiotherapy. It was good to see you. I have to get my daughter home.

Craig: That's your daughter? Hello, little one.

Chulu: Hello. (she smiled)

Craig: Have you been crying? (he looked at me and Chulu looked up at me)

Me: Just bad sinuses.

Craig: I might not have seen you in years but I know you. Who is that on your shirt, princess?

Chulu: It's Moana, I love her. She almost looks like me. Have you seen the cartoon before?

Craig: No but I'd love to.

Chulu: We have it on DVD. My mommy can take your number and you can borrow mine to watch it. You must return it though.

Me: Uncle Craig does not watch cartoons, baby.

Craig: I actually do. So please give me your number so that I can call you to meet up. I really want to watch Moana. (he smiled)

Me: Craig, you know you won't.

Chulu: Mommy, please give it to him. I want him to see how pretty Moana is. (I sighed)

Me: Fine. (we exchanged numbers)

Craig: I can't wait to see it. I promise to return it. What did you say your name is, princess?

Chulu: Talia Chulumanco Zweni. (he laughed softly)

Craig: I'm Craig Knights. Very nice to meet you Talia Chulumanco Zweni. (they shook hands)

Me: We have to go.

Craig: I can't wait to see you again to get the DVD of course. (I actually laughed a bit)

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We said goodbye and went to our car. I can't believe that I just ran into my "first love". Well we were too young to call it love back then but he was a special friend. Until he left without a goodbye. He has an accent so I'm guessing he moved out of South Africa. We drove around because I did not want to go home. Makhulu called but I did not answer. I'm still upset with her for failing to tell me that I'm s science project. I drove to a hotel and told Chulu it's an adventure. Hours went by and I called makhulu to tell her I'm fine but I need time and that we'll sleep at a hotel. The last thing I want is for her to die of a heart attack due to worrying. I called room service and we ate. We played a few games until Chulu finally fell asleep. I went to the bathroom to shower and when I was done I stood in front of a large mirror. I don't usually do this because I don't like what I see. I let the towel fall to the floor and I looked at myself. I ran my fingers over the long very visible scar on my belly. Well it starts on my right breast and go all the way down to my left hip. I hate looking at myself in the mirror because of it. I at

times forget that I was in an accident with uTata when I was fourteen. It left me paralysed for a year and left me with the scar that is stopping me from wearing revealing clothes. Not even my friends have seen this scar. I had forgotten that I was once bound to a wheelchair until Craig brought it up. I quickly moved from the mirror and wore the gowns they provide at the hotel. I got into bed. My phone vibrated and I didn't recognise the number. I opened the message. "I'm sorry I just disappeared. C. Knights", it read. I switched my phone off because he might call. I'm still dealing with the fact that I'm a project and was not conceived out of love . I guess it explains why my parents don't like me. I'm now even thinking that my dad planned that car accident to finally get rid of me for good. I started to cry and kept it silent so that I don't wake Chulu up. I ended up crying myself to sleep. Maybe my mom should have had the doctors terminate me and keep my brother. All that my dad spoke suddenly made sense. He should really have chosen the boy and maybe he's even right in saying that I'm not created by God. I feel like a person without a sense of belonging.

7

Othu

Last night was the most restless night of my life. I have never tossed and turned so much in my life. I'm trying to force my heart to stop aching so much but I can't. I can't see the silver lining in all this at the moment. I'm not even in the mood to go to work today but I'll have to keep busy so that I don't think too much. I checked the time on the radio next to the bed and it's 4:30am. I switched the bedside lamp on and usually I'd say a prayer but today I didn't. Has God even heard all my prayers over the past few years? I went to the bathroom and hopped into the shower. Good thing they have soaps here. After I finished I wore my clothes of yesterday and put Chulu's jean and jacket on her while she was asleep. Such a deep sleeper this one. I took all our stuff, carried her and left the room to go to the reception area to check out. My little one is becoming heavier now. Or is it because I'm not particularly strong at the moment? I put the bags in the car and placed her in her seat. Hopefully we will be on time for school today since we didn't spend the night at home. I'll wake her up at her usual time. I drove home in silence because music would have made me think too deeply and that is not good when one is behind the wheel. We finally arrived after a while. I once again had to carry her so I opted for the lift instead of the stairs. The kitchen light

is on so I'm sure my gran is up already. I unlocked the door and opened. She came rushing from the passage and looked so relieved to see us. I felt her arms wrap around us before I could even greet. We greeted each other and I went to put Chulu on her bed. She still has a good hour of sleep left before I wake her up for school. I returned to the kitchen and found makhulu preparing what seems like our lunch boxes. I went to her and gave her a hug. She held me even tighter and I just cried in her arms. The only arms that have ever made me feel safe. She looked at me and wiped my tears off.

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Makhulu: My beautiful gift. (he kissed me)

Me: I'm sorry for leaving like that yesterday, Ma and for not coming back. I was just shocked, hurt and angry.

Makhulu: I'm sorry for keeping all of that from you but how you were conceived is not a issue because you are a human being. You hurt, love, get angry and feel all other emotions all humans feel. They didn't create a robot, nunu.

Me: I'll see it that way someday, Ma but for now let me just deal with this and process it.

Makhulu: Maybe you should stay home today.

Me: I want to keep busy and I look forward to seeing my class. I'm sure I'll hear very funny stories today. (I laughed softly and she smiled)

Makhulu: Go shower then so that you'll be ready when Chulu wakes up.

Me: I showered at the hotel. I just need to get dressed.

Makhulu: And eat. (she said in a stern voice and I smiled)

Me: Yes and eat too.

Makhulu: Dr Flinch wants to see you. There is more that he has to discuss with you but all in your time. I'll write his number down for you and when you are ready you can call him. You also don't have to worry about the land issue anymore because I'll ask the lawyer to deal with everything from now on. You focus on getting yourself good again.

Me: We still need to go see him today. I promised to start this with you and we will finish it together whether we are victorious or not. I actually like getting on Hans's nerve. I don't think he's that dangerous but he tries very hard to be shame. (we laughed)

Makhulu: That's how men are. Go and get dressed. I'll sort out breakfast and the lunches. I'll back your breakfast too because I know you eat at work.

Me: Thank you. (I kissed her cheek)

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I made my way to the bathroom to empty my bladder first and went to the room to choose an outfit. I didn't even check the weather but it felt warm out so I'm sure it'll be a hot day. I chose a dress and got ready for the day. After a while I went to wake Chulu up. Funny how she is a morning person during weekends and wake up early by herself but on school morning it's a struggle. She opened her eyes and yawned.

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Chulu: Are we still on the adventure? Did the dinosaur get us? (I laughed softly)

Me: No we are home and you need to get up so you can get ready for school. The dinosaur did find us and you were right he was just so friendly. (she smiled)

Chulu: I told you so.

Me: You did. (I kissed her chin) It's now time to get back to reality though. What do you want to wear today?

Chulu: You're wearing a dress so I also want to wear a dress.

Me: Dress it is. First go say good morning to Makhulu then go brush your teeth while I make your bed. (she rushed out)

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It's amazing how colourful a child's imagination is. I told her that we were in a jungle last night and she just started to imagine all kinds of animals. Some were totally unrealistic but hey anything is possible with the imagination. I tidied her bed and chose a dress for her. I finished getting her ready and marked a few books while she had her breakfast. I've been so busy that I neglected my work but luckily I'm working with primary schoolers their work is not so challenging. Soon it will be award night and I have to nominate learners who will get awards in my class. They are all so amazing and they all deserve an award for different reasons. Some for being good listeners, others for being good at reading, etc. I don't get why I have to choose a few. Chulu finally finished and we took our stuff, said goodbye to makhulu and off we went. She kept on asking me if Craig called to get the DVD. I wouldn't know because my phone is still off. We arrived at school and we rushed to her class and said goodbye to each other. Being a Pre-Primary learner must be nice but next year all of that will change. I went to the staff room as usual and ate my breakfast while I waited for Yandi. She arrived with the rest of the teachers and the meeting started. I asked the principle for a longer break in private and he had no problem with that. I then went to do what I usually do and waited for my class. I love these warm hugges that I get and it beats being stuck in corporate any day. The bell rang and

we went to class. I greeted them and asked them to share what they were up to this long weekend. I knew there'd be a few funny stories. One claimed to have climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and I laughed so much. I told them that I'll be taking an extended break and they sulked but forgot soon after we started the lesson. I managed to mark all the homework and gave them their books back. All would smile when they saw the gold stars or smiley face stickers on the end of the page. I wonder what my class will be like next year. I went on with the lesson until it was break time. They walked out and I also went to my car and went to meet Makhulu at the lawyer's offices. We arrived almost at the same time and made our way inside. The receptionist took us to his office and told us to wait. She offered coffee but I said no thanks. A man who seems like he is in his forties walked in, greeted us with handshakes and sat. We made some introductions and he is a good looking man I must say. After that we explained to him why we are here and what results we are hoping for after this.

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Mr Sonki: I've dealt with numerous similar cases so you have come to the right place. It will cost you though. (he told us his fees and I almost fainted)

Makhulu: I saved up for this money is not a problem.

Sonki: Well in that case you ladies won't mind if I quickly make a phone call right?

Me: No, sir. (I looked at Makhulu and he dialed a number and spoke to the person)

Sonki: I'm sorry about that but now that you are officially my clients I need to make sure that this issue is kept as clean as possible. I was just on the phone with Thomas's lawyer. I know these issues can make some fight dirty. I told Weber to tell his client to keep this clean or else he risks having me on his case. I'm sure by now he's tried to intimidate you somehow but rest assured that was the last time. You here a single word from Thomas you tell me. If he needs to say something to you he has to use me to get to you and he knows I don't play.

Makhulu: Oh thank you because I feared for my daughter's safety.

Sonki: You need not thank me, Ma. You pay me the big bucks so that I can make your life easy as far as this issue is concerned. They know I don't play. Now that we have that out of the way please allow me to explain in detail what will happen. Miss Zweni, I suggest that you get yourself a drink too. You'll be here for a while. (he called his assistant in)

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I've never seen someone so straight forward in my life but not in an annoying way. Well I asked for some juice and he explained things in simple terms so that makhulu could understand. We also found that we have the same clan name and in our culture that means he is family. He said I must now call him Malume. I laughed a bit but I actually liked the man. It seems he really is worth the big money he charges. We got all other formalities out of the way and makhulu and I were almost experts in this kind of claim, well so so anyway because he is good at explaining. We finally ended the meeting and thanked him. I made sure my gran got a cab home and I drove back to work. I arrived and thanked the lady who supervised my little ones while I was gone. We went on with the business of the day as usual until it was second break. I decided that I'll sit and eat in my class today. It's not a long break but I have time to eat something. Yandi walked in while I was eating and hugged me.

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Yandi: No, friend but what you are doing is not right. I could see that you weren't well yesterday and then you switch off your phone. I had to call your granny and she said it's best I speak to you.

Me: I'm okay, friend and I'm sorry for everything.

Yandi: I'll accept it only if you tell me what's wrong.

Me: I finally know why my parents aren't as loving towards me like yours are to you. (she sat and I told her everything)

Yandi: Othu, when Licia told us about the IVF thing in order to get pregnant you were the first one to say you'll support her. What's different between what those people did and what Licia wants to do?

Me: Licia is not doing it to get a perfect child nor is she doing it to get rich. She is doing it so she can have a child she'll love.

Yandi: But does the way her child will be conceived mean that it will be less human? No, it doesn't and that's what I'm trying to tell you. Screw the reasons why your parents did it but you were created and God blessed you with life because you are His creation. I'm actually glad your parents did it because I have a friend and sister today. Chulu has a mother. If you didn't exist what do you think would have happened to her. Your ancestors acknowledge you because I could feel them when we went to their graves. I'm glad they screwed up the experiment because I don't want a perfect friend.

Me: You've never used the word scree so much. (I laughed)

Yandi: Well you're parents are the screwed ones here not you. (I stood and hugged her)

Me: Thank you for being a great friend. I'm sure I'll be fine soon just give me time. I think I want to speak to Unathi and Kumkani first but not today.

Yandi: Take your time. So yesterday I saw you with some yummy man. Do tell.

Me: He's just an old friend. Haven't seen him in years. He just disappeared.

Yandi: Well I saw the way he looks at you. I suggest you go out for coffee with the man and hear why he disappeared on you.

Me: I think I know why. Do you want vetkoek? Makhulu made them.

Yandi: How I wish I had a gran. I'd love some thank you. You and Chulu are being spoiled. (she took one)

Me: Is Zuko still planning on suing Hans?

Yandi: You know she does not back down from anything so I'm sure she will. That man can try to lie all he wants but we all know that he was hoping for a wild animal to get us while we were out there. Thank goodness for that guy. He clearly cares about you Othu. Maybe call him since Makhulu said there's more to this.

Me: I will when I'm ready.

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We sat and spoke while eating. I told her about Langa and she told me to let my big brother deal with stuff on his own because I have my own load. She's right I guess but Langa looked so defeated yesterday. I'll go see him someday. The break was over and we went on with our usual duties. Hours went by and we were finally able to go home. We first went to do some shopping. Makhulu asked that I get her a few stuff. We got everything and went to the car to pack it in the boot. A beautiful car parked next to me and Craig walked out. I can't believe this is the same skinny boy that I knew. How can someone transform so much? He spotted us and Chulu ran to hug him. And then? Since when do we hug strangers? I asked myself.

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Me: Chulu baby, you can't hug strangers like that. (she walked back to me)

Craig: A stranger, me? I'm hurt.

Me: She doesn't know you so to her you are.

Craig: I have been calling you to borrow that DVD. (Chulu looked at me)

Me: I can't find it.

Chulu: It's in my room with all my other cartoons. (I looked at her)

Me: Oh. (I smiled) You'll get it some other time. I'll have to check with my husband first.

Chulu: Mommy, but you are not married. (she whispered and he laughed softly)

Me: I'm not? (she shook her head)

Chulu: It is just you, me and makhulu at the house. (she whispered again)

Craig: Well now that I know that the husband is imaginary I ask that you two beautiful ladies please have a drink with me.

Me: We can't.

Chulu: But I'm actually thirsty.

Craig: Come one, O. You can't let your child die of thirst. (I shook my head)

Me: Fine.

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They both smiled and if I didn't know better I'd say they planned it all. We packed the rest of the stuff and went back inside the mall to one of the eating joints to get drinks. I finally switched my phone on. So many messages but I'll read them when I'm alone. We talked but nothing deep. Told him which suburb I live in and he doesn't live far from here. After a while I

told him that we had to go. When we got out it was raining and it was not just a little drizzle. It was pouring. We ran to our cars and Chulu enjoyed running in the rain it seems. We drove out and realised that small blocks of ice also started to fall from the sky. My phone rang, it's Craig. I answered. "Follow me to my place because it's closer. The hail might damage your car.", he said and dropped the call. I was debating with myself about whether I should do it or risk driving home. I love my car so I decided to do as he said. We got to a block of flats soon enough and parked inside. We got out and followed him to the lift. I can't believe I'm trusting him so much. He could have turned into a serial killer for all I know. We got to a beautiful, spacious loft apartment. Clearly the living setting of a bachelor. I hope that coming here is not a mistake.

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#Craig

I looked at the only girl my heart has ever loved as she took off her daughter's wet jacket. Well she's no longer a girl but a beautiful woman. I went to the bathroom to get clean towel for them. Again she first made sure that her daughter is taken care off first. She used one towel to dry Chulu's hair. She ran her hands over her little dress and I know it's wet too so I went to get one of my T-shirts and told her to dress Chulu in it. I gave

her one of my morning gowns since her clothes are also wet. I excused them so that they could change. They appeared soon after. I laughed at how big my shirt was on Chulu. It came up to her ankles. She looks adorable though and her mother just wow. I took their wet clothes and put it in the dryer and went to change into dry clothes myself. I went out to join them in the lounge.

"Mommy, it looks like a ball gown", she held the shirt and giggled.

Othunyiweyo laughed as she watched her daughter twirl in her "ball gown". I couldn't help but laugh myself. I went to them and put the TV on hoping that there's something on that Chulu might like. Othunyiweyo stood to go and call her granny to say where they are and why they are here I think. We switched from one channel to another and waited for Chulu to tell me when to stop. An advert where a man lifts his baby up in the air appeared. Chulu's facial expression suddenly changed but I don't know what she might be feeling. I suddenly wondered what happened to her father. Who would leave a woman like O and such an adorable child? A fool, I thought. The ad passed and she finally told me which channel she'd like and it's a cartoon one. Othu returned and gave me the phone saying her granny wants to speak to me. I was not expecting that. I took the phone and greeted her and she did the same.

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Makhulu: You has better make sure they are safe

Advertisement

Cray. I don't know you but I'm trusting you with them. If there is a single scratch on either of them I'll come there and I'll chop of your pipiliza. I know all men are lost without that part of their bodies. (I was lost for words)

Me: I promise that they are safe, Ma. I'll personally make sure they are back home after the hale and rain has stopped.

Makhulu: Good, please give Chulu the phone. I look forward to meeting you.

Me: I do too, Mrs Zweni. (I handed the phone over to Chulu)

Othu: I'm sure she gave you a warning and maybe even threatened you. I'm sorry. (I laughed)

Me: Your grandma is the first person that I am actually scared off. Well I was scared of my mother and father too but she is something else. (she laughed)

Othu: How are your parents? (I looked out the window)

Me: They died five months after we moved to the States. Car accident.

Othu: I'm sorry to hear that.

Me: It's cool. How are your parents.

Othu: They are themselves.

Me: I'm guessing that you still aren't a close knit family?

Othu: It's worse now but let's not talk about it now.

Me: It seems we still have a lot of catching up to do. I'm sorry I left without a goodbye, O.

Othu: I sat on our usual spot and waited for you to show up for a whole month, Craig. I thought you left because I was paralysed. (she said softly and I sat closer to her)

Me: That was not even one of the reasons I left, O. I'll tell you everything when the time is right but I did not go because you were paralysed.

Othu: I needed you, Craig. Back then you were the only person I could talk to. (a tear fell and she wiped it off quickly)

Me: I'm sorry. (I held her hands)

Othu: The rain is now stopping. It's time that we go. Thank you for providing shelter for us. Chulu, it's time to go. (she stood)

Chulu: But I'm watching. (she sulked)

Me: We have a TV at home. You'll watch there. Makhulu is alone so please get up. (she got up slowly)

Me: Come on, sunshine. I'm sure it's not the last time we'll see each other.

Chulu: Will you visit? (I looked at O)

Othu: We'll see.

Me: See? There's hope. (I picked her up and flung her in the air)

Chulu: Higher, uncle Craig.

Othu: No, uncle Craig is an old man so he can't go higher.

Me: I'm no old man. (I held her steadily above my head)

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She's actually not heavy at all. She laughed so much and made "plane" sounds while she spread her arms out. I put her down after a while of flying. I'm guessing I just found one of the things she loves. Othu dressed her daughter and she too got herself dressed. We opened the door only to find that the hale is just worse and bigger.

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Me: This is just going to damage your car, O and I can only imagine what the road is like.

Othu: It was such a beautiful afternoon. I guess you'll have to put up with us for a little while longer. (she looked at Chulu then at me)

Me: I don't mind. I can whip up some dinner for you guys. (I smiled)

Othu: Can you even cook? (I laughed)

Me: No.

Chulu: My mommy can cook. (she looked up at me)

Me: Will you please cook something for us, mommy? (she smiled)

Othu: Only because I have this one to feed but we are leaving soon after we've had dinner. I'm sure the weather will be better by then. (I nodded)

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Chulu was fascinated by the small blocks of ice that fell from the sky so we went to the sliding door leading to the balcony to watch from there. Othu didn't even ask where what is in my kitchen she just opened all cupboard doors until she would find what she is looking for. The hale stopped. After a while my apartment got filled with an aroma that made my mouth water. I looked over to the open plan kitchen area and looked at her as she chopped something. My heart suddenly melted and it got even mushier when Chulu put her soft, warm hand in mine and smiled at me. I smiled back and tightened my grip around her hand. I wonder where her father is or who he is. I'm a man with means to investigate and find even the most important people

and know their darkest secrets. When I arrived back in South Africa I was tempted to do the same to Othunyiweyo. Find out more about her life but my respect for her would not allow it. I actually want her to be the one to open up to me about what has been happening in her life. About an hour passed and dinner was ready. We helped set the table. It's the least I could do to thank her for the lovely meal. She asked us to hold hands and said grace. The last time I did that was when my mother was still alive. We ate and my goodness this woman can cook. I know her granny taught her how to because I know how her relationship with her mom is. It's always been like that. So much that she didn't want to introduce me to her family but she knew my parents well. I packed the dishes in the dishwasher afterwards and thanked her. We played hide and seek because Chulu asked us to. Well it went terrible for me because I'm a tall man so hiding in an open plan apartment was impossible but I had fun. I put on more cartoon movies for her and she sat down and watched with such concentration. Othu and I sat on the couch. I reached out to hold her hand but she moved it and looked at me.

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Othu: What are you doing?

Me: I'm hoping that you'll tell me what's bothering you, O.

Othu: You go and return after about eleven years and expect that our friendship will be as you left it, Craig?

Me: I'm not expecting anything. I just want to know what is happening in your life at the moment.

Othu: Nothing much has changed. I'm still as you knew me. Only difference is that I've grown and now have priorities. (she looked at Chulu)

Me: You're a great mom. She loves you. So who is the bastard that left you to raise a child alone?

Othu: Who said I'm raising her alone?

Me: Well she kinda told me that it's always been you two. (she looked at me)

Othu: I don't know who her father is and I don't want to get into it, Craig. (I nodded)

Me: Okay, why were you crying yesterday? (she took a deep breath and told me the story while looking down)

Othu: Now you know.

Me: Well there loss for choosing money over you then. I know you're strong so you'll get through it. I still think you're a special woman.

Othu: Thanks and you, what do you do now and are you here permanently or not?

Me: I'm a businessmen. I do consulting for security and tracking companies and other businesses. I'm here to stay. I promise.

Othu: Wife and kids? (I looked down and shook my head)

Me: I don't have any of those.

Othu: You did put the word "yet" at the end of your sentence so I'm guessing you never want to have any of those. (I looked at Chulu)

Me: A lot has happened and it is not something I can tell you in passing like this. Can you please meet up with me on Saturday for the entire day. You can bring Chulu of course. I'll make sure that we go to a child friendly place where she'll be entertained while we talk.

Othu: Okay Saturday it is then. I'm curious about where you've been. I hope it was all worth breaking our friendship. (we both laughed)

Me: It wasn't but I hope we can be friends again. You look beautiful by the way. (she smiled)

Othu: Thank you and you have come a long way since I last saw you. My friend would say you're a "beautiful" man. (I laughed)

Thank you for making Chulu laugh. I've honestly never heard her laugh like when you picked her up and flung her in the air.

Me: She's a special child and I'm just glad I'm liked that's all.
(she smiled)

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She told me about the people in her life now. I decided to not push about Chulu's father and wait for her to be ready to tell me the story. I'm guessing she had a wild night one time and was a bit reckless but that's fine. It does not make the respect that I have for her fade. She also told me about this land issue and how this Thomas man is handling it. I felt my anger surfers when I heard what he had tried to do to her and her friends. I don't know the man but if he carries on he will force me to get to know him and it won't end well for him. I have a side to me that I don't want to show. A life that I don't want to go back to. I don't even know how I'm going to break the news about my past to Othunyiweyo. Should I use out get together on Saturday to tell her everything about the life that I lived? The last time I remember she hated anything gangster and violence related. Only thing is I'm no gangster and I've never been. Some people would beg to differ though. The two of us have a lot of talking to do and I'm afraid of being naked with her and I'm not talking about physical nakedness. I mean emotional nakedness. To reveal all to someone and hope that they won't judge you. I've

been wanting to kiss her so many times tonight. When she came from the bedroom dressed in my gown, when she sat and spoke briefly about life, when she stood in my kitchen cooking. But I won't though because she is going through a lot and I don't want to take advantage. I wonder if she'll even want me near her when I tell her that I was something else before I became a business man. Will she be able to love an assassin? Well retired one but my past might still be a deal breaker for her. There is so much I need to tell her or is it best to just keep it all to myself for now?

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NARRATED

Chulu sat on the couch feeling a bit sleepy. She moved from her spot and went to cuddle up next to her mother. Her mother held her tightly and she could feel how her mother's body shook whenever she'd laugh. She had a great day today and she really likes uncle Craig. And was wondering if God had finally answered her prayers. Is uncle Craig the father that she asked for. He lifted her up in the air as she'd seen other daddies do to their children. She prayed for a father who would do the same to her and uncle Craig did. She saw that as a sign that God had indeed answered her prayer. Suddenly her mother stood and said something about going back home. Her sleeping self got

lifted off the couch but the comfort felt different. The grip was much stronger than her mommy's but yet gentle. She opened her eyes slightly and saw her mom follow behind which means that uncle Craig was holding her. She'd seen Buhle being carried by her father and Khloe too and often wondered what it felt like. For the first time she actually has an idea of what it might be like. The cool wind blew into her face and it woke her up a bit. They got into the car and she was put into her seat. Uncle Craig said goodbye and kisses her forehead with his cool lips. Do daddies have cool lips? she asked herself because her mommy's lips are always warm. She saw her mom hug Uncle Craig and got into the car. She waved at him and he smiled and did the same. The car went into the road.

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Chulu: Mommy, I like uncle Craig.

Othu: He likes you too, bhabha.

Chulu: Is he going to be my daddy? (Othu almost choked)

Othu: Just because he likes us it does not mean he will be your daddy, my love. I'm sorry but it does not work that way.

Chulu: Oh. (she said softly and it broke Othu's heart)

Othu: I am going to organise party packs and cake for your class this weekend so you can enjoy your birthday with them. (she said in a cheerful voice)

Chulu: I want to celebrate at home.

Othu: Well we will go out. You, me and makhulu and I'm sure aunty Yandi, Licia, Zuko and Poppy will join us too. You'll get a lot of gifts.

Chulu: Okay. (she said in a whisper)

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She was hoping that by the time her birthday comes God would have answered her prayer. She looked up to the dark sky and wondered if her prayer really went all the way up or not. They arrived at home after a while and she changed into her sleepwear and her mom tucked her in. Makhulu joined them and they prayed. She got under the covers again and said goodnight to the women in her life. They kissed her cheeks and left her room. She put her hands together and closed her eyes. "Hello, God. It's me Chulu. I know my mommy said uncle Craig is not going to be my daddy but he lifted me up in the air as I asked my new daddy would. I like him. Please make him like me enough to be my daddy, Amen and goodnight", she prayed softly and closed her eyes. She smiled as she thought about today and finally fell asleep.

8

Othu

A few days have gone by and it seems I find myself enjoying Craig's company more and more each day. Some part of me fears that he will stop calling someday and just go away without a warning again. Makhulu has been asking when she'd meet him and I just don't have an answer anymore. It seems Thomas is going to abide to the law because I thought I'd get some "back off" kind of sign by now but I haven't. Mr Sonki called saying that he managed to get an earlier date for the land claims court and I wondered how he managed that because when I researched it it said the waiting list is long. I guess the man has his ways but we are not complaining. I'm also worried about Chulu and her having this false hope that Craig will be her father because it's not even realistic. He doesn't want to me in a relationship with me and I'm sure he's not ready to be a father to a toddler. I sat in the kitchen with Makhulu while I waited for Chulu to come out of the bathroom so we can go. Makhulu would look at me but say nothing. It was thee most uncomfortable moment of ever. I sighed loudly and turned to look at her.

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Me: You have something on your mind, Mrs Zweni. What is it?
(she laughed)

Makhulu: I don't like being called Mrs Zweni by you. I do have something on my mind, Miss Zweni. I'm wondering why Chulumanco thinks this Cray man is her father. (she looked at me intensely)

Me: I don't know either. I think she's getting attached because no man has ever given her the same attention.

Makhulu: That poor child. If Kumkani and Langa played their roles in her life she would not be acting this way. What are this man's intentions, Othunyiweyo?

Me: I don't know because we are not in a relationship. I'll talk to Chulu and explain everything to her. She can't just claim any man as her father.

Makhulu: She doesn't just claim any man as father. It's the first she's done it and that makes me want to meet this man even more. I can't believe that you went to school with him and was his best friend but never introduced him to me.

Me: You always said a boy and girl can't just be friends so I didn't want you to think that I had a boyfriend then.

Makhulu: Well I would have minded back then but I won't mind if you meet a special male friend now. Just make sure you bring that person home so I can see him. We old people have a way of seeing people's true colours. (Chulu came rushing in)

Chulu: I'm ready to go, Mommy.

Me: Did you wash your hands? (she nodded and brought her hands to my nose)

Chulu: Smells nice. When are we going to visit uncle Craig again? (Makhulu raised her brows while looking at me)

Me: Chulu, I'm not trying to break your little heart by saying this but uncle Craig is not your daddy, bhabha. I'm not sure he even wants children.

Chulu: Does he think I'm unlikable? (she looked at her hands while fiddling with her thumbs)

Makhulu: Yhu never! My Chulu is not just likable she is lovable. (she kissed Chulu's cheeks)

Me: Makhulu is right and uncle Craig adores you and he doesn't have to be your daddy in order for him to love you, Chulz.

Chulu: Is he going to ignore me like your daddy does when he is here? (my heart broke into a million pieces)

Me: No, so far he has not been ignoring you. When he calls he always asks to speak to you, right? (she nodded) And tomorrow we are going to go out with him.

Chulu: I feel sad when your mommy and daddy ignore me, mommy. (Makhulu blinked away her tears)

Me: I know and I'm so sorry. (I hugged her)

Makhulu: You two have to go before you are late.

Me: At least it's Friday. Kiss makhulu so we can go. (I stood to get our stuff)

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She kissed her grandma and led the way to the car. I hate it when she is sad early in the morning. Maybe I should get someone who is going to investigate Tatiana's past and see if I won't find any clues as to who she was sleeping with when Chulu was confused. It breaks my heart to see my child heartbroken. I wish I can give her the type of father that she wants but unfortunately money can't buy daddies. I've always thought I'm enough and can fill both parental roles in her life but I'm clearly wrong. She has a void in her heart that I won't be able to fill. I can still hear her laughter when Criag swung her in the air. I've heard her laugh many time but that laugh was one that was unfamiliar even to me. We drove in silence and let the radio fill the car with some noise at least. After a while we arrived and at the same time as Buhle. Her father picked her up and would make bubble sounds on her neck and it made the little girl giggle so much. I looked at Chulu and her facial expression was undescrivable. We got to her class and I kissed her goodbye and went on with my day. The bell rang after a while and I started to do my daily work routine. Break time came and my learners went out to enjoy their lunches. I sat in

my class and suddenly someone very unexpected stood by the door with the school principle. It's Dr Flinch. I stood and let them in. Mr Thorn excused himself and shut the door behind him. We stood awkwardly not knowing what to do. I offered him a seat and apologised for the small size of the chair but he joked about it instead. I didn't laugh but sat to listen to his reason for coming to my work.

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Flinch: I'm sorry for just coming to your workplace like this, Miss Zweni. I'm sure you wonder why I'm here and how I even know that you work here.

Me: It seems my grandma likes you, doctor so I'll just take a wild guess and say that you got information about her from me. I am wondering why you are here though. (he cleared his throat)

Flinch: I know that you are disgusted by my involvement in your life and I am too.

Me: I hope you don't expect me to call you daddy. I have one and I don't want another. (he laughed awkwardly)

Flinch: I'm not expecting anything. I just came to tell you the rest of the story.

Me: Is this where you reveal my superpowers to me? (he laughed)

Flinch: Now that would be interesting but no. What did get my attention was your recovery after the accident many years ago. I looked through your medical file and all the stories about similar spine injuries that I know left patients permanently paralysed. Yet you recovered so quickly.

Me: I thought you said you're no medical doctor and who gave you the right to look into my medical record. Should I be worried that you'll be a danger to me, doctor? Why bother so much with my life? (I raised my voice)

Flinch: Like I've said some part of me sees you as a daughter. Maybe the fact that I never had any children plays a part. I'm sorry. I will stop because it clearly upsets you. I am here to tell you something else. (he gave me documents)

Me: What are these?

Flinch: The signed contract that your father and mother signed when they agreed to be a part of the project.

Me: I'm not interested in anything concerning my parents at the moment. You can keep it, sir. (I handed them back)

Flinch: This concerns you, Miss Zweni. According to that contract you are entitled to half of what your father owns. (my eyes widened)

Me: But how?

Flinch: There is a clause there on the second last page that clearly states that should the child live half of the money the volunteering parties got paid belongs to the child. Your father later said he wanted to use the capital in starting a construction company and invest the rest in shares in the mining industry. The next clause after that first one was specially added to his contract saying that half of the company and also half of of the shares he accumulated should then belong to the child. Today your father is owner of one of Africa's most successful companies and has shares in one of the world's biggest mine companies because of the money he got from being a part of the experiment. Half of which belongs to you. (my jaw dropped to the floor)

Me: But I didn't help grow the company in any way.

Flinch: It doesn't matter because your money helped in forming it. He was suppose to have told you this when you reached age 21 but I have a feeling he has not. If your father owns 50% in shares in that mining company you own 25% of it and you own 50% of his construction company.

Me: But I don't want to be in corporate.

Flinch: You can be a silent partner all while carrying on with your teaching.

Me: My father would never allow me to just take half of his business interests, doctor. You clearly don't know him.

Flinch: Well there are records that prove that he is the man that he is today because of the money that was given to him. Money that you rightfully own half of. If he fights this he will most definitely be fighting a losing battle. You have proof to back you and witnesses and I'm one of them. I was there when the terms and conditions were read to them. I was there when they agreed and signed.

Me: I can't believe he kept this from me. (I looked at the documents and read the part and it did indeed say that)

Flinch: He went against the contract by not telling you and giving you what was rightfully yours when you were twenty one. That means you can sue him for not disclosing that to you and make even more money.

Me: I don't know what to say. (he smiled)

Flinch: It's time that you get your lawyers to communicate with his lawyers so that you can get what's yours as soon as possible. Congratulations, Miss Zweni. You have just become a rich woman. In fact you have been since you were born. (he shook my hand)

Me: I still don't know what to say.

Flinch: I'll leave you alone so that it can all just sink in. (he stood)

Me: Thank you for telling me this, doctor. I don't think my father would have.

Flinch: It's the least that I can do. If you want to go out and talk some time or have more questions for me. I'm free so just call me. I'm not trying to get close romantically so please don't think that. I just have a feeling you'll have some questions. Tell your lawyer to also contact me anytime if need be. Don't worry about the documents because I have back up should "something" happen to them.

Me: Thank you. (he nodded and left)

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I closed my eyes and said a short prayer asking God to give me strength to deal with all that is happening. My life suddenly seems busier. I have let go of the negative thought that I'm not created by God because I know that I am. He has put me in this world for a reason. I, like everyone else have a purpose. I read the documents again. I can't believe that I was kept in the dark about this all this time. The bell rang and my class returned. I gave them something to keep them busy because I can't think straight at the moment. Hours went by and it was finally time to go home. Chulu's mood is much better now. We drove to get

some take away and I told makhulu not to cook. I'm so glad it's Friday. We got home and ate dinner early because it seems Chulu is sleepy. I bathed her afterwards and we played some games until my baby was too exhausted to keep her eyes open. I'm glad she went to bed early because I actually wanted to go visit Langa. I told Makhulu where I'm going and she hated that I drove so late at night for someone who doesn't even care. I asked her not to wait up and drove off to my brother's place. I hope he is in town. The security guard gave me trouble at the gate so I had to show my ID so he could see I have the same surname as Langa since he doesn't pick up when buzzed. I parked and looked up at the beautiful estate complex area. Someday I'll buy a house with a pool and garden just like these ones I see here, I thought to myself. I'm sure Chulu would like it very much. I pressed the little grey door bell button but heard no sound from it. I knocked but still nothing. I went to the side gate and made my way to the back door. I hope Langa didn't decide to get a dog because I haven't been here in months. Our relationship is not close but we can tolerate each other. I passed the kitchen window and stopped in my tracks just as I was about to reach the door. I went back to the window and I nearly fell to the concrete paving. Langa was in his kitchen kissing another man. I stood against the wall not even sure if I must knock or not. I went to the door and knocked anyway. It seems my family has more secrets than I thought. I'm still

wondering if I should take what's mine from my father or not. Do I even want to be rich? I've seen that rich people aren't the most friendly people in the world. What if I turn out like my dad once I have extra zero's in my bank account? Maybe I should just let him keep it all and go on with my life. The door flung open and made me snap out of my deep thoughts. My brother in law stood there with a wide smile. Is it too early to call him that?

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#Langa

"Baby, it's your sister!", Ian shouted from the door. Is he crazy? How could he call me that when it's my sister at the door? I turned to face the door and it's indeed Othunyiweyo. She stood there smiling so awkwardly. Ian greeted her with a hug and I just wished he'd disappear right now. He let her in and I stood smiling awkwardly like a child who got caught with his hand in the cookie jar. She came to stand in front of me and greeted. "Hug each other for goodness sake. You are siblings.", he said and put Othu close to me. We patted each other's backs in our attempt to hug.

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Ian: Well since your brother won't introduce me to you I'll just do it myself. I'm Ian and I'm his...

Me: Friend, he is a friend and he is just leaving. Thanks for the visit, bro. I'll see you soon. (I cut him short and shook his hand)

Othu: Pity you're leaving. I'm Othunyiweyo. Little sister to this one.

Ian: I know who you are, girl. Believe it or not your brother actually talks a lot about. About how bra...

Me: Ian, go please. (I looked at him and he rolled his eyes)

Ian: Oh my word, you look so beautiful. I just want to cuddle you. (he hugged Othu and she laughed)

Othu: Thank you.

Me: You can cuddle her some other time but for now let me speak to my sister alone please.

Ian: Okay, babe. (he leaned forward to kiss me but I moved back)

Me: What the hell? (I pretended to be angry)

Ian: It was nice to meet you, sweetie. Don't be a stranger. Here is my number. (he gave her his number, looked at me and left)

Othu: I really like him. Will he be one of your groomsmen on your wedding day? (I cleared my throat)

Me: Why are you here

Othunyiweyo?

Othu: To hear if you've finally grown balls to tell Mrs Zweni Snr where to get off.

Me: Don't speak to me as if I'm your younger brother. Respect me, Othu. (I pointed at her)

Othu: So you're going to marry the girl?

Me: I said so didn't I? Do you want anything to drink? (she shook her head)

Othu: Bhuti, please stop torturing yourself to make our father happy.

Me: I've always known that you are jealous of my relationship with them since you...

Othu: I pity you not jealous. I care about you, Langa. (I cut him short)

Me: Well don't. Go home to your child and our granny. I have a family.

Othu: One that control you and don't take your feelings into consideration. You have a degree and experience. Start your own life and leave them and their money. It's not worth your happiness.

Me: So is that what's this is about? Your fear that he will make me his sole beneficiary.

Othu: If only you knew that I own h...(she shouted but cut herself short)

Me: Finish the sentence. You own what? You don't own anything. You own a car because makhulu pitied you. You rent your apartment not own it. So what exactly do you own, Othunyiweyo.

Othu: I don't even know why I bothered. You are even starting to sound like Tata now. I'm sorry I bothered you. I'll try not to care next time. I hope you'll be able to come out of that small, stuffy closet you are in. (she turned to walk away but I stopped her)

Me: What is that suppose to mean?

Othu: You know exactly what it means. (I started to panic)

Me: Stop beating around the bush and just say what you want to say or was that not programmed into you when those scientists made you? (her eyes became shiner)

Othu: At least I'm living my life. Science project or not. You on the other hand not so much. A part of you die each and every single day just because you are afraid to show people who you are. Yes, I'm an experiment but I'm finally embracing it. When

are you going to embrace who you are? (she said with a shaky voice and walked out)

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I stood there with a lump in my throat. You see, the truth is that I've always been envious of my sister. She has always been a brave girl. When our mother told her to wear something she didn't like when we were children she'd speak up and wear what she wants. She has always been this way but I'm not able to do that. I am the coward who always follows orders. Being mean to her is the only way I can hide my weakness. If I didn't know better I'd think I'm the science project and not her since I do all my parents tell me to. I've agreed to marry a girl I don't know nor love just because I'm told it's my duty to carry on the family legacy. The Zweni family needs an heir and I'm expected to produce one. My father will never accept that I'm gay. I broke up with Ian tonight but it seems he's still in denial about it. I now fear that Othunyiweyo will go and tell our father and all hell will break loose. He would rather see me dead than risk having me humiliate him. So I hope she shuts her mouth. I'll just learn to live the life of a lie until I die. I wish I had Othu's bravery. She just doesn't care. I don't even know if I should tell her that Thomas has no partner. My dad thought he'd use Othu's love for makhulu to his advantage. We all know how much the old woman wants her ancestral land back. Tata

thought Othu would sacrifice her life to give makhulu what she wanted. Well Othu proved him wrong by standing her ground. Again proving that she belongs to no one. Why can't I be like that?

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#Craig

I think I've been able to let O trust me again. Well I hope I have because I want her to see that I won't disappear on her again. I've also been talking to Chulu over the phone. I love hearing how her day has been. I am literally counting down the hours until tomorrow because I miss them. It might be the last time I see them though because I'm planning on telling O what I've been up to in the past. A friend of mine, Wes has come for a short vacation. He picked up a pink little T-shirt and held it up with a confused look on his face.

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Wes: Is this was the women you've been tapping wear? (I laughed)

Me: Don't be crazy. This is a gift for a very special person. (I took it and smiled)

Wes: You tracked her down, didn't you? (I know he meant O)

Me: I didn't have to, man. I ran into her a couple of days ago.

Wes: And let me guess. She has a child.

Me: The most adorable and smart little person I know. Her name is Chulu and she'll be six soon. She...

Wes: Oh shit! You are attached, aren't you? I'm sure you even realised that you still love this woman too.

Me: I never said my love for her died in the first place. (he laughed in disbelief)

Wes: Snipe, people like us can't fall in love and have children. We can't have the white picket fence life. We are contract killers. (he shouted)

Me: I was o...

Wes: You know that you can't fully escape that life, man. Does she even know that you are a killer? (I kept silent) I'll take that as a big fucken no. Snap out of it. We are meant for flings. Casual sex and nothing more. Our world does not allow us to love.

Me: I think you need to go back to your hotel now.

Wes: That's what people do when they are afraid of the truth. Look, have sex with this woman and buy her child a doll or something and move on. You might have moved on from that

life but how sure are you that, that life has moved on from you. Be realistic. To fall in love means you'll have a weakness.

Me: The agency was secret. No one knows we even exist, man. We aren't called the discreet for nothing. (I said with clenched teeth)

Wes: Keep telling yourself that. Stop smoking the shit that's making you so delusional. (he pointed at me and left)

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I looked at the door and clenched my jaw. Had we still been at the agency he would not have dares speak to me like that. I'd have had him on the floor begging for his life in seconds but I'm not about that anymore. I've seen movies where we are labelled murderous, hit men and many more. I often wonder what assassins who take out evil people are. Does that mean that we are good people for making sure we rid the world of bad people? I looked at the shirt that I made for Chulu and smiled. All these years I thought my heart was too cold to love but these two people have proved me wrong. There was a soft knock on the door and I thought it's Wes but there's no way he'd knock like that. I put the shirt on the couch and to open. It's O. I smiled and was about to say something when she wrapped her arms around my waist while crying. A part of me wanting to know right away who dares hurt her so that I can go and teach that person a lesson. I lifted her off the floor to carry

her in and closed the door. I wrapped my arms around her petite body and waited on her to tell me what's wrong. My heart broke with each sob and sniff that escaped from her. She finally stopped and wiped her tears off the sleeve of her shirt. She told me about her visit from her brother and I don't understand why these people keep hurting her. It's been like this since we were teens. She went to sit down while I got us some coffee. I handed hers to her.

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Othu: Thank you and I'm sorry for just barging in like this. I'd go to my friends bu...

Me: O, stop. I don't mind having you here. I'm actually glad you chose to come here. I missed being your shoulder to cry on.
(she smiled)

Othu: I think you need to change your shirt.

Me: It's just tears, O and a bit of snot but it's okay. (we both laughed)

Othu: Gross. What's this? (she took the shirt beside her) It's not Chulu's.

Me: It actually is. (she looked at me)

Othu: I know my child's clothes and it's not one of them.

Me: I made it for her, well the art work in front. (she focused on the front)

Othu: That looks like her. The brown curly fro, small eyes with the black dot on her forehead. (she smiled) It says princess Chulu.

Me: Well if you remember well you'll know I'm not so bad with drawing. I created a cartoon version of her and printed it onto the shirt. I hope she loves the colour. (she smiled)

Othu: She'd have loved it even if it weren't her favourite colour. She'll love it so much. Thank you, Craig. (she hugged me)

Me: I'm glad you like it. I hope she does too. (she looked at the shirt for the longest time while smiling)

Othu: She's been so down lately. This will cheer her up.

Me: Why is she down. I hope you don't pinch the child when no one's looking, O. (she laughed)

Othu: I get tempted when she's having her naughty moments but no that's not it. She really wishes for a dad. That's why I rejected your invite for dinner Wednesday because she's getting attached to you and to her you're like the father she never had. (she said slowly)

Me: Is that a bad thing?

Othu: It is when you aren't her father. I can't have her attached and risk having you go again.

Me: Now why would I do that?

Othu: You've done it before. (I exhaled loudly)

Me: True but you don't even know my reasons.

Othu: I'm listening. (she looked at me)

Me: Well my mother got a better job and unfortunately it was in the states. It happened so fast that I barely had time to say anything. She got the job one afternoon and the evening we flew out. I'm sorry but it was beyond my control. I was just a boy back then.

Othu: I understand. I was angry at you for months though until I eventually forgot about you.

Me: I understand. I thought about you everyday so I could not forget about you even if I wanted to. I was afraid I'd find you married.

Othu: Why would that make you afraid?

Me: I don't think a husband would have allowed you to see me.

Othu: I'm no one's property. (I laughed)

Me: I know. So don't worry about me breaking Chulu's heart because I won't. I'm not planning on going anywhere.

Othu: It's still better that she sees you as an uncle and not dad.

Me: Will you ever trust me with the news about her dad? (she looked at me for a long while).

Othu: I don't know who he is, what he looks like or if he still exists.

Me: Please don't tell me some sick bastard took advantage of you. (I looked at her intensely)

Othu: No, it's nothing like that. (she told me the story and I found myself falling for the woman deeper)

Me: Do you know that bothers me? The fact that you were quick to tell me what a mistake you are but slow to tell me what an amazing woman you are. I honestly thought you carried and gave birth to Chulu because one can see and feel the love you have for her.

Othu: She makes it easy for me to love her. (she smiled)

Me: She really does. When last have you been on a date?

Othu: A few months ago.

Me: Damn lady, you need some action so please go out with me tomorrow night.

Othu: On a date, date?

Me: Yes. (she broke eyes contact)

Othu: Why?

Me: Because I'd really like to grow our relationship to more than just friendship. I still have to tell you a few things though but not tonight. I just want to enjoy your company tonight.

Othu: Why don't you have a girlfriend?

Me: Because I'm hoping you'll be my girlfriend.

Othu: Craig, I have a lot to deal with. Chulu and I are a package and it scare...(I kissed her before she could finish, damn this woman)

Me: A perfect package at that. (I planted a soft kiss on her lip)

Othu: You are complicating your life. I have issues.

Me: I can't wait to hear all about them. (she didn't reply just looked at me)

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I kissed her again and I got lost in the moment. My hand slid under her shirt. She allowed it for a while but it was as though she realised something. She jumped up from the couch. She sat back down slowly. I think she thought I want to take her to bed. I'd be a liar if I said I didn't but I'll wait on her to okay it. After a while she stood saying she's leaving. I also got up and walked her to her car. I gave her a long hug and watched as she got into her car and drove off. A text message came through. "You

claim to have left that life. What happens when you finally find your parents killers?", it read and it's from Wes. Well I don't know, I thought to myself. My parents accident looked like an accident but I can't shake the thought that someone was behind it. I've been trying to get leads but would always run into a brick wall. I suddenly wondered if I must drop everything and move on with my life now that O is back in my life. Well she might never want to see me after tomorrow afternoon and also won't want me anywhere near Chulu. I walked back to my apartment and suddenly wondered if what Wes said is right. Maybe I should just let O fall in love with a decent and uncomplicated man. But will I be able to watch as she loves another man? I became what I was because I had to and I fear that she won't understand my reasons.

Othu

I've been thinking about the kiss Craig and I shared. It was one of the most magical moments of my life. I still remember the first time we tried to kiss and I ended up biting his lips. I still don't know how that happened but it makes me laugh whenever I think about it. I wonder if he remembers it. I think it's now safe to say that we have both improved a lot and I won't mind if he does it again. I ruined the moment by panicking when he had his hand up my shirt because the last thing I want is for him to see my scar. The thing looks horrible. If I can't find it in myself to look at my own image in the mirror, how is he going to look at me? Do I even want to be in a relationship? How will me being in a relationship affect Chulu? It's always just been us and I have become content with that. I also can't shake off the feeling that he wants to tell me something but is afraid to. Maybe he has an ex wife or something personal like that. I do hope today is the day he'll do it. I told Makhulu about what Dr Flinch said and she was as shocked as I was when I heard about it. I asked if I should go ahead and claim what's mine from Kumkani or not. She told me to go get what's mine but said she'd also understand if I don't. I haven't made up my mind yet. My phone rang and I looked at

the screen first. I don't recognise the number but I decided to answer anyway.

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Me: Hello.

Person: Good morning, Othunyiweyo. It's Ndalo. (I forgot about him)

Me: Oh hey, Ndalo. How are you?

Ndalo: Good and you?

Me: Great. (then there was awkward silence)

Ndalo: Uhm, I'm sorry for only calling you now I've just been very busy. I wanted to let you know that I'm in Cape Town and would really like to see you. (he finally said and I kept quiet trying to come up with an excuse to not meet up with him)

Me: I am busy today and tomorrow. Next week it'll be work.

Ndalo: Oh come on. How busy can the life of a primary school teacher be?

Me: I don't know how many primary school teachers you know but my learners keep me busy.

Ndalo: Next weekend is fine. I'll be in town for a while. I have some business to take care of this side.

Me: I'll see if I'll be free and let you know.

Ndalo: I can't wait to see you.

Me: Yeah, bye.

Ndalo: Have a great day.

Me: Likewise.

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I ended the call and I can't believe that I forgot about the poor guy. I'm also disappointed by the fact that he didn't ask how Chulu was. Well he's never met her but he knows of her and I would have appreciated had he asked about one of the most important people in my life. I suddenly realised that I might be comparing him to Craig. I checked the time and it's 7:30am. Who calls so early on a Saturday? I laid in my bed thinking about my life and I decided that it's time that I got the answers to the many question I have for my parents. I got up and went to get myself ready for the day. The TV volume was high so I'm guessing Chulu and Makhulu are there since she's not in her room. I showered, got dressed and looked decent enough to go out. I went to the lounge to greet my flatmates.

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Makhulu: You smell and look so good early in the morning. Are you going out? (Chulu turned to face me)

Me: I have somewhere I've got to be.

Chulu: But I'm not ready yet, mommy. (she stood)

Me: I'm not going to see uncle Craig, bhabha. I'm going to see my parents. (makhulu raised her brow)

Chulu: Will we go when you come back?

Me: Yes we will so please ask makhulu to help you get ready.

Makhulu: I'll make sure she's ready. I'm also going to a church fundraiser with Nolitha.

Me: That's great, Ma. I'm glad you have made a friend because I feel bad whenever we leave you here alone sometimes.

Makhulu: You are young and I don't mind being alone as long as you'll come back safely. I thought you were going to wait for me so we can go see Kumkani together.

Me: I have to speak to them now that I'm up to it, Ma.

Makhulu: Are they even in the Cape Town?

Me: I'll go over and take my chances. If I call they might just leave the house on purpose.

Makhulu: Have Sonki handle the matter, Othu.

Me: Lawyers can't fix everything, Ma. I'll see you later. I love you both.

Chulu: Don't forget to come back for me. (I laughed)

Me: I won't.

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I rushes out before makhulu could utter another word. She might be afraid that my parents will hurt my feelings and I know that they will but I have to face them some time. I got into my car and put on my favourite music. Craig called but I told him I can't talk because I'm on my way to my parents. He was not to pleased with that idea because he too is afraid they will say hurtful words. I finally arrived at their house. A house that has never felt like home to me. The security guy still remembers me so getting him to open the gate was no issue. I can't believe that it's been four years since I stepped foot here. I stopped coming because Chulu was not welcome and where she is not welcome then neither am I. I don't even know why they are keeping such a big house when it's just them and the helpers. I rang the doorbell and a woman I don't know opened the door. I told her who I'm here to see and she said my dad is not home so I asked to see my mom. Most children would run upstairs to their mother's room and give her a tight hug. I on the other hand am sitting awkwardly in the lounge not knowing what to do with myself. Mrs Zweni finally came parading down the stairs in her expensive looking navy dress. Why dress up when you are sitting at home all day?, I asked myself. She

finally stood in front of me and hugged me. Her hugs have never felt natural. We both sat down.

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Mama: Rosy, make us some tea please. No sugar for me. You know how I like it. Othu, how do you take your tea?

Me: I won't have anything thanks. (I smiled at Rose)

Mama: Nonsense make her that new blend I got from Italy. I'm sure she'll love it. (I rolled my eyes in annoyance)

Rose: Yes, mam. (she rushed off)

Me: Why do you let your staff work on Saturdays? They have lives too, Mama.

Mama: Well if they don't want to be here they can leave and I'll get people who won't mind.

Me: Forget I said anything. Where is Kumkani? (her eyes widened)

Mama: Since when is he Kumkani to you?

Me: Since the day he wished I was the one who died and not my brother. Why did you choose me? (she became edgy)

Mama: I don't know what you are talking about.

Me: Drop the act, Unathi. I know everything. Did you really think you'd go to the grave with it? So why did you choose me?

Mama: Who told you this, Othunyiweyo? What exactly did they say? It's your grandmother. How could she tell you that?

Me: That I was formed in a lab and that my mother never wanted to bond with me while she was pregnant. You should have kept my brother instead.

Mama: We had Langa already so I wanted a girl. All mothers wish for a little girl.

Me: Yet you weren't able to love the little girl you were given.
(she looked down)

Mama: I don't hate you, Othunyiweyo.

Me: You don't particularly love me either, Mama. When is your husband getting home?

Mama: He has gone to play golf so he should be home in a few hours. How have you been...you know since you found out the truth? (she asked softly)

Me: Well I cried, was angry and even hated myself for a while but I'm good now.

Mama: I'm sorry, Othu. (she actually sounded sincere)

Me: It's o...

Tata: Whose ugly car is standing in my front yard, Unathi? (he cut me short and walked in)

Mama: Our daughter came to visit. (she stood and kissed his cheek)

Tata: Did you finally realise that you can't live on R 15 000 pay a month and she here to ask me for a better job? (he said with a smirk and I stood)

Me: Actually I am here to take what is rightfully mine. My 50% of Zweni Construction and half of the shares that you have in that mining company. (I faked a smirk and his faded)

Tata: What the hell are you smoking? I worked hard for all that I have today and you don't just...

Me: Stop it right there, Kumkani. We both know how you got rich so please do not give me the "I had to juggle two jobs at a time" bull. You had it easy. All you had to do was donate sperm and convince your wife to carry me. (he raises his hand to slap me but Mama held it)

Tata: Let go of my hand, woman. (she did and he walked towards me). You do not come to my house and disrespect me like that. Do you hear me, Othunyiweyo? You might be of my loins but that doesn't mean I'll tolerate your crap. (he pointed his finger in my face)

Me: Give me what is rightfully mine and I'll make sure that I never step foot in your house again. (he laughed)

Tata: I don't owe you anything little girl.

Me: You owe me so much but you can keep all else. Just give me what's mine and I'll go.

Tata: Get out!

Me: You know that I can strip you of so much. I know how much you value your money. You value it so much more than your own children. Don't push me, Kumkani or else I'll take you to the cleaners and make sure you don't even have a shack to live in.

Tata: I said out! (he shouted and I thought he'd strangle me)

Me: I have proof to back me up and witnesses. If you want to take this to the court of law be my guest but rest assured that you'll be losing so much more than me. I'm not Langa. I won't roll over and play dead just because you ordered me to. I'm wondering if I really am the lab created child or him though. Had I not known better I'd think it's him since he is your perfect boy.

Mama: Othunyiweyo, please leave now. He is getting angry.

Me: What about my anger, Mama? Do you know how much anger a child of distant parents accumulate over the years? He has no right to be angry. I have long accepted that you two won't give me your love and affection but I'll be damned if I allow you to keep more from me. I want what's mine, Tata. (he

kept quiet and I walked out but turned around again) Did you plan my car accident?

Mama: Don't be crazy! He was in that car with you.

Me: Funny how he only got a scratch. I got scarred for life and was paralysed. I bet you were disappointed when the doctors told you that my heart still beats. I mean it makes sense now. If I die you wouldn't have to give me half of what you own.

Tata: Unathi tell your child to go. I'll be back and if she's still here when I return all hell will surely break loose. (he rushed upstairs)

Mama: Othu, go please.

Me: I hope you are a better mother to Langa than you are to me. Your son is dying silently each day and you as his mother fail to see it. I'm actually glad that you want nothing to do with my baby because I would hate for her to be exposed to what you and your husband expose us to. Do you know that you've never told me you love me, Mama?

Mama: Go now, Othunyiweyo please. (she pleaded)

Me: Tell your husband that I'll be back with my lawyer and all the documents he needs to sign in order to hand over what's mine. Beautiful dress by the way. I hope it was not bought with my money. (she looked at her dress)

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I left her standing there with her mouth open. I hate being disrespectful to elders but these two make me snap. I got to my car and my dad got out shouting and holding a sjambok. Was the man going to hit me with that? Oh well maybe I should have stayed longer to see what he would do. I felt my anger just rise and so I parked my car just to calm down. The last thing I want is to crash into something and end up breaking the promise I made to Chulu that I'd come back to get her. My phone rang, it's Craig.

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Me: Hey. (I said softly)

Craig: You don't sound to good. What's wrong? (I told him everything)

Me: I don't get why I'm hated so much by my own parents. It's making me emotionally drained.

Craig: Where are you?

Me: I'm on my way home. Don't worry I won't cancel on you.

Craig: I'm not worried about that. Tell me where exactly you are and which route you'll take home.

Me: Why?

Craig: I want to stalk you. (we both laughed)

Me: Don't be crazy. (I told him what he wanted to know)

Craig: I'll be the creepy guy at the robots. (he joked and we laughed)

Me: Let me go and see if the princess is ready for her trip. She's excited to see you.

Craig: I am too and I have her gift all wrapped up and ready.

Me: You ironed it didn't you? You've always been a neat freak. (he laughed)

Craig: I was not about to give her a creased shirt, so yes I've ironed it. Get back on the road and get to me already. I miss the two of you. (I smiled)

Me: We'll see you soon then. (I ended the call)

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I sat and smiled alone like a fool. "I miss the two of you", his words echoed in my mind. He included my Chulu. That's what I wanted in a man. One who won't just push my child to the side as if she doesn't exist. I'm in love with Craig and I think he has been the only guy that I've loved. Well back then I think it was just a silly teenage crush but now it's different. A part of me is still afraid that he'll leave. His departure won't just break my heart this time around but it will break Chulu's too. She has

never been so attached to a male before. I also called Mr Sonki. He thought it's to discuss the land issue but I know that rushing that case is useless because there are other claims the land claim court got wat before ours. I briefly told him the nature of the case and he said I must come see him tomorrow afternoon. I felt very grateful because I know he doesn't meet clients over weekends but he was willing to make time for me. My phone beeped. I checked and it's a message from Langa. "Please don't tell Tata what you know about me", it read. I just shook my head and threw the phone aside. I know had the tables been turned he would have used the news to his advantage but I'm not him. I would love to see my dad's reaction but he won't hear the news from me. I have my own issues to take care of. I started my car and got back on the road. Today I'm just planning on having a good time.

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#Kumkani

I have been interrogating Unathi about who told Othu about the details of the contract. It can't be my mother because we never told her that we got paid for what we did. It seems Unathi knows nothing. I need to find a way to stop this from

happening. I called my mother. She answered after a long while.

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Ma: Hello. (she spoke so loudly)

Me: You don't need to shout, Ma. I'm calling about Othunyiweyo..

Ma: I hope you haven't done anything to my child, Kumkani. You will not like my angry side I tell you.

Me: Okay

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Ma and I didn't hurt your precious, disrespectful child. Who told Othunyiweyo about what we did?

Ma: I did.

Me: You could have told her about how she was conceived, yes but there is other information that she knows. I know you didn't know about it. Who has she been speaking to?

Ma: Well I called Dr Flinch to explain everything to her in detail since I knew I wouldn't put it in correct terms. I heard about the other information got kept from me and Othu. Information she should have gotten when she turned 21. Why are you do greedy, Kumkani? Who taught you to be so sneaky and

heartless because I didn't. I raised you to be kind to others yet you fail to...

Me: Bye, Ma. (I cut her short and ended the call)

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So Flinch is in the country and he has been filling Othu's mind with this. The man clearly doesn't know who he is dealing with. I got as much identification information on Flinch and emailed it to my contact. I made another phone call to someone who is going to help me with this problem. The phone rang and was answered quickly.

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Me: I need one of your best men to take care of a problem for me. I've just emailed the information.

Guy: You're in luck. One of my best is in your city. I'll make sure I assign him to the mission.

Me: Keep it clean, Net and make sure nothing points back to me.

Net: Have we ever slipped up?

Me: Be ready. I might contact you for another job if things don't work out as I hope.

Net: I'm ready already. (I ended the call)

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Well we will get rid of the evidence that Othu had. One witness at a time and Flinch made it easier for being in the country. The man has always had an obsession with Othu. Perhaps I should have left the damn child with him because now she's being a threat to me. I made another local call to someone. I need to teach my little girl a little lesson. Something to shake her up a bit. Unathi walked in while I was on the phone.

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Una: Don't tell me you asked that gangster to hurt our daughter, Kumkani. (she looked at me)

Me: Since when is she your daughter?

Una: Our blood runs through her veins. (she sat)

Me: I'm like a sperm donor. Do you think men who donate to sperm banks care about what happens to their seeds? No, they don't. The only difference is that I was forced to raise her because I needed the money. And I won't have her killed. I'll just teach the girl a little lesson.

Una: She might just have been our way out of poverty at first, Kumkani but if you have her killed I'd never forgive you.

Me: And the maternal instincts finally kick in. I was starting to think that you're a lost case. (I said sarcastically and laughed)

Mama: Just give her what is hers. Why must you always go to war when you can just have a peaceful negotiation?

Me: I knew the day that I signed that contract that I'll go against what it said. If I wanted to give her what's hers I'd have done so when she was 21. I made that company what it is today and I'll be damned if I let Othunyiweyo just waltz in here and claim half of it. Please let me deal with it in my own way.

Una: Just don't hurt her.

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She stood and walked out. My wife has become such a softly lately and I can't help but wonder if she'll be a problem in the long run. Why the sudden care about Othunyiweyo? I get she's her mother but she has never truly been the most affectionate mother. I decided to dismiss those thoughts for now and focus on more serious matters. Soon Flinch will be a dead man and hopefully I'll be able to get the documents that he has shown Othu. I need to get rid of all the proof about this. I can't slave around for years and just have someone take it from me. The girl is not even in my Will for goodness sake. I have never been able to see her as my daughter. I'm no different to a man who goes to a sperm bank to donate some seeds. Maybe had she been an obeying child I'd have given her more attention. That's why I favour Langa more. My boy knows when to do the right thing and he knows that I am always right. That's why I trust

him to someday run the Zweni empire. I made one last call to my lawyer. We need to forge some documents so that it will be my word against Othu's when we go to court. I'm going to have to cough up a lot of money but it'll be worth keeping what's mine, all that is mine.

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#Craig

The fact that Othu went to see her father had me worried all morning. I might not know the man but I know of men like him. Men who would do anything to keep their statuses and wealth. Men who are not afraid to hurt or even kill their own close family and there is no love lost between Othu and her dad. I could hear in her voice when I called her that the meeting didn't go well. When she told me which route she'll be taking I sped off in that direction. I wasn't joking when I said I'm going to stalk her. I finally spotted her car and she was almost home but another car followed. I came out here knowing that something might happen. In my line of work you learn to be vigilant. Suddenly Othu stopped her car. Why the hell is she stopping? The car that followed her was not far from hers but it was far enough for her not to notice it. It also stopped and I thought now is the time that I have to take action. I got out of my car and walked to the stranger's car. Good thing I'm good at not

being seen. I finally reached the car and knocked on the window signaling for him to roll his window down. Damn fool did just that. I stuck my hand in, unlocked the car, opened the door and dragged him out. It all happened so quickly and I'm sure it's the last thing he expected. I had him in a choke position before he could even realise what was happening. He tried to wiggle himself from my grip but failed. I could literally feel his pulse get weaker by the second. I looked over at O's car but it was gone. Good now I can deal with the scum without any interruptions.

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Me: Why are you following that car? Who sent you? (I shouted in his ear)

Him: I...I ca...I Can't breath. (I loosened my grip and he coughed)

Me: If you don't tell me who sent you I am going to snap you neck right here.

Me: I don't know man. (he tried to reach for his gun but I twisted his hand with my other hand and took it)

Him: (he let out a sound of pure agony) I don't know. All I know was that I was suppose to scare the driver and give her message.

Me: What message?

Him: Tell her to not mess with the big boys or risk losing her life. I wasn't going to hurt or kill her man. Let go because I can't feel my hand.

Me: You tell your boss that if he ever attempts to do similar dumb shit like this I am going to kill him and every single person he is working with. I'm not going to kill you because I want you to take the message to him. If I see you near her again I'll cut your legs off, feed them to wild dogs while you are watching and bleeding to death. Do you understand me? (he kept quiet)

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I broke one of the fingers of the hand I was holding and he tried not to scream too much because it's a quiet area but he knows a scream will draw attention but I know the pain must be unbearable.

"Next time I won't just break a finger", I said and let go of him. He quickly got into his car and sped off. Does Kumkani know that his boys are amateurs? The fool even left without his gun. Now I'll have to get rid of it. I know it's him because it's too big of a coincidence that this happened right after she told him she's taking half of everything he owns. What kind of father is this man? I drove to Othu's place because I'm not letting her drive herself especially not when she's with Chulu. I'll just say I was in the neighborhood or something. Good thing I have Chulu's gift in my car. I placed the fool's gun in the hidden place

in my car's boot. If Kumkani is trying to hurt my lady then he leaves me no choice but to come out of retirement. I parked my car at the apartment Othu's apartment block and called her. She answered very quickly.

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Othu: Hey, we'll be at your place shorty. We are just delayed because Chulu can't find one of her sandals. (I laughed)

Me: I'm parked outside of your place. I was in the neighborhood and thought I'd save you petrol by giving you two a ride.

Othu: Come up. It's apartment 25.

Me: O, I ca...(she ended the call)

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I took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. I looked up at the block of flats and made my way up. I don't even have a gift for her grandma. I'm not ready for this. I walked up the stairs and finally got to apartment number 25. I knocked and the door flung open. O, stood looking so beautiful in her African print dress. She smiled and hugged me. She smells so damn good. Chulu came running to the door and I lifted her up to hug her. She's also wearing an African print dress but different material. I feel so left out.

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Me: You two look beautiful. (they smiled)

Chulu: My makhulu made the dresses for us. I love it very much.

Othu: Thank you. (she smiled)

Me: I'm a bit afraid of meeting your granny because I didn't prepare but I'm ready.

Chulu: She went to church. (I breathed a sigh of relief and O laughed)

Me: Bhabha, go find that shoe please or pick another pair. (I put her down)

Chulu: I'll pick another, mommy. (she rushed off into the passage)

Othu: I'm a terrible person. Come in I'm sorry f...(I grabbed her and kissed her)

Me: I've missed you. (I said in a whisper and she smiled)

Othu: I've misses you too. (she hugged me)

Me: You smell so good. (she giggled)

Othu: Thank you. Are you coming in or not?

Me: No because I might enjoy being alone with you guys and end up not wanting to go out.

Othu: That's not a problem.

Me: I promised Chulu a day out and that's exactly what I plan to do. (Chulu rushed back)

Chulu: I'm ready. (she jumped up and down)

Me: Well I have a gift for you. I hope you like it. (I gave her the gift bag)

Chulu: Thank you, uncle Craig. (I smiled)

Me: You're welcome. (she looked at the shirt and smiled so much)

Chulu: She looks like me. She has my hair and my little dot on my forehead. I love it, uncle Craig. (she hugged me)

Me: I decided that Moana is no longer my favourite. Princess Chulu is. (she giggled)

Chulu: Mommy, can I wear it now?

Me: Makhulu already dressed you so beautifully, bhabha.

Chulu: I'll wear it over it. It will be like I'm wearing a skirt. (she pleaded with her mom)

Othu: Okay but don't come crying to me if you are feeling too hot. (she helped her put it on and Chulu jumped in excitement)

Chulu: I'll wear it to school too. (we laughed)

Othu: Just don't think it's uniform to be worn everyday.

Me: There's nothing wrong with th...(O raised her brow and I cut myself short and smiled)

Othu: Are you ready to go?

Chulu: Yes! (she shouted and rushed out)

Othu: Thank you. I can't remember the last time she was this excited about something. Can we please make a stop at some shop first? I need to organise party packs for her class. Her birthday is on Friday.

Me: We are in no rush. Come let's go. (I stood as she took her bag and locked the door)

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We got to the parking area and took Chulu's car seat from her car and put it into mine. I can't believe that I have a car seat in my car and I'm actually happy to see it brighten up my car. We strapped Chulu in and off we went. I was a bit distracted because I wanted to be on the lookout for more danger. We got to the place and organised the party packs. I could finally take them to the place I intended to. It's a park but today it's different because there's some fun day event happening. There's entertainment for kids so Chulu won't be bored but it

seems like it's too crowded to talk. We decided to let Chulu have all the fun for now. She is just so happy. We played on almost every game and we joined her in some. Someone poked us softly and we looked behind us. It's an old lady.

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Her: You finally found her. (she smiled)

Me: Pardon?

Her: You found her. Many, many years ago before civilisation was as it was you two were soulmates. (we laughed)

Othu: Uhm, I'm sorry, Ma but we are from this generation.

Her: Yes but your souls are old. You my dear died before him in your past life and he was broken but promised to look for you in the next life time even if it took him many lifetimes but he promised to find you again and he did. Souls don't die. They just find refuge in different flesh.

Me: Our daughter needs to go home. Excuse us please.

Her: Wait, you young man. When you sleep with a woman don't you always feel guilty afterwards. Like you are betraying someone but you just couldn't understand why? And you young lady, has any man made you feel the connection you feel with him? This is your chance to live out the love you could not in your previous lives.

Othu: Excuse us please. (we went as far from her as possible and laughed)

Me: What just happened?

Othu: I don't know but I'm sure she has a stall here. Maybe she's a fortune teller or something but that freaked me out. And I don't believe it's true.

Me: So have you felt the connection we share with another man?

Othu: No but that's only because you knew me when I was young. (she laughed softly)

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We watched as Chulu played with the other children. A part of what that lady said was true though. I did feel slightly guilty after I've slept with a girl and I thought all men feel it. There's no way the reason is that deep though. That lady must try other people. Chulu went and told the children that I made her shirt and a few mothers came to me asking if I'm making a business of it and I unfortunately had to say no. I'm no fashion designer and that shirt was an exclusive for my princess. Is it even okay to say "mine" when referring to her? We later grabbed a bite and ice cream afterwards until Chulu fell asleep. Shame she's been on all the games here so it's understandable that she's exhausted. We decided to call it a day and went back to my

place. We finally arrived and I put her on my bed. She is so cute. I kissed her cheek and left. I suddenly realised that I want this life. The wife, children and maybe a few pets too. But am I able to have this kind of life with the past that I have? I snapped out of my thoughts and went to join O. I could finally kiss her properly. She's improved a lot because she once bit my lips.

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Othu: Thank you for the beautiful day. I loved every second of it. (she smiled)

Me: I did too. Even the part of the soul reading lady. (she laughed softly)

Othu: Do you feel guilty when you are intimate with other ladies?

Me: Maybe and you. (she looked down)

Othu: I wouldn't know because I've never been intimate with anyone. (she spoke so softly and the news took me by surprise)

Me: As in never?

Othu: I know it's lame or whatever but I haven't been in a serious relationship.

Me: You're like virgin Mary the second. (she laughed softly)

Othu: I knew you'd make fun of me. (she stood and I did too and hugged her from behind)

Me: Only because I'm taken aback, O. You're something else, you know that? A very beautiful, unique and special something else. (I kissed her neck)

Othu: Enough about that. You said you have something to tell me. What is it? (we sat down)

Me: Can I ask you a hypothetical question first?

Othu: Shoot.

Me: Would you ever fall in love with an assassin?

Othu: Like the sexy ones from the movies? The James Bond type of men? (she laughed)

Me: Yup.

Othu: Well honestly, no. If such a man wanted to be in a relationship with me it would put my life and Chulu's in danger.

Me: What if they take bad men from the world? Let's say something happens to Chulu. You go to the justice system and they fail you. An assassin offers his services to take out the bad person. Would you take it? (she took a deep breath first)

Othu: I love my child and if the law fails to give justice then I'm pretty sure I would. But there's a difference between being in a relationship with such a person and just using their services.

Me: Agreed but perhaps not all are bad men. Not all kill for the thrill. Some do it to rid the world of evil.

Othu: Why is this becoming such a serious discussion? Where is this coming from?

Me: Just a movie that I watched. An assassin fell for a good girl but he was afraid to tell her the truth because he didn't want to lose her.

Othu: How did it end?

Me: I don't know because I didn't finish it.

Othu: I'm sure she was not willing to put her life at risk and turned him down. I most probably would have done the same. Especially since I have a child to think of. Do contract killers even exist?

Me: Don't know but anything is possible.

Othu: Okay enough movie talk. What did you want to tell me?
(she smiled)

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I had to make up a story so I spun her a quick lie. I can't tell her who I used to be. I joined the organisation because after my parents died I had no one. One of the seniors found me on the street and took me in. I trained so hard and with different weapons but I like using a sniper gun. That's why I'm nicknamed Snipe. Perhaps O doesn't need to be introduced to Snipe. She knows Craig and maybe that's for the best. I can't tell her who I used to be because I'm not ready to let her go. This moment is too perfect to ruin so I'll tell her another time. This woman is too good for me. Now I also know that I can't sleep with her. What if I do and end up breaking her heart? A virgin! Damn I didn't see that coming not even from a sweet woman like O. I've never been with a virgin before. I asked her to spend the night. She was uneasy but I promised that I'll be on the couch while she and Chulu have the bed. She first called her granny and it seems her gran is concerned but she said O's an adult so she must decide. Chulu woke up and we played some games. After a while O said they will spend the night. I smiled and thanked her. I think I miss being loved and having them here makes me realise just how much. We ordered pizza for dinner and ate. We sat and watched cartoon movies. Well Chulu did while we spoke softly. She fell asleep in front of the TV and we laughed. Her mom went to tuck her in. I even made sure that I changed the bedding for them. I gave O my shirt to wear to bed. We spoke until late in the evening and she also started to feel

sleepy and she has to wake up for church so she called it a night. I watched as she looked sexy and cute in my oversized T-shirt. We kissed and cuddled first before she went to bed. I laid on the couch alone and thought of the day. I need to destroy that gun and it seems Othu didn't notice that she was followed. I'm just glad I managed to save her the trauma of being pointed with a gun. It seems I'll have to "stalk" her more now. I finally fell asleep. I suddenly felt someone shake me softly. I opened my eyes. One of the lights are on so I could see properly. It's Chulu and I immediately sat up straight.

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Me: What's wrong?

Chulu: There is a monster with many eyes under the bed. (I smiled)

Me: What? How many eyes?

Chulu: Like nine or so. (I widened my eyes)

Me: Well I won't allow that monster to scare you. Let's go deal with it.

Chulu: I'm scared of it, uncle Craig. (she whispered)

Me: I'll protect you. Come you have to learn to face your fears head on. (I held her hand and went to the room)

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Well I asked her if it was still there and she nodded. I looked under the bed and saw nothing but I pretended to drag something out.

"Come out here you ugly five eyed monster. You won't scare my Chulu", I shouted while pretending to struggle dragging it out

"It has nineteen eyes, uncle Craig, she shouted.

I laughed because the eyes suddenly doubled. We I finally got the monster out from under the bed and started to kick around. O woke up clearly annoyed. We told her that we are fighting a creepy monster and she looked at me like I'm crazy.

"It's running away", Chulu shouted.

"Come help me kick it out of the apartment. It's too strong", I shouted back.

I thought she'd refuse but nope she came and we both kicked her invincible monster. She finally said it ran through the door and out the apartment. I was breathing so heavily. We stood trying to catch our breath while joking and laughing at the coward monster. She said he'll never come back and hugged me. I took her back to bed again.

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Othu: Chulumanco and Craig, please let me sleep. (she said in a sleepy tone and I tucked Chulu in)

Me: Are you okay now? (she nodded) Are you sleepy? (she shook her head)

Chulu: Not anymore.

Me: Do you want to have some hot chocolate?

Chulu: I'm allergic to it.

Me: Mmm I don't really like the smell of it either. Hot milk?

Chulu: It makes my tummy runny. We could just talk. (I laughed softly)

Me: About what?

Chulu: Life. (I laughed so much)

Me: What about life? (she stood on the bed and extended her arms wanting me to pick her up and I did)

Chulu: I think life would have been better if the clouds were purple. (she said in excitement)

Me: But purple is such a dull colour. How about yellow?

Chulu: Yellow is nice too. (she smiled)

Me: Let's go and draw this vision of yours then. Can we make the sun black?

Chulu: Now you are asking for too much. (I laughed)

Me: Where did you hear that?

Chulu: Mommy says that when I want something that I can not have. (we both laughed)

Me: You are just special. Come let's go get busy before mommy throws a pillow at us.

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I got my scratch book and tore out two pages. She could not believe it's size. I put my pencils on the table and we both got busy drawing and colouring. I found myself enjoying this so much. I wonder if she'll be able to get up for church tomorrow because it's almost midnight. She showed me her drawing. The clouds were yellow with purple stars. She had to explain certain things because it was not clear. The four stick people were me, herself, her granny and mommy. My heart melted because she added me to her family. I thanked her and continued until she was sleepy. I went to put her next to O again and watched as they both were asleep. I kissed both on their cheeks and left the room. I don't know if keeping the news about my past was a good idea or not but I'm glad I didn't ruin today. I'll tell her some other time. I went back to the couch and finally fell asleep.

Makhulu

My visit to the city so far has not been as pleasant as all the others. I become more and more worried about Othunyiweyo. She has so much to deal with at the moment and my poor girl is not used to such a complicated life. I've been trying to call Kumkani so many times but he has been ignoring my calls. All I want is for him to give his child what's hers. I can't believe that the sweet boy that I raised has turned out to be the greedy, power hungry man he is today. What did I do wrong? His father was also a gentle man and he hardly physically disciplined Kumkani when he was naughty. Could my boy be possessed? My heart is just broken by who he has chosen to become. Othu returned with Chulu from this man friend of hers and I don't like the fact that she spent the night there with the child one bit. Chulu is still sleeping so Othu went to put her in her bed and returned to the kitchen. Both of us just kept silent and for the first time it felt uncomfortable between us.

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Othu: I know that you didn't approve of me not coming home last night, Ma. I'm sorry. (I turned to face her)

Me: Othunyiweyo, you are a grown woman who can come and go as she pleases. You sleeping there is not a problem. I'm glad you were honest with me and told me where you were.

Othu: I just get the feeling that you aren't happy about something. Nothing happened between us. He offered his bed to Chulu and I and he slept on the couch.

Me: I'm just worried that you went with Chulu. You yourself said she's getting attached and I'm sure it's even worse now. I want to know what this man's intentions with you are. A child is involved here. Had Chulu not been a part of your life I would not be so concerned but she is and she is yearning for a father. Is this man willing to step up?

Othu: I won't take her with me again then. (she said softly)

Me: I'm not saying that. I want to put a face to the name. Have him over so that I can know the man.

Othu: It's too early to introduce him to my elders. What happened to a man may only meet the parents when he comes to honour the girl's family with lobola? (I laughed)

Me: A new and different generation happened. The men of this time aren't as your grandfather's generation, my girl. You children are afraid of commitment. If he was willing to meet Chulu then surely he's not going to have a problem with meeting me.

Othu: You threatened to cut off his manly part, Ma. I think he's afraid of you. (I laughed)

Me: I'm harmless but when it comes to my granddaughters I might not be. If he treats you right then I won't have a problem. Invite him to go to church with us. (her jaw almost dropped to the floor)

Othu: I'm not even sure if he is a religious man, Ma. Or what religious group he prefers.

Me: Well today is the day you'll find out, my girl. Let me go and get ready. Call him and tell him I'm inviting him to join us. (I left her)

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I know that they are still trying to get to know each other but a man who has intentions and the right ones won't fear meeting his lady's elders. His answer to this invite will tell me plenty about his character. I went to my bedroom and tried Kumkani again. This boy is clearly ignoring me. I decided to dial Unathi's number instead. It rang for a while but she finally picked up.

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Una: Hello, Ma Zweni. I'm sure you dialed the wrong number this is not Kumkani's number.

Me: I know exactly whose number I dialed. My son is avoiding me.

Una: I can't talk now. I have somewhere to be...

Me: I'm not going to keep you because I've also got to get ready to go out. Unathi, I called you because I wanted to appeal to your kind side. You might act like you don't care about your daughter but I refuse to believe that you hate her. Please speak to Kumkani and ask him to not make things difficult for Othunyiweyo.

Una: I don't make decisions on his behalf, Ma. He hates it when I put my nose in his business.

Me: It's your business too. You carried Othu, felt her little kicks and felt the labour pains when she was born. It is not too late to be her mother.

Una: I don't think she needs me because she has you. She has always had you.

Me: But it's not the same. She might not admit it but your child yearns for your love. Yes, she has me but I know that a part of her wishes after had you too. Fix things and for once make her feel special and loved. You do not someday want to be filled with regrets only to realise that it's too late. This is life it's short and unpredictable. For once put your daughter first by being on her side. Don't you want to be in your grandchild's life and all

the future grandchildren she'll give you someday? Do you want to die old and alone or surrounded by loved ones? Think about it. I have nothing against you. I've just always hated how you neglect your motherly duties. Have a good day. (I ended the call)

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I went to the bathroom to take a bath. I am not a fan of the shower. Unathi is not a bad person but she's not exactly the best either. I hope that she'll think about what I said. I can never fill the void in Othu's heart that's left by her mother. Unathi has to step up and do what's right. I'm glad I'll be going to church with my children today and hopefully Othu's male friend won't be too much of a coward. All I want is to know the man that has my little Chulu so happy and excited.

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#OTHU

I sat on the couch with my bowl of cereal trying to think of the right way to invite Craig to go to church with us. What if this scares him off? I can't believe that Makhulu is making me do this. I don't even know if we are in an actual relationship. We shared a few kisses and he offered us his bed but that does not

mean we are serious. I guess I should not have gone to a sleepover with Chulu. I finally decided to just dial his number to hear what he'll say. It only rang twice.

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Craig: Good morning, beautiful. (I blushed)

Me: You already said good morning. We spent the night at your place remember? (he laughed)

Craig: I miss you already. I thought you'd be getting ready to go to church by now. (my heart started to beat faster)

Me: Uhm, that's why I'm calling you actually. My grandma wants to meet you and has asked that you go to church with us today. (I said quickly and closed my eyes)

Craig: (cleared his throat) Wow, I didn't see that one coming. Church huh?

Me: You're not obligated to join us. I know it's too early in the relationship for such. Goodness I don't even know if we are in a relationship. Look...

Craig: O, calm down baby. You are rambling. Tell your grandmother that I'd love to meet her. (he cut me short in the most gentle tone ever)

Me: Are you sure?

Craig: I'm sure, love. I'll go get out one of my best suits and get ready. Send me the address of your church or must I come pick you all up?

Me: It's best that you meet us there. You might also be forced to meeting my friends if they are there. It's too much and too soon but they will introduce themselves if I don't and they might just do it in a weird crazy way. (he laughed)

Craig: I love meeting people, O. I actually look forward to meeting the other important people in your life. Chulu is still my favourite though. (I laughed)

Me: Yeah, yeah. I'll see you in a few hours then. Let me go wake her up.

Craig: Okay, I'll see you soon. I can't wait. Please tell your granny to be lenient. I bruise easily. (I laughed softly)

Me: I'm sorry but I can't promise you that. May the odds be with you today. (he sighed and I laughed)

Craig: Let me get ready, O. The last thing I want is to make a bad first impression by being late.

Me: Later. (I ended the call)

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I got up and went to rinse my bowl. My granny came from her room and I told her that he has agreed to meet us there. She

smiled and I hope that's a point for Craig shame. I sent him the address and rushed off to take a shower. Makhulu offered to get Chulu ready and I thanked her. I finished and got called into Chulu's room. I found her standing on the bed sulking like never before.

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Makhulu: Your baby wants to wear the dirty shirt she got from uncle Clay to church. I don't know what to say to convince her. (she said walking out)

Me: Chulu, you can't wear a dirty shirt out in public, bhabha.

Chulu: But I made sure I kept it clean, mommy.

Me: And that big chocolate ice cream stain on the front? (she looked down)

Chulu: We can wash it.

Me: There's no time for that now. Please wear the other dress makhulu made for you. When we get back from church we will wash it and you can wear it tomorrow. (she kept quiet) Uncle Craig is going to join us for church. I'm sure he won't like seeing you so sad. (she looked up and smiled)

Chulu: Okay, I'll wear the dress then. Can I sit with you in the big people church and not go to Sunday school?

Me: You haven't been to Sunday school in a while now. Plus you children join us soon after the service has started. You'll see him.

Chulu: Okay. (she smiled)

Me: Can I have my morning hug and kiss please? (she jumped into my arms)

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I hugged her and kissed her cheeks. I can't believe my baby has a new favourite person. Just hearing Craig's name makes her smile. I don't think I'm ready to share my little girl with another parent figure. I took her dress and helped her get into it. My grandma can make a lot of money with these dresses should she decide to get some real customers. Already Poppy has been begging for a short African print jumpsuit. I tied her hair and put her shoes on. She is the cutest person that I have ever seen. We went to the kitchen and I made her breakfast and rushed to the room to finish getting ready because makhulu was getting impatient. We finally made our way out of the house and into the road. Makhulu's favourite gospel show playing and she'd sing along to the songs played. We arrived after a few minutes and it seems most people are here already. Yandi, Zuko and Licia were also here already. Poppy comes whenever she's in the mood and I'm guessing that today she was not. We went up to them and greeted. I later walked Chulu to the Sunday school

section and she was not too happy to be there. I went back to the adults.

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Yandi: Makhulu tells us that you have invited a guest. (they all gave a naughty looking smile)

Makhulu: Where is he, Othu. I hate sitting at the back and the front seats will be filled soon.

Me: You can go in, Ma. We can do the introductions after the service.

Licia: Leave, makhulu alone. We all want to meet him before and not after church. (she let out a soft laugh)

Zuko: Oh my word, Othu has never introduced a man to us. I'm so excited.

Me: He is just a friend.

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They tried to keep the discussion respectful in respect of makhulu but I know they have plenty to say. Craig's car finally appeared and for some reason it made me smile like never before. I didn't know if I should go up to him or stand and hope that he spots us. He got out and he looked all types of sexy and handsome in a navy three piece suit. It fit so perfectly and was clearly tailor made. I could see he looks a bit lost so I excused

myself to go to him. He smiled immediately when he saw me. I gave him a brief hug because we are on church premises and my gran is watching after all.

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Craig: You look so beautiful. (I smiled)

Me: You don't look too bad yourself, Mr Knights. Are you ready? (he exhaled)

Craig: There's no turning back now. Let's get it over and done with. (we walked over to the ladies)

Me: Ma, Licia, Zuko and Yandi this is Craig Knights and Craig this is my grandmother and friends.

Makhulu: Now I finally know what you look like. Good morning, Clay. You and I have plenty to talk about young man but not now because the service is about to start.

Craig: It's a pleasure to finally meet you as well, Mrs Zweni. I'm available to have that talk whenever you are free. Pleasure to meet you too, ladies. (they all smiled)

Makhulu: Join us for lunch today. We can go out to a nice place and I can get to know you a bit better.

Craig: I'd love to, Ma. Thank you for the invite. (he smiled)

Makhulu: Let me leave you children now. You are looking handsome, my boy. A man in a suit looks proper and clean. (she smiled and left)

Yandi: Mr Knights, we hope that you will love and take care of our girl. We might look sweet but we can turn on you should one of our own gets hurt. (he laughed)

Craig: I'm not planning on destroying a great thing, so don't worry.

Licia: You all must come to my place next Sunday. I'll cook and we can just have a great time and get to know each other more.

Zuko: I'd love to because I also have someone to introduce to you guys.

Yandi: This is all just so exciting. Soon we might have a wedding. Let's leave Othu to greet her man properly. Craig, nice meet you. (she shook his hand)

Craig: Likewise.

Licia: We will see you two inside. (they smiled and left)

Craig: I think I made a good first impression. (he smiled)

Me: I think so too. Craig, I know this is not the right time for this but I'll drive myself crazy thinking about it so I'll just ask now. What is this between us? Is it too early to label it?

Craig: I should have done this a while ago and it's going to sound cheesy. Othunyiweyo, will you please be my girlfriend? (I giggled like a teen girl)

Me: Yes, I would love to be your girlfriend, Craig. (he smiled)

Craig: Is it safe to kiss you? (he whispered)

Me: Rather not. You don't want to ruin that great first impression with Makhulu. (we laughed)

Craig: You're right. Where is Chulu? I hope you didn't leave her at home with a babysitter. (he said in a sulky voice)

Me: As if she'd have let me. She just lit up when I told her you're coming. I think my spot is being taken by you. (he kissed my hands)

Craig: Never. I'm sure you're the one person she'll never be able to live without. I love you, O. I love both of you. (I nearly cried)

Me: I love you too. We both do. (he smiled).

Craig: Now I really want to kiss you. (he bit his bottom lip)

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I looked around and saw we were the only ones outside. I planted a quick kiss on his lips and told him to follow me inside. The church service started and it was so packed. Later the

Sunday school teachers let the children walk in quietly and all went to their parents. Chulu ran straight to Craig's arms. I guess I'll have to get used to sharing her. They look so adorable together. Makhulu would occasionally look at us but not with dirty

Advertisement

unkind looks. Almost like she's trying to read Craig. My girls would also look and wink. It seems he stole the attention of the ladies in my life. The pastor asked the guests to stand and he welcomed them. Shame he looked so nervous but it was over before he knew it. The Sunday collection was done and after a while the pastor blessed the service and ended it. I had a great time and I really hope Craig has too. I went to the ladies before we could go grab a bite and my friends followed me. They screamed as soon as I came out of the stall. I laughed so much and made my way to one of the sinks to wash my hands.

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Me: You guys are so crazy.

Zuko: Hey girl, I'm into women nhe but that man looks good.

Me: Don't drool too much though. He's taken.

Yandi: Yes, girl. (she shouted)

Licia: I'm just glad that you have found love. Did you guys see the man with Chulu? (she smiled)

Yandi: He is a natural and she is bonding with him effortlessly. I think God heard those little silent prayers she had for a daddy. I think he is the real deal.

Me: We are not speaking marriage so soon but I must admit I'm happy and I'm in love. (I blushed and they screamed)

Zuko: Receive it all, lady because you deserve it. The most selfless person that I know is you, friend. Be selfish now and enjoy this love this man gives you. (she blinked away tears)

Yandi: Oh damn, Zuko. Now I'm emotional. Othu is like the little sister in the group and her happiness makes us as her big sisters happy.

Licia: Don't keep your family waiting. Go and enjoy lunch with them and we will catch up.

Me: I still want to hear about Zuko's person.

Zuko: Let's all do dinner tomorrow night and I'll tell you all about it. Deal?

Licia: Deal, baby.

Yandi: Have you guys heard how sweet he sounds when he says "O" when referring to her. (we laughed)

Me: Stop it..

Yandi: I can't because I'm just so happy. Oh my goodness, I'm happy and I can't hide it.

Me: Thank you for being in my corner, ladies. (we group hugged)

Licia: Always and I know Poppy will be just as happy. Now go be with your man. (she said in a sexy voice and I laughed)

Zuko: Guy is in a three piece suit guys. I can't wait to hear more about him. Go, Othu. They are waiting for you.

Me: Okay call me for the details about tomorrow's dinner. I love you all.

Them: Love you too. (we blew kisses to each other)

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I rushed out and went to join my people. I found them all standing together and talking actually. We got into my car and Craig to his and drove off to Makhulu's favourite restaurant. She doesn't like spending money of such but for this place she is willing to spend extra even. We finally arrived, got a table, sat and ordered drinks first. Chulu went to the play section they had but we could see her so I'm not worried. Makhulu didn't waste time at all she started to ask him questions.

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Makhulu: Tell me Clay. Why do you want to be in a relationship with my daughter?

Craig: I want to be with her because firstly I love her, Ma. She is the only woman that has ever made my heart feel what it feels. I want to be in a relationship with her to love and respect her and also love Chulu unconditionally.

Makhulu: Let's say this goes further. Are you willing to love Chulumanco as your own?

Craig: I already do, Mrs Zweni. (he smiled and looked at Chulu)

Makhulu: Being a part time uncle is different from being a full time father.

Craig: I'm aware of that and should we take our relationship to the next level I would gladly step up and be what O and Chulu need.

Makhulu: What exactly is the next level?

Me: Haaa, Makhulu. Let's order now. (she raised her finger and I knew its a "shut up" signal)

Craig: The next level being making her my wife and Chulu my daughter. (he looked at me intensely)

Makhulu: Good because a man with intentions is not afraid to speak about marriage. What do you do for a job, my son?

Craig: I have a consulting business. I give advice to security companies on ways to up their products and services. I also have some investments in good companies.

Makhulu: Are you making enough to take care of a wife and child? (I almost choked)

Me: Ma. (I said pleading for her to stop now)

Craig: I am financially stable enough to provide for my future wife and children, Mrs Zweni.

Makhulu: Okay, let us order now because I can see Othu is starting to panic but I still have plenty to ask you.

Craig: And I'll gladly answer. (he smiled)

Makhulu: And call me Makhulu not Mrs Zweni. (we laughed)

Craig: I'll remember that and thank you for raising such a good and beautiful woman. I promise I'll love and do anything to perfect her and Chulumanco.

Makhulu: I choose to trust you so don't disappoint me.

Me: Can we or...

Someone: Othunyiweyo! (they cut me short and I turned to see who it is, it's Ndalo)

Me: Hello, Ndalo. (I smiled)

Ndalo: What a coincidence? (Chulu came to sit down)

Me: It sure is.

Ndalo: So when will we go on that date you promised me?
(Craig looked at me)

Me: I never promised you that. Let me introduce you to my grandma, my daughter and my boyfriend. (his smile faded)

Ndalo: Boyfriend? So you've been leading me on?

Me: I never made any promises to you, Ndalo.

Ndalo: When you ga...

Craig: Look man I don't know who you are but I do know that you are making us all uncomfortable. My lady said she didn't give you any false hope and I believe her so please respect her and the rest of us by excusing yourself. (he stood for a while and left)

Chulu: I don't like your friend, mommy. (she said softly)

Makhulu: That makes two of us, baby.

Me: It's a guy I met at the lodge. I never promised him a date but he did ask to meet up since he was in town but didn't know he meant a date.

Craig: You don't need to explain yourself. Let's just enjoy our lunch. (I smiled)

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We ordered and our food came soon after. I can't believe Ndalo thinks I'm into him. I didn't even agree to meet up with him. I decided to enjoy the lunch with my people and forget all else. Makhulu asked more uncomfortable questions and Craig answered. He then went to play with Chulu and makhulu said she likes him. Especially because Chulu does too. Later Craig had to go because he had plans with a friend. He asked me to also meet his friends when I'm free some time. He said goodbye to Chulu and Makhulu and I walked him to his car. We managed to share a hot kiss in the empty parking lot. He told me to go back in before he drives off and I laughed at the over protectiveness. I went back to the ladies and Mr Sonki joined us for that brief meeting we scheduled. I brought the documents and he told me to give them to him for safe keeping. I have been carrying them in my bag since I got them. I did make copies though. I know Sonki will keep them safe because I trust him. He is a man who is not corrupt. The meeting ended and we decided it's time to go home. While driving I swear I spotted Craig's car far behind mine but I'm sure it's not him. We finally got home and were shocked at what we came home to. My apartment looks so messy. Chairs are all over and drawers taken out. I rushed to the room to see if Tatiana's memory box she left Chulu is still there and it is. I'm so relieved because Chulu still has letters from her mother she needs to read as she gets older. All else was okay. The TV was taken. I can't believe

my house was broken into. Who does such a cruel thing though?

CRAIG.

The church service was not bad at all. I haven't stepped foot into a church in over ten years. I've never felt worthy since I have such a dark past. I like makhulu and I hope she likes me too. The Ndalo guy had better stay away from my lady or I'll make him. I followed them home but I think she saw me so I took another turn. I'm hoping that they have arrived home safely. O called sounding so panicked. I tried to calm her down and she finally was able to tell me what happened. I'm sure it's Kumkani and he wanted the documents the doctor gave O. I called Wes to offer to take him to the airport since I know his flight is tonight. He said he'll be in S.A for a while longer because he has some business to take care of. Wes is a contract killer and knows nothing else so it means he got a mission. My gut just told me that O is involved. He had better not hurt her or I'll gut him out with my bare hands. He was vague about the mission so I made an international call quickly to the one person who can tell me what mission Wes is assigned to.

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Prof: Hello. (he said in a serious tone)

Me: Prof, it's me Snipe. I need a favour.

Prof: Damn, man. It's been a while. We miss you, Snipe. Please tell...

Me: No, I'm not coming back. I need to know the details on the mission Wes got in South Africa.

Prof: No, Snipe. I can do anything for this but you kn...

Me: I hate to do this but I'm desperate. If you don't do this then your seniors will know about that big slip up I helped you with. You owe me a favour and now I'm calling in that favour.

Prof: Dammit, Snipe don't do...

Me: What's your commander's number again, 555...

Prof: Fine shit! No need to tell him about that shit. Okay let me check for you.

Me: Good man. Tell me who put out the hit and who the victim is.(I waited)

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He finally told me and it confirmed my suspicions. Kumkani put out a hit on Flinch. The one witness O has. I called O to ask for Flinch's number saying I need to ask a science related question. She gave it to me. I immediately dialed his number and he answered.

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Dr: Hello.

Me: Doctor, you don't know me but I know you. Your life is in danger and I need you to do exactly as I say.

Dr: Who is this?

Me: For now call me a saviour. A hit has been put out on you and trust me the person who will do it does not miss. Listen to me and do exactly as I say.

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I told him that he must leave his place and take a cab. No one can see him so Wes must believe he's still in the house. Wes is a close up assassin. So I know he'll go into the Doctor's place to do it. I gave him further instructions and told him to follow each one to the dot. He asked who is trying to kill him so I said it's someone who wants to keep his mouth shut. I dropped the call and called Wes to distract him a bit. I'm sure he will do it tonight. I would go and help him but I need to be with O and her family to see that they are okay. I hope the doctor survives but if he does as I said he will until. I got into my car and drove to O place. They will have to be checked into a hotel for a while. The police were there when I arrived and I hugs my girls because they were clearly frightened. We waited for the police to do their bit and I told them to pack. After a while we drove

to a hotel and got them checked in. It seems I'll have to take matters into my own hands now.

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#Kumkani

I can't even describe the anger I'm feeling at the moment. Who the hell dared to interfere with my plans to scare Othunyiweyo? The damn bastard even broke my guy's finger. Who is this girl been working with? It seems I've been underestimating my poor daughter. Could she have been planning to get at me for a while now? I have to up my game clearly. My mother has also been calling me endlessly and I honestly don't have time for her nonsense right now. I called my contact and told him to ensure Flinch is taken care of today. Unathi has also been acting weirdly. Asking me every chance she got to not hurt Othunyiweyo. The woman suddenly got a heart. I sat in my study when she walked in holding a tray with tea essentials. She put it on the table, poured the tea in the cups and sat down.

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Me: Tea is not going to solve all the problems that I have, Unathi.

Una: I didn't say it will, Zweni. Your mother called me and told me to ask you to pick up your phone. It's not so late yet so I'm sure she is still up.

Me: She can wait. She's not dying so whatever she wants to say is not important at the moment.

Una: You also been in this study since Othu came to see us. Just gi...

Me: Don't even dare suggest that I hand over my company and my shares to her. I will give her the amount I got paid when I took part in the project and that's it. I have worked damn hard to have what I have today. That girl has been nothing but a problem in my life.

Una: She is just a person who knows what she wants and has always gone for what she wanted. She is actually like you in that sense. (I looked at her)

Me: I don't go around claiming other people's assets.

Una: Kumkani, I trust you with my share of the benefits we got. If you fight this you risk losing everything. Would you rather have nothing or at least half of what you have? Have sounds much better to me than having nothing.

Me: Thank you for your lack of faith in me. I prefer to keep all that I have. Not half of it. I'll deal with it. Your daughter will

know that I do not play and the fact that my blood run through her veins does not mean I'll go soft on her.

Una: I don't like the sound of that, Zweni.

Me: Then go and convince her to stop this right away.

Una: She'll never listen to me. Talk to your mother and maybe she will be able to convince her to drop this.

Me: I prefer to not involve her. She'll take Othu's side anyway. Don't worry soon the problems will be taken care of.

Una: I'm going out for dinner with the Yenges. I'm late already. You can still come and join us.

Me: I don't have time to make small talk with them. Go alone and enjoy. (she stood)

Una: Okay, bye. I'll see you later then. (she kissed me)

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I watched as she walked out gracefully. I looked at the tea and decided that I need something stronger. I stood to get myself a strong drink. Hours went by and I called to ask if Flinch is dead yet. The guy said I must stop calling and he will call when it's done. I stood to get another drink when I suddenly felt someone choke me from behind. I tried to fight but I clearly had too much to drink. I could not even reach the panic button.

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Person: You see, you think that you are above all but truth is that you are not. I knew it was you who wants me dead when I got that call. So I thought I'd pay you a visit. I even have a gift for you. I thought of killing you but I want you to sign over Othunyiweyo's things to her first. I have dealt with men who are far more dangerous than you. Compared to them you are like a toothless dog. I outsmarted them and I will outsmart you too. (he held a needle to my face)

Me: What is that?

Flinch: I'd explain but there's no time for that. The beauty about my line of work is that I can understand medicine. This is not going to kill you, well not now anyway but the pain of it will make you wish for could die. Don't mess with me, Kumkani and I'm going to make sure that you beg your daughter for her forgiveness after this. I wish you'd die like the dog that you are but I'll keep you around for now.

Me: You inject me with that they will pick it up wh...(he laughed)

Flinch: They won't even trace it in your bloodstream. This one is to teach you a lesson but the next one will be to kill you. (he stuck the needle into my arm)

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The sting was not so bad. He took it out and let me go. I turned to fight him but I suddenly felt the most agonising pain in my back. It felt as if someone was literally ripping me apart. I went on my knees and held on to my desk. My chest felt like it was on fire.

"Enjoy the pain, you bastard", he said and rushed out.

I pressed the panic button but the alarm didn't go off. I took my phone but it fell to the floor and so did I. My entire body was in pain. From head to toe. Tears even fell from my eyes. Why is this not killing me already? He was right, I do wish I could just die but that's not happening. No words can describe this pain. It felt as if I'm being eaten from the inside. I screamed in agony hoping someone would hear my plea for help.

"Tata", someone said while touching me. It's Langa. My vision became blurry and suddenly it was dark. I can't be asleep because I still feel the terrible pain.

"I can't see", I said with panic. "I can't see, Langa", I shouted.

The pain became intense by the second and I for the first time pleaded with death to take me because I couldn't take it anymore. That bastard said this won't kill me though. I finally felt my body being pulled up and I let out a scream of pure agony until I lost consciousness. What has that pig done to me?

NAREATED

To Chulu the past weekend was the best ever and she can't wait to tell Buhle and Khloe all about it. Her prayers for a father have finally been answered and uncle Craig is perfect and she loves him. He picked her up, drawa pictures with her, play with her and gives her forehead and cheek kisses. All the things she's seen other daddies to so this must mean he likes her too. Seeing their home all messy yesterday broke her heart but uncle Craig came and gave her and her mommy comforting hugs that made everything better. Today is Monday and that means it's school. She felt someone shake her gently and her eyes opened. Her mommy smiled at her and she smiled too. Today she's excited to go to school so she didn't give Othu trouble. Her mom planted a kiss on her forehead.

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Othu: Good morning, bhabha.

Chulu: Morning, mommy.

Othu: It's time to get up and go to school. Mommy's not going today.

Chulu: But why? Are you not feeling okay? (she asked softly)

Othu: I'm fine but my daddy is in hospital. I have to go see him.

Chulu: Will he be okay? (Othu kissed her cheek)

Othu: Let's hope so, my love. I asked uncle Craig to drive you to school. Is that okay with you?

Chulu: Yes it is. I want to go tell my friend about my fun weekend. Who will get me from school?

Othu: Uncle Craig and I'll be home when you get there. I'll cook a nice lunch for us all.

Chulu: Will we go to our own home?

Othu: Yup, today they will install security stuff so that the thief won't get in.

Chulu: Naughty thief.

Othu: Very naughty thief but I'm just glad we weren't home. Come let's go get ready so uncle Craig will find you ready when he comes. I had your shirt cleaned and it's a beautiful day out so you can wear it. (she hugged her mom)

Chulu: Thank you, mommy.

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She and her mom first got on their knees and said a morning prayer. Makhulu is not here because she has left for the hospital already. Chulu would rather go to school than go see sick people. Her mom said children are not allowed anyway and

she is afraid of her mommy's daddy and mommy. They went to the bathroom and her mom helped her get ready. She can now almost bath herself without any assistance. Her mom dressed her in a short and her special shirt and tied her hair. Chulu felt happy that she'd be going home because she doesn't like being in this place they spent the night. Having uncle Craig drive her to and from school has made her even more excited. They were having breakfast even there was a knock on the door. Surely it's uncle Craig, she thought. Her mom went to open and soon appeared with him. She got off her chair and ran to hug him. He always smells nice.

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Craig: Are you ready to go? (he smiled)

Chulu: Ready, uncle Craig.

Me: No, you are not. You haven't finished your breakfast.

Chulu: But I'm full. (she said softly)

Craig: Go finish your breakfast. I don't want my princess to collapse at school while playing.

Chulu: Okay. (he put her down and she went to finish up)

Craig: How are you. (he held Othu's waist and kissed her forehead)

Othu: I'm exhausted. I wish I could have my old and simple life back. I don't even know if I'm saddened by my father's sudden hospitalization, baby. Makhulu is devastated. He is her only child after all.

Craig: I'm sorry you have to deal with so much and your father might be a bad person but no one will hold caring about him against you.

Othu: I'm not sure I even care. I'll go to the hospital to be there for my gran though. Me Thorn said I can take a few days off to deal with everything. The break in and all else.

Craig: I'm glad because there's no way you'd be fully present if you were at work. My guys will go to your apartment soon to install the security measures we spoke about.

Othu: Thank you. (they hugged)

Craig: Anything to ensure that you guys are safe. Chulu has been staring at us all this time. Is now a good time to tell her that we are in a relationship or do you prefer to wait? (Othu looked at her daughter)

Othu: Shame I'm sure she's confused by the affection we display. Now is good if you don't mind.

Craig: I don't, love. (they held hands and went to sit with Chulu)

Othu: Bhabha, you know I've always been open and honest with you about things that concern you right.

Chulu: Yes, mommy.

Othu: Well there has been a new development in my life and it affects you too. If you don't like any part of what we are about to tell you. What will you do?

Chulu: Tell you. (she smiled)

Othu: Yes, uhm mommy and uncle Craig...uhm, I'm not sure how to put it. (she looked at Craig and he knelt in front of Chulu)

Craig: Sweetie, mommy and I have been friends for a long time but we have now decided to be even more special friends to each other.

Chulu: Like boyfriend and girlfriend? (the adults coughed)

Othu: Where did you hear that?

Chulu: At school. Is it bad words?

Craig: No it's not. Yes like boyfriend and girlfriend.

Othu: Do you understand? (Chulu nodded)

Chulu: Does this mean you will get married?

Othu: Uhm, perhaps but it's still early to say.

Craig: So do you have a problem with what we just told you?
(she shook her head quickly)

Othu: Okay, I love you.

Chulu: I love you too. I ate all my food. I'm ready to go.

Othu: I asked uncle Craig to pack lunch for you.

Craig: I hope I did your lunch some justice. I even slipped in a sweet or two. (he whispered to Chulu and she laughed)

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Othu sat and watched the two of them and their bond is so natural. Chulu lights up when the name Craig is mentioned. It's a beautiful thing to witness and she hoped that Craig is not a fly by night that will just end up breaking their hearts. She's also worried about her grandma. Kumkani might be a cruel man but she knows his sickness has makhulu worried and she's afraid it might make her sick. She is old after all. The three of them made it out to the parking lot and out Chulu's seat in Craig's car. Othu asked to inspect the lunch Craig packed for Chulu in the little back cooler bag. He tried shame and she was impressed. He indeed did slip in chocolate sweets. They strapped Chulu in and went around to the driver's side. Chulu watched as uncle Craig planted a soft kiss on her mommy's lips. She smiled and covered her eyes with her hands. She doesn't mind that he is her mommy's special friend. She also noticed

that her mom is looking a bit sad and it made her sad too. Othu rushed to the back to kiss her daughter's soft cheek again. Uncle Craig got into the car and hooted as they drove off to school. He put the radio on.

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Craig: This is actually fun. I've never driven anyone to school.
(he said smiling)

Chulu: No one else has ever taken me. It's always my mommy.

Craig: Tomorrow she will. Are you excited for school.

Chulu: Yes because I want to tell my friends about my nice weekend and show them my new me shirt. (he laughed)

Craig: Hopefully they won't want one for themselves. Are you excited about your birthday?

Chulu: Yes. Uncle Craig will you come with my mommy to bring the cake and party sweets for my class?

Craig: Would you like that?

Chulu: Very much.

Craig: Then I'll be there. Thank you for the invite.

Chulu: Will you be my daddy? (he suddenly wasn't sure how to answer without O being present)

Craig: We don't know how life is going to turn out, Chulz but I do hope that I will be. Let's hope that God has plans to keep you, me and your mother together so that we can be a family.

Chulu: I love you. (his heart melted)

Craig: I love you too, princess.

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Craig has never felt his heart go so soft and that because a little girl thinks he is worthy to be a father to her. He hopes that his past won't mess things up. He suddenly felt guilty for putting O into this. He knows he has to talk to her because a relationship based on secrets is not a good one. But he just does not want to lose them. They have become an important part of their lives in such a short space of time. They finally arrived at school and he parked inside the yard. He put the cooler bag over his shoulders and picked Chulu up from her seat. Suddenly he felt like a real father. Chulu gave him direction for her class and they saw Yandi. She greeted them and kissed Chulu. Also promised to go see O later on. Some of the lady teachers were watching Craig so much and it made him wonder if he is doing something wrong. They finally got to Chulu's class and he put her down. She asked him to wait, ran off and returned with two little girls.

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Chulu: Uncle Craig these are my best friend. This is Buhle (she pointed) and this is Khloe (she pointed again)

Craig: Nice to meet you Buhle and Khloe. (they smiled)

Chulu: Look he made me a shirt with me on it. It says princess Chulu. (the two widened their eyes and put their hands over their mouths)

Buhle: It's so pretty. Are you Chulu's daddy? (Chulu looked at me)

Craig: I will be . (Chulu sniled and they hugged each other.) I have to go now. You have to go now. I'll see you when I come to pick you up. You three have a great day. (he hugged Chulu)

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They ran off to the play area and he asked the teacher where to put her lunch bag. She told him to find a box with her name on it. The class was so colourful. He looked for Chulu's box and put it in there and left. He has never started his day on such a happy note. He called O and she told him she's on her way home. The security company people called saying they are at her place already. Chulu on the other side was telling her friends all about her weekend. She was going to have a good day.

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#CRAIG

I hate seeing my woman so down and all that because of the man she calls dad. A part of me even wishes that he had died and I know it's wrong of me to think that but I can't help it. I hope that the Flinch man was able to get himself to safety. At least my day had a great highlight so far. Driving Chulumanco to school was great and I hope it's not the first and last time O asks me to do it. I'm glad I managed to pack some good food for her lunch. I had to go to the internet and searched "great lunch box ideas for five year olds". I laughed softly as I thought of it. I was going to go to a meeting but it got postponed so I thought it's best I go check on O and make sure the security stuff is installed properly. I finally arrived at her place and found the guys busy. I greeted them and made my way inside. I checked the lounge but it was empty so I called out her name. There was no answer but she soon appeared from the passage avoiding eye contact. I lifted up her head gently so she could look at me.

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Me: You've been crying. Has something happened?

Othu: I'm sorry, Craig. (she started to cry so I held her tight)

Me: What for, baby? (I kissed her head)

Othu: For dumping so much on you when we have been in a relationship for a day. Now I'm having you drive my daughter to school and I realised only now that I'm asking so much of...

Me: O, I loved taking Chulu to school. Dammit I love your daughter, Othunyiweyo. I'm glad that you are including me in your lives. It makes me feel good and wanted. Stop saying all of this please. (her grip around my body tightned)

.

I can't believe that she thinks she and Chulu are a burden to me. Yes, we have just started to be in a relationship and stuff have happened but I'm happy and love being with them. I kissed her. She looks beautiful even without make up and while crying. She dried her tears and offered to make breakfast for us. I watched as she started to effortlessly move around her kitchen. I kept myself busy by putting the few stuff that were out of place in their places. The kitchen was soon filled with a bacon aroma and it made my mouth water. She finished and served the food on the tray for me and also served the workers. I could see that they were not expecting such kindness but they gladly accepted and thanked her. She sat and I thanked her again before we both dug in. I think I'm addicted to her cooking too. She doesn't have a dishwasher so after we were done we washed the dishes together and I managed to make her smile

and laugh a few time. I know she's still not okay though. She went on to do some chores and I went to help the men with the security system installment. We also installed a security gate at the door. After a while all was finished, we thanked them and they left. I could finally just relax with O. She locked the gate and we sat in the TV-less lounge and just spoke. This would be the right moment for me to tell her about my past had she not been dealing with so much already but she has too much on her plate. She suddenly leaned forward and kissed me while I spoke. I don't mind being told to shut up with a kiss so I responded. The kiss got passionate and I was wondering what is happening. A big part of me wanted to rip each and every single item of clothing of her body. I put my hand on her waist and slid her top of slightly but she removed my hand. I wanted her so badly but I broke the kiss to gather my thoughts. I looked at her.

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Me: We have to stop, O. I don't have condoms and something just tells me that you aren't on any birth control. I want to do this but not like this. I'm sure you're not even ready. (she looked down)

Othu: I'm sorry. (she said softly)

Me: Don't be. I don't want your emotions to control you and have you end up doing something you'll regret. Let's wait for the right time.

Othu: You're right.

Me: Why does your body tense whenever I slide my hand up your shirt while kissing you? Am I making you uncomfortable? (she kept quiet)

Othu: I have a scar and I don't like showing it. (she finally said in a whisper)

Me: I didn't know that. A scar is...

Othu: It's not a little scratch, Craig. It's a big, ugly scar and I prefer that no one sees it because I don't like seeing it either.

Me: Not even your husband someday? I don't know about other men but I like seeing all of my partner. Even what they consider flaws. When did you get this scar? (she looked at me)

Othu: When I had the accident years ago. I just didn't tell you about that injury.

Me: Can I see please? (she looked at me for a long time)

Othu: Okay. (she said softly)

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I kissed her and told her that I love her. She was laying on her back so I moved my hand to the bottom part of her top. I looked at her and could see that she doesn't really want me to do this. I asked if she's sure before I lifted her top up and she nodded quickly. I slowly moved the material to reveal her belly. Her body tensed so much. I looked up at her only to find her eyes shut. I lifted it until it reached her bra. I finally saw this scar. It ran from her waist all the way up to her breast it seems. Why would she want to hide it when it is a part of her? I love her and all of her. Scars or not and to show her just how much I planted soft kisses from where it was visible to where it ended. I went up to her face and her eyes were still shut.

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Me: Baby please look at me. (she opened her tear filled eyes and her tears fell to the side of her face as soon as she blinked)

Othu: It's horrible.

Me: I love it. I love all of you. You're beautiful.

Othu: Why are you so perfect, Craig? That scares me.

Me: I'm not perfect, O. Far from it. I'm just not fazed by this. If anything it makes you even more beautiful because it makes you unique. So is there any part of yourself that you feel insecure about?

Othu: Why?

Me: I want to kiss those too. (she laughed)

Othu: So far that's it.

Me: I hope so because you have nothing to be insecure about.
(she kissed me)

Othu: Did you manage to get a hold of Flinch? (I cleared my throat)

Me: Yes, love.

Othu: Why did you want to contact him? (she looked at me)

Me: I wanted to ask how a love potion is made. (she laughed so much)

Othu: Why would you want that?

Me: To make you fall deeper and deeper in love with me. (I kissed her passionately)

Othu: You don't need potion for that, silly man. I already am.

Me: Yeah? (I kissed her neck)

Othu: Yeah. (she said in a soft moan)

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We cuddled for a while until she fell asleep. I lifted her up and went to put her in what I thought was her bedroom. I laid next to her and also closed my eyes. After an hour we woke up but I

had to go. I know she'll go to hospital soon so I offered to babysit Chulu. I kissed her and rushed off to do some business before going to the school. My phone rang and it's Wes. He was angry because his mission didn't go as planned. He was sure the doctor was there. I pretended I had no idea what he is talking about. I later called the doctor and told him to meet me some place that's not so crowded. He sounded a bit scared but I assured him nothing is wrong. I described myself so he'd know who to meet. I went to the little coffee shop and waited. A man who looks nerdy came in so I figured it's him. He walked to my table.

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Dr: Are you the one who called me?

Me: Sit down Dr Flinch.

Dr: Who are you and how do you know me?

Me: A friend a Othunyiweyo Zweni and what I've heard about you it seems you have some strange interest in her. I don't know whether it's a good or bad one but I hope you will tell me.
(he sat)

Dr: I care about her and not in a sick twisted way.

Me: Tell me in which way then, doctor.

Dr: When I started this project I was very committed to it. I am attached to all my work. She was the only embryo that survived and so she is special. I never had any children so to me she has been closest I'll ever be to being a father because I formed her.

Me: Did you get some sick thrill in knowing that you might ruin the futures of these perfect children you wanted to create? (I raised my voice)

Dr: I won't lie. At first I did but somewhere along the line I realised that what we tried to do was wrong. That's why I am protective of her and want her to get what's hers from her selfish parents.

Me: To ease your guilt about your involvement in this. All I want to know is this. Are you a threat to her?

Dr: No, I want to help her.

Me: I hope you're telling the truth, doc because you do not want to be a tourist who disappeared in a foreign country.

Dr: From where I'm sitting you are the dangerous one. How do I know you won't hurt her?

Me: That's not possible. Her apartment was broken in to yesterday. (his eyes widened)

Dr: By who? Are they hurt?

Me: No they aren't. I at first thought it's Kumkani but there is this Hans character too and yesterday a guy approached our table and Othu said he works at Han's lodge.

Dr: I managed to get some dirt on this Hans. Money laundering, fraud and some more. I'll go pay him a little visit. Can I count on you to look after her? I think if we can work together we can give her the peace she needs.

Me: Who are you doctor? A nerdy scientist would not even know where to begin searching for this type of stuff.

Dr: No but a nerdy scientist has contacts of his own. I am just a scientist but I know that the world is not just black and white there are grey areas too.

Me: Maybe just go into hiding for now.

Dr: I can take care of myself.

Me: As long as you keep Othunyiweyo's best interest at heart I'm good so don't make an enemy of me.

Dr: Same applies to you. (I laughed a bit)

Me: I need to be somewhere.

Dr: How is Kumkani? (I looked at him intensely)

Me: Something tells me that you know, doctor. I am not dumb. I tip you off on a hit on you. You put two and two together and

went to drug him somehow. I've dealt with all types of people in the world. Even nerdy scientist with a dark side. Like I've said if you continue to be on Othu's side I don't care who you really are.

Dr: I'm no threat to her.

Me: Good man.

Someone: Hey, guy. (I looked up and it's a woman)

Dr: Excuse me. (he stood and left)

Girl: It's me Poppy. We hooked up a few weeks ago. (I finally remembered the face)

Me: I'm sorry but that was just that, a hook up. If I promised you marriage I'm sorry it was the alcohol speaking. (she laughed)

Poppy: Don't be crazy. I knew what it was. So any chance of us repeating it but just sober this time? (she flirted)

Me: No chance at all. Excuse me Lopyy.

Poppy: It's Poppy. (I faked a smile)

Me: Yes, goodbye.

.

I put the R50 note on the table for my drink and left the place. I'm so glad I stopped drinking a week ago. I can't live a life of

alcohol and women when I have a perfect woman in my life now. I believe the doctor when he says he is no threat to Othu but I don't believe that he is just a nerdy scientist. If he drugged Kumkani as my gut tells me then I Underestimated the man a lot. The police have been useless in trying to tell us who broke into the apartment. I went on and did my daily work. Hours went by and O called me to remind me to get Chulu. As if I'd forget such an important thing. I drove to her school and she ran to me as soon as she saw me. I think I can get used to this. I took her stuff and she was busy telling me all about her day. She had lots of fun. We went to Mc Donalds for lunch and ice cream. I don't think I'll ever get tired of this. We drove home after a while and she fell asleep in her seat. We got to my place and I carried her to bed and let her sleep while I get some work done. O, will come pick her up later. The fact that she trusts me with Chulu makes me feel so special. I just wish our lives weren't so complicated.

OTHU

I've promised Makhulu to follow behind her to the hospital this morning but I just couldn't. I hope she she understands why. I think Craig and I shared our most intimate moment so far this morning. My friends have never seen my scar yet he did and he still loves me. I can still feel the soft kisses he planted on it.

They were both sexy and innocent. I am in love with this man. There is no denying it now and I hope we can take this relationship to the next level someday. Chulu was asleep when I called so I'll call again later. A man who can love my child is a catch to me. I finally arrived at the hospital and I don't have the strength to go in and face the situation but I just have to. I walked in and made my way to the waiting room and found Mama, Makhulu

Advertisement

Langa and Ian sitting on the seats. What is Langa's man doing here? I went to them and greeted.

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Langa: Our father was hospitalised last night and you only bother to show up now? (he stood)

Makhulu: This is not the time for this. She is here now, isn't she?

Langa: Makhulu you always take Othunyiweyo's side.

Mama: Langa, sit down. (he looked at me and sat)

Me: How is he? Did they say what is wrong?

Makhulu: They don't know what caused it all but they are still running tests in order to make a diagnosis.

Mama: Your father is such a healthy man. I don't know how this happened.

Me: Let's wait and see.

Makhulu: Where is Chulu?

Me: Yandi will go home with her then I'll pick her up later on. (I lied because I don't want Mama and Langa knowing about Craig yet)

Makhulu: Okay at least Yandi is a responsible girl. Have you eaten, Othu?

Me: Yes, Ma.

Makhulu: When last did you eat?

Me: Just now. (lied again)

Mama: Where are these doctors?

Langa: They will be out soon I'm sure, Mama.

Me: It's good to see you again Ian. (he smiled)

Mama: I didn't know you two know each other. Ian is one of your father's trusted employees and you never go to Zweni Contruction.

Me: It's a small world, Ma. I didn't know he worked for Tata though. (I smiled and Langa clenched his jaw)

Makhulu: He has been a good friend to Langa because he has been here since this morning.

Mama: Oh they have been friends for a while now. Ian is practically family.

Ian: Thank you, Mrs Zweni. (he smiled)

Me: Really? That's nice. I'm glad Langa has such a close friend.

Langa: I'll go check if there's no one to update us on his condition. (he stood and I laughed)

.

So Langa has been sneaking around with one of his father's staff members. Tata will burst another vein should he find out and I'm sure he will someday. I went to get coffee for my granny because she said she's feeling a bit cold. I also gave her the jersey that I can't with and put it over her shoulders. We waited a while longer until the doctor finally called us in. Ian stayed and the rest of us followed behind the doctor. Tata was awake and Mama ran to kiss her man.

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Tata: I don't want that girl here. Make sure that she leaves here and never comes back. (he pointed at me)

Me: Okay speedy recovery. (I turned to walk out but Mama stopped me)

Mama: Don't go, Othu. Kumkani the child made an effort to come and s..

Tata: She's the reason why I'm here in the first place. (he raised his voice)

Makhulu: Let's go, Othunyiweyo. Clearly he is not as sick as we thought if he can speak like that.

Doctor: He actually is very sick. Unfortunately Mr Zweni's kidneys aren't functioning well and if it carries on like this they will fail and he will die. (Mama started to cry)

Langa: I've once read about dialysis or something like that for patients with kidney problems.

Doctor: Yes but his are failing him rapidly and he needs a kidney transplant.

Tata: Organise it then. Money is no problem. Just make me live so that I can get back to the person who did this to me.

Mama: What do you mean?

Tata: Ask your lovely daughter.

Me: I'm leaving. I'm not going to stay where I'm clearly not wanted and on top of that be blamed for putting him here.

Mama: This is not the time nor place for fighting. Doctor, you heard my husband. Do the transplant immediately.

Doctor: It's unfortunately not that simple. Mr Zweni needs a matching donor and the hospital has a waiting list of people waiting for a new kidney. We can't just move him up the list.

Langa: Well take mine.

Doctor: We first need to test you and see if you are a match.

Langa: But I'm his son.

Doctor: That doesn't mean that you are a match, Mr Zweni. We can run those tests to see if you're a match. In fact we can test all of you.

Tata: Not her (he pointed at me). I'm sure my son or mom will be a match.

Me: Goodbye then with your rotten kidneys.

Mama: Othunyiweyo! (she shouted in a stern voice)

Doctor: Let's test everyone anyway. I'm sure you'd love to know your blood types too.

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Tata gave me the dirtiest look ever. We followed the doctor to another section of the hospital where we all got tested. This is just such a waste of my time. I could have been home with my child and man but instead I'm having needles stuck into my body. We were told to wait for the results. Tata asked to speak

to Langa privately. Poor thing is going to get his ears filled with more poison and I'm sure he'd strangle me to death if his father instructed him to. After what felt like forever the doctor appeared and told us to go into the room again. I asked to stay behind and speak to Ian instead but Makhulu insisted that I join them. I know she is doing it so that I don't feel left out. I dragged my feet to his hospital room again and stood by the door instead of next to him like everyone else. The doctor had a look of pity whenever he looked at me. Well there's just the life of Othunyiweyo I guess.

.

Tata: Doctor, when can we have the operation? My son will give me his kidney.

Doctor: That would be great if he were a match but he is not. In fact the only person who is, is Miss O Zweni. (I nearly collapsed)

Me: Me? Oh wow that's great. If I had a loving father I'd have cut myself open and given it to him without even thinking twice but I don't. I'll just keep my kidney thanks.

Langa: That's selfish, Othunyiweyo.

Me: Was that suppose to make me feel offended? If so it didn't work, brother. Imagine if someday someone worthy in my life needs a kidney and I'm a match. I'll regret giving my extra one to my undeserving father. Like you said, money is no problem

so go buy a kidney or something. I don't have a kidney to play with yhu.

Mama: I beg you, Othunyiweyo.

Me: Funny how the one person who needs this kidney hasn't begged and asked. Makhulu, he is your only son and I know you hurt when he does and I hurt when you hurt but I'm not about to give so much to a man who has given me nothing.

Langa: He gave you life, dammit.

Me: And he regrets that every single day of his life. I'm sorry, Makhulu. (she hugged me)

Makhulu: I can't dictate to you what you must do with your body.

Langa: Dammit, Makhulu are you choosing her over your own son? (she slapped him so hard that his nose became wet)

Makhulu: Don't you dare raise your voice and use vile language when speaking to me. I'm not afraid of your father so I'm not afraid to discipline his golden seed in front of him.

Doctor: Uhm, I'll give you time alone to speak. (he left)

Me: I'll leave you too. (I turned to leave)

Tata: I'll give you half of everything in exchange for the kidney. (I faced him)

Me: I am going to get half of what is mine and I do not need to pay with my kidney to get it. My kidney is not for sale. Keep your rotten kidneys and I'll keep mine. I am still coming for what is mine. So do me a favour and don't die now.

Mama: Ma Zweni, you'll let her speak to him like this yet you reprimanded Langa.

Makhulu: You are her mother, aren't you? Do something if you want.

Tata: Is that how little you care for your own son?

Makhulu: At least I care about you no matter how little it is but you on the other side I've watched you treat your child like nothing. You don't care about her one bit yet you preach to me about the little care that I show you? I'm not going to force the child to give an important part of herself to you if she doesn't want to. You are not worthy and you still have the audacity to sell to her what is hers to begin with. I raised you to be a good boy but this you that I see is not who I thought you'd be. You've hurt me in ways no child should do to his parent by not listening to my advice and teaching. I'm sure your father is turning in his grave because you are not even half the man he was. I once warned you and told you that there are things money will never be able to buy. Now you need your daughter to live. The same daughter who you claim is not from God. (she started to cry) Now that you need her you see her organ as

good enough to be inside your body. Now tell me, if she's not created by God why would you want a part of her in you? I don't want you to die but I'm not going to turn a blind eye to your many faults. Give the child what's hers and do right by her without expecting anything in return. You are missing out on so much joy by not giving yourself a chance to know her. For once be a father. You are lying in your death bed filled with hate that will take you no where. I'm disappointed in you as a son and as a father. (he kept silent, for the first time my father has nothing to say)

Me: Ma, must I wait for you in the car or will you go home much later.

Makhulu: Take me home and if anything happens to Othunyiweyo your kidneys aren't going to be the problem. I'm going to make sure your heart fails you. Don't think I don't know about the dark market sale of organs. My child had better not be kidnapped or you'll all know me well.

Mama: We would never do something like that.

Makhulu: I just don't know anymore. Come Othu, let's go. I miss Chulumanco.

Tata: Okay, I'm sorry. Is that what you want to hear? (I looked at him and walked out)

.

Makhukmlu followed and we walked out. I guess it's true that one must always be kind to people and help them because you never know when you might be in need of their help. My dad has always thought I'm useless but now suddenly I'm useful just because he needs a kidney. We drove home in silence and I stopped by a fast food place and got dinner for us. I dropped Makhulu off and gave her the key to the security gate and told her the code to the alarm system. I watched her until she went up to our flat and drove off. I arrived at Craig's place and got out of the car. Someone poked my arm with their finger and I turned to look. It's a man and I don't recognise him.

.

Me: Hello, can I help you?

Him: I'm just here to warn you about the man you claim to be your boyfriend. I thought he was my friend but I clearly didn't know him well and you don't either. Look at this. (he gave me a picture of a woman)

Me: Who is that and better yet, who are you?

Him: That is Lizzy Craig's first and only love. See how much she resembles you? Well there's more. She was pregnant with his child, a girl. She died in an accident caused by a natural disaster though. I'm sorry to tell you this but you and your daughter are

just rebounds. Replacements to his love Lizzy and his unborn daughter. (my phone rang, it's Craig)

.

The guy rushed off and I looked at the screen as Craig's name appeared. How much do I know this man?, I asked myself. Could all of this be true? I looked at the picture of this Lizzy woman and she doesn't look like me. Yes, we have the big hair and same skin colour but that's about it. I put the picture in my bag and rushed up to get my child. I knocked and Craig opened. He hugged me and my body tensed. Chulu ran to me and I picked her up.

.

Me: Go get your stuff. We need to go.

Chulu: I ask to watch the last bit of Sponge Bob, mommy. We don't have a TV.

Me: Chulu...

Chulu: Please, mommy. (she pleaded)

Craig: Please, mommy. (he helped her plead)

Me: Okay but o...(she ran off before I could finish)

Craig: You don't look too good so I'll take a wild guess and say the visit was not well. Come in. (he held my hand and we walked in)

Me: His kidneys are failing and guess who's a match. (I said sarcastically)

Craig: What are the odds? So what now?

Me: Now I move on with my life and wish him well. (he leaned forward to kiss me but I moved back)

Craig: O, what's up?

Me: Can we go to the balcony so we can speak?

Craig: Yeah. (he locked the door)

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Chulu was laughing so much at the TV while eating grapes. It seems she loves it here. We walked to the balcony and I felt him hug me from behind. I didn't know how to start this conversation so I'll just come out and say it.

.

Me: Who is Lizzy? (he looked taken aback)

Craig: Where did...

Me: Was she the love of your life, Craig? Are you with me because I remind you of her. Am I her rebound? (he just kept

quiet so I turned to walk away but he held my hand and spun me around)

Craig: If anything she was a rebound after you. When I got to the states I wanted to replace you and she was it. I cared for her but not as I love you. It was unfair of me to try and compare her to you. I think I also know who told you all of this.

Me: And the baby? How did she die? (he looked down)

Craig: She went home to visit her parents when an earthquake struck. Their home caved in while she was inside. Her parents tied too and she was still pregnant.

Me: Love, why didn't you tell me all of this?

Craig: I was going to. We just never really touched on the topic of exes. I'm sorry. Yes, Chulu does make me think about the daughter that I never had but you two are no rebounds. I love you guys so much. Is this the reason why you were so distant just now?

Me: Yes and I'm sorry. I love you too. Is there anything else that you want to tell me? (he exhaled loudly)

Craig: Yes there is. I should have told you a long time ago but I was afraid to. Remember that movie I said I once watch where an assassin fall for a sweet girl? (I laughed softly)

Me: Did you finally managed to finish it?

Craig: No, I don't know how it will end , O. I don't know because I am the guy and you are the girl. (I was confused)

Me: What do you mean?

Craig: I was once a contract killer. I...

.

I could see his lips move but I blanked out a bit. My vision became blurry and tears fell as soon as I blinked. Did he just say he is a killer? I left my child for the entire day with a killer? What type of mother am I? I don't deserve to be a mother if I'll be this careless with Chulu's life. His eyes were shiny and he blinked away the tears. I still didn't hear a single word after he told me what he is. I rushed inside, took Chulu's stuff and carried her out. She was not understanding all that's happening so she started to cry. I didn't have time for this now. Craig followed behind but I told him to stay away from us. I strapped Chulu in and we drove off. I wiped my tears off in order to keep a clear head while on the road. Chulu was crying silently and I didn't say anything. I know I've broken her heart but I'll take her tears over a dead body any day. We finally arrived home and she ran up to the apartment as soon as I opened the door. I saw Makhulu open and hug her. I took my bag and followed. I wanted to console her but she wouldn't let me even touch her. Makhulu asked what happened but I told her I'll fill her in some other time. My heart broke with every sniff and snobbing

sound that escaped Chulu but I did this for her. We can't be around a killer. Was all that happened between us even real? I went to the bathroom, took my clothes off and hopped into the shower. The water felt so amazing and I cried softly. I'm heart broken. I got out after a while and my phone was vibrating non stop. It's Craig so I switched my phone off instead. Maybe Chulu and I should move to the Eastern Cape and live with makhulu. Start a new life far from my parents and all else. I'm sure teachers are needed there too. I can't keep on putting her life ar risk like this, I just can't. Why do all the men in my life break my heart like this?

CRAIG

It's been a few days since I last saw O and Chulu and it's slowly killing me. Why won't she just give me a chance to explain? I'm no longer that man. Snipe died a year ago and I'm not planning on being that man again. I know that I'm not a good man because of the lives that I've taken but I'm trying my best to look forward. They motivate me to do just that. Chulu's sweet hugs and I love you make my life better. I've been calling and leaving O messages but it seems she doesn't want anything to do with me. Was I wrong in telling her what I used to be? Should I have just kept my mouth shut? I quickly dismissed those questions because there's no use asking myself those when the damage is done already. Today is Friday and it's no ordinary one. It's Chulumanco's sixth birthday and I promised to be there when her party packs and cake is delivered. I even had a sponge Bob cake made for her since it's one of her favourite cartoons. Should I go to her school or just cancel the cake and stay at home? There was a loud annoying knock on my door so I rushed to open. It's Wes and the first thing he did was push me. I let that slide but he did it again. I punched him and held him against the wall while strangling him. I guess I'm taking out my pain on him so his timing was perfect. He tried to wiggle

himself out of my grip but failed. I stopped when I saw him go pale. He bowed down while coughing.

.

Me: Don't you ever dare come to my place and disrespect me. (I shouted and he laughed)

Wes: Does she know what a monster she is letting into her life and that of her child?

Me: That will be the last time you ever speak about them.

Wes: Or else what? Are you going to make sure that I die by a bullet in my head, Snipe? That is who you are after all. You will always be that man. You think screwing a sweet teacher is going to wash away all your sins? (he laughed)

Me: Get out before you get hurt, Wes. (I said in a low tone)

Wes: I called Prof and he told me that you asked about the details of my mission here. I know you sabotaged it. I wanted to know why so I did some digging. So the man who put out the hit is your father in law? Why would you get in the way of his request? If anything you should go and offer to do it yourself so that you'll be in daddy's good books. (he laughed)

Me: I'm not in the mood for this, Wes. You figured a few details out? Well good for you and I'm glad to finally see you use your brain. Stay away from Othunyiweyo and Chulu.

Wes: Are they worth going back to your old life? The life you swore you'd never go back to. Maybe I should tread on forbidden territory a bit to see if the man I used to know is still in there. We used to worship the ground you walked on at the agency but now you are just a laughing stock. A shadow of the man you used to be.

Me: You're trying to provoke me and you almost succeeded.
(he pulled out a gun and I laughed)

Wes: If you sabotage this mission again I'll have the entire agency come for you. You are no longer one of us so they won't hesitate taking you down.

Me: You're still talking? I thought I'd be dead by now. If you aren't going to shoot then please stop boring me. You had better do more research on that target of yours. The hunted might just turn into the hunter. Now get out.

Wes: Screw you, Snipe! Screw you! (he put the gun to my head and rushed out)

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Damn coward just made a fool of himself. When you are a true assassin you aim and shoot not cower away at the last minute. The boy still has a lot to learn. This mission he got was so easy. Dr Flinch has a soft spot for O so calling him to say you want to discuss her safety is all one needs to get him the right place.

Had he done his homework he'd have known that but like I've said the boy still has a lot to learn. If I have to come out of retirement and kill one of my own in order to protect the two people that I love most I'll do it. I don't want to but if I have to I will. The cake place called and asked when I'll pick it up. I was debating with myself about whether or not I should cancel it but I told them I'm on my way. It's 09:30 and that party pack place said they will deliver Chulu's packs at 10:30. I took my wallet and keys and made my way out to my car. I drove to the bakery and picked up the yellow cake. I also went to buy her the tea set that she wanted so badly and got other gifts too and rushed to get them wrapped. I don't know if O is back at work or not but I know she'll be at Chulu's class when the packs are delivered. I finally got to the school and sat in my car wondering if I'm doing the right thing. I saw a truck with candy images on and I knew it's for Chulu. The man carried two crates of party packs. I got out and took the cake and followed them. I saw O pointing her finger most probably giving the man directions. I walked closer and she just stood looking at me. She looked so beautiful. I finally reached her.

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Me: Hey, I bought a cake. (I smiled)

Othu: We already have a cake, Craig.

Me: Give this one to your class then, O so that they can celebrate with Chulu.

Othu: Okay, thank you. Why are you here? You could have told the place where to deliver.

Me: I want to see the birthday girl. One doesn't turn six everyday.

Othu: I don't think it's a good idea. She is already getting used to not seeing you.

Me: And expecting her to understand is wrong of us. She doesn't know why I suddenly stopped calling, O. Well I didn't stop but you just refuse to take my calls. We told her we are in a relationship and suddenly that same day she had to accept that I'm no longer a part of your lives. It's too much for a child to handle. Let me keep my promise please. I said I'd be here when her party packs are delivered. Dammit, O. (I raised my voice)

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She just looked at me for the longest time without saying anything and walked away. I followed her and it seems we are both going to Chulu's class. I walked in after her.

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Chulu: Uncle Craig. (she shouted and ran to me)

Me: Good morning, princess. Let me put the cake down so that I can wish you a happy birthday properly. (she smiled)

Chulu: A Sponge Bob cake. (I put it on the table and picked her up)

Me: Happy Birthday, Chulz. May God grant you all that your heart desires. I love you. (I kissed her cheek and hugged her)

Chulu: You stopped calling. (I looked at O)

Me: We will talk about that some other time. Today I just want you to enjoy this special day, okay? (she nodded)

Chulu: I have two cakes. (she giggled)

Me: And you deserve it.

Teacher: Class, let's all stand up and sing happy birthday to Chulu. (they all stood)

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They started to sing and some weren't too sure of the words. I saw Othu smile for the first time today while singing for her daughter. Chulu has her one arm around my neck and was also enjoying the attention she's getting. I'm just glad she's happy. Each child got a party pack and also a big slice of cake. We decided to take my cake to O's learners and the extra party packs. They also sang for Chulu and thanked her for the treats. I took her back to her class so she'll enjoy it with her class.

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Me: I have to go now. I'm too big to be in your class.

Chulu: Noooo (she held onto me)

Me: You have to enjoy the day with your friends, Chulu.

Chulu: But you will stay away again and it makes me sad. I prayed for a daddy and he gave me you. (my heart got crushed)

Me: And I'm the luckiest man alive to be worthy of that title. Mommy and I still have a few things to sort out. I don't like staying away either but adults are complicated people.

Chulu: Make it not complicated. (she said softly)

Me: Soon. For now go and enjoy with Buhle and all your other friends. I don't want you to be sad on your birthday. Look how pretty you look.

Chulu: It's a new dress. (she smiled)

Me: I also have presents for you. I'll leave them with your mommy.

Chulu: What is it? (she smiled)

Me: You'll see it later but only if you promise me that you'll have fun.

Chulu: I promise. (she jumped up)

Me: I love you.

Chulu: I love you too.

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I hugged her one last time and watched her disappear into her class. She's getting hurt the most and I hate that so much. O came from her class and pretended not to see me. I rushed to her and held her from behind.

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Othu: This is my place of work, Craig. I'm not the boss so such is inappropriate. Please let go.

Me: First promise to meet up with me so we can talk. I need to explain things, O. I love you, baby. We are hurting Chulu by acting like this towards each other and I know you love her too much to see her hurt. Hear me out then decide on a way forward please. Please, O. I'm not that man anymore. (I said all in a whisper)

Othu: Please let go. (I did and she turned to face me)

Me: A chance to explain is all I ask.

Othu: I can't have Chulu be involved in a life of gangsterism, Craig.

Me: I never said I'm a gangster. There's a difference between being a gangster and an assassin.

Othu: If gangsterism and contract killing were human they would be cousins. (I tried not to laugh)

Me: O, I did this because the man that took me in...

Othu: This is not the place to talk about this, Craig.

Me: I understand. Please come to my place later so we can talk. I'm not going to hurt you, O. If that were my plan trust me I'd have done it long ago.

Othu: I'll see you later. (I let out a sigh of relief)

Me: Thank you. I have Chulu's gifts in my car. Please get them now. (she nodded)

Othu: Thank you for coming and bringing her cake. I'm sure it's the highlight of her day.

Me: It's a pleasure. Let me go get the gifts quickly. I'm glad to see you're back at work. You look beautiful. (I rushed off before she could say anything)

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I took the three perfectly wrapped gifts and I put them in her car. I just want to grab this woman and kiss her but I'm sure I'll get slapped instead of being kissed back. She at least agreed to

meet up with me later on. I just wish we could have a normal life if something like that even exists that is. I went to go about my daily business. I'm so glad I'm not bound to an office. I hope Chulu is still having a great day. My own daughter would have been four years old had she lived. I loved Lizzy but it's nothing compared to what I feel for O. I know it's early days but I want to make her Mrs Knights and adopt Chulu and make her Miss Knights. After I finished with some work I went to do some groceries. I don't cook, in fact I can't but I can at least follow recipe book instructions. I'm going to cook for her so that we can talk while enjoying a good meal with some red wine. I hope I'll do the recipe some justice. I've literally never cooked for a woman before not even Lizzy but I find myself excited doing it for O. I hope she's going to enjoy it. I looked at the candle section and wondered if I must get those too. I decided it's go big or go home so I purchased scented candles too. I can't believe that I'm doing this. A friend of mine Sabelo approached. We bro hugged and he inspected my trolley with a rather confused look on his face.

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Sabelo: What the hell are you buying? Are you shopping on someone else's behalf? (he laughed)

Me: Aren't you suppose to be at work sorting out company financials?

Sabelo: I'm on lunch and don't avoid the question. Usually you have ready made food, energy drinks, beer and bottled water in your trolley. Now I see candles and all kinds of treats. Have you been hiding a lady from us? (I laughed)

Me: I'm not hiding her. I just haven't introduced her to you guys.

Sabelo: Look at you smiling and all. Now I want to meet this girl. The guys must hear about this. No wonder we haven't seen you in a while. Yours playing house with your lady. (we both laughed)

Me: We can get together tomorrow.

Sabelo: With the special lady? We can organise our ladies to join so that she doesn't feel left out.

Me: I'm sorry but tomorrow evening we have plans with her friend. (he laughed so loudly)

Sabelo: My man! (he patted my shoulder) What's her name? No, don't tell me. I want to hear it when you introduce us. Shame on you for not telling us about her. Now I can't use the "I've heard so much about you" line when I meet her. (I laughed)

Me: Stop being crazy. Let's get together for drinks and a game at the pub tomorrow afternoon.

Sabelo: I can't wait to make fun of you with the boys present.
You are clearly into this girl.

Me: Bye. (he laughed)

Sabelo: Bye

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bro.

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We shook hands and went out separate ways. He is right. I don't do the whole romantic and falling in love business but I can't help it. I finished with my shopping and went to pay. I checked if I have everything on the list and I do. The friends that I have here are no assassins. They are ordinary family men who lead clean white collar lives. They don't know what I used to do because it's not something I go around telling people. I told O because I wanted her to know the type of man I was and the man I am now. She has the right to know what she is letting herself into. I'm no demon with a heart of stone. I'm just a good man with a dark past. A past I won't fall back into. If I did Hans and Kumkani would have been dead by now for trying to hurt her. I finally got to my place and made pre-cooking preparations like marinating meat and such. So far I've managed to do all according to the recipe. I'm not expecting her to bring Chulu but I made extra anyway. I know all that she is allergic to and

what she finds "yucky" as she would say. I would smile alone like a damn fool whenever I think about her. I do have start tracking Wes's movements though to ensure that he doesn't come near Othu. Hours went by and I finally finished cooking. I can't believe that I cooked a while meal. I'm feeling so proud of myself and I hope O loves it. I went to the bathroom to take a quick shower because I'm sure I smell like spices by now. I finished and made sure that I'm smelling nice and fresh. The sun was setting already so I set the table because she might be here any minute now. I lit the candles and it almost looks as nice and romantic as in the movies. I grabbed a beer and waited. I will not call and end up making her feel pressured. So I'll just wait. My phone beeped. It's a text from O. I smiled because I thought it would say she's almost here but it read "I can't make it". Just that and nothing more. No explanation as to why she can't make it. I felt my heart just crumble into pieces. Why can't she just hear me out? Don't I at least deserve that much? I stood up in anger and hurt and blew the candles out. I guess Wes was right. Men like us aren't made for family life. A wife and children is something that I'll never have and the sooner I accept it the better. I feel like O is still punishing me for disappearing on her. I dialed her number but it went straight to voicemail. I can't just go to her place because her grandma might see it as disrespectful. It's time I just move on with my life. I don't know how I'll do it but I have to find a way and hope

that Chulu forgives me. I don't blame O for being afraid for her child. If anything I'd have been disappointed had she just turned a blind eyes to it all. She's a great mom and any man will be lucky to call her wife someday. I was hoping to be that man but I guess that won't happen.

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#OTHU

Seeing Craig holding the yellow cake this morning made me want to go to him and give him a big kiss. I miss him so badly. I know he said that life was in his past but I can't shake off the fear. I once read an article where a gangster said one can never escape such a life. He said he's not a gangster but the two worlds have something in common and that's killing. What if his past is not finish with him? What if he has made enemies who are out to get him? Chulu and I will surely be one of the ways those enemies might get to him. I'm a mother first before anything else and I have to put Chulu's safety first. She loved the gifts that he got her and has been playing with them all day long. I can see that she misses him. I bathed her and put her in her night clothes. Tonight I'm going to go out with friends to clear my mind. Chulu was half asleep on the couch so I picked her up so she can go to bed. I tucked her in and kissed her forehead.

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Chulu: Mommy, I'm sad. (she said softly)

Me: But I thought you had a good day.

Chulu: I did but I wish uncle Craig didn't have to go. I prayed a lot for a daddy and I thought he would be my daddy.

Me: I'm sorry but things aren't so simple, bhabha.

Chulu: Why not?

Me: Uncle Craig and I have things that we need to sort out first.

Chulu: Then invite him over.

Me: You're too smart for your own good. I will do that tomorrow. Go to sleep now birthday girl. I love you. (I kissed her forehead)

Chulu: I love you too.

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She was sleepy already so she fell asleep quickly. My baby is sad and I feel bad. I went to the lounge to get my bag.

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Makhulu: Who are you trying to fool, Othunyiweyo?.

Me: Ma? (I looked at her)

Makhulu: You are busy walking around here acting as if you don't miss the young man.

Me: I don't want to talk about this, Makhulu.

Makhulu: What has this boy done? Don't say you don't want to talk about it. You included Chulu in this union and now the child is confused and hurting because of whatever is going on between you and Clay. It's non of my business but it is because she is involved.

Me: I should never have let her spend time with him.

Makhulu: Well you made your bed now lay in it.

Me: But Makhulu that's not nice.

Makhulu: Have you ever known me to be a person who sugarcoat the truth. I love you but I'll never be afraid to tell you your truths, my girl. Now tell me what's going on. (I sat down)

Me: He did something in his past, Ma and I...(she clapped her hands once and I stopped talking)

Makhulu: Is he being punished for what happened in his past? Were you his girlfriend then?

Me: No, ma.

Makhulu: Then why punish him for the sins he committed long ago?

Me: Because it's not an easy past. It's one that might affect our future.

Makhulu: Did you give him a chance to explain why he made the choices that he made? Did you give him a chance to explain the situation and find out if his past will remain in his past? Or did you just jump to your own conclusions?

Me: I jumped to my own conclusions but only because I'm trying to protect Chulu from getting hurt.

Makhulu: It's too late for that. She's hurting already. She loves someone and suddenly that someone has become distant. Not just anyone but a person she saw as a potential father figure. A person she wanted so badly, gotten him and now has to learn that it was not meant to be because you two have your issues. That's why I didn't want you to include her in your relationship so soon because I know you belong to a generation that fears commitment. You run at the first sign of trouble. No wonder the divorce rate is so high. No man, my granddaughter is no play thing so don't give her false hope next time. (she said and left)

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I took my bag and slowly made my way out. I'll take my car because I'm not going to drink tonight. My grandma doesn't always scold at me but when she does I feel it deep like now.

She really did raise her concerns about me taking Chulu to meet Craig so early but I didn't listen. I switched my phone on and a text came through from my mom. "Your father asks that you visit him tomorrow", it read. I know he's going to beg me for my kidney but I'll go anyway. Craig also called and I just want to drive there and be with him and live happily ever after. To Chulu things are they simple but once she's older she'll understand. I got to the place I'll meet the girls and found them all seated already. I greeted and sat too.

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Yandi: Thank you for sending me those big slices of cake to my class. I could see Chulu had a great time.

Licia: I have her gift in my car so remind me to give it to you.

Zuko: I personally went to give her mine. Othu, you are going to be faced with teen issues soon. The princess has grown so much.

Me: She has.

Yandi: What's wrong? And don't say nothing.

Me: Nothing.

Poppy: Let's let Othu mope in peace for whatever reason. I just got a text from one of my flings. (she smiled)

Zuko: Do you even use protection with these flings, Poppy?

Poppy: I'm not stupid. So ladies I've got to leave you.

Licia: And Jacob?

Poppy: I like older men but a girl needs some sexual excitement once in a while and this man is so good. I actually thought I won't hear from him again but I guess I was wrong.

Yandi: This was suppose to be a girls night, Poppy.

Poppy: Girl, if you could see this man you'd understand. I have to. Love you all. (she rushed off and we looked as she went out the door)

Me: I also need to get going.

Licia: No please don't. I wanted to ask if Craig is a fussy eater. I'm putting together a menu for tomorrow night.

Me: What's happening tomorrow night?

Ziko: Felicia invited us over remember. So we'll get to know your man better.

Me: We broke up. (their jaws dropped)

Yandi: But I saw him at the school today.

Me: He was fulfilling a promise he made to Chulu.

Zuko: Tell us what happened. I'm so heart broken. I loved you two together.

Me: You met the man once, Zuko.

Zuko: I'm a good judge of character and I can tell he is one of the good ones.

Yandi: She's right. Please tell us what happened.

Me: He has a rather unpleasant past.

Licia: Past? So we aren't talking about the now but about the what was?

Zuko: What could possibly be so bad? Was he a stripper? (they laughed)

Licia: Or a Mafia boss?

Yandi: A gangster?

Me: Something like that.

Yandi: Did he tell you why he had to do it? Some people do stuff out of desperation and some just didn't have other options at the time.

Me: I didn't listen to the entire story. I blanked out.

Zuko: Well I think it's time you listen to him and not blank out.

Me: Why is everyone making me feel bad for what I feel? Is it wrong of me to fear that this might affect my child negatively?

Yandi: In what way? You said past so it's over. You don't need to face the man that he was because he chose to become the man that he is. Look, babe your feelings and fears are valid. You're shocked and angry but you can't hold his past against. Especially if you weren't a part of it.

Licia: She's right. I have never told you this but Brandon used to be a drug addict back in his days before he met. When he told me about his past I also wanted to run for the hills because I thought he'd relapse but I chose to embrace his past and focus on the man that he is. I don't regret it one bit. He can't change his past but he chose a better and improved future. Othu, I don't know the details of Craig's past life but think about things before pulling the plug on the relationship. He clearly loves you and Chulu. How many men are so accepting of children of previous relationships?

Zuko: He's flawed so what?

Yandi: Are you telling me that you don't love him?

Me: I do, I love him a lot. (I started to cry)

Zuko: Then hear him out. You never just cry but now look at you. You're missing him so much.

Me: I do. (I said softly)

Licia: That's it. I'm not letting my dinner plans go to waste. You and Craig were the VIP guests. I'm driving you to his place now. Get your sexy behind up so we can go. (she stood)

Yandi: I'm going with. I'm doing it for Chulumanco.

Zuko: I'm in. Mission let's drive Othunyiweyo to her man so they can talk. (I laughed while wiping my tears off)

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They helped me up and we went to Licia's car. It's a safe area so I guess the rest of our cars are safe. I have crazy friends. They are all right. I never gave him a chance to explain. I immediately just shut him out of my life. I should have gone and had dinner with him. I have Licia directions and we finally arrived. We all went to his apartment because they wanted to make sure that I make it and not get cold feet on the way. We stood in front of his door and I took a deep breath before knocking. There was complete silence on the other side of the door. Zuko knocked louder and finally we heard that sounded like footsteps. The door flung open and Craig stood in front of me half naked. Should I hug him? No, I'll just wait because he doesn't seem to pleased to see me.

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Zuko: Evening, Craig. We are not staying we just wanted to make sure she arrives safely. Take her, she's yours. (she gently pushed me forward)

Me: I'm sorry for not giving you a chance to explain. I needed time but I'm rea...

Craig: Now is not the right time, O. (he cut me short)

Me: Oh, I'll come back some other time.

Poppy: Baby, let's repeat that wild love session. It wa...(Poppy appeared in wearing his shirt)

Yandi: What the hell, Poppy?

Craig: You guys know each other?

Me: I'm sorry to disturb. (I walked away)

Licia: Of all the damn men, you had to do him. Dammit Poppy. (I heard her shout)

Poppy: I didn't know...

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Their voices faded off into the background. I guess I deserved this one. He didn't even run after me to explain but then again I never listened to his first explanation. Does he even owe me an explanation? Is this cheating? We never officially broke up so it must be, right? I'm sure they didn't know they have a mutual

friend that's me so I can't go and start fights with Poppy because she's not a one man woman. Craig on the other hand is a different story. I know I hurt him but he just jumped into bed with the next woman that came along. My friends joined me in the car and looked concerned. I didn't cry though. We finally got back to the restaurant. I said good night, got into my car and drove off. I'm clearly not the fighter that I thought I was because all that I want to do now is go hide in a hole and never face the real world. That old lady was wrong in saying we are soulmates. If we were I think things would not be so hard. Maybe friendship is all we can offer each other in this lifetime. That way he can still be in Chulu's life. I'm not made for this love thing.

OTHU

After crying and crying some more I finally decided that perhaps it's best that Craig and I remain friends. We have once lost each other and I'd hate for lovers tiffs to be the reason our friendship ends this time around. I love having him in my life but when it comes to relationships I'm like a naive teenager. I clearly still have a lot to learn in that department. At least by remaining friends he will still be a part of Chulu's life just not as constant as he has been. I've always been open with Chulumanco and this time won't be any different. She has to learn to let go of the idea of Craig being her daddy. A father is unfortunately not something that I can guarantee her unless I do what I said and do some past digging into Tatiana's life. Perhaps a visit to her old work is a start. If there's someone who used to be her colleague there I might get a lead. Tatiana was selfish in not disclosing the man's identity but it's too late to complain about that now. What I need to do is take action now. I'm glad it's a Saturday because I find that all that has happened in my life drains me physically too which makes it hard to focus at work. I don't think that I want to face my grandma today because she might still be mad at me. I don't care if the entire world is mad at me but I can't stand it when it's her or Chulu. I got up and went to the bathroom to brush

my teeth. I looked out the little window and realised it's raining. I love rain a lot especially when I indoors all day. I have to go hear what Mr Zweni wants though. I'm actually sure it's my kidney he wants. I finished and ran into Chulu who was busy rubbing her eyes uncontrollably. I greeted her with a kiss and asked her to go brush her teeth. We got a new TV and I could hear it play so my granny is up already. I went to the lounge to greet her. She at least smiled at me so I'm guessing I'm in the "good girl" books again. Chulu ran to the lounge and jumped on makhulu. My poor granny is too old for such but she hugged and kissed Chulu anyways. I went to the kitchen to prepare breakfast. Today I'll go all out for me and makhulu because I know Chulu will prefer her coco-pops. I first have to speak to Craig before speaking to Chulu. Dating for a single mom is really not straight forward. My phone rang and I first checked the screen. It's Poppy, I first stared at it for a while before answering.

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Me: Hello.

Poppy: Othu, how are you?

Me: I'm fine thanks and you?

Poppy: I'm not fine. I feel terrible for what happened last night. I honestly didn't know that you and him have a thing. I'm sorry.

Me: You didn't know so I can't be mad at you.

Poppy: You know I don't go anywhere near your men. I might love men but I'll never cross the line by having an affair with one of my friends man.

Me: I know your moto, Pops.

Poppy: He is a damn fine man but I'm not in love with him. I deleted his contact and all.

Me: Okay.

Poppy: When I got there last night he had a romantic dinner planned.

Me: Oh. (I said softly)

Poppy: It wasn't for me, silly. With us it's just sex, it was just sex. He said someone stood him up and now I'm guessing it is you.

Me: Yes, it was me.

Poppy: Well for what it's worth he moped around much like you last night. You two have to get together and speak. That's all I want to say. Sorry once again, friend. He's off my flings list. (she laughed softly)

Me: Thank you for clearing that up and for apologising. I'll see you soon.

Poppy: Please don't let it be awkward between us now. I know how you serious girls get.

Me: I've got no reason to make it awkward.

Poppy: Bye then.

Me: Bye. (I ended the call)

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I've really accepted her apology because Poppy really doesn't go that far with her friends men. She didn't know and I'm hoping things won't be awkward. I am hurt by Craig's moving on so quickly. I also feel bad for standing him up because he is not the romantic setting type of man and to hear that he had gone through all that effort just for me makes me feel awful. I finished making breakfast, dished up and served Makhulu on a tray. Chulu wanted cereal as I suspected so I made that for her. The three of us ate while watching cartoons. The TV belongs to Chulu because it's always on her cartoon network. We only get a chance when it's time for the news. My baby offered to wash the dishes while I dried. She's growing so much. I even found her bed imperfectly made when I went to her room. Zuko is right soon I'll be dealing with a teen and I don't think I'm ready for that. We all got busy with some chores. I called the police station to hear if there are any new leads about the break in. They said the thief was careful as to not leave evidence so the

case might be a dead end. It's sad to hear that a person can just break in and do as they please in someone else's house and get away with it. I later helped Chulu bath and get dressed. She's becoming a real miss independent. It makes me both sad and happy. She went to play with her new toys and I went to shower. I then joined makhulu after I was done.

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Me: Ma, I'm sorry I didn't listen when you advised that I keep Chulu away from Craig before she got too attached.

Makhulu: As long as you've learnt from this experience. You came home early last night. Did your friends cancel.

Me: I was not in the mood to stay long. I've decided it's best I just remain friends with Craig. (I looked at her)

Makhulu: Are you sure?

Me: Yes, Ma. I might do well in my other roles but as a girlfriend I don't. (she held my hand)

Makhulu: And no one will hold it against you. Almost all of us got afraid with our first serious relationship. This is new to you and you are still trying to figure out how it is working but my nunu you can't run at the first sight of trouble.

Me: So must I give it another chance?

Makhulu: I didn't say so but if you want to I'm not going to stand in your way either. You're a grown woman so I must let you make your own choices whether good or bad. I just want you to learn something from this experience so that next time you meet someone you'll know better. We all have a past. Yes, some are darker than most but who are we to judge? We go to church begging God to forgive us when we ourselves can't forgive others and that's not right.

Me: I didn't mean to seem judgemental towards his past, Ma. My instinct just said I must protect my little girl. Maybe I'm a bad mother for breaking her heart in the process but I didn't know what else to do at the time. His past is one that might have consequences. I wouldn't keep it against him had I not feared that it might come back to haunt him and in so doing haunt Chulu and I also. I don't know what to do because I don't feel heard. It's like I'm a terrible person for putting Chulu first. I'm a mother first, not so? Isn't the deal about motherhood putting my own issues aside and put her first? I'm sure I'd have been seen as a bad person had I not reacted to his news. I'm failing no matter what my reaction. (I started to cry)

Makhulu: Oh, Othu you...

Me: I just want to be Chulu's safety. I want to give her what my parents never gave me. I want to be her home and safety, Ma. I want her to know that it doesn't matter where we are but as

long as I'm there and must take comfort in knowing that I'll keep her safe no matter what it costs me. (I cut her short while still crying)

Makhulu: (she hugged me) You are a thousand times more of a parent than your own parents. I see you, my baby. I see you do things in Chulu's best interest. I see you loving her. I see you protecting her. I see you be a great mother. She's the most blessed girl to have you and I know that she knows it. You are enough for her, baby. Yes, she prays for a father because all her friends have one but that does not mean you aren't enough for her. It just means that she too has her own little wishes as we all do. If you think parting with Clay is best than don't let us tell you otherwise. You have the right to feel those fears that you are feeling.

Me: Thank you, Ma. (I said in a whisper)

Makhulu: If you feel like you don't want to be in a relationship now then fine but I ask that you not block love totally. I want more and more great grand babies and I'm sure Chulu won't mind a few brothers and sisters. (I laughed)

Me: Okay, ma. Will you come with me to the hospital?

Makhulu: I was there yesterday morning and I don't want to see that grump now.

Me: You're not mad at me for not wanting to give him my kidney? (she shook her head)

Makhulu: No not even one bit. I don't want him to die but I'm not angry at you. Knowing Kumkani he'll make use of the black market.

Me: How do you know so much about it?

Makhulu: The news and newspapers, nunu. We live with evil people in this world. There's still slave trading in this day and time. Such disgusting practices and the victims are innocent people. What has this world turned into?

Me: Yeah, it's sad. Let me go and get ready to go see your son.

Makhulu: Be careful, Othu. I have been feeling strange all morning that's why I'm up so early. It's like something will happen. Come let's pray before you go out.

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I didn't try to argue with her about the strange feeling she has. She always gets up early. I knelt down and she remained seated because of her knee problem. She said a prayer and we both said amen when she finished. I thanked her and went to Chulu's room to tell her I'm going to the hospital. I kissed her goodbye and she gave me a long, sweet hug. The hugs that keep me going. Shame next year I'll plan a proper party for her birthday. Hopefully we'll have that beautiful house with a garden by

then. I don't want a mansion. Just a beautiful house in a safe neighborhood where she'll be able to play outside. I took my bag and kiss Makhulu goodbye. I rushed downstairs and to my car. A car hooted annoyingly so I looked at the direction it came from. It's Craig's car. He stepped out and stood by the door. My heart suddenly started to beat faster and faster. I slowly made my way towards him. We stood in front of each other awkwardly.

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Me: Hi.

Craig: Hi. How are you?

Me: I'm okay and you?

Craig: Okay and Chulu?

Me: She's fine thanks. Why are you here?

Craig: To apologise for last night.

Me: You don't owe me anything, Craig.

Craig: I never heard you break things off with me, O so it makes what I did wrong. Technically we are still in a relationship. I'm sorry that you had to see that and I'm even more sorry that it had to be with a friend of yours.

Me: It's okay. (a tear fell and I wiped it off quickly)

Craig: No, it's not. Can you please get into the car quickly so we can talk?

Me: I'm visiting Kumkani. I can't talk long.

Craig: All you need to do is listen.

Me: Okay. (we both got into his car)

Craig: Your gran has been standing at the door for a while. I hope she won't hit me. (we laughed softly)

Me: She has just had a bad morning.

Craig: O, I know what I'm about to say won't justify what I did but I'm hoping that you'll hear me out. When my parents and I left South Africa we thought that life would be better. In fact it was. They seemed to have been financially stable. We had a decent home and all of that. Life was good but it was also short lived. They died a few months after and life became hell for me. Not just emotionally but all other ways too. You know that I've always told you that I don't know my extended family. So I had no aunt, uncle or cousin to run to. I was put in foster care until the woman that took me in accused me of stealing from her when it was her son who did it. I got tired of that life so I ran to the streets. On lucky nights I'd get a spot at a shelter for the homeless but some nights I was not so lucky. One winter night it was snowing. It was my first winter on the streets. I swear that night I thought my fingers and toes would freeze and then

break off. That's how cold I was. I for the first time said a prayer after my parents died that night. I didn't pray for a new family or shelter...That night I prayed for death. (I started to cry)

Me: I'm sorry, Craig.

Craig: It's not your fault. A man who was dressed in the best suit and coat approached me while I laid on a bench in the park. I told him my story and he offered to give me a better life. I was no fool so my mind immediately thought he wants me to deal drugs for him but he told me that's not it. He told me that he has been watching me all this time. Watching me defend myself against other boys who lived on the street and he liked my fighting spirit. He then told me that he has an agency that could put my skills to good use. He left me money and his card and left. I went to buy socks and gloves with the money. (he laughed softly) The snow storm got worse and not even socks helped. I became desperate so I took the coins I had and made it to a public phone. I dialed the number and asked to speak to Commander. That's what it said on the card. They got him to the phone and I told him that I accept whatever it is in exchange for a better life. The street is no place for a child. He came to get me soon after

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took me to a warm apartment and I had my first shower in months. I didn't know one could miss the little things so much.

Days after being at his place he told me it's time to go and live with others. I found other boys my age there and it made everything better. There were girls too. We started to train days in and day out. I got hurt so many times because they never held back. I had to learn to defend myself and destroy my opponent and I soon excelled. I became an expert in everything but I loved using a sniper gun more. I was in love with that weapon. That's when Snipe was born.

Me: Snipe?

Craig: That's the name I got because I chose the sniper gun as my weapon of choice. So, O I was a sniper. The agency would take out targets that they thought were not good for society. Those were gang leaders, rapists, murderers and so on. Remember the example that I made about justice failing a parent when their child were wronged? (I nodded). Well we have them the justice they needed by making sure we rid the world of the bad.

Me: I'm sorry you've had to go through so much. I'm also sorry for not listening to the entire story.

Craig: That life is in my past, O. It became a so when new policies were made by the new boss. Suddenly we went from taking out the bad people to taking out the good as well. I found this out and that's when I decided to quit.

Me: But isn't quitting hard in that life.

Craig: When I joined I agreed to take off dangerous people off the street. That's the pikicy I agreed to but they changed it without informing me and there was no way I'd take out a woman just because her husband put out a hit on her in order to get her insurance payout. Many of us quit when we found that our last victims were no criminals. Some like myself retired but some joined other agencies. I'm not suppose to tell you all of this, O but I'm keeping the details as vague as possible. That guy who told you about Lizzy is an assassin.

Me: Is?

Craig: Yes, is as in present tense. He is still with my old agency.

Me: Why is he here?

Craig: It's best you don't know the details, O. I don't want you involve in this shit. He hasn't been following you though. I've found a way to track his movements. (he looked at me)

Me: This is all so much, Craig. How sure are you that your life is not in danger?

Craig: Danger is all around us, O. I can take care of myself don't worry. That's why I've decided to stay away from you and Chulu. Maybe it's best we just remain friends.

Me: I was going to suggest the same thing. I'm sorry about everything.

Craig: Don't be. I still love you though.

Me: I love you too, Craig. I really do but I'm not good at this girlfriend thing.

Craig: I'm not good at this boyfriend thing either. (we laughed)

Me: Will you please visit Chulu every now and then? (he smiled)

Craig: A big yes. Thank you. (he leaned forward and we kissed)

Me: Friends don't kiss like this, Knights.

Craig: I know and I want you to know that I'll never see that friend of yours. I feel nothing for her. It was just physical.

Me: Okay And I sorry you had to go through all of that. Had I known I'd have stolen money from my dad and got you a ticket back to SA. (he laughed)

Craig: It's done now. I'm just looking to make a better life for myself. I hoped that it would be with you but yesterday morning something happened and I realise now that my past will always come to bite me.

Me: What happened? Do the agency people want you back? (he shook his head)

Craig: It's nothing I can't handle. When last did you speak to Flinch?

Me: The day he told me about the money. Why?

Craig: I'm just asking.

Me: I have to go.

Craig: Want me to take you then you can get a taxi back?

Me: I still have a few errands to run. Thank you though.

Craig: You look beautiful. (I smiled)

Me: Thanks. (he planted a soft kiss on my lips)

Craig: Have a great day, friend. (I laughed)

Me: You too, friend. (he smiled)

Craig: Hopefully you'll meet my other friends soon.

Me: I'd like that very much.

Craig: I'm going to see them in a few hours. (I smiled)

Me: Have a great day, Craig.

Craig: You too. (he kissed my cheek and I felt warm and fuzzy inside)

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I got out of his car and I hope he's not looking at me while I walk. I turned my head only to find him looking so I waved. Who am I kidding? I love the man and hearing all that he had to endure hurts me deeply. To be so desperate that you'd turn into something you never thought must be terrible. Craig has always wanted to be a doctor. It pains me to know that he had to give that dream up. I got into my car and drove off. I arrived at the hospital and went to see Kumkani. He looks pale and thin. That broke my heart shame.

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Me: Morning, Mr Zweni. Your wife told me that you want to see me.

Tata: Here I had my lawyers draw it up. That is papers giving you half of everything. Review them and sign. (I was shocked)

Me: Just like that?

Tata: Review the papers and say if you're not happy. Go now because I'm tired and have to rest.

Me: What do you want in return.

Tata: Don't worry. I won't beg you for your kidney. I've already made a plan.

Me: Okay bye then. Get well soon.

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I actually meant it I want him to be well. Usually I'd call Craig to tell him but I decided against it. I'll let him enjoy time with his friends. I scan read the document and it does say what he said. I can't believe he didn't put up a fight. Is that what dying does to a person? I got to my car and put the documents aside. I felt something cold against my neck and got a huge fright when I saw a man with a mask in the mirror holding a gun. All of me went totally numb.

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#CRAIG

I know that seeing me with another woman hurt O. She tries to hide it but I know her. I feel like scum for betraying her like that and it just had to be with someone she knows. I just needed to let out the feeling of hurt and pain and to be comforted by someone was the best option. This Poppy girl looks available all the time so got her. I feel nothing for her and I'm sure she doesn't either. I love her and Chulu but I thought about Wes pointing that gun at me and that made me be afraid for them. I first have to deal with my past demons first and hope no man would be in O life once I've dealt with everything. I'd be a fool to not take Wes's anger seriously. Hours went by and I went to the pub to meet up with my friends. I enjoy these men's company because it's different from my old friend. My old

friends would only speak about missions and such. These guys speak about everything. Found them all sitting and waiting already with tall glasses of beer in their hands. I greeted and ordered a beer for myself.

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Thabiso: So I hear that you'll be tying the knot soon, bro. (I laughed so much)

Me: Sabelo saw a few candles in the trolley and now I hear I'm going to tie the knot.

Sabelo: Look those weren't a few candles. It was like ten in different sizes and shapes.

Steve: And scented. (they laughed and I looked down)

Me: I knew I should have gone the other direction when I saw you. (I pointed at Sabelo)

Thabiso: Well since you have plans with her friends tonight. It's only fair that she has plans with us next weekend.

Me: That's not going to happen, bro.

Steve: Stop hiding the poor girl.

Me: We broke up. (they looked disappointed)

Sabelo: Please don't tell me you took some random chick home, bra.

Me: I did and she came to my place and saw the sick. (their eyes widened)

Steve: Damn!

Me: It gets worse. The random chick turned out to be one of her friends.

Them: Damn! (they said at the same time)

Me: Yeah but there were other issues too. I don't want to get into that.

Sabelo: You're heart broken.

Thabiso: I see that too.

Me: I thought I'd get it right this time.

Steve: Fight for your lady, man. Stop sitting here and moping. Show her that you want to be in it for the long haul.

Me: I wish I could but it might cause her and her daughter more pain. I still have issues of my own to deal with.

Thabiso: Why does it become so difficult when we finally find the right ones?

Me: Don't know but let's enjoy this game and drinks for now. Tell me about your ladies. Is all good?

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Steve went first. He is married to Nadia and they have Five year old twins. Thabiso is also married to Lesego but no kids yet. Sabelo is engaged to his lady Phakama. I'm the only bachelor in the group and it never bothered me much because they have never made me feel left out. I do wish I had the simple life that they have though. Well it seems their lives are still good and so are their families. The game started and I forgot about my problems for a while. I feel relieved that O listened to me. We went to go braai at Thabiso's place and it felt good to be out. Hours went by and my phone rang. I didn't recognise the number but I answered.

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Me: Hello.

Person: Hello, Clay. Can you hear me? (I knew who it was because only one person calls me Clay)

Me: I can hear you, Mrs Zweni. Can I help you with something?

Makhulu: Is Othunyiweyo with you? She has gone to see Kumkani but it has been hours now and it's getting dark. (my heart started to beat faster)

Me: She's not with me, Ma. I last saw her this morning just before she went to the hospital. (I heard some sniffing)

Makhulu: Her mother says they don't know where she is either. I think something happened. Her phone is off too. I don't know

what to do. I'd go to the police station but I'm looking after Chulu and she's already asking for her mom.

Me: I'll see what I can do, Ma. I'll keep you posted. I'll find her.
(I ended the call)

Thabiso: What's up?

Me: I need to go. Thanks for the days. (I rushed off)

Steve: Craig, what's up man? (he shouted behind me)

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I got into my car and made my way to the hospital her father is at first. It was past visiting hours but I didn't let that stop me. I got to his room and shook him roughly. He opened his eyes.

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Kumkani: Who the hell are you? How did you get in?

Me: Where is she?

Kumkani: Who?

Me: She came to visit you and now she's gone. I swear if you have anything to do with this.

Kymkani: Oh you mean Othunyiweyo? (he laughed) I take it you're the knight in shining armor that came to her rescue. Well sorry but I don't know where she is. I saw her, gave her what

she wanted and that's it. Maybe she found another...(I strangled him and his machines started to make a louder noise)

.

A nurse came rushing in so I let go and rushed out. Making sure that I once again outsmart the cameras and I hope I did because I'm not thinking straight at the moment. I ran to my car and checked the tracking system to check where her car is. I put it in without her knowledge and I hope she'll forgive me when she finds out. I also checked for Wes's car location and it was at the hotel. I went there first before going to where O's car is. He opened the door holding a glass of whiskey. I didn't ask anything I just went for the attack. I asked where she is but he kept on saying he doesn't know who I'm talking about with a smirk on his face. I left him and drove to the location her car is at and it's dumped. I predicted as much. I can't lose her. Dammit Chulu can't lose her. My phone rang and I answered without even checking who it is.

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Me: O?

Person: I got a new friend for your girlfriend. Actually I left her with a person with multiple personality disorder. So I technically left her with four friend. Guess what my favourite personality is.

Me: I'll kill you and I'll kill your friend if you lay a hand on her.
(he laughed)

Person: This friend has four personalities. That of a friendly young man, one of an older woman, one of a child. The last one is my favourite. It's that of a man who finds pleasure in strangle people. How long do you think it will take for that personality to show itself? Imagine his hands around that beautiful neck.

Me: Only a coward would get another person to do his dirty work and only a coward would use a voice disguise device. I clearly know you and that's why you don't want me to hear your voice. I'm coming for you and she had better not have a single scratch on her.(he laughed and ended the call)

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I let out a loud scream of frustration. I've read about people who have different personalities and one of those personalities have always been a killer in the stories I've read. I need to find her and I don't need distractions. I called Makhulu and told her to hold off and not call the cops. The person doesn't want me to hear their voice and that's my first clue. I know who it is and I've heard them speak that's why they disguise their voice. I inspected her car and I found nothing. What did Kumkani give O? I called in some help from my guys in the security and tracking companies. One of which is a private investigator. I asked him to track down a Ndalo Vazi. So far I've got Kumkani,

Hans, Wes and Ndalo as suspects. I put my guys on Kumkani and Ndalo. I know Wes will be too smart for them so I'll go deal with him. Where are you, O? I asked myself. I went to my car and opened the secret compartment in the boots to take out a weapon. I looked at Chulu's seat and I felt grateful that she was not with her mother. I called some other friends to guard O's apartment to ensure Makhulu and Chulu are okay. This happens just as I thought Snipe is dead. I'm now forced to resurrect him. I drove to my place to change cars since Wes knows this one. I went to the hospital and paid the security for the hospital parking area. I watched it and could see someone run to her car, fiddled with it and got in. She appeared after a while holding papers. The car started to move after a while. I watched it over and over again but I can't see the face or make out who it was. Should I put Flinch on the suspect list? This is so damn hard because I'm personally involved. I hope my emotions won't make me mess this up. This is the most important mission of my life.

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THU

I opened my eyes and my vision was blurry and I had a terrible headache too. I shut my eyes again and I remembered what happened. I got held at gunpoint by a masked man and was instructed to drive. I still don't know how I managed to drive thought. I guess fear can make a person do anything. I remember an article that said a victim of crime must never allow the criminal to take them to a different location. How was I to tell a man who had a gun against me head that I refuse to co-operate? It's true that one never knows how to react in a situation until they find themselves in it. I once swore I'd do as the article advised but I didn't. I let the criminal take me to the second location. A location unfamiliar to me but I'm sure is familiar to him/them. I opened my eyes again and my vision got better. I'm in an old building. The windows looked foggy or is it dirt? My feet tied and so are my hands. I lifted my head and noticed that I'm on a bed. An uncomfortable single bed. I shut my eyes again and imagined Chulu's smile. My happiness. I wonder how long I've been out of it. There was a sound and I think it's a key turning in a door. I suddenly thought that I'm being rescued. I lifted my head to see who it is. I nearly blacked out again when I saw a familiar face. He walked towards me with a smile.

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Me: Ndalo? (I said softly)

Ndalo: Oh you're awake, my darling. I thought you'd never open those pretty eyes. I'm sure you are hungry. (she spoke in an unusual soft voice)

Me: Why are you speaking like that?

Ndalo: I'm sorry, I didn't introduce myself. I'm Dorothy and I'll be the one who makes sure that you are well fed while you stay with us. I'll feed you such good food.

Me: Ndalo, you're scaring me. Why am I here and why are you talking like that? Please let me go.

Ndalo: Oh, sweetie. I'm just a harmless old lady. How can you say I'm scaring you? You see, Xavier is the one you have to be afraid of. (he whispered)

Me: Why is that?

Ndalo: I can't say much but he is not a nice person. I hope that he doesn't come here. (he suddenly looked like he is in deep thought)

Me: Ndalo, I don't know what sick game you are playing but you aren't an old lady. Let me go. (I shouted and he snapped out of it)

Ndalo: Othunyiweyo? Oh my goodness. What has Xavier done to you? (I was so confused and scared)

Me: Please get me away from here and home. My daughter is wondering where I am. (I pleaded)

Ndalo: I wish I could but I can't. If I do Xavier will make me hurt myself as punishment. Look what he did for all the other times I've been bad. (he showed his arms that were full of scars)

Me: Who is Xavier? (he looked at me)

Ndalo: He is the one that took you. Unfortunately he has gotten attached to you. Obsessed even.

Me: Then untie me and get me home so that I can help you get rid of Xavier. (I raised my voice)

Ndalo: Don't shout or he'll hear you and I don't want him to meet you, Othu. There's no telling what he might do. (he covered his ears with his hands)

Me: Okay, I'm sorry.

Ndalo: Aunty Dorothy is who you want to deal with. She's kind. I love her too. Have you met her? (he looked at me and smiled)

Me: I have and you're right. She wants you to let me go, Ndalo. Age said so herself. (he went into a trans again and I felt like screaming)

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He untied my one hands and placed the tray in front of me. Is Ndalo okay upstairs? I asked myself. I feel like I've just dealt with two different people who occupy the same body. What is going on? Who is Xavier and why would he want me? I've never been so afraid of the unknown before. I didn't even know if I should eat the meal in front of me. It's a warm, decent meal and I'm hungry so I dug in. He looked at me with a weird look. Almost like the look Chulu gives me when she's about to ask something.

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Ndalo: Are you enjoying your food? (he said in a child like tone)

Me: It's nice. (he smiled)

Ndalo: I'm Glen. Do you want to play ball with me when you are done?

Me: Glen? (he smiled and nodded)

Ndalo: I like you.

Me: How long have I been here?

Ndalo: I don't know because I was not here when you came. Do you have children, tanie?

Me: Yes.

Ndalo: Do they play hide and seek? I love playing hide and seek.
(he jumped up and down like a little child)

Me: How old are you?

Ndalo: Ten. (he held up his ten fingers)

Me: Do you know where my phone could be, Glen? (he shook his head)

Ndalo: I'm just a child. I don't play with phones.

Me: My child does and she likes helping me find my phone when I've lost it. I've lost it now. Can you please help me find it, Glen?

Ndalo: Will you tell me you're proud of me if I get it, tanie?

Me: I'm already proud of you but I'll be more and more proud when you go get it for me. Can you do that for your tanie, Glen?

Ndalo: Yes, I'll go and look for it now. Don't go. (he jumped up and hugged me)

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I have decided to play along with Ndalo. If you can't beat them join them, right? I hope "little Glen" can find the phone and bring it to me. I sat and waited anxiously for Ndalo to return. The poor guy is not well in his head. He needs help as much as I do. No wonder he acted strangely when I was out with

Makhulu, Craig and Chulu. I have met two people today but faced the same body. Is that even possible? Is this Ndalo's way to play mind games with me? He finally came in hopping like a true ten year old. He had my bag in his hands and put it in front of me. I opened it and found my phone battery and sim card not attached to it.

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Ndalo: Is that what you wanted, tanie?

Me: Yes, I'm so proud of you

Glen. What a good little boy you are. (he smiled) Now go and play while tanie makes a call. I'll call you in again.

Ndalo: I'll come back with my ball. (he hopped out of the door again)

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I quickly put together the phone and hoped the battery is full and that I had airtime. I finally got it together and switched it on. It felt like it's taking forever to get on. I dialed Makhulu's number and she answered immediately.

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Makhulu: Othu. (she said loudly and started to cry)

Me: Ma, call the police. I've been kidnapped. Tell them that it's... (she started to cry louder so I dropped ended the call)

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Should I bother Craig? I decided that I have to make use of all my option since I'm running out of time. I dialed his number and he picked up immediately.

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Craig: O, where are you? (I started to cry) Baby, I need you too keep a clear head right now. Can you tell me where you are?

Me: No, I'm tied up.

Craig: Is there a window?

Me: Yes.

Craig: What are you tied up to?

Me: M...my feet are tied to together.(I stuttered while crying)

Craig: Try to hop to the window, look out and describe your surroundings. I'm tracking your phone but it might take time so go to the window and do as I say just in case the tracking doesn't work. (I did exactly as he said)

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I hopped to the window because trying to untie this knot would only be a waste of time. I wiped the window and described to him as much as I possibly could.

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Craig: I know your location. I'm on my way.

Me: It's Ndal...

Ndalo: What are you doing? (he took the phone and threw it on the wall and it broke)

Me: Ndalo please. I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings by rejecting you but just don't hurt me please.(I stood against the wall shaking)

Ndalo: I'm not that weakling. I'm Xavier and you and I are going to get to know each other well, sweet things. (he came towards me and held my neck gently)

Me: Please don't hurt me.

Ndalo: Your neck is so beautiful. I've never see something this beautiful before. I almost don't want to bruise it but I can't resist. So smooth. (he put his face against my neck and I got so disgusted) Oh damn, it even smells good too. I knew the second I saw you that I'd love this part of your body most.

Me: Ndalo, please.

Ndalo: How many times must I tell you that I'm not that coward? (his voice sounded so cold)

Me: I'm sorry.

Ndalo: I hope that phone call to your boyfriend was worth it. I'm not going to be in a relationship with a slut who sleep with other men. I'd rather see you die than share you, sweet thing. Don't worry we'll be together soon when I die. (he laughed and held my neck firmly)

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I tried my best to fight him but he was just too strong. He lifted me off my feet by my neck and violently put me on the bed. I was not about to go down without a fight. I can't die. Chulu can't lose another mother. She'll be physiologically scarred for life. I kicked him and managed to poke his left eye with my thumb. He backed down to tend to his eye and I tried to get off the bed and forgot my feet are tied. I fell on my face and he got in top of me. He turned me so I could face him and I saw a darkness in his eyes that I've never witnessed in my entire life. I that moment I realised that I'm not dealing with the Ndalo I thought I knew. His eyes were always soft. His grip around my neck tightened. Even my fighting spirit died when I looked into his eyes because I'm dealing with a human demon. At least Makhulu will look after Chulu. I hope they know how much I love them. I hope Craig knows how much I love him too. I could

feel myself struggle to breath with each second that passed. This is not how I imagined I'd die. I always thought that I would die an old woman in her sleep surrounded by my grandchildren but I guess life has a different idea. I hope Ndalo gets the help he needs because he'll clearly not well. Life is indeed filled with all types of people.

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#CRAIG

I had an idea of the place O described. The fear I heard in her voice was just something else. My guy said it seemed as if Ndalo disappeared from the face of the earth and that made me know he is involved. I still have a feeling Wes is involved. I could track the exact location she called from and I was driving like a maniac. I called Thabiso since he's a cop to follow behind me for back up and called an ambulance go to the location. I'm only now involving the cops. I finally arrived at place and made my way inside. I found that Ndalo guy strangling her. I didn't even want to make it easy for him by shooting him. I grabbed her from behind and started to beat the living daylight. I beat him until he was covered in blood. I drew my gun and was ready to shoot but felt someone grab my arm. I tried to fight them but more hands grabbed me. I looked up and it's Thabiso and a few policemen. I didn't expect them this soon. I surrender

and rushed to O. Her neck had strangulation bruises on it. I felt a pain wash over me that's I've never felt before. I felt her pulse and luckily she's still alive. It's weak though. The ambulance came soon after and took her away. I told them to get another for Ndalo. I didn't care if he died. I would have killed him had I not been stopped. I drove behind the ambulance to the hospital. They admitted her and told me to wait. I know Othu's granny loves her very much. I didn't tell her because the woman might have a heart attack. The last hours without her daughter were hell and to tell her she's in hospital might kill her. I'll just wait until O is discharged so I can take her home. She's been away for more than 24 hours. I waited in the waiting room to hear what is what. Thabiso came to me and sat.

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Thabiso: You need to go down to make a statement. You didn't alert the police about this, Craig. You could get into serious trouble for taking the law into your own hands.

Me: Had I not she'd be dead by now. I know how slow you guys are. No offense, Thabs but I don't trust the law. I'll come down to the station to give a statement.

Thabiso: At least the guy is still alive.

Me: You should have let me kill him.

Thabiso: And then what? Go to jail for the rest of your life?
Think Craig.

Me: Go and catch real criminals, Thabs. I don't regret what I did. The only thing I regret was not shooting the bastard dead. You'd have done the same had Lesego been kidnapped by a lunatic. (he kept quiet)

Thabis: You're right. (he finally said) I'll get those statements some other time. I'm just sorry I had to meet your woman in such circumstances. I'll go down to the station and make sure you're not in trouble. Please tell me your gun is licensed. Possession of an illegal firearm is a serious crime.

Me: It is. (he stood and patted my back)

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He left me and promised to keep Ndalo under heavy police guard while he's in hospital. I called makhulu just to tell her I've found O. She cried and thanked me so much. The doctor came and told me I could go in. I rushed to her room and found her sitting up straight. I went to her and held her for dear life. She was crying so much and shaking. Holding her felt so good. I kissed her tear filled face. I don't think I've ever been so scared to lose someone. .

Me: How are you feeling? Never scare me like that again, O. What the hell was I going to say to Chulu had something happened to you?

Othu: How is she?

Me: I couldn't bring myself to face her without you. I'm sure makhulu spun her a lie.

Me: Thank you for coming to get...

Me: That goes without saying. Thank you for making it easy by getting a hold of your phone. I'm proud of you.

Othu: He kept on saying he's different people. First it was a Dorothy, then he was himself, then Glen and lastly Xavier.

Me: He's sick, O. I nearly killed him. (she looked at me) I didn't do it. (the doctor returned)

Doc: Well everything seems to be well. You'll have trouble swallowing for a while because we saw some swelling but no great damage was done. I'll go sign your discharge papers. You can go when you are ready.

Othu: Thank you doctor. (he nodded and left)

Me: He did not hurt you... uhm, in a sexual way right?

Othuf No, he didn't. The doctor confirmed it. I'll be fine. Thank you. Please take me home.

Me: Okay. Your car is with the police.

Othu: Why when they caught the criminal?

Me: Procedure, O. Come your gran is waiting for you.

Othu: Oh my goodness I'm sure her high blood pressure is high.

Me: She's a strong woman. You'll walk like a mummy for a while. (she laughed)

Othu: Don't make me laugh it's sore.

Me: I'm sorry. (I kissed her)

Othu: Thank you for finding me in time. (she whispered)

Me: You don't have to thank me.

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I helped her up and I could see that her neck was really sore. They wrapped a bandage around it. I wanted to carry her to the car but I feared hurting her more. We slowly made our way to the car. I drove her home and finally arrived. We knocked and her grandma let out a loud cry and hugged O. She inspected her neck and cried even more. We made our way in and Chulu ran to her mom. Makhulu told her that her mommy has gone to work to prepare for exams. O thanked me again and makhulu did too and kissed my cheeks a few times. I can't remember when last an elder kissed my cheeks. It felt special. I said

goodbye and got a nice, long hug from Chulu. I've missed her. I left them to be alone. Just as I went out my phone beeped. I opened the text. "I'm not done yet", it read. I went to see Ndalo to ask who he's working with. He was up. His entire face swollen. I hope he can talk.

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Me: Who sent you to this?

Ndalo: He said he'd help Xavier get Othunyiweyo. I didn't mea...

Me: I don't care about that details of your personalities. Who sent you? (he kept silent)

Ndalo: He said he's a friend. He had a funny accent. Has a scar on his cheek. The police told me that Xavier did. Apologise to Othu for me please. I'll take my pills again I prom...(I rushed out before he could finish and dialed Wes's number)

Wes: Sni...

Me: I'm coming for you. (he laughed)

Wes: You and what army?

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I dropped the call and rushed out to my place to dress properly for a mission. I went to my secret place and got one of my gun. I brushed my fingers over the weapon. I can't remember the

last time I held a sniper gun before. I looked at the tracker system to trace his moves. Hours went by and I went to I choose a spot that's at a distance from where he was and set up there. I waited for him to enter his hotel room. I need the perfect angle. He finally stood at his balcony sipping something. I aims until I was sure I'd get the perfect shot. I waited a few more seconds and then I pulled the trigger and watched him fall down. I rushed away to get rid of the gun. Only a fool keeps evidence. Hours went by and I went to my place. I can't believe that I have gone back to my past. But it's to protect Chulu and O. I'd rather turn into a hunter again then have them be hunted by another hunter. I guess I'll truly always be this man. Will Snipe ever really die?

15

#OTHU

It's been two days since I've come back home. I have some difficulty sleeping because I'm getting nightmares. Detective Thabiso suggested that I go for trauma counselling but speaking to a stranger is not something I'm comfortable with. The police released my car and handbag but I'm even struggling to drive. Craig has been taking Chulu to school and I feel bad for asking him to do such. He has just been amazing and I at times feel like he deserves a better woman than me. I guess he'll get one soon since we're just friends now. I've been told about Ndalo's mental disorder and I did some research about it. I've watched movies where characters play a role of someone with more than one personality but I've never thought it's real. Well I never thought assassins exist in real life either but I was wrong about that too. I feel like I've been living in a bubble and it's popping slowly but surely. I know understand that it's not Ndalo that wanted to kill me but it's Xavier. The bruise around my neck is getting better and I can't wait to go back to work. My learners are my life and I'm sure they are wondering what's wrong with me. I've never stayed away from work this much. Makhulu has been treating me like a child and as much as I love it it's also frustrating. I found her and Chulu sitting in the

kitchen having breakfast. I greeted and made myself a cup of coffee.

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Chulu: Morning, mommy. Makhulu and I made you a necklace for your neck until the mosquito bite mark goes away. (she held up a black ribbon with colourful decorations on it)

Me: Thank you. It looks so beautiful, baby and makhulu.

Makhulu: And we made sure that it matches with everything. Those marks are fading a bit but they are still visible. I got Chulu ready for school and now we are just waiting for her uncle Clay to get her. (Chulu giggles)

Chulu: It's uncle Craig, not Clay. Clay is dirt, makhulu. (we laughed)

Makhulu: Well he doesn't mind me calling him that. Maybe I should give him an African name.

Me: Haaa, ma. His parents gave him that name.

Makhulu: But I'm sure people expect a white man when they read his name. They should have given him an African name as well.

Me: He might have been born here but his parents were from the States, ma.

Makhulu: Oh now it makes sense, my nunu. I understand now that you've explained it.

Chulu: What is uncle Craigs surname again?

Me: Knights.

Chulu: Is he a knight like in the princess movies? (I laughed softly)

Me: Well no he...(someone knocked, it's Craig so I let him in)

Chulu: Uncle Craig. (she screamed and rushed to hug him)

Craig: Good morning, Chulz. Good morning to you too, Mrs Zweni. (makhulu smiled)

Makhulu: Good morning, my boy. Have you eaten? (he looked down shyly)

Craig: I don't eat so early in the morning, Ma.

Makhulu: This one is exactly the same. (she pointed at me)

Chulu: Mommy, can I ask him the question? (I nodded)

Craig: What question? (he looked at her)

Chulu: Are you really a knight like your surname says? Most of the princess movies I watch have knights. (he laughed)

Craig: What do knights do?

Chulu: They where shiny suits and protect everyone. (we laughed)

Makhulu: Well he has protected you. (she whispered to me and I smiled)

Craig: I'm not sure if I'm willing to wear shiny suits but I'm willing to protect those who I love. (Chulu laughed)

Chulu: You don't need a shiny suit.

Makhulu: I guess that would make Clay a knight without shining armor. (we laughed)

Chulu: I'm ready to go now.

Makhulu: Have a good day, my beautiful child and you too Clay. I'm going to lie down a bit. (she kissed Chulu)

Craig: Enjoy your nap, Ma.

Me: Are you okay, Ma? (she nodded)

Makhulu: I'm well. I just got up very early.

Chulu: I'll bring the sweets.

Makhulu: I can't wait for you to return then. (she smiled and left us)

Me: Thank you for taking he...

Craig: O, you give me the same thank you speech every morning and I give you the same "oh it's nothing" reply. I love you but please stop. (I laughed)

Me: Shoot me for being grateful.

Chulu: No, don't shoot my mommy, uncle Craig. (we laughed)

Craig: It's a figure of speech. I'd never shoot your mommy.

Chulu: My teacher said that guns are bad.

Craig: They are very bad. (he looked at me)

Me: Go and get a jersey for just in case the weather changes, bhabha.

Chulu: Okay. (she ran off)

Me: So I was wondering if it'll be okay with you if I come to visit you today. That's if you're not busy. I just don't want to come to your place unannounced and risk disturbing you from something again.

Craig: I'd love to have you over, O.

Chulu: Ready! (she came holding a jersey)

Craig: We will see you later, mommy. (I smiled)

Me: Enjoy school, bhabha and stay away from that berry tree please. Those things give you gas. (she giggled)

Chulu: Okay mommy. I love you. (she spread her arms and I hugged her)

Me: I love you too. (I kissed her cheek)

Chulu: You forgot to kiss, uncle Craig. (he smiled as if he'd won the lottery)

Craig: A kiss would make my day a lot better. (he said softly)

Me: Whatever! (he laughed and I kissed his cheek too)

Craig: Let's go, Chulu. Your teacher might shout at me if I bring you late.

Chulu: She never shouts. Teachers don't shout. (I laughed)

Craig: That's debatable. (they walked out talking so much)

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I watched them walk down the stairs holding hands. The thing with these two is that they both tend to speak a lot so I'm guessing that there are no quiet, awkward moments in the car. I realised that they forgot Chulu's lunch so I grabbed it and ran after them. I can't have my baby starve at school but I'm sure her friends would have shared though. I watched as the car drove out of the gate. I looked to my car and walked towards it. I got a cold chill as soon as I touched it. To me it's as if Ndalo is hiding himself in the car again even though I can see that it's empty. I ran back up the stairs and locked my apartment.

Makhulu came rushing from the passage. I think I banged the gate too much. She asked me to take her to the hospital later but I just can't drive that car. She understood and said she'll call a taxi. I went to the bathroom and showered. I think it's time I go to visit Ndalo and see for myself that he is in handcuffs or something like that. I finally finished getting ready and told makhulu where I'm going. A part of me hoped that she'd tell me it's a bad idea and that I must not go but instead she offered to go with me instead. We got ready to go out, took our bags, activated the security system and went to the cab. She's been coming up with African name suggestions for Craig. I can't believe my grandma at times though. We got to the hospital and went to ask to see Ndalo. He was under police guard so we had to get permission from the police on duty. They said it's okay and we went in. The swelling looks better but I can see that Craig did some damage. He smiled when he saw me enter. I wanted to run out and never return but I felt my grandma brush my hand gently. To me that's her way of saying "I'm here, my child. You don't have to be afraid". I suddenly felt courageous and walked closer to his bed.

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Ndalo: Othu, I'm so glad to see you. I heard what that fool Xavier did to you. I'm sorry. I should have been strong enough to fight him but I wasn't.

Me: It's okay, Ndalo. I did some research Dissociative identity disorder and I understand now that you aren't to blame. I accept your apology. (he smiled)

Ndalo: Thank you so much. They have placed me on medication again and I promise to always take it.

Me: Does it ensure that the other personalities stay away?

Ndalo: No unfortunately not but it does control the black outs.

Me: Does your boss know about your condition?

Ndalo: He does but he doesn't believe that it's real. I've been taking me treatment well for years so it didn't interfere with my work much that's why Hans laughed when I told him. He said it's just an excuse people use to not get into trouble when they are caught doing wrong. This is real, Othu. I was diagnosed when I was young. I'm not making it up.

Me: Tell me more about the others. Do you remember what you say when you change?

Ndalo: No but I know all my personalities because I wrote down their characteristics once. Aunt Dorothy is 65years old. She is kind and loving. Glen is a ten year old Afrikaner boy. He's just a child and knows of no better. Then there's Xavier. He's 34 and he doesn't like people and believe the more are dead the better. He's obsessed with the neck. I wish it could all stop, Othu. (he cried)

Me: I'm so sorry that you have to deal with all of this, Ndalo. No person deserves this.

Ndalo: Xavier made me kill my abusive aunt. (he cried louder)

Me: I can't begin to imagine what you must be going through.

Makhulu: Let's pray.

Ndalo: I've done that, Ma but this will never go away. Maybe I should just die. That way he dies too. (my heart broke)

Me: Don't say that.

Ndalo: She used to molest me. My aunt used to sexually and physically abuse me as a young boy. My doctor says I developed this disorder in order to cope with the trauma.

Me: The aunt that you killed? I mean that Xavier killed?

Ndalo: Yes, he was my first personality. He helped me stop her by strangling her to death when I was a teen.

Me: I'm sorry. I don't even know what to say. No child should go through so much. (I also started to cry)

Ndalo: What are you doing here? Tell that boyfriend of yours that I'm going to come for you all. Neck time I'll break your necks. (his voice changed and he got that dark look in his eyes again)

Makhulu: Let's go now, Othu. He asked for forgiveness and you forgave him. You can't help him.

Ndalo: Don't come near, Ndalo again or you'll regret it. Now get out of here. (he became violent so we moved back)

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The officer held him down and a nurse came in asking us to leave. We did as ordered. Shame Ndalo's mind created all of these personalities to cope with abuse. What type of woman does that to a child? My heart broke for Ndalo because this must be hell to him. How could Hans just take this so lightly? I hope his treatment will help him control his disorder again. Makhulu and I held hands and prayed for him. Makhulu went to the hospital my father is at and I made my way to Craig's house. I hope he has some food because I'm hungry. I got a taxi that drove me there. The last time that I set foot there was that night with Poppy. I haven't seen her since though. The cab finally arrived. I paid the guy and made my way to his door. I don't know why I want to spend time with him but I just want to be close with him today. I knocked and the door immediately flung open. He lifted me over his shoulders and closed the door. I screamed and laughed so much. He put me on the couch and got on top of me. Goodness I've never been so turned on in my life.

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Me: You're crazy.

Craig: Tell me something that I don't know, Miss Zweni. I want to kiss you so badly. (his voice sounded so intense)

Me: Then why don't you?

Craig: Because you're my friend now so I don't want to cross the line.

Me: Cross it. (I whispered)

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He didn't waste any time his lips were against mine before I knew it. I never knew I could want someone so much. The kiss became more intense and so passionate. His hands slid under my dress and for the first time I didn't panic because he has seen the one flaw I was afraid to show. He slid the side zip of my dress all the way down and gently caressed my right breast. Oh my goodness, my body responded in ways I never thought were even possible. No man has ever held my breasts before and yet I find myself wanting him to do more and more. He suddenly broke the kiss and put his forehead against mine while we both breathed heavily. I looked at him and we made prolonged eye contact. Passion filled eye contact.

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Craig: You're going to be the end of me, O. Dammit I've never wanted to be with someone this badly yet I know that I can't. Not yet anyway. I don't even know what is between us now. I d...

Me: I love you. (I cut him short quickly)

Craig: I love you too but will love be enough, O? You are afraid of me.

Me: I was afraid of you, Craig but that's because I thought you're still that man.

Craig: My past will always haunt me, O. You said so yourself. I won't ever forgive myself should you and Chulu be caught between all of that.

Me: Ndalo is not a part of your past. This ordeal just made me realise that danger is all over us. I never would have guessed that it's Ndalo holding that gun to my head because I never thought he's capable of such. (he looked down)

Craig: He isn't. Ndalo was taken advantage of

O. Someone found out about his disorder and used that to their advantage.

Me: That's terrible. Who would do that?

Craig: I didn't want to tell you this but I know the truth reveals itself one way or another so I will. Your father put out a hit on

Dr Flinch. Wes, the guy who told you about Lizzy and the baby happened to be closest since he was in South Africa anyway. He was given the mission.

Me: No, don't tell me the doctor is dead. He must be because he stopped calling and such.

Craig: No, he's not dead. I put two and two together and realised what's happening. I called in a favor from the agency and my guy confirmed that your father hired a hitman to kill Flinch. I'm guessing that he wanted to get rid of the witness who would help you get what's yours.

Me: Thank you for saving the doctor. I hope he is fine because I tried to call but he doesn't answer. How could Kumkani do this?

Craig: Because he is a power hungry capitalist.

Me: Maybe I should just break all ties with him and drop this thing I'm doing. I haven't signed that contract.

Craig: Why not?

Me: Imagine dealing with more men like him. I don't think I can handle that.

Craig: You can be a silent partner, O.

Me: You don't get it, Craig. I want nothing from him. What if I sell the shares to someone that he can't stand? (he laughed)

Craig: If that's what you want okay but keep the mining ones because there he is not the big boss.

Me: I think I might just do that. Let's talk about us. Would you like to try again?

Craig: Are you fine with my past? Like sure, sure?

Me: It's in the past right?

Craig: Let's just say I'm not a bad man who goes around killing innocent people.

Me: Is this Wes guy going to try something else again?

Craig: No.

Me: How can you be sure?

Craig: I jus a... (my phone rang)

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It's Langa and Craig said I must take it because it might be important. The last thing that I want is to be sucked into his tantrums and drama. I answered anyway.

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Me: Langa.

Langa: Hello to you as well, Othu. How are you?

Me: Did you just ask how I'm doing? That's a shocker. I'm good and you?

Langa: I heard from Makhulu about your kidnapping. I'm sorry that you had to deal with all of that.

Me: Are you sure that you weren't in the room when Kumkani plotted the plan?

Langa: Don't be like that. I wanted to invite you over to my place tomorrow. My fiance and her family will be having dinner with us.

Me: You're really going to marry the girl while knowing full well that you are gay?

Langa: It was a phase. I should never have allowed Ian to seduce me. Mama took me to a priest to be prayed for so I'm healed now. (I laughed)

Me: Being gay doesn't mean that you have a disease, Langa. How could Mama even do that to you? Why are you allowing it?

Langa: She knows what's best for me and she promised to keep it a secret. Tata won't ever find out. Are you coming?

Me: I'll see how I feel tomorrow. I actually want to meet the poor girl who is going to have to deal with it all.

Langa: I heard that he offered you shares. Congratulations.

Me: Are you sick? Usually you'd give me an earful about not bring worthy of it.

Langa: I guess I'm excited to see my future wife for the first time. (he laughed)

Me: I ho...(my concentration was a thing of the past when I felt Craig kiss my belly)

Langa: Othu! (he shouted)

Me: Bye. (I said softly and ended the call)

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These soft, moist kisses sent shivers through my entire body but in a good way. He went all the way down and attempted to take my underwear off. I held onto it stopping him from going further. I slid downwards to face him and found a smirk on his handsome face.

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Craig: I want to taste you. (he said softly and I got so turned on)

Me: No, Craig. What if you don't like it?

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He lifted me up and moved me upwards on the couch again. His lips were on mine again and at first just innocently but it became passionate soon after. He kissed my neck and I laughed

a bit because it felt a bit ticklish. I felt like a silly teen. He moved downwards and lifted my dress revealing my scarred belly again. I just watched as this man used his lips in ways that I didn't think were possible. He slid my undies off slowly while looking at me. The eye contact made it all just so intense. He got it off and threw it aside. I slightly closed my legs because I've never been that exposed before not while someone else is in the room. He brushed my thighs gently and parted my legs. I literally covered my eyes with my hands when he saw my lady part. I'm not ashamed of it but I've just never had someone stare at it so intensely. He laughed softly and I suddenly felt his lips kiss my inner thighs. A sensation I can't even describe rushed through my body. I felt his lips on my lady part and I swear my heart skipped a beat in that moment. I wanted to stop him but who was I kidding. I was enjoying each second of it. What on earth is this man doing to me?

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#CRAIG

I did my magic and watched as she squirmed and let out soft moans. Damn she tastes incredible and seeing her let go and get lost in the moment was even more sexier. Her legs gripped my head but not in a turn off manner. I pleased her until I felt her body tense up. I looked up at her and found her eyes shut

and her mouth slightly open. She looked so sexy. Her hands held the back of my head and to me it was a sign that she is enjoying each and every second. Her body tensed some more and she softly screamed my name in a moan and she went over the edge with pleasure. Her thighs held my head firmly while her legs shook. I watched as she breathed heavily until her breathing was normal. I went up to her face and found her eyes so wide. Like she didn't believe what just happened. I laughed softly and leaned forward to kiss her. She back away a bit and I smiled.

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Me: That was amazing. (I whispered)

Othu: I've never done that. Was that your way of telling me that you want to take our relationship to the next level?

Me: No, O. I'll wait until you're ready. I'm sorry if I rushed things. I should have checked if you're okay with it before I just...(she kissed me)

Othu: It's okay. I didn't stop you so I wanted you to do it. I've just never shared such intimacy with anyone. It's all new to me Craig. I'm sorry if I'm being weird.

Me: You're not. You look so beautiful. All of you looks so beautiful. (she blushed)

Othu: That felt amazing. (she covered her face with her hands)

Me: I like how you weren't shy just now. (she laughed)

Othu: I'm not ready to go all the way yet, Craig. We still have to go on our first official date. It sounds cheesy but I would really like that.

Me: Does that mean that we will give it another go?

Othu: Yeah, let's try again but slowly.

Me: I'm on no rush. So Miss Zweni, would you like to go out on a date with me tomorrow evening? (she smiled)

Othu: I would love too, Mr Knights.

Me: You taste amazing by the way. (I whispered in her ear and she laughed shyly)

Othu: I'm not sure if I should say thank you or what. (I smiled)

Me: I also love the fact that I have been the first man to do that with you. Hopefully I'll be the last too. (I kissed her)

Othu: I'm hungry.

Me: Well since I've just had a delicious starter I'll go check if there's anything I can feed you. I'd give you me but you're not ready for all of this yet. (we both laughed)

Othu: Oh my word, you're crazy.

Me: Marry me. (she laughed)

Othu: I'll just go and fix that meal myself because you are clearly planning on fooling around instead. (she got me off her)

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I watched as she zipped up her dress and wore her underwear. If only she knew that I meant it. I really want her to marry me. I'm glad she laughed it off though because I have a feeling that she first want to enjoy the girlfriend phase. Going on dates. Stealing kisses when no one is watching and all the other silly yet important details of a relationship. I watched as she got busy in my kitchen putting together a meal from the little that I have in my fridge. This woman could make my house a home. I can already see the three of us as a family someday. She finally finished and dished up for us. I put her on the kitchen counter while I stood in front of her. She ate as if she hasn't seen food in days. I love a woman that is not afraid or shy to eat a proper meal.

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Othu: Eating while standing is not good. Makhulu would have you in a chair by force. (I laughed)

Me: And I'm sure I would not have put up a fight. For now I just love looking at you. (she looked at me and smiled)

Othu: Just don't get obsessed.

Me: Too late. (we laughed)

Othu: Don't you ever think about following your dream of being a doctor?

Me: I did not expect that question. Imagine a 28 year old starting med school. I'm actually where I'm meant to be. Life is not bad at all. I thought you wanted to be a nurse. (she laughed)

Me: Only because my granny was one. I worship the ground the woman walks on but I've realised that it was not for me.

Me: Pity. We could have opened a practise. I mean I would not have minded a sexy assistant. (she laughed)

Othu: I would not have to that. This almost feels like old times. I've missed that. I have missed my best friend.

Me: I'm here now and I'm not planning on going anywhere.

Othu: Do you think we can make this work?

Me: If we want to and put the work in. We'll have obstacles but which couple doesn't have those?

Othu: Please promise that you won't call Poppy or any other girl to blow off some steam when we fight or have a disagreement. I didn't say this but that really hurt me, Craig. Especially knowing that they can offer you what I can't yet.

Me: I'm sorry I've hurt you. No Poppy or any other fling will come here but you need to promise to be a better

communicator, O. When you rush off and switch your phone off I jump to the wrong conclusions, baby.

Othu: I've just never had to deal with serious relationship issues before. I'll try harder next time.

Me: We both need to try a tad bit better. What I do promise is to protect you and Chulu. I'm a protector, O. I think I became one when I failed to protect my parents.

Othu: But it was an accident. There's nothing you could have done.

Me: Yeah, I really love this conversation. So in future how many siblings are you planning on giving Chulu? (she smiled)

Othu: One. (I raised my brow)

Me: Woman, stop being stingy with your eggs. Give the child some more siblings. (she laughed so much)

Othu: How many do you want?

Me: Five at least.

Othu: That's too much, Craig.

Me: Well if I marry you then we'll add four. We have Chulu already. (she smiled)

Othu: I love how you include her in everything.

Me: She's a part of your life and if I want to be a part of your life I'll have to make sure she's never left out. I mean it when I say I love her.

Othu: I know. (she kissed me)

Me: I also know that makhulu must also be included. She gave me kisses on the cheeks the other day. You'd have competition if she was younger. (we laughed) I'm just kidding. I loved getting affection from an elder again. It made me miss my mom.

Othu: I'm sorry. She thinks you need an African name. Even gave a few suggestions this morning. (I smiled)

Me: Would you like to settle down here?

Othu: I think so or in East London. I would like a beautiful house with a pool and garden.

Me: Not a high market estate mansion? (she frowned)

Othu: I had that growing up and it never felt like a home. I just want a nice house in a safe neighborhood with friendly neighbors.

Me: That sounds good. I always thought I'd want a big mansion but now that you say that I can see myself in such a home. Tell me how you'd like your first time to be.

Othu: My first time doing?

Me: Sex, making love or whatever you call it. I remember I always wanted my first to cuddle with me first before doing the deed. (she laughed)

Othu: Did she?

Me: Nope, no cuddling. Not even after. I was so disappointed. So tell me how you'd like it someday.

Othu: Just romantic and I always just wanted Boys 2 Men's "Make love to you" playing in the background. (we laughed)

Me: That's just so cheesy but sounds nice. Are you waiting until your wedding night? (she shook her head)

Othu: If it happens like that then that will be fine but I just want it to be with the right person.

Me: How would you know that it's the right person?

Othu: When it feels right I guess. I don't know. There are people who waited until their wedding night only to find that they gave themselves to a monster. I guess I just wish to be sexually intimate with one person for the rest of my life. That's all I wish would happen.

Me: I would like to be your first and last. (she laughed softly)

Othu: Let's take it one day at a time, love but thank you for being so vocal about what you feel and think. Today you gave me an experience I'll never forget. I've never felt such physical

pleasure in my life. I showed you parts of myself that no man has seen and I thought I'd regret it after the pleasure rush is over but I don't. In fact I...no never mind. (she smiled and looked down)

Me: I mind. In fact what?

Othu: No, babe let's drop it. (she giggled)

Me: In fact you'd like it if we continue to explore? (she looked at me with those innocent eyes and nodded)

Othu: I know my shy reaction when speaking about such may be childish for you because you are used to experienced women who call a spade a spade I'm sure. I'm sorry you have to deal with this.

Me: That's exactly why I love being with you. Yes, I've had women who aren't shy to speak about sexual stuff openly but I've never had a person like you. I love your innocence, O. It's beautiful and refreshing. I like how you blush and cover your face with your hands when you get shy. (she laughed)

Othu: Have you ever tested for HIV and other sorts of sexual transmitted diseases?

Me: Yes, and I'm always responsible. I know that this is going to sound like too much info but I also don't perform oral sex with flings. Last time I did it was four years ago in my last serious relationship.

Othu: Liar...last time you did it was a few minutes ago. (we both laughed)

Me: If you like we can do the whole testing together thing. No pressure to take the relationship to the next level of course. That's what couples do right?

Othu: I don't know but I like the idea.

Me: We haven't even had our first date and we are already getting serious.

Othu: We aren't strangers to each other though. We were friends before this.

Me: True. I seriously love this discussion. I don't think we have sat and talked like this since we reconnected. I love you as a friend and girlfriend. I don't want an on and off relationship, O. I'm too old for that. Men my age are either married or in serious relationships and I want that because I want a family. I know that I'm getting too serious too quickly but I know what I want. That's a family someday and that's why I don't date to fool around.

Othu: I don't want to date to fool around either. I also want the same Craig. For my sake and Chulu's. I'd love to give her a sibling.

Me: Or two...or three and more. (she laughed)

Othu: Yes or more. I also know that you're the man I'd like to have all of that with. (I kissed her)

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I'm glad that we have had this talk. She's right, we are no strangers to each other so we can get serious now. I love being with her and I'm glad that she has come to visit. We went to sit on the couch and watch TV. The news was the first thing that appeared and I wanted to changed it but she stopped me.

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Reporter: The man who's body was found on the balcony of one of Cape Town's five star hotels was finally identified as Wesley Don. It seems he was a tourist but police also found six fake passports amongst his possession. It's believed that Mr Don could have been an international fugitive. (O, looked at me)

Othu: It's the man. I heard about a man being shot at a hotel but I didn't think it's him. What could have happened?

Me: Wes was a reckless one and that is the last thing you want to be in his line of work.

Othu: Craig, what if the person that killed him comes for you?

Me: I doubt, O. It's been a year since I left the agency and no one has made a move. Like I've said Wes always thought he's smarter than all.

Othu: Will you go and say you know him?

Me: It will make me tied to a crime and I don't want that. The agency will find a way to get hid body to the states.

Othu: I'm sure it's my dad or Dr Flinch. Maybe he wanted to kill him before he got a chance to kill him

Me: So many possible suspects. Let's let the law deal with it.

Othu: Shame poor guy. Excuse me, I need some water. (she kissed me)

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The moment she looked at me when they showed his picture I thought she'd figured out it's my doing. It seems she doesn't suspect me or she refuses to let her mind go there. I covered all my tracks so I know they can't find evident to pin this on me. Even made sure that I got a hold of the footage of me visiting his hotel room. I can't afford to be tied to Wes in any way but should it happen I'll just say he was an old friend I ran into. I'm not obligated to shout out to the world that I know him. My phone rang and it's a international number. I knew it's one of the agents. I answered.

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Me: Yeah?

Prof: Did you kill him, Snipe?

Me: Who?

Prof: Don't fucken play dumb with me. You know I'm talking about Wes. I hope you didn't do it, Snipe. If they dig and find a connection between you and hid murder they will come for you. You know we no longer go by the honours code.

Me: That's why I left.

Prof: If you are involved they will come at you hard. It might not be today or tomorrow but someday when you've forgotten they even exist.

Me: That sounds like a threat.

Prof: I have your back so I'll keep shut about the info you asked but I don't know who Wes spoke to here. Be ready for a war, Snipe. (he ended the call)

Othu: I was thinking that we could go for ice cream when we fetch Chulu. (I kept quiet) Craig? (she waved her hand in my face)

Me: Mmm?

Othu: Are you okay?

Me: Perfect. What was that?

Othu: Ice cream after school. (she smiled and I faked one)

Me: Sounds good.

Othu: Babe, who was that? Did they say something upsetting?
(I kissed her passionately)

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I think I'll now have to up my security game. I can't protect her when she's living far. Is it too early to give her a key and ask her to move in? She suggested we get Chulu early and enjoy the day. I agreed quickly. O is no fool. She'll ask until I crack so Chulu's presence will distract us. We drove to the school and went to Chulu's class. I could see she didn't expect it. She ran to her mom and Othu told the teacher we came to get her. Since they know her well they didn't ask much. I picked Chulu up and we went to the car.

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Chulu: Wow! Mommy and uncle Craig you came together to get me. (she smiled)

Me: Is that good?

Chulu: Yes, it makes me feel special. (we laughed)

Othu: Well don't get used to it and to being picked up early, Miss Zweni. (she tickled Chulu)

Chulu: I won't, mommy (she laughed and wrapped her arms around our necks)

.

I looked at O smiled and kissed her. We both kissed each of Chulu's cheeks and she giggled. Goodness I love these people. Today is a great day and I should be happy. We I am. I spent the morning with Othu sharing some level of intimacy with her. We spoke briefly about what we want. She cooked for us. And now I get to go have ice cream with my girls. Any man would be happy but I'm suddenly worried too. Had they not been in my life I would not even be fazed by that call because I can look after myself. What if I fail to look after them? I looked at O as she sang while we drove and checked the mirror and saw Chulu also sing her lungs out. I love them. Dammit I have a weakness. I've never had one before. Not even Lizzy was. My daughter would have been but that was not meant to be. Now these loving, innocent people are my weakness and if they link me to Wes's death they will investigate my new life here and link them to me. Should I tell O that I don't want to do it anymore? I'd be hurting her so much especially after we shared so much today.

DR FLINCH

I've been laying low as Othu's friend advised me to do but I've also been busy with my own business. Some might think that I'm obsessed with Othunyiweyo when they hear how much I want to protect her. Some might even say that I'm trying to ease my guilt by helping her. I don't know why I fell so attached to her but I do and I'll do my best to help make her life easier. I watched the news and I saw a bulletin about a tourist who was shot dead. I thought nothing of it but when it was revealed that he might be a problem something told me that it might be the man who was hired to kill me. Who could possibly have killed him? Was he bringing too much attention to himself so his organisation decided to kill him? I've got so many questions. I also tried to get information but the guy that tipped me off but failed. Why would Othu have such a friend in her life? I've been busy with a new ally trying to bring this Hans to his knees and I finally have everything that I needed. Now I have to decide if I must kill the man or take what I have to the cops. My ally managed to drug him so that he can pass out. She also made sure that all the cameras were dead so that I can carry my plan through. I went into his private living space and carried him out. Mr Thomas and I are going to take a nice long drive. I had everything prepared for what I want to do to him. I drove to a

secluded part of the open bush where I dug a hole to bury Hans in. I took his heavy body and placed it inside and started to put dirt on it. I'll keep him alive for now so I didn't cover his head. It's early morning so I sat, watched as the sun rose and waited for him to finally come to. He finally started to groan and opened his eyes slightly. He shut them again and I figure he thinks that he is dreaming. He let out another deep groan and I laughed.

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Me: Just open your damn eyes, Hans. You're not dreaming.

Hans: Wh...who are you? Why am I paralysed? (I laughed)

Me: Oh stop being so dramatic. You're not paralysed. I just tucked you in nicely so you could have a great sleep. (he lifted his head and screamed)

Hans: What have you done to me, you pig? Get me out of here or you'll regret it. I swear you'll regret it. (he shouted and I laughed)

Me: I told you to not mess with Miss Zweni, Thomas. When I give someone a warning and they don't listen they force me to take action and unfortunately for people like you my actions are bad. Did you think I'll just leave you to get away with leaving her and her friends stranded? You left five women who

didn't know this surrounding alone. What were you hoping would happen?

Hans: I don't know what you are taking about.

Me: Mmm I think I know what you were hoping for. You thought a wild animal would come and perhaps attack on of them. Your plan was dumb those because even had an animal came it would not have known who Othunyiweyo Zweni was. (I laughed out loud)

Hans: Okay, let's make a deal. I'm sure brothers like ourselves can work something out? (he said in a shaky voice)

Me: Brothers? (I laughed) You being white doesn't mean I'll see you as a brother. In fact we don't even have the same skin colour. You're pink and I'm pale. (I lit a cigarette and smoked)

Hans: How much do you want? I have money and connections. I'll make sure that this does not come back to you. (he pleaded)

Me: I have those too. How do you think I managed to get you here?

Hans: I've stayed away from, Miss Zweni. I haven't done anything to intimidate her. Please let me go.

Me: We both know that the chances of the court giving them back their land are slim to non. They might offer them financial compensation but nothing more. They don't want money and

I'm here to make sure that you give them what they want willingly. (he laughed)

Hans: As if that will ever happen. If you kill me there's no way they will get it and I'm not about to sign anything.

Me: Did you think I'll come unprepared?

Hans: Who the hell are you really? No doctor would do this.

Me: I'm glad you asked. You see I was not always a good doctor. When you've had a life like mine you become anything. I was once a very, very bad man. One that would rip a man's heart out and sleep peacefully at night. I decided to change though and follow my life long dream of being a scientist.

Hans: So you're a mad scientist. (I laughed)

Me: I actually like that very much. You see, I might have stopped my old life but I owe it to Miss Zweni to find the old me again so that I can help her. That's why I tracked him down. (I held a picture in his face)

Hans: Why the hell must I care about a stranger? (he laughed)

Me: Shame, you don't even recognise your own seed. (he looked at me and I laughed) Now I've got your attention. He lives in Australia actually, not New York. He has a wife and a child. Is a good man with a stable job and doesn't have a criminal record. He's the exact opposite of you. Pity you had to

ignore my warning when I told you to stay away from my daughter and now you force me to know your son better. This is a recent picture by the way. I'm sure you see it's him because he hasn't changed much from his younger self that you knew.

Hans: Screw you! Screw you! You leave my boy alone. (she shouted)

Me: Now you know the anger I've felt when you threatened Othu. I'm sure you want to strangle me. I felt the same way. Difference between you and I is that I'm not afraid to kill. I could have him killed now and have my people sent me the clip so that you'll see what you did to your own boy by being stubborn.

Hans: What do you want? (he shouted)

Me: Yes! He finally asks me something I want to hear. I almost thought you wouldn't. Nothing like a man's only heir to soften him up. Back to the question. What do I want? Mmm, let me see. I want the land. Is your son's life worth that?

Hans: I'll need to get in touch with my lawyer and dra...

Me: No need, sir. Being the good man that I am I spared you all that trouble. Just all of it. I had my lawyer draw up the papers.

Hans: How do I know that your contract doesn't have a clause asking me for more than just the land?

Me: You don't. For all you know you'll be signing over all your assets to me. Hans: So you'll keep the land for yourself? (he laughed) See, we aren't that different.

Me: Oh, I also know about the money laundering and your other dirty details. You are a dirty man, Thomas. No wonder that woman took her boy away from you.

Hans: Something is biting me. Get me out of here. (he shouted)

Me: Imagine had it been a lion ripping that ugly head off or an elephant stepping on it. So what you feel there is nothing. I do have to let you out so that you'll sign those documents though.

Hans: You have to promise to stay away from my son.

Me: You didn't stay away from my daughter when I asked.

Hans: Look, let's do this and promise to stay out of each others ways afterwards.

Me: You have so much to lose if you don't keep your end of the deal. All your assets, your son and maybe even your grandchild.

Hans: I'll keep to my end of the deal. I promise. Get me out please.

Me: I'll give you enough room so you can sign those documents but I first have to keep a promise to someone. (a car approached) And she's just in time. I love a punctual woman. (I smiled)

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The car came to a stop and Melisa Thomas stepped out with a huge grin on her face. I looked at Hans and he looked flushed. Well I had to get someone on the inside to help me and who better than the wife, right? Not just any wife but an abused wife who has a score to settle. Revenge can be sweet and I know Mel is loving the taste of this revenge. I honestly don't care what happens to the man all I want is for him to give me what I want. I was once a hardcore gangster in my youth but only because I had my family to support. I went to school and left that life as soon as I made enough to study. It of course was not easy and I had to kill a few people to be free but I had a dream to become a scientist and no one was going to stand in my way. Now I'm back and I am enjoying it actually. People undermine me a lot. The lady knelt down and laughed at her husband.

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Hans: Mel? You helped this pig do this to me?

Mel: The pig here is you and not him. You treat me like trash and think I'll have your back. I told you that your day would come.

Hans: You fu...(she shut him up by scratching his cheek with her long nails and he screamed so much)

Mel: Now look what you've done. I have your filthy skin under my well done nails.

Me: I have to go. Let's get this over with. Do you have the cheque book?

Hans: She's not getting a cent from me. (he shouted)

Me: I'll just make that call to Australia. (I dialed and he screamed loudly)

Hans: Okay, okay I'll do it. I'll do it.

Me: You think that you are in the big league when in actual fact you aren't in any league at all. You're a bitch compared to the animals I've dealt with. Stop this acting before you hurt yourself, boy. You'll sign that cheque and give her what's due to her. For the crap she's had to take from you she deserves more. You see I've never married but when you treat a lady right she'll fight to death for you. You gave me a gap to bring you down by not taking care of her.

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I took the shovel and scooped the dirt on the top of his body off. He needs to sit up so he'll be able to sign the documents. I went to my jeep and got the papers and a pen. He let out a scream of anger before signing. I had Mel confirm that it's his signature. She did and I had him write a cheque to her amount of choice to her. I double checked everything. All seemed to be

in order so I put them back in the envelope. Mell will have to sign as witness to the handover of this land.

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Me: Oh by the way you have just signed over ownership of your other businesses to Mel here. From now on you're her bitch.

Mel: What? (she looked shocked)

Me: He used his money to control you. Karma has just knocked on his door. Take the opportunity. Or do whatever the hell you want with it. He can't get to you because should he try he's going to jail. A broke man in jail is not good.

Hans: Son of a bitch. (he shouted)

Mel: Now who's disadvantaged in the marriage. I'll make your life hell

Advertisement

Hans. (she laughed)

Me: What a lovely day it is. I'm sorry but I'll have to put you to sleep again. .

He tried to fight but failed. I took out the injection and injected him. After a while he slept. I got him out of the hole and into the car boot. I covered the hole properly and we then drove out to town to have the lawyers deal with everything. I have

"friends" all over so the process will be a speedy one. The signature is valid and who better to be witness than the wife. She went to cash her cheque and gave her lawyer and not Hans's one to process the documents giving her ownership of his businesses. We then went to the lodge and made sure the area we will enter in is clear. I put the man in the shower first and we made sure he's clean and dressed in clean clothes. We put him in his bed so he'll sleep everything I injected into his system off. He'll wake up only to realise that he owns nothing. Money was his greatest power so I want to see how he will be with no power. I'm sure his wife will enjoy this. I'm sure Mrs Zweni will be happy to get back her ancestral land. I'm not sure what they plan to do with it but that's all up to them. I'm just glad that I could help them. Innocent people need some help to deal with not so innocent and who better to help with a not so innocent but decent man like me. At least if I die now I'll go knowing that they have what they wanted. Men like Hans are afraid of jail so I know that the information I have of his dirty dealings are security enough but I'll keep an eye on him and the second he thinks of double crossing me I'll throw him into a crocodile filled lake. My phone rang and that's strange because this is a new number. I let it ring but answered anyway.

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Me: Talk.

Person: Hello, old friend. It's that mutual friend you have with Miss O Zweni.

Me: How did you get this number?

Craig: I have my ways, doc. I also know you've paid Hans a visit. I hope you got the desired results. (he laughed)

Me: What do you want?

Craig: I just found out that Kumkani's company is in huge debt and he placed his shares as surety should that happen. I need you to call Miss Zweni and advice her to go see him and have him write her a cheque from his personal account. Have her cash it immediately because the man is about to be declared bankrupt. He gave her papers to sign so she can have what she wants but if she does she inherits a huge debt. I don't want her to be liable for his crap all her life.

Me: Why don't you do it?

Craig: I don't want her to see me as some sort of hero and end up thinking that she owes me something for helping her. I want her to see me as normal friend. You on the other hand might get some points. She'll think you're helping because you have a guilty conscious. Who know? She might give you a chance to know her.

Me: What's in it for you?

Craig: Like I've said. As long as you are on her side you're my friend.

Me: Well you remember that too. If you mess with her.

Craig: Doc, let's just be friends for her sake. I don't need any but I might need you soon.

Me: I don't work with others.

Craig: Ahh something we have in common! Let me ask you this. If I need your help as far as she's concerned would you step up?
(I started to panic)

Me: Is she in danger?

Craig: No, just asking hypothetically.

Me: If you need me to protect her. Call me. I owe you my life.

Craig: You don't. I think we need to sit down and talk, doc. You are yet to tell me who you are.

Who you really are.

Me: I think we should talk because you are yet to tell me who you are also. Who you really are. (he laughed)

Craig: You can stop running now. (he ended the call)

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That bastard just never wants to see his own child happy. How could he want her to inherit a debt of million I'm sure? How did he even get himself in so much trouble? I made the call to Othu and for the first time I heard her sound relieved to hear from me. I'm sure our "mutual friend" told her about her father wanting me dead. I told her what I've been told and made as if I'm the one who came to the findings. I don't know that guy but I'll do as he asks. I do owe him my life no matter how much he is modest about it. She sounded sceptical at first but said she'll trust me since I've never led her astray so far. I won't tell them about the land issue until all is done and they too have received the documents and the deal is sealed. I need to go back to Cape Town and make sure the hand over is done well. If they want they can let Mel keep the lodge there and get rent money from her. They can also start a farm. Well just so many possibilities.

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#OTHU

No wonder the man was willing to give me the shares. They will be worthless if I'm in debt with him. They would be a liability instead of assets. If I ever had doubts that my father hates me then now I know that he does. I still have time to kill until my date with Craig this afternoon so I got ready and rushed to the hospital. I still don't have the courage to drive my car. Maybe

it's time that I sell it. Chulu is at school so I don't have to explain where I'm going. I told makhulu where I'm going but not the reason. The cab finally arrived at my destination and I made my way in. I was told the nurses are still busy with him so I must wait. They called me in after a long while. I stood at the door and watched him. I felt so much hurt and anger but I took a deep breath before going in. He looks pale and thin. I walked in and he turned his head to face me.

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Tata: Do you have the signed documents?

Me: Good morning, Tata. I have them but they aren't signed.

Tata: Why not? I thought you wanted this. (he raised his voice)

Me: Why are you upset? I thought you'd be happy? I've decided to take your first offer. I'll take the money. Knowing you your cheque book is here so write me a blank one. I'll decide on the amount. (he looked at me) It's either that or you go to court. What will your associates say if you go to court and humiliate yourself and them? What will Langa's future in laws say? (he banged his fist on the bed)

Tata: You are a curse, Othunyiweyo. (he pointed at me)

Me: Oh well at least I'm not your curse to care about. Where is your cheque book? (he gave me such a dirty look) Okay, bye I'll

just start the process of to sue you for not telling me what I was entitled to as per that contract you signed. (I walked out)

Tata: Wait, dammit. Take it out of that drawer. (he pointed)

Me: If it bounces then you'll have trouble. Let this be our way of parting forever because I'm sure you don't want to ever see me again and trust me the feeling is mutual. (I gave him the book and pen)

Tata: I hope I never do. (he ripped a page off and gave it to me)

Me: I wonder how much I must take.

Tata: There is only a couple of millions in my personal account.

Me: I was actually not even thinking about millions but now I do. Thank you. Oh I accepted Langa'a invite to meet his fiance. What a perfect boy you have. Mr Zweni. It would be a shame if he had a flaw though. (I smiled)

Tata: Only curses like you are rotten. My son is not. (I laughed and walked out:

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I heard him let out a soft scream. Clearly of anger and frustration. I couldn't help but laugh. He clearly thought I'd sign the contract that same day. Something just told me that it's too good to be true and now I know the reason. He wanted me to drown into debt with him. All my assets would have been sold

to cover the debts of his company. Not that I have any assets anyway. I honestly don't know how much money I should take from him. I called Craig and told him what just happened. He couldn't believe that my dad would do that to me but said anything is possible. I asked him what I must do with the blank signed cheque and he told me my dad's net worth. My eyes almost fell to the ground. Why doesn't he use it to cover his debts? Maybe the debts are way more than what is in his account. He advised that I take enough to secure my future and Chulu's financially. Enough to buy that dream house cash and still have enough left over to make other smart investments. I got what he was trying to say. I finally inked the amount area with the amount that I want. He told me to stay at the hospital because it might not be safe for me. He arrived so quickly. He showed me what to do after I've cashed such a big amount of money and also got me in touch with his financial advisor. It made me wonder how much he has. All was done and I can't believe that I have so much money in my account. I'm a millionaire. I thought it would bounce but it didn't. I could have taken everything but I felt sorry for my mom for some reason. I think she's also a victim to my father's controlling. This is enough and I'll find ways to grow it. Craig and I drove in silence. He held my hand briefly and kissed it. I looked at him and smiled.

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Craig: You're so quiet. You should be happy.

Me: Baby, what if the money changes me? (he smiled)

Craig: Then makhulu and I are going to make sure we humble you again. (we laughed)

Me: You're the first person I told this to. I usually call my gran. You're important to me, Craig. (he smiled)

Craig: As you are to me, O. The money won't change you. I'm just glad Flinch found out about Kumkani's plan before you signed. I just knew it's too good to be true.

Me: I think Dr Flinch is also a spy. (he laughed)

Craig: Anything is possible. You focus on your life from now on. Invest the money smartly, save and all else that make you remain stable financially. You can even buy that house you dream of. Chulu can have her next birthday there. We will make sure she has a big party. (I smiled)

Me: That sounds lovely. If this money ever goes to my head please humble me. (he laughed)

Craig: I doubt it will but okay.

Me: Do you think he'll just let this slide?

Craig: Let's just prepare ourselves for when/if he decides to retaliate.

Me: Yeah. (I said softly)

Craig: You'll be fine. So I have a gift for you. (I looked at him)

Me: We are on our way to our first date and you already have a gift. (he smiled)

Craig: Oh well. Check the cabinet. It's in there. (I opened it and took out a spray bottle)

Me: Pepper spray? How romantic. (we both laughed)

Craig: I give my lady something to protect her with. Do you know how to use it?

Me: Yeah I do. Aim for the eyes, spray and run. (he laughed)

Craig: Baby, this thing about you being afraid to drive. (I looked down)

Me: I'll be fine by next week.

Craig: You need to face the fear head on, O. Don't give it power. How about I give you self defence lessons? (I looked at him)

Me: Will it help me get over the fear?

Craig: Yes because you'll feel more courageous and strong. They might also come in handy when trouble occurs again.

Me: Okay I accept your offer.

Craig: I also have a gift for Chulu.

Me: I hope it's not the same as mine. (he laughed)

Craig: Never. It's a whistle but not a usual one. This one has a tracker and a device that's almost like a panic button. The second she blows it that little ball 's movement will trigger the panic button and my phone and yours will send a signal. (I smiled)

Me: Where do you get that?

Craig: Collectors items from my old job. Do you want a whistle too?

Me: If you have a spare then okay. (he smiled)

Craig: We're here. We will have our brunch here. Look, I just want to use all resources to keep you too safe and your granny too. What happened to you scared me. So please don't think I'm being obsessive by all I'm doing.

Me: I know you're not. Thank you for making sure we are safe. (I kissed him)

Craig: Anything for my girls. Let's go on that first date.

Me: This one is on me. (he laughed)

Craig: Nothing turns me on like an independent woman so spoil me rotten if you want. (I laughed)

Me: I love you. (he kissed me passionately)

Craig: I love you too. (we both smiled)

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We got out of the car and held hands making our way to the nice cosy looking cafe. I miss work though. I miss my little people. But I'm going to enjoy this week because next week it's back to work. I called Dr Flinch and thanked him. He was so modest and said its nothing. Craig and I sat in a corner table and would kiss when we don't have too many people staring. We ordered and ate. Both of us were starving because we don't eat breakfast early mornings. I sat there and still could not believe that I'm rich. Why do people like my dad fear public humiliation so much? The second I mentioned hid associates not wanting to have anything to do with him I saw a panic in his eyes. I decided to not bring him to this beautiful moment I'm sharing with my man. We had a great time and we later went to the beach. Chulu would never forgive us should she hear we went without her. Being in love feels so great. The stolen kisses, hugs from behind, long, passion filled kisses, learning things you never knew about the person. I love being in love and I absolutely love being in love with this man.

CRAIG

I have already started to make some preparations should the agents of The Discreet come after me. I did some digging on Zweni because I just had a bad feeling about his offer. That company is dead and is drowning in debt. His shares practically don't belong to him anymore. Who does that to their child? If I can love Chulu so much why can't he love his own blood? I'm enjoying this first date a lot but I'm also on the lookout for anything out of the ordinary. Hours went by and we went to get Chulu. I'll miss this routine once O is back at work. She ran to us as soon as she saw us approach. I knelt down to her level because I want to speak to her.

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Me: Chulu, I have something that I want to give you but this gift comes with a lot of responsibility. Do you know what that is?

Chulu: Uhm, it's taking care of something well. Right, mommy? (she looked up at O)

Othu: Yes, bhabha. I'm so proud of you. Listen well to what uncle Craig says. (she looked back at me)

Me: This is a whistle. It's a special one because it tells mommy and I where you are at all times. You know that there are thieves around right? (she nodded)

Chulu: Like the one who took our TV.

Me: Yes, princess. I'm sure mommy has told you to not talk to strangers. So should a stranger come to you and doesn't back away or you not comfortable you take this whistle out and you blow into it and make sure it makes a loud noise. It will tell us that you need our help. Now this is where the responsibility part comes in. You can't just blow it when you feel like it or when you are playing with friends. Do you understand so far?

Chulu: Yes, uncle Craig.

Me: Good, I want you to only take it off when you bath and sleep but all the other times it must be around your neck. You must tuck it in so no one steals it.

Chulu: Okay. I'll put it under my top.

Me: Yes. Also when someone touches you in ways that make you uncomfortable. You use the whistle. Has mommy showed you your special places that no one must touch? (she nodded)

Chulu: My bum bum, my girly part, my chest and all other places that makes me not comfortable. (she looked at her mom for reassurance)

Othu: Yes that's it. (she smiled)

Craig: So can I trust you to be responsible with the whistle?

Chulu: Yes because I'm a big girl now. I'm six. (we laughed)

Me: Yes you are. Let me put it around your neck then you can tuck it into your shirt. Those weird strangers must know they can't mess with you. (I put it over her head and around her shoulders)

Othu: Thank you for this, Craig. (I stood and kissed her)

Me: Anytime. Now let's go have something sweet.

Chulu: Can I have sour worms please.

Me: They taste disgusting. (she shook her head)

.

O strapped her in her seat and we got into the car and drove off. At least knowing that I'll track her movement so I'd know where she is should anything happen. I'm hoping nothing does but I can't take chances. I also told her to keep her whistle a secret from everyone else. I'm not sure how much she understands but I'm hoping that she understood every part. We went to the shop to get sour worms and she hated it the second she tasted it. My poor baby. Had to buy her juice to wash that taste away from her mouth. Knowing the agency they won't strike now. They will come with a plan first. I like Prof but at the moment I don't trust him. We went back to the beach so Chulu can enjoy the salty water and sand. The three of us had a great time. I put her over my shoulders and held O's hand while we walked on the sand taking in the sea breeze. I

wish that we didn't have the extra things to worry about but we do. I'm not going to tell her that I killed Wes. I don't want her to be afraid of me. I later took them home because they will be going to Langa's dinner. I'll be there too but I will remain unseen. I don't want her thinking that I'm following her. I have to though until I've come up with a more solid plan to protect them. We got to her place and I walked up to greet Makhulu. We found her dressed and ready for the dinner.

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Me: Good evening, Ma. You're looking beautiful.

Makhulu: Hello, child and thank you. I'm glad to see my little girl had fun.

Chulu: I did, makkhulu.

Makhulu: You look tired too. I'm guessing you'll sleep soon.
(Chulu shook her head)

Me: I'll leave you ladies to get ready for your evening.

Othu: Thank you for the lovely day and for helping me this morning.

Me: You're welcome. Chulu, remember what we spoke about right? (she smiled)

Chulu: Yes, uncle Craig. (I kissed her cheek and O's)

Me: I'll be off then.

Makhulu: Why does everyone get a kiss and not me? (we all laughed)

Me: I'm sorry, ma. (I kissed her cheek and she smiled)

Makhulu: Go well, my boy. (she patted my hand)

Othu: I'll walk you out. Chulu, I'll come bath you now, bhabha. I'll be right back.

Makhulu: Clay, I've been thinking my son. Would you like an African name? Something like Anathi, Mondli or so.

Othu: Ma, haa no. We spoke about this. (I laughed)

Me: An extra name won't hurt, Ma. I do like being called Clay by you though. (she laughed)

Othu: Let's go, Craig. We still have to get ready to go. (she pushed me out and I laughed)

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I said goodbye again and we walked out. O was so embarrassed by her granny's suggestion but I really don't mind. She got into the car with me and we shared the sweetest and longest kiss ever. She thanked me again and got out of the car. I'm hoping there won't be any drama that will bother her at Langa's. I drove off so she'd think I'm gone but I'm just waiting to follow

behind the taxi they will get. I'll be a stalker for now until my protection plan is full proof. It'll be exhausting but they are worth it.

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#LANGA

My mother found out that I'm into men when she caught Ian and I in a compromising position in my office. I still remember the look on her face. I honestly thought she's going to have a heart attack. She didn't even ask how long it's been going on. Her first concern was what my dad would do should he find out. She then suggested a priest to pray for me. As always I didn't stand my ground. I just did as told like the good boy that I am. Ian said I'm not a man but a coward. He doesn't get it. My parents aren't as open minded and laid back as his. My dad would kill me. I'm hid heir after all. The company has been going through some trouble though and the directors aren't happy. My mom had their chef over to my place to cook for my future in laws and bride. I'll just have to keep pretence because that prayer and holy water did not help me. I still yearn to be with Ian. To share my life with him but that has to wait. The future of the Zweni empire lays on my shoulders. The house smelled amazing and I'm hoping Othu will join us. Makhulu said she's coming to meet the makoti. Hours went by and

everything was finally ready. The doorbell rang and I rushed to open. It's my mom. I love her but at times I resent her for giving me her cowardly characteristics. Othu is like my father. When they want something they most times go for it no matter what. Had she been a boy I'm sure my dad would have favoured her most. A part of me feels like he wishes that I was like that but he won't say it. Someone knocked and I went to open. Makhulu and Othu stood at the door. She's holding her daughter in her arms. I guess I should have expected that. I don't hate the child but my dad wants nothing to do with her so my mother and I stay away. I greeted them and let them in.

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Me: Hello, Chulu. (I smiled)

Chulu: Hello. (she said in a whisper)

Me: Your a shy one huh?

Makhulu: Had you been s decent enough uncle she would not be shy at all.

Me: Oh but why be so cruel, makhulu.

Makhulu: Says those who can't handle the truth. Are going to let us stand in your doorway all night?

Mama: Oh you came. The Yende's age going to love seeing us united and together. Hello, Chulu.

Othu: I wonder how you guys manage to pretend so much?

Makhulu: Yhu you're asking the king and queen of pretending. This one is willing to pretend to be happy in a loveless marriage all his life. (they laughed and I looked down)

Mama: If you two aren't going to behave maybe it's best in go.

Makhulu: Oh stop it. I'm sure some humour will come in handy tonight. I foresee awkward moments.

Me: There won't be. We know the Yende's. It's just their daughter I'm yet to meet.

Othu: Langa

a word in private please.

Me: Okay. (we stood aside)

Othu: Did you know that Tata is in a financial crisis? (I cleared my throat)

Me: The company is but he is not.

Othu: Well that little he now has in his account will be used to pay off his debt so he is. Did you know this and didn't say anything? You even congratulated me knowing fully well that I'd be signing up for a life long inherited debt. Why would you do that? I have kept quiet about you being gay but you can't even warn me about this? I'm hurt.

Me: I'm sorry but you know I'm afraid of the man. Had I warned you he would have known it's me. Who told you? It's not public news yet.

Othu: Someone who cares more about me than my own blood. I'm done with all of you. Even if he manages to revive the company again I want nothing of it. You people are rotten. Here I am supporting you but you won't do anything for me. After this I'm done with you.

Me: I'm sor...

Mama: Come, Langa before you say too much.

Me: She knows already. (mama looked at me)

Mama: Othu, I beg you to keep this quiet. If those people know about his curse...

Othu: What curse? Your son is gay! So what? (she cut mom short)

Mama: Keep it quiet. We need the Yende's now. Your father is about to lose everything and we will be out on the street. You even had the audacity to get money from him. It was money out aside to pay some of his many debts. Billions of rands of debt. (she started to cry)

Me: Don't worry, Mama. I won't disappoint you.

Othu: They are selling you. You are nothing but an investment to them.

Mama: At least he's willing to save his family. Unlike you who took and took instead.

Othu: I can't believe that I left money when I could have taken everything. I left it so that you won't struggle, Mama. You people are so ungrateful.

Me: Othu, we're sorry but we are just desperate.

Othu: Mxm. Who accumulates so much debt anyways? What type of life do you guys lead? uTata has money to pay contract killers but refuses to settle debts. I hope you all go to jail so sense would be knocked into your heads. I thank God for the day he brought Dr Flinch in my life. I would now have carried the burden of a debt that I don't know anything about.

Mama: I actually care about you, Othu. I'm sorry your father did that. I tried to stop him.

Othu: If you did I'd have gotten the warning call from you or Langa but I didn't. Let's just get this night over with. I want to see the girl who will imprison herself by marrying you. Does she know that she's just an ATM?

Mama: We are building an alliance between the two families.

Othu: How will they react if they found out that the Zweni family is weak and need this marriage to gain strength? Better yet, how will they react if they find that their son in law actually prefers to kiss other men?

Me: Othu, please. (I pleaded)

Othu: You are all sick. I just want this over with and take my gran and daughter home. (she walked out)

Mama: Why did you tell her that we are on the brink of bankruptcy?

Me: Didn't you hear the part where she said she was told by someone else? Let's just hope that she keeps quiet.

Mama: She's angry at us for many reasons so she might just spite us. Damn Kumkani for gambling with our money. We need to make sure you get married soon and in community of property. You are our only hope, my boy. (she kissed me)

Me: I know.

Mama: I can't believe Ian seduced you. I'm sure he got you love potion. I've always known he is bad. I'm sure the priest casted out all of what he fed you. Now you can focus on making this marriage work. (I looked down)

Me: Yeah, he seduced me. (I said softly)

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The two of us went to join the others. I hope Othu has not told makhulu all that she knows. The old woman doesn't have filter. The doorbell rang and I knew it's our guests of honour. I suddenly felt nervous. Mama went to open and came in with Mr, Mrs, Miss Yende. She's a beautiful woman. We greeted and said introductions. I offered them drinks and we all sat.

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Mr Yende: Great house you have here, Zweni.

Me: Thank you, sir.

Mrs Yende: How is your father doing?

Me: They are still trying to find him a donor but he is stable for now.

Mr Yende: That's good. What do you do, Mrs Zweni?

Othu: Oh I'm a teacher. Foundation phase. (he smiled)

Mr Yende: That is wonderful. Hopefully soon the government will give our teachers that well deserved salary hike. (he laughed)

Othu: I doubt that will happen but I teach because I love it.

Mr Yende: So does my son. He teaches at high school level though.

Mama: And weren't you disappointed that he didn't follow in your footsteps. We were very disappointed in Othu.

Mrs Yende: No, we are proud of our boy. Teachers are important.

Mama: Uhm, ye...yes you're right. (I could see she's embarrassed)

Me: May we go sit around the dinning table? The food is ready.

Mr Yende: Oh yes. (he smiled)

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We all stood and went to sit down. It seems they are more impressed with Othu than me. The help served the food and we all started to eat.

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Makhulu: Are you always this quiet, Sibongile?

Sibo: Oh, yes I'm not much of a talker, mama. (she spoke softly)

Othu: You must give me your number. Since we are going to be family soon we might as well get to know each other.

Sibo: I'd like that.

Makhulu: What do you do, my girl?

Sibo: I'm a physiotherapist.

Mr Yende: And a very good one at that. I foresee a great union between the two families. Myself and Zweni have been planning this for a long time.

Othu: I'm sure it will be a very strong union. The love will follow. (she faked a smile and looked at me)

Me: I believe that it will.

Mama: It must. We need grandchildren.

Makhulu: You're lucky. You have one already. (she said sarcastically)

Mama: Yeah. (she said softly)

Mr Yende: Are you married, Othu?

Othu: No, sir.

Mr Yende: I think you and my son will have a lot in common. Maybe you must meet.

Othu: No thank you if you're trying to hook us up. I'm in a relationship and happy.

Mrs Yende: But not married yet. (they laughed)

Mama: Uhm, we can talk about Othu some other time. Tonight is about Sibongile and Langa. (she smiled) I think we must get them married as soon as possible. I mean this has been something that we've been planning for a while now.

Mrs Yende: I agree.

Makhulu: My girl, are you happy yo be married to a man you don't love? Langa could be a serial killer for all you know.

Mama: Ma Zweni. (she said in a stern voice)

Makhulu: I'm just asking.

Sibo: I actually am happy, Ma. I look forward to knowing Langa better.

Othu: I wonder what revelations will come to light?

Me: I'm a pretty straight forward guy.

Othu: Straight? (I looked at her)

Mama: This chicken tastes lovely.

Mrs Yende: It does indeed.

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We continued to enjoy our dinner and there were indeed awkward moments. I wish Tata was here to handle everything but he has chosen to trust me with this so I can't mess up. We finished and had a coffee afterwards. Chulu was sleeping on the couch. Othu would not take her to bed. I guess she doesn't trust us. I saw Othu and Sibongile laughing a few times when having their private conversations. I finally got her aside.

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Me: Please don't tell anyone.

Othu: I don't owe you, your mom and especially not your dad. You failed to have my back so don't expect me to have yours. The Yendes even like me. (she smiled)

Me: Othu, please. This is for our family.

Othu: Like I've said. I don't owe you a thing. I like Sibongile. We will meet up some time. I've got so much to tell her about our family. (she walked away)

Sibo: You two look close. (I smiled)

Me: We are. She's my everything. So do you agree to get married sooner rather than later?

Sibo: Yes but let's wait a few weeks to get to know each other. I still have to settle well here in Cape Town.

Me: I can show you around.

Sibo: I'd like that. Othu also offered.

Me: She's a single mom so I doubt she'll have time. Tell me more about yourself.

Sibo: There's not much to tell.

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She smiled and told me about herself. She's a typical good girl. I hope she won't be as boring when we are married. Ian is lively

so she must show some excitement. I've had sex with women before so that won't be an issue even if it's just to make babies. The dinner went well. Othu and her family didn't stay for dessert. I don't know what she'll do with the information she has but I'm hoping she'll forgive me and keep quiet. If she doesn't we are as good as bankrupt and homeless. I have to make sure the Yendes don't find out about our debt problems until after wedding. They are our only hope. Marrying their rich daughter in community of property mean that I'll be rich again too since I'll be entitled to what's hers. I'll pay my father's debts and make sure we are good again. All I need to do is make sure that I'm not a closet gay who is marrying their daughter for money. I can't mess this up. I can't let my dad down and be a disappointment to him.

OTHU

A few days have passed and I have also gone back to work. I have received warm hugs and beautiful hand cards from my learners on the first day of my return. Moments like those remind me why I chose this career. Being a teacher is so fulfilling. Craig is still the one taking us to school because I'm still afraid to drive. I feel so weak for letting that incident control my life so much. We still have to get to self defence lessons because Craig and I have both been so busy. He's been so amazing and I still can't believe that he is my partner. The man has stolen my heart and I don't want it back. Chulu has been so protective of her gift. My baby has been so responsible with it. Not once have we seen her play with it. I've told makhulu about the money and she's just happy that I didn't go on an expensive shopping spree or spent it on useless things. I have taken her out for a spa date though and she enjoyed it. I also bought her a new sewing machine since hers is at her home. Sitting at home and doing nothing was starting to get to her so at least not she'll keep busy if she wants. Today is a Saturday and I woke up with the most painful headache ever. It felt as if someone was banging my brain with a hammer. I checked the time on my phone and it's 3:45am. I sat up slowly hoping that the pain would stop but it didn't. What's going on?

I hardly get sick. I decided to go to the kitchen and take some painkillers. I slowly stood and dragged my feet to the kitchen. I had to stand mid way and balance on the passage wall because I suddenly felt dizzy. I felt someone brush my back and I jumped out of fright. It's makhulu and she held my waist and led me to one of the kitchen chairs. I slowly sat down. Well that didn't last long because I suddenly had the urge to throw up. I was too slow and I threw up on the floor. Makhulu started to panic but I told her that I'm fine. I wanted to stand and clean up my mess but she offered to do it. I sat and watched as she did it and felt so bad. She finally finished and made me some rooibos tea.

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Me: I'm sorry that you had to do that, Ma. (I said softly)

Makhulu: I was a nurse, nunu so I've seen and cleaned up much worse. My child's vomit will not kill me. What's wrong?

Me: I was woken up with a terrible headache. I wanted to take some pain killers but I got dizzy on my way back here. (she put her hand on my forehead)

Makhulu: You do feel slightly hotter than usual. Should I call an ambulance?

Me: It's just a head pain, Ma. I'll be fine after I've drank the pills.

Makhulu: Sometimes it's better to be sure it's nothing serious. Many have lost their lives just thinking it's just a silly headache. Let's call Clay and ask him to drive you to the emergency room.

Me: Mama, you make it sound as if I have a brain tumour or something. (I laughed but she didn't)

Makhulu: Don't joke like that. Othu?

Me: Mmm.

Makhulu: Uhm, my nunu do you want to tell me something? (I looked at her)

Me: Such as?

Makhulu: Anything, you know you can tell anything.

Me: I know, Ma but I've got nothing to tell you now.

Makhulu: If you and Clay have uhm, you know...(I looked at her)

Me: Know what?

Makhulu: If you two have come together sexually and you got a bit irresponsible...(I finally got her)

Me: No, ma. I'm not pregnant. Craig and I haven't done anything of that sort. I haven't done it with anyone.

Makhulu: Okay then it's not pregnancy. You know I've never had a problem with talking about sex with other young people

and giving advice since it was a part of my work once but I still struggle to communicate with you about it. (we both laughed)

Me: I understand. Let me have those pills so we can go back to bed.

Makhulu: If you're not feeling better soon I'll carry you to hospital myself. (I laughed)

Me: That would be nice but I'd never risk breaking your bones. I want you to live until age two hundred. (she laughed)

Makhulu: That is just cruel. Imagine how I'd be. I'd just be a burden to you. That's if you'll still be alive that is. (we laughed)

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She went to get me the pills and I took them and finished my tea. She's looking at me with eyes filled with worry but I understand that it's not nice to see your child sick. A parent always just wants to take their child's sickness to themselves. That's how I feel when Chulu is sick. I can't believe that she thought I'm pregnant though. I'm sure it's just a bug or something. After a while my head felt much better and I started to feel sleepy again. We went back to bed and I finally was able to sleep peacefully until the sun came up. I need the rest because I have a busy day ahead. I'm meeting up with my girls for breakfast. Have a lunch date with makhulu and Chulu and then later I'll be spending time with Craig. I woke up feeling

much better than a few hours ago. I showered and got myself ready for the day. I found my flatmates eating their breakfast already.

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Me: I hope you two aren't going to eat a lot because you'll need a big appetite for the burgers we'll be eating later on.

Makhulu: Leave the burgers. How are you feeling now?

Chulu: Mommy, are you sick? (I kissed her cheek)

Me: I was earlier on but I'm fine now, bhabha. Do you still want to have those cornrows done later on?

Chulu: Yes, please.

Makhulu: Why take her to a salon when I can do it? I'll wash her hair and do it.

Chulu: I don't want them all backward, Makhulu.

Me: She wants this style, Ma. (I showed her a picture)

Makhulu: That's very easy. I'm a woman of many talents. (I laughed)

Me: I know you are. (I hugged her)

Makhulu: Othu, remember deacon Funda?

Me: I see the man almost every Sunday, Ma so yes of course. What about him? Oh no don't tell me he is dead.

Makhulu: Why would you think that? Just because a person is old it doesn't mean that they are dying.

Me: You're right, Ma. I'm sorry. What about him? (she cleared her throat and looked at Chulu who wasn't bothered by us)

Makhulu: He is going to come and pick me up later. We are going to see a play. (I looked at her)

Me: Why?

Makhulu: Because we are old enough to go out and enjoy ourselves.

Me: But you're old. (she looked at me)

Makhulu: Exactly and that's why I'm not asking for permission but I just wanted to let you know. You'll have to take Chulu with you later or ask Clay to visit here for a chance. He doesn't have to be afraid of me.

Me: He just don't want to seem disrespectful. I want the deacon's number please and the details of the places he's taking you. (she laughed softly)

Makhulu: Yes, mommy.

Me: Are you two going on a date? Ma, you don't even know the man.

Makhulu: I've been going to your church whenever I'm visiting so I know him. We have been writing letters to each other and have become good friends over the years.

Me: I don't know how I feel about this. Why wasn't I told?

Makhulu: Nunu, I know that you've never seen me go out with a man friend because your grandfather died before you were even born so I understand why this shocks you but just because I'm old it doesn't mean I can't enjoy the company of friends at a nice place. I'm not saying I'm rushing off to marry him. You know what kind of man he is so I'm not going to be with a stranger. I'll give you all the details you want if that will ease your mind but please let me go and enjoy my golden years.

Me: Okay, ma. He had better bring you home safely. (she laughed)

Makhulu: He will, my baby. Are you okay with it?

Me: I guess, ma. It's just strange that's all. Don't worry I'll stay home with Chulu. I have to go now.

Chulu: Bye, mommy and don't forget to fetch us.

Me: You and makhulu will take a taxi and meet up with me.

Makhulu: I don't like that she gets into a car without her car seat, Othu. When will you drive your car again? In fact buy yourself a new one.

Me: We'll talk about it later. I love you.

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I kissed them both and rushed out making my way to my taxi. Maybe I must really buy me a new car. I got into the car and the guy drove off. I can't believe that makhulu has a date later on. Deacon Funda is looking all innocent yet he knows he is crushing on my gran. My phone rang and it's Vuyo, Yanda's man. I never get a call from him so I answered immediately because something might be wrong with Yandi.

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Me: Bhut Vuyo.

Vuyo: Hello, Othu. How are you?

Me: I'm good thank you and yourself?

Vuyo: I'm perfect thanks. I'm sure you're wondering why I'm calling you.

Me: Yes, is Yandi okay? (he laughed softly)

Vuyo: She is perfect. I know that you ladies have a breakfast date but could you please come to Smith jewellers? Do you know where it is?

Me: Yes I do. Are you okay? I hope you're not in trouble.

Vuyo: No but I desperately need your help. Please don't tell Yandi that we are meeting up.

Me: Why?

Vuyo: I want you to help me pick out the perfect engagement ring for Yandi. You are her best friend and you're the one I know can help. I have a idea of what she might like but I... (I cut him short by screaming so much)

Driver: Sisi, are you okay?

Me: My friend is getting engaged soon. I'm great. (I screamed more) Bhut

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stay put on on my way. (he laughed)

Vuyo: Thank you. (I dropped the call)

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Oh my goodness! I'm so happy one would swear I'm the one who is about to get engaged. Yandi has always thought Vuyo would make a run for it someday but I'd tell her he's not that

type. I can't wait to say I told you so. He is good for her. He is her calm space. I couldn't choose a better man for my friend and the fact that he wants to make it forever is just such great news. The cab finally stopped, I paid and rushed out to where he is. I found him sitting and speaking to the sales lady. We greeted each other and I swear this man is the calmest person that I've ever had the pleasure to meet.

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Vuyo: Thank you so much for coming here first.

Me: I honestly wouldn't want to be anywhere else right now. I'm so happy for you two. (he let out that soft gentle laugh of his)

Vuyo: Well she still has to say yes first. I've been looking at a few options. Yandi is a calm person but has her dramatic moments so I was thinking about something simple with a bit of voom. (I laughed)

Me: Let's look for that something simple with a bit of voom then. When are you planning on popping the question?

Vuyo: Tonight and if you want you can come and witness it. Well you'll have to hide so that she won't get suspicious of course.

Me: So it's a public engagement?

Vuyo: Yeah unless you think she'll hate that.

Me: She'll love it a lot. Just make sure it's not an overcrowded place. She likes attention and people but when she's put on the spot in front of too many people she panics and we don't want that.

Vuyo: I knew you'd be the best assistant. (we laughed)

Me: Let's go look at those that side. (we walked over)

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We checked out the options and they were all so beautiful. The sales lady was helpful in explaining the ring types to us. We both saw one ring and pointed at it at the same time and smiled at each other because we knew that's a Yandi ring. My friend is getting married soon and I'm overjoyed. He purchased the ring and it was put in a leather box for him. We also went to the restaurant he wishes to use and made all the preparations. I offered to pay for this bit as a congratulatory gift from me and Chulu. Vuyo thanked me and we parted ways. I found the ladies sitting already and I hugged all and sat.

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Zuko: We are about to have our second drinks. Where have you been? (I smiled)

Me: No where.

Yandi: And the smile? You've been grinning since you've sat down.

Me: I'm happy.

Poppy: That man must be giving it to you good. I would know.
(my mood suddenly changed)

Me: Look, Poppy I know that I said I've let everything slide and I know that's you've done the deed with Craig but I ask that you not speak about it. I'm in a relationship with this man so please respect me. I don't want to hear you speak about your time with him.

Poppy: What happened to not being to serious about it and laughing it off? (she smiled).

Licia: I agree with Othu, Pops. Respect her because he's her boyfriend and not an ex.

Poppy: Okay geez I've stopped.

Yandi: So what has you so happy.

Me: It's nothing. Are you all ready to oder?

Poppy: I suddenly feel like I've spoiled the mood. Will I be expected to apologise every time we meet?

Zuko: Who asked you to apologise? She was just telling you that you speaking about the details of that time makes her uncomfortable.

Poppy: Now you're ganging up on me? Othu, I didn't go and snatch your man from you. He called and I went to his place. We had great sex. So what? Neither of us knew that we both know you. (she became defensive)

Yandi: Now you can say you've spoiled the mood. Let's just eat yho.

Poppy: I just want us to bring all hard feelings to light so we can deal with it.

Me: I don't have any but I don't like listening to you speak about the sex you've had with Craig that's it. Why are you becoming so defensive?

Poppy: I'm not and I'm sorry.

Me: That's okay because I'm too happy to have anything ruin that. I got the best news today and no, I'm not sharing. (they laughed)

Yandi: You're cruel. (I laughed)

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We ordered our food and had a great talk. Licia has started with her hormone injections. Zuko is up for a promotion at work.

Yandi says there's nothing new in her life but I know that will change soon. Poppy is just Poppy. Living her life to the fullest. She asked me to not make things between us awkward but she does that exact thing. I do hope she doesn't have any feelings for Craig. The breakfast date was amazing. Hours went by and Makhulu called saying that she and Chulu are on their way to meet up with me. I made sure I didn't have a heavy breakfast because I crave for a burger for real. They finally joined me after a while and my jaw dropped to the ground when I saw how adorable my baby looked. Makhulu plaited her hair even better than the girl on the picture. Why am I even surprised because she used to do my hair when I was a child. I just thought she'd lost her touch after years of not touching other people's hair. We first went to do some clothing shopping. Soon I'll have to buy Chulu's uniform for next year and I'm so excited about that. We let Chulu enjoy the kiddies cars in the mall. We later went and enjoyed that lunch. We had an amazing day. Makhulu wanted to go and buy a gift for her date tonight. She got him that little flower pin for his jacket. Are they dating? I'm even afraid to ask her because she's my elder. How would I even begin such a topic? We went past the street markets bought a few handmade items as well. I called Craig while Chulu and makhulu checked out some street dancers. I told him that we have to take Chulu out with us since Makhulu has plans of her own. He didn't have a problem with it. Hours went by

and we went home to take a short nap before we go about our businesses later this evening. We woke up after a while and showered and got ready. Makhulu looked all kinds of beautiful and young in her new dress. Craig arrived first and greeted us.

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Craig: You ladies look so beautiful. Three generations of beautiful Zweni woman. (we smiled)

Makhulu: Thank you, my boy. You three have a great night. Othu, don't forget your key.

Me: We are going to wait for the deacon to come get you. I want to see what car he's driving so that I'll know should anything happen.

Craig: I heard about your evening out. I hope this gentleman behaves well. (makhulu laughed)

Makhulu: He is a kind man.

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There was a soft knock and makhulu insisted on opening the door herself. It's her date. A tall man with pure white hair appeared. I see Mr Funda almost every Sunday but I've never had him over at my place and the fact that he's here to take my gran out makes it even weirder. He greeted us all and kissed makhulu's hand. Why my gran? Couldn't he choose someone

else's gran? He gave her a flower bracelet and I almost laughed. They are actually fresh flowers. She pinned the pin on his jacket and I felt as if I'm watching those old movies where the two teens go on their prom night. I can't believe that this is happening. Makhulu took her bag, put her arm around his and they wished us a good evening. We also did the same. I walked out to see what car he has come with. It's a vintage car and it was so shiny. He opened the door for her and went around to his side and the car slowly moved out. Am I watching a movie where my granny is starring in? It feel like that.

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Craig: Wow, I think that I need to ask the man for some tips. He got her a fresh flower bracelet and picked her up in a rare vintage car. (he laughed)

Me: I'm not sure I like it much.

Craig: Someone doesn't want to share her granny. (we both laughed)

Chulu: Mommy, can I please have a flower like makhulu's?

Me: I don't even know where it's bought, my baby.

Chulu: I'll ask makhulu to give me hers when she no longer uses it. It's pretty.

Me: It is. Do you think she'll be fine?

Craig: She's happy. She might not say it but I'm sure she wishes to have mature conversations at times about the good old days. She'll be more than fine.

Me: Do you think he's her boyfriend? (I whispered and he laughed)

Craig: Maybe. (he whispered back)

Chulu: When are we going? (Craig picked her up)

Craig: Now. (he kissed her cheek)

Me: Yes because I don't want to miss the big moment.

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I took my bag and activated the security system and off we went. I've decided to not worry too much about Makhulu. She's a grown woman and Mr Funda is a kind man. We drove off to the restaurant and it was nice and cosy. We found a hidden table so that we won't be seen. Later on Vuyo and Yandi made their way in. They are looking so beautiful. Chulu was excited to see aunt Yandi but I had to tell her that she can't go to her just yet. We ordered our drinks and enjoyed our moment while I waited for the big moment. After a while I saw Vuyo stand up and the feeling of excitement that I felt was just out of this world. He went on one knee and I saw that Yandi was confused. Everyone looked over at their table with great admiration. He finally popped the question and she was crying non stop until

she finally said yes repeatedly. She knelt down, hugged and kissed him. I was also crying. He finally slid the ring into her finger. A moment of pure perfection. We waited for the right moment to go over to their table and congratulate them. Yandi screamed and waved her beautiful ring when she saw me.

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Yandi: I'm going to be Mrs Gumede soon, friend. (we hugged)

Vuyo: She knows because she helped me pick out the ring this morning. (he laughed)

Yandi: So that's why your were late and all smiles. You could at least have given me a warning.

Me: Never and spoil the surprise?

Yandi: Chulu, would you like to be my flower girl? I can't think of a better person to fill that role. (Chulu smiled)

Chulu: Yes, aunt Yandi.

Yandi: Oh my word I'm all over the place. We even forgot that the men have never met. Baby, this is Craig Knights and Craig this is Vuyo Gumede my boyfriend.

Craig: You mean fiance. (we all laughed and they shook hands)

Vuyo: Good to meet you, man.

Craig: Likewise, Vuyo and congratulations. You are a lucky man.

Vuyo: I am indeed. (he kissed Yandi)

Me: I'm so happy to have witnessed this moment.

Congratulations once again guys. You two look beautiful. We will now leave you two alone to enjoy your evening. (I hugged Yandi)

Yandi: Thank you for helping him choose and I love it so much. You two know me so well. Have a lovely evening.

Craig: Vuyo we must grab a beer some day and celebrate properly.

Vuyo: I don't drink.

Craig: We'll have juice then. (they laughed and shook hands)

Chulu: Am I really going to be a flower girl? (we laughed)

Yandi: Yes, baby. (she kissed Chulu's cheek)

Me: We will discuss that some other time. Let's let aunt Yandi and uncle Vuyo enjoy their night.

Chulu: Yes. (she smiled)

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We congratulated the love birds again and left them to enjoy their evening. We ate and Chulu started to feel sleepy so we called it a night. We finally got to my apartment and Craig went to put Chulu in her bed. I took off her jean and jacket so she'd

be comfortable. I tucked her in and kissed her. I went to join Craig in the lounge and kissed him. I laid on top of him and looked at him.

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Craig: You look beautiful.

Me: Thank you, baby. (I kissed him)

Craig: I think I just got schooled today on how to be more romantic.

Me: I love you as you are, Craig. You're romantic in your own little way. (he smiled)

Craig: Let's say we are at that point where we are ready to get married. What type of proposal would you like?

Me: One where it's just you and I. I don't like the idea of it being done publically.

Craig: I'm not a fan of having all attention on me either but tonight was beautiful. I hope they get blessed with many years together.

Me: I hope so too. You still need to give me those self defence lessons.

Craig: You can go and change and we can start now.

Me: Really? (he nodded)

Craig: As long as we keep it quiet and not wait up the princess.

Me: Okay. (I stood)

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I rushed to my room and changed to comfortable clothes. I'm hoping that we won't wake Chulu up. Once I finished I went back to the lounge and found Craig in his vest. I suddenly felt turned on by the sight of him. He started to show me some warm ups. Will they even be needed? I don't think a criminal will give me a chance to warm up. We finished that and he showed me the basics and I actually enjoyed it but he said that I'm too soft. He told me to imagine someone taking Chulu while the other held me from my back. He held me from behind pretending to be an attacker and I don't know what happened but it felt as if someone else was in control of my body. I elbowed him hard and somehow managed to twist his arm and got him on the floor and wrapped my legs around his neck strangling him. "O, loosen the grip baby", he shouted. He had to repeat it and I finally did.

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Craig: Where did that come from? I didn't show you that.

Me: Don't know. (I said softly)

Craig: Have your had lessons before, baby because that was impressive and not something that a person learns within a few minutes. For a second there I was actually scared.

Me: It felt as if I'm not in control of my own body, Craig. I pictured the scenario and I just had to protect Chulu at all costs. I don't know what happened. (I sat down and he knelt in front of me)

Craig: Let's take a break for now. Maybe it was just the adrenaline rush. I like it though. If I had been an attacker I'd either have been unconscious or dead by now because your leg grip was strong. (I laughed)

Me: Stop playing with me. Are you going to sleep over?

Craig: And risk doing the walk of shame tomorrow morning?

Me: You'll get up early befor makhulu. She's usually up by 6am. So by 5am you must make sure you're out. She is a lite sleeper though because she heard when I was sick this morning.

Craig: Sick?

Me: I had a headache but I'm fine now.

Craig: Why didn't you tell me? Maybe you need to see a doctor.

Me: I'm okay now. (I kissed him) Baby, what if I have the same disorder as Ndalo? I mea...

Craig: You don't, O. You imagined an unpleasant moment and you reacted. The mind is a powerful thing. Or maybe you have a superpower. (we both laughed)

Me: Stop being silly. Do you think we should stay up and wait for makhulu?

Craig: She won't like that much and my sleepover must be kept secret remember.

Me: Yeah, you're right. Let's go to bed. It's been a long day.

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He carried me to my room and closed the door behind him. We kissed and ended up on the bed. He tickled me unexpectedly and I laughed so much. We laid in bed and talked about everything and decided to go and have an HIV test together next weekend. The way this man makes me feel when he touches me makes me wonder if I'll be able to keep our kisses and cuddles innocent. Maybe it's time we took the relationship to the next level. But what if I regret it? I heard some fiddling at the main door so I went to check because Craig can't since we want to keep his presence secret. Makhulu locked the door and I pretended to go and drink water so that she doesn't think I've been waiting up. She said goodnight to me with a big smile on her face. I switched the lights off and made my way back to the room again. I found Craig in bed already so I took my clothes off

and wore my night dress and joined him. I love being in his arms so much. It's been a good day and it seems love was what fuelled it. I'm still a bit uneasy about Poppy's reaction though. The last thing I want is for one of my friends to crush on my man. Craig and I spoke, kissed, cuddled and spoke some more. I know this is my place but I can't have my granny know he is here. It's all exciting though. I'll hear about Makhulu's day tomorrow. I'll never look at deacon Funda the same way again. I wonder if he and makhulu wink at each other at church when no one is looking? Why am I even thinking about this? What do old people in their seventies do in new relationships? I had so many questions and what sucks is that I'll never bring myself to ask makhulu. Chulu said she prayed for a father and Craig showed up. Did my little girl pray for a grandfather too?

These past few days have been the best for the Zweni women. Othu and Craig's relationship has been going from strength to strength. Makhulu has also been seeing her good friend Deacon Funda a bit more. Chulu has never felt so much happiness in her life. God has answered her prayers and now she goes to school with her mommy and uncle Craig. She likes having a father figure around and it is as perfect as she had always imagined it to be. She's also glad to see the marks on her mommy's neck have gone away. Makhulu told her that lots of mosquito's have bitten her mommy's neck. She never liked mosquito's and now she knows why. Today is a school day so as usual she felt her mother or makhulu shake her gently. She opened her eyes and saw her mommy smiling at her. She rubbed her eyes with her hands but her Othu stopped her because she feared they might get red and irritable. Othu kissed Chulu's cheek and greeted her. To Chulu this woman has always been her mom. She has been told that she had another mommy before but she has no memory of it what so ever. Othu has showed her pictures of Tatiana but to her mommy is and will always be Othunyiweyo. She got up and made her own bed as her mom taught her. She's getting better at a lot of things including washing dishes. She honestly just like having her hands in warm, soapy water. Othunyiweyo helped her daughter get ready for the day and dressed her in a nice dress since it's a

sunny morning. Chulu knows that her mom is ready already because she gets herself ready before waking her up and she too is wearing a dress. She likes matching with her mom. They made their way to the kitchen where makhulu was busy packing their lunch. Her mom prepared cereal for her and she ate leaving enough milk in the bowl so she could dip the bowl and sip the chocolate milk. When they were finished with everything they stood and made their way out. Uncle Craig was waiting for them already and this is one of her favourite moments of her day. He plays Disney movie movies for her and has now even started to sing along with her on some songs. She suddenly realised that she forgot her whistle. She let go of her mother's hand and rushed up to the apartment again. Othu called out behind her but she just ran up. Uncle Craig said she must always have it with her and that's what she's planning to do. He like mommy and makhulu have become a hero in her eyes. Makhulu opened the security gate and she rushed to her room and put the whistle over her head and around her neck and tucked it into her dress. She waved goodbye to makhulu again and found her mom about to enter the apartment looking confused.

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Othu: Did you need to use the bathroom, bhabha?

Chulu: No, we forgot my whistle, mommy. (Othu smiled)

Othu: I'm glad you remembered it. Come let's go before we make uncle Craig late for his meeting.

Makhulu: Othu, you don't have a fear for cars. You have a fear of being in that one you own so sell it and gift yourself with a new one. You've had that one for years now. Buying a car won't make you broke, baby.

Othu: You're right, ma. I'll ask Craig to help me sell that one. We are late. Love you.

Chulu: Love you, makhulu. (they rushed off)

Makhulu: Have a great day. I love you too. (she shouted behind them and waved at Craig who waved back)

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Makhulu stepped away from the railing and went inside. She really likes having this security gate. Now she can let fresh air in through the door and not have to worry about someone just walking in. She still thinks that Othu is not comfortable with her being friends with Thami, known as deacon to most. She enjoys his company a lot. They have the sort of conversations that Othu won't want. They have a lot in common. They are both Christians. They enjoy theater plays especially of African stories. They are the same age. The only difference is that Thami has a big family with eight children, ten grandchildren and great grandchildren. The other thing that they have in common is

that their late partners both died of cancer. They can talk about how much it hurt them to go through that and to have someone understand something she's been through is nice. Hopefully Kumkani will understand that she's not trying to replace his father the day she tells him that she has met someone. She went to put on her gospel music and did her chores. Meanwhile in the car Othu wanted to listen to the radio but Chulu wanted her princess music. Craig took Chulu's side and hoped O would forgive him. Chulu was singing along to her music while Othu sat looking annoyed and the setting made Craig laugh. He could get used to this. He put his hand on O's thigh and brushed it gently. She looked at him and smiled. This woman is so beautiful, he thought to himself.

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Craig: Chulu, tomorrow we are playing mommy's radio show, right?

Chulu: Okay, I like the songs they play there too. (the adults laughed)

Othu: You even know the Disney music? (she looked at Craig)

Craig: Some songs are actually nice. They remind me of when we used to do ballroom dancing. (Othu laughed)

Othu: That was so long ago. I actually continued after I started to walk again but stopped after a few months. I just could not connect with my other dance partners as I did with you.

Craig: I know what you mean. Do you still remember the waltz we self choreographed? (they laughed)

Othu: I do and I still know the steps because we did say the one who gets married first can have it as their first dance with their wife/husband. (we laughed)

Craig: We have great memories, O. I also remember the steps actually because I plan on getting married first so sorry for you, lady. (they laughed)

Othu: Or if we get married to each other than we can both use it. (she said without thinking and there was silence). I'm sorry, Craig. I was thinking out loud I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable. (she looked down and he smiled)

Craig: I'm not uncomfortable. Actually I was thinking the exact same thing but I didn't have the guts to say it out loud. I'm glad I didn't because it sounded much better coming from you. I love you. (he kissed her hand)

Othu: I love you too. Now stop getting all mushy on me and focus on the road ahead. (he laughed)

Craig: Yes mam. Chulu did you know that your mommy is a good dancer?

Chulu: That's nice. I never seen mommy dance. (she smiled)

Craig: Shame on you for hiding your gift from the child, O. I'll make sure you see her dance someday okay.

Chulu: Okay. (she smiled)

Craig: What do you want to be when you grow up?

Chulu: A chef.

Othu: I thought it's a Miss South Africa.

Chulu: That too but I like helping you make food too, mommy.

Craig: You can be both and so much more. And we are here! I miss you girls already.

Chulu: But we are still with you. (Craig laughed)

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A part of Craig wishes that O would take her time with driving herself again because he loves these morning drives. Chulu's car seat is now permanently in his car and he loves it. But he also knows that it's important for his lady to regain her power and get behind the wheel again. O has not wanted to start the self defence lessons again because she fears what happened that night might happen again. Craig doesn't mind what happened. In fact he hoped it was not a once off. She really caught him off guard that night. Craig helped them carry their

stuff and they went to Chulu's class first and kissed her goodbye. He gave O her bags and kissed her cheek before rushing to his car. He watched his lady walk into the staff room and drove off. He also went about his business of boring meetings. He doesn't need the money but it keeps him busy and he likes that he has flexible hours. And speaking about flexible hours he suddenly got an idea. He made a quick stop at one of the costume shops and chose a batman costume for himself and a princess dress in Othu's size with a little mask. He paid for the order and promised to return it in one piece. He drove back to Chulu's school before her class ends and went to the principle and made a few arrangements. The principle welcomed his idea and went to Chulu's teacher who also didn't have a problem with it. In fact she loved the idea of having her class entertained before they go their separate ways. Craig rushed to O's class, knocked and she looked to see who it was. She was surprised to see him. Her learners were busy so she quietly walked to the door. He knew kissing her is not an option so he will just get to the point.

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Craig: So I'm here to see if you were speaking the truth when you said you still remembered our dance.

Othu: I'm at work, baby. (she laughed softly)

Craig: I have included your learners. So take this and go get changed. (he gave her the dress)

Othu: It's like a wedding dress. What's going on, Craig?

Craig: You are going to finally show Chulu that you can dance. Well that we can because I'll be your partner like old times. (he smiled)

Othu: Love bu...

Craig: I already made arrangements. Chulu and her class are waiting.

Othu: We need more room for that. Why don't we just wait until later tonight?

Craig: Now I have to disappoint Chulu. (he sighed and looked down)

Othu: Emotional blackmail? Really?(she laughed)

Craig: Is it working?

Othu: I've got a class, silly man. (they laughed)

Craig: I'm sure that they watch cartoons too. Good morning, class. I'm Mr Knights, a friend of your teacher. Would you kids like to see your teacher dance?

Them: Yes!!! (they all shouted in excitement)

Othu: Say no, guys. (she said to her class but they shook their heads laughing)

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Othu gave Craig a look and he just lifted his shoulder and laughed. She knew that she doesn't have a choice. So she watched as Craig led her class to Chulu's one. She went to the staff restrooms and changed. The dress is pink. Of ask colours he had to go with pink she thought. It's like a ball like wedding gown only with too much glitter. She remembers their dance because it has always been special to her and after he left their old dance instructor gave her a video of the time they performed it. She has never showed it to him though. She put on the pink and silver mask and made her way out feeling so silly. Thank goodness all the teachers are in their classes. She stood outside the door and took a deep breath and saw someone in a batman costume approach. She immediately knew it's Craig. Is this man crazy? She laughed shyly. He stood in front of her and bowed.

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Othu: Craig, I'm actually nervous.

Craig: That's why your hero is here. Just make sure you don't step on the cape. (they laughed) You look beautiful.

Othu: Thank you and got look superhero like. (laughter again)

Craig: Shall we? (he extended his arms and she held his hand)

Othu: I can't believe I'm doing this.

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Craig put his mask on and the two of them walked in. The boys went crazy when they saw "batman" and the girls could not stop going on about how pretty "the princess" looks. Craig gave signal and the music started. It was the sound track of the cartoon Aladdin titled A Whole New World. It's not really the songs she'd choose for such a dance but they are just kids so they won't mind much. Batman Craig and Princess Othu started to dance. It suddenly took them both back to when they were just teenagers. The two even forgot that they weren't alone and got lost in the moment. It's not a perfect waltz but it's their waltz and that's what makes it better. Craig would sway Othu and reel her back into his arms. Goodness such a moment of perfection. Both wished that it could last forever. The dance finally came to an end and the two bowed before their audience. The space might be small but they made it work. The kids all clapped their hands. They both took off their masks and Chulu's eyes widened. She got up from her seat and ran forward to hug them. She has never felt so happy and special in her life. Her mommy and uncle Craig planned the biggest surprise ever. All the kids wanted to touch the exciting looking costumes. Craig thanked everyone and Othu's learners went

back to their class. Just when Othu thought Craig had outdone himself for one day the man got onto a huge black motorcycle. The little boys went crazy. "The Batmobile", most shouted. "Batman" rode off in style. Othu went to change and she must admit that she's never seen Chulu looking so happy in her entire life. Chulu was enjoying the attention her class gave her. Most saying that her parents are awesome. This was the best day of her life and she liked how her friends said her parents and not "your mommy and uncle Craig". Othu had difficulty calming her class's excitement after that so she decided to just have a fun discussion with them. She still can't believe that she did that.

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#CRAIG- CONTAINS SOME ADULT CONTENT!

The look on Chulu's face when she realised that it's us behind the masks was priceless. I have a spontaneous side and I hope that Othu won't have a problem with it. It feels good to be playful after years of only being serious and feared by many I'm finally living and not just existing and it feel freeing to say the least. I called a biker friend of mine and asked if he could borrow me his bike. When he heard why he came through for me because he's a father too. Am I a father now? When I watched Batman he had a motorbike he calls the batmobile so I

had to have that. I was glad to see it parked when we were done. My phone beeped and it's a text from O. "You're crazy but I love it", it read. I laughed to myself and drove off. I'll return the costumes tomorrow. I went about my day once again with a happy heart. I'm still worried that the agency will hear of my involvement in Wes's death but I can't let that cripple me. Hours passed and it was time to get the ladies from school. I parked outside and waited until they came out. I got out of the car and Chulu gave me a sweet hug. We all got into the car and drove off.

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Chulu: Mommy and uncle Craig, are you going to do that again?
(we laughed)

Othu: No, bhabha. I was ambushed and so no.

Chulu: I really loved it and so did my class. (she smiled)

Me: And that's all that matter. The fact that you enjoyed it.

Chulu: My class friends say I have cool parents. I can't wait to tell Makhulu. Mommy did you take the video from my teacher? I want to show it to her.

Othu: As if you'd have forgiven me had I not. I have it, baby.

Chulu: You looked so pretty in that dress. You are the most prettiest princess ever.

Othu: Thank you but next time I want to be a superhero too please. (I laughed)

Craig: That would be sexy.

Othu: I wish I had as much time on my hands as you do

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Mr Knights. I'm surprised that you even have some money. (I laughed)

Me: I'd never be able to take authority from a boss now.

Othu: Thank you for this, love. That smile on her face was worth doing it.

Me: It really is. So you don't mind having a crazy man. (she laughed)

Othu: It's actually exciting but don't go overboard. I'm a very safe person and think twice before doing something. You are the opposite of that.

Me: I'm the storm to your calm. (we laughed)

Othu: Yeah and it's refreshing. I have a video of the time we danced that dance for the first time by the way. I have to convert it to a DVD because video machines are no longer a thing.

Craig: I'd like to see it. Have a copy made for me please. Your accident happened two months after that. I remember you thought you'd never dance again. Honestly I thought the same thing.

Othu: Yeah but I'm glad I can. You've been back for a few months now but you never tried to find me. Did you fear that I'd still be in a wheelchair?

Me: I feared that my coming back into your life would not be good, O. When I came back I was in a dark place because of guilt. I still have it but I've learnt that it won't undo the past. I believed that there was no place for a cold hearted bastard f...

Chulu: Uncle Craig, you said a bad word. (she cut him short)

Me: Oh I'm sorry. What must I do to take it back?

Chulu: You can't take it back. You apologise and put money in the jar so that you'll think twice before doing it again. (we laughed)

Me: I can't believe you're six. How much must I put in?

Chulu: Two rand. (I pretended to be shocked)

Me: So much.

Chulu: Swearing is expensive, right mommy? (we laughed)

Othu: Yes, bhabha.

Me: Remind me to put it in the jar when we get you guys home.
Where do you get these parenting stuff?

Othu: Nanny TV shows. (I laughed)

Me: You're a wonderful mom, O. I think we must talk softly
because someone is listening. (she laughed)

Othu: True.

.

We finally reached their place and I watched as they walked up the stairs. Makhulu came down and came towards my car. Oh boy, I hope I'm not in trouble. She greeted and invited me to dinner tonight. It made me feel special. She'll be cooking stew and dumplings. I could feel my mouth water already. I accepted the invitations. I said goodbye until later. I went to see a guy who wants advice on a security system. I rarely take individuals as clients but we all want to feel safe so I went to help him. Security and tracking is what I know best well aside from aiming and shooting guns. Hours went by and I went home to get ready for the night. I finished and went to buy flowers for the ladies. I'm not the most romantic but I've seen how other men do it. I went to their apartment and greeted. They thanked me for the flowers. Is it too soon to honour makhulu with lobola for her child? I got offered a drink and sat down. Makhulu's date of the other night also joined. We had some small talk and all sat

around the table in the kitchen. O doesn't have a dining area.
More reason to get that beautiful house she dreams of.

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Funda: Oh Nomhle, it smells wonderful. Thank you for the invite. (makhulu smiled)

Makhulu: I'm famous for my stew where I live. Just ask Othu.

Othu: What do you do for a living, deacon?

Makhulu: Othu, you know the man. You see him every Sunday.

Othu: But we never speak. All I know is that he's a deacon.

Funda: I don't mind her asking, Nomhle. I'm a retired teacher. I still help the young ones with mathematics extra classes.

Makhulu: She's also a teacher.

Funda: I know (he laughed) She's one of the kindest young people in our church. Pity we never speak. I also want to apologise for not coming to ask for your permission first before taking your granny out. (I almost laughed)

Othu: You don't need to, sir.

Makhulu: He is just old fashioned. It's your house after all.

Othu: But it doesn't mean you need permission to have guests over, Ma.

Makhulu: Before I forget Flinch asked to meet up with us tomorrow afternoon. I said it's okay.

Othu: Okay. (she looked at me)

Chulu: Makhulu do you want to see the video again? (we laughed)

Makhulu: I've seen it five times already but I'll watch it again later. Thank you for making her day, Clay. (I smiled)

Me: It actually made my day as well. I haven't danced in years.

Chulu: My friends say I have the best parents. Nob of their mummies and daddies have done that. (she smiled)

Funda: Are you two going to get married soon? (we looked at each other and laughed a bit)

Me: I really won't mind making her Mrs Knights, sir.

Funda: An English surname? Is it safe to assume you're not South African?

Me: I am actually but my parents weren't. I'm still waiting for that African name, Ma. (we laughed)

Makhulu: Othu, said I must stop, my boy. (we laughed)

Me: Shame on you, Othunyiweyo. (laughter again)

Funda: What do you do young man? (he looked at me)

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I told him what I do and he wanted to know my qualifications. I was honest and said I had none. I only have my high school certificate. All else is street taught or rather secret agency taught. It was an amazing night and Makhulu is glowing. Chulu fell asleep after dinner and O went to put her down. The night came to an end and Mr Funda left. His lady walked him out of course. I took the opportunity to steal a well deserved kiss. Makhulu came in and we broke the kiss and stood like two naughty teens. She just laughed and offered to look after Chulu should we want to go out and be alone. She read my mind because I miss cuddling and doing it here is a bit uncomfortable. We said goodnight to her and Othu promised to be back soon. We decided against going out and went to my place. I kissed her the second we set foot inside. I've missed her so much. I went to get us some drinks. O was busy walking up and down looking at my place.

.

Othu: Is this massage oil? (she smelled the container)

Me: Yeah, went to some event and it was in the goody bag. You can have it if you like.

Othu: It smells great. Would you like a massage?

Me: Really? I'd love one, baby. Especially the back.

Othu: I saw some show on TV so I'm sure I'll do your back some justice. Get comfortable. I just need to wash my hands first. They feel sticky.

.

This woman is a god sent. I can't remember when last I had a massage. I took my shirt off and laid on my back on the bed. She joined me and got on top of me. She kissed me first innocently. I finally felt her soft hands on my shoulders and she was right in saying she's not bad. She ran her smooth thumbs over my spin and I felt like I was in another world. She went on and I even started to feel sleepy. Will she mind if I sleep? She suddenly instructed me to turn over. I guess I'll get a chest massage to. She kissed me so passionately and held my arms up. I was so lost in the moment that I realised that my hands are tied to the bed when she stopped. I opened my eyes to check if it's still her. For all I know I could be kidnapped. It was still her though.

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Me: What's going on? Where did you even get the handcuffs?

Othu: That drawer in your living room. Don't worry there's a key. We'll speak about why you have them later. (she kissed me)

Me: What is going on? (I said softly)

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She didn't answer but continued to kiss me. I've never been so confused and turned on by the unknown in my life. I felt her unbuckle my jeans. Did someone abduct my girlfriend and replace an identical alien in her place while I didn't notice? The pants were gone and my boxers followed. I was not surprised to see that my body reacted to all of this. I have so hard by the time she slid my shorts off. I watched her and wanted to see what she'll do next. She took the oil, put some in her hands and massaged my chest. The sensation was out of this world. She then put some more and the next spot she chose to massage was my manhood. Feeling her soft, warm hands on it sent a rush through my body that I've never imagined was even possible. I can't believe I'm getting a full body massage. Something I've never had before. My eyes closed as I enjoyed the moment. The fact that I could not touch her made it all just more intense. I looked at her and found her looking at me with a smile that's filled with passion and innocence. What the hell? I knew that I would not be able to hold on much longer. Where did she learn to do this? I felt a different sensation and realised that she's planting soft kisses on my manhood. I wanted to touch her so bad but all I could do was let out deep groans of pleasure. How could something so innocent feel more intense than the actual act of sex? I've never thought it's possible. She then continued to massage my inner thighs and I couldn't hold

off anymore. It drove me over the edge and I released and let out a deep groan. Damn! I looked at her and she laughed softly. She got up, went to the bathroom and came back with a towel. She cleaned me up and reached for her pocket for the key and freed me. I kissed her so passionately.

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Me: You're going to be the death of me. What was that? Where did you even learn to do that? Dammit, O I've never experienced such intensity and here I thought I'm good at such. (she laughed)

Othu: I once saw it on a video. When I saw the handcuffs I thought I'd try it. I remembered each detail as if I was watching it again.

Me: You watch porn?

Othu: No, it was one of those sensual videos and not as exposed as porn. Did you like it?

Me: Is the sky blue? Of course I loved it. I thought you have a twin that abducted you and took your place because I wasn't expecting it. (she laughed)

Othu: Why do you have handcuffs?

Me: One of those collected items from my past job. I'm glad I kept them though. My lady has a naughty side. (she covered

her face with her hands) It's sexy, baby. To think that you saw it on a video and did it so perfectly is mind blowing. Are you sure you're my, O? (I raised a brow and she laughed)

Othu: Yes. (she kissed me)

.

No woman has given me that experience. It seems Miss Zweni has a side to her she's yet to discover. I returned the favour of course. I love this exploring. We are naughty while maintaining her innocence. We went to take a bath together while we spoke about life and the future. Hours went by and she had to go. She has to wake up for work early so I understood even if I didn't want to let go. I drove her to her place and thanked her for the wonderful night. I walked her to her door, kissed her and waited until she locked the gate and door. I was on cloud nine. I drove back to my place and I found someone by the door that I didn't expect. Someone I've got no desire of seeing.

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Poppy: Hey guy, so my boyfriend is away and I'm bored so...

Me: Do I look like your play thing to have when you are bored?
(I cut her short)

Poppy: So you can call me when I'm bored and I leave everything and rush over but I can't.

Me: Look, I've just had the best day of my life with your friend. So please go. I can't believe O keeps a friend like you.

Poppy: She doesn't have to know. (she wanted to kiss me and I stopped her)

Me: Stay away from me and from Othinyiweyo because she clearly doesn't need a friend like you. Damn you almost burst my happy bubble but I'll inside before you really do. (I left her)

.

What the hell? This girl is O's friend and she now knows that I'm her man but does this? I walked inside and locked my door. Should I tell O about this? I was hoping to not have something distract my excitement tonight but I was wrong. I went to my bedroom and took my clothes off and threw myself on the bed. I laughed when I thought of what just happened on it. I sent Othunyiweyo a " I'm home safe", text. She called and we spoke for over an hour. One would swear we didn't just see each other. I'm not sure if I must tell her about her friend though. We finally said goodbye and I fell asleep. I'm sure I'll have sweet dreams tonight. How can I not when I've has such an amazing day?

OTHU

Today I woke up feeling very tired. I think Craig and I must stop those late night calls we have because I'm the one suffering the consequences. What he did for Chulu yesterday was the most amazing thing ever. My baby will be talking about this for a long while so we better get used to it. Makhulu's boyfriend, it's weird to even call an elderly a boyfriend so I'll just call him her special friend. I've known the man for about three years now but I've never truly been bothered with his life but he was clearly bothered with that of my granny. I still find the idea of her dating to be weird but it seems she's glowing now so I'll see how it all turns out. The man has a huge family and if they decide to get married I'll have a new extended family. I'll give him a chance though better not hurt makhulu. I still can't believe that I did to Craig last night. Even thinking about it makes me smile shyly. I literally could see each movement of that lady's hand on the video in my mind. I'm just glad that he enjoyed it and I'm enjoying these explorations that we have. I've decided to sell my old car as makhulu advised. I love being driven to work by Craig but I still feel like I'm throwing too much responsibility at him far too soon. So much so that Chulu's friend refer to him as her father. He adores her but I don't want to scare him off. I love being in a relationship

though. I got up and did my usual routine before going to wake Chulu up. I am getting used to having makhulu help me and it will be difficult for me once she's back to East London. I finished and went to wake Chulu up. I kissed her soft cheeks many times and she finally opened her eyes. The first thing she did was rub her eyes with her hands. I don't like it when she does that. She stood on her bed and hugged me.

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Me: Good morning, Miss Zweni.

Chulu: Are you also a Miss Zweni, mommy? (I nodded) Then morning other, Miss Zweni. (I laughed)

Me: How did you sleep?

Chulu: Good. (she smiled)

Me: I'm glad. Chulu, why do you rub your eyes so much? Are they sore?

Chulu: They get itchy. My teacher moved me to the front of the class too.

Me: You didn't tell me that. When?

Chulu: Yesterday before you and uncle Craig came. She was teaching us how to count big numbers but I didn't see the number on the paper well.

Me: Before yesterday did you see them well? (she nodded)

Chulu: My teacher said she will tell you she moved me.

Me: I'm sure after the dancing excitement she forgot to do it.
Do you see better now that you sit in front?

Chulu: Yes but my eyes still get itchy.

Me: I think mommy must make an appointment for you with an optometrist today.

Chulu: What's that?

Me: It's an eye doctor. He/she will check your eyes and tell us what the problem might be. Mommy has stayed away from work so many times so will you be okay with going with makhulu?

Chulu: Will I stay home?

Me: Yes I'm sure we can get an early appointment. Don't worry makhulu will ask for a note from the doctor to telling your teacher why you were absent.

Chulu: Will the doctor hurt my eyes?

Me: No, they will just check with their special things for any problems. If there are any.

Chulu: Okay mommy.

Me: Do you want to go back to sleep?

Chulu: I'm not sleepy anymore. (I laughed)

Me: Okay please go brush your teeth then. (she got off the bed and rushed off)

.

I knew that something is up with those eyes and I hope it's nothing serious. I have to get an appointment today and I know a good optometrist. I hope Makhulu doesn't have plans and agrees to take Chulu. I made her bed and found her sitting in the kitchen with makhulu.

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Me: Ma, do you have any plans this morning?

Makhulu: Don't worry I'll take her. (she smiled)

Chulu: I already told her.

Me: Thank you, ma. (I hugged her) I'll send you the details of the appointment once I've made it.

Makhulu: Okay, my nunu. I'll take her out afterwards to keep her busy. Chulu, we must get you ready just in case the appointment is early. Don't forget that Flinch is coming, Othu. I'll cook and have him stay over for dinner if that's okay with you.

Me: Are you two friends?

Makhulu: I won't say friends but we have kept in touch over the years.

Me: I still can't see the man as a father figure, ma. Please don't force him onto me.

Makhulu: If that was my aim I'd have done it years ago when you were just a child. Kumkani called and said he's getting a new kidney soon.

Me: That's good for him. Let me go and finish up. I also decided to take your advice on getting a new car, Ma. I'll go check out a few options tomorrow. (she smiled)

Makhulu: Good. Now go get ready.

.

I first prepared breakfast for Chulu and left the two of them. I went to my room to finish getting ready. I'm not in the mood for work today but I must go because my learners depend on me to go to the next grade. Soon it will be spring day and that's one of my favourite days of the year. The flowers and cards I'll be getting. Some even bringing me candy. I have decided to host an independent award ceremony in my class and I'll give all my learners an achievement certificate. I know them all by now so I know who is good at what. I have nominated names for the school award night already and that will be in a few weeks. I finished getting ready and went to the kitchen and

waited for my ride. He sent a text saying he's outside and I kissed my flatmates and rushed off. "Uncle Craig", Chulu shouted. Craig and I both looked up and she stood waving. We smiled and waved back. We then got into the car and drove off. I finally had a chance to listen to my morning radio show. I told Craig why Chulu has stayed home.

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Craig: Do you think she'll need glasses?

Me: I don't know, love. If so I really hope that she won't be ashamed to put them on since no child in her class has them.

Craig: You'll explain the importance of her wearing them, baby.

Me: I've decided to get a new car. I'll take that one to a dealership and have them sell it for me. Thank you for being our driver for all this time. Actually you've been more than that.

Craig: It's all been a pleasure. I'll drive your car to the dealership and make sure they give you a great deal for it. I'll also pick Makhulu and Chulu up for her eye appointment. I don't like that she gets into a cab with no seat for her.

Me: You don't have to do that, Craig. I already feel like I'm depending on you too much.

Craig: Isn't that the whole thing about having a partner, to have someone to help you?

Me: Yes but we've only been in a relationship for a while.

Craig: O, if you feel like I'm rushing things please tell me. The last thing I want is for you to feel like I'm suffocating you. (I looked at him)

Me: Don't be silly. I love it all. I think that's what scares me, baby.

Craig: Baby, you and I both deserve this love and happiness. I love helping you.

Me: Thank you. You're amazing.

Craig: I try. So do I have permission to go pick them up?

Me: If you can, love then it'll be great.

Craig: I can. I have something that I need to tell you. It's honestly not something that I want to do so early in the morning but I think it's best that you know.

Me: It sounds serious.

Craig: It is. Well to me it is. Last night when I came home after dropping you off I found someone waiting for me.

Me: Who? (he looked at me briefly and looked ahead)

Craig: That Poppy girl.

Me: Oh, was she looking for me?

Craig: I wish, O but no, she was looking for me. She said her boyfriend is out of town and she is bored so she wanted to, you know. (I kept quiet)

Me: Oh. (I finally said in a whisper)

Craig: I told her where to get off.

Me: I believe you, baby. I'm just hurt by the news that's all. I can't exactly say I'm surprised though. I picked up something was not right from my last talk with her. Love, are there any feelings from your side?

Craig: O, I have you. I love you and you are who I want to be with. I could never trade a woman like you for one such as your so called friend.

Me: She can give you what I can't though.

Craig: Sex? (I nodded) Baby, come one. What I have with you is so much more than what she can ever give me. Please don't do this to us, O. But please don't compare yourself to her. You two are in two different leagues.

Me: You're right and I'm sorry. Thank you for not giving into temptation.

Craig: I wasn't even tempted to be with her. How could I when you gave me the best sensual experience of my life? Do you know that I even dreamed of it. (we laughed)

Me: I actually enjoyed it a lot. I loved hearing you groan and say my name.

Craig: O, let's change the topic because I already feel developments in my pants. (I laughed softly)

Me: I'm sorry.

Craig: I do love that side of you though. I can't wait to see more of it.

Me: It was a once off, baby so don't have expectations. (he laughed)

Craig: We'll see.

Me: I do love being close to you. Feeling the warmth of your body on mine. Having your han...

Craig: O! (he cut me short and I laughed)

Me: I'm sorry but that was innocent. You have a dirty mind clearly. (he laughed)

Craig: That's the thing your innocent dirty talk is actually sexy.

Me: Let's talk about something else. Kumkani got a donor.

Craig: Well good for him. Let's hope his body accepts it. When is the transplant?

Me: I don't know and I don't wish to know. Langa's fiance has been asking me to meet up. She's a lovely girl but I fear that I'll say too much.

Craig: I can't believe that your brother is willing to marry a woman while fantasising about other men. I'm surprised he doesn't have depression or something. I am glad that you've kept yourself out of it though. They were never worth your worrying. We're here. (he looked at me)

Me: Thank you. (I kissed him passionately)

Craig: You're welcome. Please send me Chulu's appointment details once you've made it.

Me: I will. I love you and thank you for telling me about Poppy.

Craig: I actually wasn't going to say anything but I've met such women before. I don't want her coming to you with her version of events that are false. I can't tell you who to be friends with but I can say that you don't need such friends, baby. I love you too and I'll see you later. (he kissed me)

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I took my bags, stood and waved and he hooted before driving off. Am I a lucky girl or what? I saw Yandi's car and went to the staff room. I found her having a cup of coffee. She stood to hug me and I made myself a cup of black coffee too. I told her what Poppy did and she couldn't believe it.

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Yandi: Sies man. I'm so disgusted by her behavior right now. She's always going on about not going after her friends men and now this.

Me: Well I've read somewhere that women tend to catch feelings even in no strings attached agreements. Maybe she has too.

Yandi: She must go and attach her string to her old man and play far away from yours. It's not the first time too. Remember Lubabalo? You had a crush on the guy first and she knew it but still decided to go use her charms to get him to bed knowing that you'd never want him after that. We overlooked that.

Me: He was not my boyfriend.

Yandi: Then there's Ndalo. He came on to you but she still went on about how handsome he is and how she wouldn't mind having him.

Me: But neither of those men were mine.

Yandi: That's not the point I'm trying to make. I'm trying to make you realise the pattern. It seems the girl envies you. Who came with Poppy to our friendship circle anyway?

Me: She came on her own. We were chilling at that club and she walked over to our table saying her friends ditched her. We pitied her and bought her drinks. (we laughed)

Yandi: I'm starting to think that she planned it all because she thought she'd sponge on us. I've never been so repulsed by someone as I am by her right now. What she did was not right and you need to address it.

Me: I'll call her later. So how is being engaged? (she smiled)

Yandi: Amazing, friend. My mom and dad are over the moon. Apparently they thought I'd die old and alone because I gave too little focus on settling down. (I laughed)

Me: Makhulu loves Chulu a lot but I know she wishes for me to have more children. Once I'm married of course. I'm happy for you, friend. You have one of the good ones.

Yandi: Remember how I used to be annoyed by his calm nature and soft way of speaking? (we laughed)

Me: I do and I remember how depressed you were when you had an argument and didn't speak to him for two days. I think that's when you realised that you are in love with him.

Yandi: I really am. Thank you for always knocking sense into me on days when I wanted to end things with him. I'm now much more in control of my gift and it makes life easier. That's why I

would be honoured to have you as my maid of honor. (I screamed a bit)

Me: I'd love too, friend. Thank you. Chulu and I promise to be at every rehearsal. (she laughed and we hugged)

Yandi: I love the other girls but you have a place in my heart that no friend can reach. I want you at my wedding, my baby showers, in the waiting room when I give birth to my first born and I want to be in your special milestones too.

Me: Yandisa you're going to make me cry and I'll be there for all of that.

Yandi: The way you and Craig are doing it seems you'll be engaged in a few months.

Me: No! We just click because we were friends before. I've been seeing him almost everyday since we reconnected. Do you think that's too much?

Yandi: If it feel right for you too than it's not. How are your flatmates?

Me: The elder one is in love and Chu...(she laughed so much)

Yandi: Yes to Makhulu. Who said love has an expiry date? Who is the man?

Me: Don't breath a word to anyone about this until they make it public please.

Yandi: Pinky promise. (we entwined our pinkies)

Me: It's deacon Thamsanqa Funda. (she laughed and I did too)

Yandi: But you must admit that is a handsome grandpa. I wish them well. The Zweni women have themselves some loving. That's amazing. How is Chulu?

Me: She's good but has been having eye problems.

Yandi: No my poor baby. Make an appointment with an eye doctor, Othu.

Me: I will. Most places open at 8am so I'll call then. Craig is going to drive them. (she smiled)

Yandi: He fits in so perfectly in your life. As a friend, a lover and potentially a daddy to Chulu.

Me: It scares me at times

Advertisement

Yandi. What if we get used to his presence and one day he decides it's all too much?

Yandi: If he was afraid of all that you come with he'd have made a run for it long ago. You gave me that same line when I had my calling and thought it would be too much for Vuyo. Look where we are now. Happy and planning our wedding. Now take your own advice.

Me: Will the two of you have a long engagement or short?

Yandi: We sat down and discussed it. Short is what we want. Next week we start the pre-marital counselling with the pastor while we wait for my family to invite his over for the lobola negotiations.

Me: All of this is so exciting. Shout if you need help. (she smiled and nodded)

.

Seeing my friends happy makes me so happy. All the teachers arrived and we discussed the award night, the farewell party for the grade sevens and all else until the meeting was over. I went to wait for my children to all be here before the bell rang. The bell rang and they all ran to form a line. I greeted them and gave permission for them to go in. I gave them work to keep themselves busy with and made a call to an optometrist one of the teachers recommended. I was lucky because he had a cancelation just now so she got a morning appointment. After I was done I sent makhulu and Craig a message. I stood and went on with the lesson of the day. I was happy today regardless of Poppy's news because I've got so much to be grateful for. Hours went by and school was out. I was sitting in my class marking some work when my phone rang. I thought it's Makhulu or Craig to tell me about Chulu's eyes. Then I remembered that I don't want to hear what the doctor said over the phone. I

checked the screen and "Poppy", appeared. I felt some anger rise inside of me but I decided to answer.

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Me: Hello.

Poppy: Hey, Othu. Can you talk or are you at work?

Me: I can talk.

Poppy: I need to tell you something. I'm sorry that you have to hear this from me though. Something happened last night. (I rolled my eyes)

Me: Yeah?

Poppy: Yeah, your man called me again asking me to come over to his place. I at first refused but then decided to go and tell him that I'm not some loose girl he can call for sex whenever he wants and your my friend for goodness sake. I'm sorry to say this but it seems this Craig guy does not really love you. Why would he invite me over if he was serious about you?

Me: Are you done?

Poppy: I'm sorry, Othu. Dump the bastard you deserve better. Had I been that kind of friend I'd have slept with him but you know I play far from my friends men.

Me: You know, Poppy you are something else. You deserve an international award for your acting for real. Craig told me what happened last night. What really happened and I'm hurt by what you did. To throw yourself at him knowing that him and I have something going is a new low even for you.

Poppy: So you're going to believe a man you met just yesterday over a friend you've known for years?

Me: Had you been a true friend you'd listen to what I tell you. You'd know that I didn't meet him just yesterday. If you were a true friend you wouldn't have gone and offer yourself to my man.

Poppy: Believe what you want then and oh just a tip since you are a new comer in this dating game. Men like him can't be tamed even by a sweet girl like you. You watch too many movies, darling. He's always going to have a side thing like me to satisfy him and go back home to play happy family with you.

Me: Well had that been true he would have taken you up on your offer last night but he didn't. Girl like you only get that temporary pleasure from these men you have affairs with and after that it's back to your pathetic lonely lives. Get some self respect, girl. It's never too late. If you carry on like this you'll find yourself old and alone. Stop chasing after what will never be yours. You're right about me deserving better though and

that's why I'm cutting ties with you. I don't deserve nor need a friend like you. Bye. (I ended the call)

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The nerve of the girl! I'm so glad that Craig told me what happened before she twisted the truth because I would have been filled with doubt and insecurities right now. I told Craig to not come get me because I have to go do some grocery shopping. I can't have the poor man drive me all over Cape Town. Yandi came to say goodbye and left. I also tidied my desk, took my bag and off I went. There was a mini Pick n Pay close by so I walked there. The weather was perfect. Hot but the sun hid under the clouds. I was thinking about a lot of things and Chulu's eyes were on top of the list. I can't wait to hear what the doctor said. I was deep in thought when I felt someone grab my shoulder violently. I grabbed the hand, turn around and twisted it so much that it made a cracking sound. The guy dropped a knife and screamed in pain.

"You broke my hand. Your fucken broke my hand, bitch", he said while groaning in pain. For a second I felt numb. I took the pepper spray out of my bag, aimed for the eyes and he screamed and swore at me even more. I then took my heels off and I ran as fast as my feet could carry me. He was clearly going to rob me and even stab me. I finally made it to the store and called Craig. He told me to stay put and arrived so quickly. I'm

starting to think Craig is always close by but that can't be true because no one has so much time on their hands. I told him everything that just happened. He wanted to take me home but I told him I'm fine so we did the shopping together. We then drove off after we were done. I'm still shocked by the way that I reacted to what happened. We arrived at the apartment and he helped me carry the bags up. Once again he is being amazing. Makhulu opened the gate and Chulu ran to hug me. I've missed her so much and I'm so glad that I have once again come home safely. So much happens out there. I unpacked the food and put them in their rightful places while Craig and makhulu spoke. I finally sat down and they both looked at me weirdly.

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Makhulu: So you weren't going to tell me that I've been attacked? (I looked at Craig)

Me: I was, Ma but I wanted to hear what the optometrist said. Is Chulu going to be fine?

Makhulu: He used his big words to describe the problem but I asked him to explain in simple terms. It seems she's having difficulty seeing things that are too far and writings of a certain size.

Me: Okay so did he give her something to help?

Makhulu: Yes but only for the irritation the itching caused. He said she'll need glasses. (I exhaled loudly)

Me: How is she taking it?

Makhulu: We were waiting for you to come so that we can do it. I told the doctor to get her those glasses and chose a beautiful pink frame for her. In fact she chose it herself but she just doesn't know it's for her yet.

Me: Thank you both for taking her. I appreciate it. Chulu. (I called her and she appeared)

Chulu: Yes, mommy. (she walked to me)

Me: How was your visit with the eye doctor?

Chulu: Nice. He made me look into some thing and I saw many letters. I couldn't see some though.

Me: I'm proud of you for doing as she said. Well makhulu said that the doctor wants you to wear glasses so that you'll see better.

Chulu: Like the ones we looked at, Makhulu?

Makhulu: Yes, nunu and I told her to give you that pink one you liked.

Craig: I'm sure you'll look very pretty with them on. I can't wait to see it.

Chulu: But I don't want to wear glasses. (she looked down and cried)

Me: I know, bhabha but you're too young for contact lenses so there's no other alternative for now. (I hugged her)

Craig: They will help you see the numbers on the board, Chulz. I'm sorry that you have to wear them but if you don't your sight might become weaker.

Makhulu: There is nothing wrong with being the only one who wears them in your class. If anything it makes you even more beautiful and unique.

Chulu: What if they tease me? (I wiped her tears off)

Me: Then you tell your teacher and she'll tell me. I'm right on the school premises so I'll make sure it's dealt with.

Makhulu: I wear glasses when I read. Do I look funny?

Chulu: No, makhulu. (she said softly)

Makhulu: We can match but yours will be prettier. No one will laugh at you, my baby.

Me: Makhulu is right. You're still the most beautiful little girl that I know. (she smiled a bit)

Chulu: Will I see everything?

Me: Yes you will. You'll be able to see as you have before.

Chulu: Okay, mommy. (she said softly and hugged me)

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My poor baby but she'll be fine. Our school is very strict about teasing so should it happen we'll make sure it stops before it escalates. I'm so glad to have Craig and Makhulu be here to support me. Craig said goodbye and excused himself because he has to go see a friend. I walked him out, we sat in his car and spoke. We had a long passionate kiss and we had to go our separate ways. I hate being away from him but I can't tell him and come across as clingy. Makhulu put the eye medicine in Chulu's eyes because I just couldn't. My baby looked so afraid but stood still while her gran did it. Makhulu and I started with dinner since we'll be having a guest. There was a knock while we were busy and it's Flinch. I am glad to see him alive after what Craig said my dad tried to do to him. He had some wine and chocolates for us and a teddy bear for Chulu. She thanked him and went to go play in the lounge. I have him something to drink and we sat down with him.

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Flinch: Thank you so much for agreeing to see me. I have something important to tell you.

Makhulu: Oh it's nothing and we are cooking enough for everyone so if you want you can join us.

Flinch: Only if I won't be intruding. (he looked at me)

Me: Not at all, doctor. So are you going to share your news now or after dinner?

Flinch: Now so that we'll have a good dinner while in a happy mood.

Makhulu: Good news are always welcome. We are listening. (he took out papers from his bag and out them on the table)

Flinch: This right here are papers that legally state that Mrs N Zweni now has full ownership of her people's land in Umhlabomhle. (Makhulu held her chest in shock)

Makhulu: But how? The court date is only next week.

Flinch: Well I went to Hans and made him an offer that he can't resist.

Makhulu: Oh I can't believe this. (she started to cry)

Me: How much do we owe you? I might not know much about live but I do know that nothing is for free.

Flinch: I wanted to do something good for deserving people and I chose to do this.

Me: Hans didn't want money when I offered it to him. I hope you have not done something to place my life and that of the people I love in danger, doc.

Makhulu: Othunyiweyo! (she said in a stern tone)

Flinch: She has every right to be concerned, Ma Zweni. You're right men like him only understand when you communicate with them in a manner that they understand.

Me: A violent manner?

Flinch: No just a manner of offering him something way better. You two don't owe me anything.

Me: Should we now worry that this man will be an enemy? I've learnt recently that when something is too good to be true it usually is. What's the catch?

Flinch: No catch and Hans won't come after you. Everything is legal. His signature was not forged. That land belongs to your granny. Had you gone through the court you'd only have gotten compensation and no land. We all know that this has sentimental value to you grandmother so it's worth more than money to her.

Me: I will pay you back. It might not be the market value of such a land but it'll have to do for now.

Flinch: Miss Zweni I don't need money. Keep the small fortune you got to start a better life for yourself and child. A thank you is enough for me.

Makhulu: Thank you, thank you! (she stood and hugged him)

Me: Thank you.

Flinch: It was a great pleasure.

Makhulu: I want half of it to belong to Othu.

Flinch: Have your lawyer draw that up. I can also give some advice should you not know what to do with the place.

Makhulu: Let us first process this good news. I'm so happy. (she cried again)

Me: I'm glad that you finally got what you wanted, Ma. (I brushed her back)

Makhulu: Excuse me while I go tell my sister. She'll be so happy. Thank you once again Flinch. You're a kind man. (he smiled and she left us)

Me: I hope this has not made Hans an enemy to us.

Flinch: He doesn't have the means to come after you and he knows that won't be a good idea.

Me: I hope so. I have something to ask you actually and it's been bothering me.

Flinch: I'm listening.

Me: The other day I took up self defense lessons.

Flinch: That's wonderful. (he smiled)

Me: Something unusual happened. My instructor pretended to attack me and I gained some strength and managed to overpower him. Last night something else happened that was also out of character and today I think I broke someone's hand while he tried to mug me.

Flinch: These lessons are clearly helping.

Me: That's the problem. The lessons never really started. It's like I'm not even myself.

Flinch: That's strange. So you think I had something to do with it?

Me: You were the one who injected me with foreign medicine when I was just an embryo so yes I do.

Flinch: Yes but we weren't trying to create superwoman. What happens in your mind when you do all these things?

Me: I watched a fighting documentary once. It played in my mind but in slow motion almost and I followed what I saw. These images are in slow motion in my mind but clearly my actions aren't even I'm mimicking them.

Flinch: That's interesting. I don't know what it could mean. So you follow what is stored in your memory to handle different situations. Perhaps it's just the excellence of your mind. I did say you showed signs of high IQ.

Me: So what happens if I saw a documentary on how a gun is used. Do you think I'd be able to handle it when one is placed in my hand?

Flinch: It certainly sound like it. It's fascinating. I don't have a work space here but we can ask a neurologist friend of mine to scan your brain and see if it's any different from the usual person's one. Are you up for that?

Me: Yes, I am. Tomorrow if possible because I've watched movies where people break others legs and stuff. I don't want to do that not even to a thief. I feel bad whenever I recall the sound that man's bones made. There's no way I'm that strong and it all started after I had a terrible head pain once.

Flinch: Tomorrow we can check.

Makhulu: She is just so happy. (she said while walking in)

Flinch: I'm sure she wants in too. (he laughed)

Makhulu: I no longer have a big family. Most have died but I won't exclude them in this. They must just accept that Othu is a part of the legacy even if she's not a Tyini.

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They spoke while I got up and finished cooking. I dished up and served everyone when I was done. Chulu asked to eat while watching her shows and I allowed it today. Flinch and makhulu

have a lot to talk about. We finished eating and Flinch called it a night. We said goodbye and he left. My phone rang and it's Langa. I pressed the green button and put it against my ear.

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Me: Hello.

Langa: How is my favourite sister?

Me: Do you have another sister because I'm sure you're not talking about me?

Langa: Oh come on don't be like that.

Me: What can I do for you?

Langa: Uhm, I need your help. Today our parents house got taken. It's part of the assets that will be sold to pay of some of the debt. The cars are also taken. All we have is the little to pay for Tata's operation. They are staying here at my place. Well Tata will join us once he's out of hospital.

Me: So where do I fit in?

Langa: Thing is I can't afford a domestic worker and Mama had to lay off her staff. So could you please help us by paying for a domestic worker and a cook.

Me: What?

Langa: And also when you bump into Sibho or decide to meet up with her please say the parents house is being renovated and that's why they are here.

Me: No! I can't believe you people. Mama is a rural girl from a village so I'm sure they didn't have a domestic worker when she was young. Tell her to clean your house while you go look for work. I'm not going to lie for you either. Goodness, you are parasites man. You suck my joy and now you want my well deserved money too. No, no and no. Don't call me again. I'm tired of feeling sorry for you. A cook and domestic worker? I don't even have those. Bye, Zweni parasites. (I ended the call)

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I was so upset afterwards. For them to ask me to pay for luxuries is so not cool. They are clearly not starving yet. I told makhulu and she told me to let them get to me. I went to join my daughter in the lounge and found her eyes narrowed to see clearly what's on TV. My poor baby. She'll get used to the glasses even they come. I sat and enjoyed the time with her. My joy, my everything.

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#CRAIG

I can't believe that Othu managed to save herself today. I obviously can't follow her everywhere since I have other commitments at time. I'm glad I was close to calm her down though. I'm also glad that I told her about her friend and her trusting and believing me made it all worth it. She thinks something is wrong with her though because of the recent behaviors but I don't mind any of them. I'm sad about Chulu and I hope she accepts her situation soon. Seeing her down hurts me. I'd take her bad eyes and give her mine if I could. Ant kid who dares to tease her will face trouble. No one teases my Chulz. I was sitting in a fast food place having dinner when a familiar face walked in. He went to the counter to buy water and was about to leave.

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Me: Doctor Flinch. (I called out and he looked at me)

Flinch: Mutual friend. (he came to sit) I actually forgot your name.

Me: It's Craig. So how was the dinner?

Flinch: I gave them a gift and they liked it.

Me: The land? Do I have to worry about you bringing a new enemy into her life?

Flinch: I'll deal with it should it happen. (his phone rang)

Me: Answer it.

Flinch: It's a call from Hans and since you seem to know everything about my moves I'll put it on loud speaker.

Me: I don't really care. (he did just that)

Flinch: Did Mel give you airtime money? (he laughed)

Hans: I told you that you will not win this. Your sweet Mel has just hung herself, oh with my help of course. Her diary is full of sad depressing writings so people will think she has always wanted to do it. I'll be the sad hubby who wonders why she chose that way to go and not ask for help. Once all of the fake mourning is over I'll go back to having all that I had. We were married in community of property after all. Oh what you did motivated me so much. You can't keep me down.

Flinch: You hanged you're wife for money?

Me: I have to go. (I whispered, stood but he stopped me)

Hans: Look over your shoulder because I'm coming for you. I've sent my men to find my boy in Australia.

Flinch: Oh dammit Hans. You are good man. You are good but like I've said you're not in my league yet. So smile for the camera, bitch. Wait, let me show you what I mean. (he took out another phone and pressed it and there was silence for a while)

Hans: (he screamed so loudly) Screw you! (Flinch laughed)

Flinch: All that you did to help Mel hang herself is filmed and oops, I just mistakenly sent the video to the cops together with the evidence that I had on you. Dammit I've got clumsy fingers but I'm sure Mel will appreciate it. May her soul rest in peace. Now you're still broke and going to jail. Had you just been a good boy this would not have happened. Mell would have given you an allowance but now look. You just don't listen. (I heard sirens on the other end of the line and it went dead)

Me: So all of this confirms to me that you aren't just a scientist.

Flinch: The fool thought he won. I had cameras planted in their living quarters. He literally hung his wife and had I not done that all would have thought she'd committed suicide. He'd have gone unpunished.

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I asked him to tell me who he is and he was open about his past. I've heard about the gang he once belonged to. It no longer exists though or so I think. I'm suddenly not comfortable with him being around O, Chulu and Makhulu. Is he an ally or a disguised enemy? Just when I thought I'd have a normal boring life this happens. I'll keep the doctor close and familiarise myself with his movements. We finally parted ways. I went home and just as I closed the door there was a knock. I opened the door now this is really the last person I expected to see. It's Commander, a senior at my old agency. Dressed in a tailored

suit as always. I couldn't read his body language. I let him in and shook his hand. I don't fear the man but I just don't like that he's in SA.

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Me: I didn't expect to see here. Whiskey?

Comm: I'm not staying. I finally got authorisation to get Wes's body. It seems he was taken down by a sniper.

Me: He brought too much attention to himself when he was here. I told him it's not good but he didn't listen so I'm not surprised it ended this way.

Comm: He was a hot head but he was one of us.

Me: His death was all over the news. You risked the agency for him?

Comm: He was my nephew so it's personal. Clearly someone knows of us already. I will find out who and they will pay. I'm not staying. I'm going back with his ashes and after that I'll look for who did this. I would ask for yo...

Me: I'm not going back.

Comm: Pity, you were my best man. I trained you myself. I'm not here to beg you back but if you now anything let me now. For old time sake. I'll see you around, Snipe. I'll be back in this country soon. (he stood and walked to the door)

Discussions between us have always been cold and brief. I can never say he was a father figure to me just a mentor. He left without saying goodbye and I expected that. I knew they'd come but I didn't think he'd come himself even if Wes was his nephew. I need to come up with a plan soon. He knows that it was a sniper who killed Wes and SA doesn't have many of those. It's only a matter of time before they figure it out and come for me and possibly for those I've grown close to.

OTHU

I have been tossing and turning all night because of the attempted robbery I managed to escape from yesterday. The fact that Flinch doesn't know what's going on bothered me even more. I feel like the after effects of their crazy project are now starting to show. I do hope that the scans he spoke of are going to help me figure out what's wrong with my mind. Today is Saturday and once again it'll be a busy one for me. I've become quite the social butterfly. I'll be meeting up with Dr Flinch very early. I got up and went to brush my teeth. I went to Chulu's room and kissed her cheek. This issue about wearing glasses has really gotten her under but I'm sure she'll get used to it. I'll have to speak to her teacher so she could address her class on why Chulu has to wear glasses. I find that kids make fun of what they don't know and once it's explained they understand better and stop. I greeted makhulu so was busy with her sewing matching making curtains. I went to go shower and get ready for the day. Dr Flinch is going to pick me up. I'm choosing to trust the man because so far he hasn't given me any reason not to. I finished up and said goodbye to makhulu. I found Flinch leaning on a silver car and I walked towards him. We greeted each other and I hopped inside the car. I for some reason felt at ease actually and not scared or nervous. The car

drove off and some jazz music played softly in the car. We drove in silence and I didn't mind that much.

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Flinch: Thank you for trusting me. I actually thought you'd call to tell me that you've changed your mind. (he said breaking the silence)

Me: I want to know if something is wrong with me. My grandma trusts you so I chose to trust her judgement.

Flinch: She's a good lady and not once did she hold what I did against me though she saw it as disgusting. She told me that perhaps it was God's plan. That had I not done it perhaps you would not exist today. You're her greatest gift. That's what she always says.

Me: Do you believe in God, doctor. I have read a survey saying that most scientists are atheists. (I looked at him)

Flinch: I do believe that there is a greater power. There are certain things that I've seen that neither myself nor other scientists could explain. So you could say that I believe in God, Miss Zweni.

Me: Please call me Othu. (he smiled)

Flinch: Then please call me Sam. (he laughed)

Me: And risk having my grandmother twist my ears or something? I don't think so. You'll have to get used to me calling you doctor for the sake of respect since you're older than me.

Flinch: I don't mind at all.

Me: Why have you never married and had kids?

Flinch: I guess the fact that I had to support my family from a young age and being responsible for providing for them made me like my freedom when I got older.

Me: So you grew up in a child headed household?

Flinch: Yes, my dad worked odd jobs but as eldest I had to go out into the real world, man up and find means to help him.

Me: So you never want children?

Flinch: I have kept myself busy with my work for many years and only now do I realise that there is more to life than making money and creating new things. The thing about having a life like I had is that when you start making money you want to ensure you make more so that you'll never again starve.

Me: Well I grew up with both parents and they had the money but I've never felt loved. I guess it's safe to say that money is important but it's not everything. The things that matter are

free. Such as love, kindness, compassion and so on. (he smiled and nodded)

Flinch: One never stops learning then because I've only come to realise that now in my old age. (I laughed)

Me: You're not old. I think you're in your 50's right?

Flinch: 55 (he laughed)

Me: Well you could still find love and maybe have a child or two. Adoption is an option too. I've just learnt that love has no age at all.

Flinch: Are you in love? (I smiled like a love sick teen)

Me: I am and I'm happy.

Flinch: I'm glad to hear that. I hope he treats you right.

Me: He does and he treats my daughter right too. Doc, can we please put on the radio for the news? It's only five minutes.

Flinch: Sure. (he fiddled with the buttons and the news came up)

Me: Thank you.

Reporter: On other news the owner of one of Eastern Cape's lodges, Hans Thomas was taken into police custody last night after allegedly killing his wife Melisa Thomas. It's said that he hanged her in attempt to make it look like suicide but what he

didn't know was that Melisa installed hidden cameras in their home. Some of his staff have apparently also told the police that he had a history of abusing women. Mr Thomas will appear in court later today. (I almost collapsed)

Me: I can't believe it. How can he be so cruel?

Flinch: We'll never know why certain people do the things that they do. I'm just glad that he was caught. Mel clearly knew he'd try something and that's why they had the cameras.

Me: So many women die at the hands of the man they love. When will it all end? I'm so heart broken right now. A friend of mine, well she was a friend of mine is also in a physically abusive relationship. She might have hurt me lately but I do hope she gets out of it soon.

Flinch: Some people don't realise that they even are being abused.

Me: Like my brother. My dad has him so under his control that he now has him doing things for him. The sad part is that he doesn't realise that this is slowly killing him. He is living for Kumkani.

Flinch: Unfortunately some kids would kill for their parents all in the name of love.

Me: That's so sad. I never allowed him to brainwash me. Imagine where I'd be had I done that.

Flinch: People like your dad don't deserve to be parents.

Me: True. Are you going to stay in South Africa permanently?

Flinch: No, my whole life is that side. I'll be here for a few more weeks. Have you ever thought about moving away from your toxic family?

Me: A lot but not away from my granny so going out of the country permanently is no option.

Flinch: So what will you two do with the land?

Me: Well there already is a lodge there so we could just continue with that. I don't know if she wished to live there or what but she has to have a meeting with her family. I doubt they will allow me to own half of it though but I don't care as long as she has what she wants.

Flinch: Hans never used it to its full potential. You can keep the lodge and do various other things. Her family can also move back if they want to.

Me: There is not many left. Only her sister and a few cousins.

Flinch: Just make sure they don't bully her.

Me: Who would dare try bully Nomhle Zweni? (he laughed)

Flinch: You're right. Before we get to where we are going I just want to tell you that I've enjoyed this talk a lot. Thank you.

Me: Doctor, you meant it when you said you have no romantic attachment to me right?

Flinch: I swear on my mother's life that I don't. I am attached in a weird fatherly way but I promise that I won't force myself into your life.

Me: I'm glad to hear that. Shall we go in? I'm sure we are on borrowed time because your friend has other people to see.

Flinch: You're right.

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We got out of the car and walked into the facility. I'm feeling nervous but I have to be sure. For all I know I could be seriously sick. We entered the building and it was empty. Flinch introduced me to his doctor friend. We explained the problem to him and he told me to go change into a hospital dress. I did that and they took me to another room with big medical equipment. I was told to lay on the bed and he explained that the machine is going to scan my brain. He pressed something and it started to move up and into some machine. Thank goodness I don't have a fear of small spaces or I'd be freaking out right now. The doctor asked me a few questions and I'd answer. After a while they were finished. I got out of the machine and he has me change again. He then put up my head scan results and they both examined it. They placed another

person's one and they said mine does seem different but neither could say why. I just heard increased brain activity when they spoke. Is that even good?

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Dr Xaba: I've never seen something like it. How good is your memory?

Me: I'd say it's not too bad.

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They threw around more big words while they spoke. I suddenly really felt like the experiment that I was meant to be. Dr Xaba had us go to his office and he had me do a few memory test. I passed them all with 100%. I remember that at school I even used to correct teachers during lessons. I didn't know how I had that knowledge but I did. I also know that I was meant to finish school before age 16 but my dad bribed some teachers to keep me in the same grade even if it was torture to me. So I was not surprised when I passed his memory tests. Well now we now something is up with my brain but no one can explain what. Doctor Flinch made a few other call. We left the place and I was just more confused.

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Flinch: Here watch this. (he gave me a tablet)

Me: What is this?

Flinch: A tutorial on how to use a gun.

Me: Such things are on the internet?

Flinch: Everything is

Advertisement

Othu. Yesterday you asked if you'd know how to handle a gun if you saw how to. So watch that while we drive to a rifle training center. I already have everything prepared for you.

Me: This is a waste of time. There's no way I'll be able to do that.

Flinch: Only one way to find out.

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I looked at him and I played the clip. This guy is clearly a professional but I still don't think such should be so easily available. I listened to each instruction and watched his body as he aimed. I watched each detail. We drove in silence this time but it was not awkward. We drove to a farm like place. He parked and we made our way in. He introduced me to the guy who own the place and we went to the training area. The man wanted to explain but Dr Flinch stopped him and only told him to give me safety gear. I put on the goggles and he gave me a little hand gun first. I can't believe I'm holding and loaded gun.

It felt heavier than I thought and cold too. I was told to put on the sound blocking equipment and aim and the target board ahead. I did that and I aimed. I recalled the details of the clip I saw earlier on and I shot at the target. I took off the ear blocker.

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Guy: You just hit the target in the face. Usually first timers miss the target all together. Especially women.

Me: You sound a bit sexist by the way.

Guy: I'm sorry but I'm just stating what I've seen. Let's try again. Maybe it was beginners luck.

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I really hate how this guy seems undermine women. I'm surprised that such men even exists. I repeated what I did before, aimed and shot. This time I hit the neck area. For some reason I was more motivated to prove this guy wrong. So I tried again and hit the cheek and again until I finally got the area between the eyes. His jaw was practically on the floor.

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Guy: Just tell the truth, lady. You've done this before. There's no way a beginner could do that.

Me: Next time stop looking down on woman. I'm ready to go, Doctor.

Flinch: As you wish. Thanks for organising this for me Wendel. I'll see you around. (they shook hands)

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I kept it together to not give this guy the satisfaction of seeing that I'm freaked out. The second we got into the car my hands started to shake. I looked at them trying to keep them still but failed . I have just perfectly shot a gun all thanks to an instruction clip. Flinch held my shaking hands trying to calm me down.

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Flinch: I don't think anything is wrong with you. This just proves that your mind is unique. Let me take you home.

Me: I'm a freak. What you did is finally showing itself.

Flinch: And I'm sorry once again but you being able to protect yourself to some extent doesn't make you a freak. You don't have to go get a gun either.

Me: Don't tell my granny about this please.

Flinch: Okay. (he let go of my hands)

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He started the car and drove off. We drove in silence and I just looked out the window as we drove on. I asked him to drop me off at a cafe because I'm meeting Craig for coffee then we have that HIV testing date soon. I said goodbye and got into the coffee shop. Craig walked in after a while and I stood so he'd spot me. He came towards my table and hugged me. He looks strange. Exhausted in a way.

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Me: Are you okay? I called last night but it went straight to voicemail. (we sat)

Craig: I'm okay, baby and I sorry about that. My battery died. You don't look to well.

Me: I heard on the news that Hans killed his wife. It suddenly makes that place tainted.

Craig: So you no longer want it?

Me: I never did, baby. I was helping my granny. I still don't know how Flinch got him to sign.

Craig: What do you know about this man, O?

Me: Nothing really. Just that he's had a difficult childhood and of course what ties me to him.

Craig: Nothing ties you to him. Can we just stay in today rather than go out?

Me: Okay that's fine by me. Are you sick?

Craig: I just want to have a lazy day with you and Chulu.

Me: No problem. Do you want us to postpone our visit to the health care center?

Craig: No because it's important. We can do everything now while it's early.

Me: No problem. Are you sure you're okay? (he kissed me)

Craig: I'm sure. I'm just tired.

Me: I'm sure it's because you had to wake up early to drive us to school. I am planning on going to get that car I've been eyeing.

Craig: I hope it's not a sports car because there won't be space for a car seat. (we laughed)

Me: It's a sexy family car. Poppy called yesterday giving me a completely different story from yours.

Craig: O, I have no reason to lie t...(I kisses him before he could finish)

Me: I know. (he smiled) I was thinking of getting myself those glasses they sell at the street and model it to Chulu. Maybe then she'll see that glasses aren't so bad.

Craig: That's a great idea. Will makhulu be home all day today?

Me: No she's waiting for me to return. She has a cake sale thing with the lady next door.

Craig: Is it fine if we chill at your place instead of mine then?

Me: It's perfect because all Chulu's toys are there. Are you hungry?

Craig: Not yet so if you aren't either then let's go and do some of those things we want.

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I was in agreement with that and the first thing was to go get my car. I had the key so I don't have to go into the apartment for them. I did tell makhulu to not freak out when it's gone though. Craig drive it while I drive his. Makhulu was right. I have a fear of my old car not not all cars. We drove to a second hand car dealership and they checked the car out. Craig negotiated since he knows more about cars. They agreed to sell it off for me and will get back to me when they have a buyer. I emptied it and read the agreement. Once I was happy I signed. We then went to my favourite car brand dealership and I knew what I wanted from word go. I took it for a test drive and I was happy. After the agreements and all I was finally the new owner of a new Land Rover. I've always loved big cars. Craig took some pictures of me before we drove off. We finally went to the center and driving separate cars felt strange. We were told to

wait a bit and a health care provider called us in after a while. I felt so nervous but Craig looked so calm. She explained everything to us and the different tests there are. We did the prick test. We also did a blood one for other sexual transmitted diseases. The test only took five minutes and they were both negative. We explained the window period so we'll have another after three months. We skipped the counselling part of it all. I wasn't sure if I should tell him what happened with my meeting with Flinch. What if he thinks I'm a freak who might someday give him strange children? I can't believe I'm even thinking that far ahead. I went to the street vendors and bought those plastic glasses. We said goodbye and went our separate ways. He has things to deal with before coming over to my place. I drove home in my new baby and it felt great to be independent again. Soon I want to do some house hunting. I finally arrived and ran up to my apartment to get the ladies. They were a bit confused but soon understood my excitement when they saw the new car.

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Chulu: It looks more prettier than the old car. (she got inside)

Me: That old car used to get us from A to B for many years but it was time.

Makhulu: Will you take me and Nolitha to her church?

Me: No problem, ma. That church has a lot of cake sales though.

Makhulu: They are fundraising.

Chulu: Mommy, let's drive to get ice cream. (I laughed)

Me: Let's take makhulu and Ma Nolitha to church first.

Chulu: Okay. (she smiled)

Makhulu: Congratulations, my nunu. It's beautiful and you deserve it. (she hugged me)

Me: Thank you, Ma and the money for that old one will go to you. (she smiled)

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The three of us made our way back to the apartment and makhulu went to finish getting ready. Ma Nolitha who lives in the same apartment block came to wait for makhulu. She finished and we all went out. I drove them to the church and on our way got ice cream for Chulu. She's been asking me when she'll stop sitting in the car seat and even I don't know that. I read that age ten is the right age to stop but we'll see. Craig called and said that he won't be able to make it. I still feel like he is keeping something from me and I hope that he is okay. I'll tell him about my shooting lesson some other time. Chulu and I had something to eat and made popcorn afterwards. We went

to sit and watch movies. I then got up and went to put the glasses on and I modelled for her trying to make glasses cool and she laughed so much. She also put them on and we took pictures. I hope that she'll see they aren't a bad thing to own. She fell asleep while we watched the movie and I did too. I'm glad we could spend this moment alone together. It's been a while since we've done so.

POPPY

I still remember the day that I finally forced my father's identity out of my dying mother. She laid on our old worn out single bed mattress that we shared looking so weak and like a ghost. I knew that day that it's the day she'd take her last breath. I cried so much begging her to at least have my father summoned before she goes just so she could introduce me to him properly. That day she gathered the strength to sit up and communicate with me. Giving me advice and words of wisdom. She'd cough up blood after each sentence she managed to say. I sat besides her brushing her back lightly while tears fell from my eyes. Then she finally gave me the name Kumkani Zweni. That is the man who is my father. That night she took her last breath and as sad as I was I felt grateful to her for finally telling me the man's name. Her family buried her and it was a struggle but we made due. I remained living in our shack and survived on hand outs from family and friends. I realised along the way that I can't live on such little and that's when my neighbor introduced me to the sugar daddy life. Suddenly my life went from nothing to something and all I had to do is sleep with these men. I at times had four partners at once and got girlfriend allowance from them all. That allowed me the opportunity to leave the shack life and move to an apartment in town. I also had enough to

finally do research on Kumkani. I heard someone once said that everyone is on the internet today so that was my first start. I googled the name and so much came up about this man. I looked at his picture and realised that I actually have his nose do my mother must be right. I've been living in poverty when my dad is actually filthy rich. I thought that it's the salvation that I needed. I no longer have to depend on other people's father to live because my father had more than all the men I'm with combined. That's when I decided to go to him and tell him who I am. I remember walking into his office space and the receptionist asked me how I'm related to Mr Zweni. All of me wanted to shout out that I'm his daughter but I luckily had some self control. I was told that day that he's out of the country and got an appointment for the following week. I used that time to look up more on him. I found that he is married to a social worker and they have two kids. A boy, Langa and girl, Othunyiweyo. I looked up for some pictures on them and in all of them I found the girl looking so sad. How can she be sad when her parents are rich? I kept on asking myself. I realised that my sister is the same age as me. I was just born two months before her. That could only mean one thing and that's that I'm a product of an affair. I didn't care about that much though. I just wanted my dad to support me and send me back to school. The day of the appointment finally came and I made sure I dressed in my best clothes. The receptionist told me to go

and wait in his office. The security guard escorted me and the building looked like something out of a movie. I was offered a drink while I waited. The man finally entered his office looking so handsome. I'm glad my mother told me so he is to me or else I'd have seen him as a potential Blessor. He shook my hand and looked so serious. We both sat and he told me to make it brief because he is a busy man. He further added that he is not hiring so if I'm looking for work I'm wasting my time. Goodness the man was not the most friendly, I thought. I introduced myself and told him why I'm here. He just froze for a while then stood and walked to my side of the desk.

"Look, I don't know who you are and what you are trying to achieve but I don't have time for bull shit. Go out the same way you came in and never come back here", he said gently but with anger. I started to shake in fear a bit.

"But uMama said you're my dad. Her name was Lydia Thongani...", I said softly avoiding eye contact.

"Hey! I said I don't know any gutter people. Go out of my office and life or I swear you'll regret it. If I hear from or of you again I'll make sure you join your mother", he said with rage. I held onto my bag so tightly fearing for my life. I slowly stood before the man could assault me. I walked out of the building shaking and tears flew down my cheeks immediately. I went back to my small apartment and cried even more than I did when Mama

died. I looked at the few pictures their daughter was in and I cried even more. What's the difference between her and me, I kept on asking myself. I think that's when I started to feel envious about Othunyiweyo Zweni. The girl who had our father's love and who got everything that she wanted. Things that I'm also entitled to as his older daughter. I went on with my life and depending on other men. School was no longer an option because I had to make sure that I eat and have a roof over my head. I started to up my level in the older men I'm dating and went for the rich. I then someday decided to track my sister down and I did. I stalked her for a while until I finally introduced myself. I saw her sitting at a club with other ladies and lied saying my friends had ditched me. I first wanted to see what type of person she is before telling her who I was. For all I know she might reject me as our father had many years back. I lied to the ladies and told them that I'm educated but prefer to be a house girlfriend. If such a thing even exists. She seemed friendly but I still had no guts to tell her that she's my half sister because she was obviously going to tell her dad and he'd kill me as he said he would. I kept the secret over the years and remained her friend. I have always wanted what she has because to me her life seemed perfect. She said many times that things aren't always as they seem but I didn't care. To me she had a great life compared to me. She got the education, the family love, the car and so much more. I want to be her. There

is one thing she lacked that I didn't. That's the ability to charm any man. She's beautiful but she just doesn't have that flirtatious side. I've always used that to show her that she is not all that though she was unaware of it. That's why I went after this Craig knowing he's her man because I wanted to prove that she can't have it all. I failed though so once again miss perfect get it all. A great life and a damn fine, rich man. I say he's rich because of the suburb he lives in and the condition of his place. A broke man would never be able to afford that. She ended our friendship and I must admit a part of me is heart broken by it but not so much. A few days ago I got a call and it said that Kumkani wants to see me. Langa is the one who called. Saying our father is in hospital. I'm sure he doesn't know about my existence either. I at first told Langa to tell his father to go to hell but later changed my mind. Today is the day I've decided to go see him. I got ready and made sure I'm on point as always. There was suddenly a knock on the door. That's strange because Jacob never knocks. He pays for the place after all. My phone rang and it's him but he ended the call before I could answer. I ran to the door to open because he might have left his key somewhere and he'll be furious if I don't open for him quickly. I fixed my weave before opening. The second I opened the door I felt a hot slap on my face. I wanted to look up and see me attacker but another slap followed. My cheeks were on fire. It's not Jacob though. I know he's slaps by now. I looked up

and an older woman stood at the door. She came in and held me by my neck. I scratched her but she didn't back off. Jacob came running in and took her off me.

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Her: Sies, you're now even defending your slut. Thirty years of marriage, Jacob and you cheat on me with this? (she shouted and pointed at me)

Jacob: She seduced me, my love.

Me: Don't you dare speak nonsense. You found me sitting at a club and you're the one who made the first move. I didn't even know you're married.

Jacob: Are you dumb? All these years you've never seen the pale mark on my wedding finger clearly indicating I'm a married man? Lulama, my beautiful wife I'm sorry. I was so drawn to her. You know these girls of today and witchcraft.

Me: What? Screw you. You didn't say that when you were having great sex. Sex that this old hang can't give you.

Wife: What did you say? I will bear the hell out of you. You're nothing but a dumb fool. Get out of here right now.

Me: With pleasure. I'll just take my stuff and leave this abusive thing you call a husband.

Wife: All of what's here belong to my husband. Leave this place as you are.

Me: You must be drunk. This thing of yours is not that rich and he knows it. I'll take what's mine and don't you dare lay a hand on me again. Piece of old trash. (I clicked my tongue)

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She wanted to attack me again but her excuse of a man stopped her. He's right I did notice the pale ring mark on his finger but chose to turn a blind eye. The sex was not even that good. I took the stuff that were bought for me by my other flings. I might not be educated but I'm not dumb so I saved up some money. I finished and left them there. Once again I'm all alone. I got into my car that I got long before Jacob came into my life. My other flings are married too so I can't go look for a place to stay there. I went straight to the hospital. I got there and asked where Mr Zweni is. They showed me and I went there. I found the shadow of the man I met that day. He must really be sick. He looked at me and smiled. Did he just smile at me? I walked in slowly.

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Kumkani: My beautiful daughter.

Me: So I'm your daughter now?

Kumkani: I'm sorry about that time you first came to me. I was shocked and afraid. My wife was going to find out that I has an affair and a child from it so I couldn't risk it.

Me: So why am I here? To listen to your useless apology?

Kumkani: Yes and I'm sick and don't have much time left. (I started to panic)

Me: What's wrong?

Kumkani: My daughter that I love with my entire heart turned on me. She got mixed up with people and they attacked me. My kidneys are now shutting down. I don't know what I have done to Othunyiweyo. (he started to cry)

Me: I'm so sorry. I can't believe it. How could she?

I know her but never thought.

Kumkani: You know her? (he sat up)

Me: I might as well tell you. I researched your kids and wanted to meet my sister. We've been friends for years but I've never told her I'm yours.

Kumkani: You did good. Who knows what she could have done to you? That girl would sell her own mother if needs be. She could have seen you as a threat and plotted to hurt you or worse. I'm glad you kept it secret, my girl. I told Langa about you because you two are much alike but not Othu.

Me: Wow so my brother knows of me? I'm so happy.

Kumkani: Yes, I spoke about you to my closest friends. The thought that I couldn't raise youth because of the affair haunted me for years.

Me: And here I thought you only cared for your one daughter not me. I can't believe Othu did that.

Kumkani: Evil that one. I clearly chose the wrong daughter to give love to. I wish I had not turned you down. I'm sure you'd never have turned on me. Not just that but she took my money too. (he cried more and my heart sank)

Me: Now that's pure evil. You've given her everything. Do you know she goes on telling her friends that you're not the best father there is?

Kumkani: I still don't know what I've done to that girl but I've forgiven her. I can't go to my grave with anger for my own child. She might be evil but she's my child. That's also why I called you here to apologise. I can't die knowing that I never said sorry. I'm sorry. (I started to cry)

Me: Can't they treat your kidneys?

Kumkani: They are damaged. I need a new one. Othu was the only match but she refuses to give me one of hers. I'd have given mine to her without hesitation had she needed one.

Me: That's pure evil. She looks so sweet but is not.

Kumkani: I know but she's not. Have you forgiven me?

Me: Well yes. I'm still hurt but no use holding onto that now.

Kumkani: I really wanted to get to know you better but the doctor said I only have a week to live. Thank you for forgiving me. I'd give you money but the hospital takes it all. (tears flew down his cheeks again)

Me: I'll give you a kidney. (he looked at me)

Kumkani: What? My child, my beautiful child I'm not expecting that from you. I can't accept not after all I've done to you. I'm not worth it.

Me: Well I'm worth having a father. I can't lose you now that we've made peace. I need you in my life Tata. I know financially you say you can't but I'll settle for your love and attention.

Kumkani: I would love nothing more. my baby. Oh your kind heart reminds me of your mother. If you're sure and you match then I'll accept. I'll give you that love and attention I've been giving to the wrong daughter ask this time.

Me: What do I do now?

Kumkani: Let me call the doctor. He'll test you to see if you're a match. Thank you. You know when I heard your mother was pregnant I always wanted to give you the name Sisipho because

you're a gift but things didn't work out. I'm sorry to only call you now that I'm sick but I just didn't want to die knowing I never gave you love and an apology.

Me: Tata that's enough. Yes, I've needed you but no use crying over spilt milk. I'm glad you thought of me when you are so weak. Call that doctor.

Kumkani: Give your dad as tight hug. I love you, Sisipho. (I cried and smiled)

Me: I love you too, Tata. (I hugged him)

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My heart felt a joy that I never knew existed. I just got the first hug and I love you from my dad. I've always wanted this to happen. He told me that he'll talk to his wife about me. I'll also get to meet my brother and he said Langa is not like Othu. The doctor came and we went to another section of the hospital. He ran his tests and I went back to my dad while we waited for the results. We sat and spoke so much. The doctor returned to us after a long, long while and gave us the results. I'm a perfect match just like Othu. She's not so mighty as she thought after all. Othu has never wanted us as her friends to meet her parents and I was fine with that since Kumkani knew me already. I agreed to give him one of my kidneys. He was so happy and hugged me so much. I'm going to give life to the

man who gave life to me. I will definitely be his favourite daughter after this because Othu refused to be a donor. Who refuses their father life? The same father that gave her everything. I don't mind being the one giving him another chance at life though. This will only make our relationship stronger. The operation is scheduled for tomorrow morning. I was given instructions on what to do and what not to do before the operation. I was asked a few medical questions to check my medical history. The doctor seemed happy and so did we. I was told the patient needs to rest and I said goodbye. I gave him another long, tight hug. I left the hospital feeling happy. Suddenly I have a purpose and it feel so great. I went to look for a place to stay. I don't have much to spend so I can't spend a lot on a flat. I didn't find anything so I called Zuko hoping that Othu didn't poison them against me. She answered and told me to go to her work. I did and told her all about Jacob but left out the daddy part. She offered me a place to stay until I'm on my feet. I guess she has no issue since she's lesbian and I'm straight so she doesn't fear I'll take her man. Who knows what my so called sister who damages our father's kidneys told them? I'll tell them someday who their "sweet" Othu really is. Now I know why I never felt like I must tell her the truth because she would have poisoned me against our father. Zuko gave me the keys to her apartment and it's better than the one I lived in. I drove there and went to put my stuff in the guest room. I made

myself at home as the owner told me to by making myself some food. I'll tell her later that I'm scheduled for an operation but not what kind. I'll need her to look after me post operation. I'll break the news about me being our friend's half sister when I'm ready. For now I'll just follows the pre operation instructions to ensure that my daddy gets my good healthy kidney. I can't wait to start a relationship with him.

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#CRAIG

I have been the worst boyfriend to O lately . I don't spend as much time with them as I used to and I feel horrible for distancing myself but I can't help it. I'd be a fool to believe that the commander doesn't suspect me in Wes's case. I'm sure now they are trying to figure out if there are people I'm close to. That's why I've limited the time I spend with O and Chulu. I miss them so much. I miss when Chulu runs to me with her arms wide open and hugs me. I miss when O looks at me with eyes filled with such innocence. Today is Saturday and I haven't been then in four days. Four long miserable days. If my moves are being tracked then I want the agency to see them as nothing but friends. Of they find out that they are way more to me then they will pick up on my weakness and use it to their advantage. I have put in a tracker in O's car and I see Chulu still carries her

whistle whatever she goes. If things go badly I think I might have to call on Flinch. I still don't trust him fully but I think the man really would do anything to Othunyiweyo. I sat and kept busy with my safety strategy and not for myself but for my ladies. There was a knock on the door and I thought it's the commander again since I'm not expecting anyone. I went to open the door and found two beautiful smiles in front of me. I couldn't help but smile back. They were both wearing glasses and looked so cute. Chulu jumped on me and I picked her up. I wrapped my free arm around O and kissed her neck. My heart suddenly felt at peace. I let them in and looked around to spot if there was any sign of someone following them. When I was satisfied I closed the door and faced them.

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Me: This is a lovely surprise. (I smiled)

Othu: Well we figured if uncle Craig won't come to us then we'll... (she looked at Chulu)

Chulu: We'll come to uncle Craig. (she finished and we laughed)

Me: Uncle Craig has been too busy and that's not good

Chulu: We brought you some food. Well it's for all of us. It's makhulu's dumplings and stew. (she smiled)

Me: Thank you

ladies and before we eat. I'd like to compliment you on the beautiful glasses. You look so adorable, Chulz. I love them.

Chulu: We got them this morning. I see better now. I saw the dust at home. (we laughed)

Othu: That was actually the first thing she noticed. Makhulu almost collapsed. (we laughed)

Me: You look beautiful too, mommy. (she blushed)

Othu: Thank you. Chulu go and wash your hands before we eat, baby. Do you need help? Oh I'm sorry, that's if it's okay with you. (she looked at me)

Me: More than okay. We'll wash ours after you.

Chulu: I know that the red dot mean hot and the blue dot mean cold, mommy. I can do it. (she rushed off)

Othu: Baby, I know that I involved you too much in our lives too soon and I'm sorry. You have most probably kept your distance because you needed some time out and I understand that. I'm sorry for just coming unannounced like this but I've missed you, Craig. We've missed you a lot. (she said softly)

Me: I'm sorry for being so distant. I've just had too much work. I miss you two so much. You didn't involve me in your stuff too soon. I wanted to be involved, love.

Othu: You'd tell me if you need...space right? (I held her by her waist and drew her closer to me)

Me: I won't tell you because I don't need space. (I kissed her)

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I've missed her desperately so when the kiss got intense I was not surprised. Knowing Chulu she'll play with the water and soap bubbles for a while so it gives me a chance to show my woman that I have missed her and that I want her. I squeezed her soft butt cheek and she let out a soft moan. I smiled and looked at her. My beautiful O. Chulu came from the bathroom after a while and we had to smell her hands because she wanted to prove that she washed them. We also washed our hands and warmed the food up. The fact that they thought of bringing me lunch was just so amazing. The three of us sat and enjoyed makhulu's cooking. She must write the recipe down for me. We finished and washed the dishes. Chulu wanted to read for us so we did that. Her reading is so good. She hardly stuttered. After a while she got bored of that and wanted to watch her cartoons. She was so happy to be able to see what's on the screen properly. I hope Monday she'll be confident enough to face her peers with her glasses. O and I cuddled on the couch.

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Me: Your hair smells like a tropical island. I like that. (she laughed)

Othu: Thank you even though I don't know how that smells like.

Me: So you two left makhulu alone? You took her stew and made a run for it. (we laughed)

Othu: Well technically all of that was actually for you because she saw that you liked it when she made it that one night.

Me: Oh my goodness. You beautiful thieves. (I kissed her and she laughed)

Othu: We can't let you eat alone. Plus she's not even home. She and her special friend have gone to Table Mountain. Next weekend he has invited us to his family lunch. The man has so many children, baby.

Me: It'll be strange being around them at first but if they are nice they'll make you all feel comfortable.

Othu: I guess. There's something I should have told you long ago. I went with Flinch to do some brain scans. (I looked at her)

Me: Why? Should I be worried?

Othu: No, they just showed that my brain activity is different from a typical one. the doctor said nothing seems wrong but he just could not explain why it's like that. There's more, that same day Flinch organised shooting lessons for me.

Me: The hell?

Othu: There's more, baby. He first made me watch a clip of a guy giving basic gun handling lessons. I did and when I got there I managed to shoot the target in the face a few times just by remembering each instruction from the video.

Me: That sounds great. It would explain the episode on our self defense class. That epic massage you gave me and how you managed to save yourself from that thug. But what exactly does it mean?

Othu: I think that my mind stores information well.

Me: Why am I only hearing about this now?

Othu: I was afraid to tell you because I feel like a freak.

Me: There's a difference between a freak and a person with a great mind, O. Could this be the results of how you were conceived?

Othu: Think so. You're not freaked out? What if we have a child that takes after me.

Me: Heck I wish all our children could. Chulu is smart already.
(she smiled)

Othu: You're a great man, Knights.

Me: And you're a great women. At times I don't feel worthy of you..

Othu: Don't say that when you were the one who said you and I both deserve the love and happiness we give each other. I love you.

Me: I love you more. (we kissed)

Othu: There's more I'd like to tell you. (I laughed softly)

Me: Today you come with a lot of news. I'm listening.

Othu: Uhm, I've been thinking about this for a while. I at first thought it's too early but I figured if it feels right to me than it doesn't matter. I'm ready, Craig

To take our relationship to the next level that is. (my eyes widened)

Me: As in on a physical intimacy level? (she smiled and nodded)
Baby, us having those tests didn't mean I'm trying to rush you into it. It just meant we'd openly know each others statuses. You know that right?

Othu: I do but that's not why I want to do it. I'm doing it because I'm ready and I want to to be with you.

Me: You're sure, O?

Othu: I am. (she kissed my neck)

Me: Wow! I've never been with someone whose never been with another person before. I don't even know if I deserve it. It won't happen tonight though. (she looked at me)

Othu: Okay whenever you are ready.

Me: I first have to go get that Boyz 2 Men track and make sure it plays on repeat that day. I also have to make sure all is romantic. (she laughed)

Othu: Now it sounds so cheesy when you say it like that.

Me: I like the sound of it. O, you're sure?

Othu: Yes, Clay I am. (I laughed)

Me: Okay and thank you for thinking I'm worth it. (she kissed me)

Chulu: Uncle Craig, do you have some ice cream? It's hot.

Me: I have been making sure to always stock up since I've met you. I always buy your favourite. Want a scoop or two or more?

Othu: Not too much. We don't want you to go into a sugar coma.

Me: That's really a thing?

Othu: I don't know but I don't want to take chances.

Me: Overprotective mommy bear. Come, Chulz let's go get enough scoops to satisfy your sweet tooth and not get you into a sugar coma. (we laughed)

Chulu: I want to scoop it please. Mommy, do you want some?

Othu: Coffee would be nice.

Me: You're going to go into a heat coma. (we laughed)

Othu: Whatever. (she threw a cushion at me)

Me: Let me go get my girls what they want. (they smiled)

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Chulu and I stood and went to the kitchen. I let her eat a few spoons from the ice cream tub while O was focusing on her phone. Hopefully Chulu won't go into a sugar coma. I made her the coffee she wanted because I know how she likes it by now. I got myself an energy drink. I have O her coffee and Chulu sat on the floor eating her sweet treat. They thanked me and I smiled. I can't believe that Othunyiweyo wants to give me such a big gift. One that she'll never be able to give any other man again. I hope I'll make it special to her and cheesy too. I'm so glad that they have come today because it's one of the best days of my life. Having a lazy day with my girl. I still wonder if it's too early to put a ring on it though? This is the woman that I know I want to spend the rest of my life with. I want to adopt Chulu with her. Make them the Knights ladies and hopefully

more little Knights will come in future. I first have to deal with the Wes issue though before starting a proper and more stable life with them. Today I won't flood my mind with panic. I'll just be lost in this beautiful moment with them. I would lay down my life for them. I am happy about O's new abilities too. To me they mean that she'll be able to look after herself and Chulu should she know how to. I will know have to insist on those lessons. Today is the days to be serious about it. So when Chulu takes her afternoon nap we'll use the time to our advantage. I still won't cause her to panic by telling her about the commander's visit. I can't be the reason for her living in fear again. I'll protect her while she is unaware of it as I've done so far.

KUMKANI

I can't believe that my plan worked out well. My performance was incredible. She must be desperate for a father and that gives me opportunity to use it to my advantage. I didn't expect her to be a match but I had to take my chances. I'm sure I have a few more bastards out there and I'm not willing to go play happy father or write to Khumbul' ekhaya in search of them. She was just an option since I knew she might be in Cape Town. I have a donor and I'm just so happy. I'm Kumkani Zweni, a man who always gets what he wants even if I have to deal with certain obstacles. Unathi came to visit and I thought now it's time to tell her the news. She greeted me and sat.

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Una: Did your plan to get a donor work? Oh Kumkani I hope you haven't stolen someone's kidney.

Me: I might at times be a ruthless man but I'm not that vile, Unathi. My plan has worked but no, I didn't steal a kidney. I can't afford one off the black market.

Una: So who is the donor?

Me: My daughter. (she smiled)

Una: How did you get her to agree. I'm so happy. This must be taken as an opportunity to start a relationship with her. I knew she's not that cold hearted.

Me: I said my daughter not our daughter, Nolitha.

Una: What's that suppose to mean?

Me: It means that I am telling you that I have a daughter. (she looked at me)

Una: One not birthed by me? Tell me she's older than our marriage, Kumkani.

Me: She's younger than our marriage, Una. I was young and stupid. I'm sorry, Marhadebe. (she started to cry)

Una: You cheat on me and have a child to prove your indecency? After all I've done for you Kumkani? You know that I didn't want a second child but because you saw the opportunity to make money through Othu's birth I supported you. My body carried her and I breastfed her. You're so ungrateful. How old is she?

Me: About the same age as Othu I guess. (she stood and walked to the door)

Una: So while I carried your child. Your ticket out of poverty. Another women was carrying your love child? Why am I even with you, Kumkani?

Me: I'm hoping it's because you love me. I don't want to live without you, Una. You're my biggest supporter, my cheerleader. I know I've let you down by losing our wealth but I'll make it all back. I still have favors that I need to call in. I need this girl to live. It's just that a means to live longer. Please let her do this and pretend to be loving and accepting until I've achieved my goal.

Una: I've done most things that you wanted but to expect me to love your proof of an affair is asking for too much.

Me: I didn't say love her. I'm asking that you tolerate her so that I'll live and be able to get us back on our feet again. Please, Ma Zweni. I'll stop asking for so much. I love you, Unathi. You're the only person who understands me.

Una: When is the procedure? (I smiled)

Me: Early tomorrow. You'll have to pretend to accept her. She could be useful to us. She is more like Langa than Othu and that might be good for us. Please don't tell my mother because she'll tell Othu. I'm not ready for that yet. I told Ma Zweni senior that I'll get a kidney soon and the odds are in my favor.

Una: What's her name? Don't tell me you screwed one of my friends. (she said softly)

Me: It's Lydia. Her father used to help with gardening remember? (she looked at me looking disgusted)

Una: That girl who used to have dirty cracked feet? Sies man Kumkani. Could you not at least have chosen a better girl? Such humiliation.

Me: She died so you don't have to worry about her. The daughter looks decent enough. Not the smartest tool in the box but she'll have to do.

Una: You are willing to be accepting of this girl when you refuse to accept our daughter. You don't want to admit it but Othu is like you. That girl is a go getter and smart. She has her own mind.

Me: There you're using that word again. Who said anything about love?

Una: My daughter deserves better, Kumkani. I'm not mother of the year but now I'm drawing a line. I wish I could go on shopping sprees with her now. I want to be her mother.

Me: I'm not stopping you just don't involve me. You are just upset about my other daughter. This has got nothing to do with Othu. It's about me getting that kidney so I could go back to work. Now stop going on about a damn affair that's over twenty years old. I'm sorry. Just please be in my corner this one time.

Una: Only because I want you to live and make my money back. You owe me. (she clicked her tongue)

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She looked at me intensely. I told her the time of the operation and she just looked at me and left. Una has been my partner in crime literally so I forget that she's human too at times. When she shows emotions I don't know how to react to that. I do love the woman though. Even if it were just us without kids I'd have been content but she wanted Langa. I forced Othu on her for the rewards she came with. I've decided to stop going after that girl. She's a waste of my time and a waste of oxygen all together. I'll make more money back than what she took. Naive fool left some. I'd have taken all so I guess she's not like me at all. I hope Una shows the Poppy girl fake love. She even believed my story about the name Sisipho. How dumb could a person be? Okay I'll give Othu points on smartness and sharpness. I know she'd have seen right through my act and called me out on it. That she does get from me. A got an unexpected visitor so I sat up. It's Melusi Yende.

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Yende: How long did you think you'd fool me? (I looked at him)

Me: I don't follow.

Yende: Don't play me for a fool, Zweni. Your company is under liquidation. Did you really think I'd marry my daughter off to a man who can not provide for her? (he shouted)

Me: I can explain. Those weren't my intentions. When I made that deal with you to marry our children I still had it all. I will be able to make it right.

Yende: How?

Me: Any way you want. (he looked at me)

Yende: Your daughter. She's a woman so I don't expect her to provide for my son. I want her to be the mother of my grandchildren. That way I'll make sure to help you get your dignity back.

Me: Othunyiweyo? That girl is a loose one. I had to deal with her boyfriends knocking off my door while fighting for her since she's a teen.

Yende: That's not what I saw when I met her.

Me: That's her gift. You can ask my other daughter. She'll tell you all about her sister. Let's arrange for her to marry your son instead.

Yende: I didn't know you had another.

Me: Well this one I decided to raise at the rural areas. She's way better than Othu. I'm sure she's even a virgin and if not I'm sure she has not been with more than two men. Othu I'm sure has exceeded twenty in her lifetime. Reconsider my other daughter.

Yende: Let's meet her first.

Me: So Langa no...

Yende: No man is going to live off my daughter. A man must be able to provide for his household. That agreement is over. My son will be able to provide for your daughter that's if we like her. I really liked the one I've met though but I can't have my son go around having left overs of so many other men. What a pity that she's not who I thought she was.

Me: Great pity. You'll like Sisipho. That I can guarantee you.

Yende: Never think you'll deceive me again. I'll deal with you in ways that will shock you. I'll strip you of all that you have and you'll find yourself a beggar.

Me: Never again, Tshawe. That daughter is going to give me a kidney tomorrow. Othu refused. Now do you see the difference between them?

Yende: Like I've said. I want to meet her first.

Me: After the operation and once in healed a bit please. I want to be there when it happens.

Yende: Okay, I'll go tell my son so long. You do this right, Zweni you'll be a rich man. (he walked out)

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My heart was pounding so much. Usually I'd not let any man scare me but this one holds the fate of my future in his hands. I need his money. I knew that such a well connected man would put two and two together but I just took my chances. I'm glad that I have a chance to build a relationship with him though. Langa will just have to cut his loses. I'll find him a wife from another wealthy family once we're rich again. I knew that Othu would never agree to marry a stranger. She told it to me straight up once and I'm not about to beg that girl. I told Langa to not invite her and now look Yende liked her. Now I have to mold this Poppy person to my liking and make her be exactly what Yende wants. Now is the time to test how far her desperation for a father goes. I hope that Una will agree to be a part if this. All my plots and scams have been a success because of her. She's the ying to my yang. I know Langa will play along because my boy always wants to see me happy. Una is the same but I know she's hurt at the moment. I'm not sorry for the affair because it came with the daughter I'll need to make my plan work. I'll push that she's a virgin and wants to do it on her wedding night. With the right acting from her about acting innocent it'll work. I get why Yende liked Othu. The girl has an innocence about her. It shows in the way she speaks. In her eyes and the way she carries herself but she is not one I can control. Suddenly all just seem to be coming well. My life is falling back into place naturally. Well I had to make Langa

investigate Poppy to see where she is but after today all is just flowing well. Soon I'll have a new kidney and I'll be filthy rich again. I think I have just found that "perfect" daughter. Well she'll be perfect after I've worked on her a bit. I can't wait to be back in the game. Kumkani Zweni is not a soldier that stays down for good.

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#OTHU

Chulu and I have been having a great day with Craig. It makes it even more difficult to say goodbye. I love this man a lot and I'm glad I told him about the developments in my life. He hoped that Chulu would take a nap for some reason but my baby refused. I blame that ice cream. I watched as he played pretend with him. They were having a tea party. I'm honestly not in the mood for fake tea today. I'm also glad that I told him I'm ready to take our relationship to the next level. This was no hush hush decision either. My phone rang and it's Poppy. I ignored it at first but she kept on calling. I answered.

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Me: Poppy.

Poppy: It's Sisipho from now on.

Me: What?

Poppy: You know Othu you're evil. You're a snake dressed in a wolf's clothes.

Me: I think it's wolf dressed in wolf's clothing.

Poppy: Whatever! That's your other problem you think that you are above all.

Me: When did I ever show you that I'm above you, Poppy? How many times have I helped you out of a tight spot? Don't try and make it seem like I'm the one at fault for our relationship being as it is.

Poppy: You can keep your man. The thing is weal in bed anyway. A man that can't even go down on a girl is not the shit. Keep him.

Me: Why have you called me?

Poppy: To tell you that you are evil. A little bird told me that you refused to give your own father a kidney. Shame on you. Acting all holy whe...(I cut the call)

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I was not about to listen to nonsense not on such a beautiful day. I can't believe that Yandi told the others about me being a match. She's the only one in the group in open to about the real situation with my parents and Poppy could only have heard

about it from her. Just now she went on about how good Craig's bedroom game was and now that she's been rejected its lame. If only she knew that he has no problem with oral sexual pleasure. I'm not about to make public my private life with him just to prove something to her though. I can't entertain such. I called Yandi and asked her why she spoke about my family life with Poppy. She said she cut ties with her after what she did. I apologised for suspecting her and said goodbye. Craig walked over to me and held my waist.

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Craig: Please spend the night. You two can have the bed again. Today has just been great.

Me: We have a special ceremony at church, baby. I'll have to get up early. Would you like to join us?

Craig: Love with a past like mine I feel guilty whenever I step into a church.

Me: God is not a God that holds our pasts against us, Craig. That's something we humans do. We judge each others ways forgetting that no one is perfect. He has already forgiven you but you'll have to forgive yourself too. You can't change your past. But you have control of the present. I'm not going to be that girlfriend who forces you to go to church with me because

I want it to be when you're ready. Even if you choose a different faith than mine it won't be an issue. I love you.

Craig: I'll come to church but just not tomorrow.

Me: And I'm okay with that. Chulu and I pray for you and it would be really special if someday you'd pray with us. (he smiled)

Craig: That sounds so special. You're special. Your little girl is special. (he kissed me)

Me: And you're just as special.

Craig: Is it just me or are we starting to sound cheesier by the minute? (we laughed)

Me: Nope I noticed too but I don't mind.

Craig: So what had you so upset? Me: Poppy called. (he sighed loudly)

Craig: What now?

Me: She's telling me that I'm evil for not giving Kumkani a kidney. What bothers me is how she found out because I only told Yandi and she says she said nothing.

Craig: Well he's a well known man so perhaps a local paper ran with his story.

Me: You're right. That never crossed my mind. Well he told makhulu that he'll get a kidney soon. I refuse to let anyone make me feel guilty.

Craig: Yes because you owe them nothing after the way they treated you.

Me: Can we sleep over next time? Craig: I'd love that very much. I was thinking that we must have a romantic get away. (I smiled)

Me: I'd love that very much. Makhulu will go to the Eastern Cape to meet with her family though about the land. We'll have to do it before or after that.

Craig: If you're referring to Chulu we are taking her with. We'll make sure she plays enough during the day so that she'll sleep at night and the adults can have that alone time. (he brushed my inner thigh)

Me: Craig, stop that makes me turned on and we don't want that with the little miss so alert. (we both looked at Chulu and laughed)

Craig: The joys of having kids. So I know of a place just outside Cape Town. It has a double room suite so Chulz can have her own room. I checked its safety and I'm satisfied.

Me: You do realise that we aren't presidents or royalty right? So I doubt any danger will follow.

Craig: I just want to be sure. Crazy people are out there. So even you are free one weekend let me know and I'll book it.

Me: I'll ask if the deacon can assemble his family during the week for dinner then we can do it this coming weekend.

Craig: I'll arrange everything.

Me: I can't wait. I'll also do house hunting soon. I'm excited to own my first property.

Craig: Congratulations, baby. I'm so happy for you. (he kissed me)

Me: Thank you.

Craig: You look beautiful. (I blushed)

Me: Thank you.

Craig: Can I tell her that we are going? (I smiled)

Me: Yeah.

Craig: Chulz, next weekend we are going on an adventure. (he picked her up)

Chulu: Yipee, I love adventures. What will we be doing?

Craig: Well if I tell you it won't be an adventure. (she laughed)

Me: Don't worry, bhabha. Mommy also don't know what the adventure is. (there was a knock on the door)

Craig: Let me get that. (he put her down)

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He rushed to the door and opened. A man in a beautiful suit walked in. He clearly works out even in his old age. Craig's facial expression changed and his jaw tightened. They shook hands and the man walked in with a smile. Chulu held on to my skirt. Something she rarely does.

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Man: Good afternoon or is it evening already? (he laughed)

Me: Hello

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well it doesn't really matter.

Man: Snipe, aren't you going to introduce us?

Craig: This is Othunyiweyo, a client of mine and that is her daughter Chulu. Othu, this is Patrick Davis. (my feeling got hurt. A client?)

Pat: It's always a pleasure to meet a beautiful woman. (he kissed my hand and Craig looked as if he'd punch the man)
Hello, little girl. (he waved at Chulu)

Chulu: Hello. (she said in a whisper and held onto me)

Pat: I see you have a shy daughter.

Craig: Comm...I mean Mr Davis, we were having a meeting. My client here has a very serious security issue.

Pat: It must be if she bored the child by bringing her to a meeting. I'm not staying. Just came to tell you I'm flying out tonight. I finally had Wes cremated. I thought you'd be there.

Craig: I wasn't told.

Pat: You used to know everything. Nothing would pass this guy. (he laughed while looking at me)

Craig: I'm glad you managed to do what you came for.

Pat: I'll be back. South Africa has beautiful women. I'm sure you won't mind me asking this lady out for drinks.

Me: In sorry but I'm in a relationship wi...

Craig: She is seeing someone. In fact he proposed marriage. Try another.

Pat: You've lost your touch in so many things it seem. Your vigilance and with women. The old him would not let a skirt pass him by.

Craig: Patrick, I'm trying to keep a good reputation here. If you tell my client such it might taint my company.

Pat: Of course. I'll be on my way then. Goodbye Oti, should that man mess up have this one call me. Bye, sweet pie. Here's a

sweet for you. I always keep sweets in my pocket. (he gave it to Chulu she kept quiet)

Me: Say thank you, bhabha.

Chulu: Thank you.

Craig walked him out and I could see he's tense. I don't know what is up but something is not right. He walked towards us again.

Craig: Chulz give me that sweet, princess. It'll give you tummy ache.

Chulu: Okay. (she gave it to him)

Me: Go play, Chulu please. (she rushed off) A client, Craig?

Craig: That was a person from my past. He's Wes's uncle. I don't want him knowing who you are.

Me: Why not?

Craig: I'm trying to leave my old life behind, O. That means the people from it too. Please understand, baby.

Me: Should I be worried?

Craig: No, you need not be.

Me: Chulu seemed uncomfortable around him.

Craig: He has never been a kid person, ever. Are you okay, Chulu? (she looked at him)

Chulu: Yes but I don't like your friend, uncle Craig. He looks angry.

Craig: You don't need to like him. You'll never see him again. It's getting late now, O. Perhaps it's time you go home.

Me: Just now you wanted us to sleep over.

Craig: And I respect that you can't and that's why you must go. I don't like the idea of you two being on the road alone at night. Please, baby.

Me: You'd tell me if something was wrong right? You're not yourself.

Craig: I'll be fine. I just don't like the man much like Chulz. I love you and tomorrow we start with those lessons.

Me: Okay, Chulu gather your stuff. We're leaving. (she stood and packed)

Chulu: Uncle Craig I'm reading from the bible in front of the whole church tomorrow. Did mommy tell you? (He looked at me)

Craig: Yes but I unfortunately can't be there.

Chulu: Oh. (she said softly)

Me: We'll make a video for uncle Craig, bhabha. He is busy.

Chulu: Okay. (she became busy with packing again)

Craig went to help her and that to me proved that he doesn't want us near him. He's been hot and cold lately and it makes me feel so insecure. I feel like it's because I come with so much. I know he said he doesn't mind helping me but when he distance himself I can't help but feel that way. I thought we'd communicate better but it seems that's not the case. Do I even want to give more of myself to a man who keeps stuff to himself? This Davis man clearly spooked him for some reason and he won't say what that reason is. Maybe I should have fought my feelings and remained just friends with him but how when I love him so much? He walked us to our car and looked so uneasy. I decided to stop asking whether he's okay. He strapped Chulu in her seat, kissed her forehead and gave her a hug. He came to my side and gave me a kiss.

"Lock the doors, O", he said before closing my door. Not I love you or I already miss you as he usually does. I smiled faintly and waved before driving off. He waved too and Chulu blew kisses. He knocked on my window and signaled for me to lock the doors. I did that and drove off. Should I be worried by his behavior?

MAKHULU

Today I won't be going with my girls to church because my son is having his operation. I'm really glad that all has worked out for him. I've been trying to hide my pain from Othu because I didn't want her to give Kumkani a kidney just out of pity for me. He is not the man I envisioned he'd be but he is still my son. When he hurts I do too so I'm glad that God decided to give him a second chance. I told Othu about the operation and she wished him well. I know my baby and I could see that she really meant what she said. For a girl who has not been given much love by those around her she sure has much love to give. The operation will be an early one so I got up and got myself ready. I said a prayer and I went out to the kitchen to call a taxi. I found Othu busy preparing some sandwiches. I greeted her with a kiss and made myself some tea.

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Me: Why are you up so early, nunu?

Othu: Because I wanted to beat you at the early bird thing. (we laughed)

Me: You think I get up early by choice? It's old age, my girl. By 4am my eyes are wide open already.

Othu: And by 10am you fall asleep on the couch while watching TV.(I laughed)

Me: You're naughty. Are you and Chulu going on picnic after church?

Othu: No this is all for you. I know that the food they sell at some food outlets isn't healthy so I packed you some food. (I kissed her cheek)

Me: Thank you so much, nunu. I'm so sad by the fact that I won't be there to see Chulu's performance. My baby doesn't read a bible verse in front of the entire church often.

Othu: I'll make sure I sit in front today and make a video of it. I thought she'd be nervous but she actually seem excited.

Me: She's a people's person and she sees the people each Sunday after all.

Othu: You're right, ma. I also wanted to ask if you'll be able to have Mr Funda move his dinner and have it earlier on. Craig is taking Chulu and I for a weekend away.

Makhulu: I was actually going to suggest it to him. I'm going to the Eastern Cape this weekend to speak to the family.

Othu: I'm glad because I was worried about leaving you alone here. Until I remembered that you have a friend who keeps you bust these days. (we laughed)

Me: I'm happy and I enjoy his company. I been single for 27 years now.

Othu: Ma, since you both have life experiences and wisdom. I'm guessing that neither of you want to date casually. Correct me if I'm wrong but at your age you know what you want. You've done it all so now you just want someone to enjoy the rest of your golden years with. Is it safe to assume that you two might be married soon?

Me: Would that bother you? (she suddenly focused on packing the food)

Othu: He makes you happy so it doesn't matter what I want.

Me: It does actually. (I held her hands)

Othu: I feel terrible for not looking happy, Ma. I've just never imagined him as my possible grandpa. I just feel like you've been in a special friendship with him for long and didn't tell me.

Me: I'm sorry best friend for keeping it secret. (she laughed)
You are my best friend, nunu and I tell didn't tell you because there was nothing to tell. We aren't talking marriage. I'm yet to meet his children and other family members. They might hate me.

Othu: Well they'll be missing out on getting to know a great woman should they hate you. I am happy to see you glowing and going out though.

Me: And I'm really happy. (we both smiled)

Othu: I'm glad, ma. Please go get ready. I packed you some breakfast and lunch because I'm hoping you'll be back by dinner time. I don't trust Mrs Zweni and Langa they might order food and let you watch while they eat. (we laughed)

Me: I wouldn't put it past those two. Thank you, my nunu. I see that behind and hips are full again. Craig must be doing something right. (she looked at me strangely)

Othu: Ma! (she laughed)

Me: I'm just saying.

Othu: If you meant that innocently than it didn't sound like that. Oh my goodness, Ma Zweni. (I laughed)

Me: I'm just saying that I love what I'm seeing. I failed to do it then Craig comes along and the curves are popping out again. Those are Tyini curves by the way not Zweni. (she laughed)

Othu: Makhulu, please go and get your stuff so that we'll get you to the hospital. (she blushed)

Me: I hope you're not planning on locking Chulu in. I can take a taxi.

Othu: I'd never, Ma. I'll carry the sleeping Chulu she's a deep sleeper.

Me: No, don't do that. A taxi ride won't kill me. Let her sleep before her big moment. Please call that taxi while I go finish up.

Othu: Okay, ma.

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I have the most considerate child ever. God never blessed me with a daughter of my own but He made sure I get to experience having one by blessing me with Othu. She's really a daughter that any mother would wish for and I'm thankful that she's mine. Unathi is missing out shame. I went to finish getting ready and took my bag. I made my way to Chulu's room and kissed those soft cheeks. My other beautiful gift. I made my way to the kitchen and took the cooler bag Othu packed my food in. It's so heavy and I wondered what's in it. We both made our way out and said goodbye to her before getting into the cab. I told the driver where I'm going and he drove off. I arrived at the hospital after a while. For a broke man he sure has ways to keep the expensive medical care. I walked to his room and found his wife and Langa with him. They all looked shocked to see me. I greeted them and stood by his side.

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Kumkani: I didn't think you'd come, Mama.

Me: I might not agree to the way you do things but I'm still your mother and I love you.

Langa: So Othu really didn't come?

Kumkani: Good thing she didn't. I can't have high blood pressure before such a big procedure. Othu is a high blood pressure trigger.

Me: Do not speak like that about my child when you all are the reason she's distant. Remember how you used to take Langa out because he was a "good boy" and left her behind?

Una: Let's not bring up the past. You heard that stress is not good for him.

Me: I was just trying to make you see that you've never made her feel included in your little family. So don't make her feel guilty for excluding herself when it's you who made her be like that.

Kumkani: Mama please stop.

Me: I hope you'll take this second chance at life as an opportunity to start afresh Kumkani. Be kinder and change your ways. God has given you a second chance so don't waste it.

Kumkani: I know it's Sunday but please stop with the holy stuff.
(the door opened and Othu's friend walked in)

Poppy: Good morning, family. Hello makhulu. (she came to hug me)

Me: Why are you here, my girl and in a hospital gown?

Kumkani: You'll find out anyway so I might as well tell you. She's my daughter and is giving me a kidney. (I almost collapsed)

Me: You're daughter?

Una: Yes we recently found out and we welcome her with open arms.

Me: You welcome another woman's child with open arm yet you refuse to show the slightest care to your own? What am I missing here? What has my baby done to you people? If anything she gave you a better chance at life yet you...

Kumkani: Mama, if you come here with negativity then it's best you not be here. We'll call to let you know how it went. I don't know what Othu has to do with this. Accept your other granddaughter.

Me: I've met this child before and many times so. Why did she never say she's one of us?

Kumkani: I d...

Me: Hey! I'm asking her. She seems old enough to speak for herself.

Poppy: I didn't know that I'm one of you at first, Makhulu.

Me: My girl I've been in this world for a long time. Try again and the truth this time. (she looked at Kumkani)

Langa: I think it's best that makhulu comes after the operation. You can go do your stuff and we'll call you afterwards.

Me: Look, Pop stickle I don't know what you are trying to do but I can assure you that you'll come dead last. They look like dolphins but they are actually sharks. I don't know why you came with false pretences to my child but I can guarantee you that she'd have been a much better option then them if you wanted to be a part of a family. I can see that you are one of us because you have the Zweni nose. At first I just thought you resemble Othu by coincidence but now I know why. You have just thrown yourself into the deep, dark part of the ocean and I hope that you can swim, my baby. I'm your grandma and I'd love to get to know you but I'm not blind to the sins of your father. If you stick to them then I can't trust you. I'm sorry that you grew up not knowing him but I can assure you that once you hear and see the type of man that he really is you'll see not having him as a part of your life as a blessing. You think that dear Unathi will give you love? You're the same age as Othu so it doesn't take a genius to figure out that you're a child of an affair. She doesn't care for her own daughter. You're a fool to believe that she'll care for her husband's love child.

Poppy: I ju...

Kumkani: I just knew that you have come here to destroy my chances at life. You and Othu have never wished me well. I still

remember when makazi told me that you once tried to suffocate me with a pillow. Now that you see a chance to finally get rid of me by convincing Sisipho to not give me a kidney. It now is clear why Othu is as she is because she's raised by you. Sisipho, you don't have to give me a kidney. I've forgiven my mother and daughter even when I never got an apology so I'm ready to die. I made peace with you so I'll rest in eternal peace. (he cut her short)

Me: You need prayer from leaders of all faiths, Kumkani. You're right I can't stay here. My granddaughter is having a special day at church so I'd much rather be there. You might as well just have ripped my heart out after what you just said because I've never been so hurt. You Unathi grow that backbone, woman. Gone are the days women used to be doormats to men like your husband. You Langa, you have all the physical attributes of a grown man but you behave like a small, scared little boy. Join your mother in growing that backbone, my boy. You, Pop my girl I feel sorry for you. He is using your desperation to his advantage. I never heard about you. A parent who really longed for his child would have let slip something about it. If it's family you're looking for you know where you can find Othu and I. We are not perfect but we sure beat what they offer. (the doctor came in)

Doc: You pressed the help button, Mr Zweni. Is something wrong?

Kumkani: Have my mother be escorted out please

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Doctor. My BP is rising and I know if it's too high you won't be able to do the operation.

Doc: Miss Thongani, go back to your room please. The nurses need to prepare you now. Mrs Zweni please mam we can't upset any of the patients before such an operation. I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to leave.

Me: You don't have to ask me twice, Doctor. I had my say and it seems he doesn't need me. Who needs a mother who tried to "suffocate" him with a pillow right? Thank goodness I'm thrown out now I can go be with my Chulu without feeling any guilt. I'll pray for you all. Popo, like I've said you better now how to swim or at least have a life jacket. You're in deep water with sharks and you seem to think you're in a swimming pool with dolphins. My poor girl I feel for you. I'll pray for you all.

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I smiled and gracefully walked out with my head held high. I'm a lady after all. They don't need me so I'll go be with people who always want me around. Pity my poor child had to wake up early to pack food for nothing but I'll still eat it. I feel sorry for

Poppy but a child has to get those fingers burnt a bit in order to understand that a hot stove is not a play thing. Something tells me she knew who her father was all this time and if I'm right it makes me be afraid of her a bit. She could be dangerous. I'd love to hear her story though because I'm sure it's not an easy one. Othu won't believe this but I'll tell her after church. Today is about Chulu. The taxi arrived and I drove back home. My heart pained by the lies my own son said about me. He feels like such a stranger to me.

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#KUMKANI .

I had to lie about my mother hating me. To be honest she's a great mother. I didn't expect to see her today but she came regardless of my shortcomings. I hope she can forgive me for lying. I had to make this girl believe that I'm the victim because I could see that she was starting to listen to Ma Zweni. Well she went with the doctor to her room and my family waited outside. I had to call one last guest before I go under. He came just in time.

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Me: I was starting to think you'll never arrive.

Nzulu: I don't usually do home visits or in this case hospital visits but I've known you for years now so I had to come

Me: Oh my dear friend. You've been a vital part of my success. Without you and your help I'm nothing. Do you have the stuff?

Nzulu: I do and had to go to foreign land to get this type of it.
(he gave me a bottle)

Me: Oh silver tongue my dear old helper. I'll definitely need a stronger one.

Nzulu: You do know that silver tongue would do nothing had you not been a natural born manipulator right? It is just there to enhance your talent.

Me: And I'll need it now more than ever. For years it's helped me get people to do what I want them to. It's like they can't say no to me.

Nzulu: Like I've said it works when you truly are a manipulator.

Me: I don't care. Pity my daughter is immune to it and it seems so is my mother but that's fine. I've got the people I need wrapped around my finger already. Here is your money. I'll see you next time when I come to re-stock. (I gave him money)

Nzulu: I'll see you around. Use that wisely it's stronger than the usual. (I laughed)

Me: Yeah. (he left)

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I took the little bottle and hid it in my drawer. That has been my way to manipulate people. I know I'm a born manipulator and perhaps even a narcissist but a man has to do everything to get his way in this life. I don't know if the silver tongue muthi works or if I'm just good at luring people with my words naturally. But whatever it is I don't mind because it gives me power. The nurses came and prepared me to go into the operation. I said a little prayer before they wheeled me out to the theater. I found Poppy there already and held her hand while they were busy. It seems I'm blessed with meal tickets of daughters. Othu's birth was my way out of poverty and Poppy is my way out of a tight spot. How lucky can a man possibly be?

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#OTHU

I really pray that Kumkani's body accepts the new kidney. I just can't seem to hate the man no matter what he's done. I went to get myself ready before Chulu wakes up. Today she'll be reading a verse from the bible. It'll just be a few seconds but I'm a proud mommy. Well I'm proud of all the little ones at Sunday school because the first half of the service will be their time. They will sing, dance and be reading. I finished and heard a noise at the door. I went to check and makhulu walked in. I might not know much about operations but I'm sure a kidney

transplant isn't so quick. I waited for her to come in and tell me what's up.

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Makhulu: I don't even know why I bothered going. They told me to leave.

Me: What?

Makhulu: Let's talk about it after church, nunu. Go and finish up and I'll wake Chulu up and get her ready. The service starts early remember.

Me: You're right but after church I want to hear everything.

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I rushed off to my room and finished getting ready. I'll go all out today with make up and heels. I'll even sit right in front with makhulu today. Chulu came to my room to say good morning. She's so excited for today. We both got ready and had breakfast. We said a prayer before leaving the house and we went off to church. I'm curious to know what went on at the hospital but I'll wait as makhulu asked. We finally arrived and it was packed already. I hope there are a few from seats left. Chulu went to her Sunday school class and we walked inside luckily there were a few vacant seats in front. We greeted others and I got so many compliments. The service started with a prayer by deacon Funda. I'm never going to look at him the

same again. The kids joined the service all dressed in white and gold. My baby looked like an angel. I took out my phone immediately. The pastor called the Sunday school teachers to the front and gave them the platform. They greeted the people and gave us an idea of what to expect. Music started to play softly and we all went quiet as they placed the children in their places. The song changed and they started to dance. I was honestly just looking at my baby. Biased mother I know but I'm not going to apologise for that. Some made mistakes but they are kids so who cares? Now I know what they do at Sunday school. The dance ended and the teacher asked Miss Zweni to come to the front. Most looked at me though. I am not a public speaker at all. Chulu made her way to the front and Makhulu and I smiled at each other. Yandi ran to sit in the seat that I kept for her and also smiled. Chulu stood and looked at us and I could see the nerves have finally kicked in. Makhulu, Yandi and I smiled and made thumbs up. They adjusted the microphone to her level and she stood holding her little pink bible. "Good morning all", she said softly. Her teachers signaled that she speak up a bit.

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Chulu: Good morning all. I'm going to read from 1 John chapter four verse 7-10. "Dear friends, let us love one another because love comes from God. Whoever love is a child of God and

knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God...uhm, God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. This is what love is, it's not that we lov...loved God but that He loved us and sent his Son to be means by which our sins are forgiven". Thank you. (my heart melted like never before)

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I just couldn't sit and not clap hands for my baby so I stood and clapped and so did makhulu. The rest of the people also clapped. She smiled and waved at someone at the back. I turned to see who and Craig was also on his feet clapping. I smiled and nodded and he did the same. We sat back down and the service went on. One child explained what the verses Chulu read means to him and it was just beautiful to see little people do this. I made sure to save the clip of Chulu reading. They went on with their wonderful service until it ended. I take my hat off to their teachers. The pastor themed his preaching based on love since the kids started on it. It was a great service. What a theme! And I'm here with the ones I love most so it became even more special. The service came to an end after two hours and it was worth joining. Chulu ran to us and I picked her up and kissed her.

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Me: That was so wonderful. You read so beautifully, bhabha. I'm so proud of you.

Makhulu: I'll keep that video forever. I'm just as proud of you. Oh my heart is at peace and I'm so glad that I came.

Chulu: I felt scared at first.

Craig: There's the star. (he kissed her cheek) You were amazing, Chulz. I'm glad I was just in time for that. Wow!

Makhulu: It's good too see you join us again, Clay. You've been hiding from us. (she hugged him)

Craig: I know and I'm sorry, Ma. I'm really glad that I managed to make it today though. Hearing about the love of God was special.

Me: Thank you for coming. We appreciate it a lot. (we held hands)

Craig: I realise now that I belong here with you guys. (the deacon approached)

Funda: Oh Nomhle, your grandchild did great. Here is a sweet for you, Chulu. (she took it)

Chulu: Thank you. Uncle Craig, is this one also going to give me tummy ache? (he smiled)

Craig: No, princess. It's not.

Me: But you have to eat it after we've had lunch.

Funda: I'd like to take you all out if that's okay.

Makhulu: We didn't cook so I'm sure they'd love to. (she smiled at him)

Me: We'd appreciate it, deacon. Thank you. Will you join us?

Craig: Only if the deacon agrees to let me pay half of the bill.
(we laughed)

Funda: A young man who knows how to treat his ladies. I agree, Knights.

Makhulu: Men! Othu and I are fully capable of paying.

Funda: We know and I don't know about Knights but that's one of the things I love most about you. (she blushed)

Craig: I agree with Mr Funda but please built our man egos by letting us pay. (we laughed)

Me: We'll see. (laughter again)

Funda: How did the operation go, Nomhle? Is the boy going to be well?

Makhulu: I'll tell you all about it later but let's go celebrate my Chulu's milestone today and forget the rest. I'm sure he'll be just fine.

Chulu: Can I please have a big milkshake?

Makhulu: Today you can have what you want, my baby. Makhulu will make sure of that. (she looked at me and I laughed)

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Makhulu, Chulu and the deacon went to say goodbye to other people. My friends walked to us and greeted. Craig stood aside with Vuyo. I see a great friendship in the near future for that two. They are both great men.

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Yandi: Oh my word. Chulu makes me so broody. I suddenly also want a daughter.

Me: They are magic.

Licia: Soon she might have a friend.

Me: Are you trying to tell us something?

Licia: No. (she smiled)

Zuko: I'm glad we all are okay but Poppt is not. She went in for an operation today to have her appendix removed. I know we are all still upset with her but I took her in.

Me: I'm glad that you did because we aren't cold hearted people. I really hope all goes well for her.

Licia: So Jacob dropped her when he heard she won't be well to give him the sex? Why am I not surpriced?

Zuko: His wife found out and attacked Poppy. Since he was paying for the apartment she's left homeless.

Licia: I'll take a few job opportunities to her. She'll have to start at intern level since she never made use of her degree but hey we all started somewhere.

Yandi: I wish her well but I'm not ready to forgive what she did to my friend. My man and I have plans. My mom is in town so yeah.

Me: I'll come visit her soon.

Yandi: Why don't you all come over next Saturday?

Me: I'd love to but I have plans with my daughter and man.
(they smiled)

Zuko: Me too with my new bae. I know I said I'd introduce her to you and I will just not yet. (we laughed)

Me: Enjoy your love bubble, girl. We just hope she treats you right.

Zuko: So much. Thanks to internet dating.

Me: I have to go. Tell Poppy that she must have a speedy recovery. I love you all. (I hugged them)

Licia: We love you too.

Me: Yandi, I'll come over during the week to see the first lady.
(we laughed)

I walked away and Craig followed soon after. I love him in a suit. He looks so sexy. It seems like he and the Davis man loves well fitted suits.

Craig: Have I told you how much I you?

Me: You have and I do too.

Craig: You look so beautiful, baby. Even had to give some of your church brothers the evil eye when they looked at you. (I laughed)

Me: Had they wanted me they would have asked me out long ago.

Craig: I'm a man, O so I know what a man who admires a woman romantically is like. Some want you trust me but they can't have you.

Me: Yeah, yeah. Just look how much they are glowing. (we looked at makhulu and deacon)

Craig: Love does wonders to a person. I should know. (I looked at him)

Me: I want to kiss you.

Craig: Me too but no I'm not going to give into temptation and have all the church ladies gossip about you.

Me: You're amazing.

Chulu ran to us and she loves the attention and compliments she's getting. We finally got into the cars and drove to a kid friendly place. We ordered and ate as soon as our food came. It was a special moment and deacon Funda is growing on me too. After we were done they said they are going to a funfair. I wanted to go home and hear what makhulu wanted to say but I can't stand in the way of her fun. They went their way and we went to the apartment, my apartment. Chulu fell asleep and we just sat and cuddled and planned our weekend. He asked me to go change for the lessons and I was not in the mood. I went to change though since it's for my own good. We started the lessons and I must say I'm impressed with myself. Until I threw a punch that made Craig's nose bleed that is. I felt terrible but he complimented me. My hand hurt a lot but not as much as my heart did for hurting him. I aided the nose and kissed it. I decided to end the lesson and just cuddle and kiss like a normal couple. We later fell asleep in each other's arms.

OTHU

Makhulu came home late last night and was too tired to sit down and talk. She seems to have a great social life these days but I'm glad. I'm curious to know what happened at the hospital yesterday though. Why would Kumkani throw out his mother? I'll never understand that man shame. It seems like I didn't do much damage to Craig's nose. I've never even been in a physical fight but it seems like I have a boxing talent. I watched Chulu's video over and over again. My baby is just the best and I'm super proud of her. It's sad to hear what happened to Poppy. To lose a home and then have to go for an operation must be hell. I hope she gets back on her feet again. I heard some noise in the kitchen and got up. I know it's makhulu making herself tea. My alarm is only set to go off at 5:30am and it's now 5am. I'll use the extra time to get the news from yesterday. I hugged her from behind and greeted. I've got a beautiful granny though. No wonder Mr Funda fell for her.

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Makhulu: It's not time to get up yet. Go to sleep I'll wake you up at your usual time.

Me: I'm not sleepy, Ma and I want to hear about what happened yesterday. Why did your son throw you out?

Makhulu: I need to sit for this one, nunu. You won't believe what happened there. (she put her cup on the table and sat)

Me: Don't tell me they did it because you're still living here with me after I've refused him as kidney. To them that means you've chosen my side.

Makhulu: I don't care what they think. So I went yesterday and told Kumkani to use this second chance at life to change. Someone so unexpected walked in.

Me: Who? (I looked at her and she sipped her tea)

Makhulu: His donor, my girl.

Me: Oh so he didn't buy one of the black market. That's a relief. The man at least has a conscious.

Makhulu: You know the donor, nunu. (I looked at her confused)

Me: But neither mama and Langa matched. Who is it?

Makhulu: His daughter from an affair he had years ago.

Me: Well I can't say I'm surprised by him having an affair. Ma, who is it? The curiosity is killing me.

Makhulu: Poppy Thongane. (I almost collapsed)

Me: My Poppy? I mean my friend Poppy?

Makhulu: The one and only. Apparently she only just found out the identity of her father but I don't buy that story. (I kept quiet trying to process everything)

Me: If she's his then that means she's my half sister. Oh my goodness, Ma. (I finally said)

Makhulu: Do you remember that time I commented on how she resembles you a bit? Well my baby it is no coincidence. The girl has Zweni blood running through her veins.

Me: Wow! You know, Ma had you come with this news long ago I'd have been happy but now I realised that Poppy is not the most honest.

Makhulu: I don't know what happened between you two but I picked up that she can't be trusted either. That girl knew Kumkani long before now, my nunu. My gut feeling never lies.

Me: Wow!

Makhulu: You've said that already. (she laughed softly)

Me: If she knew then why keep quiet about it? Ma, if she knew him before now it means she knew I'm her sister all this time. And if that's so I'm worried.

Makhulu: I'm sure the girl has a bad past but I also wonder why she did not reveal such an important detail to you.

Me: Mama must be angry.(she clapped once)

Makhulu: That one has become a pro at pretending. They have Poppy thinking she's a part of the family. I have a feeling she has always yearned to have a family and that's what they are offering her or at least they seem to.

Me: Her mom died when she was sixteen, Ma and she never met her dad. So I'm sure that's what happening. I can't believe Mama is hiding her anger and pain. Why?

Makhulu: Do you even have to ask? Kumkani is why of course.

Me: I've been friends with my sister all this time without even realising it? (I said in a whisper)

Makhulu: I'm still processing it myself. I'd love to get to know her because there's no difference between you two. You're both my grand babies but I don't know what the other Zweni's have fed her. Can you believe that Kumkani lied to the girl saying I tried to kill him as a baby? (I could hear the pain in her voice)

Me: Let's leave them alone. They will someday self destruct. I'm sorry you had to be victim to his lies, Ma. Tata has always used all means possible to get what he wants. Let's let God deal with it all. When did Poppy become a part of their lives?

Makhulu: I don't know.

Me: And she's giving him a kidney? They must have been in contact for months now. Who just gives a kidney to someone who abandoned them?

Makhulu: Only they have the answers, nunu.

Me: I'll go see Poppy after work.

Makhulu: Won't you make it for the dinner at Thami's?

Me: I will because I have to be there to make sure his kids treat you nicely. I'll make it in time, Ma. Don't worry. (she smiled)

Makhulu: Thank you. Let me make you tea to process the news you just got.

Me: I've always wanted a sister but now that I do I'm not so sure anymore and it just had to be Poppy of all people. So she lied about the appendix to Zuko. Zuko took her in and she can't even be honest with the girl.

Makhulu: It makes you wonder what else she's been lying about ne?

Me: Yes it does. I think she's a Zweni through and through.

Makhulu: No, it just showed that she's her father's daughter. I told her that those people can't be trusted and I'm hoping she called off the operation. If not then she's a fool.

Me: One that is willing to part with a part of her for a man who never gave her a piece of bread. I'm sure Tata knew about her. Poppy's mother was not rich so she definitely needed help with a child.

Makhulu: I agree. Go see her and hear what she has to say. I'm just as curious. Please drop Chulu off first because I don't want my baby at a hospital.

Me: Yes, Ma.

Makhulu: Drink your tea and go get ready, nunu.

Me: What a way to start the day? Some shocking news and tea.
(we both laughed)

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I took a sip of the tea and I can't remember when last I had wine. I no longer buy it because Makhulu is here. Poppy is my sister? I think I'll need time to let that sink in. I wonder what Kumkani promised her for her kidney? I drank my tea and went to get ready. I finished after a while and went to wake Chulu up. She no longer rubbed those eyes all thanks to the eye drops. We hugged and greeted each other. She went to greet makhulu and brush her teeth while I made her bed. I then helped her get ready for the day. She had breakfast while I packed lunch for us. We finally finished everything and said

goodbye to makhulu. She's been quiet and that's unlike her. I strapped her in and looked at her. Goodness my baby is cute.

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Me: What's wrong? Are you feeling sick? (I put my hand on her forehead)

Chulu: It's my first day with the glasses, mommy. What if they laugh?

Me: They won't laugh, bhabha and if they do you tell your teacher. No one has the right to make you feel uncomfortable. You don't need to fit in, Chulz. You're unique because God made everyone unique. You're so beautiful with and without glasses but it's for your own good to have them.

Chulu: Okay, mommy. (I kisses her forehead)

Me: I love you. (she smiled)

Chulu: I love you too.

Me: Shall we go? (she nodded)

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I closed her door and got into the car, locked it and put on my safety belt. She spoke a bit but I can still see that she's nervous. We drove off and Craig called to also cheer Chulu up. I've got a great man though. So considerate. We arrived at school and I

walked her to her class. Her grip around my hand tightened as we walked closer. I first went to her teacher and asked her to check for any teasing because Chulu already feels like the odd one out and to have her put on the spot will worsen the situation. Mrs Louw was understanding. We walked to the play section where the other kids were and some stared at her and she almost hid behind me. Buhle and Khloe walked up to us and greeted.

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Khloe: Chulu, you have pink glasses. I love them.

Buhle: Can I try them on? (they looked at me)

Me: Those are unfortunately specially made for Chulu, Buhle. I'm sorry.

Khloe: I'll ask my mom for yellow ones.

Buhle: I want orange ones. Then we will all be twins. (the giggled)

Chulu: I chose mine myself. The eye doctor put my eyes in an eye machine. I see everything.

Khloe: Even ghosts? (I tried not to laugh but failed)

Chulu: Maybe next time. (liar)

Buhle: That is cool. Tomorrow I'll also have mine.

Me: I have to go now. See you don't look weird at all. Your friends like your new look.

Chulu: Thank you for making me special. (I nearly cried)

Me: You were born special. All of you. You girls go play and I'll see you later. (they hugged me)

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They ran off and I looked to see how the other kids respond and I saw nothing unusual. If there is in future we'll deal with it. Chulu's happiness means everything to me. I went to the staffroom and found Yandi sitting there already. I greeted and heard stories about her weekend. I told her about Poppy and she suggested we cut ties with her for good. How can I when she's my blood? We'll always be tied. I'll tell Craig face to face later on. Poppy's father issues have me worried about my Chulu. What if my child has the same daddy issues? The Monday meeting ended and the IT guy came up to me. He gave me the achievement awards I asked him to type and make pretty for me for my class. I guess we'll have that award ceremony today then. To me they all deserve it not just one or two as per the school says. The bell rang and class started. I greeted them and it's always great to have them all present and healthy. I went on with the planned lesson. During break I went to the shop and bought some kit Kat's. Once they returned I started to hand out their certificates. Even organised someone

to take pictures. I'd call the name on the certificate and the child would walk forward to get his/her certificate with the chocolate and we'd pose for two pictures each. The smiles on their faces just made it all worthwhile. I love these people so much. After all gotten their reward I had them applaud themselves for working so hard during the year. That was all worth spending money on. To see a child smile is everything. Hours went by and it was finally time to go home. I took Chulu and dropped her off first. Makhulu is baking again so she was excited about helping. I guess we really have a chef in the making. She had a great day and it warmed my heart. I drove to the hospital and went to visit Poppy. She was sleeping and I at first just stood and watched her. She opened her eyes and jumped in a fright.

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Poppy: Are you here to kill me?

Me: What? (she sat up slowly) Let me hel...

Poppy: Don't you dare touch me! (she cut me short shouting)

Me: Okay. So I take it you went through with the operation.

Poppy: Jealous? Do you now wish you'd done it?

Me: Not even a little bit.

Poppy: You'd let your own father die, Othu? Does Craig now that he is dating a witch?

Me: And I gather you wish for him to date saint Poppy right? (I said sarcastically)

Poppy: Get out.

Me: You knew all this time that you're my sister but didn't say.

Poppy: I don't know what you're talking about.

Me: Kumkani told me. (she looked at me)

Poppy: Well I'm glad that I never told you. You'd have poisoned me against my own father.

Me: Remember that day you told us that your father chased you away like a dog? Well if you spoke of Kumkani it means he showed you his true colors the first time around. Why are you trying to recolor them? The man is bad news Poppy.

Poppy: That's not what I see. I see a broken man and that's all your fault. You had people damage his kidneys. You refuse him a kidney and then take his money too. If there's anything I've realised now is your true colors. (I laughed)

Me: Oh my goodness, you and Langa should have been twins.

Poppy: I said go.

Me: You and I could have had such a great sisterhood, Poppy. I'm not the monster you think I am. Your father is and he'll show you a side to him you won't believe even exists in a human being. Look, it's okay to not take my word for it but when you start doubting our grandma then I pity you. That woman is blunt and speaks truth whether you like it or not. You best keep what she told you in mind. Why do you think I am like I am today? It's because I am a product of her teachings. What else have you been hiding from us?

Poppy: I owe you no explanation, Othunyiweyo.

Me: Wow! He really hooked you. I know you're past was not easy but your future can be better. Walk away from Kumkani.

Poppy: You're just envious because he'll give me more attention than you now. Nurse! Nurse! (she shouted)

Me: If only you knew, dear sister that I like you have never gotten attention from him. (the nurse came in)

Poppy: How did the get in? It's not even visiting hours. Your using my father's money to bribe hospital staff? Sies man.

Me: Actually I was just kind and they liked me. Money is not everything. (she threw her water cup at me and the water splashed on my top)

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A part of me actually wanted to rip a stitch from her wound out of anger but I took a deep breath and chose to not retaliate. I walked out and decided to go to Kumkani. He was lying down looking at the ceiling. He turned to the door and I smiled and walked in.

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Me: Hello, Tata. How are you? (I kissed his cheek)

Tata: What's wrong with you?

Me: I wanted to come visit my dad and hear how the operation went. (I brushed his hand)

Tata: Why? Did Flinch send you to finish me off? (he looked at me confused)

Me: If that were the case I'd have done that long ago. So you're not going to tell me how it all went?

Tata: Why must I?

Me: Because you've been right all along. I can't believe that I have been so blind. You've tried to show me love all this time but I've been blind. I'm sorry. (I looked down)

Tata: What's going Othunyiweyo?

Me: Tell me how I can make up for it. I'll marry that man you wanted me to marry. I'll give back all your money. I just don't want to be replaced by Poppy. I'll be a better daughter.

Tata: It actually works? (he said in a whisper)

Me: What did you say?

Tata: Nothing. Oh I'm so glad you've come to your senses, my girl. That Poppy girl means nothing. Poppy is dumb. She'll never replace you. Oh daddy's girl have finally saw the light. (he smiled)

Me: I can't believe I've never seen what a good dad you are. My money is just best in your care. Why did I even doubt you? (I sniffed)

Tata: Better late than never. I've been waiting for so long for you to finally listen to me. Nzulu was right the stuff is really strong. Let's start by you returning the money.(I started to laugh so much and he looked confused)

Me: You actually bought that? The master manipulator is not immune to being manipulated after all. (I said why laughing)

Tata: Get out of here you devil. (he shouted)

Me: You just got a bitter taste of your own medicine. You're pathetic and cruel for using Poppy. The girl gave you life. At least give her the love the yearns.

Tata: Get out! (that nurse came in)

Nurse: Mam, I'm sorry but you'll have to go. You seem to upset all my patients. They just had operations.

Me: I'm going. I wish I had taped that moment. Imagine me apologising to you, Tata? I'm not Poppy and Langa. Well now I see where they get that flaw of being easily manipulated from. That was fun. (I laughed)

Tata: Out! (he shouted and the machine started to make noise)

Nurse: Miss, Out now!

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Well she didn't have to tell me twice. That was for my granny and the pain that he caused her. How dare he claim she's a killer? I did make a recording of it all. There's the part where he says Poppy means nothing and I'm wondering if I must send it to her. Well I know I'll never forgive myself for not trying to open her eyes to how he is. I cut it after he said she's nothing so she won't hear that I pranked him and actually got away with it. I sent the recording adding "That's how little he thinks of you. Open your eyes before you lose more than just a kidney, Poppy". I really hope she'll listen. I saw a clothing shop still open and it was just my luck. I went to look for a dress for tonight. I chose one I liked, fitted it and paid when I was happy with it. I drove home to take a shower. Makhulu asked how

they are and they looked well to me so I told her Kumkani's body accepted the kidney. Leaving out what I did and the impact it had on him. He won't die now I know. How could he when he found another child to use? A girl child at that. Thing is Poppy is not child and I hope she'll now believe us. If not then we'll just let her learn the hard way. Tonight I'll just enjoy myself. I might even get a new extended family. I hope they are nice.

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#CRAIG

It's been a few days since Patrick met O and Chulu. The man knew who they were even before I introduced them. I'm sure he wanted to find out just how deep my relationship with them is. I said she's a client because it would for now explain why I've been seeing her so much. I hated that he touched her. I took that sweet because it might be laced with something. The last thing I want is for Chulu to be sick because of my doings. I saw how her eye problem worried O so if she should be admitted to hospital or worse it would break even a strong woman like O. Chulu is her life. I've checked my apartment for any listening devices because I can't have them hearing all my conversations. I've been making calls and even got someone to park at O's apartment block and keep an eye on them at night. So far no one has been following them. I wonder what that bastard is

planning. Him not taking some sort of action has me worried. O has been excelling with her self defence lessons. She punched me by accident and gave me a nose bleed. She felt terrible that day and wanted to stop but I knew that was not an option. I've had broken bones before so a nose bleed is nothing. Friday the three of us are leaving for our family weekend and I'm guessing that O expects me to make love to her. I've never been so nervous about sex before. I'm glad makhulu is also leaving and won't be left alone. I sat and worked on a security system plan for a steel warehouse when my phone rang. I didn't even check the screen.

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Me: Knights.

Prof: He knows. (I recognised the voice)

Me: I know. (I stood)

Prof: I want to help you, Snipe.

Me: Why? You're still a part of them.

Prof: Exactly and who better to help than the inside man.

Me: What's in it for you?

Prof: I'll explain everything when we have time. For now remove the bug on that plant by the door. (I looked at the plant)

Me: I've checked there.

Prof: You checked the soil I'm sure but check the stem of the leafs. It's green and small.

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I walked over to the big plant and checked each stem. I found a small green thing. It looks more like a real bug than a listening device bug. I took it and stepped on it.

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Me: What the hell is this?

Prof: New technology. A lot can happen in a year. I've deleted what it recorded so far. You have a weakness

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Snipe and you know he is like a bloodhound. He'll sniff it out and use it. You'll have to make a few compromises soon. Stop telling your girl about us. You're compromising her. This shit is not suppose to fall on ears that aren't made for them.

Me: I'm still wondering why you are on my side.

Prof: And I will tell you. Look, I've always been weak when it comes to shooting and fighting but you can't deny my talent with IT stuff. You can choose to see me as an ally or an enemy

that's up to you. Just trust me even when you don't agree with me at times. (he ended the call)

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I looked at the phone and knelt down to get the device I found. I suddenly inspected all my plants. They make these things small these days. I feel so old for not knowing what the new kids play with in the game. Can I trust Prof? Well so far he's shown that I can but I can't let my guard down. He's right in saying I'm compromising O by telling her stuff about my past. That's why I didn't tell her about Wes. Mr Funda invited me to his house so I'll also meet his family. I actually like the old man. I'll drive to O's place and pick the ladies up. I love showing my gentlemanly side. I'm also glad I went to church to hear Chulu do her reading. She was so adorable. I still don't know if it's okay to say that I'm a proud father though. It seems she has not had problems at school because of her glasses and I'm glad because she looks cute. I got dressed and took my wallet and keys. I activated all my security systems and rushed out. I was in deep thought while driving but snapped out of it before I hit someone with my car. I wonder what made Prof want to help an outsider. That's what I am now after all. I arrived at my destination and went up to O's place. I should have gotten flowers. I must up my romantic game for real. I found makhulu and Chulu ready and waiting for mommy. I greeted them and

we sat and spoke. O appeared wearing a tight red dress. She looked so classy yet damn sexy at the same time. I stood and gave her a hug. She excused herself to go get her bag. I just couldn't help but drool over those curves. Have they always been there?

.

Makhulu: Close your mouth, my boy. (I snapped out of it and she laughed)

Me: I'm sorry, Ma. (I looked down)

Makhulu: It's okay. She is a beautiful woman and she is in a relationship with you. Look, Clay you are a kind man and I adore you. But I'm also her mother. I know that she has never been with a man before unless you two have decided to go there. So whether you've been her first or you are going to be I want you to be the man that does right by her. I'm not saying walk down the aisle tomorrow but I'm saying treat my baby well. She deserves the best.

Me: You're not going to encourage that we wait until our wedding night?

Makhulu: That would be great but I know that's wishful thinking. You are a generation of impatient youngsters. I'm saying that don't hurt her. In fact don't hurt each other.

Me: We won't, Ma.

Othu: All ready.

Chulu: Finally. (she sighed)

Othu: I didn't take that long. (we laughs)

Chulu: You look pretty, mommy. Keep that dress for me please.

Othu: Thank you and I will, bhabha. Shall we get going?

Makhulu: We've all been waiting for you.

Me: You look so beautiful, baby. (she blushed)

Othu: Thank you.

Chulu: Uncle Craig, no one teased me. (she smiled)

Me: I'm glad to hear that. Ladies, let's go please. (we all stood)

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O activated the security system, locked the doors and we all went down to my car. I opened the door for them all. Mr Funda has been a good example to me on how ladies are treated. We drove off and Makhulu gave me directions. Finally we made it into a the driveway of a beautiful yellow house. It's not big but it's perfect for a man who lives alone. We took the stuff we bought just so we don't pitch empty handed. I'm finally a part of a family again. I do feel like I must just make it official though. I know makhulu is understanding but I'm sure she's wondering when I'll show my true intentions. Our talk earlier

hinted at that. I don't feel pressured because I've been wanting to do it but I'm just afraid that O is going to think it's too early for marriage. We went and knocked and the man of the house opened. He greeted us by shaking my hand and hugging the ladies. Makhulu even got a kiss on the cheek. Which left her blushing of course. We walked in and got introduced to his kids. Ruth, Maria, Ester, Noah, David and Eden. I'm no bible expert but I'm sure all those names are in the bible. The other two sons Moses and Solomon don't live in Cape Town. There were a lot of children and I forgot their names as soon as Funda said them. What a big family.

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Noah: Wow my dad never told me that his church has such beautiful ladies. (he looked at Othu)

Funda: Well go find another because Mr Knights and Miss Zweni are in courtship.

Noah: I suggest you make her Mrs Knights before another man gives her his surname.

Me: And you're one of those men who will try I presume? (he laughed)

Noah: You said it not me.

Othu: Well sorry for you, Noah but I'm happy with this gentleman over here. (she smiled at me)

Ester: It's so great to finally meet you all. Chulu has even made new friends already. I'm so glad my dad found a girlfriend. Gone are the cold winter nights spent alone.

Ruth: Esther, these are elders you speak of in such a manner. We are so sorry, Ma. She's young.

Makhulu: Don't apologise, my girl. I know that each person is different. I took no offense. Thank you for welcoming me into your home.

Eden: The thought of actually having a mother again is nice. We are a large family so please don't mind the noise. (we laughed)

Funda: Let's go sit around the table. I hope you don't mind that Chulu will sit with the other kids.

Othu: She looks comfortable already so it's fine, deacon. (we went to sit)

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I don't like the way this Noah guy looks at my woman. He had better not be looking at those perfect curves. Well they are all dedicated Christians just as I thought. They were clearly raised by those beliefs. Esther is a bit of a rebel that I can see and she looks no older than 25. So she was that unexpected surprise that her parents got when they thought they are done having kids. The rest are pretty straight forward. Have good careers, families and are believers. They seem to like Makhulu. Heck

who doesn't? Chulu had friends and she enjoyed it. Othu must give the child siblings it's getting sad now. Maybe we can discuss that in the near future. The night was good except for Noah's drooling over Othu. We finally went home after hours.

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Chulu: Mommy, I want many brothers and sisters. Sisters most please.

Makhulu: Yes, you tell her my nunu. (I laughed softly and looked at O)

Othu: Babies don't just get ordered from a factory, Chulu.

Chulu: How do they come?

Makhulu: Yho!

Othu: Uhm, well they grow in the belly of a mommy.

Chulu: How do they get into the belly?

Othu: Chulu, aren't you sleepy? (I tried not to laugh)

Chulu: Nope. I'll pray for babies to grow in your belly so I'll have sisters. (O looked flushed)

Makhulu: I'll join you in prayer, my baby. When you're older we'll explain how it all happens. Clay, you're quiet.

Me: I'm just listening to you ladies, Ma. I agree with Chulu on the siblings part.

Othu: Is today gang up on Othu day. Go adopt puppies.

Me: It's just not the same.

Chulu: I had lots of fun. I gave Buli your number so she'll call me. She has a phone.

Othu: I hope you're not hinting for one. (she looked back at Chulu)

Chulu: No, you let me play games on yours and make me talk to uncle Craig and aunty Yandi. I don't want one.

Makhulu: You get adorable by day. I can't believe you're the same baby I met years ago. (she kissed Chulu)

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We drove on until we finally arrived. I'm glad Chulu realises that she needs sibling company. Hopefully I'll be her father and that of her future siblings. Makhulu went to bath and we tucked Chulu in. Well she read for us instead of us reading to her but she finally fell asleep. We later went to chill in the lounge. She told me all about her day. I can't believe that the Poppy girl is her sister. How different the two are.

.

Me: Do you want to build a relationship with her?

Othu: Yeah but not while she still is how she is then I'd rather pass.

Me: So Kumkani found another victim to manipulate? The man is good.

Othu: I can't believe he gave her kidney. He'll treat her like trash soon enough. That man has no love to give.

Me: Well if she doesn't believe that warning you have her she's plain dumb or she's oblivious to red flags.

Othu: Makhulu thinks she's desperate to belong. If so then I understand because I grew up wishing for the same but I know she'll never find it with them.

Me: She'll learn that soon.

Othu: Yeah shame. How is the nose? (she kisses it)

Me: Well you didn't break it because even that kiss would have hurt. It's good, baby.

Othu: Craig, you've been pushing for these lessons so much. Does Davis have anything to do with it? (she looked at me)

Me: No, I just don't want you to experience an ordeal like the Ndalo saga again. So from now on I ask that you be aware of your surroundings all the time.

Othu: I am now. I can't wait to go away with you. (she kissed me)

Me: I can't wait either.

Othu: The Funda children are nice. Even have biblical names. (I laughed)

Me: I figured. That Noah guy must keep away though. (she laughed)

Othu: He can look but he can't have.

Me: You look so damn sexy in this dress. (I cupped her ass and squeezed it)

Othu: I'm glad you like it. Makhulu says you must continue doing whatever you are doing to me because it makes my curves pop. Not sure if she's trying to say I'm fat though.

Me: You're curvy and I love it. So keep on popping. (we laughed)

Makhulu: My children (we sat up straight and she laughed) Stop doing that. This is your house Othu. I've just come to say goodnight and thank you so much for coming with me to the Fundas. (she kissed our cheeks)

Me: Thank you for inviting me, Ma. I had a good time.

Othu: I did too.

Makhulu: Goodnight. Clay, you can go on and brush that behind in peace now. (I looked down)

Othu: Ma! (she laughed shyly)

Me: I'm sorry about that, Ma. I meant no disrespect.

Makhulu: Oh nonsense. You two are young and believe it or not I was too at some point. (she laughed)

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She said goodnight again and disappeared from our sight. Othu and I laughed. Well we laid on the couch again but I kept my hands to myself until we kissed and got lost in the moment. I haven't had sex in a while so I got turned on so much. I wanted her badly. She has her legs wrapped around my waist and the warmth of her inner thighs didn't help much. We were both moaning and enjoying the moment until my phone beeped. A part of me thankful that it did or else we can kiss that cheesy first time goodbye. She told me to read it if I want. I opened it

"The plan is coming together well. Be prepared. Trust me, Snipe. You can't take on the agency alone. You need me. We need each other. I'll tell you why I'm doing this once the plan is 100%. Prof", it read. He's right a one man army is suicide. O and I cuddled for hours and spoke until it was time for me to go. It's a work night after all. I wonder what Prof is planning?

CRAIG

I've been trying to figure out what score Prof has to settle with the agency. Surely they must have betrayed him somehow for him to turn on them. Has he even turned on them or I'm I being made a fool? I want to trust the guy but it's not easy. He is still one of them so why would he want to risk his life for me? I've looked out for him in the past but I've never expected something in return. I was on the road on my way home from Paarl. There has been a car that has been following me since I left this morning. It kept on appearing and disappearing so I didn't give it much attention. But now I am absolutely sure that I'm being followed. I thought that it's best I lead the driver to a trap. I know the area well so I drove to an abandoned brick factory. And just as I thought the black Mercedes followed right behind me. I parked my car and pretended to go inside but I hid behind a steel wall. I was hoping the person would follow me in. I heard a car door slam and footsteps head my way. The bastard has fallen into the trap perfectly. The man appeared and I attacked him. I twisted his arm to his back and he groaned trying to get out of my grip. He used his other arm and elbowed my ribs and I let go of him. He tried to punch me but I blocked it and hit him multiple times in the stomach. The guy actually put up a decent fight but it's not good enough. He was laying on the

concrete yard and bleeding from the mouth and nose soon enough. I took one of the broken bricks that were around and I pressed my knee on his chest and held the brick over him.

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Me: Who sent you?

Him: No one! (he spat on my arm and I strangled him)

Me: Well pity you won't have a report for the person who sent you because you're dying today.

Him: I..I..thought you'd have done it by now. (he laughed) I heard that you're not the man you used to be. You're now just a weakling. I can't believe that you were once one of us. If you were the old Snipe I'd be dead by now. That's what I heard from the others who have worked with yo...(a bullet hit his heart before he could finish)

.

He was bleeding so much and I was trying my best to stop it but failed. I knew he was dead and that's the last thing that I wanted to happen. I stood and looked around me. I looked up all the buildings and I saw movement in one. Clearly it's a sniper making a run for it. Going there is no use because she/he will be long gone. I looked at the guy and I screamed in anger and frustration. I went to my car and drove off before this gets pinned on me. I called O to ask where she is and she said she's

at work and added that Chulu didn't want to stay in after school care today so she's in her class too. I breathed a sigh of relief. At least they are safe for now. I decided to call the one person who seems to know how to play dirty. I still don't trust the man. He seems unstable but I need someone who is going to look after the ladies while I deal with this. I dialed Flinch's number and it rang for a long while.

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Flinch: Mutual friend.

Me: Are you still in the country?

Flinch: Why do you want to know?

Me: I'll need your help with something. (he laughed)

Me: I've actually been waiting for this call. You saved my life so I owe you. If you are collecting that debt then I accept. Yes, I'm still in the country.

Me: Let's meet at that cafe right now. Othu's safety depend on it.

Flinch: What do you mean? (I sensed the panic in his voice)

Me: Not over the phone. Meet me at the cafe. (I ended the call)

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I first drove to my place to change. The shirt I'm wearing has that boy's blood on it. I'm sure that the bullet was meant for me. Why did he send amateurs though? The sniper missed the target and that boy was not the strongest fighter either. I got to my place and changed quickly and drove to the cafe. I finally arrived and found the doctor there already. He stood when he saw me.

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Flinch: Why would her life be in trouble? Has Kumkani or Hans tried to...

Me: It's got nothing to do with them. This is something to do with me and my past.

Flinch: I thought we had an agreement. We remain "friends" only if we both have her best interest at heart. If you've endangered her or is a danger to her I will quit being nice.

Me: I know what we agreed on but just hear me out first. You told me about your past and I didn't cast a stone at you because mine is just as dark. (we both sat)

Flinch: Talk.

Me: Thanks. (I told him my story and the Wes issue)

Flinch: Okay, I understand why you killed Wes. Actually I'm thankful to you for that because he might have come back for me. So what type of danger are we dealing with?

Me: The type that can access anything at any time they want. The type that have high and powerful international politicians as clients. The type that don't just hurt people but kill. The type that call strangle a baby if need be.

Flinch: I've heard about your type. You are just glorified gangsters. You hide behind that moral code of you only take out bad guys but truth is both our old lives allowed us to kill.

Me: I'm not here to be judged.

Flinch: I'm the last one to do that. I take it she's unaware of all of this.

Me: I told her about my past.

Flinch: Are you crazy? (he banged his fist on the table with anger) You know that you shouldn't have. Agencies kill any outsiders who knows about them. Why do you think journalists who were on the verge of exposing some of these agencies suddenly disappeared? You've compromised her. (he was angry)

Me: I know but I thought that life is behind me. I didn't tell her that I killed Wes.

Flinch: You keep it that way. Dammit I can't believe that I didn't see this one coming.

Me: All I want is for you to keep them safe because I might get distracted with trying to stop these people and drop the ball. Please, Flinch. I can't trust anyone who is still in that agency.

Flinch: You should just have turned and walked the other way the day you met her. She doesn't need this shit! I helped her with Hans and Kumkani because I wanted her to move on with her life and be happy but you came and fucked all of that up. (he said with clenched teeth and that showed his rage)

Me: I am a screw up, I know but I've never wanted her to be in danger. I love her. I love her and her child. I might have a way to solve this. What happened today showed that I'm the one they are after.

Flinch: You're skilled at this. You know how to dodge bullets. How long do you think it will take before they target her and Chulu? You might teach her self defence lessons and she might be good but she'll be nothing compared to trained killers. Had any of your targets in the past known that you are pointing a gun at them they'd have moved and be alive today. Are any of your targets alive?

Me: No. (I clenched my jaw holding back tears)

Flinch: I'm not trying to take you back there but I'm trying to make you realise that she's nothing compared to what we know is out there. For all we know a sniper is aiming at her car right now waiting for the perfect moment to take her out. They know about them that I guarantee you. You love her but she might die because of you. (he stood and walked)

Me: So you're turning me down? (I said behind him)

Flinch: I'm going to the school and make sure that they get home soon. I'm not familiar with snipers but I do know they need the perfect shot to take out a target. I'll make sure that they're always behind something so that if any sniper is aiming at them they don't get an opportunity. I'll help you protect them but you better fix this shit. I have contacts in the States. Shout if you need anything. (he spoke softly)

Me: Thank you.

Flinch: I'm not doing it for you. I'm doing it for those ladies who don't deserve to have bastards like you and I in their lives. We'll always be a danger to them. I'm so angry at you now that I want to strangle you but I want you to fix this first. (he said in my ear in anger and left)

.

I was not surprised to hear that he wants me dead if anything it erases the doubts that I had about him. He loves O as his

daughter indeed. Only a father would speak like that. I'm glad that he can protect them while I find out what Prof is up to. My phone rang and I answered.

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Me: Knights.

Comm: Can you believe that we have a new Snipe in the team. He still needs practice and he's happy to take out the old Snipe to fill your shoes.

Me: You know that I was the best you've ever recruited. I'm not scared of you. (he laughed)

Comm: It's so refreshing when the student challenges the teacher. You forget that I know you. I know the gun you are good at using. I know how you fight. I know it all because I'm the one who showed you everything. Don't worry though. You were not the target. That boy we dealt with was a weakling and you know we can't let weaklings go once they have seen too much.

Me: You'll never be like Chief. You see now that man had integrity. He skilled moral assassins and not the serial killers you have. I'm glad I was as part of the old team. You might have trained me but Chief groomed me. That's why you were so jealous.

Comm: That's why I killed him.

Me: And that's why I'll kill you. (he laughed)

Comm: I thought of framing you for today's killing but then I changed my mind. You being in jail won't be fun for me. You taking me on now that is what I want.

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I ended the call and hit the table with my fists. I'm angry at myself for not knowing what to do. I'm used to getting detailed missions but I've never had to put together a mission. How does one kill an assassin? It's either Prof has lost his touch or he is not to be trusted. Nothing goes past him in that agency. He knows more about what goes on in there than the seniors. He knows the movements of all agents yet he didn't tell me that I have tails. I got a text and it's from O. "We are so excited about the weekend", it read and had a smiley emoji. I have completely forgotten about that. It's Friday so we depart today. I exhaled loudly. I can't cancel because I promised Chulu an adventure. My phone rang, it's Flinch.

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Flinch: They are excited about the trip. Go and I'll make sure that I follow behind unnoticed. Send me all the details about the trip. (I was about to answer but he ended the call)

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I went to my car and took out my old notebook. It had the numbers of all my fellow agents who left with me. I'll need an army of my own and I'm hoping that they are it. Some answered but others not. I told them that I need favours but I'll go in detail when I have time. It sounds like most are keen on hearing what I have to offer. I sent Flinch all travelling, accommodation and activity details. I have to trust him because I have no choice. I drove home and went to pack. I burnt the blood stained shirt. Davis's call was international so I know he's not here but he's lapdogs are. I'm sure they are all amateurs. There's no way he'll send his pro's when there are serious, money making contracts out there. Flinch and I can deal with the young youth. I went to shower and I actually cried. I thought I'm done taking lives but it seems not really. I put my hands against the wall, closed my eyes and felt the warm water hit my head.

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Me: Dear heavenly Father, I know that I don't pray nearly as much as I should. It's not because I don't believe but it's because I don't feel worthy of being called your child. I'm rotten with sin, Lord. I was trying to change my ways but it seems like life won't allow me to. Whatever happens I ask that you keep O, Chulu and makhulu safe. If me dying means that the evil will stop following them then let it be done that way, Amen.

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I opened my eyes and wiped the water off my face with my hands. All I want is for them to be safe. I showered and went to get dressed. I put on all my hidden cameras and also activated my security traps. I'll be gone for a while and I know I'm being tailed so I must make sure that I know who enters my place. I went to get my small bag and other essentials, activated my security system and went out. I hope that I can keep my promise of a great weekend to them while I keep them safe. To put together an army of my own is the only chance I have. I know Flinch will go beyond just watching over the ladies and I'm grateful to him for that. Gangsters are street smart so that will be an element of surprise to the agents.

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#OTHU- CONTAINS ADULT CONTENT!

I have been hoping that Poppy would send a text saying that she sees right through Kumkani but that didn't happen. Zuko said that she got discharged yesterday afternoon. I haven't told any of my other friends that she's been keeping her paternity secret. I know she'll try to badmouth me but I honestly don't care. I've been nothing but a good friend and I would have been an even better sister but I'll let her do things her way. I've done my bit and all is now up to her. I went to work as usual but I couldn't wait to go home and pack. It's Friday so we are going

on that weekend trip at last. Chulu had her big baby moments today and didn't want to stay in after care. I had her keep busy with her colouring book. Hours went by and it was time to go home. We packed up and went to the car. Flinch came running towards us with an umbrella. I saw that Chulu was just as confused. He picked her up and got us under the Umbrella.

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Me: Hello, doc. What's up?

Flinch: It's hot and if you're too exposed to the sun you'll get skin cancer.

Me: You came all the way from wherever to tell us that?

Flinch: Because I care. Sun damage is serious.

Chulu: My teacher said we must all put on suncream. (he smiled)

Flinch: See? Even Chulu knows this. Let me walk you to your car. Me: Thank you. (we started to walk)

Chulu: I have glasses like you. Flinch: Yes but mine aren't as beautiful. (Chulu smiled)

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I looked at him as he made sure that we are safely in the car. Saying that the sun is burning hotter today and there was a

warning out to not walk exposed to it today. Why didn't I see that part in the news? He even went as far as putting black sun blockers on all windows. I'm sure if he could he'd have done the same to the windscreen. I sat frozen and watched him do it all. He finally was happy and told us to go home. I told him that we are going to the mall first and he said he is too so he'll drive behind us. Shame I'm sure he is feeling alone at the moment. I drove to the mall after work and went to do some shopping. I'm nervous about this weekend though because things might change between Craig and I after we've been intimate. I'm hoping that we'll just be closer to each other than ever before. I'm not having doubts but I'm so nervous. Flinch even went in with us. I asked him to wait at the chairs. I went into a clothing shop with Chuli. We went to the lingerie section and looked at the sexy lace items before me. I didn't know which to choose. The last thing I want is to be a turn off to him.

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Chulu: Mommy, when will I get a bra like yours? (I looked at her)

Me: Well it depends.

Chulu: On what?

Me: On when your body develops breasts

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bhabha. You have a couple of years before that happen so I suggest you become patient.

Chulu: I'll put socks in. (I laughed softly)

Me: I don't think that will be comfortable so just wait your turn.

Chulu: Okay. When will we get that puppy?

Me: What puppy?

Chulu: You said you'll get me a puppy.

Me: You never forget, do you? We can't have a puppy while we are living at the flat. It's against the rules.

Chulu: I'll hide it in my room. (I laughed)

Me: You won't like it when it stinks up your room. Soon we will have a house then you'll have that puppy. Next week we're going to buy your uniform for big school. Are you excited?

Chulu: I am. I like the green hats the other big children wear. Will I also get that?

Me: You will but you'll only be allowed to wear it Monday-Wednesday.

Chulu: Why?

Me: Because Thursday and Friday has their own uniforms. Unless you want to go to another school.

Chulu: No, I like having you close, mommy. (I smiled)

Me: I like having you close as well. Let's hurry because we must still take Makhulu to the bus station.

Chulu: When will she come back?

Me: Next week Thursday. (she nodded)

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I picked out a few items that I liked and went to buy Chulu a hat. We finished our shopping and went to the car. The doctor did the same and followed us home and once again pulled out the umbrella for us. All three of us went up to the apartment and greeted Makhulu. I went and packed for Chulu and I while they spoke. I finally finished after a while of debating with Chulu on what I wanted to pack for her and what she wanted. We joined Makhulu in the lounge and Craig also joined us. I don't know if it's my imagination or what but I swear I saw them give each other a strange look. I hugged Craig.

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Me: Ma, we can drop you off at the bus station and then head out.

Makhulu: You don't need to worry, nunu. Flinch has already offered. Thank you though. You three go and have a great weekend. I have to leave now.

Flinch: Let's go then, Ma Zweni. You three wait until I'm back to say goodbye.

Craig: I'll stay with them and you make sure to take makhulu to the station and wait until she gets onto her bus safely. We'll be here when you return. (they nodded at each other.

Makhulu: I love you, my nunus. I'll see you soon. Clay, look after my girls please. They are my heart.

Craig: Will do, Ma. I promise you.

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She hugged and kissed us and off they went. We also said a prayer before they left. I didn't get why we had to wait for Flinch to come back and say goodbye but I'll let them do what they want. Men always think they are right. I left him and Chulu while they went on about the weekend. After a while Flinch came saying that Makhulu's bus came on time and has departed. We also activated the security system and finally went on the road. Craig seems odd again but told me he's fine whenever I asked so I decided to stop before I end up annoying him. He also came with a different car that had darker windows. We put on some music and enjoyed the road trip. We arrived at our destination after a few hours and by then Chulu was fast asleep. Good thing she ate on the way. I loved the place Craig booked us in. It's so quiet and just beautiful. I

carried the sleeping Chulu while he carried our bags. We checked in and went to our rooms. The place might as well just be someone's house because it even has a kitchen and lounge. Craig walked around each room while I put Chulu to bed. He came to the room and asked me to close my eyes. I laughed and did just that. He held me by my waist and we started walking. He stopped and so did I and he told me to open my eyes. It was a lounge area but it was transformed into such a romantic setting. I smiled and kissed him.

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Me: It looks beautiful. When did you do this?

Craig: The staff helped. In fact it was like this when we walked in but you went straight to the room. I'm glad that you like it.

Me: I love it and you. Aren't you tired from the driving though?

Craig: Not at all. I just won't eat with you because that burger we had on the road was huge.

Me: I will just have desert. (he smiled)

Craig: Let's go enjoy it in the bath. (he kissed me)

Me: That sounds like a great idea.

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We kissed and his phone beeped. I went to fill the bath with all the lovely essentials that will make our bodies feel relaxed. I went to our room and took off my clothes. I felt his cool hands hold my waist and he then kissed my neck. I smiled and turned to face him. I watched as he removed his clothes until nothing was left. His body looked perfect. Seeing that he is aroused turned me on so much. We kissed and the warm feeling of his skin against mine made the moment so intense. He lifted me off my feet and walked to the bathroom. He stepped into the bath first and helped me in. We both sat and first just soaked in the warm bubble water. After a while we finished bathing and stepped out of the bath. We dried our bodies and I put body lotion on my body. He did too but finished before me so he just stood and watched as I put lotion on my legs. I must admit having his eyes on me while I'm doing it made me feel sexy in a way. I went to him when I was done.

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Me: I'm ready. (he looked at me intensely)

Craig: What if you regret it, O? I've never been so nervous about doing this before and that to me proves just how special you are to me. (I planted a soft kiss on his lips)

Me: I love you, Craig and I want this. I'm not doing it because I feel pressured.

Craig: You sure? (I smiled)

Me: Yes and I'm also nervous by the way. You've done so much. The room also looks amazing. Thank you.

Craig: I love you.

Me: I love you too. (he came closer)

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My body immediately felt foreign to me. He went to play the song and I laughed because it suddenly felt weird. He kisses me and I've never experienced such intense yet innocent passion before. He kissed me and the kiss became hot before we knew it. He lifted me up again and put me on the bed. He looked at me and planted a soft kiss on my lips before kissing my neck. I moaned softly because the sensation felt great. His hands caressed my breasts before I felt his lips on one of them. I looked at him and he seems to be in no rush at all. After he gave some great love and attention to my breasts he kisses his way down. The second I felt the warmth of his breath between my thighs I couldn't think straight. He kissed my inner thighs and I held the back of his head. He moved to my lady part and I could not help but say out his name softly. It seems like its much better than all the times he has done it. I can't get over how good he is and how much I love all of this. After a while of moaning and biting my lower lip I finally had a mind blowing

orgasm. He came up to me and looked at me with eyes filled with such desire. I kissed him and he asked me again if I'm sure and I said yes. I reaches his arm to the bedside and grabbed a condom. I watched as he got ready and my nerves started to get the better of me. He kissed me and I actually senses that he's just as nervous. He positioned himself and looked at me I guess wanting more reassurance. I nodded and I felt him penetrate me gently. The pain caused my entire body to tense up, he stopped and looked at me with concern. I kissed him and told him to go on. We finally made love. It was not too bad even with the pain. He kissed me and held me so tightly when we finished. I'm no longer a virgin! We both just kept quiet and I looked up at him.

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Me: Are you okay? (I said softly)

Craig: I should be asking you that. Are you okay?

Me: Yeahand you?

Craig: Perfect. No regrets right, O? (I started to cry) You regret it? Baby, please don't tell me you regret it. (I shook my head) Did you tell me to stop and I went on? (he looked at me with concern)

Me: No.

Craig: What then?

Me: Ice got no regrets, baby and I didn't tell you to stop. I'm just overwhelmed with happiness. I love you. I know that it wasn't the best experience for you since I'm inexperienced bu...
(he kissed me)

Craig: Your just scared me. It was the most wonderful night of my life actually. You've given me a gift that no other man can have. Thank you. I love you.

Me: I love you too.

Craig: Marry me, O. (he looked like he means it)

Me: Was the sex that good? (I joked and we laughed)

Craig: It was so special that I even afraid to call it sex.

Me: Baby, this was not my plan to have you put a ring on it.

Craig: I've been wanting to put a ring on it since day one. So what do you say? Will you do me the honour of being Mrs Knights please? (I started to cry)

Me: Yes. Yes and yes. (I kissed him)

Craig: Yeah?

Me: Yeah! (we smiled and kissed)

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He apologised for not having a ring but I didn't care. I don't want any other man to be my husband. I'll need to sit down and

hear how Chulu feels about it of course but I'm happy. I saw a little red dot on the sheet and he joked saying he'll keep it to show makhulu on our wedding night. I laughed so much. He got up and went to the bathroom. I replayed the moment and I wouldn't change a thing. It was a perfect first time with my fiance. I have a fiance. He came back from the bathroom with a strange look on his face. Worried in a way. We cuddled and just enjoyed the rest of the night. I later went to check on Chulu and she was out like a candle. I went back to Craig and found him asleep. I smiled and kisses him. I cuddled up next to him and fell asleep. I'm going to be Mrs Knights!

OTHU

A week has gone by and last weekend was just so amazing. To be woken up with kisses and breakfast in bed felt amazing. The three of us had a great time and there was plenty to do for a curious little person like Chulu. Craig and I have made love a few times and I now find great pleasure in it all. I didn't want it all to end but we had to return to reality. I thought I saw someone who looked like Flinch one time but it can't be him. If it is then I'll start to think that he is obsessed with us. I haven't discussed the engagement with Chulu because I want it to at the perfect time. I know she loves Craig but she might not like the idea of having a man in the house full time. I also haven't told makhulu. We've been calling each other and it seems all is going well. The family has decided to continue using the land as a tourist destination and will use parts of it for agriculture. She had to stay on longer because they went to the Tyini graves to tell the ancestors that the land is theirs again. They also went to cleanse the place since so much bad happened there. I have a great feeling about this and I foresee greatness for the Tyini family. I have cousins but I don't know why we aren't keeping contact. Hopefully that will change soon. Today is Saturday and I'm having a mother daughter date with my baby. We'll have to go get makhulu from the bus station later on. Flinch said we

must keep the sun blocker things on the windows. He seems to be very concerned about this. Chulu and I drove to the place that sells makes our school's uniforms. If I don't do it now I'll struggle next year. I still don't get why children wear different uniforms each day but I have to respect the rules. We parked and once again Flinch "coincidentally" bumped into us. He offered to help carry the shopping bags. We went inside and we chose the items that Chulu will need. She's a short girl so I'm sure they'll still fit next year. I helped her fit it all and she was just super excited. Some items we didn't get in the size that I wanted so they had to order it. We paid for what we took and then went to the car. Flinch put the bags in the boot and we stood smiling awkwardly.

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Me: Thank you, doctor but we will be fine. I don't mean to be rude but I was hoping to enjoy time alone with my baby.

Flinch: Ahh a mother and daughter date. That's amazing. I won't keep you. I just ask that you sit inside the restaurant. The sun remember? (he pointed up and laughed awkwardly)

Me: We'll do just that. Thank you once again. (he nodded)

Flinch: Bye, Chulu.

Me: Bye, doctor. (she waved)

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I strapped Chulu in her seat and he stood and waited until I also got in. I waved one last time and got into the car and drove off. We went to Mc Donalds since it's her favourite. She just likes the play area and toys the kiddies meals come with. We got our food and went to sit in a corner table and dug in.

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Chulu: I like fried chips. (she said putting two in her mouth)

Me: Yes I do too but too much of them is not good. I could see how excited you were when fitting your uniform. (she smiled)

Chulu: I am and mommy please can I not use the baby seat when I'm in big school?

Me: That's for your own safety. Let's talk about that next year. There's something that I want to talk to you about.

Chulu: Okay.

Me: So last week when we went away with uncle Craig something happened. Uncle Craig asked me to marry him. (her face lit up with the biggest smile ever)

Chulu: Wow, mommy that is nice. (I laughed)

Me: How do you feel about it?

Chulu: Does that mean that he will live with us forever?

Me: Well yes but only after the wedding.

Chulu: I would like that. I love having uncle Craig with us. Will he now be my daddy?

Me: Well he would be marrying your mommy so yes. (she came to hug me)

Chulu: I'm happy, mommy. We will be a family with a mommy, daddy and me. (I kissed her forehead)

Me: I'm glad you'd like that. If you have any concerns you know you can tell me right? (she nodded and sat back down)

Chulu: Will I be a flower girl on your wedding day like with aunt Yandi?

Me: That goes without saying. You'll be a part of it all. Even the planning.

Chulu: Wow!

Me: You like saying wow these days. (we laughed) I love you, Talia.

Chulu: I love you too, mommy. Will my surname change too?

Me: We'll discuss all the details soon. Chulu: I'm really happy. (she smiled)

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I'm so glad that she is happy about this news. If she wasn't I would have had to take things slow with Craig. A part of me

fears that we are moving to fast but it feels right. We enjoyed our meal and went to play for a while. Well she played and I just watched. After a while we went back to our car. She's talking non stop but that means she's being herself. It's when she's quiet that I worry. I opened the door for Chulu and she hopped in and strapped herself. I checked it and she did it perfectly well it's no rocket science anyways. I opened my and was about to get in when someone grabbed me by the back of my neck and pinned me against the car. Chulu went crazy and started to scream. I saw another man trying to open her door but she unbuckled herself and went to the other side and opened the door and went out. I remembered what Craig said I must do when attacked from behind so I managed to fight the jerk off. I heard a whistle go off and I knew it's hers but it stopped. I ran to look for Chulu and found the other guy holding her. She was not screaming nor moving. My attacker came and I took out the spray from my bag and sprayed in his eyes and he screamed. Flinch suddenly appeared and strangled the guy holding Chulu. I went to get my baby and I was shaking. She's unconscious and I panicked like never before. The security guards came out and dealt with the other guy while Flinch beat the hell out of the other one.

"Take her to the hospital", Flinch shouted. I don't know why I didn't think about that. Why does a person's mind freeze under certain situation? I put her in her seat and drove off as fast as I

could. I'll get a few speed tickets but that's not important. I don't know what that man could have done to Chulu. I would look in the mirror hoping she'll awake but her eyes were shut. Dammit I can lose everything but not my child, not my child. I said a short silent prayer while driving. I finally arrived at the hospital and carried her in. I shouted for help the second I walked in. A nurse came and took her another appeared pushing a bed and they laid her onto it. I tried to explain as sensible as possible what happened while crying. My journey came to an end when I was told to wait out here. Wait out here? How when my baby needs me? I stood against a wall and just cried. Cape Town is clearly too dangerous. Maybe I need to think about moving to a less crime filled place. I went to reception to fill in forms.

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Craig: O! What happened? (he came running and I held on to him tightly while crying) What happened, baby?

Me: She...they..we were going home a...and some thugs attacked us. (I stuttered and held held me tighter)

Craig: A signal came from her whistle and I tracked her here. I tried to call but you didn't answer. Did they hurt her? (he clenched his jaw)

Me: Don't know. She's wasn't moving. Had Flinch not come that man could have taken her, Craig. I've never been this scared. I'm scared even now.

Flinch: The police came and took those bastards away. How is she? (he pushed Craig away and looked at me)

Me: I don't know. Thank you for your help. I can't believe that I was actually annoyed by you always being where I was but I'll glad that you were. (he hugged me)

Flinch: I'm glad that I was there too. I nearly killed that thing with my bare hands. I would have had the security men not stopped me.

Nurse: Are you the family of the little girl that just got admitted? (she looked at us)

Us: Yes. (we all said at the same time)

Nurse: We have good news. She's awake and it seems she bumped her head on something which caused a mild concussion.

Me: I'm her mom. Can I see her please?

Nurse: She has asked for you so please come through. (she led the way and I followed)

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I left the men standing there. She was indeed awake I. "Thank you, Lord, I said softly and walked to her side. I hugged her and kissed her each spot on her face. She giggled softly and that made me so relieved.

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Me: How are you feeling?

Chulu: My head was sore but I'm okay now, mommy. That man took me and I bumped my head on another car.

Doc: Luckily there is no sign of bleeding. She will be fine but I'll keep her for a few hours just to be sure. Her life is in no danger but we deal here with a child so I just want to be sure.

Me: Yes of course. Thank you so much, doctor. (she nodded and left)

Chulu: I blew the whistle. Was that the right time to do it?

Me: It was the perfect time. We'll go home soon and I'll cook your favourite food. You had mommy so scared, baby.

Chulu: Are you okay? I didn't like what that other man did to you?

Me: I'm fine and the police locked those thugs up. You and I must see a trauma councilor. She will make sure that we are okay and we don't get nightmares.

Nurse: There is one on hospital premises at the moment. If you want I can arrange a session right now.

Me: I'd appreciate that a lot. Thank you.

Nurse: I was once hijacked with both my kids in the car so I know how you are feeling. I'll go get her now. (she smiled and left)

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I got on the bed next to Chulu and held her tight. Today could have turned out so differently. That man could have taken her and hurt her. After a while the nurse returned with a nice looking lady. She introduced herself as Mrs Vuso. She is good with kids because she has Chulu smiling and talking. The nurse excused us and the session started. It was good to talk about the incident. I somehow felt better after I've told her how I felt and I hope Chulu did too. She gave me her contact details for if I'd like to book another session. She offered her services for free today. I'll call her because one session is not enough. After an hour she left. The doctor came to check on Chulu and gave us the green light to go home. He gave me medicine should her headache come back but said the tests showed that no damage is done to her brain. My phone rang, it's makhulu.

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Me: Ma hello.

Makhulu: I'm 50 kilometers away, nunu. I hope you haven't forgotten about me.

Me: So much happened, Ma but I haven't.

Makhulu: You don't sound okay. Talk to me.

Me: Chulu bumped her head and I rushed her to hospital. She's been discha...

Makhulu: Bumped her head on what, Othu? She's never played roughly before.

Me: We got attacked at a parking lot.

Makhulu: What? Oh my baby I'll be right there. Driver get me home fast because my children need me. (I heard her shout and couldn't help but laugh)

Me: It's a bus. So it's best it drives at the right speed. I'll see you soon. I love you.

Makhulu: I love you too. I'll have Funda get me don't worry. You stay at home.

Me: Okay, Ma. (I ended the call)

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I dressed Chulu in her clothes and carried her out of the room. Flinch and Craig were arguing but stopped and faked smiles when I walked in. Craig came to get Chulu from my arms and

hugged her. The look of relief on his face was not one a person could fake. He really loves her. I didn't ask what's up with them because I don't have the energy to deal with extra stuff right now. All I want to do is take my baby home. I put her in her seat and Craig drove ahead of my and Flinch behind me. I actually like being escorted home. We finally arrived at home. Craig's police friend came to get our statements. Both Chulu and I told them what happened. One of the men got admitted to hospital because Flinch beat him up badly. Chulu fell asleep and Flinch said he'll go wait for makhulu at the station. I sent her a message telling her that. Craig sat beside me and kisses my cheek.

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Craig: I'm sorry that I wasn't there to help you, O. (I looked at him)

Me: There's no way you'd have known what would happen and I was the one who said I wanted to be alone with, Chulz.

Craig: I still feel like I've failed you two. (I kissed him)

Me: You haven't, baby. You being here right now is enough. Luckily no damage was done. When I saw she wasn't moving I started to panic so much. It didn't even cross my mind to check for a pulse. It's like my mind was slow for the first time in my life.

Craig: Shock does that. I'm just glad that you both are fine, my love.

Me: Last Saturday was so perfect and now this happens. I don't feel safe anymore. I'm thinking of moving to a province with a lower crime stat.

Craig: Let's talk about that once the shock is over. If you still want that then we will move. (I hugged him)

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I can't hold him not being there when it happened against him. He's here now and I feel safe now. I thanked him for the defence lessons because they came in handy today. The two of us cuddled up next to Chulu. We both just stared at her. I'm feeling so blessed to have this little joy in my life. Tatiana left me with the most amazing gift ever. I felt sleepy but a part of me was afraid to sleep. Craig's grip tightened around my waist and that made me feel safe so I ended up falling asleep.

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#CRAIG

The fear that I felt when my phone went off and I realised that it's the signal from Chulu's panic button was indescribable. My first thought was that the agency got to them. Had Flinch not

been close who knows what could have happened. I feel like such a failure for not being the one who was there to make sure that they are safe. Flinch is ready to kill me and I don't blame him. I'd have felt the same way had I been him. When I heard that Chulu was unconscious my first thought was that she's dead. That maybe those pigs snapped her neck. I've been calling my old team mates and some just ignored my calls. They are most probably afraid of putting their lives in the firing line. I looked at my girls as they were both asleep. They look so peaceful almost as if nothing happened today. I know for a fact that Davis is responsible for this. I stuck my hand in my pocket and took out the red velvet box that had O's ring inside. I started to wonder if asking her to marry me now with all that's going on was a mistake. I love her so much. The fact that I was her first made what I feel for her even deeper. I loved every moment of our first time together. I've never experienced such. To know that no man will ever get what she gave me. I opened the box and looked at the ring for a long while. She has agreed to be my wife so I'm not afraid that I'll get rejected. I'm just afraid that I made a hasty decision. She's caught up in my mess and so is little Chulu. She turned around to face me and her eyes opened slightly. She closed them but reopened them widely so this time and looked at my hand. She looked at me and smiled. I can't just tuck the ring away now that she's seen it.

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Me: Well I didn't get to do it right the first time I thought I'd do that today.

Othu: When did you buy it? It looks beautiful, baby.

Me: I got it today actually. I was out getting a ring when you two needed me most. (I laughed in disbelief)

Othu: Craig, I ask that you please not do that to yourself. You're no Superman. You're my superman but you can't control certain things. Look, Chulu is here and so am I. Let's be grateful for that.

Me: You're right. I'm thankful to have you both here safe and sound. (I stood)

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She moved to the edge of the bed and I knelt down on one knee. She cried once again as if she didn't expect it. I kissed her first and wiped her tears off. I looked at her and I can't believe that she chose me. She chose me to be her partner. She chose me to be a father to her daughter. She chose me to be the man to make love to her first and last.

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Me: Othunyiweyo Zweni, I love you and I want to spend the rest of my life with you. Will you marry me? (she nodded many times)

Othu: Yes again and again. (I slipped the ring into her finger and she kissed me)

Makhulu: (she stood at the door and screamed in excitement) Is that what I think it is? Are you two getting married?

Me: Yes! (she showed her ring)

Makhulu: Congratulations

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my babies. I'm so happy. I'm worried too but look at what God did. (Chulu woke up)

Chulu: Makhulu? (she said softly)

Makhulu: Oh I woke up my precious one. Hello, nunu. How are you?

Chulu: I'm okay.(she told her what happened)

Makhulu: I'm so happy that you and your mommy are okay. God didn't allow anything serious to happen to you. I'd die if anything happened to you. Thank you so much Flinch.

Flinch: I was at the right place at the right time. Craig, help me with Ma Zweni's luggage.

Makhulu: It's just one bag. (she laughed)

Flinch: Old age is creeping up on me.

Craig: I'll go help him. Excuse me. (we left)

Flinch: Are you crazy? Do you want her dead?

Me: I want to spend the rest of my life with her. (he laughed sarcastically)

Flinch: Well with the way things are going she might not much of a life left to live. I hope that you have found a way to to end this. That baby could have died today. Fix your mess and stop planning weddings. (he walked out)

Othu: Makhulu is so happy. What's going on with you and the doctor?

Me: He is acting like an overprotective father. Fathers never like their daughters boyfriends. (I faked a laugh)

Othu: He must get used to it because you're not going anywhere. I love my ring. You've got good taste.

Me: Thank goodness. So have you spoken to Chulu about us getting married?

Othu: I have an...

Chulu: Uncle Craig! (she said walking in cutting her mom short)

Me: Yes, Chulz? (I picked her up)

Chulu: Are you going to be my daddy?

Me: I'd love to be. It would be an honour.

Chulu: Is that a yes? (we laughed)

Me: Yes, it's a big yes. I love you.

Chulu: I love you too. (she hugged me)

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Flinch walked in holding the bag and gave me a dirty look. We'll plan the wedding only after I've dealt with this problem. Flinch and I stuck around and Othu cooked. Hours passed by and she served us dinner. I love her cooking so much. We ate and finished. Makhulu said she's tired and still call it a night. Othu went to bath Chulu and gave her, her meds. She fell asleep quickly. Flinch finally went away but he said he'd keep watch on them all night. I decided to do the same thing. Othu went to take a shower and returned after a while smelling so good. We went to her bedroom and just enjoyed each other's company. One thing led to another and we made love. Trying to suppress our moans and pleasure sounds were such a mission. A big part of me feeling so guilty for doing it while her granny is down the hall. I love that she enjoys it now and when her legs shake when she orgasms drives me insane. On that first night together I found a leak in the condom when I disposed of it. I'm sure it tore when after though and not before our love session.

She told me that she takes mild birth controlled pills to prevent her painful period cramps. So we are safe right? After some time I got dressed and had to go. I kissed her one last time and she followed me to the door to lock it. I grabbed her and kissed her again. Leaving her is always difficult. I went to my car and saw Flinch's also parked. I guess we'll both do night shift then. My phone beeped.

"Go to you apartment, Prof", it read. He has been quiet all this time. I told Flinch and he didn't answer me. I knew he'd make sure they're safe so I went to my place. I found no one at the door so I went in and waited. There was a loud knock on the door and I stood to open. I could not believe my eyes. Three of my old team mates stood in front of me. I smiled and shook their hands. I let them in. Sharp, who is good at all things knife related opened a laptop and put it on the table.

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Me: What are you guys doing here?

Nate: You'll know soon enough. It's good to see you, man. (we bro hugged)

Prof: Good evening, old members of The Discreet. (I looked at the laptop and his face appeared)

Jake: We're listening, Prof. Snipe wants to know what we are doing here.

Prof: I told you to trust me. I've been putting together man power. I know you all have been out of the game for a long while but I think you will want a piece of the action.

Sharp: We have flown from all across the world, Prof. Get to the point.

Prof: I found out some info. I don't know how I missed it but I finally uncovered the truth.

Me: About?

Prof: We have all had things in common and hence the strong brotherhood. First thing being that we were all young recruits. Second that we are/were the best in the agency at what we do. Thirdly and most importantly we are all orphans.

Sharp: The point!

Prof: We are all orphans because the agency planned it. (we looked at each other)

Jake: What?!

Prof: All our parents died in some kind of "accident". I found here records of us way before we even lost our parents. We were targeted and they knew having a family would be an obstacle. So that do they do? Kill the ones closest to us, make us live lives of desperation and come on to be our saviours. They targeted boys who had no real extended family. The

discreet is formed a long time ago. They just needed time to investigate our lives and so forth. Snipe, did your dad ever apply for that job that made him leave SA?

Me: He was headhunted.

Prof: No, he was trapped and he walked straight into it which led to their deaths. All of us have some weird story about what led to the deaths of our parents. Nate, your mom and dad got killed in a house robbery. Why did they not do the same to you? I mean you were a witness. They kept you alive because they wanted you. Same with my mom. She got hit by a car and they made sure she died. Soon after the deaths of our parents Chief just appeared offering us salvation.

Me: No, not Chief. Commander yes but not Chief.

Sharp: I'm with him on that.

Prof: Jake that case I gave you contains all my findings. Read it now.

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He opened a case and it had yellow files in them. Each of us took one. I opened it and found pictures of myself and in some I'm sitting with O when we were still kids which proves that I was followed. I read more and more and realised that what Prof said makes sense. I looked up at the men and they were

just as shocked. I can't believe that the man I looked up to killed my parents.

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Prof: I was just as shocked when I first saw it. I'm sorry, fellas.

Sharp: I want to avenge my father.

Prof: I'm sure all of you do. I've organised enough man power consisting of former assassins like us who have been through the same thing we have. For long I've thought that the seniors saved us by taking us in when in actual fact they are the reason we cry for our parents even today. I don't know about you but I miss my mom. She didn't deserve any of that. I say let's kill this entire operation. I have ammunition. Weapons that I know you all are skilled in using.

Nate: Count me in. My parents deserve justice. That's our code not so? That's why we call ourselves moral assassins. We get justice for those who could not get it for themselves.

Jake: And who better to give justice to than our own blood? Let's do what we always have. Rid the world of bad people one person at a time.

Prof: Snipe, you're quiet. What's on your mind?

Me: A lot. I looked up to Chief. He was like a father and to find out that he killed my real one. Dammit it's too much. How did we not notice the pattern long ago?

Prof: Like I've said, we saw them as saviours. So we were oblivious to many things. It's like people who are victims of human trafficking. Those pigs get them addicted to drugs and make sure only them can give it to them. When they are hitting a low they beg for drugs from their captures and soon enough the victim sees his/her capturer as a saviour because they give them a fix. We are no different. Let's take these people down. I've been planning this for months but I'll need you.

Nate: I'm in. (the others also said so)

Prof: It's your only chance to get rid the Commander and live a free life, Snipe. Help us free ourselves. We need your skills man.

Sharp: We do.

Me: So we'd have to fly to the States. We can't destroy it from here.

Prof: There is one other sacrifice you have to make. You have to let go of anything that is your weakness that might be used to get to you.

Me: No! Hell no. I know what you mean and my answer is no.(I stood)

Prof: That incident that day and the one of today were no coincidence. I only found out about it today. It seems the Commander keeps his cards close to his chest as far as you're concerned. He suspects that they are your weakness but isn't sure yet. Today's incident was to take the child and see just how far you'd bend yourself to save them. Had you shown that you love them it would have erased all his doubts. Take control, Snipe. Break away from them so that he will see them as useless in his plan. Save them by breaking away from them. I'm sorry but we've never had normal lives. This is our chance to have that normal life. Let's destroy The discreet. Who better than those who have been a part of it all? (I kept quiet)

Jake: Snipe, can just come up with an excuse. Like a work travelling thing.

Prof: Yes, it would have been possible but Commander has a personal score to settle with him. He'll use all means possible to get to you. They will be his means when he finds out just how deeply you feel about them. Take control of the game and trick him into thinking that they are nothing. I'll also need to record your break up so that he can hear with his own ears how meaningless they are to you.

Me: They aren't. (I said with anger)

Prof: We know that but make him think they are. You know he'll stop using them to get to you as soon as he thinks that you

yourself don't care. It's the only way you'll take the possible targets off their back. Are you willing to make this sacrifice for your peace of mind and for their safety? (I felt a sharp pain in my heart)

Me: When are you expecting us?

Prof: The sooner the better. So tomorrow. I'm sorry, Snipe.

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I listened to the other men going on about how glad they are that they didn't fall in love yet. I took my keys and rushed out. I needed time to breath. I trust the men fully but this sacrifice is too big. I have just told Chulu I'd be her dad and proposed to O. I took her virginity, for goodness sake! I went to the warehouse that my friend owns. I took my guns out of the safety place in the boot. I went in, stood before a target picture and started to shoot in frustration and anger. I need to let out some steam. I knelt down and started to cry. I'm going to hurt the ladies that I love most. I have to do this. I finally finished and drove back to my place. I found the guys sipping beers and having snacks. They all looked at me.

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Me: I'm in.

Prof: Great! You can't warn your girl. If somehow they get to her and ask her questions about your whereabouts it's

important that she really knows nothing. He will see if she is hiding something to protect you and he will kill her. You have better get your acting together because you'll have to break up with her and it must sound real. I'll arrange for protection for them just in case but you know him. He will leave them alone if he feels like going after them is not helping them get to you. You must trust me, Snipe. Trust us all.

Me: I said I'll do it.

Prof: He doesn't know you've destroyed that listening chip. So in that case is one. When you do it make sure it's on record.

Me: He'll want to know where the other recordings are.

Prof: Let me deal with that. This is the most important mission of our lives. Tomorrow you fly out and we come together to strategize. Let's finally bury our pasts so that we'll move forward. Have that wife and kids without having to look over our shoulders.

Nate: Let's do it. (they put their hands together)

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I stood and they looked at me waiting for me to join in. I put my hand on theirs and we shook hands. All of me is feeling pain because I'm about to break O's heart. I did when we were kids and I about to again. Only this time it's worse. I've made her fall in love with me and asked her to marry me. She trusts me with

her life. Breaking her heart is much better than burying her. I would never forgive myself if anything happens to them. I'll make this sacrifice and hope that she'll forgive me and Chulu as well. I love them and that's why I have to do this. I might die but I'll die knowing that they will be safe. Now I'll have to practise what I'll tell her when I break up with her. I feel like the scum of the earth. I'm hurting so much. So damn much. I hope that someday she'll heal and find a man to love her but I'm not him. I'm not. This will take months to complete. I've always known that I'll avenge my parents. I'm glad that I have brothers to help. We'll need to train harder because we are a small team but we have years of experience compared to what Commander has now. They will be easy to take on if we plan properly. Death is a possibility though and right now I don't mind it because even when this is over I'll have nothing to live for. My girls are my life. I went to the bathroom and tears flew down again.

"I'm sorry, O and Chulz", I said softly. I feel like I'm dying already and I'm not even in the real battle yet.

It's Sunday a day after Chulu and her mommy got attacked. She was on her way to go and call for help when the thug grabbed her violently which led to her bumping her head on a car and losing consciousness. All of what happened yesterday left her feeling afraid of going to a mall again. She was happy that she and her mommy are home safe though and that makhulu has returned safely. Despite all that happened earlier yesterday she was also happy to hear that uncle Craig has finally agreed to be her daddy. She's never been so happy in her entire life. Now she was sure that prayers always reach heaven and that God answers them in due time. She can't wait to be a flower girl on her mommy's big day. She's excited about being one at aunty Yandi's wedding too but her mommy's will be more special. Maybe soon she can have sisters and puppies. She opened her eyes and could hear some voices on the other side of the door which means her mom and granny are up already. She took her glasses from her bedside table and put them on. None of her classmates have teased her about them and that made her feel so relieved. She decided to say a thank you prayer to God for answering her prayers so she quickly went on her knees, put her hands together and closed her eyes.

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Chulu: Morning, God. It's me Chulu again. Thank you for keeping me and mommy safe and a big thank you for giving me a daddy. I love him with all my heart. Have a nice day. Amen.
(she stood, looked up and smiled)

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She made her bed quickly because she has now mastered doing a lot of things all on her own. After finishing she went to her storage boxes in her cupboard and looked for something until she finally found it. It's a card that she made herself but could never give it to anyone but now she knows just who to give it to. She rushed to the lounge where the voices were and found her mommy and granny sipping their morning coffee. Both smiled when they saw her and she ran to makhulu first to give her a hug. She then did the same with her mommy and sat between them.

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Makhulu: You don't usually get up this early. Did you have a bad dream?

Chulu: No, makhulu. I'm just not sleepy anymore.

Othu: How is your head? No pain? (Chulu shook her head)

Chulu: Mommy, look. (she gave her mom the card)

Me: This is so beautiful, bhabha. Thank you.

Chulu: It's not for you. I'm sorry. It's for uncle Craig. My teacher had us all make father's day cards when it was Father's Day. I made mind but didn't have anyone to give it to.

Othu: "To...Daddy I love you. From Chulu". (she read it out loud)

Chulu: I left the space next to "To" open because I didn't know whose name to write. Can I put uncle Craig's name next to it?

Makhulu: I'm sure that he is going to love that a lot, my baby. (she smiled)

Chulu: Can I call him daddy after you get married?

Othu: You'll have to ask him that, bhabha and hear if he'll like that. I'm sure he has never gotten a father's day card before though so that's going to be a special moment for him.

Chulu: Is he coming to church again?

Othu: No but he might change his mind like he did last time. Let's wait and see.

Chulu: Okay, please spell his name out for me so that I can write it on the card. (Othu did that and she wrote on her card)

Makhulu: Even your handwriting has improved so much. I'm a proud makhulu. My baby is a good child, she reads well and writes beautifully. (Chulu giggled)

Chulu: I still need to put on my uniform for you to see, makhulu.

Makhulu: Yes but only after you've bathed.

Othu: Bhabha I'm not going to church today. Will you go with makhulu or stay?

Makhulu: No, you both stay. You have experienced something very traumatic just yesterday. Her headache might also start. In fact if you want I'll stay with you.

Othu: No, I know that you love church and feel weird when you miss it. Go, Ma. We will be fine. Can the deacon pick you up?

Makhulu: I'm sure he won't mind if I ask him to. I miss him.
(Othu smiled)

Othu: Then go and spend time with him. You haven't seen him in almost a week. He misses you too I'm sure.

Chulu: So I'm staying home?

Me: Not unless you want to go.

Chulu: No, I'll stay home with you, mommy. We can cook.

Othu: That would be amazing.

Chulu: Is the wedding next week?

Othu: Whose wedding?

Chulu: Yours. (the adults laughed)

Makhulu: If they go to a judge it can but then you won't be a flower girl. (Chulu frowned)

Othu: Let's plan a nice proper wedding, my baby. Then we can all be a part of it. You can be my flower girl and look pretty. Ma, will you please walk me down the aisle on the day? (makhulu blinked away tears)

Makhulu: That goes without saying. It will be an honour. I'm blessed to witness all your important milestones. Your matric farewell celebration, your graduation and now your wedding day. Not forgetting when you got Chulu. Not many get to live long enough to see their. grandchildren celebrate such. I love you both so much.

Othu: We love you too. We are the luckiest to have you in our lives. (the three hugged)

Makhulu: Chulu, go and brush your teeth, baby. Your mommy will make pancakes for us for breakfast. With syrup and fruit. (Chulu smiled in excitement)

Chulu: Mommy please make a lot so that I can take some to Khloe and Buhle.

Me: We'll make them fresh ones tomorrow morning. (she kissed her mom's cheek)

Chulu: Thanks.

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She got up from the couch and rushed to the bathroom to clean her mouth. After she was done she went to the kitchen to help her mom. Othu asked her to wash her hands first and she did just that. These moments are her favourite. Helping her mommy make food and that's why she wants to be a chef. She helped stir the ingredients so they form a sloppy batter. After that her mom started to make the pancakes. The kitchen smelled good and it made her mouth water. Her mommy finally finished and plated. Makhulu only wanted fruit of hers. Chulu wanted all the sweet trimmings because her mom doesn't make a sweet breakfast all the time. The three of them sat and ate and Chulu just can't wait for the day uncle Craig lives with them so that he will enjoy such moments with them.

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#CRAIG.

I can't remember the last time I literally stayed up all night. Actually I do remember. It's the day I took out my first target. The guilt that followed after that made me restless. That's when I decided to disconnect myself from all emotions. Now I'm forced to go back to that life and this time I'll be taking out

young lives. I already feel so broken and I'm sure if I come back alive from this mission I'll be an even more broken man. I can already imagine the pain O will be feeling and not to mention little Chulz. Makhulu will surely hate me for hurting her child. Flinch will be happy that I'm out of her life that way he'll know she's safe. I'm doing all of this for them. I was on my apartment's roof lifting weights. I'll need to be in good shape physically and mentally even when I damaged emotionally and spiritually. I felt someone pat my left shoulder and I turned to find Nate holding a cup of coffee. I took it and thanked him.

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Nate: I can see that this is weighing heavy on you, man. I'm sorry that you are forced to do this.

Me: Well I'm paying for my past sins. I just hate that I had to drag a great woman and a sweet child into my messed up shit. I knew from word go that I'll never be able to give them a normal life but I tried to force matters and now look.

Nate: Warn her then. (I looked at him)

Me: Are you crazy? You know Davis can sniff a lie from a mile away. Imagine what will happen if he has a gun to her head because she covered for me. He won't think twice before putting a bullet in her head. The man hates being lied to. I'm not going to put her life at risk to ease my conscious. She has to

think that it's real. If she pretends he will pick it up. We both know he'll still have her followed and stalked after I've left to see if she's really heartbroken and to check if she has really broken ties with me. Warning her compromises her. I want to do it but I'd be signing her death warranty. I'd rather she hate me than die because of my shit. (he sighed loudly)

Nate: Okay you have a good point there. There must be a way though. If you are like this can you imagine how she will be?

Me: She'll get over it over some time. Heartbreaks are unfortunately a part of life.

Nate: Why not tell someone what is going on? Last night you mentioned that some reformed gangster knows and has been helping you keep them safe. Tell him what we are about to do. Hand write a letter that he can give her once you are certain Davis has stopped targeting them.

Me: But I'd still have to break her heart first.

Nate: Yes, true but let's say she reads the letter after a month or two after we've left and hears your true reasons. It will make her realise that you did it for them. Maybe she won't hold you going away against you. It was either them or Wes and you chose them and now all of that is coming to bite you in the ass. Write it down, man. Shit, Snipe how many of us get to fall for a woman who knows about our pasts and choose us regardless.

We are good at this shit. With proper planning we'll nail those bastards within a few months. We can destroy The Discreet so make sure you still have a chance with her when you return.

Me: We aren't going to a paint gun fight, Nate. We are good but we aren't bullet proofed. What if I die and she us here waiting for my return?

Nate: Then don't fucken die, man.

Me: Really? (I asked sarcastically)

Nate: Okay then break her heart and have her hate you for the rest of her life even when you come back or break her heart but later give her the reason that might make her forgive you so that you will have another shot with her when you return. It's all up to you. I've had my say.

Me: And what a say you've had. Since when do you speak so damn much? I liked you more when you were a quiet man. (he laughed)

Nate: I've had a few life changing moments of my own. These ladies changed your life too clearly. Long ago you were just about hot parties, hot chicks and fast cars. Look at you now. A man in love and willing to sacrifice his life for the woman he loves and her daughter. Do you still remember Fera Lopez?

Me: That was not love. She was a fellow hot agent. To think that she just disappeared is crazy.

Nate: She was hot but older so she was your sugar mama. (I laughed)

Me: Just a friend with benefits. Do you think she's still alive?

Nate: She has spoken about a new life many times, man. Maybe she lives under a fake name on some exotic island.

Me: Maybe I should have thought about that. Damn it's been years since I spoke about her. I hope she's living the best life wherever she is.

Nate: Yeah. I'll leave you to decide what you will do. Remember it's have her hate you forever or have her hate you for a while but possibly forgive you. I won't tell anyone about this discussion. I'll go raid your fridge now. (I laughed)

Me: You all have been here all about five minutes and it's already empty. (he laughed and walked away)

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I have missed these men. Nate hardly uttered a word even we were agents but now he has found his voice. I had a cold heart when I was an agent but now it's pure mush because of the Zweni ladies. Damn I forgot about agent Lopez. One of only Three female agents of my time. She was good and I wonder where the hell she went. She was good in bed too but love was never a part of it ever. I thought about Nate's suggestion and thought of who I'd give the letter to. Flinch might never give it

to her because he thinks she's better off without me. Yandi might go soft and spill the beans too prematurely. Thabiso is a cop so hell no. Makhulu? Will she be able to stay silent until I give her the go ahead to give O the letter? That letter can't be given to her while Davis is still watching her every move. Dammit is writing her a letter of explanation even a good idea? I went back inside and found the guys playing X-box. I excused myself and Nate nodded and I gave him a nod back. I drove my car to a place where I'll quiet my mind and find the right words to pen down. I then realised there are no right words only the truth. I noted the letter down explaining everything and apologising. I called the person I trust most to give her the letter at the right time. She told me to come pick her up at her place. I drove there and parked across the road. I called her and she said she'll be out now. Makhulu came looking good and clearly going to church. I hooted because she doesn't know this third car. She came towards it and came in. As usual she smiled and kissed my cheek in greeting. I'll miss these special moments.

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Makhulu: Why the secrecy? Are you planning a surprise for her?

Me: Ma, I have a huge favour to ask and you'll hate me for it. I'm asking you because I trust no one else with this.

Makhulu: Oh that tone though, my boy. I don't like it one bit.
What's wrong?

Me: I have to do something and in order for me to do it I'll have to bre...break O and Chulu's hearts. (I started to cry)

Makhulu: I don't understand. Talk to me, Clay. (she brushed my back)

Me: I have a bad past, Ma and now it's catching up on me. I have an opportunity to kill it and move on freely but there's a sacrifice that I have to make.

Makhulu: To let go of Othu and Chulu? (I nodded)

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I started to tell her my story and she was now also crying. I told her about Wes and why I did it and also about what I need to do now. She at first didn't say anything and just looked out ahead. Was telling her a mistake? She looked at me intensely and took a deep breath.

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Makhulu: I'll do it. I'll give her your letter when you tell me to. You ending things will crush her but I see why you have to do it that way.

Me: I'm so sorry, Ma for everything. I know you hate me b...

Makhulu: I could never hate you. I hate the situation you've found yourself in and dragged them into it but I don't hate you. I'll console her and I will make sure we lie to Chulu and say that you've gone to work. I can't break her little heart. Today she made you a Father's Day card. (my heart sank) I'll only do this if you promise to come back so that Chulu isn't heart broken.

Me: O won't agree for you to lie to her. She would be too crushed to let her child live on false hope.

Makhulu: I'll find a way. She listens to my advice most times. Look, my boy there is something that I've never told anyone. My late husband was active in the struggle. He would go on mission all over Africa taking out spies and such. During the apartheid days an impimpi (snitch) was a danger so my husband would have to go make sure snitches are taken care before they cause damage. And it was believed that the only way to silence a snitches was to end their lives. So what he did was not much different from what you did. He would go away for months because he knew being at our house was a danger to me and Kumkani. We saw him three times a month at secret locations. I was heartbroken by the fact that my husband was never around like those of other women but I knew he was fighting for liberation. I don't condone killings though but I understood why. I later realised that he was doing it all for us.

He was doing his bit so that we can have a free and better future.

Me: That's remarkable but you can't compare me to a struggle hero, Ma.

Makhulu: I'm not but your situations aren't too different. He had to be on the move and neglect his family so that we'd be safe. You have to distance yourself from Othu and Chulu so that they can be safe. I was heartbroken and Othu will be too but I know once she reads this letter she'll finally understand just as I did. You're the only person I've told this to. Not even Kumkani knows what his father really did.

Me: I don't know what to say. I'll keep it secret

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Ma. Thank you for trusting me with it.

Makhulu: There is a promise that I always made my husband give me. That was to stay alive no matter what. He kept that promise and after apartheid he became a husband to me. Promise me that you won't die. (I kept quiet for a while)

Me: I promise I'll try my best to stay alive and come back to them. You are a remarkable, woman, Ma Zweni. To have you as a parent has been amazing. Thank you for everything and once again forgive me for hurting your child.

Makhulu: All will work out as it should. Usually I'd have advised you to forgive those who took your parents from you and move forward with your life but I see why you have to do this. For yourself, for Othu and Chulu and all the other small boys being targeted by these men. No child deserves to have a parent killed just so evil people can use them in their sick plan. Once all of this is over I want you to focus on healing and forgiving. Hopefully Othu will see this sacrifice was for her and Chulu. I'll wait until you tell me when to give this to her. I have to go now but first let us pray and ask God to shield you and your friends as you take down the devil agency that stole so much from you. If possible save lives of young ones who are like you. Remember that some are just like you so they don't know better. Help them to know better instead of ending their lives. You have a lot of work ahead of you but I believe in you and together we must believe in God. Let's close our eyes. (we held hands

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She started to pray so much and I opened my eyes to look at this woman. I've just told her that I'm about to hurt her child and I expected her to swear at me, hit me or tell me she hates me but she didn't. She instead shared her story with me and is praying for me. I now know why O worships the ground her granny walks on. She finished praying and cupped my face in

her hands and smiled. She suggested that I go and give Chulu some kind of goodbye and not just disappear. Saying she'll tell Funda to not get her but she'll hang around until I've left so that she'll be there for O. I sat first and felt a sharp pain in my chest. All of this is going to give me a heart attack. I left her in the car and made my way to O's apartment. I at first stood outside and just stood there deep in thought preparing myself for my acting. This is officially the start of my mission.

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Chulu: Uncle Craig! Why are you not knocking? We didn't know you were outside. (she said and took the key to unlock the security gate)

Me: I was about to knock, Chulz. Where's mommy?

Chulu: Inside showering. Come in. (I went in and she hugged me, dammit this will be a hard goodbye)

Me: Let me go and alert mommy of my presence.

Chulu: Would you like ice cream?

Me: I have a feeling that's your way to get ice cream because you know mommy won't agree to it so early but I'd love one scoop please. (she laughed)

Chulu: Okay. (she rushed off)

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I went to the bathroom and found O showering. I sat on the toilet seat and watched her through the steamy shower glass. How I wish I could join her and make love to her. The shower stopped and she opened the shower door to grab the dry towel and jumped in fright when I stood. She saw it's just me and smiled. I walked towards her and held her wet body.

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Othu: Baby, I'll wet your clothes.

Me: I don't mind.

Othu: Are you okay? (she studied my face)

Me: Perfect. Do you have ice cream in your fridge?

Othu: No. Why? (she looked at me confused)

Me: Because Chulu craves it and thinks you have it. Is it okay if I take her to the spot down the road for a cone?

Othu: Yes that's fine. Craig are you okay?

Me: Yes but we need to talk when we get back.

Othu: Okay.

Chulu: Mommy, we don't have ice cream and uncle Craig wants it. (she shouted from the kitchen)

Othu: See you when you get back. (she kissed me)

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I left her to finish getting ready. We locked her in and Chulu and I walked to the nearby ice cream place. I know we're being watched but I can't just disappear on her. We got to the place and bought coned ice cream.

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Me: Chulz, I have to tell you something.

Chulu: Okay.

Me: I have to go today back to where I lived first. (she looked at me)

Chulu: But why? (she said softly)

Me: You know that I want to marry mommy and be your daddy right? (she nodded) I have to go do some stuff there so that all of that can happen.

Chulu: For how long?

Me: I'm not sure, princess. Are you okay with that? (she shook her head)

Chulu: But I'll miss you.

Me: I will to. I'm doing this so that we can someday be a family. Do you trust me? (she nodded) Then trust that I'm doing this for you.

Chulu: Okay. I have a card for you. I made it on Father's Day but had no one to give it too. (she gave it to me)

Me: "To: Uncle Craig. I love you dad. From: Chulu". (It read and I cried)

Chulu: Did I make you sad?

Me: No, I'm so happy that's all. I read it everyday.

Chulu: Will you call?

Me: The place I'm going to has no phones. (she looked down)

Chulu: I'm sad. (my heart sank)

Me: Chulz, I'll be back. I'll be back, princess.

Chulu: Promise?

Me: Promise. (I kissed her cheek)

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We made our way back to the apartment. Telling her I'll be on a trip is better than telling her that I no longer want to be a part of their lives. Even if O doesn't take me back should I return I'll at least have a chance to still be a friend to Chulu. She's sad but she is holding on to the fact that I'll be back. I gave her a beaded bracelet of mine for safe keeping telling her that I'll be back for it soon so she must keep it safe. Makhulu will convince O to not tell Chulu that I broke things off with her. I wish I could

give O the same explanation as I did Chulu but Davis will be sure that I love them with my entire heart. Hopefully O will forgive me after reading the letter. I'm hoping Davis will call his people that have been following her in so that she'll read it sooner rather than later. I'm sure that he will find a way to fish out information from her so it's important that she not get that letter now. That way she won't have to fake a story to cover for me. He'll never ask Chulu. The man hates being around kids and he won't get much even if he does ask her. I'll miss them but hanging around them now is dangerous.

Othu

I can't shake off the feeling that something is off with Craig. Maybe he lost a client. Hopefully he will tell me what the problem is soon. He must share his burdens with me. I'm going to be his wife soon after all. I haven't even told my best friend that I'm engaged. I finished getting ready and went to the kitchen to get water. Makhulu unlocked the security gate and came in.

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Me: And then, Ma Zweni?

Makhulu: My knees are acting up again. I decided to come back.

Me: Must I take you to the hospital? (she gave me a strange look)

Makhulu: That would be a waste of money because they will just tell you that I'm suffering from old age.

Me: You? Old age? Never! (we laughed)

Makhulu: Is Chulu bathing?

Me: She's out with Craig in pyjamas.

Makhulu: No one cares. She's a child. (Craig and Chulu came in)

Me: Why the long face? I thought your sweet tooth would be appeased by the ice cream.

Craig: She's fine.

Makhulu: Come, Chulu. I need help with something in my room.

Chulu: Okay. Uncle Craig, will you come give me a hug before you leave?

Craig: I will, Chulz. (she and makhulu left us)

Me: Didn't they have the mint flavor she likes? That's the only thing that could explain that long face.

Craig: She actually wanted vanilla today. No one loves ice cream as mu...

Me: Craig, what's up? Even your body posture is different. Your shoulders are down. (I cut him short)

Craig: I forget how observant you are. We need to talk, O. Let's go to my car.

Me: Uhm, okay.

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I locked the security gate and we walked to his car. How many cars does the man have? We both got inside and he started to fiddle with a button first. I thought music would start playing but not.

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Craig: This is not easy for me to do. You're a great woman, O.

Me: If I didn't know better I'd think you're about to break up with me. (I laughed) What did you do? Confess, Knights.

Craig: I can't do this anymore, O. (I looked at him)

Me: Can't do what?

Craig: Us. I realised that we rushed things and now I'm starting to feel a bit suffocated. (I looked at him without saying anything)

Me: You want space?

Craig: I want to get away from you. I'm going away.

Me: Wow! And you realised all of this after you had sex with me and proposed marriage? Wow! (I felt my chest tighten)

Craig: I'm so...

Me: No, no Craig. What's the hell is really going on? (I raised my voice)

Craig: I didn't want to do things like this but if it's truth you want then I'll give it to you. I actually was not going to pursue a relationship with you but when I heard you were still a virgin I stuck around. I always wanted to know that having a virgin is like. I know now so no use sticking around. (It all felt unreal to me)

Me: What? You made me love you. Made my family love you only because you wanted to be the one who is first to sleep with me? Was that like a thing on your bucket list, Craig? "Sleep with a virgin, check!" (I laughed in disbelief)

Craig: Don't make this har...(I punched his arm many times while crying)

Me: I thought you were different from other men, Craig. It's one thing to break my heart and play me but you hurt my child. I hate you. I hate you so much right now, Craig. (I opened the door and got out)

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I feel like I'm having a bad dream and waiting for someone to wake me up. But it's all real. How much of a fool am I? I gave so much of myself to a man who doesn't a damn. I must give him credit for his good acting though. Acting all perfect and treating us right and now that he's gotten what he wanted he moves on. I should never have introduced Chulu to him. I knew that it's too good to be true for me to find a good man but my love for him erased all doubts. I went upstairs and got into the apartment. I went to my room, closed the door and threw myself on the bed. I cried like never before. The door opened and I got makhulu's scent so I knew it's her. She laid next to me and brushed my back asking what's wrong.

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Me: He was not the man I thought he was, Ma. I'm hurting so much and don't even know what I'll tell, Chulu. My child will be crushed. I hate him.

Makhulu: Hate is a strong word, Othu. I'm sorry, nunu.

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She held me tightly while I just soaked my bed with my tears. I've been okay before he came back so I'll be okay again. In time both Chulu and I will get used to being by ourselves again. He was not the center of our lives anyway. He can go jump off a

cliff for all I care. Hate is a strong word but that's what I feel for Craig Knights.

#NAREATED

Craig sat in his car hating himself for what he just did. She's smart so she saw that there was something up so he had to come up with something convincing. He drove to the warehouse again and went to shoot to let the frustration and pain out. He can't wait to put a bullet in Davis' head. He decided to go for a video instead of just a recording. He wishes that Othu hit him harder because he knew she capable of doing that. After a while he went to sit in his car and cried. The camera and ant sound device is killed so no one will hear him. His phone beeped.

"He watched it", it read. There came another beep and it is a recording. Craig pressed the play button.

Comm: Damn, I can't believe that he did that. The bastard just broke her heart. The pain in her voice and face was raw. I knew Snipe is a pig but I actually feel for the woman. I thought she's my trap for him but now I don't know.

Prof: Do we still go after her?

Comm: That woman is already broken. What's the use of killing them if that heartless pig won't feel it. To get close to a woman just to fuck her and take her virginity? That's cold. He's always

been a womaniser but I thought this one tamed him but no. Let's keep an eye on her for a while though. That might have been good acting for all we know but no one can fake that. What a bastard! I'll kill him as pay back for hurting that kind girl. She actually grew on me so I'm glad I might not have to kill her because of him.

They spoke some other things putting together a plan about how he will to Craig. Craig trusted Prof but he also feared for the guy. If they find out he's a rat they will kill him. He took a deep breath and tried to access that old, emotionless him to get through all of this. His eyes suddenly became darker and he looked in the mirror. He recognised that look in his eyes all too well. In that moment Craig was suppressed and Snipe came to life. He laughed as he thought about Ndalo. Not because he makes fun of the man's sickness but because he too has two different sides. He drove to his place and found the guys dressed in black. That's their colour. The men all prepared to go to the most personal mission of their lives. Prof, arranged all the papers and the private jet. Suddenly he felt as if he's still with The Discreet. Only difference now is that he is against them. He will try his best to keep his promise. And that is to not die.

OTHU

I feel like I have been pranked and I'm waiting for someone to tell me that's it's all not true. That Craig is still the sweet man that I thought he was but that's wishful thinking. I applaud him on being a master of deceiving though. I never saw that one coming. I don't know what I'll tell my Chulu but I've always been honest with so now won't be any different. I don't feel like going to work today but life has to go on. I'm not the first woman who got fooled by a man and I'm unfortunately not the last either. I woke up with puffy eyes, said a prayer and went to the bathroom to brush my teeth. I stared at my reflection in the mirror and I couldn't recognise myself. Why does it hurt so much? He hurt me so it only makes sense that I hate him, right? I splashed my terrible looking face with cold water and towel dried it. I went to the kitchen and starting to make myself a strong cup of black coffee. If I had a strong drink I'd have added that to the coffee. Makhulu appeared from the passage with a faint smile on her face. I couldn't smile back so I just greeted and sat down waiting for the kettle to finish it's duties. She sat across from me and held both my hands. I suddenly felt that sharp pain in my chest again. Tears flew from my eyes just when I thought that I'm all out of tear supply. She brushed my hands with her warm ones.

.

Me: I gave him my purity, Ma. (I said softly)

Makhulu: Oh, Othu.

Me: Stupid me, right? Giving a man such a sacred gift when we've only been dating for a few weeks. Who is the fool of all time? Othunyiweyo Zweni! (I laughed in disbelief)

Makhulu: Don't do that. You are no fool, Othu.

Me: He told me that my virginity was what made him stay, Ma.

Makhulu: There's no way a man can stick around so long and go through so much effort for that, Othu.

Me: Ma, I know you love him but Craig did that. I'll never forgive him, ever. I must tell Chulu that he is gone.

Makhulu: No, if you are like this, can you imagine how she will be. Tell her that he went away for long term.

Me: Until when? He's not coming back, Ma. (she looked down)

Makhulu: Until she stops asking about him.

Me: So I must let my child live on false hope for a man that's not even worth it all, Ma? No.

Makhulu: Othu, I've raised you. Just trust me this one time. Children forget, nunu. To crush her little heart is not worth it.

The last thing we want is for her to suffer from depression or something related to that.

Me: I hate him.

Makhulu: No, you don't. You're hurting and understandably so. Give it time. Time is the healer of all things. Don't you want to stay home today?

Me: And put my life on hold for Craig Knights? Never! I survived the first time he left I'll get through this as well. Please excuse me, Ma. (I stood)

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I feel like Makhulu is trying to justify Craig's behavior. She adores him but she must realise soon that it was all fake. None of it was real. I took my clothes off and hopped into the shower. I feel so used. I feel like a used piece of trash. I finished getting ready. I applied extra make up today and I don't usually do that but I can't go to work looking like a dead woman walking. I feel dead inside but I don't have to show it outwardly. I went to Chulu's room and found Makhulu making up Chulu's bed meaning the princess is brushing her teeth. I was about to step out when she rushed in and hugged me.

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Me: Good morning, bhabha. Did you brush your teeth?

Chulu: Yup, mommy. (she showed me her teeth)

Me: Come let's get you ready so we won't be late.

Chulu: Today I'll make, uncle Craig a welcome back card for when he comes back. He likes the colour yellow so I'll use the yellow pencil most. (I looked at Makhulu and she gave me a pleading look)

Me: That's great, my baby. Uncle Craig is a lucky man and such an undeserving one too. (I mumbled the last part)

Makhulu: Othu. (she said softly and I rolled my eyes)

.

I adjusted the water temperature of the shower so Chulz could shower. She prefers showering over bathing lately. I picked out clothes for her while I waited for her to finish. My phone rang and my heart skipped a beat because for some reason I thought that it's Craig. I'm really the queen of fools. I checked the screen and didn't recognise the number but it's local. I decided to answer.

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Me: Hello.

Poppy: I can't believe that you actually pointed a gun to our father's head just so that he could say I mean nothing. Am I

such a threat to you? Geez, Othu siblings share parents. Tata is n...

Me: Hey, hey! I don't know what you are smoking but don't you dare speak crap. I don't give a shit about you. I don't give a shit about your father or any other member of your so called new family. You dare accuse me of such again I'll lay a charge against you or I'll personally come and tear every single stitch of your rotten wound. Don't test me because you won't like the results. I'll leave you to your stupidity so that you'll see for yourself what I tried to warn you again. Don't call me again. (I said in a rude tone and ended the call)

Chulu: Mommy, you said swear words. (I turned around and faced her)

Me: I'm sorry, bhabha. I'll put money in the swear jar. You'll have to put on a jacket today. I think it's going to rain.

Chulu: Okay, I also want to wear uncle Craig's shirt please. The one he made...

Me: Uncle Craig this, uncle Craig that. Stop it, Chulumanco man. (I raised my voice and she looked down)

Chulu: I'm sad. (I regretted my words)

Me: I'm sorry for making you sad. Mommy is just in a bad mood and it's not right for me to take my frustrations out on you. I apologise.

Chulu: Okay, mommy.

Me: Hug? (we hugged)

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Maybe today it's best that I just keep my mouth shut because I'm lashing out on others. I hope that I won't do the same with my learners. Chulu finished getting ready went to have breakfast. We finished everything at long last and said goodbye to makhulu. I put on her favourite music because I'm sucking up. We got to the school and I took her to her class. I only went to greet the other teachers and went to my class. I'm in no mood to discuss the business of the weekend. The bell rang and I went on with my work as usual. I at least managed to give a lesson. While my kids were busy I decided to do what I've been thinking of for a long while now and that's type my resignation letter. I won't give it in today because I still have to discuss it all with Makhulu and Chulu. I've decided to relocate. I took out my laptop and started to type with a heavy heart. I looked at my learners who were All occupied with work. I love these little people. There was a point where I couldn't wait for next year's group to come but now I am not looking forward to it all. I can't believe that my life has become so complicated and filled with pain in such a short space of time. I'll get through it though eventually, I know but just not now. Now I'll just grieve for all that I've lost. Evaluate my mistakes and make sure that I learn a

few lessons from them. I saved the letter and went on with my work. Break time came and the kids all walked out. I took my cooler bag and took out my food. I'll eat it cold because I'm in no mood for staff room gossip. Yandi knocked and came in. We didn't see each other earlier this morning. She sat across from me and looked at me intensely.

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Yandi: Okay, out with it. I know something is wrong.

Me: You'll most probably just laugh at me, friend. I find myself laughing at myself actually.

Yandi: Is it Poppy again? I'll go short her out for you.

Me: I don't care what my so called sister does. So much has happened that I haven't told you.

Yandi: I'm here now so do tell. (she opened her lunch box and bit a piece of her meat)

Me: Your friend last lost her virginity and gotten engaged all in last week. (she stood and screamed in excitement)

Yandi: I'm engaged and so is my best friend. I'm so happy I can't contain myself. Don't bet on a double wedding though. How was your first time? (she smiled)

Me: It was amazing. He was perfect, Yandi. Loving and gentle and proposed when we were cuddling after all the love making.

Yandi: Yho girl, you must be good. (she joked and laughed)
Where is the ring?

Me: At home. (she raised her brow)

Yandi: Why?

Me: Because I'm not engaged.

Yandi: No

Advertisement

Othu. Please don't tell me you turned him down.

Me: I now wish I had. He broke up with me, Yandi. Saying he only wanted to tick being with a virgin off his bucket list. Well he didn't say it like that but that's how it sounded to me. (her jaw dropped)

Yandi: How could he? You love him. Chulu loves him. Heck we all love him. I can't believe it. I'm so sorry, friend. I don't know what to say or do.

Me: Just don't give me as sympathy hug because I'll just cry.

Yandi: And Chulu?

Me: Makhulu suggested we lie to her by saying he is away on business. She says someday she'll eventually stop asking about him and the memory of him will fade away. I don't want my child to have abandonment issues because of a bastard of a

man. I don't want to give her false hope but makhulu knows more than me about parenting so I'll trust her. I'm hurting so much, Yandi. I'm trying my best to not break down but I don't think I'll be able to keep this up. What about me makes men not want me? (I blinked away tears)

Yandi: You are an amazing woman. An intelligent, smart, independent and not to mention beautiful inside and out. Any man will be blessed to have you as his. Craig was not the one that God intended for you. Your man is coming. For now focus on healing and someday you'll meet your person. I love you.

Me: I love you too. I've decided to move.

Yandi: From your apartment? Have you found a house you like?

Me: I am relocating to I don't know where. I'll first have to sit down and tell Chulu but I'm sure she'll understand.

Yandi: Noooo, Othunyiweyo! You're my sister, my best friend. What will I do without you?

Me: I'll visit and skype. It'll only happen next year so I hope you're still planning on tying the knot in December.

Yandi: I don't like this. I'm going to kick Craig.

Me: It's actually a decision that I took before he ended things. I feel like Chulz and I aren't safe here.

Yandi: It makes me sad but I understand. Please visit as often as you can and we will come too. (I nodded)

.

I love this soul so much. Yandi's kindness is the unfiltered kind. She doesn't act it out. It's natural and I know that she'll make a great wife and mother someday. The bell rang and we had to get back to work. Hours went by and we finished for the day. Chulu and I first went to do mini shopping. She got into the trolley and was choosing her favourite foods

.

Me: Bhabha, how would you feel if we moved? (she looked at me)

Chulu: Where to?

Me: Maybe to where makhulu lives.

Chulu: That would be nice. I miss her when she's gone. I won't be able to see my friends.

Me: We can video call them and if their mummies allow we they can visit us on some long weekends.

Chulu: But we already got uniform.

Me: We can give it to a deserving child who does not come from a big income family. (she looked at her cereal box)

Chulu: But how will uncle Craig find us when he's back? (she asked softly)

Me: You don't have to be afraid to speak about him, Chulz. I'm sorry about this morning. Well Craig can just ask around.

Chulu: Okay, mommy.

Me: So you'd be okay with us relocating?

Chulu: Yup. (she smiled)

Zuko: I thought it was you two. Hello, Zweni girls. (she came and hugged us)

Chulu: Hello, aunty Zuko.

Me: Hey, Nozuko.

Zuko: I can't remember the last time someone said my full name. (she laughed)

Me: Oh well. So how are you?

Zuko: Good, I'm actually here to just grab some ready made food because I'll be working until late today. I'm so glad that I bumped into you. I have a braai at my place Friday. You could meet my bae and we could all bring our partners. (I looked at Chulu who was busy looking at other stuff).

Me: I can't. I've got plans and I won't be bringing a partner even if you invite me next time. I'm single now. (I said softly and her eyes widened)

Zuko: What happened?

Me: It just didn't work out. We have to get going. Enjoy the rest of your day and don't work too hard. (we hugged her again and said goodbye)

.

The look of shock in her face after I said I'm single was great. We picked up a few more items and went to the till to pay. I felt someone hold my wrist and I turned to look at the person. It's a middle aged woman and her face looked familiar. I finally remember where I know her from. It's the lady who once said Craig and I are "soulmates". I knew it was all fake.

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Me: Can I help you, mam?

Her: He is not going to let go of you in this lifetime. The two of you are linked in this lifetime more than you realise. All will be revealed to you soon. Fate has made sure that you two are bound. Nothing is a coincidence. All that will happen will be to prove to you that you belong with each other. (she said and left)

Chulu: Who was that?

Me: I don't know, bhabha. I'm sure she mistook me for someone else.

.

It became our turn to pay and we did that and left. I was busy packing the packs into the boot but this time I made sure I'm alert. A man came towards us and my heart started to beat. Chulu is already in her seat. I didn't recognise him at all so I put my hand in my bag to reach for the pepper spray in case I might need it.

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Guy: Hello, I hope you don't mind but I'm looking for Sni... I mean Craig. I have seen you with him once so...

Me: Sorry but I don't know where he is and I do not care either. He's not a part of my life anymore. He could be dead for all I care. Excuse me. (I left him)

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I got into the car and drove off. I thought about that last part and I took back my words. I don't want him to die. He might not want me but I actually still love him. He seems to not want his friends either. This one has an American accent so he must be from there and he almost referred to him by his nickname. We

finally got home and I unpacked the grocery. Makhulu and I started to cook and Chulu went to watch her channel. I told her about the lady and what she said and she said that lady might see things we don't. What links could I possibly have to Craig? Makhulu believes in too many stuff at times. Reality is that he let go of me in this lifetime too and I definitely don't want him in the next. Another reality is that I'm not bound to him by anything. I won't take him back even if he's the last man on earth. I'll even fight my heart until I die if I must but I'll never give that man a chance again, ever. Untrustworthy fox he turned out to be.

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#POPPY

It's been a couple of days after the operation and it was a success. I got discharged before my dad because they still need to monitor him after Othu pointed a gun to his head. His high blood pressure went through the roof after her unpleasant visit so it delayed his healing. Othu is showing her true colours bit by bit. The way she spoke to me this morning was so rude. Tats's body has accepted my kidney but the doctor said he must be closely monitored. It seems Othu has even poisoned our grandmother. The woman didn't even stay during her son's operation. Unathi has been so welcoming and has even promised me shopping after the operation wound has healed. I

thought I'd feel that I only have one kidney but I don't. Apart from the discomfort of course. Langa and I call each other now and it feels great to have a family. The real shark is Othu and not them so Makhulu is the one who needs to choose the right family. Zuko went to get me at the hospital when I got discharged and I must say she's been the best friend any girl could ask for. She's not once asked me for contribution money. I've been taking it easy and following doctor's orders. It's a weekday so Zuko is at work. The doorbell rang and I was just not in the mood to get up because I'm not expecting anyone. The person didn't give up so I had no choice but to get up and get rid of them. I slowly made my way to the door and opened. I could not believe what my eyes were seeing. A handsome young guy dressed in a white shirt and navy blue tight pants. The lips looked so soft.

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Me: Hello, may I help you?

Him: Yeah I'm Nelisiwe Ludwe. I'm here to get a file of Zuko's. She'll be working until late so she needs it urgently.

Me: She didn't mention that to me. I can't just let you in and allow you to go through her stuff.

Neli: I've been here a couple of times. She's my girlfriend so she won't mind. If you want to make sure, call her.

Me: Go away! You just proved that you are a chancer. Zuko is into women. Geez go try to fool someone else. (I closed the door but he held it)

Neli: Look lady I don't know who you hang out with but have you ever heard of a man with the name Neliswa? I'll take you mistaking me for a man as a compliment though.

Me: You're a butch? Wow, you're handsome. (she laughed)

Neli: Thanks now can I have my girl's file? She needs it for work.

Me: Let me call her. (I dialed Zuko's number)

Zuko: Poppy, Neli is on her way there. She was in the area so I asked her to get a work file I forgot and bring it to me. So when she arrives let her in. She knows her way around the place by now.

Me: Okay, she's here and that's why I called. See you later then. (I ended the call)

Neli: Now do you believe me?

Me: Come in. I'm sorry about that.

Neli: All good.

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I stood aside and she came in. She really seems to know her way around because she went to Zuko's bedroom. Oh my word

I can't believe she's a girl. I actually notice her feminine attributes now that I know she's a woman. If this girl hit on me I'd have gone on a date with her thinking she's male. She appeared holding a grey file and I smiled. I wanted to get out of the way so she'd walk out but instead we bumped into each other and I felt pain. I told her what's up and she held me and led me to the couch. She asked if she can check the wound and I allowed it. She got up saying she's going to wash her hands first. She came back and check it saying that it needs to be cleaned. I hate that part because it hurt. She actually helped me and her touch was so gentle that I didn't feel pain while she did it.

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Neli: I'm done. Make sure to keep it clean by changing the bandage. It seems our little collision didn't tear your stitches and that's great.

Me: How do you know all of this?

Neli: I'm a doctor.

Me: Wow, okay then doctor. Thank you. Why is Zuko keeping you a secret?

Neli: There's a difference between being a secret and keeping our business private. We will do the whole friends introduction later on. In fact she's planning a braai his coming Friday. I'm

sure she'll tell you all about it. I have to go. Once again please clean the wound properly and change the bandage. An infection is the last thing you want. Bye. Sorry didn't get your name.

Me: Sisipho but most call me Poppy. I actually don't like the Poppy name. I don't know what my mother was thinking when she gave me that name. (we smiled)

Neli: Nice meeting you. (she took off the gloves, took the file and left)

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The apartment was filled with her scent and I liked it. All my friends seem to have handsome partners who have made something of themselves. I've at times felt so left out. Zuko must stop hiding her yummy dish. I threw the old bandage away and took a nap on the couch. There was a knock again and I just shouted "Come in". I heard the door open and close. Langa made an appearance and I smiled. I can't believe that I have a brother. He gave me a gentle hug and sat.

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Langa: So how's my favourite sister? (I smiled so much)

Me: Healing well, thanks and you?

Langa: I'm good. I'm glad you're healing and thanks again for giving our father a gift that Othu didn't want to. It makes me feel bad for asking you for more.

Me: I hope it's not my heart you want. I don't have a spare. (I joked and we laughed)

Langa: No not at all. We want you to meet someone.

Me: Who?

Langa: Let me call our dad and he'll explain himself. (he dialed tata)

Tata: Langa are you with my darling daughter yet? (I smiled)

Langa: I am so you can speak. I've put you on loudspeaker.

Tata: Hello, Sisipho. Are you good, my child?

Me: I'm good Tata and you?

Tata: Great the doctor says I'll be going home soon all thanks to you. Did Langa tell you about someone wanting to meet you?

Me: Yes but I'm still curious to know who.

Tata: A very rich man's son has shown interest in you. He first wanted Othu but then he saw that she is nothing compared to you. Look, my girl I've always wanted my kids to marry well and this man's son is the only boy he has. That means he'll inherit most of his father's money someday.

Me: Do you want me to marry the rich man?

Tata: Hell no! That man is older than me. That's just disgusting. This man and I want to marry our children.

Me: And he chose me over Othu?

Tata: Yes he did. We can't talk about this over the phone but I wanted you to think about it. You'll marry into money and the boy is not a bad person. I know arranged marriage is not a thing these days but parents know best. I'll understand if you say no though. But think about it. I have to go now. I love you both.

Us: We love you too. (he ended the call)

Langa: I was actually suppose to marry the daughter but the man found out about our money issues and he said he can't have his child support a grown man. So he asked Tata for one of his daughters.

Me: Were you going to marry the girl Tata chose?

Me: Yes, if it means securing wealth for the next generations why not? Love is overrated. What have you gotten from love so far?

Me: Nothing.

Langa: Exactly. In this you can get the good life at least but it's your choice. I just know Kumkani knows best.

Me: What's this man's name?

Langa: Yenge. (I coughed)

Me: As in Jacob Yenge?

Langa: No as is Melusi Yenge. (I breathed a sigh of relief)

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He said he needs to go and let himself out. What are the chances of this Melusi and Jacob being related? I'm sure they aren't because people share the same surname all the time. Plus Jacob would have bragged about his super rich brother had he had one. I've always wanted to marry into money so my dad doesn't have to ask twice. I just thought it would be with someone I met on my own but I'll get to know this one too. I actually trust Kumkani. I gave him a kidney after all. I can't wait to meet the guy. Now I'll be like my friends. I'll be with an educated man from a rich family. I'm sure I'll even get married before Othu and that would sure make her envious of me for a change. My luck is finally changing and it's about damn time.

Hours went by and Zuko came home late.

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Me: Hey, I'm sorry but I didn't cook.

Zuko: Then you'll have to sort yourself out because I'm sure my girlfriend cook. I'll just pack an overnight bag.

Me: But I'm sick.

Zuko: Poppy I didn't agree for you to live here so that I'll be your private maid. I have a live. Order in or something.

Me: Geez who spoiled your day?

Zuko: This will most probably make you happy but you'll find out someday anyway. Craig and Othu have broken up. (I tried not to smile)

Me: What happened?

Zuko: Don't pretend as if you care. I saw that smirk. Othu is a good friend so go and apologise to her. No man is worth breaking a long term friendship. I'll go shower and go. (she left)

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I sat and laughed out and clapped once. Good thing he turned me down or I'd be the one left high and dry. I wonder how Miss Zweni feels. A part of me wants to call her and say "I told you so". I'm sure he cheated on her. Men like him can't be tamed especially by a boring teacher like Othu. Yes, now I can finally have all of it and more while she doesn't. I'll make sure to invite her to my lavish wedding. Life feels so good right now. I now wish Tata could rush this marriage things so that I'll see my sister's reaction. No wonder she was so rude this morning. The girl is heartbroken. I guess it's karma knocking on her door for trying to shoot her own father.

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#CRAIG

We have finally landed in New York. I must say I didn't miss any part of this. I lost too much here. My parents and my childhood. I remember how excited I was even I first landed here but at the same time I was worried about O because I left without giving her a goodbye. This time I've given her a goodbye and a very painful one at that. I miss them all so much already but I've got to do this. Prof set up an old building for us where we will work from. I didn't miss this life either. The life of tracking and planning when and where to kill people. I still carry the guilt of what I did. I'm sure that I'm going to hell. We got to the warehouse and looking at all the computer screens displaying the information we will need and the maps laid out of locations of agents made me depressed. I'd rather be listening to Chulu's music with her than be here. Prof came in and greeted us. He was with a group of very good men within this field of work.

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Prof: It seems he bought the lie. My people say that he still has them tailed but no harm has come to them.

Me: It had better. I'm only doing this so that they can be safe.

Prof: And for your parents.

Me: I have a feeling that my parents would not want to be avenged but would rather I moved on. I'm doing this for my ladies. You had better not fuck me over. I'll take your heart out and sell it. You know I'm capable of that. (he swallowed hard)

Prof: I know and I don't know how many times I must tell you that you can trust me.

Me: Let's talk strategy. I didn't come here to socialize. (he nodded)

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We all sat down and brainstormed. We can't ambush them on different days because they will know that we are on to them and hide. We will take out snipers on missions first. So while a sniper taking out a target we will take out them and later go to the head quarters. Prof put a tracker on each agent and got us all the resources needed. I also have my own individual plan just in case Prof double crosses me. I can't be as dumb as to not have a plan of my own. Nate and the other guys who were at my place and I planned it well. If this is a trap we have our own plan. We called in our own back up manpower just in case Prof's one is loyal to Davis. We sat and finished the first part of our plan. This is not something we can plan in a day. Prof gave us mission details of all snipers. All agencies like The Discreet relies on it's snipers most. We take them out first we can move our way to the "main house". It's been a long flight so we

decided to eat and take a few minutes nap. I went to my room and took the phone I had arranged. I dialed O's number and it went through to voicemail.

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Her Voucemail: Hi, this is Othu plea... and Chulu. (they laughed) Bhabha this is not an answering machine where the entire family says something. It's my voicemail. (Chulu giggled). I'm sorry about that, please leave a message and I'll get back to you. (I shut my eyes and smiled)

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She kept on saying so many times that she'll record another voicemail but I guess she loves this one a lot. I glad she kept it because it shows just how close she is with Chulu. I took Chulu's card from my pocket and looked at it.

"I promise I'll try to keep my promise and come back to you, Chulz", I said softly.

I closed my eyes so that I can regain my strength. I also have difficulty disconnecting with my emotions as I did when I was still active in this lifestyle. I must keep a clear head because one mistake could be the end of me and I'd be breaking my promise to Makhulu to not die. So whatever happens I must make sure that I stay alive for my girls.

MAKHULU

About two weeks have passed since Clay asked me to keep his secret and only tell Othu when the time is right. I have been making sure that my phone is always with me because I do not want to miss his call. It's too important to miss because I want to relieve my child of the hurt already. I've been praying that Clay and his friends to return to those they hold dear safely and soon. There is no way I'm going to abandon the boy especially after I found out how he lost his parents and at such an early age. That life chose him, he didn't choose it. Same as Nkosi, my late husband. He had no choice but to do what he did because it was for the freedom of our people. I do hope that Othu understands that all that he did was so that he could finally be free and have a future with her and Chulu. I believe that he is a good man. Othu is a stubborn person but I'll try to make her see the bigger picture should she fail to. I just wish I could get permission to give her the letter already. She has been doing much better though and Chulu has her down moments where she'd miss him too much but I know she takes comfort in the fact that he told her he'd be back as soon as he's concluded his business. I just want him to keep his promise to stay alive. He can't die because it would crush my girls and even me. I know that God is a living God and that my prayers don't fall on deaf

ears and that makes me believe that he will come home soon. I also pray that he doesn't return a broken man because I can only imagine the emotional, mental and physical strain this mission must have on him. I stopped thinking too much and got up from bed to brush and rinse my face. I heard some noise coming from the kitchen so I went to have a look. I found Othu standing in front of the open fridge and was clearly chewing already. She has been on some diet for a week now and I suspect she cheats her diet because those hips look a bit wider to me. She turned to face me and smiled.

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Othu: Morning, my first lady.

Me: Good morning, nunu. Just eat some real food already and stop starving yourself.

Othu: But I can't, Ma. I have a body goal for Yandi's wedding. I must look hot. (she laughed)

Me: Well get a different diet or stop cheating on this one. You look no different from the day you started it. In fact you look a bit plumper now.

Othu: No, don't say that, Ma. I've been so committed to this and not once did I cheat. Even now I'm eating a carrot. I thought it's working. Maybe you need glasses. (I laughed)

Me: To me you will always be beautiful no matter your dress size.

Othu: Thank you, my beautiful, biased grandmother. (she hugged me)

Me: You seem so better now. It makes me happy.

Othu: You were right, time indeed is the healer of all things. I'm not there yet but I don't feel as bad as I did before. I don't even react when Chulu says his name anymore. Ma, isn't it better that I hurt her with the truth so she can move on rather than comfort her with a lie and let her live on false hope?

Me: Give it time, Othu and you also must not rush to move on because it won't be fair on the next boy. You and Noah seem to have gotten close.

Othu: Nothing is happening between us so don't worry. Plus the guy might be family soon. But if a decent guy comes along I won't reject him.

Me: Othu!

Othu: No, Ma. I'm sure no one has told Craig to sit and mourn the loss of our relationship. I'm sure he is sitting at some exotic island with a hot model.

Me: You don't know that. (I said softly)

Othu: True but I do know that I'm done mourning that fake relationship. I lost too much during it and I won't dare lose more now after it's over. (I shook my head)

Me: I at times forget that when you decide on something no one can convince you otherwise. But I also know you. You don't rush into things. I'm sure you're allergic to men at the moment. (we both laughed)

Othu: Maybe. Am I really fat? (she looked at her bum)

Me: I said plump and not fat. Please eat real food today before you faint.

Othu: I've actually already had a piece of the leftover chicken. (she laughed)

Me: Good now go and get ready. I'll make us a delicious breakfast because you've been living on tasteless rice cakes all this time.

Othu: And they really are tasteless. (she frowned and laughed).

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She took another piece of chicken and walked to her bedroom. I watched as she walked down the passage and something is just different about her. She disappeared from my sight and I started to make their lunches. I really enjoying this daily routine of caring and doing certain things for them. Othu said that they

will live with me for a while until they've found a house that they like. I'm glad that we will now all be in the same town. After some time they were both up and were ready for the day ahead. They both had breakfast and it's strange to see Othu eating so early in the morning. After a while they took their stuff and went to work/school. I started to do some minor chores and later went to bath and got dressed. I must admit I miss my house but my neighbour's boy is looking after it well. Hours went by and I heard a gentle knock on the door. The door was open so I could see the person knocking. It's Thami. I smiled and unlocked the security gate. He kissed both my cheeks and I let him in. I offered him a seat and a cup of black sugarless coffee just as he likes it. I put the tray with the coffee on the table and sat down across from him. He thanked me and took a sip of the hot beverage. He then held both my hands and smiled.

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Thami: You look beautiful today. (I smiled)

Me: Thank you and you look quite handsome yourself. (he laughed)

Thami: Oh stop playing with me. I never qualified as a charmer during my youth so I doubt I will now. Thank you though. (we both laughed)

Me: Perhaps you must try to see yourself from my point of view.

Thami: I wish I could, darling. I'm sure you are wondering why I'm here so early. I've been thinking a lot lately. About my life and future. I'm no longer a young man who is confused about life. I know what I want. You've been such a great addition to my life. You have shown me that I can still live life even at my age. I've been sitting at home and letting time pass me by but since you've been here I actually go out and I enjoy it. Even my children see the difference.

Me: I'm glad that I'm able to impact your life somehow.

Thami: And that's why I want to ask you if you'll do me the honours of being my wife.

Me: I thought you didn't want to remarry.

Thami: Yes but I've changed my mind. I can't have you as my girlfriend, Nomhle. You deserve something more. Please agree to be Mrs Funda. (my heart skipped a beat)

Me: I've never imagine being someone elders wife before. I've always been Mrs Zweni.

Thami: You can keep your late husband's surname. I'm not trying to replace him. All I want is for us to spend the rest of the years that we have left together and do all that we never could

even we were going like travelling. We now have the time and the money. We'll gather strength from the Lord.

Me: Okay, let's do it. Life is too short and like you said we aren't young anymore. (he smiled)

Thami: Wait, I want to do this right. (he stood, tried to get on one knee but failed)

Me: Oh heavens no, don't break your knees. You don't have to do it like these youngsters. (we laughed and he sat back down)

Thami: Ester said that I must go all out. Go big or go home or something like that. (I laughed)

Me: Let's rather choose the go home option because our hearts won't be able to handle going big. (we both laughed again)

Thami: Thank you for making me laugh, Nomhle. It feel good. Now can I give you the ring? I'm sorry I've never proposed like they do in these films before.

Me: I've never had an engagement ring. Yes you may put it on my finger. I love it. (he slipped it on)

Thami: Now it's even more beautiful (he kissed my hand). I have told my kids so you need not worry. I've told them that I want to retire to at the Eastern Cape long before I even met you since I'm from there so I'm glad that you live there.

Me: I'll have to talk to my children first too but I'm sure Othu and Chulu will be happy for us but Kumkani I'm not sure of.

Thami: I'd like to meet him. How is he?

Me: He's at home now but I'm still hurt after what he said I tried to do to him so I haven't gone to see him and he hasn't called to apologise.

Thami: I'm sorry you have to deal with all of that. I hope he humbles himself and apologises. How is Othunyiweyo? I honestly thought Knights was an upstanding man.

Me: She's getting better each day. Let's not judge him. Maybe he is dealing with past issues that he has to sort out before he can think about having kids and a wife.

Thami: And that's one of the many reasons why I love you. Most people would have sworn at him for hurting their child but not you. You still choose to see the best in him. Thank you for agreeing to be my wife. You can choose how you want us to unite.

Me: I want a celebration where only our families and close friends will attend. I don't want a big thing.

Thami: I agree. We will speak about the details after you've told your children. I love you, Ma Zweni. (I blushed and giggled like a teenager) I want you to sit right next to me in church and not far away. That's one of the reasons why I want to make you my

wife. I don't care who speaks what behind our backs. I don't want to hide our union anymore.

Me: Me neither but I'll only sit next to you after the wedding. And I don't need to keep the Zweni surname. I'll be your wife so it only makes sense that I take your name. We must also go to our late spouses graves to announce this.

Thami: Gladly. Thank you once again. (he stood)

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He walked to my side of the table and helped me up. We shared the longest hug and he planted a gentle kiss on my lips. I can't remember the last time I've felt so special. I decided to cook lunch for us and he helped. He is a man that can cook and I love that about him. We put on some classic jazz music and slow danced too. I know that I'll love being married to him. I loved Nkosi but he was never home most of the time. Thami is always near and he is a man who carries his heart of his sleeve. He loves God as much as I do. We both believe that it's God first and all else follows. I can't believe I'll be Mrs Funda, the head deaconess.

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#OTHU

I've been looking at myself in every window that I passed by trying to see just how much weight I've gained. I wonder where Yandi got it because she said it has promising results on others. She's also looking great so it must be me who is the problem. I'm really feeling much better now. What's the use of crying over spilt milk? Today I'll be handing in my resignation letter and next year I'll be starting my new life. Chulu seems excited but she's been worried about Craig not finding us. If only my bhabha knew that he won't look for us. Things are hectic at work at the moment because next week is award night and farewell of the grade 7's. I'm on that committee and I regret agreeing to it. I went on with my work as usual until it was break time. My learners went out to go about their business and I went to the principal's office. He was busy filling something. He offered me a seat and I sat down.

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Thorn: It's not everyday one of my teachers spend break time with me. (we laughed)

Me: Next time, sir. I want to talk to you about something. Well more like tell you something really.

Thorn: I'm all ears. (he looked at me)

Me: I'll get straight to the point. I'm here to hand in my resignation letter, sir. Don't worry I'll work until the schools close for the December holidays.

Thorn: But why, miss Zweni? Are you unhappy here?

Me: I've been more than happy here. It's just that I have decided to relocate. I don't feel safe in Cape Town after all that has happened.

Thorn: I understand but you do know that danger is all over right?

Me: I do but I feel it's worse here. I want my daughter to feel safer especially after what happened to her. (he sighed)

Thorn: As parents we always want the best for our kids. It pains me to say this but I understand. If you change your mind please let me know. (I smiled)

Me: Thank you, sir but I won't. Please excuse me. I'm sure you want to eat. Thank you for your time.

Thorn: Of course, Miss Zweni. The parents of your learners give great reviews about tiff so filling your shoes will be a big task. I wish you all the best in your future plans. May you succeed in reaching all your goals.

Me: Thank you, sir and thank you for being a great mentor.

Thorn: No goodbye like talk yet. You promised to leave only after a few months. (I laughed)

Me: Of course. (we shook hands)

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I walked out of his office with no regrets what so ever. I went to my class and found Yandi sitting and eating already. I took out my food and joined her.

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Yandi: How did he take it? Don't tell me he cried. That man cries too much. (I laughed)

Me: He took it well.

Yandi: Are you sure you want to do this and that you're doing it for the right reasons?

Me: I'm sure

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friend. (she smiled)

Yandi: Then I wish you all the best. Even if your eating food that is not on out eating plan. (I laughed)

Me: Makhulu said I look "plump" whatever that even means. Do you think I'm far?

Yandi: Truth? (I nodded) You do look like you've put on a little bit.

Me: Then there's no reason to continue dieting. You'll just have to be content with having a plump maid of honour. (we laughed)

Yandi: I won't be one of those brides who insist that her bridal party be a certain dress size. I love you all as you are. I wonder how long Poppy will stay at Zuko's.

Me: I don't know. All I know is that Zuko appreciates honesty and she also loves her own place. Poppy lied about the operation type and hasn't told her about her relation to me.

Yandi: Othu, let's tell the girls the truth. They must see her for the snake that she is.

Me: I don't have time for drama now, friend. In fact I don't have the strength for it. I'll let Poppy self destruct because I warned her but she chose to insult me.

Yandi: I can't believe that you are related to her.

Me: Oh well nothing I can do about it. (I shrugged)

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We continued to enjoy our lunch while we also discussed her wedding. Luckily she got a planner and that's going to lighten the load. They have set the date to December 16th for the

white wedding and November 25th for the traditional one. I'm so happy I'm beside myself. I love seeing that men like bhuti Vuyo still exist. Makhulu sent me a text saying she wants to take Chulu and I out for dinner. I replied saying I'd love that. Break time was soon over and it was back to work as usual. The time to go home finally came. I went to get my baby and we drove home. I'll have to research if it's safe for a six year old to ride without a car seat. My little miss doesn't want to sit on it when she goes to big school. I've tried to glamorise it but nothing helped. These little people can be a challenge at times. I love that she knows what she wants though.

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Chulu: Ma, I fell asleep in class.

Me: That's not the end of life, bhabha just don't make a habit of it. Did you just call me Ma? (she giggled)

Chulu: You call makhulu ma so I call you ma. (I laughed)

Me: Okay copycat.

Chulu: I'm a copy kitten because I'm small and you're a copycat because you're big. (I laughed so much)

Me: I can't believe that, that actually makes some sort of sense. Did your teacher see that you fell asleep?

Chulu: No and I had a nice dream too but I just can't remember the details. Uncle Craig was in it though.

Me: Oh okay.

Chulu: I can't wait until he comes back. He told me that he will and after that we'll be a family.

Me: Did the details of your dream finally come to mind?

Chulu: No, he told me that himself.

Me: Oh that's nice. (I looked at her through the mirror)

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I am now starting to worry about her. She even believes that her dreams are real now. There's no way he told her that because he doesn't want us. I also find it strange that his friend asked about him and came to me of all people. He's never even met me. Something just is not okay, well that's what my gut tells me. We finally got home safely and I headed straight to the shower. An hour went by and we drove to makhulu's favourite restaurant. We got a nice side table, ordered and dug in when we got our food and drinks.

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Makhulu: There is something that I want to tell you both.

Chulu: Oh no, makhulu I hope you're not leaving again.
(makhulu kissed her cheeks)

Makhulu: If I go then it will be with the two of you. I wanted to tell you that I'm going to get married. (she showed her ring and I smiled)

Chulu: Wow! I'll be a flower girl of three weddings. That's nice, makhulu.

Makhulu: Thank you, baby.

Me: I can't believe that I missed the ring. (I laughed)

Makhulu: I only now put it on.

Me: Congratulations, Ma. I've actually been expecting this. I'm so happy for you. (I stood, kissed and hugged her)

Makhulu: I'm so glad because I was worried. Chulu, you won't be a flower girl at mine because I'm not going to have a big wedding, baby but I'll make sure you get as beautiful new dress.

Chulu: I can't wait. (she smiled)

Makhulu: What's wrong? (I looked at her)

Me: My food smells rotten, ma. I can't believe it. Smell here.
(she did and so did Chulu)

Chulu: It smells meaty.

Makhulu: And yummy there's nothing wrong with your food.

Me: It smells terrible.

Makhulu: Take a wet wipe and try wiping the area around your nose.

Me: Let me go do it in the restrooms. (I stood, did that and returned to the table)

Makhulu: And?

Me: Still smells. I'll just have a sandwich at home since I seem to be the problem and not the food. (she looked at me intensely)

Makhulu: Othu, when you and Clay were one. Were you responsible?

Me: Yes, ma. We were I promise you.

Makhulu: Are you on contraceptives?

Me: Since forever really. Remember those that the doctor prescribed for my severe period pain?

Makhulu: And you take them everyday. (I looked down)

Me: Well not before we were intimate but during the time yes.

Makhulu: So the two weeks before you did it you didn't take them daily?

Me: No, I started committing the day before we first did it.

Makhulu: You do know that the pill takes about two weeks to be fully affective right? That's why women are advised to use other forms of protection as well.

Me: Nooo, Ma not this again

I'm not "you know what" We used the alternative precaution each time. I swear.

Makhulu: If you say so, nunu.

Me: Can we stop talking about this. It's uncomfortable to say the least.

Chulu: What are you talking about, mommy?

Me: Adult stuff, bhabha. May I have a piece of your burger?

Chulu: Of course. (she put her plate between us)

Me: Thank you. (I started to eat)

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I can't believe makhulu is suspecting me of being pregnant for a second time. Chulu's Burger tasted great so I ordered that and decided not to complain about the smelly ribs because I'm told it's all in my mind. After a while we finished and went back home. I'm really happy for my granny. She found love at age 73. There's still hope for me after all. Chulu fell asleep on the way home so I had to carry her up. Her headaches have also

stopped and we are much better now since our attack. The therapist had been most helpful. I went to put Chulz in her bed, took her jacket and jeans off and tucked her in. I kissed her small lips and left her room. Makhulu went to bath and also went to bed. My phone beeped and I opened the message.

"It seems I'll be seeing more and more of you. I can't wait to get to know you better and have family gatherings together", it read and it's from Noah. I smiled and replied. I wasn't sleepy so I decided to arrange my wardrobe. I reached for the top bags and something landed on the floor loudly. I looked down to see what it was. It's the memory box Tatiana left for Chulu. I picked up the letters and put them on the bed. I took the box and it seems I've broken it. I tried to put it back together but failed. I inspected it and found that it had another compartment. In it was another letter. I'm sure I've never read this one because I didn't know it had another compartment. I opened it and it was written in Tatiana's handwriting. I sat on the bed and started to read.

" Dear, Thunyi. If you're reading this it means that you've found the letter and that I'm dead. I'm sorry for asking so much from you by putting you as Talia's guardian but I couldn't think of a better person. You've been in her life since the first day she came into this life. I've been unfair to you by keeping her paternity a secret and I'm sorry but I had no choice since her

father lives a dangerous life. There are some things that I've been dishonest about as well. I'm not really Tatiana Swarez. My real name is Fera Lopez and I was an agent. By agent I don't mean the good innocent ones but the bad contract killer one. After a while I grew tired of that depressing life so I had to get away from it. They didn't have many female agents so I knew they'd never let me go. I decided to just disappear and start a new life under a false name and that's why I became Tatiana. If you remember well you'll remember that I used to travel a lot. I was going to New York to sort out the details of my plan. I had a fling with a younger man there who was a fellow agent. We had our last steamy sexual moment before I flew out for good. He was actually the one who spoke most about South Africa so I liked the idea of the place and decided it will be my new home. A few weeks after I was settled into my new life I found out that I'm expecting, Talia. I was shocked but also happy since I've always wanted a family. I knew that I was going to be a single mom because had I told her dad the agency would have known and they might have taken my child from me as pay back for my leaving. I know that all of this is too much to take in and I'm sorry. But I think Talia will ask about her dad and I can't burden you by not leaving a name at least. Before you go look for him please call the number at the back of the page. That person promised to never change it. She will be able to tell you if her dad is still around or not and the type of life that he is living. If

he is still with those people from the agency then please rather keep the news from him for Talia's safety. You'll find a picture of her dad in the third compartment. I really hope that you read this letter and not Talia. Her father's name is Craig Knights" (my heart started to beat faster)

She wrote some other things but I just couldn't focus anymore. It can't be the C.Knights that I know. I struggled to open the other section of the box but finally did I took the picture and found the image of younger looking Craig. My breathing escalated so much. I had to do take deep breaths before I collapse or something. "Nothing is a coincidence", the words of that lady echoed in my mind. My hands were shaking. I managed to get up and go to Chulu's room. I lit her bedside lamp and just stared at her for a long while. She actually started to resemble him. Or is my mind playing tricks on me? My baby has been looking for a father when her real dad has been here all along. Must I let him know? He doesn't want me so he might take her and raise her with another woman. The law will be on his side because he never knew about her. It suddenly explains their natural connection. I won't have strength for a custody battle but I must prepare for one. I gently laid next to her while tears flew down my cheeks. I can't believe it all. I guess that lady was right. Craig and I are linked in a way. She's our link and I hope that he won't take her from me. My baby is my everything.

CRAIG It's been a few weeks since I've left South Africa and not a day goes by that I don't think about O and Chulz. We've been making a whole lot of progress though. We have started to take down the enemy's strongest and best snipers. Knowing where they were at all times helped a lot. I think the brotherhood between us has more become stronger. We have been relying on each other for surviving this. We need to finish before the FBI catches on. By the time word goes out we must be out of this country with our mission complete. The men and I were getting ready to go out and finalise this mission. We've actually been working faster than I realised. The phone started to ring and the screen indicated that it's Prof. Sharp put it on speaker. . Sharp: Were listening. Comm: There's nothing that I hate most than ungrateful people. I guess it's true that when one wants loyalty they must just get a dogs. I know that it's you who have been killing my men. I have even found your snitch. I'll cut his tongue out since it seems to be too much of a burden for him. Then I'll come for you all and kill you myself. Nate: You and what army? Comm: Wait and see bitch. (he ended the call) . We all looked at each other and we knew that this might happen we just didn't think he'd find out who our inside man is. We took our equipment because we knew that staying was a big risk. We can't have Davis and his men surprise us with a visit. We were about to walk out when we got a very unexpected

guest. It's FBI agent Cole and we all wanted to draw our guns and shoot the obstacle but we knew that he's not alone. He had a smirk on his face and walked inside the warehouse looking all around it. . Me: What do you want? Cole: Do you men know how long I've been wanting to meet you? I've heard so much about you but I somehow could never track you down. I've been on this case five damn years. I'm sure you know who I am though. If not then let me introduce myself. I'm age... Me: We know you. You didn't answer my question. (I cut him short and he smiled) Cole: I take it that you aren't going on vacation and those aren't clothes that you are carrying in that bag. Nate: Look, if you're not going to arrest us or that kind of shit then just get the hell out of our way. Cole: You're welcome to go and be gunned down the second you set foot out or you can sit and listen to what I have to say. (we looked at each other and gave each other a subtle nod) Me: Speak. Cole: Aren't you going to offer me a seat, coffee or at least some water? (he laughed and we kept silent) Okay, jokes aside. I know who you are, I know what you do and I also know what you are busy with now. It took me years and years to find that out but my hard work and dedication has finally paid off. I can help you save your friend by the way. You are not the only ones with an inside man. I should actually be arresting you but I need your help. Sharp: We don't like cops. Cole: Well if you choose to be against me rather than with me I'll have to arrest you and trust me when I

say you'll never see the light of day ever again. But If you choose to be with me I can make sure that you are seen as the good guys and you won't get to go to jail. You see, you're not the one I'm after. Patrick Davis is who I want. If you help me get to him then I can help you escape the wrath of the law. Nate: Since you managed to find us then finding go find him and leave us out of it. Cole: Well you guys know the compound best. You know of all the secrets rooms also. You are best for this job of course my men will be there for back up. (we kept quiet) I'll leave you men alone to discuss this. Remember your freedom is on the line here so think wisely. (he walked out) Sharp: We can't work with a damn cop. Jake: Would you rather we spend the rest of our lives in jail? Sharp: We've managed to stay out of jail for years and we can do the same now. I say let's just make a run for it. We can go out the back. Me: That's not a good idea. They'll either shoot you or they will lock you up. He has us cornered. I say let's do it. We were going to go after the Commander anyways so why not have our records cleaned while at it. Nate: I'm with Snipe on this one. Kill two birds with one stone type of shit. Jake: What guarantee do we have that the cop will keep to his word. What if we help him get Davis only to have him throw us in the same prison cell as the man. I've trusted the law, man. Me: Well we'll make sure that the deal is on paper so that he won't fuck us over. We need his manpower man. We must also make sure to bring Prof out

alive. Sharp: We all know that he is dead already. I'm out. I won't spend the rest of my life in jail for trusting a cop. Me: Don't be stupid! . He didn't listen to us. We watched as he loaded his gun and made his way to the back door and walked out. He is good at remaining unseen but I just don't think he will succeed this time. Not even a minute went by when we heard gun shots. We all just knew that it's him that those shots are aimed at. We went out to look and indeed we found him lying face down on the concrete paving in a pool of his own blood. I shouted in frustration and run to him. I turned him around but I knew that it's too late. I felt a sharp pain in my heart because I have known this man since I joined the agency. It's like losing a brother. I could see that the other men were just as pained by the loss. Why didn't he just listen. Cole made his way outside and I wanted to strangle him to death but I knew that would just result in me dying like Sharp has. . Cole: Do any of you wish to join your mate? Nate: You didn't have to kill him. He was a good man. (he held Cole by the collar and I stopped him) Me: We need proof that you'll keep your end of the deal. We want all the evidence that you say you have wiped out and non of us must be prosecuted. (he smiled) Cole: I knew you're the sensible one. Let's go inside and have my men deal with the body. I'm sorry for your loss but he was told to not run but he tried anyway. He has in fact shot two of my men and one of them she dead. It's best we work together rather than

against each other. Jake: Give us some time to pay our last respects. He was a brother. Cole: Of course. I'll go let the District Attorney know that you agreed to the deal. She'll come over with all the needed documents to secure this agreement. Me: Well be quick about it because Davis is looking for us and we don't know what Prof could have told him. Cole: I'll get right to it. If all goes well we'll complete this mission by tonight since you men have done the ground work already. Jake: You speak to much. Just go do what you must so that we can get to work. (he shouted) . Cole rushed to the corner and made a phone call. The three of us went to pay our lasts respects to our comrade. I wish he had put aside his stubbornness aside just this one time. The forensics people came and took his body away. I don't like the cops and my hatred for them has become worse but I have no choice but to work with Cole. I wonder who the other snitch is. I'm sure it's a cop who has been undercover for years now. The DA came and she put the deal into detail. We knew that accepting it is our best chance at going out of this country at the moment. I can't risk being arrested and rot in jail. I can't contact Makhulu now. I'm sure Prof will be tortured first before being killed and I don't know what he might reveal to Davis so to be safe I won't make any contact with Makhulu because I'm sure that Davis has people trying to hack my calls now and there's no time to arrange another phone. I'm hoping that Flinch is still around just in case something happens. After we

concluded our business with the law we and their team sat down and planned an ambush. The plan seemed tight and we equipped ourselves with weapons. My team and I said a short prayer. I hope that God will forgive us for the lives we'll take and protect us. It was night time and it's perfect for the type of mission that we are on. We drove out and each went to their planned stations. My team first started to attack the men at the gate and that us a chance to make our way inside. We started to open fire and it was all just so chaotic. I'm not used to the target shooting back at me so this is all new to me she I'm hoping that I won't fail. We would shoot, take cover and move inwards. I knew each passage and corner of this place and Davis didn't even change the positions of the men who keep guard. That man can be so predictable at times. Bullets were flying left right and center and some of the men in my team were gunned down. I made my way to the torture room and just as I suspected Prof was tied down to a chair and beaten up. I walked towards him while I looked around to see if there's no gunman inside. When I saw it's empty I went to Prof and shook him roughly. His mouth was slightly open and I realised that they cut his tongue out. I felt that pain in my chest caused by grief again. I've lost two brothers in one day. My anger rose to a point that I didn't know was possible. I let out a deep scream of anger and agony. I thought I was done with this life but now I'm taken right back. I knew staying there much

longer was dangerous so I went out feeling like a failure for not getting to Prof in time. Something just told me that Davis is not in the building so I went out to the place where he usually described as his hideout. Like I've said the man can be unpredictable. I drove there and made my way inside. I fought with the men at the gate and managed to defeat them. I pointed my gun ahead while slowly walking in. A shot was fired and I had to take cover. I shot back and gunned a man down. I went ahead and found Davis pointing a gun at me as like I'm doing the same to him. He laughed. . Comm: I must say I'm impressed. You managed to find me just when I thought no one at the agency knows of this place. Me: Well I have my way of finding things and you aren't as good at this as you believe that you are. Comm: Well it seems we won't get anywhere by pointing guns at each other. Why don't we just do it old fashion style? Let our fists do the talking. Let's fight like real men. Me: A coward like you would never do that. You hide behind the boys that you tricked into the agency. (he threw his gun aside) Comm: So I've got nothing. Will you shoot me down while I'm unarmed or will you fight fairly? There aren't any rules. We fight to death. (I threw my gun aside too) . I started to get ready for the fight and so did he. We first just looked at each other and he marched towards me and I punched and kicked him down. He got up quickly and threw a punch hitting my jaw. We fought until we were both bleeding. I feel my body being in

so much pain but I can't give up now. I punched him multiple times until his face bled so much. My anger took over and I knew that I'm going to kill him with my bare hands. I could see him get weaker and weaker but I didn't stop. I then strangled him and his lips turned blue. I felt a sharp, painful sting in my back area and I knew that I've been shot. My grip loosened around his neck and I fell to the floor. I looked at the shooter and don't know him. I tried to reach for my gun but he shot me in the knee. I've never been in so much pain in my entire life. I heard gun shots and my attacker fell to the floor. Nate soon appeared. I saw Davis reach for his gun to shoot at Nate but I grabbed mine first and shot three bullets in his chest and my body gave up. I fell and I felt as my head hit the wooden floor. Nate came to me and I felt him put pressure on my back. I knew that he is trying to stop the bleeding. I felt someone else tie my knee tightly. Nate was calling out my name so many times and I knew he is right next to me but it sounded like he was far away.

. Nate: Snipe, we have done it man. Hang in there. Don't fucken die dammit. It's mission complete so don't die. You still need to go get your lady and live that family life you've always wanted. Don't die, Snipe. I've lost too many brothers today please, man.

Me: Take the letter that's in my right pocket. Give it to O pl...please. Tell her that I'm sorry and that I love them. (I said with great struggle) Nate: You can tell them yourself. . I suddenly had images of them in mind and I smiled. I've had the

hell beaten out of me and I've been shot yet the thought of them eases the pain and gives me a reason to smile. I know I've lost a lot of blood and that's not good. My body got weaker by the second. I suddenly felt my body being lifted up and a lot of people worked on me all at once. I saw Nate run alongside me as I'm wheeled out and my vision became blurry. An oxygen mask was put over my mouth and I lost consciousness. I hope that makhulu will forgive me should I break the promise that I made to her. I tried my best but I'm only human. I'm made of flesh and now that flesh is weak and it might even die. I know Nate will give O the letter and I hope that she'll forgive me and know that I love them. I've always loved them. I hope Chulu will also forgive me for promising her that I'll return. I really tried my best. . . . #OTHU I've been tossing and turning all night long because my mind was flooded with a lot of things. How could I not have realised the little resemblance especially when she's asleep? I can't believe that Craig is her real father. Of all people it just had to be him and it just had to happen now. I couldn't sleep so it's no use staying in bed. I went to the kitchen to make myself a strong cup of black coffee. I reread the letter again and again. It explains why she left so much money. I knew that a waitress couldn't have so much money unless she had a rich family or something. In the letter she also states that she really was an orphan. She lost her parents at a very young age. Makhulu joined me and she greeted. I made her a cup also and

we sat down. . Makhulu: You've been crying. What's wrong now, Othu? Me: I just found out something that I never expected, Ma. Makhulu: What? (I have her the letter and she started to read) Me: My life feels like a dream lately. (she put her hand over her mouth) Makhulu: Chulu has been praying for Craig to like her enough to want to be her daddy when in fact she's his. My nunu, now do you see that you two belong together? What are the chances of her biological mom choosing you to raise her child when in fact she's the child of your soulmate? That lady was right. Your union and all that binds you is no coincidence. This is God showing you that he formed your union long before you two even met. Wow! This is amazing. All of it is just amazing. Me: Not if he wants her, Ma. Craig doesn't want me so he won't think twice before taking his child from me. I'm sure he'll find out soon. I'm not going to take it all lying down though. Makhulu: Othu, that poor boy left because he had to and not because he wanted to. Me: I know to love him bu... Makhulu: No

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I know what I'm talking about and I have proof. He left me a letter explaining to you in detail why he had to do what he did. Me: I need to go and get ready for work, Ma. Makhulu: Just sit down and listen. I'm not sure if I must give you the letter now because he hasn't told me that I can give it to you. Me: What

letter, Ma? Makhulu: Wait here. (she rushed to her room) . I'm so confused right now. What letter? I hope that there aren't any other shocking surprises. Waited for her to return and she finally did after a while. She came back holding a white envelope and gave it to me. I looked at it and saw that it had Craig's handwriting on it saying. "For Othu", it read. I suddenly remembered the day he broke my heart and I got angry all over again. I tore it apart before even opening it. Makhulu looked at me as if she's going to give me a proper hiding afterwards. .

Makhulu: I was actually expecting you to do that and that's why I took the letter out of the envelope. Now please sit down and listen while I read it to you. Me: No, Ma. I don't want anything from that man. (I started to cry) Makhulu: It's said that listening when you're spoken to is a sign of respect. Please sit down and show me respect as your elder by listening to what I have to say. You're hurting that I know but I think you'll look at things differently after you hear what I have to say. Please, nunu. (I slowly lowered myself into a chair and sat) . She unfolded the paper and started to read for me. The more she read the more I cried. Why didn't he just tell me? I can't take it all. It's all just way too much to take in. She finally finished reading and looked at me. She wanted to come hug me but I stood and stood at a distance. So everyone knew but me. Flinch knew and so did makhulu but not me. Doesn't he trust me? I wiped my tears off and walked to my room but felt a bit lightheaded. I ignored it

and kept on walking and before I knew it I landed on the floor. Makhulu rushed to me and tried to make me focus but I failed to. She got up and I heard her speak. She was kneeling by my side again and started to shake me. "Flinch is on his way, baby", she said. I didn't want to be driven to a hospital so I gathered strength and got up. I still felt dizzy but better. Flinch came after a long while and makhulu insisted that I go to the emergency room. She helped me get dressed and Flinch carried Chulu to my car since her seat is there. She was still fast asleep. He drove to the ER at great speed. We finally arrived and we filled in the forms and I went in to be examined. They had me change into a hospital gown and took some blood samples to be tested. I'm sure that it's nothing serious. After a few hours they allowed my family in. Chulu ran and got on top of the bed and gave me a hug. I looked at her for a long while just trying to see which parts of her resembles Craig's. She was talking but I didn't pay much attention to that. Not even her morning breath bothered me. Makhulu shook me gently. . Me: Hmm? (I looked at her) Makhulu: The child has been talking to you. What's wrong? Chulu: Mommy, does your head hurt like mine did when I came here? Me: No, bhabha. I'm fine. When is this doctor coming back? I have to go to work. Makhulu: As if I'll let you do that. You both are staying home. I called Yandisa and she'll tell your boss. Chulu: I'll take care of you, mommy like you did with me. (she smiled) Me: Thank you and I love you,

bhabha. Never forget that. Chulu: I won't (she hugged me) Look what the nurse gave me, a sweet. Me: You'll have it after breakfast. (she nodded and the doctor walked in) Doctor: Sorry to keep you all waiting. I've been waiting for the results. Would you prefer we speak in private or i... Me: You can speak in front of my family, doc. (I cut her short and she nodded) Doc: Well we were worried about your blood pressure but that has gone back to normal. There's nothing wrong with you but we did find something. Me: Is it serious? (she smiled) Doc: You might feel sick for a while but it's not serious. The pregnancy test came back positive...(she lost me after the word "positive") . Did this woman just say that I'm pregnant? I finally snapped out of my thoughts and demanded that she do the test again. She told me they did it three times already and showed me the proof. I nearly fainted again. Makhulu had a big smile on her face and started to cry. I told the doctor that I've been safe all this time and she said the condom could have broke and me not taking the pill everyday have left room for pregnancy. I don't know how I feel. The father of my daughter and unborn child is somewhere and I don't even know if he's alive. Why did Craig do this to me? Why didn't he tell me that the protection broke? I just don't want to be me right now. It's too much. . Chulu: Mommy, what does it all mean? Makhulu: It means you'll have a little brother or sister. Chulu: Wow! I'd like a sister please. (they laughed) Doc: Unfortunately you can't choose, princess.

I'll go sign those discharge papers. I'll prescribe some vitamin and iron supplements for you. You'll need them so that both you and baby can be strong. Excuse me and congratulations. (she left and Makhulu started to dance and so did Chulu) Me: You both are giving me a terrible headache. Makhulu: I'm going to have another grand baby. I can't wait. I knew it and that's why I didn't want to risk giving you anything this morning. Chulu: When is the baby coming? Makhulu: The baby still needs to grow in mommy's belly and be strong. We want a strong baby not so? (Chulu smiled) Chulu: Yes! (she shouted) Makhulu: You don't look happy, Othu. Me: I want to go home. I just can't deal with this right now. (I got up from the bed) . I started to get dressed and Chulu put her head on my belly like she's trying to listen to the baby or something. I moved her head away gently and continued getting dressed. I'm not excited at all. I don't want to be a mother again so soon. I thought I'd be married by the time I have my first biological baby. Makhulu was already speaking about knitting socks for her unborn little nunu and Chulu said she'll share her toys with the baby. Flinch didn't look so pleased when I told him the news but he managed to fake a smile. We finally got home and I went to my bedroom to undress. I stood in front of the mirror for a while and inspected my body. I can't believe that a baby is forming inside of me. I went to shower and then we had breakfast afterwards. I went to lay on the couch and Chulu laid next to

me and put her head on my belly. I guess she senses the connection between herself and her unborn sibling. Craig and I have another link and I just can't believe it. Was it his plan to trap me with a baby? I hope that he comes back safely to be a father to his kids but I don't think that I'll want to revive our relationship. I can't be with a man who trusts a child and not me because he told Chulz he'd be back but made me live a lie for two weeks. I'll forever fear that he'll disappear again. I'm not going to keep him away from his kids but I can't be with him even if he had to do this. I'm hurt and we will find a way to remain civil for the sake of the kids. I didn't want to be a single mom of two but it's how it'll be it seems. I pray for his safe return because his children need him. I know that he will be happy to hear about Chulu being his and I guess I'm glad that I don't have to deal with a strange man. I love him and miss him but I'm afraid to welcome him back into my life as a boyfriend. He'll be the father of my kids and friend that's it. I thought makhulu would be angry but she seems most excited. I don't feel happy about this pregnancy but I'll give it time. I've just had to process a lot too soon. I hope life has now stopped giving me surprises. I can't handle any more.

It's been a few days since Craig has been on life support. The doctors have done all that they could but they think that it's best when the machines are turned off to take him out of his misery. Nate is the person who has the right to give the go ahead since Craig has no next of kin. He refused to believe that this is the end of his friend so he told the doctors to hold on a while longer. That perhaps Craig will be able to breath on his own again. Meanwhile Craig laid on the bed feeling no pain what so ever. Suddenly he found himself standing in what looked like a chapel wearing a grey three piece tailored suit. He looked around and saw that all the seats were empty. A soft, sweet melody started to play and suddenly Chulu made an appearance wearing a beautiful white dress with gold detailing on it. She held a basket in her right hand and would use her other hand to get rose petals out of the basket and scattered them on the floor while she walked towards him. She looked so adorable and he smiled. She finally reach him, he picked her up and kissed her cheeks. He has missed her so much. The melody changed to the one brides usually walk down the aisle to. Othu and Makhulu entered the chapel holding hands. Craig's heart started to beat so fast but it's the excitement that caused it. Othu looked breathtaking in a pure white wedding gown and makhulu looked beautiful too. The two finally made it to the front and he was about to reach for Othu's hand.

"Craig", a deep voice disturbed him and he turned to see who dared ruin the perfect moment. It's Mike Knights, his father. Mr Knights Snr stood with his arm held out to his son and had a big smile on his face. Craig has been dreaming about this moment for so long. To see his parents again. He looked behind his father in hope of seeing his mom but she wasn't there. He started to cry tears of joy. He put Chulu down and looked at Othu who also had her hand reaching for him. Whose hand does he reach first? Surely Othu will understand if he goes to his dad, he thought. He started to walk towards his father and he wept like a little boy as soon as his hand touched his dad's. The two men shared a long hug. His father held his hands and led him to what seems like the back exit of the chapel. Craig looked back only to see that Othu and Chulu are crying and begging him not to leave them. The sound of their cries broke his heart. Chulu held on to his leg refusing to let go. Him and his father had no choice but to stand and try to get her off but it's as if she was glued to his leg. He looked at Makhulu who was now suddenly holding what seemed like a baby wrapped in a blue and pink blanket. Suddenly Craig's body started to shake until he fell to the floor. Meanwhile in reality Nate started to panic when he saw Craig shaking uncontrollably in his hospital bed. Even his machines were making a louder noise. Nate rushed to get help and the medical personnel rushed in ordering Nate to get out of the room while they are busy with

his friend. He at first refused but later gave in and went out. Nate kicked the wall which only resulted in him feeling the pain. He doesn't want his friend/brother to die. He has lost so many friends in his lifetime so he can't deal with another loss. He sat and scratched his head roughly feeling so useless. Suddenly he got an idea and wondered why he didn't think about it before. He got up and went to the car to get Craig's bag. He went through it and found a grey book hoping that it has what he wants in it. He paged through the book until he finally found it, Othu's number. Nate walked back inside and stared at the number for a while wondering if calling her is what Craig would want. After a long while the doctor appeared. Nate walked towards him.

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Nate: Doctor, what happened?

Doc: He had a seizure it seems but we can't seem to know what caused it. He is still not able to breath on his own and is still in a coma. You have to do what's best for your friend. The only reason why he is alive is because of those machines. There is nothing more we can do for him.

Nate: I'm not going to say goodbye to my friend. That man is one of the strongest men that I know. (he shouted)

Doc: We are all made of flesh and his is getting weaker by the minute. I have the forms here. You can sign right now. Mr Knights signed a form years ago giving the hospital the right to give his organs to those who need them.

Nate: So is that why you want me to kill him? So that you can be some sort of hero around here?

Doc: I'm doing it because I know that he'll die anyways so why not save lives through him.

Nate: I don't have time for this shit. Can I go in and see him?

Doc: You may but I also advise that you say your goodbyes.

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Nate left the doctor where they stood and spoke and made his way to Craig's room. He has never seen his friend look so weak and it somehow made him weak too. He decided to make that call to South Africa. He dialed Othu's number and waited for the call to go through. Nate looked at his friend and asked him to hold on just a little while longer.

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Othu: Hello? (she finally answered)

Nate: Hello, Miss Zweni. You're speaking to Nate and I'm friends with Sni...Craig.

Othu: Okay, I'm sure you also want to know where he is and I swear I don't know.

Nate: I know, miss. I actually know where he is?

Othu: You do? (she said unable to hide the relief in her voice)

Nate: Yes but unfortunately it's not good. He was shot two times and is now in hospital. Uhm, they..

they want to switch the life support off. (Othu started to cry)

Othu: No, no please don't let them d...do that. There must be something they can do.

Nate: Nothing on their part but perhaps you can do so...

Othu: Anything! Just tell me and I'll do it. (she cut him short and spoke with urgency)

Nate: I'm going to put the phone on his ear so you could just talk to him and ask him to not give up. Just something like that.

Othu: Okay, okay.

Nate: Let me do it. (he put the phone on Craig's ear) You may speak.

Othu: Craig, it's me O. Your friend told me what happened. You can't die now when you have so many reasons to stay alive. A lot has happened since you've left. I found another letter from Chulu's biological mom and in it she confessed that she knows

you. Her name was Fera Lopez and in the letter she wrote that you two had a fling which ended when she came here. She later found that she was pregnant with your child. Chulu is your child and she needs you so much. You know how much she loves you. Please don't die. I'm pregnant. I don't want to do all of this alone so please don't leave me because your kids need you. We love you and we want you back. Come back, baby. (she said softly while crying) I want you to be here with me when we tell Chulu that you're her real daddy. Come back to us, Craig.

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After a while they ended the call and Othu felt like her heart has just been ripped out of her chest. She told Makhulu what is happening and they held hands and both prayed for Craig to wake up and return home where he is loved and needed. Chulu laid in her bed unable to sleep because she misses uncle Craig. She went on her knees and decided to say a short prayer.

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Chulu: Dear God, it's me Chulu. I really, really miss uncle Craig. Please let him come back. He said we'd be a family when he come back. My mommy is going to have a baby and both the baby and I need a daddy. Thank you and amen.

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She got up and walked out of her room and made her way to her mom's. Chulu found her mommy laying on the bed so she joined her. She's been kissing her mom's belly since she knew there's a baby inside of it. A big part of her wants the baby to grow strong and come already. The two of them laid on the bed both missing Craig dearly. Meanwhile in New York the doctors told Nate that they have to switch of the machines before his organs become damaged. They gave him a form that Craig signed three years ago giving the hospital permission to take him off life support if it's for the best. Nate couldn't do anything because the signature was authorised and was legal. He went with the doctors to the room and watched as they first switched the plug off and the machine's screen went black. Nate couldn't help but cry because he believed hearing Othu's voice would help but it didn't. The doctor issued out the time of death and the nurse put it in his details. They were about to take out the pipe in his mouth but suddenly something that looked like a big jar with some rubber thing in it started to move a little bit in an up and down motion.

"We have a pulse. It's weak but we have a pulse", the doctor shouted and suddenly they all worked on him again. Nate wiped his tears off and laughed.

"You fucken bastard, you just wanted me to shed a tear", Nate said and laughed loudly. The medical staff finished and they

said that he is stable. They couldn't explain it saying it's nothing short of a miracle. Nate stood by his friend and Craig opened his eyes.

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Craig: "O". (he said softly)

Nate: You'll see her soon. I'll make sure that you're flown out back to South Africa as soon as the doctor allows it. Welcome back, brother.

Craig: Dav..

Nate: He is dead. We are free. You're free to go to your girls man. Your lady just spoke to hot over the phone. Do you remember? (Craig shoot his head slowly.

Nate: Let me get the doctor. Oh man

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I'm so happy. (he ran out)

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Craig looked up at the brightly lit ceiling and felt a lot of pain in his back and knee. His doctor walked in and examined him. They pricked his feet and asked if he can feel it and he nodded. It's nothing compared to the pain he felt but he was glad to be alive. The doctor gave him strong pain medication and he fell

asleep soon after he felt relief. He also can't wait to go home and start a new life. The normal life that he has always dreamed about. He couldn't remember a call from his O but he is glad that she spoke to him. He wondered what she told him but he'll find out soon enough. He finally fell asleep.

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#OTHU

To hear that Craig had been shot almost sent me into my own coma. I can't lose him because he has to be a father to his kids. We've been praying endlessly and we hope that God is going to be with him. The number that Nate called me from appeared on my screen again after a few hours.

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Me: Nate. (I answered quickly)

Nate: He breathed on his own and even regained consciousness. (I smiled while wiping tears off)

Me: That's amazing. When can he be flown home?

Nate: Next week. I have arranged everything.

Me: Thankyou so much, Nate. I appreciate what you've done so much.

Nate: It was nothing. Hearing your voice made him want to live. He doesn't remember the call but I'm sure what you told him is the reason he fought death. I can't wait to meet you, Miss Zweni.

Me: Call me Othu please and I can't wait to meet you either. When he's awake next time please call me. My daughter would really like to say hello.

Nate: Will do.

Chulu: Mommy, let me say hi. (she said in a whisper)

Me: Chulu wants to say hi. I know that he is asleep but could you please put the phone in his ear again.

Nate: Sure. (he did that)

Me: Here, bhanha speak. He's asleep though so don't expect a reply. (she nodded and I put it on loudspeaker)

Chulu: Hello, uncle Craig. You are a sleepyhead. (she giggled) I want to say goodnight and I love you. Mommy is going to give us as baby and not a puppy anymore. (I laughed)

Craig: Hey...(he said so softly and I cried)

Chulu: You're awake!

Craig: Mi...miss you. (he said and I could hear speaking was a mission)

Us: We miss you too.

Craig: A baby huh?

Chulu: Yes but she has to stay in the belly for months and months and I don't like that. (he laughed and coughed)

Craig: She?

Me: We don't know the gender yet. I don't know what happened, Craig. I promise I'm not trying to trap you with a child.

Craig: Love ya...all three of ya...and makhulu.

Chulu: We love you too. I'll kiss the baby for you. (he didn't reply)

Me: Craig?

Nate: He dosed off again but don't worry he's just heavily medicated. I think I heard something about a baby. If I heard correct then congratulations.

Me: Thank you.

Nate: I'll call each day to keep you updated. (we spoke more and he ended the call)

Chulu: Uncle Craig doesn't sound like uncle Craig.

Me: He is hurt at the moment but he'll be fine. Some time next week he'll be home. Chulz, he might not be physically well to

play some games with you, bhabha. So we need to be patient with him.

Chulu: Okay, mommy. Let me go finish his card. Please buy me glitter blue tomorrow. I want it to sparkle. (he signal sparkling with her fingers)

Me: Go to bed, Chulu.

Chulu: Okay but can I sleep with you. It's raining and I don't want to be alone if thunder comes.

Me: Go get your pillow. These big ones hurt your neck. (she ran out)

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I can't believe that he is awake. But why am I even surprised? We praise a living God after all. He's coming home. I'll have to make sure that he is comfortable. Makhulu walked in and I told her. She was so happy and the three of us said a thank you prayer. Chulu came with her writing equipment and started to make her card, well finish it actually. All she said it needs now is glitter glue. Makhulu told her a story and she finally fell asleep. I could see she is not okay.

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Me: Ma, talk to me. What's wrong?

Makhulu: You've just gotten good news and I don't want to ruin that.

Me: You won't. We are friends after all. (we laughed)

Makhulu: The ladies at church have started to spread rumours They say that Funda is only after my money especially now that I have a part of the family land. Apparently he tried to scam another woman too.

Me: Who?

Makhulu: Like I've said its a rumour so it doesn't have a credible source but I must admit it has me worried.

Me: Ask Flinch to look into him. (her eyes widened)

Makhulu: And invade his privacy, Othu?

Me: He won't know and you'll stop having doubts, Ma.

Makhulu: I don't know, my baby. Let's see how it goes first. I'll observe him from now on I'm sure to pick up suspicious behaviour if there's any.

Me: Okay, Ma.

Makhulu: Thank you for listening to me. (she hugged me)

Me: Always, my first lady. Do you think Yandi will want me to still be her maid of honour. Won't I be showing in December?

Makhulu: You will because you'll be about three and a half months by then I think. Ask her but only announce the pregnancy after three months. You know how strict our culture is about such.

Me: I didn't want to make it public anyway. I'm not excited about the pregnancy. What's wrong with me?

Makhulu: You might have Chulu but remember that this is your first biological child. You have fears and those fears might be standing in the way of you being excited. It'll come, nunu. There's no wrong way of going about this beautiful journey.

Me: I was hoping that you'd live with us when we get the new house but I guess Mr Funda won't agree to living under my roof. I'll need your help with the baby, Ma. What if I drown her when I think I'm bathing her? (she laughed)

Makhulu: Those are the fears that I spoke of. Why would you put an infant in a bath without holding her? I'll be there relax and enjoy.

Me: I'll have to look after Craig when he's back.

Makhulu: I'll do it. I was a nurse after all. We first have to see the extent of his injuries. That friend at least told you he is not paralysed but he'll need physiotherapy. We'll take it one day at a time. All I want is for us to be grateful that he is alive. You also have to stop stressing. Lower those shoulders and release the

tension. I'll give you a lower back massage and make us tea after wards. (I smiled)

Me: I'm the luckiest girl alive. Thank you, Ma. (I hugged her)

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She went to wash her hands with warm water and got the massage oil. Her hands were gliding up and down my back and it felt great. My phone beeped and I opened the message from the unknown number.

"I'm getting married soon. Shame you're invited even if you'll rock up alone. Maybe you might get some other girl's leftovers that day. Shame girl but men never were attracted to you. Anyway I'll send you a formal invitation soon. Love, Sisipho (Poppy)", it read. I showed Makhulu and we both laughed instead because we just knew Kumkani arranged a marriage for her. I don't want to be there the day that man shows her his real and truest colours. I actually pity her. I wonder who he sold her to. I decided to not put my nose where it doesn't belong. I've got a lot on my plate but I'm just glad that my ma..

I mean Craig is well again. I'll empty out my bank account if need be just to fly him home because I'm sure he'll need special care and I know it won't be cheap. I can't expect Nate to help me when he has done so much. I do hope that life is really behind him now. He deserves a chance at normal, boring life.

I'll need to prepare for him and my apartment is so small and his is a bachelor one with one room. What will I do? I should have bought that house long ago. Makhulu told me not to worry all will fall into place. After the massage she went to make tea and get scones too. I called Dr Flinch and asked him to look into Funda. I can't just sit and do nothing. He might really be a gold digger. He agreed and I asked him to keep it a secret. Makhulu came and we enjoyed our tea. We laid on the bed under the covers and listened to the rain hitting the windows softly. The three of us slept in my bed that night and it felt great to have my ladies next to me.

POPPY

It's been a few days since I sent Othunyiweyo that text and she didn't reply to it. I'm sure she is dying of jealousy. To think that I was once envious of the girl but now look how life has turned out and favoured me for once. I have a family. The father that I that I've always wanted. Since Tata and I have found each other I have not once thought of going back to the "blessee" life. He doesn't support me financially and I've had to cut my living costs also but I don't mind. I realise now that I was with old men because of my daddy issues and now that I've connected with my father I don't need other people's dads to give me love and provide for me. My wound has healed 75% and I'm so glad. Today is a Saturday and I've decided to go pay my dear sister a visit. I want to see her face when I tell her face to face that I'm going to get married. I got up and got myself ready making sure that I look hot. I took my bag and was about to go out when Zuko called me back. She asked to talk to me so I sat down. Her facial expression and body language indicated that she's not happy with something. She sat on the table and looked at me intensely.

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Me: Okay now this is starting to feel uncomfortable. What's up?
Please don't tell me that you've fallen in love with me. (I laughed but she didn't) It's a joke geez.

Zuko: When were you going to tell me the truth, Poppy?

Me: What truth?

Zuko: So you thought that my girlfriend who happens to be a doctor would not notice the difference between an appendix removal scar and a kidney transplant one?

Me: Oh that? (I rolled my eyes)

Zuko: I let you stay in my house without asking for anything from you. I've had to bite my tongue on occasions where you've shown your selfish behaviour just so that I don't make you feel unwanted here. You don't cook nor clean and live here like a damn madam while I go and work my ass off to ensure that we have food and the bills are paid yet you have the decency to lie to me. Really? (she raised her voice)

Me: Look I'm sorry about not pulling my weight arou...

Zuko: I don't give a damn about that right now. I want to know why you lied to me? (she cut me short clearly angry)

Me: I'm sorry about that, girlfriend. I just didn't want you to worry about me. Yes, I has a kidney transplant operation and I was the donor. I donated one of my kidneys to my father..

Zuko: Your father? Since when do you have a father?

Me: Since the day my mom slept with a man and I was conceived. (I said sarcastically)

Zuko: You know what I don't have time for this crap. You clearly think this is a joke. I can't live with a person that I can't trust so it's best you pack your stuff and go.

Me: Where will I go to?

Zuko: I don't know. Oh, try that father you gave a kidney to whoever he is. I don't have time for this. (she stood and so did I)

Me: Okay, okay I'll tell you the whole truth. Please hear me out I don't have any other place to go to.

Zuko: Start talking. (she sat)

Me: Before I start I just want to let you know that I'm really sorry and soon I'll have the money to pay you for my stay here. Okay here goes. (I told her everything and she looked shocked)

Zuko: Are you telling me that you've known that you're Othu's sister all these years and you kept it from us? Hell, you even kept it from her. What type of person are you, Poppy? To me those are the behaviors of an untrustworthy snake.

Me: Look I might live in your house but that doesn't give you a reason to insult me. I'm no snake. The snake here is Othu.

Zuko: The same Othu who tried to warn you about her father and who sent you speedy recovery well wishes?

Me: My dad is not a bad man. Othu made us believe that but my eyes are now closed. (she laughed out in disbelief)

Zuko: Hey girl wake the hell up! The man didn't want you when you first went to him and just when he needed a kidney he contacted you and treats you like daddy's little princess. I knew you had your blonde moments but now I'm convinced that you're dumb. (I raised my hand to slap her but changed my mind)

Me: Maybe it's really best that I go. My brother has a house so I don't need this.

Zuko: Oh my word! You actually think that Mrs Zweni has accepted her hubby's love child? You know what you are right. We need some space from each other and I've missed my space anyways. Stop spreading rumours about Othu. That girl would have been a great sister to you and you know it. And Mr Zweni's money problems are no secret and now he arranged a marriage between you and his rich politician friend's son. Wake up, girl you're a meal ticket. A meal ticket! (she said that last part with great expression)

Me: I'll just leave before I find myself breaking some skinny bitch's legs. You'll swallow your words. I don't need to stay in this matchbox anyways. (she laughed)

Zuko: At least I own this match box. It's not blesser rented. I worked hard and bought it so I'm proud to call this matchbox that has been providing you with shelter mine. Ungrateful thing you are. You need a therapist seriously. You're issues are deep and I am afraid for you. Get your rags and vacate my lavish matchbox please. (she said pointing to the door)

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I rushed to my room and started to pack. Friends like these I don't need in my life. After I finished I dragged my bags out and bumped into her on purpose. I wished the skinny thing fell on her back but she balanced on a chair and Laughed. I slammed the door behind me and went to my car. After I put my bags in my boot I drove of to Othu's. When I finally arrived I found two men holding boxes and going to a moving truck. I walked in and found the apartment semi empty. She appeared from the passage and rolled her eyes at me.

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Othu: What? (I laughed)

Me: I know you got dumped but that doesn't mean you must stuff yourself like a pig. I'm sorry to tell you this but you're rather on the fat side now.

Othu: Please go before I throw you out.

Me: I don't intend on staying anyways but I just wanted to tell you that I'm moving in with the family. I'll be the daughter you never could be.

Othu: Okay. (she said calmly)

Me: It's okay shame girl you don't have to hide your pain. I know that you feel sad for me being your replacement.

Othu: If you say so. (she took a small box and something fell out to my feet, I picked it up)

Me: Is this a scan? Oh my gosh that explains the weight gain. You're pregnant. He knocked you up and dished you. I also see that you're moving. I'd have ran too if I were you. (I laughed and makhulu walked in)

Makhulu: You might also be my grand daughter but I'm not going to allow you to insult my child. I've been resisting the urge to come out and give you as hot slap since I heard your voice. If you're moving in with your family then why are you here. Does this look like Langa's house to you? Go now before I show you what I do to ill mannered children. You sure have Kumkani blood in you. (she clicked her tongue)

Me: Says the woman who tried to suffocate her ow...(Othu gave me a hard slap on the face)

Othu: Me you can insult because I don't care what you think about me but my granny is a no go area. Go before I do much worse. (I laughed)

Me: Bitter hag. You're alone with two kids. You can thank your lucky stars that you have the money that you stole from Tata or you'll be nothing. Good luck with your pathetic life, loser. (I put her scan on the table and left)

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I tried to hide the pain her slap left on my cheek but as soon as I was outside I had to move my jaw to make sure that nothing is broken. Damn not even Jacob slapped me that much. She must have some man genes in her. I can't believe miss perfect is pregnant with no man to support her. I wonder where she's running off to. I'm sure somewhere far away from Cape Town to hide her out of wedlock pregnancy. I drove to Langa's with my numb cheek and finally arrived. I left my bags in the car and went to knock. Ma Una opened the door and she smiled. Her smile seems forced today and I hope she fine. I greeted and she let me in.

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Una: I didn't expect to see you here?

Me: I didn't think that I'd come either but I need a place to stay.

Una: Oh...and you hoping that place is here? This house might look big but it only has three bedrooms. Kumkani and I don't share a room because the doctor advised that he sleep alone for a while.

Me: I can share with you. I don't mind.

Una: Uhm...oh. (she showed her fake smile again)

Me: Is Tata here?

Una: Yes, let's go through that door and wait for him. He has a visitor. (I smiled and nodded)

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We went to the lounge and sat in awkward silence. Something about her seems off so I asked if she's sick and she said she has a little headache. I told her that she'll be a granny and I think I saw her eyes light up for a second or it must be my imagination. Tata finally finished his meeting and introduced his friend to me as Dr Troy. He is a plastic surgeon. The man left and we greeted each other. Him and Unathi exchanged some look and she excuses herself. Langa is out of town.

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Me: Tata, I have nowhere else to go so I ask that you allow me to stay here.

Tata: It's Langa's house but you can stay until he gets back to give you real permission. You know that I have nothing.

Me: Thank you and I only need a place to stay.

Tata: Tonight you will meet the Yenge's. I hope you remembered the lessons Una gave you on how to behave like a true lady of grace.

Me: I remember and I can't wait.

Tata: Troy owes me a favour and wanted to know what he can do to wipe off his debt. I first wanted money but then I thought of you. You will always come first. Instead of money I asked him to do something to remove your scar. I'm sure you'll want to wear some swimming clothing with confidence again. Are you up for that?

Me: I'm so happy to hear that you put me first. Yes I want to wear my crop tops and bikini's without fear of an ugly scar showing so I accept but isn't it too early?

Tata: It is because you're not fully healed yet but no harm in going for a check up.

Me: Now?

Tata: Yes, why not?

Me: Okay let's go. Oh and I went to Othu's. She is pregnant and is moving out of town.

Tata: Do I look like I care? I don't care if she moves from the planet. Now get up so we can go. (I stood)

The two of us walked out and it seems Dr Troy didn't leave and was waiting for us. We got into the car and we drove to his facilities. I've never been into white men but I must admit this one looked good. I can't believe that I'll meet my future husband tonight. He looked handsome in the pictures of him I saw on Facebook. His facility looked so good and it was filled with women clients. He does breast surgeries, liposuction and many more. We went to the private area room where he examined my scar and said he can work on it because it has healed enough. I was worried about living with a scar for the rest of my life but now I don't need to anymore. He had me change into a facility gown and they took me to another room. Tata came to me to tell me that he loves me and only wants wants best for me. He left and another person entered saying he will put me under so I don't feel pain. I honestly thought that they would just numb that area the scar is on but hey I don't know these things. After a while I started to feel drowsy and fell asleep. I'm hoping that there will be no sign of the wound. I opened my eyes in a different room and I felt a bit out of it but I managed to see that I'm still in a hospital or something. I remember why I'm here. I expected to feel some pain where the scar is but nothing. I realised that the mild pain and discomfort was not where I thought it would be. I felt it

between my legs and I started to panic and my breathing became urgent. What has that doctor done to me? Did he rape me? I tried to sit up slowly and looked at my wound and it was as I last remembered it. " I've been raped", I thought to myself. Tears started to flow down my cheeks and the door flung open. It's Tata and the doctor.

Me: Tata, I'm so glad that you are here. I feel weird down there...uhm, you know in my lady part. I think your friend raped me. What did you do to me? (I shouted at the doctor)

Tata: Calm down, Sisipho. I would not let that happen to you. We'll explain.

Troy: I thought that you said she agreed. I can lose my licence if she didn't.

Tata: You must both just calm down. Explain to her why she feels that way first and I'll take it from there.

Me: Call the police. I want him locked up with other rapists.

Troy: Look I'm no such thing. Hell I'm not even into women. (Tata looked at him with disgust)

Tata: Keep that to yourself. We don't have to hear what shames you get up to in your private life. Now just explain.

Troy: Look firstly I didn't rape you. Your father came to me and said you're okay with this and you signed forms at the front

desk giving us permission to go on so on a legal stand point I'm safe.

Me: I'm so confused. I signed papers to have my scar removed.

Troy: Yes but you changed your mind and that's why you signed the other paper. I'm not going to explain that your father has to since it seems we're both in the dark. I will however explain why you feel discomfort down there. You had what is called hymenoplasty surgery. That is when a professional such as myself perform a procedure to restore a woman's virginity. It took about 55 minutes to complete yours. You may feel some little pain...

Me: Wait, what? (I cut him short)

Tata: Let him finish. (I looked at him)

Troy: You may feel some pain and discomfort but that will heal in time and the swelling will also go down during the healing process. You'll be able to walk normally but please don't do straining and rough activities. Also don't pull the vagina lips too much because it might cause a tear. Please keep good hygiene and soaking yourself in warm Epsom salt water might sooth the discomfort. Remember to keep clean to avoid an infection. No sex until you've healed which might take about six week to heal. You might get a discharge but that is mostly caused by the stitches that will be dissolving. That's all from me but if you

have any questions you'll call for me because I have a feeling that you and your dad have a lot to talk about. (I kept quiet and he left)

Tata: How are you feel...

Me: Don't you dare pretend as if you care. How dare you trick me into this. I didn't know that I was signing papers for that. I didn't ask you to make me a virgin again. (I shouted while crying)

Tata: I get that you are angry but soon you'll see that I did it all for you. Do you know how beautiful it is for a woman to enter marriage while a virgin? My girl you'll be respected by the Yenge family once their son show them the wedding sheet. Yes, they actually do that. I wanted to restore your dignity.

Me: You violated my privacy, my body, Tata. I thought that I've been raped. I feel raped.

Tata: You're not raped. No man forcefully penetrated you. You're just a "born again virgin". A woman who will enter marriage with respect and grace. I did it for you. All of it is for you.

Me: I don't want to meet those people.

Tata: Hey, I've been bending over backwards trying to secure a better future for you. I won't allow you to spit in my face by showing ungratefulness. You'll meet with those people and

you'll pretend to be a good girl who has never been touched.
(he shouted and I wept)

Me: Do you even love me?

Tata: I'm sorry, Siphon but it's just that we've been preparing for this moment so long now. Don't throw this away. They want a virgin for their son. It's either you or some rural girl. Don't you want the good life?

Me: I do. (I said softly)

Tata: I can't give it to you but I can help you get it. Okay, I'll postpone the dinner since you're bruised until you've healed a bit. Is that better?

Me: Okay. When can I go home?

Tata: You've been here for over an hour so I think we can go. Do you want Tata to carry you to the car? (we laughed)

Me: That would be nice but I'll only break your back. I don't like how you did this though.

Tata: I'm sorry. I thought it's best.

Me: So when is the wedding?

Tata: About 8 weeks time. Well that's when Yenge wants it to be. By then you'd have healed and have that special wedding night.

Me: Just take me home. (he nodded)

I had them bring the papers that I signed and indeed I signed for this hyme-something procedure. I don't want to lie. I feel used and violated. I do take comfort in knowing that he did it for me so I'll get the respect that I'll need as a wife. A nurse helped me get dress and I noticed some swelling. I feel like my private area don't belong to me. Being a virgin is the last thing that I wanted because the first time is never great. I don't even know the extend of this surgery. What if this fake hymen is too thick and my husband struggles to penetrate me? I slowly walked to the car. Walking is not painful but there was some discomfort. When I got home I ran myself a bath and put in Epson salt and soaked myself. It was uncomfortable at first but the body adjusted. Why do I feel so depressed? I should be happy that my dad thought about my dignity but I'm not. To know someone touched my most private area without permission freaks me out. They said they put in an artificial blood sack or something so that my hubby will believe the lie. I guess this is just one other sacrifice I needed to make in order to get the future that I want. This feeling of depression will go away and I'll be happy.

CRAIG

It's been a week and few days since the shooting. I could not believe when the doctor told me that I died for about five seconds. They can't explain this miracle and it just proves to me that God is alive. Only a power greater than human power can do such. I said prayers of gratitude since then. I even promised to dedicate this second chance to living a life that will make him proud. It's not everyday that a man cheats death. Nate has been by my side everyday since the shooting and I've also been talking with all three of the Zweni ladies over the phone. Agent Cole said that we had a successful mission and I just hope that was the last of my past life. Now I want to go be a husband, father and son and live a boring suburban life. Cole said they will cover all my travelling costs. I was put in a special care plane just in case my health goes south again. I can't walk yet not that I'm paralysed though. I'm just really injured. I was strapped safely in the plane with Nate keeping me company. We lost all the other men we went in with and I hope they are resting well.

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Me: So once you've made sure I'm home safe where to for you, man? (he looked at me)

Nate: I don't know, man. I've been a rolling stone all this time. Now that I know I can have as stable life I'm actually hoping to meet some hot and kind chick to settle down with. (I laughed)

Me: South Africa has some beautiful women. All are fair game but if you dare make eyes for mine I'll kill you. (he laughed)

Nate: I'd never do that to you. I'll stay and tour the country for a while to get a feel of it's vibe.

Me: Great vibe and great people there. O said she got a house to rent until I'm better. You can live with us.

Nate: I'm a loner and you know that. I'll visit but not stay. If possible I would like to stay at that apartment of yours. It will sure beat a hotel.

Me: That's perfect. Stay as long as you like and you're good at cooking so you won't starve. It'll be good to have you close. You can be my best man.

Nate: You still have a lot of grovelling and begging to do. First make sure you woo your woman then we can talk. (I laughed)

Me: Yeah, yeah.

Nate: You're lucky, Snipe. I can hear that they adore you. Just the fact that she will be taking care of you and made sure to organise for your return though you aren't officially in a

relationship is special shit. Don't let go of her and soon she will give you a child. I'd never let go of such a woman.

Me: Trust me, I know that I'm a lucky man and I don't deserve it after the pain I've caused her. I'll make sure I make it up to her. I can't wait to be a husband and father. I've always wanted that.

Nate: Maybe she must introduce me to her friends. (we laughed)

Me: We'll hook you up don't worry.

Nurse: Gentlemen, only twenty minutes left before we land in Cape Town, South Africa. Sir, buckle up please.

Nate: Sure. (he did)

Me: Thank you for the great care, nurse Lewis. I didn't feel any pain in all these hours.

Nurse: I'm glad now let's all prepare to land. (she smiled)

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It felt like the longest twenty minutes of my entire life. I can't wait to see them, damn I've missed them so much. After a long while the plane finally touched ground. Nurse Lewis unbuckled me and they got me on a wheelchair. There is no need for me to go to hospital but I do need to go for weekly check ups and do home based physiotherapy. Good thing I'm financially stable

and can afford that. I got pushed inside the airport but insisted to push myself when we got inside. I don't want my woman to see me as a weakling. Nate took care of all airport procedures and I left him standing there talking to airport staff. I pushed myself to the waiting area and I saw Chulu first. She finally spotted me, smiled and ran to my direction. O panicked and followed because I'm sure she didn't see me at first. Chulu jumped on top of me before I could even utter a word and hugged me. She hurt my knee a bit but I don't care. This hug was worth it. She gave me a very colourful and glittery welcome home card and I kissed her cheek to thank her. O stood in front of us but at a distance. I scanned her from head to toe and could see that her body has already started to undergo some minor changes to accommodate our unborn baby. She stood as if she isn't sure what she must do. Makhulu came from behind her, held her hand and they walked to me. My heart started to beat so fast. Makhulu kissed and hugged me. Even pulled my cheeks softly. I felt like a small boy again but I don't mind. O started to cry and then smiled. She came closer and hugged me. Damn I miss her scent and warmth so much. She looked at me.

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Me: I'm sorry. (I said softly)

Othu: Let's talk when we are home. Isn't she too heavy?

Me: Not at all. Ma, thank you so much for all that you have done. (she smiled)

Makhulu: It was nothing. I'm just glad you kept your promise. (I laughed)

Nate: You left your tourist friend alone. Shame on you. Good evening, beautiful ladies and adorable little girl.

Chulu: Hello. (she smiled)

Me: Ladies this is Nate Yards and Nate Mrs Zweni, Othunyiweyo and Chulumanco.

Makhulu: Call me makhulu, my boy. It's a pleasure to meet you and thank you for being a good friend to out Clay. (Nate laughed softly)

Nate: The pleasure is all mine, makhulu. I'm sorry but I'll struggle with the other two names. It's Owuleyo and Kulomo. (we laughed)

Chulu: Chulu as in Chulumanco.

Othu: It's fine I told you to call me Othu and you can refer to her by her Western name Talia.

Nate: Got it! Man the Zweni family has beautiful ladies.

Me: Okay thank you but now go look at the beauties of other women because neither of them is available.

Chulu: Uncle Craig, Makhulu, mommy and I made your favourite. Dumpling and stew.

Me: Wow

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my mouth is watering already. May we go home please.

Nate: I still remember the place so I'll hire a car and dr...

Othu: Nonsense. You aren't sleeping at a hotel or Craig's dusty apartment when we already prepared a room for you. It has a bathroom too so you'll have privacy. You can move out when you want to but for now we taking you home with us.

Nate: I'm not going to say no to a soft bed and a home cooked meal. They fed me take always all day and night.

Makhulu: Oh my poor boy.

Me: Stop being a cry baby. He is fine, Ma. Please can we go home now. I'm tired and I'm hungry.

Chulu: I'm glad you're back, uncle Craig. I've missed you and now we can be a family. (I looked at O)

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She looked down so I knew that she its still reluctant. We will talk about it all later on. Makhulu insisted that Nate push me to the car. Chulu liked the ride while I wish I could get rid of the

damn wheelchair. We got into the car and O drove off. I don't think I want her driving in her condition. I'll need to heal soon so that I'll take care of that. My heart is at peace. I've missed this place so much. Nate and makhulu clicked because they spoke the most. I guess she'll be a mother to all who need it and we need it. I do hope that he stays longer and maybe find that woman to settle with. It's great to be home and I can already feel my body restoring itself. I'm surrounded by love so how can it not?

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#OTHU

I can't believe that he is finally home. He's looking good though I can see that he is not there yet. I'm yet to get used to the wheelchair but I'm not bothered by it. My baby is just so happy and she has been clinging to him since she saw him. He doesn't know that he is her father yet. I wanted to break the news face to face. At least now I no longer fear that he will take her from me. Bhut Vuyo was so kind and helped us find a house to rent in a safe area because Craig will need space to move around. The house is breathtaking and the couple let us rent it cheap too. They said we will be like house sitters actually until they

return some time next year from the Spain. I would have bought it had it been on the market because it's perfect. We all arrived at home finally and got into the house. It came fully furnished but we moved the stuff so Craig will move about. I organised a physiotherapist for him too. I've been watched a lot of videos on how to care for a person with back and knee injury and it's all stores in my mind and I'm hoping it'll help. It was late already so we has dinner first while talking and laughing. I've missed him so much. After dinner Nate asked to go shower and sleep. I understood since they were in the air for many hours. I showed him his room and thanked him once again for bringing Craig home. Makhulu told Chulu to go bath and she went to help her. I cleared the table while Craig watched.

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Craig: Baby, please sit down.

Me: I have to clea...

Craig: Please, O. There's a dishwasher here. (he cut me short and I sat)

Me: I'm seated.

Craig: Hi. (he said with a smile)

Me: Hi.(I smiled back)

Craig: How are you?

Me: Good and you?

Craig: Great now that I've seen you all. O, I'm sorry baby. I know that you are angry at me for what I did but I had to.

Me: I know but you could have warned me.

Craig: And risk putting your life at risk? I told Chulu I'd be back because I knew Davis would not ask her such. I'm sorry for putting your lives in danger and me going back was the only way I could fix it. It's done now. That chapter of my life is over.

Me: I'm afraid, Craig. That you'll go again for some other reason. (I started to cry)

Craig: I won't. I promise you baby I won't. (he started to cry too) I love you. Shit, O I love you so much.

Me: There's something that I need to show you. I'll be back.

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I left him and went to the room to get what Tatiana wrote and a picture of her. I went back to him and gave it all to him. He read the letter first and I could see that he is shocked. He looked at her picture and breathed loudly. He looked at the letter again and looked at me.

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Craig: She's been mine all this time? She has been asking me to be her dad when she's been mine all along? (he started to cry and I nodded)

Me: I only found out a few days ago. I didn't want to tell you over the phone.

Craig: If this doesn't prove to us just how much God wants us to be together then nothing else will. Of all the people she could have left her with she chose you, baby. She didn't even know that we knew each other but something made her choose you. Whether it's God, fate or whatever but I'm now more convinced that you were chosen for me.

Me: That lady we met who was a fortune teller said something similar. I'm just scared.

Craig: I'm not going anywhere. Thank you so much for loving and raising my daughter. Just when I thought my love for you could not possible reach a higher level than this happens. She's mine. (he smiled and cried)

Me: Ours, she's ours. (he laughed and nodded)

Craig: Even if this had never been revealed I'd have loved her as though she's mine. I do love so much.

Me: I know. I haven't told her. Wanted you to be here when we do it.

Craig: Can we do it today (I nodded)

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We sat and waited for Chulu. Makhulu came to say that she is going to bed and we said goodnight. Chulu appeared soon after wearing night clothes. As expected she went to her father. We sat her down and explained it all to her as best as possible.

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Chulu: So uncle Craig is my real daddy?

Me: Yes, bhabha. We only found out now.

Craig: How does that make you feel?

Chulu: Happy! I'm so happy, uncle Craig. (she hugged Him)

Craig: Not as happy as I am, princess trust me. I love you so much and I'm sorry I've missed out on so many years of your life. But I'm here now.

Chulu: I love you too. Can I call you daddy instead of uncle Craig now? (he became so emotional)

Craig: I'd like that very much.

Chulu: Okay, daddy. (she said with excitement)

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I just let them enjoy this moment without disturbing them. Chulu would say "daddy" at the end of each sentence even when not necessary. Shame my baby never called anyone daddy so she's excited. After a while and fell asleep in his arms and I went to put her down in my room. Craig helped clear the table in his own little way. I asked if he wants to freshen up and he said yes. I bought bathing and showering equipment for someone in his condition. I went all out on making him comfortable. He also has his own bathroom. I helped him undress and get into the shower. I watched the manual video on how it's done. I don't know of its my touch or what but he got turned on and I laughed. I was about to step out so he would shower but he held me and kissed me passionately. It all made me just as turned on. I broke the kiss and left him to finish. When he was done I helped him out and dry his body. I cleaned his wound as per his instructions. I also has to help lotion his body and I was beyond myself with horniness. I can't do the deed with an injured man. He got under the covers and smiled.

Craig: I think I'll like all of this attention.

Me: Don't get too used to it. Craig, we haven't spoken about the baby issue. A part of me afraid that you'll think I've trapped you.

Craig: Baby, I know he/she is unplanned but I'm happy that he/she is on the way. I wanted to make you my wife and

mother of my kids since day one. You're the mother of both my kids and now I ask that you please be my wife. You don't have to answer me now but think about it. I'm here to stay. I've got so much to stay for. I'm a happy man.

Me: I've missed you. (he smiled)

Craig: I have too and I want to make love to you.

Me: No and risk hurting you more?

Craig: I'm a big boy. (he drew me closer to him)

My mind was telling me to not risk it but my heart and body were so weak that I found myself kissing him back. I undressed myself. He couldn't take control tonight so I had to lead. I kissed his entire body and he groaned. I went down to his manhood and worked my magic there. I'm not good at it but it seemed as if he enjoyed each second. He stopped me and I looked at him. "I want to be inside of you", he said seductively. I kissed him passionately and lowered myself onto him. We both let out pleasure sounds as soon as we became one. He held my hips gently as I moved on top of him. Kissing him whenever I can. It didn't take long for both of us to go over the edge. We tried to not make too much noise but I'm sure we failed. He was breathing strangely and was sweating way too much and I got worried.

Me: Craig, what's wrong? Did I hurt you? (he smiled)

Craig: I'm perfect. This injury is just limiting me. I feel like I just ran a 12 hour marathon. I can't promise a second round. (we both laughed)

Me: That's okay just don't faint or something. Let me go get a towel for your face.

Craig: I can't wait for you to show. You'll look so beautiful. I love you, O.

Me: I love you too. (I kissed him and rushed to the bathroom)

I made myself decent first and took towels to get him proper. So even making love will be a mission. That's okay though. I first wiped his face with the dry towel and did the same with his body. We cuddled for a while until he snored. The medication is too strong I guess. I kissed him, put on my dress and went to my room. I went to shower and brush my teeth. I joined Chulu in bed. I kissed her forehead. I'm just glad she slept with a happy heart. I laid on my back, held my belly and smiled for the first time since I've found out I'm pregnant. I'm now starting to feel happy about it. I said a prayer of thanks for all the blessings even the ones that I thought I didn't want. Life seems to be okay again. Hopefully soon it'll be great.

OTHU

I don't know who I was trying to fool by claiming that I'll just remain friends with Craig. The man is the love of my life. I've had a crush on him since age thirteen for goodness sake. Last night was just amazing even though there were moments I thought I'm going to send him into a coma. I also don't feel like going to work today but I must and I can also tell Yandi that I can't be a part of her bridal party. I opened my eyes and turned to look at Chulu only to find her side of the bed empty. I didn't panic at all because I knew where she might be. I got up and walked to Craig's room and I found her sleeping right next to him just as I thought. I walked in and looked at them while they were both unaware of my presence. She looks a lot like her mom but I see parts of him in her now especially now that they are asleep. I smiled and was about to walk out.

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Craig: Hey. (he said softly and I turned to face him)

Me: Hi. (I walked to him and sat by his side)

Craig: I thought that I'd find you next to me this morning.

Me: I went back to my room after you fell asleep. You had better get well soon.

Craig: Enjoy this time because when I'm well enough I won't give you time to rest. (we laughed) When did you bring her? (he looked at Chulu)

Me: I didn't. I think she woke up some time during the night and decided that she'd rather be with daddy and not mommy.

Craig: Well if mommy agrees to marry daddy they will share a bed. That way she won't have to choose. (I laughed)

Me: Okay, Mr Smooth talker I hear you. I have to get ready for work, baby. Should I help you get ready for the day ahead now or will you wait for makhulu to help? (he laughed)

Craig: I love the woman but no, baby I'd rather it be you who sees me in my birthday suit. In fact you can join me for a shower. That way we save some time.

Me: I hate how you make sense when I don't want you to. Okay I'll take a shower with you but that's it. No naughty naughty. (he laughed)

Craig: I shower sitting down in a "special chair" so what could weak old me possibly do? (I smiled)

Me: Let me go get my stuff then. I'll be back now, now. (I stood and left)

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I got to my bedroom and got my toiletries. We have to be quick before makhulu gets up. I feel like a naughty teen sneaking around. I went to his bedroom and helped him to the bedroom. He is a big man but I manage and he helps himself too. We both first brushed our teeth and made it to the shower afterwards. I got him into the seat and first had to discuss the water temperature issues because I like my showers steamy hot and him not so much. We finally found the right temperature that suited both of us. I gave him his shower gel and both of us started to shower and we were able to keep it innocent. I was about to grab the towels when he held my arm and drew me closer to him. He kissed my belly and I felt his lips tracing soft kisses downwards until I felt them on my lady part. The sensation sent shockwaves through my entire body. He worked his magic between my legs until I was overcome with pleasure. Good thing the shower is still running so no one could hear my moans. He gently lowered me onto him and we shared a passionate kiss. One thing led to another and we found ourselves making love after we said we'll keep it innocent. I love him so much. Both of us moved at a steady rhythm until we could no longer hold off. We reached climax at about the same time and held onto each other so tightly until the moment of pleasure faded. I looked at him and once again his breathing worried me.

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Craig: I...I'm okay, O. Promise, baby. (he said softly while smiling)

Me: I love you and yes, I'll marry you. I thought I'd turn you down but I can't and don't want to. We have a daughter and I'm carrying our second, Craig. I love these moments with you and I know they'll feel even more special to me when you are my husband.

Craig: I'd marry you right now if I could. I love you too.

Me: Well I don't think getting married while we are naked and in this predicament is a good idea. (we both laughed)

Craig: I love being inside of you. (he bit his bottom lip)

Me: I love it too. I do want a romantic proposal though. You can have your ring back and do it all over again. (he smiled)

Craig: With pleasure, future Mrs Knights. We need to do proper house hunting. (I looked down)

Me: I was actually planning on moving to the Eastern Cape. I've given the principal my resignation letter already. I just didn't feel safe here anymore and I also didn't want to bump into you.

Craig: But the danger is over now and you also don't have to avoid bumping into me anymore.

Me: So you want to stay in Cape Town?

Craig: Where you guys are is home to me, O. Even if we move to the desert just as long as you guys are there but my biggest clients are here so there will be moments where I'll have to come here on business for days. I don't like the thought of that because you'll either be heavily pregnant by then or the baby would be here already.

Me: In other words you want to stay? (he looked at me intensely)

Craig: In other words you don't have to be afraid nor run anymore. You love this place. I know that for a fact but like I've said to me a place doesn't matter. You four do. We can sit down and discuss it properly though.

Me: I hear you, baby. I actually like this house. It's all that I've been dreaming of and more and there's enough space out back to extend should we wish to.

Craig: Have you put in an offer?

Me: It's not for sale. The people will be back by February next year. Please can we decide what to do sooner because I don't want to do house hunting when I'm big.

Craig: We'll sort it all out. I'm sure you've also spent a lot of money on the equipment and all else. I'll cover the costs from now on. I also think it's time we sit down and be open and

honest about each others financial situations, assets and such.
Yeah?

Me: Yeah, let's have a serious life talk date. (we kissed)

Craig: Damn I love this husband life already and it hasn't even started yet. (I laughed)

Me: Just don't get a potbelly, baby.

Craig: But almost all married men have one. (he laughed)

Me: No, I'll make sure that I look good most of the time so I'll need effort from your side too. I saw the sexiest maternity wear ever. It's classy but sexy.

Craig: I'm sure you'll look great in anything. I can't wait to hear a heart beat.

Me: Me neither but soon. I think we must take Chulu and makhulu to that appointment because they are so excited for this little person's arrival. Makhulu has knitted socks. Do babies even wear home knitted stuff these days? (he laughed)

Craig: Babies with amazing great grandmothers do. I also think you must hire a help to clean. This is a big house you'll get tired faster and makhulu is the madam so she can't do that. She's raised you well and now it's time for us to treat her right.

Me: You're right. I'll ask around for someone. Let me go get ready baby.

Craig: Not so fast. I think today I'll be able to give you that second round. (I laughed so much)

Me: No, imagine if you stop breathing and I'm to blame.

Craig: I don't mind if you are the death of me. (we laughed)

Me: You're crazy. (I kissed him)

Craig: I'm your crazy.

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We kissed and the moment became passionate soon enough. We made love again and I really fear for him. Next time I'll say no. We finally finished and I helped him get dressed. Chulu opened her eyes and her timing was perfect. She first put on her glasses and turned to face us. She smiled and hugged Craig.

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Chulu: Morning, daddy.

Craig: I don't think I'll ever get used to the warm feeling I get even I hear you call me daddy. Good morning, princess. (he kissed her cheeks)

Chulu: I came to sleep with you last night. Did I kick you?

Craig: Not at all.

Me: I guess I'm invisible today?

Chulu: I'm sorry, Mommy. Morning to you too. (she gave me a kiss)

Me: Good morning, bhabha.

Chulu: Can I please not go to school today? Pretty please.

Me: Chulz.

Craig: Just today, mommy please. (they both made puppy faces)

Me: This is not fair. The two of you are ganging up on me. Okay but only for today, Chulu. Tomorrow it's school.

Chulu: I'll be up early tomorrow. I promise. Uncle C...Daddy, I got a new 350 piece puzzle. I was waiting for you to help me.

Craig: I'd love to. We can also have ice cream. You, me and makhulu will have lots of fun. Take pictures and send it to mommy. (I laughed)

Me: Such cruelty. Craig, please have someone clean your apartment and stock it with food before you send Nate to go live there.

Craig: He's a big boy, don't worry about him. (I gave him "the look") Okay, okay I'll do it, baby. I'll ask Ma Joko to go clean it and do some shopping. Nate be treated like an egg here. He can look after himself.

Me: Maybe Ma Joko can help us here full time. She's worked for you so you know her well and her work.

Craig: She freelances.

Me: That's okay. In fact it's perfect. Please talk to her or wait for me and we can do it together.

Craig: I like the together more. (I smiled)

Me: I'll leave you two now. Some of us have work to do.

Chulu: Mommy, please tell my teacher I'm not coming in today.
(we laughed)

Me: Okay, miss absent.

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I left them talking non stop and I think I know where Chulu gets her talkativeness from. I chose an outfit and started to get dressed while thinking about the great way I started my day with. I can't seem to get enough of him. I must have really missed him. I finished getting ready and went down and found makhulu making breakfast. I packed myself some lunch and helped her. I eat breakfast early these days. Everyone else joined us and once again Nate fit right in. If a stranger walked in here they would think we are all siblings.

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Nate: I slept so well. It felt as if the bed was hugging me. Can't remember the last time I felt that way. Thank you for letting me stay over.

Makhulu: It's all a pleasure, my boy. We must find you a nice girl.

Nate: Makhulu, I loooooove you. You just seem to know what I need without me saying it. Do you have another grand daughter? (we laughed)

Makhulu: I do but she is not as close to us but we are hoping that will change. She's also engaged so I'm sorry.

Nate: All good. I'll just go to church with you.

Craig: Now you're going for all the wrong reasons.

Chulu: You can be our new Sunday school teacher

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uncle Nate. (he laughed)

Nate: No, pumpkin I'm sorry. I'll most probably teach you how to do some karate instead of reading bible scriptures. I'll just sit at the back without a title.

Me: We'd love to have you join us. Don't worry Craig also sits at the back without a title.(we laughed)

Craig: That's all about to change, Baby. I might even become a young deacon.

Makhulu: Whooo, my boy that's wonderful.

Me: No, you are not. When we get married I'll have to do the duties of a deacon's wife so don't you dare.

Makhulu: Oh but Othu.

Craig: It's okay, Ma. I'll soften her up when I'm ready to take a position. (he winked at me and I shook my head while smiling)

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The morning is just beautiful. I unfortunately had to love and leave them. Even my everyday comrade, Chulu chose the home based comrades over going to the school with me. I went to her teacher to tell her she won't come as soon as I arrived. The bell rang and the day started. I felt as if I'm walking on a golden cloud. I told Yandi about the little person that's on the way and she screamed so much. She started to cry when I told her that Craig is back injured but we are making it work. Craig is right I love Cape Town and my best friend is one of those special people I've met here. She told me that she still wants me to be her maid of honor adding that we'll resize the dress whenever needed. To hear Craig say he wants to go to church with us on a regular basis was amazing. I really hope he was joking about becoming a deacon though. Hours went by and I was finally

able to go home. I found Flinch waiting by my car. I greeted him and told him to get inside. We got in and started to talk.

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Flinch: I did as you asked. He is clean. The man doesn't even have a single speeding ticket. He had some debt issues but he cleared those. We can't judge him on having debts.

Me: You're right and thank you so much for this, doc. You've been scarce too.

Flinch: I'm going back to the States next week. How are you?

Me: Happy. (I smiled)

Flinch: Nothing unusual happening?

Me: Nope, why?

Flinch: I know I don't look pleased with your pregnancy but that's only because I'm worried. We never went as far as conducting a study to show how your children might turn out.

Me: I don't understand.

Flinch: I'm afraid that the drugs we injected you with might affect your baby and perhaps not in a good way. (I looked down)

Me: So what do you suggest?

Flinch: Nothing yet but what if there are abnormalities?

Me: I'll love my child no matter how he/she is born.

Flinch: That doesn't mean that it will make life for the child any easier. I'm sorry but I must play open cards with you.

Me: So my baby might be deformed because of my genes?

Flinch: Wait and see how it goes and it's not because of you.

Me: I have someone else I've got to be. Thank you for helping me with Funda.

Flinch: I understand. I'm sorry for dampening your mood. Have a good day. (he went out)

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Have a good day? He just told me that my baby might be born different from others and he has the nerve to wish me a good day? My day was ruined. A tear fell but I wiped it off quickly. I drove to the stores to buy some food since we haven't gotten a chance to. I've been thinking about what Flinch said since. I finished, paid and went to my car. I saw a handsome looking man approach and I just felt a strange feeling. I turned to look at him and he did too. We made eye contact for a few seconds and I broke it and snapped out of it. What the hell just happened? I packed the packs in my car and drove home. I finally arrived and Nate helped me unload the bags. Craig said his session with the physiotherapist went well even if he was in a lot of pain. I didn't tell him about what Flinch said because I

don't want to worry him. It seems they had a great day. I found makhulu sitting out at the patio.

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Me: Ma, I did something and I know you won't like it. I had Mr Funda investigated and nothing foul was found.

Makhulu: It's okay. It actually makes me stop over thinking. Thank you, nunu. Are you okay?

Me: Yeah.

Makhulu: Fool them all but not me.

Me: Have you ever loved someone that you don't know. No, maybe love is too deep but have you ever has a moment with a stranger?

Makhulu: No but I don't like that you are asking. Did you have that?

Me: I'll go finish up with dinner. (I stood)

Makhulu: Othu, don't allow your hormones to fool and trap you into a predicament, nunu please.

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I just nodded and left her sitting there. I literally can't stop thinking about the guy. So much so that I avoided Craig tonight afraid that he'll notice something. I bathed Chulu after cooking

dinner. Nate said he'll be moving tomorrow. We had dinner and my mind was all over the place. I helped Craig get ready for bed afterwards and I just nodded as he spoke. I know that I must be open with him but I'm afraid it will set back his healing process. How do I even start the conversation? "Hey, baby by the way our baby might be born differently able because I'm a lab rat it might affect hi/her and oh today I also had a moment with another man". I just can't do it. Chulu said she'll sleep in his room so I left them after I kissed them goodnight. I stepped into the shower and cried. Goodness I cry so much lately it's crazy. We all went to bed early today too. I'm just not in the mood for talking right now. I got under the covers but I knew that I won't sleep any time soon.

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#POPPY

I'm still feeling that emptiness inside and I thought it would be over by now but not. Today is the day I'll meet my in laws and future hubby and I'm hoping that seeing him will make me better. It will be a late dinner since Mr Yenge has been out of the country. I got dressed and made myself pretty. Unathi walked in and helped me get dressed.

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Me: I look so beautiful.

Una: Are you sure that you really want this?

Me: Yes, I'm doing it for all of us.

Una: He told me last night what he did and I might support him in most but this I didn't. He had no right to have strangers invade your treasure without you knowing.

Me: I see what this is. You were hoping the Yenge's chose your daughter right?

Una: My girl, the Yenge's willingly chose my daughter they didn't have to be fooled into doing it. I know Kumkani badmouthed her so they would stop liking her but my girl would have been perfect. Yes, she might be pregnant now but I know that man who got her pregnant was her first. She didn't have to get second hand virginity.

Me: Tata! (I shouted)

Una: I'm not afraid of him. (he walked in)

Tata: And then?

Me: Say what you just did in front of him.

Una: I was telling your daughter that my daughter was not forced onto the Yenge's. They loved her from word go and I'm

tired of pretending to love your child. Thank you though because all this pretending made me realise just how much I actually love Othu. I have always loved her but for some reason I believed you when you told me that I don't. I can't do this anymore. I'm done.

Tata: What has happened to you?

Una: I'm finally choosing my daughter that's what I'm doing.

Tata: You think she'll just accept you with an open heart.

Una: I'll work hard to win her trust. There is something that I do know though that's that she is not like you. That girl has more courage than all of us in this house combined. I'm going now.

Tata: Where will you stay?

Una: Worry about where you will stay when this lie blows up. Do you know what Othu once asked me when she was just seventeen? "Mama, do you have any savings for rainy days", she asked. At the time I didn't but I went to the bank the day after that to open a savings account and started saving. We had joint assets but now those have dissolved because of your recklessness and don't even think you'll have my savings they weren't a part of our joint assets. I can't believe that I've stayed for this nonsense.

Tata: You think I'll just let you get...

Una: You take me down and you go down with me. I should go thank my baby for making me think about saving. I'll buy a nice flat and finally have peace. I'll also be a grandmother and have fulfilment in my life. Yeses, I can't believe I've waisted so much of my time of this fake family life. It's like the fog just blew away and I see clearly now. I'm sure you bewitched me but now your stuff is weak. I'm a rural girl so I know these things. Goodbye and you Poppy you better follow me out that door. I have a feeling this one will show you flames tonight. (she walked out)

Tata: Una! Nolitha! What did you say to my wife? (he held my arm roughly)

Me: You're hurting me, Tata. I didn't say anything to her.

Tata: You had better not tell the Yenge's what just happened.

He walked out and I brushed my arm. I saw darkness in his eyes that made me feel like that day I first saw him. I was for a second that terrified young girl again. Something told me to run but my head told me to stay put. I chose to stay and finished getting ready. After a while Mr and Mrs Yenge arrived. They seemed so nice and I remembered what I was told to do and how to behave.

Melusi: My son is running late but he will join us soon enough.

Tata: He is a busy man so I understand.

Melusi: No he went to get his uncle. My brother's car suddenly broke down. One would think these expensive cars won't do such.

Jacky: Where is Una? (we looked at each other)

Tata: She had to go to some function. (she smiled and nodded)

Me: I love your scarf, Jacky.

Melusi: My girl, I don't know where you're from but where we are from we don't call elders by their first name. Kumkani, I found out something. Your other daughter is my grandson's school teacher. He had a picture with her where she gave him an award for best reader. My grandson said that she did that all on her own separate from the schools award night. You told me she's evil to the core. Those aren't the actions of a woman that's evil to the core. (he swallowed hard)

Tata: Maybe she has changed.

Jacky: I really liked her.

Me: That's the same girl that didn't give her own father a kidney. (I said in a cheeky way)

Melusi: Are you sure she's a rural girl? The girl has some rudeness to her.

Tata: Nerves, old friend. (he fake laughed)

Tata gave me a weird look and I rolled my eyes. Othu this, Othu that. It's all these people go on about. A car finally pulled up the driveway and I got a bit excited. There was a knock on the door and a handsome young man walked in. He looked so damn fine. Suddenly a familiar face appeared, it's Jacob. He was shocked to see me and asked what I'm doing here.

Jacob: Mntakwethu (brother), this is the same girl who fed me korobela (love potion) and broke up my marriage.

Me: Hey screw you. I never fed you anything. You came on your own free will.

Melusi: You lied to me? You told me she's still a virgin. This girl is the reason my brother is about to lose everything. You'll regret this, Kumkani. You'll be stealing breadcrumbs from the birds at the park out of hunger once I'm finished with you. You want my son to marry your tramp.

Tata: Let's talk please. (he begged)

Jacob: This girl has been with all my rich friends. My nephew can't marry this. (they all walked out angry after swearing at us)

Tata: You, get out of my house right now. (he shouted)

Me: Tata but I love...

Tata: You go around opening your legs for men my age for money? I'm disgusted with you. Go now before I throw you out.

Me: But I gave you a kidney.

Tata: And I have you your virginity. Go and fool some man with it. I didn't want you then and I sure as hell don't want you now. Out! Piece of rubbish. (he shouted)

I felt a sharp pain in my chest. He didn't want me to get my clothes saying he'll post it to me. I waked out shaking and crying. So everyone was right. I've just been played all this time. His phone beeped as I was about to go out and he looked at it. He held his chest and struggled to breath and fell to the floor. I rushed to him to see what's wrong. I looked at the screen and it's a bunch of pictures of Langa in bed with another man. He's gay? I watched as he said "help" softly and was about to dial the ambulance but stopped. I stood and walked out leaving him there to die. I don't think anyone will miss him anyway just a pity he had to have my kidney. I could see I'm dead in his eyes after I humiliated him in front of his rich peers so why must I be bothered if he dies for real? I drove to a near by petrol station and parked there. I guess I'll sleep here tonight since I've burnt all bridges with my friends. Now I'm all alone feeling worthless, used and am filled with regret. Why did I choose to ignore all the red flags?

CRAIG

I think that fact that I'll be a father of two hasn't really sunk in yet. Funny how I see bits of my mother when looking at Chulu especially the small eyes. She also got the eye problem from my side of the family unfortunately. I wish Fera had just told me that she's pregnant because I'd have found a way to step up and be a father without the agency's knowledge. I thought that she's alive somewhere and never expected to hear that she's dead. I find myself believing more and more in God and continue to be in awe of the amazing deeds that he has done in my life. He let the love of my life be a mother to my daughters. It truly shows that the plans that He has for our lives far exceed the ones we had. I'm also enjoying this home life. To be surrounded by those who bring peace and joy to my heart. It's been a few days since I have returned from the States and I feel much stronger. Even my physiotherapist is impressed with me. I don't look forward to his visits because physiotherapy can be painful but I know it's best. Nate has moved into my apartment but he visits each and every single day. I don't blame him though because we both have never really had the chance to be a part of a family and Makhulu has adopted us in a way. O and I did our usual routine where she'd help me get ready for the day. I can see that something is bothering her, in fact it has

for a while now but she is as closed book. Today I felt strong enough to stand in the shower instead of sitting. I balanced against the wall though. I used my free arm to hold her waist firmly and looked at her. She avoided eye contact as she's been doing for the past few days.

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Me: Please look at me, O. (she slowly lifted her head and looked at me)

Othu: I need to go get ready for work.

Me: What's wrong? Please don't say it's nothing. You are distant, baby. Did I do something wrong? (she started to cry and I became more worried)

Othu: I'm sorry. (she said softly)

Me: What's up? I hate it when you cry. Please talk to me. (her grip around my waist tightened)

Othu: I might be the reason our baby has health issues when born, Craig. I didn't want to be pregnant at first so I'm sure that I'm being punished for that. I just wis...

Me: O, I don't understand. Start from the beginning please.

Othu: Flinch said the baby might be born deformed due to the effects of the drugs that they injected in me. I'm sorry.

Me: Baby, Flinch thought he knew how you'd turn out but you are the exact opposite of what he expected. So why must you believe him when it comes to our child? Had something been wrong surely you would have felt it or your doctor would have noticed it.

Othu: It's still too early to know for sure. What if there's no heart beat when we go for our next scan?

Me: Why wouldn't there be when our child is alive and growing as we speak? Don't do this to yourself please. The last thing that I want is for you to stress and worry because I know for sure that it will cause problems for your health and the baby's.

Othu: But I can't help but worry. I'd never forgive myself should anything happen.

Me: The only thing that will happen is you'll have cravings and I'll get you all that you are craving even if I must crawl to the stores to get it for you. (she laughed)

Othu: Crawl with that knee?

Me: Well it's feeling much better for your information. Makhulu rubs it nicely with some mint like oil.

Othu: Lucky you. Baby, please be on my side today. Chulu can't miss another day of school. I know you like playing "good cop" but at times you have to be the "bad cop" for her own good.

Me: But it's so difficult to say no. That sweet voice and the way she looks down and fiddles with her thumbs when disappointed breaks my heart.

Othu: Mine too but I need you in my corner please. She's got you wrapped around her little finger and it's cute but I don't want her to be spoiled. (I sighed)

Me: Okay I'll back you up today. I'll have to use the shower time to mentally prepare for the moment. (she laughed)

Me: The first time is always the hardest. And you'll also have to deal with her next public tantrum.

Me: How often does she have those?

Othu: She's a child so she's unpredictable. This is on the job daddy training.

Me: I love it but I don't like the being strict part. You're more suited for that and qualified. (she laughed so much)

Othu: Okay I'll do most of that but I'll need your support.

Me: I'll be your backup man.

Othu: Good. (she smiled)

Me: Is the baby issue the only thing that has been bothering you? (she looked down)

Othu: Yup and the fact that I eat too much.

Me: I'll love you no matter what. Promise to give you foot and low back massages. Makhulu said those will come in handy when you are in the second and third trimester.

Othu: I'd appreciate it all, love. I'm really hoping for a boy. (I smiled)

Me: A CJ (Craig Junior). So can we have that "serious talk" date tonight?

Othu: Yes or we'll keep on postponing it. Let me go get dressed.

Me: I miss you. (I kissed her)

Othu: I'm already late, Craig.

Me: Okay, I understand.

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She left me and I started to shower. I think I know why she doesn't want us to steal these steamy moments in the shower or anywhere else really because makhulu is in the next room. I finished and she came back to help me get out of the shower. I've been so committed to my healing program because I don't want her doing all of this. I got dressed and Chulu came running into the room to greet and hug us as usual.

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Othu: Please go and pick out what you'd like to wear to school today, Chulu.

Chulu: But mommy. (she said softly and looked at me)

Othu: No, Chulumanco you're not staying home today. You've been absent all of last week. So please do as I say. (Chulu looked down and that action gets me all the time)

Me: Chulz, listen to mommy. You need to go to school or your teacher won't allow you to go to big school next year. Is that what you want, princess?

Chulu: No, daddy. (she said softly with tears flowing down her cheeks and my heart sank)

Othu: Bhabha, your dad will be here when we get back from school but you can't stay home when you aren't sick. I know you want to spend lots of time with daddy but that doesn't mean you have to put your own life on hold. Buhle and Khloe asked about you all week. They miss you and I know that you do too. We'll be back before you know it.

Me: Yes, what mommy said.

Chulu: Okay, mommy.

Othu: Come you can wear that new jean makhulu bought for you.

Chulu: With that green shirt? (she smiled)

Me: I'll even match with you. So go and get that outfits out please. We're running late. (Chulu rushed out)

Me: I almost gave in. (we laughed)

Othu: You were perfect. I'm proud of you, baby. (she kissed me and I smiled)

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O left to help Chulu get ready for school. I used to think fathers who claimed that they become mush and when it comes to their daughters were lying but I now I know how it feels. I'm really not good at being the strict parent but I'll have to try because I don't want my children growing up thinking that the world owes them something. I looked at the crutches that stood behind the door and wheeled myself to them. The doctor gave them to me as motivation. I am determined to get out of this chair and live a normal life again. I took both crutches, put my arms in the and held onto the handle tightly. I tried to stand on my feet but failed. I wasn't about to give up though so I tried again and on the fourth attempt I finally stood. I was sweating like no other but it felt good to be up. I walked forward slowly and managed to take two steps which required a lot of effort from me. I took two more backwards and threw myself on the wheelchair breathing so heavily one would swear that I was running. I did my breathing exercises as showed by the physiotherapist until my breathing returned to normal again. I

smiled because I felt so proud of myself for managing to take four small steps. I pushed myself to the kitchen since I'm sleeping in the room downstairs. I found makhulu busy making breakfast and packing lunches already. I offered to help and she indeed gave me some tasks. Chulu and O joined us later on. We had a great breakfast as usual but my girls had to rush to work/school and one of them was not happy about that. I helped Makhulu around the house.

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Makhulu: Clay my boy, you don't have to do all of this.

Me: I really don't mind, Ma. I actually wanted to talk to you about something. I know that since I've impregnated O out of wedlock I'm expected to pay for damages. How do I go about that, Ma?

Makhulu: Oh you know if Kumkani was a father he'd have taken care of this. I can get Kumkani's cousins to approach your people.

Me: I don't have people, Ma. Would it be okay if I get a representative who is not family? Perhaps Mr Funda if possible since he knows about such.

Makhulu: Do you intend on marrying her?

Me: Definitely, Ma. I asked her again and she agreed.

Makhulu: Then we can kill two birds with one stone then. Let's combine her lobola negotiations with those of the damages. What do you think?

Me: As long as it's going to respect your culture I'm good with that. (she smiled)

Makhulu: Then you must write a formal letter to the Zweni family. It's the only way they will acknowledge you and take you seriously. In it you write the reasons for wanting to see them. I'll ask Funda to help you. Don't you worry.

Me: I'd appreciate that a lot. I also would like to apologise to you for our current living situation. I know that a man is not allowed in his girlfriend's home when he hasn't honoured her family with lobola. You can fine me all you want for the rules I've broken. I'll pay. (she laughed)

Makhulu: How about I fine you today by asking you to join me for lunch. We can go out because you've been cooped up here since you've arrived. What do you say? (I smiled)

Me: I'd love to very much thanks. Thank you for everything and I love you. Just when I thought I'd never again know what a mother's love feels like you came along. (she kissed my forehead)

Makhulu: I love you too, my boy. Let's finish up here so we can get ready to go out. I want to hear all about your childhood and

also why you never introduced yourself when you and Othu were kids. (I laughed)

Me: She didn't want me to meet her parents.

Makhulu: Okay now it makes sense. We'll discuss your wedding too. I can't wait to walk my nunu down the aisle.

Me: I'll also need your help with planning a romantic night for O and I. I want to propose in the right way.

Makhulu: Then let me finish so we can go now. We can go for coffee and walk around. Oh, I did not mea...

Me: It's okay, Ma. (I laughed)

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We did some light chores and we really need a help. I decided to call Ma Joko and she said she'll come around some time tomorrow. I honestly don't know how women do all of this especially career women like O. Women are just magic for real. Makhulu and I finally went out and being around people felt great. I got a few weird and pity looks but what the heck. We weren't hungry so we decided to have drinks instead. She helped me plan the night and said she'll go with Chulu to a church thing so we could be alone. We saw Flinch approach the table and I felt anger towards him. Makhulu invited him to sit down.

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Makhulu: Where have you been hiding?

Flinch: I've been tying up loose ends before going back home

Advertisement

Ma Zweni.

Makhulu: What a pity. I hope you will visit us soon.

Me: I just hope he visits after the baby has been born. (he looked at me)

Flinch: You seem to have a lot on your chest so just spit it out.

Me: I don't actually. I just don't appreciate the fact that you fill O's mind with so much negativity. She is pregnant for goodness sake!

Makhulu: Both of you calm down please. What's going on?

Me: He has been telling O that our baby will be born disabled, Ma and asking her if that's what she'd want for the child.

Flinch: I was just being honest with her.

Me: You know that no parent would want their child to suffer. So what are you trying to achieve? Do you want her to have an abortion is that it?

Makhulu: No such a thing is going to happen here. Othu knows that I'd never forgive such. I hope that is not your aim, Sam.

Flinch: Ma Zweni, I told her that there might be risks if she continues with this pregnancy because we don't know what her kids will be like.

Makhulu: Her kids will be like us, human. Don't fill my child's mind with nonsense when she is already having so many doubts.

Flinch: Let's say the scan show that there are serious abnormalities. What then?

Me: Then we'll still love and care for the child. It's ours for goodness sake. Children are born with abnormalities at times what I don't like is having my wife think it's her fault should the same fate befall our unborn child. Dammit you know how O is.

Flinch: I wasn't trying to make her scared. I'm sorry but let's wait and see. I do hope nothing will happen.

Makhulu: My grand baby will be born healthy and will grow up to be a healthy child just like his/her sister. I'm a praying woman and trust me when I say that my God is not sleeping. Even if it happens that something is different with the child it'll be the way God wanted it to be not because of my girl's genes. Please stop feeding my child with such.

Flinch: I didn't mean to offend anyone. I'm sorry and I'll apologise to her too.

Me: Look I know that you have her best interest at heart. I appreciate that but she doesn't need all the stress that the self blaming comes with.

Makhulu: I don't even know about this and that shows how much it's been bothering her. Thank you for raising the concerns, Flinch but let's just allow God to do His work. (he smiled and nodded)

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I just hope that will be the last of this issue. He joined us for a drink and the mood lightened actually. After his second drink he excused himself and left. Makhulu and I went to buy all the stuff for the evening ahead and we hoped that Chulu would agree to go with her but if not then it's no train smash. She can be our photographer or something like that. Hours went by and Makhulu helped me set up the patio area since its a warm night and she hardly goes out there so we'll be able to keep the surprise hidden. They finally came home and we managed to convince Chulu to go with Makhulu after we told her that Funda's grandkids will be there too. I asked Nate to fetch them since he id driving one of my cars. We said goodbye to them and O went to shower quickly and came back wearing pyjamas. She saw the trail of rose petals and smiled.

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Othu: Baby, did you do all of this?

Me: Follow the trail and you'll find out. (we both walked out and she smiled when she saw it all)

Othu: Wait, I'm going to go change. I can't look like this when you've gone through all this effort. (she rushed out before I could reply)

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I laughed and waited for her to return. She returned after a long while wearing a beautiful body hugging nude dress and even put on some heels. Those curves were so beautiful shaped as though the dress was specially made for her. I scanned her body from top to toe and I wanted her so badly but not now though. I have some business to take care of first.

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Othu: Craig, at least say something.

Me: I'm lost for words, baby. Wow! Just wow you look breathtakingly beautiful. (she smiled)

Othu: Thank you. (I pulled out a chair for her)

Me: Care to sit down and join me for dinner, my lady?

Othu: Yes, kind knight. (we laughed and she sat)

Me: I love you.

Othu: I love you more. So who will serve us when you chased away our housemates?

Me: I actually didn't think about that. Okay we just have to self serve but before I do that I have something that I have to ask you.

Othu: Yes, yes and yes again. (I raised my one brow and she laughed)

Me: Stop being so forward, baby. Allow a man to have his moment. (we both laughed) So, miss Zweni I'll be asking you this question for a third and last time. Will you marry me please? (she smiled and kissed me) You have to give me an answer before you get to do that. (we laughed)

Othu: But I gave you three yeses already. Yes, Craig I'll be your wife.

Me: And you claim that I'm crazy? You're suppose to cry and stuff.

Othu: No I'm all out of tears but I can give you something else. (she said in a sexy, seductive tone)

Me: Okay, screw the tears I'll take the something else. (she laughed)

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She stood from her chair and sat on my lap. We shared a passionate kiss and my hands were all over her before I knew it. I hate how this injury limits me. I want to teach her some new tricks but I'll have to wait a while longer. I lifted her dress and she was not wearing any underwear. That made me want her even more. We were both lost in the moment and our moans said it all. That didn't last long though because we heard some noise and it sounded as though someone was running towards the back where we were. O stood and pulled her dress down and some guy appeared with a face filled with blood. I put O behind me and I would fight to death to protect her.

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Guy: I'm sorry to just barge into your yard like this. I was jogging and some men attacked me.

Me: So you chose to run here and put my family's life in danger?

Guy: It was the closest house, I'm sorry.

Othu: It's you from the mall. (she looked at him for a long time)

Me: Do you know him?

Othu: Not really.

Guy: My name is Bandile Phillips. Look sir I'm no criminal but I'm just running from the criminal who attacked me. Please let me just stay here for a while and after that I'll go.

Me: I'm not your sir and this is no police station.

Othu: Craig. (she said softly) He is hurt.

Me: Well this is no hospital either, O. He could be running from a gang for all we know and came here. They might have seen him turn in here and think we are hiding him. So I'm sorry but no. We have a child to protect here so please leave, my man. We can't say if you're telling the truth. For all we know you are here for some other hidden reasons

Othu: Let him stay for at least five minutes.

Bandile: I'll leave, it's cool. My house is not far from here. Thank you and once again I'm sorry. (he looked at O with that same intense look she gave him)

Othu: Okay and be careful.

Me: What she said. (he left)

Othu: That was not nice, Craig really. What if he is found dead and we regret not allowing him to stay?

Me: I didn't allow him to stay so it'll be on my conscious should that happen and not yours.

Othu: So that's what we'll teach our kids? To turn people who need help away, baby? (I exhaled loudly)

Me: Of course not but if I have a feeling that the person wanting help might be a danger to us in some way then I won't just sit and pretend like all is well, O. I know you want to see the good in everyone but we live in the real world where not everything is as it seems. Care to tell me where you know him from?

Othu: I saw him at the mall a few days ago.

Me: And of all strangers you see and forget about your mind remembered him? Should I know something?

Othu: Such as?

Me: I'm not blind, Othunyiweyo. I saw the looks you two exchanged. What the hell? Had it been me who made such intense eye contact with another woman you'd freak.

Othu: I don't like what you're trying to imply, Craig. I have just agreed to marry you and you think I'm flirting with other men?

Me: I don't want to fight with you not right now. Can we just enjoy our night?

Othu: I'm not in the mood anymore. You accuse me of some underhanded cheating and now you want us to be lovey dovey as though nothing happened? (she started to cry)

Me: I'm sorr... (she left me before I could finish)

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I should not have implied that she's flirting with another man and especially not now while her hormones are all over the place. I wheeled myself and paroled around the house to check if there aren't any danger signs. I know crime is everywhere but it's highly unlikely for something to happen at this area. After a while Nate returned with Chulu and Makhulu. I told him what happened and he said he'll spend the night just in case. I really appreciated it because I'm physically weak at the moment. Chulu was already asleep when they arrived so I went to their room to apologise for my behavior earlier on. Not for chasing the guy away though but for saying that they flirted with each other. I know she'd never cheat on me. I found her sleeping already and was a bit disappointed. I don't like the idea of us going to bed angry at each other. I kissed both their cheeks and was about to wheel myself out to my room next door when I heard one of them say something. I turned my chair around and realised it's O.

"Bandile, be careful please", she said softly. She said his name a few times and I actually felt a bit hurt. O never talks in her sleep and now her first time she had to say the stranger's name. Am I missing something? What happened at the mall? This is not how I imagined this night would be. I thought we'd

be cuddling at this moment but I was dead wrong. I switched off their lights and went out. Am I losing her to another man? No man wants to know that his woman dreams of another man. I think I'll have to find out what the business with this Bandile guy is before he causes trouble. I'll be damned if I allow anyone to stand in the way of us being a family.

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OTHU

I've been tossing and turning all night long because the way Craig and I ended things last night was terrible. I hate arguing with him so much especially because of a person who is not even a part of our lives. I know now that I don't love that guy but I also know that I feel drawn to him in a way. I even had a dream about him and in it he is being chased by white lions. I stood on the sidelines shouting for him to be careful and woke up just when one lion was about to attack him. I turned my head to look at the time and it's 2:30am. I got up gently because Chulu was sleeping next to me. I made my way next door to Craig's room. The street light lit up his room a bit and I went to stand by his bed. He laid on his back with his head resting on his right arm. I carefully got on top of him because one wrong move might prolong his healing. I kissed him and shook him lightly but he didn't even move a finger. How can someone sleep so deeply?

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Me: Baby. (I kissed his cool lips again and blew cool air in his face)

Craig: Mmm?

Me: Please wake up. (his eyes shot open)

Craig: What's wrong? (he immediately switched his bedside lamp on) Is it the baby? Are you in pain? (he asked with panic)

Me: No, I'm fine and so is the baby. I'm sorry for making you worry.

Craig: What's the time? I think it's too early to get ready, love.

Me: I know and it's time for me to apologise for my behavior last night. I don't like that we went to bed with a bad vibe between us, Craig. (he held my waist)

Craig: I hated it too, O.

Me: I don't feel anything for him or any other man. I felt some weird connection when I met him but I guarantee you that it's nothing romantic. I don't know how to explain it and I should have told you long ago but I was afraid you'd think I'm cheating on you emotionally. I had a dream about him too. In it he was being chased by lions. I was shouting for him to be careful. It was terrible.

Craig: Well It would explain why you said his name in your sleep. I'm sorry for accusing you of flirting.

Me: I understand because I really would not have liked it had you looked at another woman intensely. But no love nor lust exists between me and the guy.

Craig: I know but jealousy got the better of me. Do you think that the dream meant something?

Me: But why would I be getting the dream when I don't even know the guy. I hope I'm not getting an ancestral calling. (He lifted his head to kiss me)

Craig: If that's the case then we will deal with it but let's not jump to the extreme possibilities. Perhaps he is a relative. One of Kumkani's maybe?

Me: One of his other kids? (he nodded) That's possible but why didn't I feel this strongly about Poppy?

Craig: Poppy knew she was his. Maybe he doesn't and your ancestors want you to show him the way home. (I smiled)

Me: You did your homework on our culture.

Craig: Not really, baby. I've been spending a lot of time with makhulu lately so she educates me on certain things. I know that you're a modern woman who is a believer of Christ but you can't forget your people's ways.

Me: I haven't, baby especially after Yandi's calling. Supporting her through that stage of her life opened my eyes to a lot. Maybe I should ask her what it all might mean.

Craig: That's a start. You might have another sibling out there.

Me: Hopefully if that's the case he won't see me as an enemy like my other siblings.

Craig: They are both fools. I'm glad we spoke about this.

Me: Me too. I know that I tend to be a closed book but that's only because I'm used to dealing with most things alone. So I'm getting used to this life I have now. One where I have a partner to deal with things with. I want you to be my go to person for everything and I promise that I'll try my best to be open and speak about all that's bothering me.

Craig: I promise to do the same because we are both guilty of keeping things from each other. The only way we'll know what bothers the other is if we communicate. We aren't mind readers.

Me: I agree and I think our communication must improve more now that we are parents.

Craig: Agreed. So have you thought about the relocating issue? Are we staying or going?

Me: Staying because Chulu loves it here and so do I. I also thought about your business and I also don't like the idea of you being away on business for days when the baby is born. I am worried about makhulu though. She might not say it but living alone gets to her.

Craig: Isn't the plan for Funda to relocate to the Eastern Cape once they are married?

Me: It was, baby but I feel like there's something wrong. He called yesterday morning just before we left but she ignored it. She's been a bit offish also.

Craig: I haven't noticed that but I guess it's because you know her best. I told her about what Flinch said about the baby. Could that be causing her to act strangely? It can't be it though because the call happened in the morning and I only told her at noon.

Me: I'm worried. Baby, what if she's sick and hiding it?

Craig: We'd have noticed something. She's eating well and walked good too. Let's wait for her to tell us what the problem might be.

Me: Yeah you're right. If things don't work out between her and Funda. Would you mind if she stays with us?

Craig: Not at all. I can't picture my life without her in it. We can even find a house with a cottage if she wants privacy. Let's first wait on her to be ready to speak to us.

Me: Do you think that the Lott's will ever sell this house?

Craig: You really like it, don't you? (he smiled and I nodded)

Craig: Give me their number and I'll speak to them. They are retired anyway. They don't need such a big house.

Me: I can't wait to get married and have a home. Our home. I want to give our kids what I never had. I had makhulu but it's just not the same as having two loving parents living under the same roof.

Craig: I understand. I lost my parents at a young age but I find myself lucky then most for experiencing a home life briefly. I also want to give our kids that. I've missed out on six years of Chulu's life so with all our future babies I want to be there from day one. (I smiled)

Me: It sounds great. I love you, my Knight and I don't want to ever be with another man. I've had a crush on you since I was a teen for goodness sake. (he laughed)

Craig: I did too but neither of us spoke up. I thought you biting my lip when I kissed you that first time was your way of telling me to back off. (I laughed)

Me: I bit it because I didn't know how to kiss. If there's anything we can learn from that experience is to always tell each other how we feel no matter how embarrassing or unpleasant it is. Once again I'm sorry for keeping the Bandile thing a secret when I really had no reason to.

Craig: It's all forgiven and forgotten. (we kissed)

Me: I have to ask my doctor something.

Craig: About?

Me: I feel more aroused these days. You kiss me on the cheek and my body just reacts to it in a sexual way. Do you think I should worry? (he kissed me)

Craig: No, I actually read that some woman want more sex during pregnancy while others not so much. I'm glad that you fall under those who do. (he said in a seductive tone)

Me: Then you better get healed quick, Mr Knight. (he laughed)

Craig: I'm trying, Miss Zweni soon to be Mrs Knights. There's nothing wrong with me now though.

Me: No, Craig. Have you heard how you breath afterwards? I don't want to risk it.

Craig: I actually asked my doctor and he said it might heal me faster.

Me: Liar! Why didn't you tell me then? (we laughed)

Craig: Okay he didn't say that. Come on

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O we'll be gentle. (he said while kissing my neck)

Me: You're cruel. (I moaned)

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His hands went under my night dress and he brushed my bare bums. I really don't know what is wrong with me? Why do I crave sex so much? We kissed passionately and tore the little we had on from each others bodies. He leaned against the headboard and held my hips and felt him penetrate me. We didn't move for a few seconds and just looked at each other. He just so handsome. I started to move my hips slowly and he let out a deep groan and closed his eyes. The moment became intense and the love movements fast until the headboard started to make noise. We laughed while kissing and moved to the edge of the bed instead. How could he think that I'd want another man when he is perfect for me? Our love session continued until we both went over the edge. His breathing is not as bad as before. I collapsed on top of him and could hear his heart beat fast while we both tried to breath normally. We cuddled and had some pillow talk until we fell asleep in each others arms. Hours went by and we got up on our usual time. We made love again and I helped him get ready for the day. After I was done I got myself ready and went to wake Chulu up. She insists on getting herself ready these days and my heart breaks a little because she needs me less and less now. Craig and I went to get breakfast ready and it was just weird that makhulu was not up yet. I went to check on her and found her

reading her bible. I let her finish and joined her in her morning prayer. After we were done I sat beside her.

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Me: Ma, are you feeling sick?

Makhulu: Not at all, nunu. Don't you worry about me.

Me: I can't help it. You haven't really been yourself lately. Is it the deacon. He is really clean, Ma.

Makhulu: I'm just worried about your baby since we saw Flinch yesterday but I know realise that I let it make my faith in God weak. I know that baby will be healthy. Clay wrote the letter to the Zweni family. It has to go to your father unfortunately.

Me: That's okay. I just want to marry my person and do it the right way so that we don't anger our ancestors. Yesterday a guy came running here filled with blood saying thugs were after him. (she looked shocked and worried)

Makhulu: And then?

Me: Craig chased him away saying this is no police station.

Makhulu: And you disagreed. That's why there was tension. He is right, nunu. For all we know he is a thug himself.

Me: I apologised to him, Ma. Is everything fine between you and Mr Funda?

Makhulu: I suddenly don't like the idea of having a man in my life 27/7,nunu. Is that bad?

Me: No, you've been single for over twenty years so it's understandable. If this feel like you can't and don't want to marry him then it's all up to you. It won't make you a bad person and no one will hold it against you. I'll support you no matter what you decide on. Craig and I have also decided to stay in Cape Town. I'm sorry I have you false hope because I know you've been looking forward to having us with you.

Makhulu: Nonsense. I knew you'd have to have your own life soon.

Me: You can stay with us if you want to. Craif said he'd love that a lot and you know we will too. You'll be close to us and we will either buy a house with an in dependant cottage or build one for you specially. (she smiled)

Makhulu: Let's see how it goes. Let us go and eat.

Me: I love you.

Makhulu: I love you more, nunu.(we hugged)

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We both stood and went to join Chulu and her father. I dished up for everyone and served them. I ate while making lunches for Chulu and myself. We told her that we're not moving

anymore and she was so happy that she didn't have to change schools. I'll also have to go see Mr Thorn and ask him to not mind that resignation letter anymore. After a while Chulu and I said goodbye and rushed off. I took her to her class and went to the staffroom. I greeted everyone and Yandi finally arrived. I also told her that we're staying and she even danced out of excitement. I asked her what the dream could mean and she said the ancestors are definitely trying to tell me something. Because lions are the spirit animals of some clans. Now I'm more convinced that he might be my brother. I don't even have a number to call him on. Do I now wait for another random moment to happen? The bell rang and I went about my business. Hours went by and Makhulu sent me a text. "Your father had a stroke. He is in hospital", it read. Kumkani might not care about me but I feel bad when they are not well. I wish him a speedy recovery. Mama called him inviting me to dinner but I'm not in the mood to be guilt tripped today so I said I can't. She told me she left Tata and is living alone and I didn't believe her. I can't afford to fall into their manipulation trap right now. Tata has most probably told her to get close to me to get money out of me so I just can't go through emotional turmoil right now. Hours went by and it was finally time to go home. I went to get my baby and we drove home to daddy. When we got home Makhulu was not there and Craig said she went to see Kumkani. He doesn't deserve her caring but

honestly I'd also be there for Chulu and her unborn sibling no matter what they do. That's just how a mother is. I called her and she said she had him moved from the public hospital to the private because it was a heavy stroke and public health care is not good. I said a prayer while on the phone with her and I asked her to not worry because it will only make her sick. After some time we started preparing supper. The three of us sat and enjoyed dinner when I was done and it felt great. I'm sure Poppy is by her father's side being the perfect daughter and Langa the perfect son. I went to help Chulu bath while Craig loaded the dishes in the dishwasher. I like this helping each other with chores thing. I thanked him for his help. We sat on the couch while watching TV until Chulu fell asleep. We changed the channel from her kiddies channel and went to put her in bed. I went to join Craig on the couch and we kissed, teased each other and cuddled. I was busy going from channel to channel and an episode of a show where people look for their loved ones appeared. The presenter read a letter and I for some odd reason wanted to hear what it said. I put on the volume on top.

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Her: Hello, my name is Bandlile Phillips. I live in Bizana and I'm looking for my grand mother. My mother was given up for adoption years ago and now she asked me to help me look for

her mother because she is sick and might not have much time left. My mother's name is Nokulunga Phillips. She does not have details about her mother's whereabouts but she was given the name. Nomhle Tyini by her adoptive parents. (she read on further but I was long in deep thought by then)

Me: That's Makhulu's maiden surname and Nomhle is her name. (I looked at Craig)

Craig: Hell no, O. Makhulu is not the type of woman to give her kids away.

Me: You're right and she said my grandpa was her first and last, uhm you know sexually. So it can't be and I know she is no cheater. Do you think it's the same Bandile?

Craig: I've got no idea but I know that their Nomhle Tyini is not our Nomhle. She'd never live with such a secret. She would have gone and found her child long ago had that been the case.

Me: It would explain why I...

Craig: O, she's hurt by her son being in hospital. How do you think such an accusation will make her feel? (he cut me short)

Me: True but what are the odds? (he pressed his phone)

Craig: These are the odds. There are five more Nomhle Tyini's on Facebook and two are elderly. She's not the only one with

that name. Please let's not upset her with such, baby. Well not now anyway.

Me: Okay. (I looked at the screen)

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The presenter gave details on how to contact them should anyone have any info. I memorised the number just in case. Could Makhulu have a daughter? If so how old is she? Could Bandile be my cousin? So many questions flooded my mind and I had no answer to all of them. I don't want to believe this but after these episodes with Bandile I can't help but believe it a bit. Craig changed the channel because he didn't want to hear me think ill stuff about makhulu. He begged me not to mention this to her and I promised. We waited up for her and she finally came home. She said Kumkani is stable now and that they haven't seen Poppy there. The moment with her suddenly felt strange because I didn't know how to react after what I heard on TV. I'm sure she'll get a call from someone and they'll ask her about it. Well that's if they watch the show. She said she's tired and went straight to bed. Craig and I watched a couple of movies but my mind was too busy to focus on any of them. I have to find Bandile and ask him some questions. I might have a dying aunt who wishes to meet her mom before passing somewhere. Should I sit down and speak to Makhulu about it?

OTHU

A few days have gone by and this Bandile issue has been on my mind since. I haven't bumped into him randomly as I hoped I would. The TV show didn't give his personal contact details so I have to find a way to get them. Craig has been watching me like a hawk making sure that I keep my promise of not bothering Makhulu with this. He is so overprotective of us and I appreciate it but I don't think I'll be able to keep my promise. Curiosity has gotten to me. I'm also afraid of asking Makhulu. What if she cheated on my grandpa and got pregnant by another man? Things between Craig and myself have been good and Chulu is still Chulu, happy and bubbly. Today is Saturday and I'm not planning on doing a single thing after I've done my chores. The lady that usually helped Craig with house maintenance can only come to us from next month. I've honestly never saw such an organised domestic helper. She even keeps a diary and works at hours best for her. I love how she does things. Things really seem to be falling into place. I got up and made morning beverages for us all as we like it. Rooibos with honey for the first lady. Black strong coffee for the man of the house and hot chocolate for the princess. I'd usually have coffee but I read that it's best for expecting mummies to stay away from it. My housemates joined me soon enough.

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Me: Are pancakes okay for breakfast? (they all looked at me)

Craig: I'm not hungry thanks.

Me: Well you don't have a choice because you can't drink your pills on an empty stomach.

Chulu: I would really appreciate pancakes, mommy. (we all smiled)

Makhulu: Is it just me or is your vocabulary improving day by day, nunu?

Chulu: I have been reading big words. The kids at big school have spelling bees.

Me: Yes and they travel to other provinces to compete. Is it something you'd like to do someday?

Chulu: Yes very much. I want to be a writer. (her father laughed)

Craig: I thought you wanted to be a chef.

Chulu: That too, daddy. You said that I can do it all.

Me: Just don't be so busy that you forget about us. I really like that you are interested in spelling competitions, bhabha. What big words have you learnt so far.

Chulu: Independence, Democracy, Constitution and many more.

Makhulu: Yho it sounds as if you'll put political related careers on that list of yours too. (we laughed)

Me: I'm proud of you. Big school better be ready for my bhabha because she's ready for it. (she smiled)

Craig: How is Mr Zweni, Ma?

Makhulu: He is awake but just stares into space. The doctors recon that the stroke affected his mobility. They say he is aware of all that is around him but can't respond to it. I can't imagine how frustrating that must be. We've been keeping him in prayers though so I'm sure he will be fine. If he survives this and he still doesn't change his ways then I don't know. Clearly God still wants him to do some things here on earth.

Craig: Trust me, Ma a near death experience teaches a person all that's important in life and what not so I do hope this time around he looks at life differently.

Me: Let's not hold our breaths.

Makhulu: Funny how Poppy has not visited him. Langa also doesn't visit as much as I thought he would and Unathi comes for only a few minutes a day.

Me: She's been asking me to have lunch with her but I don't want to. I don't feel like myself right. What if I get attached thinking her attention will now be permanent only for her to be cold again?

Makhulu: If you feel like you can't then don't force yourself. The last I want is for you to get upset or emotionally drained. This phase of pregnancy is nothing compared to what comes once you are showing.

Craig: I agree. Ma, did the Zweni family get the letter. I can't wait until Mr Zweni recovers so someone has to please stand in for him. I want to stop this cohabiting thing and show you respect and O as well so that we can lead by example for the little miss and the one on the way.

Makhulu: They have, my boy. Once they are ready they'll let us know. We however have to fly to Mthatha. All of us. I can organise accommodation for you and your negotiators. You remember how I said it works right?

Craig: Of course and thank you for everything you've done for me. It's all highly appreciated.

Me: You two are holding little meetings and planning while we are away. I see you. (they laughed)

Makhulu: Well shoot us for having a great mother son relationship. (I laughed)

Me: You're clearly spending too much time with Craig. You never use the "shoot me" phrase. Stop corrupting my grandmother. (they laughed)

Craig: Our grandmother. (he smiled and looked at her) Chulz, would you like to go with daddy today? Mommy said she needs her alone time today so we're not welcome.

Makhulu: Haaa, Othu. Where will they go to?

Me: I don't know. They can sit on the other side of the house if they want just as long as they aren't in my face.

Chulu: But we're never in your face, mommy. (she laughed)

Makhulu: It seems this pregnancy will make you strange. We just have to adapt until further notice. (I laughed)

Me: It won't be long now. So next week we have our first official scan and we were wondering if you two would like to join us. Well if the doctor allows. We might hear a heart beat.

Chulu: Will the doctor take a picture of the baby? (she asked clearly excited)

Makhulu: Yes, nunu but I doubt we'll see anything. Well I will because I've practised as a midwife for a few years but I don't know about you. We'd love to come, nunu. Thank you for the invite, my baby.

Craig: This baby is blessed. He/she is waited upon eagerly.

Me: Ma, can't the lobola negotiations be at your home please. I don't know Tata's cousins well so I can't have it there.

Makhulu: No problem, nunu. I actually agree. Don't you two worry yourselves. I want to see you married soon too so I'll make sure all is sorted. Funda agreed to be Clay's main negotiator.

Craig: He gave me an earful about my disappearing on my family but I explained a bit and he understood. I'll also ask my friend to go with him.

Makhulu: Schools will close for the September holiday. Why not use that week to get this done? (Craig smiled)

Me: But that's in a week.

Craig: We can do it unless you think it's too soon.

Me: No, if we can arrange everything in time then let's do it. (they smiled) So no one has given me an answer about the pancakes so I'll just get all the cereal we have and we'll have that.

Makhulu: But I said its okay.

Me: I no longer want to eat them. I crave something fatty. So what will you and daddy do Chulz? (she looked at me with a smile)

Chulu: Anything is fine as long as we will have fun.

Craig: I'll make sure we have lots of fun and take pictures. I'm sure mommy will regret not going with. (we laughed)

Makhulu: If a stranger walked in here they would think you two have been married for years now. Keep up these silly moments filled with laughter and keep the friendship strong too.

Me: We will, Ma and thank you for the words of wisdom. I'd like to apologise for the liv...

Makhulu: If one of you apologise for that one more time I'll pack my bags and move out. (she laughed)

Craig: No more apologising for that from me because I don't want you to go. We just want you to know that we love and respect you, Ma.

Makhulu: You being in different rooms is enough. (we both looked down)

Chulu: Mommy, please have my room painted soon.

Me: I can't. It's not our house.

Craig: Daddy is working on making it ours, princess.

Makhulu: I love it too.

Me: So who will look after Kumkani when he is discharged?

Makhulu: Well if no one wants to then I'll have to. I'm his mother after all. I'll have to go back to my house

Chulu: But no, makhulu. (she sulked)

Makhulu: I'll visit, my baby.

Me: Tata is lucky to have you and he is undeserving of it all but I understand. I honestly thought Poppy would jump at the chance of caring for her dad.

Chulu: I'm hungry.

Me: Let me make that breakfast. (I gave her a kiss)

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I went to open the fridge to see what I can whip up. I decided on the typical breakfast menu of bacon and eggs. Chulu wanted the pancakes I said I'd make so had to prepare those as well. I love cooking for them. Time went by and Makhulu went to get ready and went to the hospital. Kumkani is just costing us happiness because I don't like that makhulu has to go back home to care for him. Chulu and Craig also got ready and they left with Nate. I was finally left to just eat junk. food, watch movies and read my favourite book. I first did some chores and went to shower. I filled a big bowl with potatoes chips and went to sit on the couch. I was enjoying the moment until I heard a soft knock. I kicked about in frustration before I stood and went to open. I didn't expect to see this face here so I was shocked. It's my mother. She actually looked like she had a real smile on

her face. I let her in and greeted properly. The two of us went to the lounge and sat. She was looking all around her.

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Me: I'm sure you're already making mental judgements. It's not a mansion, Mama I know but I love it.

Mama: I love it too actually. I'm sure you're wondering how I knew I'd find you here. Ma Zweni told me. (I just nodded)

Othunyiweyo

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I meant what I said about being done with your father and his tricks.

Me: I just don't buy it all. Why now? Did he tell you to come and built a fake relationship with me so that I'll pity you and help you financially?

Mama: I don't blame you for thinking that after the years of bad treatme...

Me: Bad treatment is an understatement, Mama. You hated me since before I was even implanted in you. I didn't force you to carry me. I didn't force you to go to the likes of Flinch and have me made just so you could get financial freedom. I was your ticket out of poverty that I know now. You've gotten what you wanted from me so what do you want now? Why not just leave

me to be happy and move forward? I've made peace with you guys treating me like I'm a mistake. Stop hurting me, for goodness sake please just stop hurting me. (I cut her short while crying)

Mama: I'm not trying to hurt you now. I know that I've been doing that since forever but that is really not what I want right now. Your father somehow just had a hold on me but I see now that I'm a terrible mother to you and I want to fix it.

Me: I don't need you too. I've cut my emotions off as far as you guys are concerned. I had to or trust me I'd have committed suicide long ago. You've isolated me from everything. Only remembered that I existed when your snobbish friends asked about me. You'd take Langa and reward him for being a good son while I remained behind and watches you three get in the car and drove off. I don't hate you but I just don't want nor need you in my life. I've found a man that actually loves me and we're getting married soon and I'm expecting a baby. My Chulu is healthy and is growing each day. Makhulu is our anchor and filled all voids you left. Allow me to be happy please by staying away from me. You've lived without me all my life so just continue doing just. I'm glad you left Kumkani and you'll finally be your own woman now but I just can't, Mama. Yho I really can't. (we were both crying)

Mama: I'm really sorry, Othu. I'll do as you wish and stay away but if you change your mind please tell me. We can go to therapy together and take it one step a time. All I need is another chance for the millionth time I know but this next one I won't mess up. I love you, Othunyiweyo. (I wept so much until I felt a light pain)

Me: Please go, Ma. (I held my abdominal area)

Mama: What is wrong? You look as you did when you used to get those terrible period pain. Is everything okay?

Me: Just some paid. I'm sure it'll pass.

Mama: No, Othu. You're pregnant and aren't suppose to feel any pain. Let me drive you to the ER. I know I'm the cause but please allow me to do this one thing. (I nodded)

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She stood and helped me off the couch slowly and we walked to her car. She locked the door and we drove of to the emergency room. I promised Craig to always be open with him so I dialed his number while on the way. It ran twice and he answered.

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Craig: Miss us already, miss alone time?

Me: No I don't. I'm on my way to the ER got some cramps.

Craig: What? How bad are they? Who us driving you? (I smiled)

Me: Calm down. They aren't too bad but it's better to be safe than sorry. My mom is driving me.

Craig: Which hospital? (I told him) Okay I'll meet you there. I love you okay.

Me: I love you more. (I ended the call)

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Mama drove like a crazy woman. One would swear I'm in labor. The pain actually went away when we got close to the hospital. The two of us arrived and went in anyway. We bumped into Makhulu who was getting water and now it was an entire worry issue. I filled in the forms and got help immediately. They told the ladies to wait outside. I got changed into hospital gear. I don't know why though. Craig suddenly appeared speeding in with his chair and it actually made me laugh. He looked so concerned. He sat by my side, held my hand and kissed it a few times. The nurses asked him to wait outside but he said never so they left him. The doctor came and examined me. He did an ultrasound to check for whatever he is checking. I'm now 8 weeks pregnant. He said it's highly unlikely to hear a heartbeat and explained the reasons while running that scan across my belly and his explanation got interrupted by a loud banging like sound and he looked at us with a wide smile.

"That's your baby's heartbeat. Such a strong one too. Wow!", he said sounding really surprised. I looked at Craig and he looked at me like I'm some sort of magic that he is seeing for the very first time in his life. We asked if Makhulu and Chulu could come in just for this moment and the doctor decided to break some rules for us. A nurse went to get them and they came in looking so worried. Makhulu heard the heartbeat and smiled. Tears soon followed. Chulu looked confused.

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Chulu: Mommy are you sick?

Me: Do you hear that sound? (she nodded) It's the baby's heartbeat. (her eyes widened)

Chulu: Wow, what a beautiful heartbeat. (we all laughed)

Makhulu: Yes, my nunu. I can't believe it is so strong so early. I'm not complaining though. Oh God is at work.

Doctor: And I don't see anything wrong with you or the baby. You did mention you had an emotional moment with your mom and I advice that you stay clear of that please. The first trimester is the most sensitive. It's important you remain relaxed and in stress free moments.

Craig: I'll make sure of that, doctor. I'm just glad our baby is okay.

Chulu: Where is the baby picture?

Doctor: There the little one is. (he pointed at what looked like a little dot and Chulu frowned)

Chulu: But it's a black spot. Babies don't look like that. (we laughed)

Makhulu: He is still very small that's why.

Chulu: Why is he so dark? Is he Congolese? (we all looked at her)

Craig: What?

Chulu: There is a boy in my class and teacher say he is from Congo. He has dark skin but he looks very nice. I don't mind if our baby fell from the skies of Congo. (we were so confused)

Me: Who told you babies fall from the sky?

Chulu: Makhulu said so. They fall from the sky from heaven and into the mommy's belly. (the doctor laughed so much)

Doctor: I'll leave you to get dressed and remember to take it easy. You said your doctor gave you all the necessary supplements so I won't give you anything.

Me: Thank you, doctor.

Doctor: I'll give you a print out of the ultrasound. (we all smiled)

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He went out and I got dressed. Makhulu said she panicked when Chulu asked where babies come from and said the first thing that came to mind. We had to explain that the baby didn't fall from the Congo skies though. The things Chulu speak at times. I've seen the boy he spoke of and he is really adorable. I'm glad she sees beauty in all skin colours. We also had to explain the process. The nurse came and gave us the scan printouts and Craig immediately put his copy in his wallet. Mama was glad that we are fine and apologised. She left looking a bit down and that broke my heart but I really can't go there. Makhulu said she'll go home with us because visiting hours are over and Tata is sleeping. I called all my friends and asked if Poppy is with them and no one has seen her in days now. I was worried and called the number she sent me the text with that other day but it went to voicemail. Craig told me not to burden myself emotionally especially after the scare that we just got. We got home and they insisted that I lay down a bit. I actually liked being fussed over today. I laid in bed and Makhulu came with food. I felt like a little girl again. I thanked her and she sat beside me.

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Makhulu: Seeing you at the hospital worried me so much. I'm glad you both are well. I'm sorry I told Nolitha our new location.

Me: It's okay, Ma. So what did you decide on regarding Mr Funda?

Makhulu: I can't get married, nunu. It's all just too fast.

Me: Just as long as you're sure. Ma I have something to ask you but I'm afraid of your reaction.

Makhulu: Nonsense, talk to me.

Me: A few days ago Craig and I watched a show of people looking for their loved ones. A letter was read where a Bandile Phillips was looking for his mother's mother. He was the same man that ran in here looking for help and the same man that I had that connection I asked you about. I also dreamt that he was chased by pure white lions. Yandi said lions are spirit animals of certain families.

Makhulu: Why would you be afraid to tell me that?

Me: The woman wanted is named Namhle Tyini. (she started to breath fast) Ma, are you okay?

Makhulu: So what? You think that I'm the Nomhle they want? What do you think about me, Othunyiweyo. (she raised her voice and stood)

Me: I'm sorry, Ma I just wanted to be sure.

Makhulu: Well I'm not the only Nomhle Tyini. (she looked as if she'd faint so I held her) Leave me!

Me: I didn't mean to upset you. I'm sorry.

Makhulu: I'm going to my room and don't bother calling me for dinner later. (she walked out)

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I threw myself on my bed filled with regret. I should just have kept my mouth shut. Now she's angry and sick. Craig joined me and I told him. He was not too happy with me and reminded me of her high blood pressure and it made me feel more terrible. Hours went by and I picked through her door just to see if she's still alive and well. She was reading her bible and I decided to give her space. We ordered pizza and had that for supper. I'm now more convinced that she is hiding something but I'll wait until she's ready to speak about it. The three of us sat and watched animated movies but I was not in the moment though. My curiosity is now at a higher level than before.

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#NARRATED

Makhulu sat on her bed reading her bible. Well she was trying to read but she could not because her mind is all over the place. She thought that part of her past would remain hidden. They promised her that it would but now it seems that is not the case. Tears flew down her cheeks and she felt herself get a

bit lightheaded. She laid on her back and tried to relax. How could these people look for her so publicly? She suddenly had a headache and drank two pills for the pain and laid down again. She felt the pills making her drowsy. She's been thinking about her daughter all these years but not too much because it hurt her to do so. She said a short prayer while crying. Her eyes closed slowly until she fell asleep. How is she going to explain this to Othu?, she asked herself. The kids won't ever look at her the same again. Why did the painful past have to reveal itself now?

Meanwhile Poppy has parked at a petrol station and the irony of it all is that she was almost out of petrol and had no money to fill it up. She has been bathing in the public toilets since she parted ways with Kumkani. Her lady part looked as if it has swollen even more and she has been trying to keep strong but the pain is becoming unbearable. She was sitting in her car when a loud banging noise disturbed her depressing deep thoughts. A petrol attendant was knocking on her window and she rolled it down.

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Poppy: Can I help you?

Him: You think we don't see you nhe? You park here all the time and even overnight and when you come from your car you walk with open legs. I told my boss about you and we don't

welcome prostitutes here. Start your car and go before we call the cops on you. (he said shouting and pointing at her)

Poppy: I don't sell my body, bhuti. I walk funny because I just had an operation.

Him: Or you've been getting too much clients and now your private area is complaining. I don't have time for your lies. Start your car and leave if you won't buy petrol.

Poppy: Please, I'm in so much pain.

Him: Sindy, call the police. Tell them we have a prostitute refusing to leave our place of work. (she shouted to his colleague)

Poppy: This little petrol won't get me far. I beg you please. (the guy just left her)

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Poppy sat in her car and started to cry. She can't call her drinking and party friends because they only appear when life is good. She also can't call her real friends because she burnt those bridges beyond repair. Her flings aren't an option either because sex is something she can't give them. She wiped her tears off and saw a familiar face. It's Nelisa, Zuko's girlfriend. She hooted and Neli looked her direction. She looked hesitant to go to the car when she saw its Poppy but she walked to the car anyway.

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Poppy: Hi, I don't know if you remember me but...

Neli: I do. You're the friend who got bitchy with Zuko after all she did for you.

Poppy: I'm sorry. I regret it so much. Please help me. They think I'm a prostitute and called the cops who might be here any minute. I don't have petrol and I'm hurt too please.

Neli: I can't. Zuko would kill me.

Poppy: I'll just spend one night at your place and please I ask that you look at my private area. (Neli have her a weird look)

Neli: What the hell?

Poppy: Not like that. I had an operation down there. I haven't had a place to bath and so I think something is wrong. Please Neli I can't have a stranger look at me.

Neli: I'm a stranger too.

Poppy: A familiar one though please. (she begged while crying and Neli pitied her)

Neli: What kind of procedure did you have?

Poppy: Hyme-something. To restore my virginity.

Neli: Hymenoplasty? You could afford such an expensive procedure but can't maintain your post operation care?

Poppy: It's a long story.

Neli: Summarise it and make it quick before the cops arrive and think I'm your client. (Poppy told her the story and Neli pitied her even more)

Poppy: That's the whole truth. Just one night so I'll have a bath and clean the area please.

Neli: Okay and no word to Zuko about this. She doesn't like you much right now.

Poppy: I promise and tomorrow I'll leave.

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Neli sighed loudly and regretted agreeing but she pities the girl so much. She filled up Poppy's tank and they both drove off to her place. Zuko is away on business so she won't make an unexpected visit. They finally arrived at Neli's apartment and Poppy walked slowly and with legs far apart from each other. Poor girl, Neli thought. They got inside the building and Neli went to run Poppy a bath before attending to her wounded area. Poppy went to soak herself in the warm water but the burning sensation between her legs made it all so unpleasant. She finally finished and towel dried her body. Neli had her lay on her bed and asked her to open her legs. The foul smell that came from there was not good and Neli was convinced that Poppy has an infection. Poppy laid awkwardly while Neli aided

her sensitive part and it felt painful. Neli advised that they go to hospital but Poppy refused saying that she can't stand to lay open legs while a stranger touches her down there. Neli went on with her work and hoped that the medical supplies she has will help. She luckily also had the right antibiotics for infections and hoped they would do the trick. She applied ointments also but she knows Poppy needs hospital care but she can't force her. Neli finally finished and took her gloves off and threw them away. She went to get some food for Poppy and watched as she ate. Poppy drank the pills given to her without asking much about them. Neli left her to sleep and said she's going to start her shift now so Poppy must navigate around the place and do things for herself if she wants and left. Poppy laid in bed feeling some sense of soothing now but the pain was still there. Her anger towards Kumkani became more intense and she hoped that he died like the dog that he is. She can't believe that she ignored all the red flags and warnings out of desperation and now she learnt the hard way. Now she might never get married. Who wants a girl who is damaged like her?, she thought. She laid on her side and wept like never before. Will happiness ever find her?

MAKHULU

I woke up the follow day with a headache that was even worse than the one I had yesterday. I didn't eat anything and I'm sure my children are worried because I'm on high blood pressure treatment and they clearly state that I have to eat before taking them. I recalled my conversation with Othu yesterday and I shouted at my poor child when all she wanted was a clear understanding of what she heard on TV. I honestly thought that the connection she had with the boy was a fake romantic one because pregnancy comes with a long of things. It's clear that my ancestors are trying to connect my past to my future because lions are spirit animals of the Tyini family and the fact that they were chasing the boy doesn't necessarily mean they wish to harm him or perhaps things aren't going well in his life and that of his mother...my daughter. I'm a firm believer in God but I haven't forgotten my African ways. Maybe my child needs some traditional rituals and hence the lions chasing her son. I was lying on my side with a mind flooded with all kinds of thoughts when a soft knock disturbed my over thinking. The doorknob turned and the door opened slowly. Othu appeared holding a tray with a cup, teapot and other essentials. I sat up and she smiled walking towards my bed. She put the tray on my bedside table and hugged me. A part of me felt like crying so

much when I felt her embrace but I knew it would only worry her and I don't want that, especially not now when she's had a scare yesterday. She climbed over and sat beside me on the bed holding my hand. An action that took me back to when she was a young girl. She'd always come to my room first and take a nap until her alarm rang for her to get ready for school. My baby is the biggest gift Kumkani has ever given me.

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Othu: I know that you don't like me right now, Ma and I understand. Yesterday I upset you and I'm sorry but please you have to take care of yourself. If you're sick I'll get sick. I need you to be around long enough to meet my grandchildren someday. (I laughed softly)

Me: Isn't that taking it too far?

Othu: With a strong woman like you, never. You don't have to speak to me just eat and have your pills please. I'll just sit here and be invisible. (I smiled)

Me: You mean you'll just sit there and make sure that I eat. (she laughed). Thank you, nunu and I'm glad you only made toast with butter on them because nothing else will go down. (I took the tray and started to eat)

Othu: Craig and I researched centers that help patients in Tata's condition. You were a nurse, I know but I don't think you're

skilled at caring for someone who is like that. They do everything for him and even exercises to help him regain his mobility. It's of course a temporary solution so I don't want you thinking that we are throwing your son away. Once he has recovered we'll sit down and think of a way forward once again.

Me: You've grown into such a strong woman. Well kind you've always been but the strength gets remarkable each day. We can go visit the center and see. It sounds like a great idea.

Othu: How can I not be the woman I'm becoming when I was raised by a beautiful, kind, God fearing woman of strength. The future of Chulu and all my future daughters look bright because I'll pass on the teachings you've instilled in me unto them. (I looked down)

Me: I'm not perfect, nunu.

Othu: And that is one of the things that make you so perfect. Ma, I'm here whatever you need and want call on me. Lean on me as I've leaned on you all these years and together we will lean on God. (I blinked away my tears)

Me: Let's pray. (we held hands and said a prayer)

Othu: Are you going to go with us to church today?

Me: I'm not feeling well, nunu so I'll just lay down for a while. You three go and enjoy.

Othu: Have you told the deacon that you'd like to wait a bit longer before getting married?

Me: I don't want to wait a bit longer. I don't want to do it period. I thought that my loneliness was because I wanted a male companion but I have come to realise that it's because I was alone in that house. Here I'm not and the loneliness has gone. I don't want to complicate my life with a man and the extra they come with. I've done that. So if you and Clay were serious about having me here for good I accept. He can also help me with the land things and give advice since he owns a few properties himself. You also don't have to make an outside cottage for me because I love being in the next room. (she smiled)

Othu: I'll tell him, Ma. Chulu is going to be overjoyed.

Me: I love you children so much. That's why I also ask that you give Nolitha a chance but when you're ready. This time there is sincerity in the eyes and voice that can't be faked. You want her in your life, you always have but she just wasn't available but now she is. Don't do it for her do it for you. Do it for that little girl in you that still wishes for her mother's love and affection and fill that void I know is in there. (she looked down)

Othu: She'll hurt me again, Ma. (she said softly)

Me: I know but we hurt each other that's life but I think her mistakes now won't be the same as her past ones. Now I think she'll just forget to get you the magazine you asked her to buy for instead of leaving you alone at home and go to social parties as she did. (she laughed)

Othu: You're my sense maker, Ma Zweni.

Me: Thank you for the food so now please go and get yourself ready for church. You know Chulu doesn't like being late for class.

Othu: That one is becoming bossy and she says the weirdest stuff too. Let me go get ready. I'll bring you a big chocolate bar when we get back. (I smiled)

Me: And you'll steal a few blocks from that chocolate. I know it's been you who has been raiding my sweet treat cupboard all these years. (she laughed and covered her eyes)

Othu: I didn't think you'd notice. I was actually planning on blaming Chulu should you ask me. Terrible I know. (I laughed softly)

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We spoke more and my mood suddenly got better. Chulu also joined us and gave me a warm hug and a get well soon card she made last night. The two of them later went to get ready and I went to the bathroom to brush my teeth. After I finished I went

downstairs and got started on breakfast. I called the Zweni men who will lead Othu's lobola negotiations and told them where and when they must do it. They said they'll send a letter back to Clay's representative and invite them over. I do hope Funda will still help the boy after I tell him that I don't want to get married. The children finished, had breakfast and asked me if I'm sure I'll be alright alone and I said yes so they kissed me and left. To see Clay go to church without being invited makes my heart filled with such joy. Himself and Othu need to ensure that they are a praying family. I started to cook for lunch and I'm planning on going all out today. I'll even make some desert. The doorbell rang while I was busy peeling potatoes and I went to open. It's Funda looking very concerned. Clearly dressed in his usual Sunday best for church. I let him in and he sat down on one of the kitchen chairs.

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Funda: Are you ill?

Me: It's just a terrible headache, was a terrible headache actually but I'm fine now.

Funda: That is good. When I saw your children arrive without you I got worried and rushed here as soon as possible. What is wrong, Nomhle? You've been so distant.

Me: I have too much going on in my life at the moment, Funda. My son is very sick and there are more issues I've got to deal with.

Funda: That's why I'm here. You need to speak to me and make you burdens mine. I know you've been worried about the rumours at church but it's just gossip from old ladies who have nothing better to do.

Me: I know but that's not why I've been distant. I'm sorry but this is something I prefer to deal with, with the help of my children.

Funda: Will you say the same even when we are husband and wife? (I looked at him)

Me: That's actually what I wanted to talk to you about for a few days now. I can't get married to you. There is too much happening right now and I don't want to be far from Othu especially when she has her baby.

Funda: Nomhle, Othunyiweyo is a grown woman. A mother and soon will be a wife too. She doesn't need you to treat her like a baby.

Me: That's not what I'm doing. It's also not the reason why I'm cancelling this marriage business.

Finda: Marriage business? It sounds like a organisation's name. I'm too old for this so if that's what you want then I'll respect it. I do hope that you sort all your troubles out.

Me: I'm sorry.

Funda: It's fine. You're allowed to change your mind. I have to go back to church. Please tell me when Craig is expected to send his negotiators.

Me: In about a week's time. Thank you for not punishing him because of me. He really wants you to be his chief negotiator since he doesn't have family.

Funda: I'd never let him down after giving him my word. I know that you aren't a person who does such either and that's why I wish that you sort out whatever is weighing you down. I'm sad and disappointed but never hesitate to call when you need a listening ear. (I smiled)

Me: I'm sure I'll make that call to you soon. Thank you for understanding. It was much calmer than I thought. (he laughed)

Funda: I'm too old to be dramatic. Life has taught me that there is a reason behind everything. Would you like it if we prayed together before I leave. (I smiled and nodded)

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I walked over to his side and we held hands. He started to pray and I appreciated it so much. After saying amen he kissed my hands and said goodbye. He is a good man but my life is okay as is. I continued with my cooking while my favourite gospel tunes played at the background. Hours went by and the kids arrived. They are such a beautiful family. I told them to go change into comfortable clothes first. I set the table while they got ready. Chulu came running first and held my legs while looking up at me. I know she wants something when she does that.

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Chulu: Makhulu, I'll ask mommy if I can sit and eat in the lounge while I watch TV. Please let her say yes, please. (she whispered and I laughed softly)

Me: What's so interesting on that TV?

Chulu: Cartoons.

Me: And why are we whispering? (I asked in a whisper)

Chulu: So that mommy and daddy won't hear.

Me: You're just something else. Okay I'll back you up but only for today because eating as a family is important.

Chulu: I'll never ever ask again. (she smiled)

Me: Will see. Okay then I'll do it. (she held my waist tightly)

Chulu: Thank you. (Clay and Othu joined us)

Othu: You rushed out of the room so quickly you don't even have shoes on. Are you that hungry?

Chulu: Very hungry. Mommy, can I go eat in the lounge please.

Othu: But you stain the mat, Chulz. (Chulu looked at me)

Me: We will put a black plastic bag on it, Othu. Let her enjoy her day and relax as she chooses please. In fact I want to talk to you and Clay about something important and she's too young to hear it.

Craig: I hope nothing is wrong with your health, Ma.

Me: No, my boy. (he looked relieved)

Othu: Okay, you can go eat all alone in the lounge if you want. (Chulu smiled)

Chulu: Please bring my food I'll go sit so long. (she rushed to the lounge and we laughed)

Othu: I have a feeling she ran to you and soft soaped you.

Me: She actually did. You two can sit and help yourselves.

Craig: Well I'm already seated so I'll just dig in. It looks and smells amazing. I'm sure it tastes great too. Thank you, Ma. (I smiled)

Othu: Let me dish up for that one and get that plastic bag. The last thing that I want is for the Lott's to think we destroyed their furniture. (she dished up for Chulu and left us)

Craig: I became a member at the church today. (he looked at me with a smile)

Me: That's great

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my boy. I'm sure you'll be a great addition to the church. The young men need a role model such as yourself.

Craig: I'll help and serve in any way that I possibly can, Ma. It feels good to live a normal life for a change. I feel so free. I really want to be the best husband, father, son and friend and I feel like building a relationship with God will help me do that. I want to find spiritual fulfilment and not just be a part of a religion. I also want to impact lives even if it's just one. And you're right I've seen some boys at church who seem to lack some direction. Vuyo and I spoke today about starting a sports club. Perhaps our wives can have weekly meetings with the girls and we with the boys. It's nothing concrete yet but we have a vision now we just need to sit down and plan it well.

Me: I'm just proud of you. Seeing you doing positive things with this new chance at life makes me happy. I foresee two new

powerful couples in you and Othu and Yandi and Vuyo. I'm proud of you. (I kissed his cheek)

Craig: Thank you and O told me that you agreed to move in with us. I'm so happy and I hope you'll enjoy every second with us. Thank you for trusting me with your daughter and I'm sorry about yesterday. O didn't mean to upset you.

Me: That's why I want to talk to you two. I want to clear that up.

Craig: Only if you want to. You don't owe us an explanation.

Othu: Ma, did Craig tell you that he became a member today and we will soon start a youth Programme. All his idea and I'm a proud girlfriend.

Me: He told me and I'm just as proud.

Craig: If you two don't stop now I'll get drunk with all these compliments. Let's eat please. (we laughed)

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The three of us sat around the table and said grace. We then helped ourselves to the food and Othu mixed up things that don't necessarily mix but that's just pregnancy. We started to eat. I cleared my throat and looked at them.

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Me: My nunus, I have something very important to tell you. I thought I'd go to the grave with this but it seems life has other plans. Firstly I'd like to apologise for the way I reacted last night, Othu. I was caught off guard.

Othu: I was worried about you and not upset. You don't need to apologise

Craig: Are you sure you want me here? If not I'll just go join, Chulz.

Me: I want you to be here, my boy. Your family now and I want to share this with you.

Othu: We're listening so whenever you feel ready, Ma. (I took a deep breath and exhaled slowly)

Me: I'm not sure if that boy you spoke of is connected to us or not but his presence has proved to me that secrets are always revealed. This is not easy on me but I'll have to speak about it someday and that someday is now. Years ago when I was just fourteen I met a boy who was seventeen then I think. He was our village chief's nephew. We became close and I guess love formed. I didn't really have an understanding of love back then but I think that's what it was. Uhm, we got into a relationship and that led to physical intimacy. His older sister found out about us and ran off to tell the elders. The boy was promised to another family for marriage so when they found out about us

his family went crazy...They approached my family and I remember getting the beating of my life from my father that night and they forbade us from seeing each other. It was too late though because that one intimate encounter between us produced a child. (I blinked my tears away and Othu came to hold me)

Othu: Take your time, Ma. (she said while rubbing my back)

Me: Uhm, I told my mother who told my father and I thought they would follow tradition and go to the family of the boy to tell them so they can honour our family by paying damages but that's not what happened. Time went by and my mother told me that she found a woman who will take care of the baby. I felt hurt because I thought she'd say they'd raise the child at home as theirs. The following day I was sent to another village to live with a woman who insulted me day in and day out calling me all sorts of names associated with an immoral woman. She once wanted me to drink muthi that I didn't know but I refused because my gut told me it would hurt the life inside of me. From that day onwards I never ate anything she provided. I would live on fruit I'd pick from the trees and do chores for other people in exchange for food. Months went by and my pregnancy was going well. My mother arrived at that home just three days before I gave birth. I then went into labour and gave birth. They took her away the second she was

born. I didn't even get to see her face or hold her. A woman came saying she will be her mother and care for her, took my child and left just like that. They didn't give me chance to see her or hold her, nothing. My mother kept on telling me it's for the best and that I can be a child again. (I broke down in tears)

Othu: And you've kept this to yourself all these years, Ma? What they did was so wrong, just so wrong. (she also started to cry)

Craig: I'm sorry you experienced all of that, Ma. Do you have any details of the family? If you want I can help you find them.

Me: Nothing, my boy. For all I know they gave her to people from a foreign land. The only way I know it's a girl is because I begged the lady who was midwife to describe her to me after they took her away. She said it's a perfect, healthy girl and that she has a grown mark on her left hand.

Othu: A birthmark, that's perfect. If the family who looked for a Nomhle has a woman with a birthmark and is in her 50's she might be her.

Me: No, I don't want to meet her. She most probably think I'm a monster. My mom told me no one knew my name so I doubt it's her.

Craig: Unless someone who knew you told them. What happened to the father?

Me: He married the girl that was chosen for him and went on with life as if nothing happened. I also had to do the same. I've thought about looking for her when I was older but my parents never told me where the woman who took her life and who she was. It's best that I not bother. I'm sure my daughter doesn't know that she is mine so if I go and dig up such it will ruin her life.

Othu: What if your daughter is Bandile's mother, Ma. That would mean that she is looking for you and clearly wants you in her life. In that letter it said the lady is not well and might not have long. What if this is your chance to finally see and hold your daughter?

Me: I don't know, nunu. I'm so afraid.

Craig: Well that's why you have us. So that you won't be alone in this. O is right. This might be your last chance to finally see your daughter.

Me: Do you have this Bandile boy's number? I don't want to do things through the show. I can't deal with it publicly.

Craig: If you give me a chance I'll have it by tomorrow or Tuesday latest.

Me: I'd appreciate it a lot. I know you both see me differently now and I understand because I've been lying and saying your

grandfather was the first and last man I was with when that was a lie. (she smiled)

Othu: Never! If anything it tells me that you're a strong woman and you've been wronged. I love you, Ma and you having a child out of wedlock won't change that. Let's now try to move forward by finding my aunt and I might have lots and lots of cousins whom I look forward to meeting.

Craig: And they can come fill the seats at our wedding since neither of us have a big family. (Othu smiled)

Othu: You see? We need those cousins to come in their numbers. (I actually laughed)

Me: You're both being silly. Okay let's do it. Let's try to find her.

Othu: Just as long as she doesn't take my shine. I'm your daughter too.

Craig: You've had Makhulu all your life. (we laughed)

Othu: Don't care. (she said in a sulky voice and hugged me)

Me: My heart has enough space for more nunas but you're my best friend nunu. (she stuck her tongue out at Craig and he did the same)

Craig: Let me go and make some calls to get the Bandile guy's number. I'll go warm my food and sit in the study. Thank you

for sharing your story with us, Ma. We got your back. (he smiled and kissed my cheek)

Me: Thank you, my boy.

Craig: O, is the number of the home owners correct? It's just ringing.

Othu: Let's start looking for another house. They aren't selling.

Craig: We'll see. (he smiled and left)

Othu: I think Bandile is our link to your daughter. I feel it in my bones.

Me: I'm terrified. What if she tells me to go jump in front of a moving train?

Craig: Never! Anyone would be lucky to call you mother. Once she hears what happens she'll accept you. (he shouted from the kitchen and we laughed)

Othu: I hope you haven't put in listening devices here, Craig Knights. (he laughed and Chulu appeared)

Chulu: But you adults are making too much noise. Can't a child just have peace? (she said calmly and left)

Me: What just happened? (we looked at each other confused)

Othu: Chulumanco Zweni growing up happened.

Me: See why I don't want to go? I love these silly moments. (we laughed)

Othu: And we love having you here with us being a part of it all. We will find your girl.

Me: She's no girl to you. I'm afraid but let's do it. Our family seems to be growing. What does this Bandile boy do?

Othu: I don't know but he once mentioned he lives close by so I'm guessing his profession pays well. We'll find out when we meet him. I'll be with you every step of the way.

Craig: Me too, include me, O! (he shouted again and Othu laughed)

Othu: Craig too! (she shouted back)

Chulu: Noise! (she shouted from the lounge and I laughed)

Me: I'm actually feeling much better. You all are amazing. I love you. (we hugged)

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Telling them my secret actually felt great and the fact that they didn't judge me was even more wonderful. I love them so much. Chulu sounds like an old woman in a little girl's body but I love those moments she has. I'm so blessed to have them want me be a part of their little family. I've been wondering what my baby looks like and I'll finally see her though she's a

grown women now. Maybe even a grandmother herself. I do hope she'll forgive me for what happened but I was young and had no choice. All I remember about her is her healthy cry right after she was born and the image my imagination created about her from the midwife's description. I'm scared and nervous about this journey but with God and my children by my side I know all will be well. I forgave my parents long ago even when I'm still hurting. I guess now I have to forgive myself which is not easy. I've given her the name Nkosazana long ago though I never told anyone because her father was royalty. I'm sure the royal family forced mine to kill the child. It was done those days so a part of me thought my parents did what they did to spare the baby's life. I wonder what the woman who raised her named her and how her life was/is. Suddenly I'm excited and curious about her. I just hope God spares her so I'll know her better. I feel much better now and I wonder if this is not the cause of Kumkani's behavior because I know the ancestors don't like to be angered. Well so I heard and this might have angered them and they are punishing him because of me. I've got so many things that I need to correct and now is the time.

POPPY

Neli has been kind enough to let me stay longer but only because she pities me and because I'm injured so her job is to look after those who need her medical skills. Well that's what she said anyway. I'm feeling much better now and the swelling has gone down so much and the pain is bearable now. Zuko has been put of town working on some big case in Durban and I'm glad because she won't like my presence at her girlfriend's place. I've been pulling my weight around here and helping whenever I can with things such as cooking and cleaning because I don't want to seem ungrateful as I did when I lived with Zuko. I've been up for a while now and decided to make breakfast. Neli came in from her bedroom in a rush and looked for something.

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Me: What are you looking for?

Nelu: Car keys.

Me: You have this habit of putting them in that vase over there so go look in it. (I pointed and she went to it)

Neli: Found them, thanks you're a lifesaver. I need to get going. Have a great day.

Me: Why do you work so much? It's as if you you never rest.

Neli: I work at a public health care system. We are always understaffed so I've got no choice.

Me: I'm surprised that you and Zuko even have time for your relationship. Between your crazy shifts and her going away for work constantly it's tough I'm sure.

Neli: My babe and I make it work and neither of us are clingy so yeah. Speaking about Zuko, she'll be back by tomorrow afternoon so please make sure that tonight is your last night because I've found my soulmate in that one and you being here puts me at risk of losing her. You've been healing well so it should not be a problem.

Me: Yeah. (I said softly)

Neli: Bye. (she ran out the door)

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I'm a bit sad because I was hoping she'd say that I must stay longer but I understand. I've always depended on someone in my life so the thought of doing it all alone is scary. I finished making the breakfast and ate. My phone rang and it's Langa. It's the first time that he called since Kumkani's heart attack. I decided to answer maybe he'll offer me a place to stay.

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Me: Brother.

Langa: Don't brother me. You've had your phone off all this time and is no where to be seen. What did you do to my father? My mom said she left you with him then suddenly he has a severe stroke. (I sat up straight)

Me: Don't you dare accuse me of such crap. I didn't do anything to your cruel excuse of a father. He told me that I'm nothing to him and fell just as I was about to leave. I was curious to know what the cause was and guess what, brother? I saw pictures of you naked in bed with another man. So between you and me I'm sure his stroke was cause by you. He had this vision of you marrying a girl from a rich family and realised that it all won't happen. Not forgetting the fact that the man is disgusted by homosexual people. You killed him not me.

Langa: Sorry to be the one to burst your happy bubble but he is still alive and trust me he will come for you because after what you've just told me I gather that you were there when he had the attack but you chose to do nothing about it. Be ready, dear sister.

Me: I don't give a damn about what happens to me. Your father left me feeling dead and empty inside anyways. I hope that he lives so that I can get him arrested for all that he has done to me. You people are so evil. Othunyiweyo was right about all of you, damn pigs. (I dropped the call)

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He has the cheek to blame me when I'm sure he knows that Kumkani got sick because of his little secrets. Who still hides their sexuality these days? Langa needs to grow some big man balls and drop his sissy ones. I sat and ate because tomorrow I might not have anything to eat. I've called Licia but she said Brandon doesn't want distractions while they are dealing with this IVF thing of theirs. Yandi is not even an option because she's Othu's best friend. After I finished breakfast I did some chores and later went to bath. I made a few call trying to arrange some living space until I can think of a more permanent plan. I've also been thinking of apologising to Othu but I want it to be face to face. I remember that her school's first break is at 10am. I got dressed to go out and left to go to her work. I finally arrived and found the children outside already meaning it's break time. I took a deep breath and went in. The security let me in when I told him I'm Miss Zweni's sister. I first had to hear him go on about how kind Miss Zweni is. He said she's in her class and I hoped that Yandi is not with her. I found her sitting and eating and thank goodness she's alone. She was unaware of my presence so I knocked and she turned her head to face me.

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Othu: Poppy, I'm in no mood for you please. Just leave my class and never come back.

Me: I know I'm the last person you want to see but please hear me out. I've come to apologise and not cause trouble. I'm sorry for all that I've done.

Othu: Okay. (she said gently)

Me: That's all you want to say?

Othu: What do you want me to do or say? Run into your arms, kiss your cheeks and go on a sisters retreat?

Me: Okay you have a point.

Othu: Look, Poppy I've never had a problem with you. All that you did didn't affect me at all. I'm happy so no need to apologise but I accept your apology anyway. Thanks and all the best with your marriage. I hope your hubby treats you well.

Poppy: Actually things didn't go well. It turns out one of my blessers is the guy's uncle. Your dad s..

Othu: Oh so now his my dad again? (she laughed in disbelief)

Me: Kumkani didn't like it she he showed me those true colours you warned me about. It was terrible especially after giving him one of my organs and he let me have a virginity restoration surgery.

Othu: A what?

Me: Hymen-something, I keep on forgetting the name. He let me do it unaware of it all so that I'll be a virgin again.

Othu: Good for you girl. You got a second chance at purity. (she said sarcastically)

Poppy: Well I had an infection not so long ago but a good friend helped me but she can't anymore because her partner will be back soon.

Othu: So what now? (I shrugged)

Poppy: I'll see. I'll sleep in my car again.

Othu: Are you telling me this so that I can pity you? Poppy, Makhulu and I warned you until we turned red in the face but you saw me as enemy number one. You've been my friend for years. When during those years have I proven to be an evil person?

Me: Never. (I looked down)

Othu: Exactly. Look I'm sorry you are going through whatever and at times we must learn the hard way unfortunately. I do hope that you've taken some lessons from all of this. I don't hate to because like I've said nothing you did or said to me affected my life. It crippled yours instead. Your hatred for me caused you to damage yourself. You've had a tough life I'm

sorry about that but learn to listen when given advice. Me: I will. Can you please borrow me R500?

Othu: How will you return it?

Me: It's not like you need i...

Othu: See that rotten attitude of yours is exactly why no one wants to help you. Zuko took you in and you had the nerve to insult her house. Now I'm having a decent conversation with you and your big mouth just can't keep shut. Learn to think before you pollute us with your words. I'm not going to go "oh shame Poppy poor girl" on you. Yes, giving you the money won't cause me to starve but you said "borrow" meaning you have to return it. So is it wrong of me to ask how you'll return it? Don't you dare smart mouth me. (she cut me off in a calm yet stern voice)

Me: Sorry and you're right. (I said softly) I don't know how I'll return it.

Othu: Then don't borrow next time, just ask. I have a way you can repay me. The school is urgently looking for a cleaner so I can speak to Mr Thorn for you and you can start by tomorrow.

Me: Me a cleaner? I take it I'll have to clean toilets too. Do you know how filthy kids are?

Othu: Well they eat a lot and mix too much all at once so of course they'll need the toilet. Look I'm not about to go on my

knees to beg you. I actually had someone else in mind for the job but I now see you need it more so take it or leave it.

Me: I'm sure you're enjoying this.

Othu: That's your mistake. You think I care but I actually don't. I didn't care what you did or said then and I'm not about to now. It's either you clean toilets or you starve. I'm not about to sponsor your life. I'm no blesser.

Me: Okay I'll do it. Talk to the Thorn man.

Othu: You can live at my old place for this month because my lease contract is not over yet and I already paid. There's not much there but it will sure beat your car. I'll give you the R500 for food because you'll get paid on a weekly basis so you can feed yourself afterwards. You can also rent the flat once my contract ends. Get two more people to live with you and help you with rent.

Me: Okay and thank you.

Othu: You are welcome. I'm not the witch that you make me out to be. You need to wait until after the bell rings so we can go see the principle. I'll put in a good word for you

Poppy so please don't let me down by complaining or not showing up for work. You might look down on the work of cleaners but trust me they are important in the job market as much as the CEO. Don't undermine other people's work.

Me: I hear you, Othunyiweyo and thank you for your help. I appreciate it because I know you don't have to help me. I've hurt you a lot.

Othu: Also learn to listen when spoken to. What part of you didn't hurt me in any way didn't you understand?

Me: I guess a part of me hoped that I hurt you in a way and that shows that I don't deserve your generosity. (the bell rang)

Othu: Please wait outside. I need to wait for my children to come back in and give them something to do while we go to the office.

Me: Okay. (I walked out)

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She followed behind me and I watched as some of the kids in her class brought sweets and fruit for her from their break. She was smiling so much and hugged them all even the ones who came empty handed. No wonder the Yenge's liked her.

Kindness comes naturally for her and her helping me proves it also. The kids walked in and I heard her speak to them. She later appeared and told me to follow her. We went into the office greeted the secretary and went in to the principal's office. We knocked and entered. An old man came to open, greeted us with kindness and offered us seats. We sat and Othu got straight to the point after introducing me as her sister. Mr

Thorn smiled and said I can start as soon as possible if I want and I think me being Othu's sister made him take me. I said I'll start tomorrow and he said he'll get the contract ready. Othu went back to her class and Mr Thorn showed me the duties I'll be doing. We went into the boy's toilet and one even had poop on the wall. These little people are gross. I almost pucked. I can't believe this will be my life from now on. Who will I get to share the flat with because I'll never afford it alone. At least rent is sorted for a month. Mr Thorn and I parted ways and we'll see each other the next day. I went to Othu's class to thank her again and take the money but she said that I must wait until school is over. I can't believe she's doing this. I had no choice but to wait. Hours went by and she and Chulu finally appeared and they both didn't look too happy. She told me to get into my car and follow behind her. We went to a shopping mall and I thought maybe it's to withdraw the money but we went to buy food instead. She paid and pushed the trolley out to my car.

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Othu: Please open your boot and help me pack the bags in it.

Me: Wow, you got all of this for me? (I smiled)

Othu: Don't get too excited. I only did it because I don't trust to give you cash. You might call your party friends and go drink it. So I bought all you'll need and I'll give you R400 for taxi fare to

work. It'll be cheaper than driving your own car but if you have petrol you can choose whatever suits you best. I don't care if you drink that up because you're the one who will have to walk to work.

Chulu: Aunty Poppy, will you really live in our old place?.

Me: Yes, Chulz.

Chulu: Okay that's okay because my daddy said we will get a house with a garden so me and my brother/sister can play in.

Me: Daddy? (I looked at Othu)

Chulu: Yes, uncle Craig is my daddy. We live together and are a family. I'll be a flower girl when he marries my mommy. My sister/brother will come join us next year. The baby first needs to grow in mommy's belly and be strong.

Me: That's nice, sweetie. Congrats, Othu.

Othu: Thanks. Here is the R400 and the keys. The code to the alarm system is 5231. That will also be discontinued in a month but if you want to keep it you'll have to pay for it. Please keep the place in proper shape. Let me now if you'll take over the renting contract. (I smiled)

Me: I promise I'll keep it good and I'll look for girls to share it with. Thank you for everything, Othu. I came to apologise but

now I have a job and place to stay because of you. I don't deserve it.

Othu: I'm not one to kick a person who is already down. I think that's it from me. Don't be late tomorrow and read the contract before you sign. Bye. Come, Chulumanco let's go home.

Chulu: Bye aunty Poppy.

Me: Bye, sweetie. You're growing up so beautifully. Your mommy is best.

Othu: Bye. (she held Chulu's hand and they left)

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I looked at the food and I know it's worth way more than R500 and she also gave me money for taxi or petrol. I'll use both means to get to work depending on my situation on different days. I closed my boot and watched them drive off. I got into my car and drove off to Neli's. I was surprised to find her home but she said she's not well. I told her about my visit to Othu and it's results and she told me I'm lucky to have such a sister. She gave me her old beddings since Othu said the flat is empty and I thanked her. She asked to examine my private area to see if I'm healing. I'm sure I am though because the smell is gone and the pain is better. I pulled my skirt up and she put on her gloves and examined me. I'm so grateful to have her here. I'm completely comfortable around her now too so laying in front

of her with my legs wide open is no problem. She pressed gently and asked if it hurts and it didn't so she was glad. Just when she was about to finish Zuko peeked into the room and I quickly sat up straight. She didn't sat anything but just attacked me with fists. Neli tried to stop her but she didn't.

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Zuko: So you saw that you didn't succeed in seducing Othu's man and now you're after my woman? Well I'm not as kind as Othu. I'm going to beat that whore tendency out of you. (she continued to hit me but Neli got her off me)

Me: It's not what you think, Zuko.

Neli: Babe, it really isn't.

Zuko: I catch you busy between her legs and you say it's nothing? You both just disgust me. You can have her Poppy but you Neli you'll get hurt because she is a man eater. She's no lesbian. Sies man it even smells bad in here. (she rushed out looking disgusted)

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Neli followed her girl and I took my stuff and went out to my car before Zuko hurts me more. I bumped into Neli at the parking lot and I wanted to apologise but she just raised her hand to my face. Clearly she's hurt and angry so I decided to leave her alone. I got into my car and drove of to Othu's flat. So

her man came back to her and now they are planning a wedding? Not once did she brag about it in fact had Chulu not mentioned it I'd never have known. I finally got to the place and it was semi furnished but it had the essentials. I switched the fridge on and started to pack the food. I sent her a thank you text and also sent Neli one. I knew Zuko wouldn't take my calls so I sent her a essay like text to explain what happened. Neli has not once made advances at me actually 80% of the time she spoke about Zuko. I really hope that I haven't ruined things for them. I'm sure Zuko wanted to surprise Neli hence the fact that Neli expected her tomorrow. I cleaned the flat and cooked afterwards. I really don't deserve Othu's kindness. I'm sure had the roles been reversed I'd have given her the "I told you so" line. She's clearly a better person than me. I'll be cleaning poop off walls but beggars can't be choosers. From now on I plan to be grateful and also stop speaking ill of others. I can't afford to push more people away because I now realise that being kind and appreciative is what will get me going. I'll go apologise to Makhulu also and hopefully I can be a good granddaughter to her. I'm turning a new leaf. It's not a new year yet but I'll start being the new me today.

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I've been making endless calls to people who might help me with Bandile's number and I finally succeeded. Well I hope so anyway because it might not be his number anymore. Makhulu has gone to the hospital and I don't want to call while she's not here. Things between O and I are just beautiful. I feel like our communication has improved a lot. I'll have to make sure that I have enough money to send with my negotiators because I think her family won't make it easy but they shouldn't anyway. I've been waiting for her and Chulu to return because they are usually here by now. I checked my phone and it had a text from her saying they'll be a bit late. It was sent an hour ago. I was about to call them when they walked in. Chulu came running to me and hugged me. My lady came to give me a kiss and I could see she's not okay.

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Me: Want to talk about it?

Othu: So much happened today, baby but I'll tell you the rest after we talk to Chulu.

Chulu: Mommy, I'm sorry.

Othu: I'm sure that you are but we must still sit down and talk about what happened so that we can deal with it and move on.

Please sit down. (Chulu sat on top of me and rested her head on my chest)

Me: What's wrong, princess? Baby? (I looked at O and she sat)

Othu: Chulu's teacher came to me with a complaint. She said that Chulu made fun of a girl who had a skin condition. It turns out the child has scaly skin on parts of her body and some kids teased her calling her a lizard.

Me: And, Chulz was one of the kids being mean?

Othu: I'd like for her to be the one to answer that. (Chulz started to cry)

Chulu: I didn't mean to. The older kids were doing it and I thought it's okay to laugh with. I didn't call her a lizard. I promise mommy. I just laughed.

Me: But laughing is just as bad as calling her names, Chulz. Do you still remember when you got glasses and you were afraid you'd get teased?

Chulu: Yes, daddy. (she said in a whisper)

Me: Imagine the other kids had really teased you. How would that have made you feel?

Chulu: Very sad.

Othu: Exactly, bhabha. I'm sure Ruby felt just as hurt when you laughed while others teased her. Just because others do something it doesn't mean that you must too. It's okay to stand alone and not follow the majority even if it means others won't like you. I know you didn't call her a lizard but laughing is a form of teasing too. Did it feel nice to you when they teased her?

Chulu: No, it didn't. It broke my heart but when I saw the others laughing I thought it was right to do.

Me: If it doesn't feel right then it isn't, princess. Don't follow the crowds. If you can stand up for those who need your help. You didn't choose to have a eye problem and that other girl didn't choose to have a skin problem either. Those who make you do wrong things with them aren't your friend, my Chulz because tomorrow they might turn on you and tease you. I know you're no bully, my baby so don't let others turn you into something that you are not please.

Chulu: I'll never tease or laughing and anyone being teased again.

Othu: And please don't play with the naughty kids at after care. If you don't stop I'll have your teacher bring you to my class after your class and you won't get to play. I've also noticed that the manner in which you speak has changed and now I know it's because you play with older kids.

Chulu: I'll stop, mommy I promise. I'll apologise to Ruby again. I didn't mean to hurt her feelings and I'll also ask her to be my friend if she wants because no one wants to be her friend.

Othu: Ruby's condition is not contagious. Had it been she'd have been at a special school so you can hug her and play with her. Nothing will happen to you and your other friends.

Chulu: Can I please take an apple for her. I'll also make a card to say sorry.

Me: You can take the entire fruit if you want to. Look, some of the kids won't see the wrong in what they have done but you have and I'm proud of you. I'm sure Ruby would love to be your friend and one weekend mommy and I can organise for all your friends to come sleep over. (she smiled)

Chulu: Makhulu could tell us her many stories.

Me: Yes she will. You'll be a big sister soon so you'll have to be a good example. Not saying perfect though but the little one has to be proud to follow your lead.

Othu: Her owning up to her part in this and apologising just shows me that she'll be a good big sister.

Chulu: And I'll make sure no one teases the baby when she goes to school and when Ruby is teased again I'll tell the teacher and not laugh with. (she smiled)

Me: Yes, my princess. You'll be the best big sister.

Othu: No cartoons for today though and you have to put all your toys in their places. Especially the ones you left outside.

Chulu: I'll go do it now and then I'll make a card. Mommy, please help me with sweet sorry words.

Othu: Go pack your toys, make the card so we can do it together. I love you. (she got off and went to hug her mom)

Chulu: I love you too. (O wiped her tears off her cheeks)

Me: I love you both. Can I have a hug too please? (she smiled and came to hug me)

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Goodness all of this feels good. The fact that O waited until she got home before talking to her meant a lot to me because she wanted to include me. I hate scolding and being strict with Chulu but at times it's a must. She was wrong so she has to know that and apologise and think twice before thinking about doing it again. Today is no cartoons for her and she has to clean her room. O went to change and came back starting dinner. I watched as she did her thing.

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Me: Damn but I'm one blessed man. I love how you are, Miss Zweni. Thank you for being a great partner and mother. (she smiled)

Othu: You'll make me blush.

Me: Blush away. I'm sure she won't do it again.

Othu: I know but we will still deal with many more in future but I look forward to it all. She is a good girl but she will lose her way at times as we all have. All we can do is be there and hope she learns from it all.

Me: I thank God for choosing you to do this family thing with me. I'll be the best I can be for all of you, O. (she came to kiss me)

Othu: You already are. How was your day?

Me: I'm feeling stronger and my clients have been so supportive. I also found a number for Bandile. I want Makhulu to be here when we call.

Othu: Thank you so much, future husband. Your support means the world to me. (I kissed her)

Me: Let me try the number of the home owners again.

Othu: I actually saw nice houses. Let's cut our loses, baby.

Me: Let's hear what they will say first. (I dialed the number and it finally went through)

Mr Lott: Lott.

Me: Hello, sir. I'm Craig Knights husband to Othu, the woman renting your house. Do you have a minute?

Lott: Yes

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what can I do for you, Mr Knights. I hope nothing is wrong with the house.

Me: Not at all. In fact it's in such perfect shape that we want to buy it from you.

Lott: But I told Miss Zweni that we aren't sure if we will sell yet.

Me: I know, sir but you both are retired and are now traveling the world. You don't need such a big house and I heard both your kids are overseas and that's where you are. Wouldn't you rather be close to your children and grandchildren. We can pay above market price for it and in cash. (there was a soft laugh on the other line)

Mrs Lott: Hello, Mr Knights. I'm Pam Lott and I'm just laughing because what you are saying sounds so familiar. That's exactly how my husband got that house for us because I loved it so much. He went to knock on the previous owner's door and told

him he'd like to buy the house. Also offered to pay above market price. (we laughed)

Me: My wife loves it so much, Mrs Lott and I just want to give her this gift. Please allow me to be the husband of the decade.

Mr Lott: Did you steal my speech of years ago? (I laughed)

Me: Not at all, sir. I'm but a man trying to do what's best for his family. This house is a start. You'll always have the good memories in your heart. (they kept quiet for a long while)

Mrs Lott: Oh what the heck, you can have it, Mr Knights. We have been thinking about moving this side for good but we just needed a valid reason and now we do. To have you make new memories there with your family will make the place remain a home.

Mr Lott: The wife has spoken. We'll get in touch with our lawyer that side and he will contact you.

Othu: Thank you so much. We will look after it and when you are in SA again feel free to come for drinks and a visit.

Mrs Lott: We so will. You two enjoy your new life and please let home be each other and not a house. It won't always be easy but fight for it. Congratulations on your house.

Me: Thank you so much and we will keep the friendship foundation strong. Thank to once again.

Mr Lott: And remember the wife is always right. (we all laughed)

Me: I'll take the advice. You've been married for thirty years so I'd be a fool not to. I'll wait to hear from your lawyer.

Mr Lott: Okay I'll call him right away. Enjoy your evening.

Othu: We will thank you and I hope you enjoying your retirement.

Mrs Lott: We are, sweetie.

Me: Bye bye then. (they said bye and we ended the call)

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Othu sat on my lap and hugged me so tightly. She then kissed me so passionately that I wanted to rip her clothes off but we can't. I'm so glad that they agreed. All seems to be falling into place. She told me about Poppy and I honestly was not so happy about it especially after Poppy was rude to her but O has a kind heart so I'd have been shocked had she not helped. The pots were simmering nicely filling the air with a great aroma. Chulu was sitting with us making a card for Ruby. O and I thought it's best we have that financial talk. I went to get all my files and so did she. We joined Chulu who was sitting not minding us at all. The two of us begun to discuss a few things and gave each other full access to our money issues. She went through my file and her eyes nearly fell to the floor.

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Othu: Is this what to you have? I knew you're financially stable but not this much. (she looked at me)

Me: Well I've made smart investments and my business has security systems advanced then the usual one find here since it's imported so that means clients have to pay a lot.

Othu: I don't even have have half of this, baby. (she said softly)

Me: I don't care. Even if you only had your teacher's salary I still would not care.

Othu: And you want to get married in community of property?

Me: Yes unless you object which we can discuss but I don't want one foot out while the other is in. I'm in this for life.

Othu: Me too so I have no objections. I have put the majority of the money Tatiana left me away for Chulu. Her education and such.

Me: That's no problem. I was thinking we open an education fund that will benefit all our children apart from this of Chulu's. Let that be her money to do as she sees fit once she comes of age. We'll make sure she spends and invest it wisely of course.

Othu: That makes sense. That way she'll know that Tatiana left her something. We also have to sort out things of how we

would like our assets to be distributed should something happen to us.

Me: That's scary but you're right it must be done. I don't want our kids to go without now and when we are no more. I was actually thinking that perhaps we can have our traditional wedding right after the lobola. It will make me feel less guilty about living under the same roof as makhulu. I want to be living here as your husband as soon as possible and not your boyfriend.

Othu: That will take so much to pull through but I can ask Yandi's planner if she do a traditional wedding at such short notice. I also want to be Mrs Knights as soon as possible. (I smiled)

Me: I want that too. So now that we have full transparency as far as our money goes I think we can do everything together.

Othu: Yeah. This feel nice. It feel natural and I'm sorry I decided without you regarding Poppy.

Me: I'm not upset.

Othu: I'll also call my mom and ask to meet up with her.

Me: As long as she doesn't upset you again.

Othu: This time it'll be on my terms. She said she loves me and I didn't know how to react.

Me: One step at a time. (I kissed her) So have you decided on a birth plan?

Othu: Not really, baby but I do want to exercise during the pregnancy though. It helps with labor and I won't gain as much weight.

Me: You look beautiful no matter what. (we kissed)

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She went to finish cooking while I helped Chulu with sweet I'm sorry words. Not that I was good but I tried. I'm glad she'll befriend the girl. I can't imagine what trauma being called a lizard caused her. Nate will be going back to the States but will be back and hopefully for good. Makhulu also arrived at home and we told her we have a number. She looked nervous but said O could call. She did and it was the right number and she invited him to dinner saying she wants to apologies for the way I treated him. He agreed to come. Makhulu was a nervous wreck. An hour went by and we were all ready. Chulu will eat in the lounge again but not with TV. She'll have to keep herself busy with something else. The doorbell rang and I went to open. Bandile stood looking nervous and apologised for the other night while shaking my hand. I let him in and the ladies greeted. We offered him a drink and sat down while the ladies put the food on the table. We had a little small talk. O fixed a spot for Chulu to eat in the lounge and came back to join us.

Makhulu put the cutlery on the table with shaking hands. We all sat after a while and said grace. We dished up and started to eat. Bandile ate as if he hasn't eaten in days. We tried not to make him uncomfortable by staring but he felt the awkwardness and slowed down.

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Bandile: I'm sorry, it's just so good.

Othu: Thank you. (she smiled)

Bandile: You really didn't owe me an apology but thank you for inviting me.

Me: The way I reacted was uncalled for.

Makhulu: How old are you, my boy?

Bandile: 29, Ma. (he smiled)

Othu: You mentioned that you live around here. Where?

Bandile: I hope that you don't think I own such a house like yours. (he laughed awkwardly) I do gardening for a family who lives close by. They were kind enough to let me stay. They live four streets away and that's why I ran here that night because the house I live at was too far and I feared the thugs were following me.

Othu: Did they take anything?

Bandile: No, sis Othu. I have nothing so there was nothing to take.

Makhulu: Where are your parents?

Bandile: My mother is in Bizana but she's not well. My younger brothers are looking after her while I'm here looking for work. She's sick though.

Me: We once watched a show of someone looking for a loved one. They had your name so I'm wondering if it's you?

Bandile: Yes, it is. My mother found out that she was not who she thought she was. I'm trying to help her find a Nomhle Tyini.
(Makhulu coughed)

Othu: Do you have a picture of her?

Bandile: It's in my room at the resident I live at. She is a beautiful woman though. A strong and kind woman.

Othu: I'm sure she is. (she looked at Makhulu)

Bandile: She is hoping that her mom will know her once she sees her. That's her wish to meet her biological mother but we don't have a picture, nothing. Just that name. She has a mark on her arm and maybe her mom will recognise her by it. I have a feeling that I'll meet my grandmother soon and if she's no more we'll at least meet her children. We don't want money. We just want to know them.

Makhulu: Please excuse me. I don't feel too well. Goodnight, my boy. (she stood and left)

Othu: I'm sorry. I'll go check on her quickly. (she also stood and left us)

Bandile: I hope she is okay.

Me: I'm sure she will be.

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We continued to eat and it sounds like they are struggling a lot. O came back saying makhulu is laying down. Some time went by and we finished eating. O packed some food for Bandile and he left. She wanted to drop him off but he didn't want to be a burden. He thanked us and left.

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Othu: She became too overwhelmed.

Me: That's understandable. (Makhulu walked in)

Makhulu: I'm sorry for being so rude, nunus. I suddenly just felt light headed. I don't think that I have the strength to go through with this.

Othu: Ma, if she's her then you heard him say that she's sick. Please don't take too long and regret it. There's a reason why

God directed him here and you can see that he is struggling. If we are his family won't it be cruel to just watch it happen?

Me: O, please not now. Let's go to bed and tomorrow is another day. This was just day one. Ma, we'll wait for you to be ready to tell him the real reason we called him here. You are the victim in all of this but it doesn't mean it's easy on you. Take your time but O is right not too long. The way I see it he is not angry at you and I'm guessing his mother isn't as well.

Makhulu: I know and I'll be better tomorrow. Just seeing him was too much. Thank you for all you've done me. Let's pray so I can go lay down.

Othu: Don't forget to take your pills.

Makhulu: I won't, mommy. (we laughed)

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We went to the lounge and the four of us knelt down and Makhulu prayed. She prayed for her daughter too and also for Bandile. After the prayer we hugged and she went to bed. O went to help Chulu with bathing while I cleared the table and packed the dishes in the dishwasher. After a while we tucked Chulu in after reading her a story. O and I went to cuddle on the couch with a tub of ice cream of which she ate half of. We decided its best to not rush Makhulu because this can't be easy on her but we'll encourage her to not let it go though. She and

her daughter have a lot to talk about and to forgive. O and I also went to shower and I don't want to reveal that I can walk with crutches yet. Well it's only a few steps but it's progress. I want it all to be a surprise. My doctor is also happy with my progress and that makes me happy. Life is looking good and hopefully the good will always outweigh the bad.

OTHU

This issue of Makhulu has been making me worry a lot because she's not young anymore and might just end up getting sick. The fact that she isn't taking action out of fear also worries me. If Bandile's mother is her daughter then time might not be on our side. I know for a fact that she yearns to meet her daughter. I can't believe she's been dealing with all of this alone but I understand why she kept it quiet. To be a teen mom in her time was a shame no girl wanted to face. I've never met her parents but what they did was not right. Should any of my kids go through that I'll help her/him raise the child but not do everything for them either because no lesson comes from spoiling a child. I'm excited to meet my aunt and if she's Bandile's mom then I'll have three cousin brothers. That would be so amazing. Bandile seems so down to earth and so full of respect. He calls me sisi when I'm in fact his junior. Days have gone by and makhulu still isn't ready. Had she been my age I'd have dragged her there by force but I can't. Poppy has been working well and I'm glad because it's for her own good. This is just temporary until she can find a job within her field of study. It's break time and I sat with Yandi and watching her eat her salad while I had last night's not so healthy leftovers.

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Yandi: Well it seems your sister is committed to the work. (she rolled her eyes and I laughed)

Me: Friend, it's good to forgive and let go.

Yandi: I know but when those that I love get hurt by someone I don't forgive easily. I'll try though. When Zuko told me what she saw I thought that Poppy will target all our partners.

Me: I'm glad she and Neli has sorted that out. Oh my goodness we are just terrible friends to each other. I can't remember the last time we caught up. I don't know what is going on with Licia and her trying to get pregnant. I haven't met Zuko's bae and you I know all about just because I see you almost everyday.

Yandi: You're not the only guilty one. We must catch up soon. So are things still fine at home?

Me: Yes and no. At least Chulu apologised to the girl they laughed at and she said she befriended her. Craig and I are great. Makhulu is going through some stuff but I'd rather not say anything now. I'm so sorry I couldn't go with to support you during your lobola negotiations last week.

Yandi: If you apologise again I'll throw this tomato in your face. (we laughed) All went well. The planning is going well.

Me: Will Zandi be able to plan a traditional wedding that's in East London within a week?

Yandi: Do you want to do it so soon? (she smiled)

Me: Why wait, friend? I love the man and I'm about to have his baby. So we we hoping during the week the elders do their negotiations and should all go well have the traditional celebration that weekend.

Yandi: Oh my word! It's all just so exciting. My best friend and I will be Mrs Gumede and Mrs Knights by the end of the year. Our men getting along helps a lot too. They are even working on that youth group they want to start in church. I have a feeling that our houses will always have visitors.

Me: Isn't that what makes a house a home though? I'm so looking forward to it. Hopefully by then Craig would be walking.

Yandi: He's not paralysed so he'll walk soon. Why don't you guys have your white wedding in December also? You won't be showing too much I think.

Me: Knights actually mentioned it. I'm just always worried about the short notice issue for the event planner.

Yandi: It'll be a challenge but that's why they get the big bugs. Will you and Craig cope financially. I mean it's the house, his medical bills, Chulu's fees, cars, wedding and a baby on the way?

Me: We are coping, friend thanks. His business is doing well and I'm not broke either so we're fine. He is amazing, Yandi.

Yandi: A year ago you said no man would marry you but look at God. Everything will work out you'll see.

Me: Has bhut Vuyo's sisters accepted you yet?. (she clicked her tongue)

Yandi: Those three are still hung up on an ex he had in matric. My father in law adores me and my mother in law too so they are a non factor. All they know is sit at home and gossip about those trying to make a living for themselves. Oh my word, Othu let my future kids not inherit their habits. (I laughed)

Me: Well we don't have control over that. I so wish Craig had one person to call family.

Yandi: Girl be happy that you don't have to deal with in law drama. (I laughed)

Me: Yeah true. I've heard some horror stories but I know your man has your back so you'll be fine. Are you two fine financially? With sisters who sit and do nothing with their lives I take it bhut Vuyo has to support them.

Yandi: He actually wanted to stop sending money now that we are to start our own family but I had to tell him not to. Friend, parents are important and him sending money is a way of saying thank you to them for all they have done for him. It's not about his sisters. I told him to continue supporting his parents

since mine are okay. I don't want him to change now that I'm his wife. We'll be okay after it all so don't worry.

Me: You're right and I'm glad you told him not to stop. You'll make a great wife, Yandi. You two have been in this longer than Craig and I so we look up to you two.

Yandi: As we will when we have kids. You make parenting look like a breeze.

Me: It's not yho but it's a joy. Soon the little miss will be a teen and I'm not really looking forward to that. (we laughed)

Poppy: Hey. (she said walking in and we looked at her)

Me: Hey.

Poppy: I'm on my tea break so I thought I'd pop in since I know you two eat together.

Me: Grab a seat. (Yandi raised a brow)

Poppy: Thanks. (she smiled and sat)

Me: So how are you?

Poppy: Good. Even put out notice for roommates and don't worry I listed that they must have sober habits.

Me: That's not my apartment, Poppy so you'll have to reassure the landlord of that.

Poppy: I will. Yandi, how is wedding planning?

Yandi: Fine thanks.

Poppy: I thought I'd have been asked to be a braids maid by now. (she laughed awkwardly)

Yandi: Well my bridal party is complete but I'll send you an invite.

Me: She even risked asking me to be her maid of honour.

Poppy: Well I'm not surprised. In the group you two have always had that bond you don't share with any of us. So when is your wedding, Othu?

Me: We don't know yet. (she nodded)

Poppy: Well do it soon before you start to be as big as a house and that post pregnancy body won't be the sexiest either. (she laughed alone)

Yandi: That's just rude. You see why I want to keep her at a safe distance? She just runs her mouth. She's always been like this.

Poppy: It was a joke, Yandisa.

Yandi: Body shaming another woman never is.

Me: Let's not argue. Thanks, Yandi for always having my back but I'm honestly not bothered. I'm sure my husband will love me even if I'm as big as a house, Poppy.

Poppy: Yeah I'm sure. I'm sorry. I'll think before I speak. I'm still trying to not be the old me. (the bell rang)

Yandi: I'll see you second break, friend and I'll see you around, Poppy. (I smiled and walked out)

Poppy: She has never been a Poppy fan. Is it fine if I sit and eat here?

Me: The kids are already waiting to come in so no you can't. (she nodded)

Poppy: I understand. I'm really hoping we can mend our relationship, Othu. Where do you live now? I want to apologise to Makhulu.

Me: Now is not the best time. We have a lot going on but I'll text you her number and you can call her. I'm sure once she's okay she'll make time to get to know you. She loves family and you're family. (she smiled)

Poppy: Okay let me leave you. (I nodded)

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I watched as she walked out and stood to let my learners in. The day went on as usual and I have decided to also keep Poppy at a distance. I don't want her coming to my house as she pleases just because I've shown her kindness. She isn't Craig's favourite person so I don't want him to be

uncomfortable. Hours went by and before I knew it second break came. My phone rang and Craig's name appeared on the screen. I couldn't help but smile.

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Me: Miss me? (he laughed)

Craig: A lot especially after the physiotherapist hurt me. I told him my woman would sort him out. (I laughed)

Me: I'm not going to do that. The pain is a part of the healing. You'll be fine, baby. Is something wrong?

Craig: Not at all. Makhulu has decided to tell Bandile tonight and also wants to meet his mother so that they can see if they are related or not.

Me: Wow that's great. I don't know what you did to convince her but thank you, baby.

Craig: She actually came downstairs and told me. She left now to see your father and tell him that we are leaving tonight.

Me: Woah what do you mean tonight?

Craig: She said she wants to meet the woman as soon as possible. I book a flight for us all.

Me: Craig, are you even allowed to travel?

Craig: Yeah I am and I asked my doctor it's all good. We figured since its Friday you would not mind.

Me: I don't I'm actually glad to hear that she'll go see the woman. I'll come straight home after work so I can pack.

Craig: O, we will only go for the weekend. (I laughed)

Me: A girl has to be prepared for anything. I'll call Bandile and have him go to the house.

Craig: Makhulu has done that already. It wasn't easy but she did it. We'll see you later okay.

Me: I love you.

Craig: I love you, baby. (I smiled and we ended the call)

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Oh wow I can't believe Ma Zweni has finally agreed to go through with this. It makes me so happy and having Craig supporting me is amazing. I dialed my mom to tell her that I can't meet up with her tomorrow. She answered after the first ring.

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Mama: Othu. (she said softly)

Me: Hello, mama. How are you?

Mama: Good. I'm sitting here and mentally picturing our day tomorrow.

Me: And that's why I have called you. I won't be able to make it.

Mama: Oh okay. (she said in a disappointed whisper)

Me: Mama, I'm not trying to ignore you. Something came up and we have to go somewhere urgently. If I can we can have dinner next week because the week after that it'll be my lobola negotiations.

Mama: Wow! That's great and I figure it'll be at Makhulu's house.

Me: Yes it will and if you want to come with then you are welcome.

Mama: I'll be there. I can't wait for it.

Me: I also want to talk to you about, Tata. I know you left him but he is still your husband and leaving all things concerning him to makhulu who is old is not right, mama. Ease her load as best you can. We have offered to put him in a health care center until he recovers but while there you need to put your number in the contact list. There will be times when makhulu won't be able to go see him and you as his wife need to. You've been with him in the good so do so now in the bad also, both you and Langa.

Mama: Goodness you sound so grown and mature. Yes, I'll do that I promise. When is he going to be taken to the center.

Me: If all goes as planned then Monday. Don't worry about the costs.

Mama: Okay I'll do my bit as his wife. I was looking forward to tomorrow but I understand. I just hope you are all okay.

Me: We're fine, thanks. I'll see you soon.

Mama: I love you.

Me: Uhm...okay thank you. Bye-bye. (I ended the call)

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I still don't know how to respond to her I love you. Whenever she says it my heart skip a beat for some reason. The bell rang and the day went on as usual. Hours went by and we finally went home. I went to get Chulu and she was standing with some lady. I walked closer and greeted them.

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Lady: Hello, you must be Chulu's mom. I'm Julie, Ruby's mom and I just want to tell you that you have a great daughter.

Me: Yes she is. I'm glad that we could finally meet. (we shook hands and smiled)

Julie: Ruby came home one afternoon with such a big smile on her face and she said it's because she got a new friend and that friend hugged her. She's never had friends and let alone a hug from other kids so today I made time to come and meet her special friend.

Me: I'm just glad that they get along now.

Julie: I'm sure you're in a hurry. I'll let you go. I'm on leave so I'll pick my daughter up myself for a few days.

Me: I guess I'll see you around them. Bye, Ruby. (she looked at me and smiled)

Ruby: Bye, Mrs Zweni. Have a good weekend.

Me: Thank you and you too. (we said goodbye and left)

Chulu: Mommy, when will you and daddy plan the sleepover?

Me: Soon but we have to go pack. We are going away for the weekend.

Chulu: All of us?

Me: Yip, we are going to Bizana. Chulu: Are there kids there?

Me: Well of course. There are kids all over.

Chulu: I'm sure it will be nice. (she smiled)

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We got into the car and drove off. I'm feeling a bit tired but I'll have to get energy from somewhere. We finally arrived home and found Makhulu and her Clay already sitting with Bandile. He stood immediately and helped me with my laptop and handbag. I smiled and thanked him. It seems like there is awkward silence though. We greeted and I told Chulu to go choose the clothes she'd like to go with and she ran to the room. I sat and waited for Makhulu to say something because we can't just tell Bandile when she'll change her mind again. She cleared her throat and shifted in her seat.

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Makhulu: Bandile, my boy. I'm sure that you're wondering why we have invited you over once again.

Bandile: Not at all, Mama. My mom did the same thing when she was well. She'd invite even strangers and help them. (he smiled)

Makhulu: She sounds like a lovely woman but we have a reason for calling you here and it's time that I tell you what it is. I ask that you first please listen to me and then ask and say what you want afterwards.

Bandile: I hope I haven't caused trouble. I apologised again to Mr Craig for that night.

Craig: Please stop calling me Mr Craig. Just Craig is fine. (he laughed)

Makhulu: Okay now please listen carefully. (she told him the story)

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One would think that hearing it a second time would not make me cry but I found myself crying again and so did makhulu. Bandile stood and walked to the window while she spoke. He turned after she was done and he was also crying. He wiped his tears off with the hat he held in his hand and covered his eyes with it for a long while. Emotions were so high in the room. Makhulu told him the description of her daughter from what the midwife told her. Bandile's tears flew down uncontrollably while he nodded as makhulu spoke and his eyes became red. I think he is nodding because the description matches his mom's features especially the birthmark. Craig brushed my hand lightly while I brushed Makhulu's back. Bandile walked to makhulu and dropped to his knees, laid his head on her lap and wept. I could see that she wanted to hold him. Her hands were shaking but she finally put them on his head and consoled him. She kissed his head and brushed his back lightly. It was a moment of pure beauty and peace. I know we have to do DNA tests and all that to be 100% sure but something tells me that his mom is my grandmother's first born. Bandile lifted his head and smiled.

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Bandile: Oh the heavens have agreed. I declared that I'm going to meet my mother's family soon and it happened. Ma

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will be so happy. She has been wondering about you since we heard that she is not really the child of the woman that raised her. I'm sorry that you had to go through all of that, makhulu. I actually saw some resemblance to my mother but I didn't want to raise the topic. I'll work hard and save money so that I can have Ma come to Cape Town. She's not well but I know she'll get the strength from somewhere because she wants to meet you.

Makhulu: I hope that she will understand. My boy, you do understand that we have to do tests and all so let us not get our hopes up.

Bandile: Yes, yes Makhulu but all of me feels good so I'm sure the tests will be positive.

Craig: You won't have to save to bring you mom. We are going to her. (his eyes widened)

Bandile: Thank you, Mr Craig. (he stood and shook Craig's hand so much)

Craig: We'll have to work on that Mr part I see but all in due time. For now go and pack we are flying out in a few hours.

Bandile: Flying? Like in the plane? (he looked shocked)

Me: We could drive but I won't be able to drive that distance alone. I hope you're not afraid of flying. (he smiled and shook his head quickly)

Bandile: I've never been on a plane before but I'm sure I'll be fine. I can't believe that I'll be flying. (he said with excitement)

Makhulu: Well before you go pack. Can I please get a proper hug? (she opened her arms and he flew into them)

Me: I'll drive him to where he stays and talk to his employers if need be.

Craig: I'm sorry you have to do all of that. I'll heal soon, baby and you won't have to drive. We will land in Durban International airport so you'll have to drive the two hours and few minutes to Bizana.

Me: That won't be a problem but I've never driven there so it's best we book into a B&B and wait until the morning.

Craig: Of course because I don't want you driving at night anyway. I've booked accommodation online already. So they'll be expecting us. (I nodded)

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Bandile finally let go of makhulu. I've never had to share her with a cousin before. I really hope this is the end of the search. Bandile and I drove to where he lives and stays. An elderly Indian couple live there and they said it's fine he can go. We went to his room at the back which was so small. He packed two shirts and a jean into a backpack. I realised that it's all that he had. I didn't like it one bit. He went out to go get his towels from the washing line so I sat down. I saw a book on his bedside table and paged it. It's drawings of a house. The house always looked the same but not the garden. He walked in and I apologised but he smiled and said it's okay.

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Me: Is it your dream house?

Bandile: The drawings aren't focused on the house, sisi. The focus points are the gardens. I like plants. My boss says I've got green fingers. Not sure what it means.

Me: I think it means your hands can turn any garden to magic. Have you ever thought of studying Landscape design or a similar thing? (he looked at me)

Bandile: Studying was never an option. I'm eldest so as soon as I finished matric I had to work. I've been doing people's gardens at home too while I was at school and after. My hands aren't

afraid of work so if you and Mr Craig need something done don't hesitate. (I smiled)

Me: Well we're about to buy that house so we just might. I hope that we are family. (he smiled)

Bandile: Me too, sis Othu.

Me: Let's go we can't miss our flight. I hope you don't mind that we will sleep in Durban for the night.

Bandile: I have a friend but his house is small.

Me: We found a B&B. (his eyes widened again)

Bandile: Like on TV that has showers? I've always wanted to wash in a shower. The one here in my room doesn't work but sometimes I'll stand in it and pretend I'm showering. My brothers won't believe it when I tell thrm. (he said with a child like excitement and I smiled)

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Goodness there is so much that he has not experienced. He has never eaten Pizza. Little things that I take for granted are a big deal for him. We got to the house, packed and were all ready to go. I really hope travelling won't cause problems to Craig's health. Chulu was so excited and Bandile even more than her. They kept on making flying plane sounds in the car and laugh. The taxi finally arrived at the airport and we made our way in

and went through all airport processes. Bandile looked all around him with a smile on his face. Craig made fun of him a bit but innocently so. I think he won't stop calling us Mr Craig and sis Othu anytime soon so we'll have to get used to it. After some time we finally boarded the plane safely and lifted off. Bandile was looking out the window and all the city lights made him so excited. Goodness he makes me feel so appreciative of my life. He only has about four shirts and two jeans but yet he seems content unlike us who always want to buy something though our cupboards are filled with clothes. I held Makhulu's hand and she looked at me with a smile. I rested my head on her shoulder and she rested hers on mine. I know she's scared but she needs not be because we are here. Even Chulu is in her own way though she doesn't know what is really happening. We love her and I'm sure her daughter will too. They must just make the best of this moment that they have together and even if Bandile's mom is not my aunt we won't give up until we find my real aunt because I know it's important to Makhulu. What's important to her is important to me.

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#MAKHULU

Something about being around Bandile feels right. I don't want to have high expectations and end up disappointed. I'm hoping that his mother is my daughter so that we can finally fill this

void I've had for years. A void I'm sure she's been feeling too. Today is Saturday. The B&B that Clay booked us into was beautiful and their service even better but I just couldn't sleep. I'm so nervous about being here. We all decided it's best we get up early because Othu usually becomes tired by 11am one would swear she's showing already but I understand that pregnancies are not the same. We got ready and met at the dinning area for breakfast. Bandile loves giving hugs and I don't mind because I love receiving them. He seems very excited and couldn't stop talking about his first flying experience. I don't like flying but I had no choice this time. They rented a car last night so that's what we will use to drive to Bizana. Craig doesn't like the idea of his fiance driving long distance one bit. It makes me laugh because Othu is pregnant but she's not sick so she can drive unless her doctor advises otherwise. Chulu is also excited though she doesn't know why we are here. We finished eating, packed our bags in the car and off we went from Durban to Bizana. Othu and Clay sitting in front and the three of us in the back. Chulu needed to use the toilet so we had to make a quick stop at a garage. The men stayed in the car while we went to the restrooms. Chulu went in and we waiting by her cubicle door.

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Othu: Only about an hour and few minutes left before we get there. How are you feeling? (I exhaled loudly).

Me: Scared, nervous, excited and unsure. I didn't ask Bandile the life his mother lived because I think it's best it comes from her. My mother assured me that she left her with good people though.

Othu: Then you have nothing to worry about then.

Chulu: Mommy, they don't have toilet paper, only newspapers in here and I'm doing number two. (we laughed softly)

Othu: Wait I have some tissues in my bag. (she took them out and gave them to Chulu)

Me: There's no turning back now. We told Bandile we might be his family and you and Clay have gone through all this trouble.

Othu: We just don't want you to waste more time, Ma. Everything will be okay and even if she chases us away we'd at least have tried. (I smiled)

Me: You're right. Even Funda has been sending me messages of encouragement though he is not aware of what's happening .

Othu: He is a kind man and he's dealing with the break up so well.

Me: Yes, he is. (we smiled)

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Chulu finally appeared and went to wash her hands. Othu went to the shop and went to get all the things she thought Bandile has not eaten. My girl is just so kind and considerate. We got to the car and we drove off. Each board we passed was a reminder of how close we are and my palms even started to sweat. After a some time we finally arrived at our destination. Othu first made a stop at a shopping square we went to buy some groceries. I said a short prayer as Bandile have Othu directions to his home. I need the Lord to give me strength to do this. I've never been here and it's a small town but beautiful non the less. The roads are a bit bad because we had to avoid a few potholes on the way. The car finally stopped and my heart started to beat so fast that a part of me feared that it would suddenly just stop. Bandile got out and got Clay's wheelchair and helped him on it. He hates being pushed so I wasn't surprised when he wheeled himself. Chulu fell asleep on the way and her father didn't want her to be woken up so he put her on his lap as we made our way inside. The house was just so small and it's difficult to believe that four people live in it. A little boy came out with a basin filled with water. He put it down as soon as he saw Bandile and ran to hug him. He introduced him as Anathi the second born. Anathi shook all our hands with a smile and even asked if we'd like some tea. Such great hospitality. Bandile asked us to follow him and we did.

The inside of the house looked even worse. It's not dirty just small. It was a one room that was divided by a curtain. The flooring was all just soil and clearly some of them sleep on it since there's only one sleeping area. I could see that Othu and Clay's hearts were just as broken as mine at the situation. Bandile vanished into the area with the curtain and we hears voices. I held Othu's hand even tighter and she brushed mine lightly and smiled trying to calm me. After a while Bandile came holding a woman's hand and I had to blink away my tears. We finally were able to see her face. Othu looked at me.

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Othu: Your twin. (she whispered and smiled)

Bandile: Ma, these are the guests that we spoke about. They are from Cape Town and have come here to see you. They will tell you the reasons. The is Ma Zweni, next to her is sis Othunyiweyo her granddaughter and the gentleman is Mr Craig he is sis Othu's husband and the sleeping one is little Chulu. She's daughter of Mr Craig and sis Othu. This is my mother Mrs Nokulunga Phillips. (he said smiling and she smiled too)

Lunga: Good morning, oh but you are all so beautiful. Pity the baby is sleeping. (she held Chulu's cheeks gently while smiling) I hope that these boys have offered you tea.

Othu: Anathi has, Ma thank you. (she sat)

Lunga: I also hope Bandile has not caused trouble. Why else would you come here? (I suddenly just lost my voice)

Craig: We have not come here due to bad reasons, Ma. Bandile has caused no trouble. Makhulu, would you like to be the one to say our reasons for our visit? (he looked at me)

Othu: Ma. (she shook me gently and I looked at her)

Me: Yes and thank you for welcoming us in your home. How are you?

Lunga: For some reason I feel a bit stronger today. I just told Bandile about it but I'm not complaining, sisi. Apologies for the waiting. They first have to go put water on the fire outside.

Othu: We are in no rush, Ma. Don't you worry about us.

Lunga: Okay, my girl. I don't mean to rush you but I'm curious about why you are all here.

Othu: Ma? (she said softly)

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I took a deep breath and exhaled. I just have to do this. I looked at Nokulunga who looked at me with concern. She put her hands on the table and I saw her birthmark and I just knew that I have to do this. She indeed does look like me and I have a feeling that she's my child. I can't explain it but a mother just knows. I told her who I am and introduced myself as Nomhle

Tyni instead of Zweni. She jumped up from her seat a little holding her chest. Bandile asked her to sit back down and she slowly did not breaking eye contact with me. I continued to tell her the rest of the story and by now all the women were in tears. I finally finished and she stood and walked around to where I sat. I thought she'd point to the door and tell me to go out but she didn't.

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Lunga: Oh mama! Oh mama!.(she let out a bitter cry and Clay decided to go out with Chulu)

Me: I'm sorry.

Lunga: The life that I've lived was not a nice one and I have always wondered why my mother treated me so badly. When she once told me out of anger that I'm not hers it finally made sense. Mama, she used to beat me and at times I'd sleep outside in the dog house. (I felt crushed) I've never gone to school. I don't know what it feels like to sit in a school desk. I can't read nor write. She used to plug the iron in and wait until it's hot and punish me for the sins of her children by burning me with it. I have burn mark all over my back. Oh mama, the life I've lived was not a life.

Me: I'm... I'm sorry. (I said with a shaking voice) I never wanted you to have that life. My mother told me you'll be fine and

cared for. I was too young to go against their wishes...only fourteen. (she wrapped her arms around me and I cried so much)

Lunga: I have forgiven you long ago. At first I was agree but I forgave. Now I understand much better too why you did it. I'm sorry they took me from you.

Me: Describe the woman who raised you.

Lunga: Bandile go get that old album. I'll show you a picture. I've forgiven her too. She's dead now but I forgave her before she took her last breath.

Bandile: Here, Ma. (he gave it to her and she pointed to a picture)

Me: Th...that is the woman that I lived with while pregnant. I know how cruel she was. I'm sorry, my nunu. Oh God knows that I didn't want it all to happen as it did. I thought my parents would take you and I would have been happy with you thinking I'm your big sister but they chose to give you away.

Lunga: I had to force your name out of her when she laid on her deathbed. Even then she didn't want to see me happy. Oh this is the happiest day of my life. Look I can even dance now because my mother is here. (she started to dance)

Bandile: Ma, don't overdo it.

Lunga: My boy, my mother is here. I come from this woman. You look beautiful, Mama.

Othu: You two actually look like sisters. (she laughed while wiping her tears off)

Lunga: Oh Mama! (she started to cry again and hugged me) I've even forgotten the bad days I've had now that you are here I feel comforted. People would tell me to not bother looking for you asking what I'd do with a mother in my old age but I'm glad that I did. Oh thank you, Jesus. (I stood and held my child properly)

Othu: How old are you, dabawo?

Lunga: I'll be 59 on...

Me: 1 December. (I cut her short and she nodded)

Lunga: I've never had an ID because that woman didn't want to go with me to have one made and that means my children don't either. Bandile wrote matric with a birth certificate but by grace they allowed it.

Me: We will sort it all out. I also want you to get ready so that we can go to a hospital.

Lunga: They don't see what's wrong, mama.

Me: Let's try the private ones. They have means to help.

Lunga: Okay if you think it's best. A child must not argue with it's mother. (I laughed a bit) My baby, please call me Dabawo again. (she looked at Othu)

Othu: Dabawo, my Dabs. (Lunga jumped up and down like a child)

Lunga: I'm not crazy I promise. I just fail to express my joy. It's overflowing. I've never been called Dabawo. You look so beautiful and if you call me Dabs then it means I have a brother. I can't wait to meet him.

Othu: Soon. (she hugged us)

Lunga: I love you, Mama. I'm sure you thought I'd swear at you and throw pots at you but no. I love you so much. I do, I do, I do. I'm ugly now due to being sick but I can see that I look like you. I can show you my old pictures and you'll see.

Me: I do. (Chulu walked in)

Chulu: Mommy. (she said softly and walked to Othu)

Lunga: Hello, little Chulu.

Chulu: Hello. (she said softly)

Othu: She's a bit grumpy after her afternoon naps but once she's herself yho you'll wish she could stop talking at times. (we laughed)

Lunga: I have a grandchild. (she smiled) Bandile is not planning on giving me any so the timing is perfect.

Bandile: I can't afford a family of my own, Ma. (he said shyly)

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Craig also joined us and we had that tea and it was good. I didn't expect her to be so welcoming. Othu asked what did I expect when she's my daughter. It's clear that it's her. Her birthmark and the picture of the woman I remember taking her. To know that she had such a sad and difficult life broke me heart. No one deserves that not even an animal. She showed me her burnt mark on her back and I cried so much. Who punishes a child by burning them with a hot iron? She has suffered and I will make sure that she suffers no more. Craig and Othu suggested we go to the doctors in Cape Town. We weren't sure how we would sleep in the house but I want my child next to me so sharing a room with her is no problem. I apologised to Othu for burdening her but she said its no burden. That we are family. I'm so happy and I hope Kumkani recovers so he'll meet her. I told her about her father and that's she's actually a princess by blood but she didn't care about that. The internet connection was bad here so the kids had to go to town to book a flight. Anathi was happy to hear that I'm his granny. Sandiso the last born came home too and he was as humble as the other two and welcoming. Soon we will go to

Cape Town and I hope that they will heal her. She can't die before me. She needs to outlive me. We stayed and spoke endlessly. Such a kind person for someone who went through hell. I find myself seeing so many personality similarities between her and Othu. My heart feels so much joy and I don't want it to end.

NOKULUNGA

Oh but the Lord works in ways that we will never understand. To hear that Bandile ran to Craig and Othu's house when he was in trouble could only be the work of our saviour. They had brought so much food for us but my mother said it's best we go to Cape Town immediately. I asked if we could share the grocery with my neighbour who is struggling to make ends meet and they didn't have a problem with that. Sandiso and Anathi have recently gotten part time jobs as guards at some construction site in town so they had to remain behind. My mother gave them money so they could be well while we were away. It's too much but she insisted. I can't believe that I have my real mother next to me. I know we need the tests and all but I am sure that it's her. Othu and Craig's kindness and warmth is something very rare especially for people who are well off. Their little girl clearly takes after them. She was a bit confused when she was told she must call me Makhulu because she's always had one makhulu but understood when it all got explained to her. I've had a tough upbringing but that has not hardened my heart. I've been praying to God to let me meet my mother and if not her at least her family. She says she has thought about me all these years and I believe her. We slept at a fancy house in Durban and I've never felt such soft sheets in

my life. We even flied to Cape Town and I've never been so scares of something in all my life but once it was up in the sky I felt a bit better. We are yet to know each other well but they are good people. No one can pretend to be kind because the eyes can't lie. We arrived at a beautiful house and it was so big. I'm sure the president of America can live here. The inside was even more beautiful. It looked better then the houses I've seen on magazines. I'm sure they are all well educated. We still have not spoken much but I really look forward to knowing them. We sat and Othu went to make coffee for us all. Chulu walked up to me. Oh I've never seen a more adorable person in my life.

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Chulu: Makhulu Lulu, I don't have a room yet because my mommy won't paint the other room pink. I think she doesn't want me to leave her room (she whispered that last part and I laughed)

Mama: But Chulu your mommy said it's not their house yet. You complaining to makhulu Lulu won't help much.

Chulu: But I don't like having all my stuff in a box. Even the collage that I made is in a box and I want to add makhulu Lulu and uncle Bandile, uncle Sandiso and uncle Anathi's pictures to it.

Me: We don't even have pictures. (Chulu put her hand over her mouth in shock)

Chulu: I'll go ask my daddy for his phone and I'll take lots and lots of pictures of you. Would you like that, makhulu Lu? (I smiled)

Me: But I can't smile nicely.

Chulu: It's easy. You just do this. (she smiled showing all her teeth)

Me: Wooh I'll try to look as beautiful. Go get the camera phone then. I'll practice smiling. (Chulu laughed and rushed off)

Mama: Are you still feeling okay? Me: You ask me that every hour, Mama. I'm fine I promise you. Mama, please don't spend a lot on us. The last thing that I want is for you to think that I am after money. I want your love and affection. Even had I found you on a the streets as a beggar I'd still have felt this joy I'm feeling now. (she smiled)

Mama: I intend on spoiling you so you best get used to it. It's not about showing you love through materialistic things, Lunga. I know that those things don't matter. I love you already and I plan to show you that by giving you the affection and attention you've been deprived all these years but I also want to make the experience things in life. I have the means and the time to do it so it won't be a problem. (I smiled)

Me: Thank you for everything. You are all so kind. Please tell me about Kumkani.

Mama: He is a businessman and one filled with pride and stubbornness. People will tell you that he is not the most friendly and it's true but I'm hoping that he will change once he has recovered.

Me: Does he know about me? (she looked down)

Mama: The only people in my family who knew about you were my parents. My older brother who is now late was working at the mines so we could hide the pregnancy from him. My parents told me to not tell a soul. That the secret will go to the grave with us and all else who knew. Your father's family wanted me to kill you because I was from a low ranking family when their son was well off.

Me: Is he still alive?

Mama: I don't know, nunu. He pretended as though he doesn't know me after I had given birth and returned home. He didn't once ask where you are. I think he thought you're dead since it seems it's what his people wanted. I know hearing that hurts you and I'm sorry.

Me: It does. To hear that no one wanted me does hurt a lot.

Mama: I wanted you. I just had no voice then and we weren't as financially stable as we are now.

Me: I understand, Mama. What you went through was also painful.

Mama: It doesn't compare to what you've been through. You mentioned that you were married. Where is your husband?

Me: He died about five years ago. He suddenly just fell from his bicycle on the way home and that was it.

Mama: Did he have a head injury from it or was he sick before it happened?

Me: Nothing. He just fell and Sandiso saw it and he said it wasn't even a hard fall. Life is so unpredictable. We were poor but he was a good man. He didn't pay lobola because I felt like my adoptive mother didn't deserve it and well he didn't have the cows because back then lobola were livestock. (I laughed softly)

Mama: As long as you had a happy marriage. My husband and I were also poor and he worked far but he was a good man. I wish I had trusted him with this and told him about you.

Me: Let's not dwell on the what ifs, Mama or we will give ourselves heart problems. So you only had Kumkani?

Mama: Yes, after him I struggled to fall pregnant. Then he had Othu and I was so attached to her because she made me think about you constantly.

Me: She's a kind girl. Do you live here for good?

Mama: Yes I said I would. What about you? Would you consider moving to the city?

Me: I don't have the means and the kids are just starting out their lives so we can't burden them by staying here long.

Mama: Othu and Clay don't mind but I understand because I'm also worried that this is too much for a young couple starting out. They need their space.

Othu: I'm sure you are wondering where I was making this coffee since I've been gone for so long. I was preparing the bedrooms.

Mama: I hope Clay has let go of that silly idea of going to his own place. This is hid house too. Lunga and I will sleep in one room. You and Chulu. Bandile can have the room Nate slept in and Clay can keep his.

Me: I'm so sorry, my baby. We will leave for h...

Othu: No, Dabs please don't rush yourselves. We really don't mind. Stay as long as you want.

Me: Why are you and your husband sleeping in separate room? Is it his injury?

Othu: We're not married yet, Dabs. I know you must be wondering why makhulu allows us to cohabit but he has no family so I needed to look after him. (I smiled)

Me: My girl, I really don't judge. Honestly I thought you've been married for years now.

Mama: Soon we will be having her lobola negotiations and traditional wedding. (I smiled)

Me: I'm sure it will all go well and please tell him to not go anywhere. I'll feel bad if we drive a man out of his own house.

Othu: Craig is a survivor, Dabs but I'll tell him. Ma, please look after Chulu later on when you come from the hospital. I want to take Craig out and show my appreciation to him. He and Bandile are outside so I'll plan it all so please don't tell him.

Mama: Our lips are sealed and he indeed does deserve to be spoiled. Go and prepare. I'll look after Chulu.

Me: And I'll help too.

Othu: Thank you, dear beautiful sisters. (we laughed) I'll be in my room but please let me know when you are ready to be driven to the hospital. (Chulu ran to Lunga)

Chulu: My daddy said I must be careful. Mommy sit with them so I can take a picture.

Othu: But I'm not looking pretty.

Me: Oh nonsense just come sit next to Dabs. (she did and I kissed her cheek)

Chulu: Say cheese.

Us: Cheese! (we smiled so widely)

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Chulu wanted to be a part of it all so we took what she called "selfies". I love her bubbly, happy self so much. Othu was right. Once she is comfortable around someone she talks non stop. Othu left us and Chulu kept on taking lots of pictures even of the pot plants in the corner of the lounge. We drank the coffee that Othu made and it was delicious. Bandile and Craig walked in and my boy looked so excited. He came to kneel beside me and got emotional. I brushed his arm waiting for him to speak.

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Mama: Did something happen, Clay?

Craig: I'll let him tell you, Ma. I'll go and see that O is up to.

Chulz, please put my phone in the charger. (she nodded)

Bandile: Ma, Mr Craig said he will teach me the basics of his business in security. He will train me to be an installer and I'll get a salary. A salary, Ma. (he started to cry)

Me: Oh thank you so much, Craig. You don't know how much it means to us. He has been looking for work for so long. Even

had to endure being treated badly by people because they had the money he needed.

Craig: It's all a pleasure, Ma. We have a deal though. He must also go back to school. He can work for me part time while studying full time. He knows what we spoke about.

Bandile: I'm will study, sir. Sis Othu said something about landscaping. She said I can use her laptop after I'm done to research it. I won't let you down, sir. I promise I'll be the most hardworking employed you've ever met.

Me: Yes, my boy. Don't waste this opportunity. Oh God is good.
(I wiped off my tears)

Mama: Thank you, Clay my boy.

Craig: It's all a pleasure. I'll go now. (he pushed himself out)

Me: Oh Bandile please work hard, my boy. Listen and respect, Craig. I know that you are older but that doesn't matter. Don't take advantage of the fact that he is Othu's husband.

Bandile: Ma, I'm waiting for sis Othu to finish with her computer and after that I'll read a lot on the security business. I won't let you down. I'll be getting a salary

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Ma. I'm going to give it all to you.

Mama: No, spoil yourself and maybe take out a kind girl with it. Your mother won't need it, my boy.

Me: I would have been grateful but I would not take all your hard earned money anyway. Mama is right go meet a girl. Choose a nice one though (he laughed shyly)

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A part of me feels so bad about all that they have done for us. They really need not to but I'm grateful for everything. My son will study and have a job. I'm glad that Craig didn't give him things but makes him work for it. It will teach him that one has to work in order to get something. Nothing in life is free. He might be older than Craig but I have a feeling that he will learn a lot from Craig. Some time went by and we got ready to go to the hospital. Chulu stayed behind with her father and uncle while we drove off. We finally arrived and I could not believe the beauty of this hospital. Mama filled in some forms and she and I went in. She said we will take a taxi home. They had me change into a hospital dress and Mama said I won't be sleeping here just came for tests. They ran all kinds of tests after I told the doctor my symptoms and he also examined me. The staff were all just so friendly and mama holding my hand made it all pleasant. Hours went by and we were told that I'll have the results soon. Just as we were about to go out to the taxi car a

woman walked directly to us. She took my hand and made prolonged eye contact.

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Mama: Can we help you? (she kept quiet) I'm sorry, mam but you're scaring my daughter.

Lady: They will also see nothing. Your daughter is perfectly healthy. She is just lost and her ancestors want you to bring her home by introducing her to them. Take your child home and have traditional rituals done for her from your family and her father's. She'll remain sick until you do this and put her under the protection of her ancestors. Her father has always wondered about her and even now in his place of rest he wants to know his child. Take her home and introduce her to her people. Take the princess home. (she spoke in a monotone voice and left us)

Me: Who was that, Ma? (I looked at her)

Mama: I don't know, nunu but I'm not going to ignore what she said. I guess it's time that I face your father's family again for your sake.

Me: So do you think my father is really dead and that he cried for me?

Mama: We are black Africans, nunu. We might be Christians but we can not forget our ways. During that week of Othu's

negotiations I can get my family so we can do the rituals for you.

Me: Won't that disrupt the child's work? It's all about Othu that time.

Mama: We will make a plan but if this really is the work of the ancestors we can't ignore it, Nokulunga.

Me: Okay, you do as you think and I'll follow your lead. I trust you, Mama. (I hugged her)

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She held me tightly and whenever she does I feel like a child again. A child who does not want to leave her mother's side. All this time I thought I'm sick with some rare disease the doctors don't know of but it might be that my ancestors are seeking me. I'm glad my mother has made this a priority. I love this woman so much. I've known her for a day but my heart is full because of her. The empty feeling I felt has gone. I asked to meet my brother and she said he's at another Hospital. We got into the taxi and drove there. When we arrived we went to his room and his eyes were open but he was not moving. I cried while hugging and kidding him. I grew up with "siblings" but they were never kind to me so I'm hoping Kumkani gets well so I'll get to know him. Mamas introduced us and he didn't respond at all. They explained that he is aware of everything

but he just can't respond. That must feel like its own little type of torture so I hope he recovers. We said a long and powerful joint prayer before we left. I know God is at work already. Mama took me to the beach and when the water touched my feet I felt my spirit feeling renewed in a way. We also went to eat out and I've never done that. She showed me beautiful places and bought matched necklaces for us. It's a broken heart. I have the other half and she has the other. When combined they form a perfect heart. To me it symbolised so much. That we were broken when we were apart but now we're together we are whole and the voids are filled. I held her hand all the way as if I'm afraid she'll run away. We also did the DNA tests today but we both know that we are one. We finally went home to look after Chulu so that Othu can go be with her husband. When we got home we started cooking together with Chulu's help. I thought she'd cry when she was told her parents are going out without her but she didn't. She says she loves having two Makhulus. My other boys called and they were so happy to hear their brother's news. My life has never felt so complete. I love them all so much.

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#OTHU

Life has been so busy for Craig and I and that made us focus less on us for the past few days. It's time that I reconnect with my man and show him just how much I love and appreciate him. I'm so glad that all had gone well and I already know what those DNA results will say. I've been on the phone for hours trying to plan this beautiful night for us. I found a place that is about 30 minutes away and they said they do romantic nights. It's a cabin so we have all the privacy we will need. Bandile is home to look after the ladies and I'm sure Chulu will be well looked after. Knowing her she'll want to sleep between her grannies tonight. I didn't tell Craig anything just asked him to take a drive with me. I could feel him looking at me while I drove so I turned my head briefly and smiled.

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Craig: Are you kidnapping me? (I laughed so much)

Me: What if I am?

Craig: Well that's great. I'm sure I'll enjoy the "torturing" too.
(he brushed my thigh)

Me: I just wanted us to be alone for a night and enjoy us. We've been so busy and I don't want us to make a habit of it. We need this, baby.

Craig: We do, Mrs Knights but helping feels so good. I've never been a mentor before but I'm looking forward to being Bandile's. I just wish she'd stop calling me Mr Craig.

Me: It will take some time. So makhulu asked if it's okay to have a traditional ritual for Dabs in that week of our lobola negotiations. Is that okay with you?

Craig: Yeah, we can do that the Monday. If it's really a traditional issue it's best we do it as soon as possible.

Me: True and can you believe that fortune teller told them that. I'm starting to think she's stalking us. (he laughed).

Craig: Well there is one thing we can't argue about though and that is that she's good at what she does so clearly she has a gift.

Me: True, my love and I know you're worried about me not taking it easy but I'm fine, I promise. (he smiled)

Craig: I know. I guess I just don't like it when you have to do it all while I'm here.

Me: I don't mind. Through sickness and in health, right?

Craig: Right, baby.

Me: And we are finally here. Your place of torture. (I let out an evil laugh and he laughed so much)

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I got his wheelchair out and he got onto it and we went in. We checked in and the lady showed us our cabin. We thanked her and a male worker wanted to carry our overnight bags but Craig said he's fine. I let him carry them on his lap. I want him to know that I know that he is still a man and allowing him independence boosts his confidence. We went inside and it was as I asked them to do it. So romantic and cosy. He held my hand, drew me closer and sat me down on his lap. We shared a passionate kiss and I didn't want it all to end. I broke the kiss and looked at him.

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Me: I really hope that you know how much I love and appreciate you, Craig Knights. You are a great partner and I'm glad that I went through all that life threw my way with you. I look forward to many more of these kinds of moments. (I kissed him)

Craig: You make it easy for me to step up and be the partner that you'll need, O. I know that you'd have dealt with it all alone so perfectly had I not been here but I'm glad that I am. Being with you has also given me a family. I love it all a lot.

Me: Speaking about family. I'm sorry that you have to share me with so many people right now. I know that we should have enjoyed this time alone in our house with Chulz...(he cut me short with a kiss)

Craig: I love that our family is growing. Yes, it would be ideal for us and them had we not been cramped up at the house and that's why I think they must move into my parent's old house. I bought it back from the people that got it from them. It's big and spacious.

Me: A part of me feels as though you hoped to live there and settle down in it.

Craig: And that part is right but I want you to be happy too, O.

Me: I am and you heard Mrs Lott say that we must make home each other and not four wall, baby. How badly do you want to live there? (he looked at me for a long while)

Craig: Very badly. (he finally said)

Me: Why didn't you tell me that? I've never seen it. I know that you own properties but I didn't know that you bought your old house back.

Craig: I was going to then you told me how much you love the Lott's house and I didn't want you to choose my parents one just to make me feel happy.

Me: Yet you chose that one to make me feel happy.

Craig: I actually love it, baby.

Me: Please take me to the house so I can see it. From there we will think of a way forward.

Craig: I'll take you. It's close to the house we live in now. So whichever we choose will suit both families well. Makhulu could live with Dabs in one and we will occupy the other.

Me: Now I feel dumb for making you agree to buy a house when we already have one.

Craig: One can never have enough property. It's a life long investment. Can we please speak about this after you've "tortured" me. (we both laughed)

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We kissed and it got heated to fast. I was not planning on rushing this night. We explored our new surroundings and decided to take a long bath together. I thought he would not be able to get into the bath but we managed. I had my legs wrapped around his waist while soaking in the foamy warm water. We fed each other some treats and enjoyed each and every single second. After a while of tempting kissing we decided to get out. We dried our bodies and applied lotion. I had him lie on the bed while I gave him a massage. He closed his eyes and I hope he won't fall asleep. He turned to face me and kissed me, held me and flipped me over. He is regaining his strength clearly. He caressed my entire body and showed all of it love and attention which made the cabin be filled with my not so subtle love moans. After a while of foreplay we made love and we felt great.

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Craig: Had you not been pregnant already I'm sure that I'd have made you pregnant tonight. (I laughed)

Me: That was amazing. Baby, you're getting stronger. I'm so happy. (he smiled and exhaled loudly)

Craig: I must, baby. I want to be able to make that drive to the hospital when you're in labor. I must admit when I suspected that the condom had broken I was worried. (he laughed and I looked at him)

Me: When was that, Craig? (his smile faded)

Craig: The first time. (he said softly and I sat up.)

Me: Why didn't you tell me? The condom broke and you didn't tell me about it?

Craig: O, you said you're on contraceptives and I didn't think we had anything to worry about. You are pregnant and I'm happy. Hell I'm glad the damn thing broke. (I kept quiet)

Me: Just like that? So to hell with what I think? You should have told me.

Craig: What difference would that have made, O? Aside from making you worry. The baby is on his/her way. We can't change that. I'm sorry that I kept it from you but it was not deliberate.

My only mistake was not telling you. (I started to cry) O, please.
(he said softly)

Me: I just feel like you didn't give me a chance to react to it all,
Craig.

Craig: And I'm sorry. (he sat up and kissed me back) I know that
you don't regret being pregnant because you've bonded with
the baby. You're upset that I didn't tell you that our protection
broke and I'm sorry. You had the right to know so I was wrong.
Please don't cry, shit I hate it so much when you aren't okay
and more so when it's because of me.

Me: Apology accepted because you're right I can't do anything
about it now. I love our unborn bhabha a lot. (he smiled)

Craig: I know. So what can I do to make it right?

Me: You will be on poop duty for the first month of baby's
arrival. (we laughed)

Craig: How bad can a newborn's waste be? So I accept. I love
you.

Me: I love you too. (we kissed)

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The kiss led to more and we shared another wonderful love
session. I don't know why I cry so much these days. I guess
pregnancy hormones are no myth. I've forgiven him for real

because being angry would mean I wish things didn't turn out as they did and that would mean I regret our baby's existence. I did at first but after hearing that heart beat I was in love. We called Chulu to say goodnight and it didn't even sound as if she misses us. I do hope that Dabs's paternal family will agree to do her ceremonies for her. That's all she wants from them. After the call we got up and went to have dinner and it was all just so special. We promised to have at least such moments once a month after baby is born and go on a date at least once a week. I don't mind moving to his parents house since it has sentimental value to him. We'll work out the serious stuff later. For now we will just forget about the rest of the world and enjoy each other. I love this man so much.

OTHU

A few days have gone by and we have been busy preparing for Dabs's ceremony. The DNA results proved that she indeed is one of us. I honestly had no doubts. She looks a lot like her mother. Shame Makhulu has been spending time with her but also ensuring that I don't feel neglected or replaced. I told her not to worry about me and just enjoy the time with her daughter. The private hospital doctors also couldn't find anything wrong. They said she has diabetes though so she had to start on insulin shots. Craig and I went to see the doctor and she said that baby is healthy and strong which brought wide smiles to our faces. He also took me to view his parents house and it was so spacious. Clearly the last owners did some work on it and I won't lie I love it to bit. What I loved most was the look on his face when we entered. I don't think he realised that his facial expression spoke volumes and not to mention emotions of joy and a tad bit of sadness too. I decided right there and then that we will stay in it and Makhulu and family can have the new one. We signed and sealed the purchase deal with the Lott's. We also sat down and spoke for hours about Dabs's situation and decided to help. Makhulu will send Bandile to school and Craig and I will focus on Anathi and Sandiso's education. Bandile decided to study Landscape design and I was

not surprised because he clearly has a natural talent for it. Anathi said he will study Financial Management because he is good with numbers and Sandiso is a man who prefers manual work rather than office work so he just asked that we send him to a skills development college where he can learn how to paint and do carpeting. He unfortunately did not get to matric because he struggles a bit with academics but we will make a plan. To help them feels good to our souls. Chulu has taken it upon herself to read a story with Makhulu Lu every night in attempt to teach her how to read. The event planner managed to plan our traditional celebration at such short notice and now we hope the lobola negotiations will be done and dusted during the week. Our outfits were made and we were satisfied. Yandi had come with me but our other friends had to work unfortunately but they will be with me in spirit. Makhulu flew to East London a few days before us to go tell her family and also make arrangements. Craig will only join us after the ceremony. Leaving him with Nate worried me because men aren't so good at looking after each other. They might forget his pills or something like that but he assured me that he will be fine. Mr Funda, Bhut Vuyo and his friend Thabiso will be his negotiators. The deacon is just such a forgiving man. Had I been him I'd mostly probably want nothing to do with Makhulu after the break up. Today is the day of Dabs's ceremony and the people that are here have been welcoming to her. My mother

is also here looking all kinds of strange in makoti attire. Makhulu Notomato who is makhulu's cousin arrived and entered as we were peeling vegetables. She greeted and looked at my mother. Laughed out loud and clapped her hand once. She's that aunt who just talk a lot and most insulting things. Could Poppy be taking after her?

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Tomato: Yho Nolitha, I can't believe that you are my your mother in laws house. The last time we saw you here was when we welcomed you to the family and made you a makoti.

Mama: Good morning, Ma T. It's always a pleasure to see you too. (she said clearly annoyed)

Tomato: And you, Hle-Hle, where is this secret daughter? I almost fell to the ground and died when I heard the news. (she clapped again)

Makhulu: Don't start because you know you won't like how it will end. Keep yourself busy or go out if don't intend of being productive.

Tomato: You know I'm just joking. Old age has turned you into such a sensitive person. Othu hello. (she smiled and looked at me from head to toes)

Me: Hello, Makhulu.

Ma T: You look like a makoti one would swear you're not marrying a white man.

Me: Well I'm not marrying a white man. Craig is black not that it matters anyway. (she raised a brow and went out)

Makhulu: She can be such a handful. (I laughed)

Me: Don't worry everything will go well.

Makhulu: Thank you for being here and supporting me. I hope that all will go well.

Me: It will, Ma and Chulu is enjoying having other children around. I have a feeling that today will be a good week. Dabs is already looking better. I think that once she's okay the two of you must go away together.

Makhulu: Let us not overwhelm her now but we must soon. Are you and Clay sure about us living in the house?

Me: Yes because after the lobola negotiations and traditional wedding we will move in what used to be his parental home.

Makhulu: What do we do once the baby is born? You might be a mother but you're clueless when it comes to newborns.

Me: Well by then Dabs would have settled in well so you can stay for a month until we're able to do the basics ourselves. Don't worry yourself. You just ask Dabs if she's willing to move

to Cape Town. Bandile will be studying there and possibly Anathi too so I'm sure she'll want to be close to them.

Makhulu: I'll ask her once everything is done. The other elders said this won't take long. This is just an introduction ritual and we will gradually do the rest as time goes by. We still have to approach her father's family too.

Me: I don't think I'll be able to go with, Ma.

Makhulu: You need not to, nunu. You and Clay have done so much already so you two just enjoy married life. You do know that after the lobola and celebrations you'll be his wife in a customary way right? (I laughed)

Me: I know, Ma and I promise I'll be good to him. I don't want to be a bad wife to your Clay. (she laughed)

Makhulu: After this I want you to just enjoy your marriage and pregnancy. Don't worry about us at all.

Me: I'll try. (she hugged me) Ma, I haven't had morning sickness like the women on TV. Is that normal?

Makhulu: Very normal. Perhaps it will start in your second trimester or third or you might only experience it with your other future pregnancies. For now just enjoy the smooth sailing. The doctor said you are both healthy so I'm not worried at all. Did Clay get a B&B for himself and his negotiators?

Me: Yes they have, Ma. I hope they don't milk him dry. (she laughed)

Makhulu: That's not what lobola is about. It's no get rich quick thing. It's the coming together of two families.

Me: Pity my poor person has no family.

Makhulu: Family is not always blood, nunu. We adore him and he is one of us now. He has a daughter and soon might have another or a son. I hope he understands why he can't stay here because the family will not tolerate a boyfriend sleeping here.

Me: Craig understand our culture more than me at times so stop worrying. (she smiled)

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We and the other women continued to peel the veggies while Yandi was out with the team who was cooking outside. The men were on slaughtering duties. Yandi's family is very modern but bhut Vuyo's is traditional so she said that this is practice for when she is welcomed into the family officially and has to do makoti duties. A part of me is glad that I don't have to deal with that. Craig's name has the people here thinking I'm marrying a white man. Makhulu has started with the African name issue and I don't know. I don't want him to feel like he has to change himself in order to fit in with my extended family. I have cousins who are children of Makhulu's cousins but we're not

close but we talked a lot today. After a while the Tyini elders started with the ritual of introducing Dabs to their ancestors. Suddenly Tamkhulu Welile, who is my father's uncle from and the leader of the Zweni family barged in and put a stop to it all.

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Welile: I thought that I heard wrong when I was told about this but it seems it's true. How could you do this to my late brother, Nolusapho? You hid your shames from him waiting for him to die to reveal them and now you bring your bastard to his house? (makhulu stood)

Makhulu: Do not call my child names. Had I not wanted you to be a part of this I would not have told the Zweni family. Your wife called on your behalf saying the Zweni family won't be a part of this. Like you've said she was born out of wedlock so had I raised her she' have been a Tyini not Zweni. I've been a good daughter in law to your family and a good wife to my husband.

Welile: This is my brother's house. Go do this in the Tyini family house and not here.

Makhulu: Your brother didn't contribute a dime to this house. (Welile slapped my grandmother and I stood ready to take on him and his army if need be)

Me: You don't have a right to hit my grandmother in her own house. Please go, tamkhulu. This is her house as much as it is my late grandfather's. I will have you arrested and make sure you spend the rest of your old life in jail. No one and I mean no one disrespects and even worse beats my grandmother.

Welile: When a woman is being too forward that's how she's dealt with. Now your places.

Me: I'm calling the police. (makhulu stopped me)

Makhulu: That will be the first and last time you raise your hand at me. I didn't want to bring this up because I wanted to keep my husband's dignity but it seems I'm forced to say it. You know that your brother never had a steady job and even after apartheid the government never gave him the struggle hero compensation. I have been a nurse for almost all my life and I made sure to buy a house for my children with my money. I supported your brother financially, emotionally and all other ways that matter and never did it feel like a burden because I loved and respected him. You came here when he died wanting his assets and I told you that he had none. I said it then and I'll say it again now. This is my house. The deeds say Nomhle Zweni. Now go out before I lose my temper please.

Welile: This is what happens when women have too many rights. You undermine men. My brother must be turning in his grave right now. His son is left in the city while your child with

another man gets all the glory. Shame on you, Nolusapho.
Shamw on you. (Makhulu's cousin brother stood)

Fezile: Zweni, you heard my sister. We did everything according to the laws of our culture. You chose to distance yourself. That is a Tyini child and this is a Tyini matter we told you Zwenis about this but forcing you to come is a thing we can't do so please if you don't give your well wishes to this leave us. I'll punch another front tooth out of your mouth. You seem to have forgotten that I've done it once. (he pointed at Welile)

Dabs: Mama, if my presence causes tension then let's not do it.

Fezile: My daughter forward is where we go with this. You're not well and I won't let this stubborn man stand in the way of my sister's child well being.

Welile: Carry on with your nonsense but I'll be back for the lobola negotiations. Othunyiweyo is a Zweni.

Me: Well you only remember that now that money is involved.
(I mumbled)

Welile: What did you just say? (he walked closer to me)

Me: You lay a finger on me and it will be the last thing you'll get to do. My future husband won't just take your teeth out. (he backed down)

Fezile: Excuse yourself, Welile please. We never had intentions to keep you from Othu's lobola negotiations. It will be Wednesday so go cool down and return then. (he was fuming but he left)

Dabs: Mama, are you okay? (she stood and hugged makhulu)

Makhulu: I'm sure even Chulu has a more steady slap so I'm fine. His ego got bruised that's it. I hope Nkosi will forgive me for telling his business but I had no choice.

Me: It's just family in here, Ma and Ma T has gone to buy shoes so this will stay here. Tamkhulu Welile will be to ashamed to speak about what happened. So that's why he is missing a tooth, tamkhulu Fezile? You hit him?

Fezile: I knocked him out with my right hook, my grand baby. Men like Welile understand only such language. I hope you understand that him and his negotiators need to be here for your lobola negotiation. He's right, you're a Zweni.

Me: I understand.

Fezile: Let's continue and next week we are off to your father's homstead, Nokulunga my child. For you to be well you need both sides to acknowledge you. Don't worry the Tyinis will be with you all the way. Don't let their royal title intimidate you. Royal is what you also are.

Dabs: Thank you, malume. I appreciate it a lot. (she smiled)

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I guess a family gathering is nothing without some drama. The nerve of the man to slap my first lady. I think I now also know where Kumkani gets his rudeness from. I wasn't lying when I said Craig would do much worse to tamkhulu Welile had he hit me. He is overprotective of us and especially now that I'm pregnant. So I saved the poor man some punishment. He is also protective of Makhulu and she knows it that's why she asked that I don't tell him. I can't not tell him. He is my go to person and I need to off load on someone after all that commotion. I don't want my negotiations to be Zweni family led but I don't have a choice. They will ask for a ridiculous amount. The elders continued and burnt imphepho (African Incense) and all else to communicate with the ancestors. Yandi also did her bit as she's the one who was facilitating this ritual. I've never really seen her do her traditional duties and to see it was amazing. I'm so glad that she is here with us to help in any way that she can. Everything went well and I was so happy. I really hope that this will contribute to Dabs's health positively. We went to introduce her to our guests and as daughter of Ma Zweni not a family friend. The ancestors are happy and so are we. The men went to sit in their place by the kraal and traditional beer and other strong alcohol was served to them. I decided to call Craig and tell him that all has gone well.

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Craig: I hope no farm boy has proposed marriage. (I laughed)

Me: Don't be crazy. How are you?

Craig: It's the second day without you and I'm already getting thin, baby. I can't do this anymore.

Me: Now you're being dramatic, baby. You'll see me soon. I hope you and Nate are cooking and not living off take always.

Craig: We coo...

Nate: We would cook but he does not want to help me and I'm not his maid nor am I his wife. (he shouted cutting Craig short)

Craig: I don't want you to be either of those. Imagine had I have to wake up to your ugly face each morning. (they laughed)

Me: Well I see you are getting along well as always so I'll just get back to serving people food.

Craig: I have a feeling that you called me to say something but changed your mind last minute. You do know that your tone of voice changes in different situations right? I've learnt to observe so that I'll know what I'm dealing with. (I smiled)

Me: I hate how well you know me when you're still a mystery to me at times. Okay I'll tell you but don't freak out.

Nate: Too late! He's facial expression has changed already. (I laughed softly)

Me: Nate butt out of our business please. (I joked and we laughed) Baby, take me off loudspeaker.

Craig: I can't. I think Chulz let my phone fell and forgot to mention it and my ear speaker got damaged. I'll lower the volume so that the ugly one doesn't hear us talk. But he's right I'm already freaking out. What happened.

Me: My dad's uncle slapped, Makhulu.

Funda: Who slapped

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Nomhle? I'm a man who hates violence but I'll roll up my sleeves and fight for in her honour should I have to. (he suddenly said)

Craig: I'm with you on that, sir. In fact I think we must arrive sooner rather than later.

Me: Please calm down. Makhulu handled it and her cousin brother came to her defence. I hated seeing it happen but to anger then more will only make the negotiations difficult. All is well now, deacon. Roll down your sleeves no need to come and fight on her behalf. (I tried not to laugh)

Funda: Uncivilised man that person is. A coward!

Me: Baby, please excuse yourself so we can talk properly. (I said in a whisper)

Craig: Okay, hang on. (he whispered back)

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He did that and we were able to speak properly. It seems he is having a meeting with his negotiators about a plan of action. They will need one because I have a feeling that they won't make it easy on them. Anathi came to where I was at looking good even in an orange work overall suit. He smiled and came to hug me.

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Anathi: Sisi, I've gone to makhulu already and thanked her for everything and now I'm here to thank you. When bhut Craig comes I'll thank him too. Thank you for all you've done for my mother, myself and my brothers. We won't let you down. I'll make sure to buy you all gifts with my first salary someday.

Me: Thank you, Nathi and we aren't expecting anything in return. You are family and we love you. We are helping you and hopefully in future you'll do the same to those in need. I know you won't mess up because I hear in all your voices that you've been waiting for such an opportunity and you won't let it go to waste. This is the beginning for a bright future not just for you

but your future children too. Thank me by making a success of your life.

Nathi: I will, I promise. (he hugged me) Let me go and help out that side. I love you, sisi. (I smiled)

Me: I love you too, bhuti. (he smiled and I watched as he ran off to the group)

Mama: They are lovely kids aren't they? (I turned to face her)

Me: Very much. Mama, I have been thinking about us a lot lately since Dabs and makhulu has reunited. The way Dabs had forgiven Makhulu has inspired me to do the same. I'm still holding on to parts of the anger and I'm guessing it won't go away overnight but I want you to know that I lo...love you too. Let's go to therapy together and try to mend our broken relationship but I want you to promise me one thing.

Mama: I'm listening.

Me: Promise me that you'll never give up even on days when I might give you reasons to. Even if you go back to Tata but promise you'll still try to do your bit to make this mother daughter relationship work. (she smiled)

Mama: I promise, Othu. I won't let you down. Thank you for giving me another chance. (she hugged me)

Me: Also please encourage Langa to be free and open about who he is. Langa at times needs someone to tell him it's okay to do something. He had listened to your advice for years but now give him the right advice please. Tell him it's okay to embrace himself as he is. That his sexuality is no curse.

Mama: I already did that. I think he wants to hear it from your father to believe it. I watched and let him be brainwashed and now he is so deep into it that he feels lost without Kumkani. I'll go with him to therapy to and hopefully we can make him realise that he is someone without your dad. He had always been. I'll try my best to be a better mom. I've also been trying to build a relationship with Chulu but she's hesitant.

Me: It'll take a while. She's always seen you as a cold distant person so the warmth and affection is confusing her. She'll warm up to you.

Mama: You've done a great job at raising her. I'm proud of you.

Me: Thank you. (we hugged).

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Like Chulu I'm also still trying to get used to her warmth and affections but I'll get used to it. Dabs looks so happy. The family has accepted them wholeheartedly. I went to sit with the young ladies and some were married already talking about married life. To hear different views about marriage is interesting. I'm

sure Yandi and I both made mental notes. Pity I won't be able to make it next week when Makhulu goes to her ex boyfriend's home. I've never been in the presence of royalty. What am I even saying? My aunt is royalty so I'm in the presence of royalty as we speak. I just hope all goes well for them. My body felt a bit offish but I guess it's exhaustion. The day was beautiful. The presence of God and our ancestors is with us. May it continue to be so even after all of this. I can't wait for Saturday and Sunday to celebrate my traditional wedding.

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#CRAIG

If two days without O feel so draining to the soul then I know for sure that I won't survive life without her. The men and I have come together to discuss the travel plans and the deacon has been giving me the do's and don't's for when we go to O's family. I plan to respect and listen to his advises. It took some time to calm him down after he heard that some man slapped his lady but I understand because it angered me just as much. We sat and were having a few drinks when the doorbell rang. I went to open and I wanted to close the door in her face again. It's Poppy.

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Me: O is not here. She has gone to the Eastern Cape and will only be back Sunday.

Poppy: Look, I know you don't like me but to be so rude is uncalled for. Why did she go to the Eastern Cape?

Me: Had she wanted you to know I think she'd have told you herself. If it's important then you can call her.

Poppy: I'm sorry for what I did to you back then. I've changed now.

Me: Good for you.

Poppy: So are you paralysed?

Me: No, I'm deaf. (I said sarcastically)

Poppy: Geez, no need to be rude again. Tell Othu that I was here. I was cleaning the secretary's office and saw her new address on Chulu's guardian details. You must be loaded. Millionaires live here.

Me: Will that be all?

Poppy: Yeah. I'll see you around. (she smiled and left)

Nate: Why did you not let the babe in? Who lets a girl stand at the door? (he said walking towards me)

Me: The "babe" has no business being here.

Nate: She hot.

Me: She's okay. (he looked at me)

Nate: That's one of your booty call, not so? Are you crazy?
What if your woman had been home?

Me: It was a booty call but I've stopped that shit. She's O's sister.

Nate: You're dirty. You make one sister a booty call and wife the other?

Me: Nate, not in the mood man. It's a long story and I'll share it someday but for now I've got serious business to take care of. (I left him and went back to the lounge)

Funda: Knight, I have to go son. I'll see you tomorrow. Remember that it's best to have these negotiations early morning and our flight is only later. We are forced to go the next day. Lobola these days are different. Othu is an educated woman so they might use that to get more money from us. It's not how it's suppose to be but times have changed.

Me: I understand, sir and thank you. The other thing I wanted tell you is that should they say that their daughter was a virgin before me don't argue with them. She was and if that adds on to the money so be it.

Funda: Spoken like a true man. I'll make sure that all goes well. I'll see you tomorrow. (we shook hands)

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I went out with him and watched him get into his car and drove off. Nate went out and I was actually glad. I'm so nervous about what's about to happen that I don't want to be around people for long moments. I took my phone and dialed O's number but Chulu answered.

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Chulu: Hello. (she said in her little sweet voice)

Me: Hello, mommy is Chulu there with you? (I pretended to not know it's her and she laughed)

Chulu: But it's me, Chulu. I'm not mommy. (she giggled)

Me: What? Your voice is starting to sound like mommy's. How are you, princess?

Chulu: I'm dirty because I've been playing outside all day.

Me: That's nice. Have you made any friends?

Chulu: A lot the yard is full of people. Old people and children. We also ate a lot of meat.

Me: Just don't eat too much and end up with a tummy ache.

Chulu: When are you coming?

Me: Soon, princess. I miss you guys.

Chulu: We miss you too. I'll tell the baby you miss her too. (I smiled)

Me: Thank you. I'll let you go back to playing. Tell mommy I'll call again later to say goodnight to you two. I love you.

Chulu: I love you too, daddy.

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Fatherhood is just one of the most rewarding jobs ever. Even when she's being difficult or naughty I find myself appreciative of the fact that I'm a part of it all. I pushed myself to where my crutches stood and I took them. My back had almost healed completely but I must admit my knee is still in some sort of pain. I balanced with my crutches, stood and took a few steps. I no longer get tired and I can hop on my one leg. I want to be standing when O walked down the aisle to me in a few months. I want to have a first dance with her and our daughter. Walking again without support is my next goal and I will achieve it. I must achieve it before December. I can't wait to see her face when she sees me walking again.

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#KUMKANI

To see Langa in bed with Ian has left an image in my mind I can't seem to erase. When did he even become like that? I'm sure my son is bewitched. He was not born a gay. The doctor is spot on. I am aware of my surroundings but I just can't react. I feel like someone turned my body into stone. I'm glad that Mama has moved me to a private hospital. Clearly the money I've given her all these years and her stake in the family land has ensured she's well off financially. I knew she'd never just let me struggle. That's always been her weakness. She forgiving and people end up taking advantage. I'm wondering if I should take advantage or not. She came with a woman saying its my sister and I don't believe it. Where has this sister been all this time? Why appear now when Mama is old and about to die of old age soon? If she thinks she can get my inheritance then she had another thing coming. They also spoke about Othu's lobola. They had better keep the money because it's mine. I clothed her, fed her and took her to the best schools so I deserve it. I hate not being in control. No man must live like this. Unathi was here saying that she'll look after me as best she can but won't take me back. How did I go from her to zero? Then there's the Poppy girl who had my hopes up when she is nothing but a loose girl. I should just have tried to soften Othu up instead. Langa and Ian walked in together and I felt my anger rise but I could not do anything. Ian touched my hand to shake it gently. I wish I could punch him in the face.

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Ian: Hello, Mr Zweni. It's me, Ian remember me? I used to work for you. (he spoke so loudly and slowly as if I'm a dumb man)

Langa: Babe, don't shout like that. What if you hurt his ears? (Did he just say babe?)

Me: Mmmmm. (I tried to say something but failed)

Ian: Oh shame, my poor father in law. He is trying to speak but can't. (he kissed my cheek and I wanted to die right there)

Langa: The doctors say he hears and is aware of everything but I don't believe that.

Ian: Clearly you don't or you'd never have been so openly gay in front of him.

Langa: Poppy said that pictures of me in bed with someone led to his illness. There weren't any such pictures of me.

Ian: She is trying to shift blame don't worry. Let's go, honey.

Langa: Wait I need to talk to him first. (he looked at me) Tata, I know you can't really hear me but we are about to take you to a center for people such as yourself. You'll be fine there. I'll visit as much as I can. I have a job now so can't just roam the streets all day.

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Ian was packing my stuff and Langa went to help him. The two of them kissed and I felt so disgusted. I closed my eyes to not see it all and they didn't even notice. They are busy being lovey dovey. The nurse came to examine me and after a while we went out to the ambulance that waited outside. Langa got in with me and was smiling. I can't believe that this is my son kissing other men and in my presence. Life just feels so stuck to me and I'm frustrated. I can't wait to be able to move my body again. This stroke has made my life a living hell and I hate it so much. How long will I have to suffer?.

OTHU

Craig and negotiators arrived three days ago. He obviously is not allowed to enter my parental home until the negotiations are complete. I've had to explain to Chulu why her father can't see us though he is in the same town as us and I think she understood in her own little way. I still remember the day the negotiations started. Hearing the deacon say our clan name out loud from the other side of the gate made me have butterflies in belly. It all suddenly became real for me. They arrived early morning at 5am so we hardly had a chance to sleep. After reciting our clan name and and saying the reasons for their visit my elders finally let his negotiators in. I thought that they would let the poor people stand at the gate the entire day. Craig's negotiators made their way inside and soon after myself, Yandi and two of my other cousin sisters were called in so that they could choose the woman their son has chosen to make his makoti. We all sat on the mat head bowed and a part of me feared that they would choose wrong but not so. The deacon pointed at me and my elders asked if I know the people who have come to honour me with lobola and I wanted to scream yes, yes and yes but all I could say was "Yes I do, Tamkhulu" in a soft tone of voice. They excused us and so they went on with their business. Today is Friday and the

negotiations have not been concluded yet. Tamkhulu Welile asked for a long horn bull which in our country could easily cost over R100 000 and I felt all kinds of angry when I overheard Tamkhulu Fezile speak about it. I obviously could not say anything since I was eavesdropping by coincidence after the deacon and company left. Day two was described by the elders as a good day since Tankhulu Welile let go of his expensive requests. They still have not reached an agreement though and it's Friday today. If today doesn't conclude the negotiations then it means that Craig and I won't be able to have out traditional wedding tomorrow. I was stressing out like crazy. It's 4am and the adults are all up and ready to welcome the negotiators once again. My phone rang. I looked at the screen, it's Craig.

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Me: Morning, baby. (I said softly)

Craig: Hey, I just want you to know that we managed to get all that your family asked. I'm sure that all will go well today. I don't want you stressing about this.

Me: I just feel like my dad's family doesn't want to see me happy. (I said while crying) They wanted you to get a cow that costs thousands of rands.

Craig: Who told you about that?

Me: I overheard the elders speak the night of the first meeting. I Googled it, baby and those cows with long horn are rare so they cost a lot. I jus...

Craig: O, calm down please. I don't want you upsetting yourself. I've got it all under control. They agreed to compromise and so I managed to get what they asked for. I've got a strong team on my side so we got this. You just try not to stress because that won't do any of us good. I love you and I'll see you later. I have a feeling that in a few hours I'll be allowed to enter your home because I'll be a son there soon.(I smiled)

Me: I love you too and it had better go we or else I'll throw a tantrum. (he laughed)

Craig: It won't come to that. Tomorrow we will be married. I can't wait. (I smiled)

Me: I'll see you later.

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I can't help but stress because I thought all of this would be concluded on day one already. I hope that day three is going to go smoothly. I finished getting dressed and wore a long skirt topped with a head wrap. Chulu was still sleeping but that's understandable. The house is so full that we had to ask the neighbours to accommodate certain people. Those who had the means booked themselves into a B&B. Yandi and I shared a

bed with Chulu. My friend has been so committed to doing traditional chores. She didn't even mind when a few nails broke. Bhut Vuyo is a lucky man. She walked in just as I was thinking about her.

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Yandi: It's chaos out there. I had to steal the kettle to boil the water in order to make this tea for you. (I laughed)

Me: Thank you so much, friend. You know had you not been taken already I'd have made you our makoti. I have brothers now. (we laughed and she handed me the tea)

Yandi: And handsome they are. Look I know this is stressful I've been there.

Me: Yours didn't take three days, friends. I thought my father not being here would make it all easy. They wanted a long horn cow.

Yandi: Families aren't the same. At least they didn't tell the negotiators to go to hell. Khulu Fezile is a reasonable man so he'll make sure all goes well. Othu, you're pregnant for goodness sake. This is the business of the elders. No one will stand in the way of your happiness but you have to make sure you remain healthy do enjoy it all. Just enjoy it, girl. You'll look back at this moment on your tenth wedding anniversary and laugh your ass off and I'll be there to talk about it all with you.

God is here and trust me the spirit of your ancestors came in full force I'd know. (I smiled)

Me: But friend though. I'm blessed to have you here.

Yandi: I'll score more points after you see what I have for you.

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She stood and went to one of her bags. She took out the most beautiful Xhosa inspired red and black head wrap. The beading was just so magnificent. I hugged her and thanked her. I'll wear it tomorrow for the celebrations. She said she had another surprise but we have to go out to not wake Chulu up and we did. Licia and Zuko stood outside looking all kinds of beautiful in African outfits. If they look so beautiful during lobola negotiation I can't imagine what they had made for the wedding. The four of us made so much noise. How I wish Poppy was not as she is now. Craig told me that she rocked up at our house and I didn't like how she went about it. Sue who is the school secretary is a very discreet person and would never leave learners details open while she's not around so that means that Poppy was snooping and the thought of it makes me trust her even less. But I'll deal with it when I'm in Cape Town. The ladies rolled up their sleeves and went to work. I think Licia being here made people more convinced that I'm marrying into a white family. Dabs called me aside and gave me the longest hug and kissed both my cheeks. I was smiling like a

little girl. She took out a necklace that was so gorgeous. The colourful beads its made of and the design took my breath away. I started to cry and she wiped my tears off.

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Dabs: When I heard that you're getting married soon I had Mama take me to a bead shop immediately. I've been secretly making this for you. I have made a head one for Craig too. You two are kind people and I've got no doubt that your marriage will be that of love and warmth. I know you'll get more expensive gifts but I do hope that you like it.

Me: I love it. Not many will take time to sit down and make hand made gifts for us. This will be one of my most treasured gifts. It beats all the gold pieces that I got from a store. Thank you, Dabs. (she smiled)

Dabs: Today we will welcome your husband into this house I know. You just don't worry about anything.

Makhulu: That's just how she is. Worries about things that are even out of her control. All will go well, nunu. Hell will freeze over before I let anyone stand in the way of your happiness. I'm not suppose to tell you this but Welile let go of his request. (she whispered the last part) Funda said yesterday went far better then the day before. Now go and be somewhere you can't be seen. Your husband's negotiators are on the way.

Me: Must it be before the sun had even come up though? I'm so tired.

Dabs: It's how it's suppose to happen. If it happens at noon it's believed it's bad luck. You'll rest soon enough.

Me: I hope so. (we hugged)

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I first went to put the necklace in a safe place. The fires for cooking were already burning. Soon enough I heard voices at the gate again. Shouldn't they be allowed to just come in by now? They have been here twice already but I'm no expert so I'll just keep quiet. Chulu woke up and she bathed and got dressed.

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Chulu: Mommy, I miss my daddy.

Me: You'll see him soon. Tomorrow it's our traditional wedding. (she smiled)

Chulu: I know and I'm very excited. Makhulu made me a nice dress and put beads on my tommy shoes. I'll look like an African princess. Makhulu Lu said I would. (I kissed her cheek)

Me: I'm sure you will. I love being your mommy. Did you know that?

Chulu: Of course if you didn't you would not have gave me hugs and kisses. (I laughed)

Me: Yes, bhabha I guess so.

Chulu: I love being your bhabha too. Did you know that?

Me: Of course, if you didn't you'd never have let me give you those hugs and kisses. (she giggled and Mama walked in)

Mama: Such happiness in here. Good morning, Chulu.

Chulu: Morning, mommy's mommy. (I laughed softly)

Mama: You can call me makhulu if you want. (she looked at me)

Chulu: Another makhulu? (she asked in a whisper)

Me: Well you actually have a lot of makhulus present here today. You can call some gogo or khulu if you want to differentiate.(she nodded)

Chulu: Is it fine if I go to the people outside?

Me: Yes but just be careful. Go to makhulu.

Chulu: Which one?

Me: The two we live with.

Chulu: I'll be careful and I still have the whistle daddy gave me. (she got off the bed and left)

Mama: She's growing.

Me: Yeah it's both beautiful and painful to witness. I'm not ready to let go of the sweet moments but I'm looking forward to seeing the woman she'll grow up to be.

Mama: She'll take after you. So I have a gift for you. It's not much just a three piece jewelry set. (she gave it to me)

Me: Thank you and I love it. (she smiled)

Mama: Tatu Welile has always been like this. Your father should actually have been his son. I know the fact that they have been having these negotiations for so long worries you but everything will be okay. Ma Zweni will lead those negotiations herself if need be so you'll be happy. (we both laughed)

Me: And that she'd really do if it came down to it. I like these talks we have. Trust is still an issue but we build something each day. Having you here is great. Thank you.

Mama: No, thank you for inviting me to be a part of it all. (she kissed my forehead)

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Makhulu was right when she said there is just a special feeling one gets when in the presence of a mother. We have a long way to go but I'm glad that she is here. Even that little neglected girl inside of me is now started to feel the comfort and is forgiving slowly but surely. I called Langa to ask him to come to my wedding and he said he'd make a plan. I love that

he is working now and is independent. He was working before but he took it for granted since it was daddy's company. Now he actually has to prove himself. I'm exhausted so I really hope today is the day all is concluded regarding the lobola. It just has to because I want to marry my man tomorrow.

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#NARRATED .

The lobola negotiations have been one of the most complicated ones the Deacon had ever been a part of. He would sit and watch Welile with pure disgust since they started because of what the man did to his lady. Deacon Funda however put aside his anger so they could have a civilised negotiation. Each Lobola negotiation is different due to the difference in cultures, families and status. Funda felt as if the Zweni men were looking for a get rich quick plan but he didn't say it out loud. They wanted a bull that costs thousands at auction and not to mention the fact that they aren't easy to come by. Craig wanted to get it but Funda said it would open room of opportunity for the Zweni men to milk him more so they had to put their foot down. Fezile is the most reasonable one and he managed to be the peace keeper. We sat and discussed more and it seems today is the day they will solidify this union.

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Welile: We will go out now to go and see the two white bulls that we asked for and the horse. Now we must speak about the cows for the children your son gave our daughter.

Funda: I thought that we concluded the case of the baby. Our son took responsibility for it and the cow for the damages was included and we agreed that it will be cash and not live stock.

Fezile: We have concluded, Mr Funda and we are happy. Let's not forget why we are here. It is not to milk that poor man but to build ties between us and his family. My granddaughter is with child and I'm sure these long discussions have her worried. Welile you wanted two bulls and a horse. Craig went back and got them for you. Lobola is a continuous process and you know that. The rest he will pay by showing his father in law help and goodwill should Kumkani need it someday. Stop being so stubborn.

Welile: Hey

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I'm talking about the eldest child that turned out to be his and not Othu's yet our daughter was forced to raise her. A child of another women. He must pay damages for that as well.

Vuyo: Tata, Chulu was adopted by Othu as hers way before Craig entered her life. He...

Welile: I won't let a boy who is still wet behind his ears tell me how this is done. (he shouted cutting Vuyo short)

Funda: Our son is marrying your daughter so that he will take responsibility for all that you have mentioned. Yes, he picked a flower from the Zweni garden but he didn't just throw that flower aside instead he wants to continue taking care of it. Othu is that flower so please allow him to do right by her and your family. Like Mr Tyini said, we are trying to build ties between two families here and not divide these children.

Welile: Let's not forget that we are giving our daughter to a disabled man. Meaning he'll be a burden to her. Had he been a car he'd have been in a scrap yard.

Funda: I refuse to let you speak to our son in such a manner. How dare you compare him to a broken car that must be left in a scrap yard. I tried my best to be civilised with you but you make it difficult for me to. We take offence, Zweni and greatly so. (he raised his voice looking ready to punch Welile)

Thabiso: Elders please let's calm down and take a minute. I get that this its a stressful process that at times raise emotions but we can't be controlled by those. We must use our heads in this matter and not forget to keep in mind the goal of us all being here. (he said calmly but in a stern voice)

Fezile: We want the best for our child and your son has proven to us that she and the children will be well taken care of which makes us happy. We are happy and yes, we agree to build strong ties between the two families. Am I right, Welile?

Welile: Yes...yes you are right. (he said after a long while.)

Funda: Thank you, Zweni family. There have been moments we almost hit each other but I'm glad we were able to come to an agreement. Your livestock is outside and here are the rest cows that you requested in cash. (he put the money down on the scared grass mat)

Welile: We will count it now and go and check that you didn't bring us sick and thin livestock.

Fezile: I have a feeling that Mr Knights is a man of honour. I look forward to finally welcoming him in our home. We are one now so we welcome you. I'll have the cow for the welcoming of the son in law be slaughtered now. While we wait for the it's gall bladder so we can spill it in order for our children to have a successful marriage let us enjoy the tradition beer. (he shook the men's hands and whispered something to one of the men in his family)

Welile: We welcome you and I'm sure even the father of the bride will be pleased. (he also shook hands)

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After two and a half days of endless negotiations they finally reached an agreement. Even though Welile was unreasonable he was the first to smile and laugh out loud when he saw the healthy bulls and the horse in a truck outside. Funda asked if he can even ride a horse but he can't and neither can anyone in the family. It turns out Welile just always wanted to own a horse. The cow was slaughtered and all the traditional processes were done before Craig could finally step foot in the yard. He had left the wheelchair and balanced on his crutches. Welile apologised after he saw that since he called Craig a scrap. There was great cheering and singing from the women to show that all went well. A white cloth was hung by Makhulu's gate to show all that there will be a wedding. Othu was so happy when she heard that all had gone good. She was then dressed properly to go and help the other women serve her husband and his negotiators. Craig sat and watched as she walked around serving people. He could not believe that she is finally his. Chulu came running to her father and gave him a tight hug. She spoke so much and Craig wondered if he's even allowed to interact with her yet but the deacon said it's good. The groom and company got served a delicious meal while they had traditional beer. Makhulu came to hug her Clay and welcomed him properly and so did the rest of the family. Deacon Funda got the young couple together and said a prayer to bless Othu's engagement ring and to bless their union. Yandi

also stood close to thank the ancestors for looking after their children. Craig stood and balanced on his crutches and Othu just could not help but cry tears of disbelief and joy. The two of them took a short walk alone. She was showing him the area.

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Othu: I still can't believe that you are not on your wheelchair, baby. I missed looking up in order to look in your eyes. I'm just so proud of you.

Craig: Thank you. You look so beautiful. (she blushed)

Othu: Thank you. I hear my grandfather have your people hell but I'm glad that all went well. It feels good to have you here.

Craig: I was actually willing to give in to all the demands made but deacon held it down. If he drank alcohol I'd have bought him the most expensive whiskey and a cigar. (they laughed)

Othu: I'm sure he'll be happy with a new bible. To actually see both the traditional and christian ways come together is beautiful.

Craig: Can I kiss you now? My lips can't take it anymore. (Othu laughed and planted a soft kiss on his lips)

Othu: That's all I can give you for now but tomorrow I plan to do more. I've missed you so much.

Craig: I missed you more. (he kissed her cheek)

Chulu: Mommy and daddy wait for me! (she shouted behind them and ran to them) Why did you leave me behind?

Othu: You were dancing there so we didn't want to interrupt.

Chulu: Daddy can you pick me up now that you are okay again?

Craig: Not yet, princess but soon.

Chulu: That's okay. How many hours until it's the wedding. I can't wait to wear my new clothes. (the adults laughed)

Othu: Soon and I'll decorate your face nicely too.

Chulu: I'm excited. (she smiled)

Craig: So am I. (he looked at Othu)

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The three of them walked slowly and spoke a lot. Othu could not help but stare at Craig. She indeed is very proud of him. He was feeling some pain in his knee and he hoped its nothing serious. He didn't consult his physiotherapist before making this leap of faith but he was sure that nothing would happen. They headed back to the family and got so much advice on marriage and compliments too. Craig noticed that a lot of people were shocked to see that his skin is not white. He thought that now is the time for that African name but it must be modern though and have a powerful meaning to it. The day went well and Funda still harboured some dislike for Welile.

The man is just selfish and Funda could not believe his little round hands violated Makhulu. Notomato finally introduced herself to Craig and he thought she'd quite a character.

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Ma T: Heee, my boy you had us all thinking that you are white. I thought that Othu was carrying a young Jan van Riebeck when in fact it's a Shaka Zulu. It's very nice to meet you. (Craig laughed)

Craig: Uhm wow, it's a pleasure to meet you too, Ma.

Ma T: Yhu I heard that you paid a million rand for Othu. What a lucky girl.

Craig: Well it seems your source gave you incorrect information but whatever I honoured family with was worth it because she's a special treasure.

Ma T: Let's hope she'll be the million rand wife she must be. Let me go eat some meat before these rural greedy people who aren't used to eating meat finish it all. I'll tell you the habits of these people some day. They aren't used to the high life such as us. I still remember my trip to Japan it was great. (Craig didn't know what to say so he just smiled and nodded) Bye bye, son in law. (she rushed off)

Othu: Building alliances already I see. (she whispered in his ear from behind and he smiled and faced her)

Craig: What a character. When did she go to Japan?

Othu: She's never travelled internationally but don't tell her you know that. Just smile and nod. She doesn't mind being the only one talking.

Craig: I did just that.

Othu: Then I'm proud of you, husband. You're getting the hang of it all. (they laughed) Baby, I think someday we should try and look for your extended family. I know you say you don't have any but your parents didn't fall from the sky. You must have grandparents out there and maybe aunts and uncles.

Craig: No, if I do then there was a reason why my parents never wanted me to know them. I've found a family through you and I'm happy. O, let's enjoy being newly wed and parents. We have so much to look forward to next year. Chulu will start big school, the baby will arrive, our cousins will start school and we will enjoy being married. Let's not complicate our lives. Our relationship started on a complicated manner but now I look forward to smooth sailing. Yes, trouble will come but let us not go and look for it please.

Othu: They might be nice but I'll respect your decision. If you change your mind though then please let me know. I know my family is yours now but should you wish to look for your blood relatives then know that your wife has your back. I want to be

your safe haven when the cruel life gives you hassles. (Craig smiled)

Craig: As I will be yours and should I want to do that I'll tell you, Mrs Knights. I know you got my back. (they both smiled)

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Othu looked around to see if there are no prying eyes and when the cost was clear she leaned forward to kiss him. Craig's mind was filled with naughty thoughts but he'll be patient. He knows she had his back but he is afraid that looking for his family might open another can of worms and he doesn't have the strength for that. For now he just wanted to stay in this happy bubble with his family. The fact that she also gave up the house she loved so that he can make the dream of settling in his old house a reality was just amazing. Othu do things that make him fall in love with her more and more each day. Even had her family wanted half of his assets just so he'd make her his wife he'd have done that. Both of them were so excited about tomorrow. Othu just hoped that her African dress still fit her since she gains weight each day. God and the ancestors have approved of their union and tomorrow they celebrate being one. They held hands and usually Craig would let Othu pray but this time he wanted to do it. He said a prayer of thanks and also asked for tomorrow to go well. They said amen, looked at each other and he planted a warm kiss on her forehead. He

doesn't need a marriage certificate. To him she already is his wife after today. They stood like two love struck teenagers. Smiling while making prolonged eye contact which made Othu blush a couple of times. It all just felt so right for both of them.

OTHU

The big day has finally arrived. I haven't slept a wink due to the excitement and nerves. By the end of today I'll be Mrs Knights and to have those who are dear to me be here to witness it all makes it even more special. The traditional wedding was actually suppose to be at Craig's parental home as per culture but since he doesn't have any family he agreed to have it an African themed venue. I must admit the wedding planner just outdid herself it was worth every penny. I know that he doesn't want to look for his family but I'm sure that a part of him wishes that he had someone from his side of the family. Mr Funda has taken the role as father of the groom so seriously and Craig just can't stop talking about his support. We must get him a big gift though I'm sure the biggest gift to him would be Makhulu's heart but we don't have control over that. My poor granny is tired because she has been busy arranging all of this and making sure that word went out about the wedding and next week she'll have to go face the same people who tried to make her kill her child. I know she's not looking forward to it but she wants what's best for Dabs so she'll force herself. I got up while everyone was still sleeping even the elders who are usually the early risers. I put on the kettle and craved strong black coffee so much but I know I'll have to compromise for

baby's health so I opted for rooibos. I heard some footsteps come from the passage and looked to see who it was, it's the first lady. She smiled and greeted me with a warm hug.

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Makhulu: The nerves won't allow you to sleep I'm sure. (we laughed softly)

Me: I've been up almost all night, Ma. So many things have been going through my mind. What if I'm not a good wife to him? What if I have true colours that I myself am not even aware of and have them show only once I'm married? What if I've got Tata's controlling na...

Makhulu: Nunu, stop or else you'll give yourself a heart attack. Take a deep breath through your nose and exhale slowly through your mouth. (she cut me short and I did as instructed)

Me: You always know what's best. I actually do feel a little bit calmer but not much though. (she smiled)

Makhulu: Kumkani might not have been this bad growing up but he always wanted everyone to do as he wanted no matter how the other person feels so had you taken after him with a controlling nature it would have shown long ago. Yes, you have your shortcomings but we all do and Clay included. What you both must do is respect each other and embrace each others short comings. Me I'm not worried one bit about the type of

wife you'll be because I know you'll be a good one as I'm sure he'll make a good husband. Life threw so many troubles at you two in the past since you were both children yet you managed to find your way back to each other. Recently the devil tested you once again but you two fought to be together again. To me that shows that whatever troubles come you two will deal with it and fight for your marriage. Take it one day at a time. You are stressing now because you're allowing your mind to make up scenarios that might not even happen. Marriage requires work from both parties involved, nunu but if you are together for the right reasons it's a beautiful thing. I know that you two aren't doing this for Chulu and you aren't doing it because he got you pregnant either but you are doing it because your souls tell you that thru have founds their mates. God brought you two together and nothing will separate it. If something does it would mean you allowed it to. Stop this over thinking just for today and go with the flow. (I smiled)

Me: One day at a time. (she smiled and nodded)

Makhulu: Yes and before you know it you'll be married for a year and you'll look back at all this unnecessary stress you put yourself through today and see it was a waste of time and a joy stealer. I'm happy. Yho I'm so happy I could climb the highest mountain and shout it out. My nunus are getting married and my baby will finally have that family she has been praying for.

The other baby will feel the energies of today and I'm sure will grow stronger and stronger.

Me: Ma but you always just makes sense and effortlessly so. Thank you for being in my corner since forever. I don't know the type of woman I'd have turned out to be if you never sacrificed your life here to go to Cape Town and raise me. I love you so much, my everything. You my advisor, my joy, my happiness, my peace and just everything. (she wiped her tear off)

Makhulu: Oh stop it. (she smiled) You are my everything. You've become my best friend too since you've become a woman. I love you most. I also want to advice you to never let go of friend such as Yandisa. Clay must also hang on to Vuyo. It seems you all have a similar mindset and outlook on life. I love that their married too.

Me: They are beautiful people and I won't let go of her, Ma. I actually think that you must give Deacon Funda a chance after you've dealt with Dabs's issue. The man has helped the family so much and I feel sorry for him. He still calls you his lady and Craig said he wanted to come and punch Tamkhulu Welile after he heard what he did.

Makhulu: Today is not about me and Funda but about you and Clay.

Me: Smooth way to change the topic, Ma Zweni but I'll let it go for now. (she laughed)

Makhulu: Go and sleep for a little while longer. You have a long day ahead because a traditional wedding can take up to four days even a week.

Me: I'd never survive. I get tired quickly now and I'm starting to show but only when wearing something tight.

Makhulu: Gone with the tight clothing. No man must drool over Clay's food. (I laughed shyly)

Me: Oh my goodness, Ma that sounded so naughty. I'm not sleepy though. I think I'll sleep once everything is done and dusted. Let's just sit and have tea. From next week we will be living in separate houses once again. I don't like it but I'll take comfort in knowing that you are just 15 minutes away.

Makhulu: Yes, Ma Knights. (I laughed so much.

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I made her a cup of coffee and we sat and talked about everything. Soon after Dabs woke up and I made her a drink as well. The sun rose after a long while and Makhulu said I should go and get ready before it gets busy. Everyone woke up and the house was just chaotic. Ma T started to sing African wedding songs and it all made me a nervous wreck. Yandi came in with my outfit for the day and I started to get dressed. I opted for a

red and black outfit rather than the traditional black and white. I put on my African ball gown that was an off shoulder. Makhulu advised that I have a cover made for my shoulders and I didn't argue. She wrapped the head wrap that Yandi gave me so beautifully. I felt like a real princess about to marry her dashing prince. I can't wait to see him. Dabs was busy dressing Chulu and my baby was just so excited. Makhulu beaded her name on her Tommy sneakers and I think that was the highlight of her outfit. Yandi applied my make up and Makhulu applied the traditional facial decorations. After a while everyone had finished getting dressed. I stood up to look at myself in the mirror for the very first time and I almost didn't recognise myself. I'm about to officially be someone's wife. For many years I actually told myself that I'm not going to get married but life proved me wrong and I'm glad that it did. Chulu came to stand next to me and she looked so adorable. I knelt down to her level and hugged her.

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Me: You look so beautiful. (she smiled)

Chulu: You do too, mommy. Why don't I have a head scarf on?

Me: Because I wanted everyone to see your beautiful hair. Your afro compliments your outfit. After today we will finally be a family. Are you still happy?

Chulu: Of course I have been praying and asking God for a daddy for a long time and I love that my daddy is my daddy. I'm very happy. (I smiled)

Me: Well that's all mommy always wanted. For you to have a loving family with two parents. God is a God that answers prayers.

Chulu: Yes, I got all that I prayed for and more. We now have a big family. Do you think asking God for a puppy will be asking too much. (I raised a brow)

Me: Yes it will for now. Let's just count our blessings and be thankful. You'll be a big sister soon so you won't have time to care for a puppy.

Chulu: Yeah you're right, mommy. It's just that the baby is taking her sweet time to arrive but I'll be patient. (I laughed)

Me: Yes being patient is good. Now let's go so that you're mommy and daddy can finally be married people. (she hugged me)

Chulu: I'm so excited. We must take lots of pictures. (I gave her a kiss and nodded)

Yandi: Mrs Knights, we are ready for you. All that singing is to call you out so that we can celebrate with you and Craig. You are a goddess, flawless. I love you and I wish you all the best

today and for the rest of your life. I won't speak much because I still need to say my speech later. Come, let's take a selfie.

Chulu: I love selfies. Let's also pout aunty Yandi. (Yandi laughed)

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The three of us took so many selfies and they took pictures of me alone too. Makhulu came to tell us that the people are waiting for me. I took a deep breath, held Chulu's hand and we went out. Goodness I was not ready for what was on the other side of the door. The singing, ululating, cheering and dancing was just so overwhelming that tears flew down my cheeks immediately but they were of pure joy. Ma T led the way and some would approach me to congratulate me.

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Ma T: Hey, don't touch my granddaughter with dirty hands. That dress she has on cost us R150 000. Get your hand of her.

Makhulu: Tone the rudeness and exaggeration down, Mato.

Ma T: The let them not touch her. Their hard hands might tear that delicate expensive fabric that our dresses are made of. (makhulu just shook her head and I laughed)

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I Dont know where she got that ridiculous amount for my dress from but today I'll just laugh everything off. We marched to the

cars with great cheering until we all got into our transportations and off we went. I held Yandi's hand so tightly and she had to remind me a few times to breath. We finally arrived at the wedding venue and there was also singing when we arrived. All of Craig's friends are here and so are most of his clients. Our church people also came out to support and I was just so grateful. I'll admit having my mother here is a joy. When we stepped out of the car I saw a familiar face and I could not help but smile. Langa made it and he walked closer and Ian by his side. They looked so handsome. Ian ran ahead of Langa with so much excitement and gave me a kiss and hug.

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Ian: Oh my word, you look so gorgeous. Hubby won't know what hit him. I'm so glad that I'm here. I've never been to a traditional wedding and my first one is that of my sister in law. (he screamed a bit)

Langa: Ian, please not here. (he said softly). Hey, sis I made it and I'm so glad. Thank you for inviting me and you look so beautiful. (I smiled)

Me: Thank you for being here. I'm glad to see you both and together. (they looked at each other and smiled)

Ma T: Yhuu Langa is that you? I last saw you when you were in diapers. When will you bring us a bride? (she rushed to hug him)

Ian: You won't have a bride but a groom, mommy. Oh but why are you all so beautiful.

Ma T: Langa are you also like Senzo and Jason?

Langa: I don't even know who that is, makhulu.

Ma T: Don't worry yourself. These days even men are clothed in makoti attire and given makoti names. I'm young and hip so you don't have to be a...

Makhulu: Langa, it's good to see you

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my boy. (she cut Ma T short and hugged him). And you too, Ian.

Ian: Yes, mommy. (he said flicking his non existent hair)

Makhulu: I'm sure Clay is wondering where we are keeping his bride so please all family politics aside until another day. Today is about Othunyiweyo.

Mama: I agree with, Ma Zweni. (she smiled)

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He hugged me so tightly and for the first time it felt real. Ian kissed both my cheeks well he kissed the air because his lips never touched my cheeks. When the song started he was the first one to move his slender waist though he didn't understand a word. I couldn't help but laugh. He is free and I have a feeling that will rub off on Langa in the long run. It seems like Tata was the barrier between me, mama and Langa. I hope that he will come out of his current state a changed man. The venue didn't allow that we slaughter and cook on the premises. So the meat was prepared at home and sent to the catering company we hired. I want everyone to be a part of the celebrations. We finally made it to Craig's group and I was looking down all the time. Chulu let go of my grip and ran off. I had to look up to see where she is heading to and she ran straight to Craig and hugged him. Nate picked her up. Craig and I finally made eye contact and we both smiled. He also had a traditional outfit on and he looked so good. The beads around his neck and head made him so manly and for a while I forgot that he is injured. He still balanced on the crutches though. The singing suddenly faded into the background and all I could focus on was him. We finally held hands and he kissed my forehead. We were lost in that moment and the cheering around us became louder which brought us both back to the people around us. I put my hand on his lower back and we walked to the venue. I loved that we both walked down the aisle together and with Chulu walking

right in front of us. I also loved that we walked to the front with the cheering and singing of our loved ones instead of a recorded song. All of this was just so beautiful. The people would not calm down so we decided to just let them sing their hearts out.

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Craig: You look so beautiful. I can't take my eyes from you. (I blushed)

Me: You look dashing yourself, Mr Knights. Are you wearing undies under that wrap? (he laughed).

Craig: No because I don't want to struggle tonight when we play our adult game. (we both laughed)

Me: I love you.

Craig: I love you more. (he kissed my hand)

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We asked Deacon Funda to lead the celebrations with a prayer. After a long while everybody calmed down and took their seats. Mr Funda asked us to hold hands and he put his on top of ours and said the most powerful prayer that I've ever heard. After some time the dancers that were hired danced their traditional dances and it was all so beautiful. The people sat around tables so the refreshments were served while they witnessed the

beauty before us. The time for the speeches came and Makhulu was the first to stand and grab the mic. She first just stood and watched us while wiping off tears. I couldn't help but cry too. She took a deep breath and we all laughed. Oh what would I be without this woman?

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Makhulu: Oh my nunus. I still remember how much I used to nag Othu to give some man a chance and settle down but I'm glad you didn't listen to me. You waited and God gave you Clay. You two have gone through so much and I would know because I was referee at times. (we laughed). I'm glad that you chose love and unity. What people don't know is that you two have come a long way since your early teens and today you are husband and wife. I'm glad to see this place so full of people because it means the entire village came out to celebrate your joy with you. We didn't sent out invitations because a traditional wedding is a celebration where everyone who wishes to come is welcome. You both look beautiful and I know that you'll be together for eternity. Whatever you do put God first. Let Him be the foundation of your lives and you'll never go wrong. Be each others best friend. Othu, gone are the days where you run to me first because now you have a life partner. Let your husband be the first person you go to with all your issues whether good or bad and same applies to you Clay.

Respect each other. You'll fight at times that I can guarantee you but always fight fair. Don't bring up past issues into the present because you'll never grow from that. Clay, I've got no doubt that my girls will be safe with you as head of the family. You respect us and helped us when you didn't have to but your heart is kind naturally so I know that your house will be a warm home. I don't have much to say but all I'd like to say is that I love you both so much. Thank you for making me a proud parent. (she came to hug us both)

Craig: Thank you, Ma. (he whispered and Mama stood)

Mama: I was actually not planning on speaking but something just won't allow me to sit and keep quiet. Tatu and Mamu Knights, yes you must now be addressed properly. Othu, I'm not going to go deep regarding our relationship in the past but I'm glad that I can be here to witness this beautiful moment. You are now officially a woman. When the other married women socialise you have a right to join them. Craig, we don't know each other well yet but I look forward to having yet another son. Thank you for making my daughter happy and this might sound biased but you have chosen the best of the best. Please love each other and grow together. When one loses track of what's right don't follow them to please them but sit down and try to get them back into the right track again. Ma Zweni said it all so all I'll say is congratulations and I wish you

both a life of forever together and may you bless us with many more grandchildren. (everyone laughed)

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She also came and hugged us it was all just so special. The starters were served after that and more entertainment was presented to us. Everything was just perfect. I wish the day could go on for a month or so. Some of my other family members also stood to speak. Some presented their gifts to us. Most were blankets but that's okay. We appreciated each and every single one of them. I held Craig's hand and we would look at each other and smile. I love him so much, my Knight.

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I had a pretty good night sleep for a man that was getting married. Most men said that they were unable to sleep the night before their wedding due to fear of the unknown. Yes, it's scary but I'll be going through it all with my best friend right by my side. I love the traditional clothes that I have on and of course I'm wearing underwear under the wrap. I feel like a Xhosa prince and damn does my princess look beautiful. Her little bump is actually a bit visible or maybe it's my imagination.

When I saw her for the first time today I felt so grateful to God for choosing her for me. The people here are so friendly. Chulu sat on my lap eating her food while we listened to the wise words of the elders. Mr Funda stood and he grabbed the microphone. I've found myself a father in him.

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Funda: My children, what you have is beautiful. To witness young people in these times choose marriage and family is beautiful. I'm not a man of many words so I won't say much. Craig, son I can tell you know that you have found in Othunyiweyo a women that is priceless. I've watched her in church from a distance and I'll admit that at times I've thought about matching her with my son. (we laughed). She was raised by a great women so best believe that you will have a great life partner in her. Othu, my girl you have also got yourself a great man in Craig. We know that he would lay down his life for you and your family. In him you have a provider and protector. All things required of a good husband. I want you both to always put God first, then your marriage then your kids. We all are so focussed on putting the kids first at all times until the connection that bound us in the first place gets lost. In order for your kids to be happy your marriage must be healthy and in order for your marriage to be healthy you need to lean on God and be a praying couple. Congratulations, Mr and Mrs Knights.

Now it's time to surround yourself with like minded people. Thank you for making me a part of all of this. Leading your lobola negotiations was an honour I'll forever cherish. Leading your celebrations with prayer was beautiful. Chulu, my child blessed are you and your unborn sibling to be raised by kind people. I thank you. (he shook my hand and hugged O)

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I had to blink away the tears a few times while he spoke because I wished that my father and mother were here to witness this. But I'm sure that they are with us in spirit. I feared that my side would be empty but people here don't choose sides. The venue is packed and I just hope that there is enough food to feed everyone but I'm sure that there is. Hours went by and the celebratory spirits were still high. Some had too much to drink and had to be escorted home. We danced, ate, laughed and danced some more. I had to take another dose of painkillers though to numb the knee a bit. Yandi also stood and spoke so beautifully. Ma T stood and I thought she'd say a mouthful but not.

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Ma T: Let us now stop with the long speeches. This is not a funeral where there is a spokesperson for every stage of the deceased life. This is a wedding so let's dance and be happy. You rural people still need to be pop-pop but don't worry I'll get

you into current styles. To Craig and Othunyiweyo. Hey we are millionaires now. Our daughter didn't choose cheap. (makhulu stood and took the mic)

Makhulu: Let us indeed just go on with the celebrations. (we laughed)

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The speeches were done and dusted and it was indeed party time. I don't know where Ma T got the idea that I paid millions in lobola but she is sticking to her story. Hours went by and we were tired. We are married now so no one will hold us going to a hotel together. After saying goodbye to everyone we excused ourselves. Chulu refused to stay behind so we had no choice but to go with her. We had to change our booking from a single room suite to a double. We arrived at the hotel and O went to bath Chulu and she fell asleep immediately. I held my wife in my arms and kissed her like my life depended on it.

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Me: Thank you so much for agreeing to be my wife. Today was amazing and beautiful. You're beautiful. (she blushed)

Othu: Thank you, baby. I'm just glad that we are now able to finally build our marriage. I look forward to growing old with you. (we kissed)

Me: I miss you so please don't torture me even more by waiting. (she laughed softly)

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She stood on her tip toes and kissed me. I wish I could pick her up and lay her softly on the bed but that would only injure both of us and our baby. She took all my beads off and the the wraps too. I unzipped her dress and it effortlessly fell to the floor revealing her cute bump and sexy underwear. Her breasts were bare so I kissed down her neck and caressed and kissed her tender breasts gently. We made our way to the bed soon enough and I was going to take the lead tonight. We caressed each other's bodies and the room was filled with our moan and soft groans. I love pleasuring her so much but I had to be inside of her so I made my way to her lips, kissed her and penetrated her slowly. The warmth of her love part drove me insane. We started to move to a steady rhythm until we got lost in the moment. Clearly we were both hungry for each other. It didn't take long for both of us to go over the edge and her legs shook uncontrollably just as I love it. I didn't want to be a part from her yet so we remained one and it felt good to make love to my wife.

"I love you so much", I whispered in her ear and kissed her neck.

"I love you more", she whispered back while holding onto me so tightly. I actually kept on moving and she'd let out soft moans and softly say my name. Damn I love this woman. I love my wife. We cuddled while laughing at the funny moments of today. The two of us went to shower together and after that we made love again and again. We fell asleep in each others arms and I got woken up by pain so I stood to drink my pills. I looked at O who looked so beautiful while sleeping. I checked my phone to look at the time and saw a text from Nate.

"The deacon got arrested, man. He asked me not to tell you but I know you'll give me shit if I don't. Mr Welile road his horse and lost control of it. The animal nearly knocked Makhulu to the ground but luckily Bandile knows about horses and could stop it. Deacon lost it and punched the guy multiple times. He'll only get bail on Monday. Sorry for the essay text and about disturbing your wedding night", it read.

I threw my head back and sighed loudly. The deacon was waiting for an opportunity to hit Mr Zweni so he took it even though the horse thing was a mistake I suppose. I had to go to the station to see if I can do something. I got dressed and wrote O a note explaining my whereabouts. I called a cab and made my way to the police station. When I got there they allowed me to see him.

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Me: Deacon, I thought you said violence doesn't solve anything.

Funda: I have no remorse for what I did. I have been in prison in the apartheid days so I'm not scared of being here.

Me: You're old and not to mention that prison is not the same. These men aren't going to sing struggle songs with you.

Funda: That young man in the corner said he will give his life to the Lord so I'm here for a reason.

Me: What the...? Okay, I'll have you moved to a cell where you'll be alone.

Funda: Don't worry about me. I called Nomhle to tell her the same. I'll be fine with these men. They are hungry for the word of God. Go be with your wife. I'll be fine.

Me: I can't not worry but okay I'll respect your decision. OK promise I'll try my best to get you out before Monday. Your bones won't be able to handle the coldness of this place.

Funda: I'm a strong man. Now go and I still say violence is not okay but some people need it. Goodnight, son (the other guy started to sing gospel) See? God is here. I'm changing lives in here. Stop fussing as if I'm in a maximum prison. I'm in a holding cell for goodness sake. Goodnight. (he joined the singing and started to preach)

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The other guy literally started to cry when he preached and he was not drunk. I said goodbye and left him. He looked so calm. I went to where Welile was accommodated and his one eye was swollen shut and blue. Well the deacon was a boxer in his days so I guess he still has groove. I offered him money to drop the charges and he didn't even hesitate. We went to the police station and the charges were dropped. I finally took the deacon home and the police had to force him to leave. What the hell? I let him call makhulu and she was so happy that he is okay. I took him to the hotel and I was just annoyed. I finally got back to my wife, took my clothes off and cuddled her warm body. What a beautiful day it's been even if I had to bribe my grandfather in law to drop the charges when he deserved the punch. Othu won't believe that I had such a weird night while they slept peacefully.

It's Monday and Othu and her family left for Cape Town on an early morning flight. They called Makhulu when they landed to announce their safe arrival and to thank her for all that she has done to make their lobola process and traditional wedding a success. Makhulu didn't need to be thanked because their happiness was enough for her. Today makhulu and a few key elders of her family will be going to a place she vowed to never see again. To the village where she met and fell in love with Lunga's father. She is sure people wonder what a fourteen year old girl knew about love but being with Mandla felt special. He was older so he had a bit of experience in this love business. To have a baby young was never her plan but now that she's older and wiser she realises that we all live according to God's plan. We may make our own but if He has a different one then it shall be done. The bond between makhulu and Lunga is so organic. It's not forced at all and that made both the woman appreciate finding each other now after both suffered. The family has been on the road in two separate cars on their way to the small village of Kwa-Ngonyama where Mandla's family still rules. Traditional leaders are important and makhulu wished that Africa still had it's great kings, queens and chiefs like when she was a child but Apartheid ruined a lot of things but she was glad that Mandla's family still rules the their small village because it made finding them a lot easier. She wondered

if that lady was right in saying that Mandla had died because a part of her wished for him to also meet the daughter he was deprived of. Makhulu's phone rang, it's Othu.

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Makhulu: Nunu. (she said in her warm voice)

Othu: Ma, are you there yet?

Makhulu: Only about fifteen minutes away. Bandile is a good driver so don't worry we'll arrive safely.

Othu: Are you nervous? (Makhulu exhaled loudly)

Makhulu: I'm feeling a lot of things, my nunu but I don't have a choice. Lunga might seem stronger but I can see she's still not well and if this is the final step in order for her to be well again I'll do it.

Othu: We feel so bad for not being there, Ma. Craig's leg has been feeling pain after he overdid it during the wedding and I have to prepare my little ones for exams. They are in primary but trust me exams are important.

Makhulu: Don't worry, I understand and please rub Clay's knee with that oil I used to get an the pharmacy. Get the bottle in my room. It used to help back in the day.

Othu: I will, Ma and I'm so glad that Tamkhulu Welile is not a part of what you are going to do. That man brings trouble. (they both laughed)

Makhulu: He actually apologised for everything. I don't like that my son had to give him money to drop the charges though. Good thing I had your lobola money put away. That money will be used for your white wedding and gifts too.

Othu: You don't have to do that, Ma.

Makhulu: Nunu, had you married a man of our culture that money would have been used so that you can buy gifts such as a bed suite to take to your mother in laws house. Please let at least half of it go to what it's traditionally meant for. We will buy you gifts for your house. Your a wife now so your home equipment should say that. (Othu laughed)

Othu: You know best so I'll let you decide. We actually have to furnish this house. I'll leave all the furniture in the Lott house but it'll all work out well. Please keep me updated and tell me if anyone disrespects you I'll make sure the deacon is on the next flight there. (they both burst out in laughter). Ma, you went on about how I must appreciate Craig because of all the sacrifices he made for our safety. So now please follow your own advice. The man fought for your honour. A true knight in shining armor.

Makhulu: I've got too much to deal with. Lunga being my first priority.

Othu: Excuses, excuses Ma Zweni. I'll call you again later. I know all will work out well. Please take pictures of their castle. I'm sure it's nice.

Makhulu: We aren't going to the Queen of England here. It's a chief led small village.

Othu: Same thing to me. I love you and try to stay calm. Don't be that little girl they abused. Be the Ma Zweni we all know and love. That feisty, blunt, no nonsense taking Makhulu. You're a queen in your own right so slay, mommy, slay! (she said in a hyped up tone and Makhulu laughed so much)

Makhulu: Oh my nunu, thank you. I'm now actually really fired up and ready. This place has bad reception so I'll call later. I love you too. Kiss Chulu and Clay for me. I miss you, my children.

Othu: We miss you too. Bye, beautiful queen.

Makhulu: Bye, my princess. (they both made kissing sounds and ended the call)

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Makhulu looked at her phone and laughed softly. "Oh but Othu", she said shaking her head and laughing. She felt grateful

to Funda for defending her and she knows he is a good man but she can't think about that at the moment. The Xaba family weren't the most friendly bunch so she'll have to focus on this 100%. Makhulu woke the sleeping Lunga up and she opened her eyes looking around. Makhulu could not help but wonder what kind of child she was. A good one for sure but surely she had her rebellious moments also. The two sat in comfortable silence while Bandile complimented the area. It was beautiful. Green hills that had people's huts on them. Makhulu and her parents only stayed here a little while after Lunga's birth but she has always admired the beauty of the place. Kids were running freely and the women had chopped wood on their heads with white painted faces. The rural life is just too beautiful and not to mention peaceful. Lunga held her mother's now shaking hand and smiled at her.

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Lunga: Don't be afraid, Ma. If they turn us down then we would at least have tried. I have you and you are enough.

Makhulu: We can't afford to have them turn us down. You need this. I don't care if they chase me away but as long as they do what they are suppose to in order for you to be alright I'll be happy.

Lunga: If they are people who fear God and respect culture then they will do what's right. (Makhulu saw a familiar place)

Makhulu: Look that's where I used to live. It's not far from the royal compound. (she pointed at a blue house that had a hut next to it)

Lunga: It looks beautiful.

Makhulu: My girl had my home been like that then the chief would have allowed me to marry his nephew. The new owners clearly upgraded it.

Lunga: I hate how love in some families is defined by money and status. I wonder if I have siblings for side.

Makhulu: You sure do. Royal families are obsessed with children and continuing bloodlines. Don't be surprised if you have a few. So have you decided on what we spoke about?

Lunga: The relocation? (Makhulu nodded) I don't want to sell that plot I have my little house on, Mama. My husband worked hard to get it for us.

Bandile: I'm sorry to interrupt, elders but Ma you don't have to sell it. Sandiso is still living there since he doesn't want to move to the city. I'll save up money and build a proper structure.

Makhulu: And I'll help.

Bandile: Thank you, Makhulu but I ask to do this on my own for now. It will make me feel proud of myself as eldest. We will do it as Ma's sons. I hope that you don't take offence.

Makhulu: Not at all. I'm proud of you and should you need help then shout. (Bandile smiled and nodded)

Lunga: The man of the house has spoke then. (they all laughed)

Anathi: I'll build you a big house, Ma. Just a pity our village doesn't have electricity. Bhut Craig told me about the solar system though so that's what we'll do. Three years is not long and I'll be a graduate. I applied in schools in Cape Town so please take Makhulu's offer.

Lunga: That's what I just agreed to do. You don't use those ears at times. (they laughed) Okay, Ma I will move to the city with you. I still get intimidated by the many whites and the big buildings but I'll adjust. Thank you for wanting us close to you.

Makhulu: I'm glad that you have agreed. We will be close to Othu so we will visit as much as we can.

Bandile: I've never looked forward to a new year as I do now. So many blessings have come our way. Makhulu, I think cars can't get in here.

Makhulu: We will have to walk up the hill then. Will you be and to Lunga?

Bandile: I'll carry her. It's not steep at all. Tamkhulu has already gotten out of the car.

Makhulu: I just hope Notomato doesn't speak out of place.
(they laughed)

Lunga: But I love how makazi is. She's free and won't take nonsense from anyone.

Makhulu: She is also 69 years old. A thing she often forgets. (all laughed)

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Everyone got out of the car. The young men put off their jackets as a sign of respect. Tamkhulu Fezile would lead the discussions and Makhulu had full faith in him. Bandile lifted his mother off her feet with such ease and Anathi offered to carry Makhulu but she would not have any of it. Ma T greeted everyone as though they had been her long time friend. She is just someone who refuses to be defined by age. They finally made the walk uphill until they arrived at level ground. Bandile put his frail mother down and they all walked towards the royal compound which was huge with many white and black huts. The cattle in their kraals were magnificent. One of the workers greeted us and said he is going to alert Chief Vusikhaya. The name didn't ring a bell to Makhulu but it's to be expected that the chief she knew would be no more or would be retired due to old age. The worker came back saying that the chief will see them. Tamkhulu Fezile recited their clan names as they followed the young man who led the way. Makhulu never set food in this

yard even as a young girl so it felt strange to her. They finally made their way into a big room that had as few chairs. The throne was clearly visible since it was bigger and had a lion's cloth around it. Tamkhulu Fezile sat on a bench with the young men and the women on the grass mats. Soon enough a man clothed in traditional clothes entered and he was introduced to us as the new chief. Two women followed. One was much older and the other about Lunga's age. We went through all the greeting protocol for such an important family.

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Khaya: I firstly would like to welcome you all to our home. This is the heart of this village. All visitors start here before exploring any part of Ngonyama. Thank you for respecting our ways and tradition by coming to first announce your visit. I don't usually welcome passing guests myself but today feel different. What is it that I may do for you, Tyini family? (Fezile cleared his throat)

Fezile: I would also like to firstly thank the royal Xaba family for the welcome. We are thankful for your personal greeting and welcome, chief Xaba. I'm glad that you spoke about respecting tradition because this is a manner which concerns our ways. We are all adults here so I'm not going to beat around the bush. I have come here with my young sister, Nomhle Tyini-Zweni. This is a delicate matter but there is no other way of putting it so I'll be straight to the point. Years ago a son of this house was

in courtship with a daughter of the Tyini family who is Ma Zweni. From that courtship a child was conceived and born.

Nolali: What are you trying to imply, Tatu Zweni? That men of this family are loose and go around making babies? (asked the chief's wife)

Khaya: You keep quiet this instant, Nolali. Didn't you hear the man say that it's a delicate matter yet you speak so rudely. Did I say you may speak? (he looked at her with widened eyes)

Nolali: No, Tata you didn't. I'm sorry for showing ill manners. (she looked down again)

Nokwanda: I have actually been expecting you. The ancestors have been showing me signs of your arrival in my dreams. Mandla has been asking us to bring his daughter. (Makhulu nearly fainted when she realised it's Mandla's mother)

Makhulu: Ma Nokwanda? (she looked at the woman intensely)

Nokwanda: It's me, Nomhle. I've shrunk and my skin is full of wrinkles but what can be expected from a woman who is 95? I'm the only living person who was a part of the secret and now I know why I got spared because no one else would have believed you.

Khaya: Makhulu, what are you on about?

Nokwanda: Do you still remember when your father used to say you have an elder sister? That is the mother of that sister. (her hands shook as she pointed at makhulu). Your father came to us saying that he has chosen a wife but by then we had already made a promise to another family. To cover the shame we and the Tyini's agreed to send Nomhle away to give birth far. No one knew she was pregnant and that's how we wanted it. When she returned with a flat belly life went on. Your father married your mother and they moved far away. (Makhulu was unable to control her tears)

Khaya: Makhulu, all my years of being a child of this family you and the other elders stressed the importance of unity within a family. Yet, you knew you abandoned one of our own. Does that not make you hypocrites?

Nolali: Tata, you knew times were different back th...

Khaya: And you would know how times were back then, right Nolali because you were already an adult then. (he said sarcastically) Stop speaking of things you don't know of or are you a witch that has lived for hundreds of years that you'd say you how times were back then? (Ma T laughed and all looked at her)

Ma T: Yho, sorry. (she faced down)

Makhulu: Your anger is making you speak disrespectfully. We have guests.

Khaya: Your dirty laundry has already been hung so don't say that to me. I have always thought that my father spoke about a sister from an unsuccessful pregnancy my mother had when in fact the sister is out there abandoned all in the name of not shaming the family. You let a princess of this house think she is not wanted. You and Nolali are both daughter in laws in this family yet you forget that. You have shamed this family, Makhuku by letting one of its princesses be left out in the cold. You know that I love you and I respect you but I am not one to keep silent when I see injustice being done. You did great injustice to the Tyini family and especially Ma Tyini. Did you at least honour the Tyini's with damages? (Nokwandwa looked down in shame)

Nakwanda: No, we didn't. (the chief threw his hands up in surrender)

Khaya: I apologise greatly for showing you all of this but I'm just angry. The same people who taught me our customs and traditions seem to throw them out when something doesn't suit them. Ma Zweni, why didn't you come long ago? Where is my sister?

Makhulu: Chief Xaba, I was sworn to secrecy by my elders. In our time a child listened and obeyed elders no matter the cost

to that child. The elders of this family and of my own told me no one must know and I managed to obey until recently when Nokulunga looked for me. I too was deprived the opportunity to raise her much like bhut Mandla Xaba. After I gave birth they took her. I don't know where to. (she wiped her tears off)

Lunga: It's okay, Ma. (she whispered)

Makhulu: The lady next to me is the daughter. We...

Khaya: Ma Zweni, I'm sorry to cut you short but before we continue I'd like for my grabdmother to tell you where your daughter was taken and why. (the room became completely silent)

Nokwanda: The reason I have already given to you. We wanted to hide the shame and humiliation. We gave the baby to one of our helpers here. Nomali agreed to look after the child.

Khaya: In return for what?

Nokwanda: We gave her a few cattle and sheep.

Khaya: So the life of your granddaughter was worth as few cattles and sheep? (she didn't reply)

Makhulu: Chief Xaba, we have not come to point fingers. That is not going to change a single thing. What happened is over and my family and I are looking for a way forward..

Khaya: I hear you, Ma Zweni but I believe that wounds must be open and cleaned for them to heal properly. I want my grandmother to go back to that time and tell us why it happened so that we can find ways to move forward. I'm deeply disappointed in my late father for not fighting this head on and made sure that his child is raised a Xaba princess as it should have been done. The anger and sadness that I feel can't be summed up in a few words but I can see in your eyes that you indeed have not come to create war. Is the beautiful lady next to you your daughter?

Makhulu: Yes, chief. Her name is Nokulunga Phillips. (he smiled)

Khaya: Welcome home, Princess Nokulunga. Away with the English surname because you are a Xaba. Born of a man who was 100% royalty so never let anyone tell you that you aren't royalty. Stand up, sisi please. (he recited their clan names as she slowly stood)

Nokulunga: Even my flesh can feel that I'm on the land where my forefathers were buried. Thank you, chief Xaba. Thank you

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bhuti. (she shook his hand)

Khaya: I know that the way you heard me speak to my wife indicate that I lack respect for women but I guarantee you it's not so. She just has a habit of speaking out of turn and mostly

negatively but I chose her so I have to accept her as is. Not all will make you feel welcome but best believe that I will. Mr Tyini, my sincerest apologies from my family to yours. We did great injustice to you all by not taking responsibility for the actions of my father. Had I known I would have but this news is just as shocking to me. Before anything can happen I first would like the Xabas to finally pay damages to your family.

Traditionally speaking Nokulunga is a Tyini and will remain one until the Xaba family do what is right. Ma Zweni, I'm a father and to hear that your child was ripped from your chest pains me and to hear that my elders did are responsible shames me but like you have said you only wish for goodwill. I'm sure you have come so that proper cultural rituals are done for the princess and best believe that it will be done. Our father has been bothering us in our dreams crying and now I know why. But before we do it all please accept the gift of three cows for all the pain we have caused. I know I wasn't involved but I say "we" and not them because I'm now head of this family and the responsibility befalls me also. Cows won't wipe away your tears I know but I hope that it will be a start to mend the broken trust between our families. Your part in this family is great. My mother could never give my father daughters. They had eight sons. Four of which are now late so thank you for the gift of a rose to our clan. We ask for your forgiveness, Mama.

Nokwanda: This has been eating at me for years now and I'd also like to apologise for everything that I have done to you, Nomhle. As a mother I should never have given your child away without your consent but back then I thought that it was best for all of us. Forgive me also please. Mandla died ten years ago and my pride didn't allow me to ask forgiveness while he was still alive and I regret it each day. (she started to cry)

Makhulu: It's done now, Ma and there is nothing that we can do like I've already said. I forgive you for everything. Yes, you took away my power and took advantage of my poor home situation but anger will only make my heart harbour hate and I don't want that for myself. I'm sad to hear about Mandla because I hoped he'd meet Lunga but I'm sure he is rejoicing wherever he is. Set your own heart free by forgiving yourself.

Lunga: I've also forgiven all that were involved a long time ago. I just wish you had given me to a kinder woman but like Mama said nothing can be done now. I wish I could have met my father but God didn't want it to happen that way. To know that I have four brothers and still have a grandmother at this age is such a blessing so thank you.

Khaya: We are a big family. You'll forget most names because I do. Nolali and I have five children and I have four out of wedlock but I made sure that they never feel excluded. They also have their children and our brothers also have families of

their own. Once we introduce you properly you'll see that our family alone can fill this village. (everyone laughed) How many do you have? Children that is.

Lunga: I have three boys.

Khaya: Did you marry a white man? (Lunga laughed)

Lunga: I don't know why my husband had a western surname but trust me he was as black as we are. The one with the black jacket is Bandile, my eldest and right next to him is Anathi the second born. Sandiso is in Bizana held up by work.

Khaya: Don't just sit there and smile at me as if you're trying to charm a girl, my boys. Come greet your malume properly. (Bandile and Anathi stood and greeted Khaya)

Nokwanda: I ask for a hug to seal this reconciliation. (she hugged them all) Vusikhaya, I think we must burn incense to tell the ancestors that their daughter is finally home.

Khaya: And slaughter a sheep in their honour.

Fezile: Now you are talking a language I like. (the men laughed) Thank you, Xaba for the warm welcome. We accept your proposal to pay for the damages even if it's 59 years late. I must also add your father lost out on a chance of having a great wife in my sister.

Makhulu: Oh stop it, bhuti. (she blushed)

Khaya: He should just have married them both.

Fezile: Nomhle said your father was a cousin to the then chief so I didn't expect to see one of his children sit on the throne.

Khaya: Complicated business this royalty thing. My father's uncle could not have children so his bloodline could not be continued and sit on the throne but I'll explain all the politics of it another time. This is my beautiful, Nolali Xaba. Mother to my children and queen. She doesn't have the most friendly looking face but she's not bad. (Lali stood and shook the visitors hands)

Nolali: I don't know what my husband is talking about. I have the most friendly face. Welcome to our home. Our children live all over the world but we will gather them so they will meet their aunt.

Nokwanda: Khaya, I suggest after we have communicated with the ancestors we go to Mandla's grave.

Khaya: I agree, Makhulu. We still have a grandmother as old as we are. She will outlive us all it seems. Almost one hundred now.

Nokwanda: Only 95 and now my soul will rest in peace having met you, Nokulunga. You are as beautiful as your mother but you have the slender body of your father and not to mention the big forehead. (they laughed)

Khaya: A Xaba forehead. I can't believe the gods have given me a sister. I'll correct our father's mistakes, I promise.

Ma T: Why isn't anybody introducing me and acknowledging my presence? (Makhulu shook her head a bit)

Makhulu: This is my dear cousin, Notomato.

Khaya: Usually the name Notomato was given to a beautiful girl in the village and I understand why now. (he smiled and Ma T blushed)

Ma T: You may call me Mato-Mato, my chief. (she bowed down)

Lali: Do you see a venda chief here? That is nor how we show respect to our chief here.

Ma T: As id you'd know how one respect a venda chief when all you've seen is this village. Hence your name Nolali. I've seen it all. I've been to Japan and I've had tea with the president of there too. My Othu just married a man from the United States of America so that's where we will fly the while family for their white wedding. (Makhulu wanted to die of shame)

Makhulu: I apologise for that, Ma Xaba. She didn't mean it at all.

Lali: It's okay, Ma Zweni. Let us get on with the business at hand. I'll go have the kitchen staff prepare a feast for our guests.

Khaya: Thank you, my dear. (she left us)

Nokwanda: Come let us sit and we can have that little ceremony. I also advice that we speak about the damages now since we are all here already. If the Tyini's want livestock they can choose from our kraal and we'll have it transported to their home. I'm sorry that we are doing it only now. We will do all that needs to be done for you, Lunga. Tomorrow we start with the cleansing.

Lunga: I've been sick and a woman said its because my ancestors don't know me.

Nokwanda: I know all about that. Like I've said I knew you'd come at some point. I'm just glad you came while I'm still alive. Thank you. (she gave Lunga a kiss)

Ma T: Sis Hle-Hle you married Nkosi who didn't have a dirty cent and left Mandla who had gold and silver. I thought you were smarter man. You could have been queen mother now. (she whispered)

Makhulu: Stop it and stop speaking to the chief with a soft voice. Grow up, Notomato. You're no longer a child. (she said in a stern whisper)

Ma T: Okay I'll stop but Laliz must chill. She looks like she's eaten a lemon.

Makhulu: Notomato! (she pointed at her)

Ma T: Okay, sisi. Yhu almost queen mother you're strict.
(Makhulu laughed a bit and shook her head)

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The chief called the family members who were close by and they all were happy to welcome Lunga. The African incense was lit and the chief communicated with the ancestors. It started to rain unexpectedly but only for a few minutes and the clouds cleared again. Makhulu Nokwanda said its the ancestors showing their joy. They went to the gravesite and Makhulu and Lunga both said a few words and put stones after they finished. The elders sat and discussed while a feast was being prepared as to the livestock that will be given to the Tyini family and concluded it after a while. Lunga already felt her body repair itself and she knew that her father's ancestors have welcomed her and are looking after her. She also met two of her other brothers. Makhulu called Othu and Clay to tell them how it all went and they were so happy. The food was ready and everyone joined in on the feast to welcome the princess home.

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OTHU.

There is so much that we still need to do with this house because unlike the Lott's one it's completely empty. We bought a few items today but decided that we will sleep at the Lott house so long since Makhulu said the ceremonies might take a few days. In so glad that it went well even if Ma T insulted the queen. Being a wife feels amazing and I love each and every second of it. I went maternity shopping today since I had the time to do it. I didn't go to work but Mr Thorn understood. To see him and some of my colleagues at my wedding felt truly special. Chulu and her dad are out doing who knows what so I got time to clean the house. The doorbell rang and I went to open. It's Poppy.

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Poppy: Hello, sis and I'm not angry at you for not telling me and inviting me to your wedding.

Me: Hey Poppy, come in because I want to talk to you. (she entered)

Poppy: I always seem to be in trouble. What now?

Me: You going through Sue's files to get my address.

Poppy: I was cleaning and the file was on her table so I thought I'd look.

Me: So I must just believe that the file was open on Chulu's details? For once just speak the damn truth and admit that you were snooping. (I raised my voice)

Poppy: Okay, yes I did that but the file really was on the table and I saw an opportunity since you didn't want to tell me.

Me: And that is why I'm keeping you at a distance. The trust between us was broken by you and you make it worse with these habits of yours. If we are going to give this sisterhood a chance stop playing games. You went through my child's personal file.

Poppy: It's not so personal if the school secretary can know it.

Me: Oh my goodness! Sue signed a confidentiality contract and that's why she has access to those but you don't. I won't tell Mr Thorn this but it had better be the last time.

Popoy: Never again. I promise. I got flatmates now too. We are coping well and they seem nice. I'm sorry Othu and I want a sisterhood with you. I guess that's why you didn't want me at your wedding because you feared I'd spoil things.

Me: Yes and it will take work from both of us but we can do it. How is work?

Poppy: Draining because I had to listen to the teachers go on about the beauty of your wedding yet I who is your blood was

not told. I'll forgive you if you make me your maid of honour.
(she smiled)

Me: I don't owe you anything, Poppy. I'll send you an invite and make sure you're seated at the family table but that's it. Yandi will be my maid of honour.

Poppy: Okay, okay. So am I forgiven?

Me: Yup so how are you healing?

Poppy: Good and soon I'll be able to have sex again. I miss it so much.

Me: Well don't get too excited. You know "your first time" won't be nice. I still can't believe your dad went so far. Get him arrested when he heals. No woman should turn a blind eye to such.

Poppy: I will so how are you and Craig? I know you don't have much experience so don't bor...

Me: I'm not about to discuss what I do with my husband in our bedroom so stop right there. (I cut her short)

Poppy: Always serious but it's cool. (she laughed)

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I didn't have the energy for Poppy but I didn't want to be rude by asking her to leave. I made us food and she ate and told me

all about work and life. Just like Ma T she doesn't mind talking alone. I just nodded when I had to. After about two hours she left. Chulu and Craig came home and I nearly collapsed when I saw what she had in her arms, a puppy.

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Me: Please tell me that it belongs to the next door neighbor and that it somehow snuck into our yard and you have it because you'll take it home. (I looked at Craig)

Chulu: But he is home, mommy. He is ours. (she kissed the dog)

Me: Craig, I thought we had an agreement.

Craig: O, it was just sitting in the adoption basket all alone while it's siblings were taken by families. We sat at the cafe next door but could hear it's lonely cries from there. We thought it was hurt so we went to check but it was just lonely. (they both made sad faces)

Chulu: It was really, really sad mommy.

Me: I don't appreciate the emotional blackmail.

Craig: It's the truth, baby and look at that face. (I looked at the puppy and melted)

Me: Okay but he will be your baby. Poop and pee in the house is a no, no. I'm not going to be responsible for him. Also get all

its vaccine shots done because we have a baby on the way. I can't believe you two.

Chulu: I'll look after him, mommy. I'll go play outside with him. He likes chewing my flip flops.

Me: That's another issue. If any of my shoes or new furniture is torn or has bite marks. I'll put it back in that adoption bucket with you two to keep it company. (Craig laughed)

Chulu: Okay. (she ran out)

Craig: You're so strict though but I love it. Hi. (he kissed me)

Me: Baby, a puppy is one of those things that needed to be discussed. Well I remember that we did and decided to wait until baby is at least three months.

Craig: And I'm sorry. I'll make sure that it gets the shots, that we bath it regularly so that he won't be a health hazard for baby. (he touched my belly)

Me: Okay I'll let it slide this time and he looks cute.

Craig: I'll be back now, now. (he hopped off and his pills fell and I picked it up)

Me: Why are you carrying an empty bottle? (he looked down)

Craig: No reason. (I checked the date on them)

Me: Craig, these are the ones you got three days ago yet the container is empty already. Please tell me that you put them in another container. (he looked down) You drank all of them, baby? What's going on?

Craig: The pain is what's going on, O. (he sounded annoyed)

Me: But to empt...

Craig: Had you felt what I feel you'd understand, O.

Me: Then why are you on your feet and not in the wheelchair? Do you want to cause permanent damage? Has your physiotherapist even really approved this walking? (he kept quiet) Craig?

Craig: No, he didn't but I don't need his permission. Do you think I like sitting in that chair being stared at and judged. Your grandpa called me a scrap for goodness sake. A scrap, O and that only means he undermines me as a man. (he raised his voice)

Me: Do you realise that you've been sleeping way too much and now I know why.

Craig: I need some air. (he was about to grab the car keys but I took them)

Me: I'm not going to allow you to strain your knee by driving when you should not be. I don't want a junky as a husband,

Craig. Don't do this to me. We are about to welcome a child in the house. A baby, baby dammit. Don't do this to me. (I started to cry) We should still be in honeymoon bliss and not have me worried that you're addicted to prescription drugs.

Craig: Please stop crying. I'm sorry and I not addicted. They just help.

Me: What if you had fallen asleep while you went on your drive with Chulu and crashed, Craig? You aren't less of a man to me because of the wheelchair. I know that you're a strong man so can protect us against anything. You need not prove it to the world. Please just use the wheelchair until Grag says it's okay not to. You'll walk again even without the crutches but it won't happen when you do this.

Craig: I'm sorry and you are right. The thought of me falling asleep behind the wheel with her in the car is scary and I'm sorry I risk our daughter's life and mine.

Me: And the puppy. (he laughed softly)

Craig: And the puppy. I'll get back on the chair though I hate it. I'm not a junky because I know the type of father I wish to be to our kids and the husband I'm aiming to be and he is no junky.

Me: You're already a great father and husband but you need to take it easy. You married a capable woman. I'll do all that you can't do until you can help me when you're healed. I still need

you to lift me off my feet on our second wedding night so you best take it easy now so you'll be healed then and I'll be heavily pregnant so you'll need that strength. If you're having some post trauma you also let me know. (he smiled)

Craig: No post trauma, I promise. I love you and thank you for calling me out when you saw that I'm wrong.

Me: Always, now go sit on your wheelchair please. (we kissed)

Craig: Yes, Mam.

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He went to sit on the wheelchair and pushed himself towards me. I sat on his lap gently and hugged him. Goodness what will I do with my stubborn superman though? I'm so glad the container fell or I'd have known later and perhaps he would have been addicted by then. I went to get the oil Makhulu spoke of and rubbed his knee gently hoping he gets some relief from it. I'm so glad that he apologises when wrong. I know being like this was not easy especially since people in rural Eastern Cape always expect a man to be strong. I hate that he was called a scrap. He is anything but that and I love him. He went to join Chulu and the new member of the family. I wonder if there are puppy diapers in the market? I don't trust the little guy to keep it in until he is outside because he is still a baby. I guess these are the joys of being a wife and mother. As tiring as

it is at times I would not trade it for anything. We just had our first fight as a married couple and it felt terrible for both of us but I'm glad we did it fairly as Makhulu advised. I'm just glad that all has gone well for Makhulu and Dabs and we are also adjusting to our new life. We are yet to get used to having each other for life but I look forward to it. My little family and now we wait for the little person to come and be a part of this lovely union. We have so much to be thankful for.

OTHU

It's been two weeks and I have been watching Craig like a hawk. It seems like he is taking his painkillers as prescribed by the doctor. We went for a check up and the doctor said the walking irritated some nerves in his knee which might make him heal longer but it's no permanent damage. The house has been semi decorated so we could finally move in. Soon I'll have Chulu off my case with her bright coloured bedroom. she's been asking since we moved out of the apartment. Dabs has had all her rituals done and we are expecting them home soon. I miss my grandma a lot. The puppy is working on my last nerve I must add. Chulu's shoes all have bite marks in them and he leaves poop surprises in every corner of the house. I'm close to having him put back up for adoption. Yandi and myself have been busy viewing possible venues for our big days. The hubbies have been coming together to discuss their church youth programmes. Bandile returned earlier and Craig has started to train him and show him the ins and outs of the security business. We finally got Chulu's complete uniform for next year and I also bought some stationeries. She's so excited about big school and Ruby has officially joined their friendship circle. I'll have to arrange a sleepover soon because I've promised them that. Craig was out with Bandile to go see a client though it's

Saturday and Chulu went to a fun day with her Sunday school teachers and friends. I've been trying to let out my inner creative side to decorate our house and I'm failing. I guess I'll have to call in for some professional help. It will have to wait though because we have already spent a lot these past few weeks. I was lying on the couch feeling terribly nauseous when the doorbell rang. I told whoever to enter and hoped it's not a serial killer. Suddenly there was too much noise so I sat up to see who it is. Ma T made her way in looking around with a bright smile on her face.

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Ma T: Did you hear how she said "come in", sis Hle-hle? Like the madam that she is. (I laughed)

Me: Why didn't you tell me that you are coming back? I'd have fetched you from the airport. (I stood and hugged them)

Makhulu: We wanted to surprise you. I hope we are not interrupting. We came straight here from the airport because Mato wanted to see your house.

Me: I don't mind at all. Dabs you are looking radiant. Clearly whatever they did to you there was good. (she smiled)

Dabs: We had a great stay, my baby. Yes the queen was not the most friendly but we had a good time. They wanted me to stay there but I don't want to be far from Mama. I'll go visit.

Me: Yes, you did good because I've already gotten used to your presence.

Ma T: I must take photos here. These house are like the ones I see on Top Billing. You must call Jenny D to come and do her presenting here. We will need some furniture though, Othu. Why is the house naked? (I laughed)

Me: We just moved in, makhulu. Soon an interior designer will be called in and the house will be properly furnished. I'm not so sure about inviting top billing people think.

Ma T: Hayi, you must do that. I'll wear my fur coat, sip some wine and sit on that fancy couch while Jonathan presents. I can already see it. Where is my million dollar son in law? (she looked around)

Makhulu: Notomato, please don't call Clay names in his house.

Ma T: Me and him understand each other.

Me: He is at work at the moment with Bandile.

Dabs: I have to thank him again for helping my boy. (I smiled)

Ma T: Othu, what are you wearing? My girl you are a newly wed. Walk around naked or in those lace panties. (I laughed)

Me: I can't do that. Imagine how awkward it would have been had you my elders found me naked.

Ma T: But imagine how excited Craig wou...

Makhulu: Hey no. No man, Notomato. I'll send you back to Japan. (she cut her short in a stern voice)

Ma T: Sisi, when we went to the chief you stopped me when I spoke and now I'm in my child's house yet you stop me again. Let Mato free for once.

Me: You can all be free to be who you are. Where's Nathi?

Dabs: He had a headache so Mama told the cab to go drop him off at the house. Where's Chulu? How I miss our reading. I've learnt to spell new words and I want her to hear them.

Me: She's out with the Sunday school bunch. They will bring her home after five.

Makhulu: Whose it that? (she pointed at Furry the dog)

Me: I thought I told you about him. That's Chulu and Craig's new adopted baby.

Ma T: Why is it outside? In such houses the dogs are always inside. Do you want your neighbors to say we are cruel and call the SPCA?

Me: He is grounded. He ate my mat. (Ma T shook her head)

Ma T: Can someone please take me to go see my nephew?

Dabs: I would also like to go greet him.

Makhulu: Nunu, will you be able to drive us. You don't have to come in.

Me: Yes I'm bored anyways.

Ma T: Wait I first have to take a tour around the house. I'll be back. (she rushed off)

Makhulu: Don't worry. I won't overwhelm you with her. She'll stay for a few weeks at the other house with us.

Me: I don't mind. Let me go and change out of the tracksuit.

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I left them and went upstairs. I found Ma T taking pictures at every spot of the house. Most are annoyed by her presence but I actually enjoy it. She's in her sixties and still wears heels and jeans. Her beautifully shaped body allows her to look younger. I changed and after that we finally drove to the center Tata was at. I was going to stay in the car but I'll go and see how he is doing. We went in and they showed us to his room which he shared with another person. They are well looked after here. Makhulu and Dabs greeted Kumkani and told him all about their trip and my wedding. Ma T stood there looking shocked like never before.

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Ma T: I can't believe it's really the tall and proud Kumkani sitting there. I thought they were joking when they said you can't move. You are like a mummy all that we have to do now is transport you to Egypt. (I looked aside trying to contain my laughter)

Dabs: But Makazi that is not nice. Aren't mummy's dead people.

Ma T: In the films they aren't. They are like Kumkani. Lively inside but stiff on the outside.

Makhulu: How many weeks did you say you're staying?

Ma T: I've got no baby, no cat nor dog. I left my plants and problems with the neighbor so I'll be here enjoying life until Othu had her lavish white wedding. (Makhulu sighed loudly)

Me: We hope you enjoy it, Ma T. Tata, looks much better though.

Makhulu: He really does and I hope he is using this time to actually seek repentance.

Dabs: I'm sure he will recover a changed man and in a good way. Makhulu: I hope so. Let us pray for him. (we held hands)

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Makhulu started to pray and I also hope that he is a changed man. I know I'd change my bad ways had I had such a big health

scare. I sent Craig a warning text that Ma T is here and she's also fully energized and ready to speak his ears off. He sent back laughing emojis. We all sat and the ladies were talking all about their trip until visiting ours were over. I stood and went to the restroom. When I came back the ladies had left already. Tata was sitting on his wheelchair so I went to kneel in front of him. He is looking so ugly.

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Me: Tata, I don't know what is going on in that head of yours but I do believe that you are aware of us and what we say. I hope you listened to Makhulu when she advised that you turn a new page. Being kind will cost you nothing. I think you've seen that being cruel has only invited trouble to your life. What you did to Poppy was evil but perhaps if you return a reformed man she'll forgive you. She loves you. Her kidney is inside of you as we speak giving you health in its own way. Also accept Langa for who and what he is. That guy has only been loyal to you so now return the favor. Aren't you tired of being bad? Try being good it's not as bad or pathetic as you think. Oh and Tamkhulu Welile has your cows and I know that will encourage you to get better soon (I laughed) So get better and go get your cows/bulls. I'm giving you a goal here. Bye. (I stood)

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I was about to walk away but he held my dress firmly. Oh my goodness, the man loves materialistic things so much. I called a nurse and she said he had never done it before and it's a sign of improvement since he couldn't grasp anything. I walked out and told Makhulu. They were all waiting in the car for me and she was so happy. Ma T asked that we drive around so she'll see the beautiful places. One would swear she's never been here before. She wanted to visit Langa and Ian but Makhulu said another day and I'm glad because I'm not feeling all too well. We went home and found Poppy's car parked outside. I wish I had not given her my new address. She walked to us when we stepped out of the car and ran to hug makhulu.

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Poppy: Oh my word, I'm so happy to finally see you makhulu.

Makhulu: Hello, Poppy. How are you?

Poppy: I'm fine and you?

Makhulu: Good just tired, my girl.

Me: Poppy, I thought we agreed that you'd call before coming over. I gave you my new address because you promised to keep to our deal.

Poppy: I'm sorry. I just missed you that is all.

Ma T: Let me go and take pictures at the garden.

Poppy: I love their garden too, Ma. I'll go join you. (Ma T took her sunglasses off and scanned Poppy from head to toe)

Ma T: Othu, who is this and why is she so forward?

Poppy: I'm Po...

Ma T: Hey, are you Othu? Your friend makes me nervous, Othunyiweyo. A person who speaks more than me is just shady in my books.

Makhulu: She's also your granddaughter. That's Kumkani's other daughter. (Ma T clapped once)

Ma T: I knew Unathi was a mystery but not this much. She managed to keep a pregnancy from me and you also.

Poppy: I'm not Unathi's daughter.

Ma T: Is she Unathi to you? No mama or sisi at least just Unathi. Who is your mother?

Poppy: I don't you'll know her, Ma.

Makhulu: It's Bab'Jabu's daughter. He used to do gardening for Unathi and Kumkani remember? (Ma T laughed)

Ma T: Are you speaking about Noheels? Your mother had the most terrible cracked heels so I have her that name. Kumkani just puts his stick anywhere.

Poppy: I'm sorry but who are you to disrespect my dead mother like that as if you knew her. (she said in a cheeky voice)

Ma T: Hle-Hle, tell her who she is dealing with please.

Makhulu: Poppy, don't be rude. This is my sister so she's your grandmother too. I actually thought you two would get on like a house on fire.

Ma T: Look, my girl. We can get on well but you need to know that when my light is shining I want it to shine on me alone. Are you a mot? You know those insects that look like butterflies so are always attracted to other people's lights.

Poppy: No.

Ma T: No what?

Poppy: No, Ma. (she said looking down)

Ma T: Well stop behaving like one because I don't like to share my shine and you speaking more than me does that. You make me nervous, my girl.

Me: I'm tired so let's go in so I can prepare some food for us. I'm sure you two will get along as time goes on. Just give each other a chance to talk and you'll be fine.

Ma T: Pleasure to meet you and welcome to the family. Now I'll go to the garden alone and take pictures ALONE.

Poppy: Yes, Makhulu.

Ma T: Good girl. (she walked away)

Dabs: I'll go put on the stove so long, Othu. I can see you are tired. Poppy, I'm your Dabs baby. You'll hear about my story while we eat. You're beautiful and I can't wait to get to know you. Give me a hug. (Poppy smiled with excitement and they hugged)

Poppy: Thank you, Makhulu.

Makhulu: You'll find us inside. (they left us)

Me: You'll get used to Ma T. Trust me I've been called a bat and many other things by her.

Poppy: Yeah. (my eyes widened in shock)

Me: No come back? (she shook her head and smiled) Our family is not close knit, Poppy. I'm also still getting used to most of them. It's up to us to unite them. So it's normal to feel left out. I do too and I've known them for years. Let's go cook and eat. (she smiled and nodded)

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I can't believe that Ma T managed to shut Poppy up. We went in and helped cook while Ma T sat sipping a glass of cold red wine looking like a queen. Poppy played far away from here. I guess the similarities in personalities is causing them to clutch. I

do enjoy having them around though. I'll have to ask Ma T to tell Poppy to call before she comes. We finally finished cooking. I dished up for Craig and Bandile because they might come home any second now. I'll go nap after eating though. We set the table and enjoyed the lunch that we prepared.

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#CRAIG

Bandile and I have been out since early morning. I'm trying to catch up with my clients after I've neglected them for a long while. Bandile has also helped the installers with the easy projects and he is just so excited about it all. I do want to finish so I'll go back home to my family though. I love Ma T and her outrageous stories so I can't wait to hear about her visit to the royal family. After a few hours of meetings and installing Bandile and I headed back home. He is driving since I promised my beautiful wife that I'll take it easy.

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Bandile: Once again thank you so much, Craig. I've learnt so much from helping the guys today and the meetings you've had with your clients.

Me: That was the point of today. I know that it's not your dream job but you have to start somewhere. I'm also glad to hear you call me Craig and not Mr Craig. (they laughed)

Bandile: It took some practice.

Craig: You're not just my employee, Bandile. I'm married to your sister so you're my brother now. We're about the same age so we can be friends too. So when will you settle down?

Bandile: When I have the means too. What's the use of taking a girl from her home when I can't provide for her?

Craig: Yeah that's true but you can have a girlfriend though just don't make babies. Baby things are expensive. (Bandile laughed)

Bandile: So I've realised but let's see how life turns out. In just looking forward to school. My mother will be getting her ID soon and then we'll be able to get ours. I hope we will get accepted.

Craig: Both your marks were good so no doubt you will.

Bandile: I'm sure you reached PhD level. (I laughed)

Me: Not at all. I only have a matric certificate. (he looked shocked)

Bandile: Then you must be a hardworking hustler then to have achieved your level of success with just matric. I can't wait for

the young men's club at church. It's being led by you and Vuyo so I'm sure we will learn a lot.

Me: We will try our best to impact you positively but we'll bring in elders at times since we are still young ourselves and need to experience a lot in life. I'm hopeful though. I think our church will groom great leaders. (we both smiled and nodded)

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I felt so tired. We finally arrived home and Bandile brought my wheelchair to my door. There was another car parked out and I looked at the number plate. "Poppy", it read and I wanted to go back to where I can't from and return when she's gone. We went inside and I smiled like a little boy when I saw makhulu has arrived. I missed her hugs and kisses so shoot me. We greeted them and I didn't see O.

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Makhulu: We have been waiting for you to return to say hello. Soon we will go home. We'll see Chulu another day.

Me: She'll be heart broken. I'm glad that you are back safe. Dabs you are glowing.

Dabs: Thank you, my baby. (she smiled)

Ma T: Who is calling Othu's husband baby when she's sleeping upstairs? Is it you Poppy? (she said coming from the passage)

Poppy: Why am I the suspect? I think I'll just go.

Ma T: Keep your penty on girl. I was just asking. Hello, Craig my boy. (she smiled and hugged me)

Me: Hello

Ma and it's always a pleasure.

Ma T: Don't tell me that Othu out you back on that wheelchair by being too rough when you two do...you know. (she said with a smirk)

Me: Oh my goodness. (I said shyly and laughed) No, Ma that's not it. Wow, I just didn't expect you to say that...wow. (I laughed again)

Ma T: These quiet ones are the beasts in private. (I covered my face and laughed)

Poppy: That's actually not true.

Ma T: There you go again. Your in my light, Poppy. Allow me to shine bright and wait your turn. Mot tendencies, my girl they must fall.

Me: Am I missing something?

Makhulu: Don't even get involved, my boy. Go and greet your wife. They have been like this since they met and we have also decided to stay out of it.

Me: Which bedroom is she in?

Makhulu: The temporary main bedroom of course.

Me: Thanks, Ma. I'll be back now. (I pushes myself slowly)

Ma T: You see, Poppy the type of husbands Zweni woman attract? Don't disappoint, my girl. (they went on behind me and I ignored it all.

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I finally got to the bedroom we share until I'll be able to climb the stairs again. I found Othu laying on her side. I got up from the wheekchair and onto the bed. Moved my body upwards and cuddled her from behind. I kissed her neck and she moaned softly. She turned around and faced me. I kissed her soft lips and looked at her.

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Me: Hi. (she smiled)

Othu: Hi. How are you?

Me: Tired but healthy and you?

Othu: Offish but okay. I thought you'd be back earlier. Did Bandile have a good day?

Me: Very much. Describe this offish feeling to me please.

Othu: I'm not sure how to describe it but I'm just not myself but both Makhulu and Dabs said if I wake up feeling the same or worse I need to go see a doctor.

Me: Well you're up now and you're still offish so let's go. How long have you been feeling like this?

Othu: After I went with the ladies to see Kumkani. He is improving at least.

Me: That's good. Can we please go see a doctor?

Othu: Yeah let's go. I'm actually not going to argue with you on this because baby's health is important. (she kissed me) So Ma T said that I must parade around naked around the house now that I'm a wife. (I laughed)

Me: Well I wouldn't complain. Do you need a lift on my wheels or will you walk? (she laughed)

Me: I'll need a lift.

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We both got up and I went to my wheelchair. She sat on my lap but I could feel that she's not seated with her entire weight. I pushed the wheelchair and the family laughed. We told them that we will be going to the hospital. Makhulu said she'll come with and the rest must stay for when Chulu returns. Bandile offered to drive and we accepted. After a while we finally

arrived at the hospital. We filled in the forms and they finally let us through. O explained her symptoms and the doctor would not a few times. They tested her blood pressure and that was sky high but doctors said it's common in most pregnancies. He went to get another doctor who then did a detailed ultrasound. I sat by my wife's side and she looked at me without breaking eye contact. I could see that she's scared. They started to move the monitor around and we both turned to look at the screen. The doctor went out and called that first doctor and they both had a strange look on their faces

"Is everything okay?", I asked trying to sound less worried than I am. They both just smiled and nodded. We could hear the heart beat so the baby is still alive for sure. They stood and pointed at the monitor and spoke softly. O looked at me again without saying a word but her eyes said a lot. I kissed her lips and smiled faintly trying to lift her spirit. The one doctor left and the one that's left remained. He turned and looked at us smiling.

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Doc: I'm sorry about that. I needed help to determine if what I'm seeing and hearing is accurate.

Me: Which is?

Doc: Uhm , I've got good and bad news. The good news is that we heard two heart beats meaning there are two little ones in there. (I smiled and looked at O but she didn't)

Othu: What is the bad news?

Doc: You're carrying identical twins and that means they share the same sac and placenta. The bad news however is that one baby is much smaller than the other meaning that the growth has either stopped or is slow. That means that he/she isn't getting enough blood flow and nutrition.

Me: So what now? How do we make sure that they get equal of everything?

Doc: For now I'd like to monitor the growth of the one twin. I've seen similar cases where the babies eventually grew.

Othu: So I'll have to be admitted?

Doc: You might be admitted but only because of your blood pressure. If that goes back to normal you can go home but I'll need you to come for scans on a more regular basis. Perhaps even weekly.

Me: I'll make sure that we are here, doc. So is that it?

Doc: Mr Knights, I need you both to understand that if the baby doesn't grow he/she might die. (O started to breath heavily)

Othu: Then do something to prevent that.

Doc: For now all we can do is monitor you and if there are no signs of growth within a week or two we'll take it from there.

Me: How is the smaller twin's heart beat?

Doc: There's a heartbeat but as expected it is not as strong as the other baby's.

Othu: What's the worst case scenario?

Doc: That the baby might die and because they share a sac you'll have to carry them both until the other decides to come because taking out the other might cause problems for the healthy one. I'm so sorry. But like I've said that little one might start growing.(my heart sank).

Me: I've heard of such cases. In fact my wife was a twin and her brother had to be medically terminated. So can that be done if things don't improve? To save one baby instead of having them both...die.

Othu: I'm not going to choose one. I want and I'll have them both, Craig.

Me: O, you...

Othu: No, I want them both. (she raised her voice)

Doc: The fact that they share everything might make terminating one risky for both of them. Like I've said let's not think the worst now. Let's see the progress of the other baby.

I'll be right back. I just need to speak to the other doctor. Mrs Knights, multiple pregnancies come with more complications so please don't think this was caused by anything you have done. (she kept silent) Excuse me.

Me: Thanks, doc. (he left)

Othu: I can't believe you want them to abort one, Craig.

Me: I didn't say they must. I was just asking. Would you rather we lost them both, O?

Othu: I'm not going to do it even if the doctor says so. I'll give birth to two equally healthy babies.

Me: That's what we all want. I'm sure with modern technology they will be able to get blood flowing normally to the other one too. Or our little fighter will surprise us all. (I tried to cheer her up)

Me: I wonder how my mother felt when she was in this situation? Please call her.

Me: Okay, I will. (I took my phone and called her mom)

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I can't believe that this is happening. To hear that there are two of them and that they are identical made me so happy but now we have to deal with the fact that one is not growing as well as his-her sibling. Mrs Zweni said she's on her way. I stood to go

tell Makhulu what's going on and we immediately said a prayer. Mrs Zweni arrived and we went to O. The two of them hugged for a long time and Othu told her mom what is going on while she sobbed for the first time after hearing the news.

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Mrs Zweni: Oh I hate how history is repeating itself. I know how difficult this is to you, Othu but you'll need to be strong and make rational decisions. If the doctors advice that it's best to lose one then please don't fight it. It's painful but if you don't you'll lose the other too. Had I not done it then you'd not exist right now. As painful as it was I'm glad that I chose one life instead of no life.

Othu: I'm not going to do it. I'm not. (she said softly)

Me: And you don't have to because no one said that you must. You heard the doctor. They will keep close eye on you and do regular scans. I believe that our baby will grow but it's best to leave room for disappointments too. (she just looked at me)

Othu: It's Kumkani's bad lucks that have rubbed off on me and on my baby. I was okay before he touched me.

Makhulu: Oh Othu but you can't say that.

Othu: Who knows how many people those hands have hurt? I should never have gone in. Why did I go in and speak to him?

His dark energies got transported to me. I hate the man. (she said crying and I stood to hug her)

Me: They will be fine, you'll see. They will have the chubbiest legs and cheeks both of them. We'll have Chulu speak to the slow growing bhabha in her big sister tone and tell him to not dare do this to us. (she held me tighter)

Makhulu: Your blood pressure is stabilising. And Clay is right that baby just want attention like Ma T. He/she will grow once we give them the shine that he/ wants. (O actually laughed)

Mrs Zweni: Don't even think about the negatives and Kumkani is one of those. I know they will be okay. They are identical for goodness sake so the other won't let his/her sibling suffer. These things have a way of sorting themselves out. God is at work. (we all looked at her) What? Yes, I also speak of God. Don't look at me like that. (we laughed)

Othu: I want to go home before they say I've got to have an operation or something.

Me: Let them clear us first. I'll run you a hot bath and sing to you. (she smiled and gave me a kiss with her wet nose and all)

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The doctor came after a while and asked us to excuse them. I didn't want to but they wouldn't examine her further while I'm there so I left. After an hours he said we can take her home.

Othu said they inserted some needle in her to get out some access fluids. She looked a bit better though. We drove home and when we got there Deacon Funda was there. Makhulu called him and Vuyo and Yandi too. Poppy was also still here and a part of me can't help but feel like she's rejoicing internally. Am I judging her too harshly? The deacon had us sit on chairs and they made a circle around us holding hands. Soon enough the room was filled with powerful prayers from each person here. I could feel the holy spirit in the room. I can't explain it but I could feel it. I held Othu's hands while our loved ones filled the house with prayer inviting the holy spirit to be with us and asking God to protect both our blessings. After those powerful prayers and declarations we said amen. Dabs she Ma T cooked a great meal for us.

"Don't worry, I didn't let Poppy near the pots. She still makes me nervous", she whispered in my ear.

I didn't know what to say so I thanked her for the food and smiled. I thought O wouldn't eat but I was wrong. She seemed better after the prayer. Chulu came to us looking warm and cosy in her sleepwear.

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Chulu: Mommy, are we really having two babies and the other baby is bullying the other?

Othu: Who told you that?

Chulu: Aunty Poppy. (O fumed)

Me: I'll deal with it. Try not to work yourself up because of that girl. (she nodded)

Othu: We are having two babies, bhabha no neither is a bully. They are just sleeping uncomfortably in mommy's belly but soon they will be okay.

Chulu: Just turn and make space for each other, babies. I know mommy's tummu is small but you have to share it. One can sleep with her head upward and the other downwards that's what I do when I sleep over at Buhle's because her bed is small but when we sleep like that we both have space. Try it okay. (she put both hands on my belly)

Me: I'm sure they are turning to share the space right now after hearing their big sister speak. (she smiled)

Chulu: Maybe we should put one in daddies belly. (we laughed softly)

Othu: Uhm, daddy is a man and men can't carry babies because they don't have wombs. I wish it was possible though.

Chulu: Me too. Is it okay if I sit next to you and fall asleep here?

Othu: Of course. Tell me about your day. (she sat next to her mom and rested her head on O's lap)

Yandi: Everything will be fine, friend. I'll go make intambo (rope) for you. That protection has to come from everywhere. We know God got us so now let's make sure the ancestors do too. Your little ones will both grow strong. I can feel it. That heart is growing strong as is. You know what this is an emergency so let me go and make that waist rope now. Is that fine with you both?

Me: Yeah because I know you won't harm our babies. O, will explain it's meaning for me. (she nodded)

Othu: Thank you, friend and yes let's call upon all the soldiers.

Yandi: Othu, this might not be a coincidence. You have once been like those twins and unfortunately your twin didn't live. I'm hoping that something will be revealed to me while I make the band for you. To start of call Dr Flinch and ask him what really let to your brother being terminated. He might have been just a fetus but he had a soul. (we looked at each other)

Othu: Do you think he is angry?

Yandi: I don't know but it's best to know why they wanted him terminated.

Me: To save my life.

Yandi: How do you know that they didn't do it to go on with some other experiment? What if they terminated a healthy baby? I don't want to worry you but it's my job. Your parents

never did a cleansing ceremony on you and themselves. I just asked your mother. You shared a womb with this person. I know this condition is common with twin pregnancies but let's not forget that we are Africans. Our spiritual beliefs go deeper than Christianity or any other faith.

Me: I'll call Flinch. (she nodded)

Yandi: I'll be back soon. Goodnight, Chulz because you're so cosy there next to mommy I'm guessing you will sleep soon. I love you.

Chulu: I love you too, aunty Yandi, goodnight. (Yandi left us)

Me: I'll go make that call. (I kissed her)

Othu: Hope we get a hold of him. Thank you for being a great man and sorry O reacted like that in the hospital.

Me: No bother. (I gave her a kiss)

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I stood and I went to make that call. As I suspected it's unavailable. Now I need to track him down because he might be in the States. I saw Poppy opening my fridge and I went to her.

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Me: You are getting to comfortable in my house and I don't like it.

Poppy: But I'm just getting wa...

Me: I don't give a damn about what you are getting. You're a freakin guest here so when you want something you ask me, O or Makhulu and wait until served. It starts with the fridge and before we know it you've cut yourself a key so know your damn place. I'm tolerating you for O but I've had it. You had the nerve to tell my child that one of her unborn siblings is a bully. (I cut her short)

Poppy: I was explaining in simple terms.

Me: I don't care. Close my fridge right now and go home. It's night and all who are here live here.

Poppy: Dea...

Me: I said go now. (I said in a stern voice cutting her short)

Poppy: Okay, goodnight.

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She closed the fridge and left. I saw her say goodnight to everyone and she looked at me with puppy eyes until she went out. I went to check on our puppy in the garage and made sure he still had food and water. I let him come in the house to greet everyone. After a long while Yandi returned with the belt. She

explained it's purpose is to protect the person wearing it and to strengthen. At this moment I'll take anything. Makhulu offered to sleep over and I was grateful. Bandile carried Chulu to our room and put her on the bed. O followed soon after. I had to wait until our guests are gone and they left after a while. Giving me words of encouragement. I told Bandile he can take my car to drive home. Makhulu went to bed and I made sure all is locked and lights are off. I found O in the shower and I went to join her. I sat on the shower bench while she stood.

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Me: Hey guys, it's daddy. We thought that there was one of you when in fact you are two. I don't know if you're girls or boys but I don't care. To the little one hiding from us please stop it. Yes, daddy just scolded at you for the first time and I hope you're not sleeping. To the little other little one, I'm sorry that you are under so much pressure to keep you both going. You two were formed from the same egg so you two must be born together too. Share everything. I know you can do it. I know you're growing. I love you both a lot.

Me: I'm sure they heard you. (he looked at me and smiled)

Me: I look forward to seeing them.

Othu: We all do, baby. (she kissed me)

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We continued with our showering and we kept it innocent which is unusual for us. We put lotion on our bodies and usually we'd go to bed naked but Chulu is here so we got dressed and snuggled close to each other. I can't believe that soon there will be five of us. That baby just has to grow because now that we know about him/her we are attached. I want to be a father of three. I said a silent prayer and finally fell asleep.

POPPY

It's been a few days since I've been to Othu's house because Craig and Ma T don't seem to want me there. All I've been trying to do is get closer to my family. Is that such a bad thing? I haven't gone to see that evil man and a part of me is still hoping that he'd just do us all a favor by dying. The girls that I live with are both Accounting students and I've been lying to them saying that I've got a degree but I'm just struggling to get work. There will never be a day that I'll say I love my job because cleaning after others just is not what I want to do but hey I've got no choice. I thought that Othu would share the millions she got from our father but not. Langa is not rich so why would she get all the riches when he is our father too? I know that I must be grateful to her and I am but I just can't help but feel like the Zweni ancestors favour her most. Dabs is kind so she's been calling me since we met. I can't believe Makhulu had a child at fourteen. Who knows about sex at that age and let alone does it especially in her time when internet was not a thing. I got myself pretty and just sat at home while my flatmates went out to have some fun. There was a knock on the door so I went to open. It's Ma T and I rolled my eyes hoping that she didn't notice.

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Ma T: Hello, Nopopi. Don't roll your eyes like that. It makes you look like a chameleon. (she let herself in)

Me: Makhulu, why do you hate me so much though? (she laughed)

Ma T: My girl, I'm not one to swallow my words so had I hated you I'd have told you straight up. Where have you been hiding?

Me: I thought that you and my dear brother in law don't want me. (she looked at me intensely with a smirk)

Ma T: Aha that's what I want to talk to you about. Your dear brother in law. I see you, Nopopi. I see how you look at him. and I sat and wondered but why would Poppy look at her sister's husband with soft eyes. I then asked Hle-Hle and she finally told me your history with Craig. You still love him. (I laughed)

Me: We were never in a relationship.

Ma T: Then you're still in lust with him. Look, Poppy I can tell you now that he won't leave Othu. If he is foolish he might again fall into temptation with you but he won't fall for you. Have you seen how that man looks at Othu?

Me: I don't want him. I'm trying to win Othu's trust back so I'd never fuc...sleep with Craig again. Lying to her and saying he wants me back then was a bad mistake but I won't do it again.

Ma T: Are you trying to fool me or yourself? (I kept quiet)

Me: Okay, maybe I caught some feelings because he is a good looking man and good too.

Ma T: And no one will crucify you for having those but you must keep them to yourself. I've once developed feelings for my friend's man and we had an affair. I thought I'd gotten him but you know what? He chose his wife and I realised that he always would. Craig won't choose you. You can do all the styles and such in bed but that won't make him want you. Othu offers him way more and you might think that she doesn't satisfy him in bed but you'd be surprised. If you go after Othu's man you can kiss this bond you are trying to build goodbye and trust me the family will take her side since she'd be the victim. You are a beautiful girl so go get your own man for goodness sake. I love Craig for Othu. They compliment each other well.

Me: I actually didn't think you can be so serious. It's shocking.

Ma T: I'm yet to shock you. You and I similar. I've made mistakes and I'll tell you about them and the lessons I've learnt hoping you'll listen and not make the same mistakes. Don't change who you are but don't make people feel annoyed by your presence as well. I still don't like sharing my shine but you're my granddaughter and you take after me so I'll try just don't be conniving and manipulative. I'm not like that, your father was/is but don't be like him.

Me: I'm trying my best.

Ma T: And Othu has been giving you a chance. Do you think this is easy on her? You once slept with her husband I know it was before you all knew but that doesn't make the situation any less pleasant for her I'm sure but because she's trying to include you she's putting it all aside. Once again stay away from Craig.

Me: I don't want him.

Ma T: Good. I'll see you around. I think the Zwenis should perform a ritual for you too. You seem to need it. Bye I've got a shopping date.

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She smiled and out she went. I just got another reminder that Othu is and will always be more important than me. I guess I'll always be under her shadow. What will I do with a paralysed man anyway? He's just a fling I got attached to. I went to make myself some coffee when I heard my door open and saw Langa appear.

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Me: Did my door just suddenly vanish?

Langa: Give me your phone.

Me: I'm not going to do that. Go to hell, Langa.

Langa: I finally heard what happened the night that Tata had the stroke. I'm sure you've had pictures of me with a male friend for some time now trying to blackmail me. When Tata showed you the door you decided that you'd take me down with you. (I laughed in disbelief)

Me: How the hell would I have taken pictures of you with "your male friend" in bed together? You give me way too much credit but thanks. I suggest that you go ask the person you've been sleeping with what his part in all of this was.

Langa: Ian would never do that.

Me: I'm not homosexual but had I been I know a partner who refuses to come out of the closet would have been a turn off. Maybe Ian was tired of being turned off by you so he took action. Good for him I say. Maybe I must just move from all you perfect Zwenis. You all make me sick.

Langa: Even Othu who has helped you? (I looked away)

Me: Just go. (I finally said)

Langa: I wonder if Othu knows that she makes you sick. (he took his keys and went out)

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That's it I've finally decided that I'm leaving this place for good once I've recovered fully. I'm a hustler so surviving is my thing. I

actually care for Othu. I think her good and kind nature is what makes me sick because I'm the opposite of it. I can't believe Langa had the nerve to tell me all of this. He must thank whoever did it and stop being a coward. I'm grateful it happened because Kumkani got what he deserves. I can't wait to heal so that I'll move away and start a new life where no one knows me.

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#OTHU

We have gone to the doctor after a week of finding out that I'm carrying twins and he said that there is improvement on the growth of the child but we should not be too excited. Yes, the baby has not stopped growing but the fact that he/she is growing slow is still not good. The low and slow heartbeat has them worried too. We finally heard the difference and we agree that they aren't the same. I have another appointment in a few days and we are hoping that everything will be fine. Yandi has been pushing for us to get a hold of Flinch because she believes that my twin's soul is restless and that is why history might be repeating itself. Craig and I have become the ultimate praying couple and it's special indeed. We are still keeping the

honeymoon phase alive by going out alone and connecting. I'm now really starting to show. I woke up after my afternoon nap and walked to the kitchen. I found Craig fixing our toaster. He was sitting on one of the kitchen chairs so I hugged him from behind and he turned his head and smiled.

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Me: I love seeing you do all these manly chores around the house. It's sexy. (I whispered in his ear).

Craig: Don't say that. You'll make me break all our appliances on purpose just so that I can repair them again. (we both laughed)

Me: Don't go dare.

Craig: I love feeling your small bump against my back. The growth is still slow but it has improved. That's something, right?

Me: Yes and it gives me hope. We're having twins. (he turned to face me)

Craig: And I can't wait.

Me: Baby what if one dies and I'll have to carry hi...(he kissed me)

Craig: No negativity, O. No baby will die. I've left a message on the new number that I got for Flinch. Told him its urgent but it's been days now.

Me: I doubt he'll ever come back to the country. We'll just deal with this as time goes by. Where's Chulu? (he pointed outside)

Craig: She loves that puppy but I have a feeling that the poor little guy will take backseat once the twins are here. (I laughed)

Me: He'll be a big dog by then. You two need to train him. Look for videos on how to online and follow the instructions. I can't have the house be decorated and furnished well when there is a dog who bites and chews on everything that he can.

Craig: He doesn't poop as much indoors though so that's an improvement. Did Bandile and Nathi tell you that they both got accepted at the universities they applied at? (I smiled and nodded)

Me: I feel like Sandiso is not the most family orientated. He needs to visit someday though.

Craig: Not everyone adapt easily so give him time to get used to the idea of us. Dabs's diabetes is being treated well and she's much stronger. I have a feeling that next year will be a good year for us and our family. (I was about to reply when there was a knock on the door)

Me: We'll continue talking now, now let me go see who it is.

Craig: For people who only have a selected few people our new address we sure get a lot of visitors. (we laughed)

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I walked to the door and I couldn't believe my eyes. It's Flinch. How did he even know where to find us? This man is just such a mystery. I let him in and Craig stood balancing on his crutches. His doctor approved it this time so I'm not worried. I could see that he is just as shocked to see Flinch in our home. I was actually happy to see him for some reason so I found my arms around his waist before I knew it. He smiled and hugged me back. He shook Craig's hand and we all sat.

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Me: You scared me, Doc. I thought you're dead or in some kind of trouble.

Flinch: Never well someday but not now. Beautiful house you have here. So I missed your wedding. I'm sorry.

Craig: You missed out on some great fun.

Flinch: I'm just glad to see that you're still good to them. I didn't trust you at all. I also heard that you're looking for me so here I am. I also have something very important to tell you.

Me: Well we were looking for you because we want to know a few things. We're having twins. (I looked at Craig and we smiled).

Flinch: That's great news, Othu. I've got no doubt that you'll be a great mother. So what can I do for you? You do know I'm no medical doctor right? So I hope you haven't called me to ask that I deliver your babies. (we laughed)

Craig: Hell no. We were just wondering about O's twin for traditional reasons. Our friend who is a healer says that he might be unhappy, well his soul anyway.

Flinch: And you believe that?

Me: Please don't undermine my tradition, doc. If my babies aren't well because of something that happened in the past that needs to be corrected then I'll do anything to fix it so please just tell us the story of my twin. Why did he have to be terminated?

Flinch: I'm sorry if I sounded like I'm disrespecting your culture, Othu. I just believe that when a person is dead that's that. I'll try to be more understanding of African beliefs. Uhm, the past is actually what brought me here. I wasn't exactly too honest with you.

Me: What now? (I asked softly)

Flinch: Let's wait for everyone else to come.

Craig: You came with company? This must be interesting.

Flinch: I called Ma Zweni and asked her to call Mrs Zweni. They must be on their way.

Me: What for?

Flinch: Let's wait for them. (I looked at Craig)

Me: I'll make coffee so long. Would you like anything to eat?

Flinch: I'd love something to eat thank you. (he smiled)

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I stood and prepared coffee for them first and served it to them. I made some sandwiches for Flinch. There was a knock and I had a feeling that it's Makhulu and Mama. Him wanting then here tells me that there really is more to the story of my twin brother. Craig went to open and it's them indeed and they were in the dark as we were. I made tea and coffee for them too and they sat. I went to check if Chulu is still okay and went to lock the gate so she and the puppy won't go to the road. She came in to greet her grannies and Flinch and left once again to play. We all looked at Flinch waiting for him to talk.

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Flinch: Okay I guess everyone is waiting for me to say why you're all here. I've kept a part of the truth from all of you but only because I was trying to help. There's no easy way to say this so I'll just be straight with you. The other twin is alive. (my

heart started to beat faster and we all kept quiet clearly shocked)

Craig: What? (he finally broke the silence)

Flinch: Well in a way anyway. The science organisation I worked for only wanted one experiment at a time and not two. That's why they told the Zweni donors that they need to choose one twin. The detailed ultrasound showed that the boy had more signs of brain activity which possibly meant that he would be born more intelligent than you. That's why they advised the donors to terminate the boy and keep the girl. They did it because they wanted to breed the boy with machines until he developed fully. The machine was an artificial womb to say so after they took him from the natural womb he was immediately placed in the machine until full development. After he fully developed he was "born" and so grew up at the science facility.

Makhulu: I can't take this anymore. I've heard enough. I'll go sit with Chulu. (she stood and no one had the strength to stop her)

Mama: I want to hear what happened. (she looked like she'd strangle Flinch)

Flinch: Like I've said he grew up in the lab and later the organisation signs all rights to him to the military. He was very, very intelligent and smart.

Me: Was? (I said in a whisper)

Flinch: I'll get to that now. He helped the military attack/defence strategies, new exclusive weapons designs, could hack enemy accounts in just a few seconds and many more other things meaning that he knew a lot of secrets of other countries. That made him a wanted man of course but his team managed to protect their most treasured secret weapon for years but somehow someone found out about him. If only he was as strong physically as he was mentally he'd have protected himself. The enemy got to him by sending someone to work inside the military to get close to him. After years of not being able to get to him they finally succeeded in putting a bullet into his brain. (Mama started to cry)

Mama: What are you people? Who uses a child's gift to benefit a government? Which military is this I want the South African embassy on this right away.

Flinch: Telling you would be dangerous so it's best I don't.

Me: You said he is alive but again spoke of him in the past tense. Which is which? (I said in a whisper)

Flinch: They shot him four years ago in the head but he survived it. The military he worked for kept him on life support but he was in a vegetative state for a year with little brain activity. I heard about this three years ago since I also thought that he was dead as a fetus but I got fooled by the organisation I worked for too. (he laughed in disbelief)

Craig: This is bullshit. Why did you start with this sick experiment in the first place?

Flinch: Had I not you would not have a wife today. (we all just looked at him)

Mama: Go on with your story.

Flinch: After I heard about it all I went back to get my contract with the organisation from safe keeping. It stated that I have 80% ownership to the experiments since they it was my brainchild. So I went to the official in charge and showed it to him and since twin two was no longer a use to them they gave me to me without a problem. I finally have 100% ownership of him. After years of trying they finally gave him to me.

Me: Ownership of him? What is he

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a thing? That's my brother you're talking about dammit not some robot. Why didn't you give him a chance to live normally?

Flinch: Had I known that he was still alive I would have made sure that he had a life. He was the property of the organisation and later the military property. He knew how he was created and for what reason I was told so that's why he never saw fault with his existence and life.

Craig: O was created the same way. So she's someone's property too?

Flinch: Like I've said they wanted one baby and I thought that their focus was her but I was wrong. She's no one's property that I guarantee you.

Craig: It's rather difficult to take your word for it, Flinch. If anyone comes here and claims my wife like some piece of furniture blood will be spilt. You mark my damn words. (he pointed at Flinch in anger)

Mama: I'm still waiting for the end of the story because I feel like there's more. (she said in a whisper)

Flinch: Well when I said that I have to go sort some things out outside the country I meant this. It took me three years of getting those rights to experiment 7 the boy. Ironically when I got Craig's voicemail asking to see me I had just signed the papers. He has been on life support for all these years but he is still in a vegetative coma stage but since there is little brain activity they managed to keep him alive through machines. I've had him flown over to South Africa. He is practically dead since what's keeping him alive are ventilators.

Me: He's alive?

Flinch: Only because he's on life support. When those machines stop he won't be. (Craig held my waist and put his forehead against mine)

Craig: Are you okay? (he whispered)

Me: No. My womb buddy has been alive all along and was someone's property. He lived a more cruel life than Langa who was under Tata's control. He now belongs to another master like a slave. I'm not okay, baby but I'm too tired to even shed a tear.

Flinch: He doesn't belong to me nor anyone else but the rights to his life since he is in this state belong to the Zweni family.

Mama: What good is that? You got everything that you wanted from him and now that the same brain that benefitted you no longer works you suddenly bring him to his family. You treated him like a gold mine whose minerals got looted and now that there's no more gold he is useless. (she shouted while crying)

Flinch: I di...

Mama: Shut up! Damn you, Flinch. You might not have known the rest of the story but you came up with this project in the first place. Damn you.

Me: Had people like you and Tata not volunteered to be donors then people like him would not have succeeded with the project. He must take responsibility for his part in this but so

should you, Mama. You see why it's said that money is the route of all evil? (she looked at me and ran off) You said that he is in the country. Where?

Flinch: You'll get the details here and I'm sorry to say this but I think it's best that you consider finally pulling the plug. It's been years and clearly he won't wake up. It's for the best for him.

Me: You don't get to tell me what to do with my brother. (I took the file and stood)

Craig: Baby, I'm going with you. I can't believe this. It's like some sci-fiction movie. I think your mom and makhulu must also come with us.

Me: I'll be fine. He is my twin after all. I've been wondering what he would have looked like since I found out about him. He was a modern day slave.

Flinch: There are DVD CDs in there that I got of him in it. No one has ever seen them actually since his existence was secret. I haven't looked at them either because I wanted to let you all do it first. I really thought he was dead, Othu. They clearly got a smarter scientist who outsmarted me in at my own game. I'm sorry to you all and I hope that me bringing him home even if he is in such a state brings some closure. I'll leave you now and don't worry I've told the facility to expect you. I know that you'll want to keep him on life support for a while longer but

remember that it's been four years. I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner but I didn't want you spending your money and possibly risk your life trying to get him back. It took me three years of blood, sweat and tears and I'm glad that I managed to spare you the pain and trauma. I'm also sorry that I'm breaking the news now while you're pregnant. Accept my deepest apologies to you and your family. When I started this project this was not my goal. I hate slavery with passion and that's why I made sure that you're no one's property. Had I known that they had other plans with him I'd have done the same. I'm sorry. (he smoke softly but I just kept silent)

Craig: Please give us time alone. (he nodded and left)

Me: Am I a bad person for not being grateful to him, baby? (he held me tight)

Craig: You're human and it's normal to feel as you do. I'll be here every step of the way. He is right though. You all have to keep in mind that it's been four years.

Me: But I'm only now going to see him for the first time and now I have to put him in the ground. I'm not ready for that. (I cried)

Craig: I know but you have these videos. You have to think about him as well, O. (I hugged him while crying).

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I finally calmed down and I went to apologise to Mama for throwing the past in her face. I told Makhulu the rest of the story and I was afraid she'd faint but she kept strong. We decided to not waste any time. We called Langa and had him bring Tata to the address given. We also decided to involve Poppy. He's her brother too. I asked Zuko if she could look after Chulu and she was more than happy too come over. I didn't tell her the story though. Yandi my best friend had to know since she is the one who felt that there's more to the story. Zuko arrived at the house and Chulu love them all so she didn't mind being left with one of her aunties. Ma T who always has something to say actually kept quiet this time around. Craig drove us to the place and we got lost a few times but finally got it. It's no hospital that I'm sure of. We went in and there were a few people there. We asked around for the person brought in by Flinch and Langa arrived with Tata pushing him on a wheelchair. We waited for Poppy but no sign of her she'll find us inside because we were all just too anxious and couldn't wait. We walked in following the man in front of us and finally got to a room and saw a man lying on the bed. He was plugged into machines as expected. Mama broke down as we entered and Langa held her. We explained to Langa and Tata what is going on and Langa couldn't believe it. Makhulu recited our clan names while crying. Craig never letting go of my hand. I guess he is afraid I'll faint or something but that won't happen. I

can't faint now when I'm about to meet my twin brother. I walked closer slowly and finally could see his face. I smiled while tears flew down my cheeks. He is so handsome. He looks a lot like me but in a manly way of course. I extended my left hand that was shaking uncontrollably to his face and put it on his face. He doesn't feel warm nor cold. Clearly they groom him because his beard and hair is cut. It's as if he will wake up anytime and ask who the hell we are. Makhulu stood on the other side and also managed to smile.

"My handsome boy", she said in a whisper.

I gave him a kiss and for some odd reason I felt complete. Like I've been missing a puzzle piece but now I've finally found it. We aren't identical but it makes no difference. Mama finally calmed down and looked at her son. She also gave him a kiss. I watched as she expressed raw emotions for the son she never knew and I could not help but wonder if she'd have reacted the same had it been me lying here. I snapped out of my thoughts because this is not the time. Everyone got a chance to stand by his side and I didn't move an inch from where I stood. They let Tata sit closer and put his son's hand in his. He actually gripped the hand. This family moment went on for hours and Poppy finally arrived. They explained to her and she was just shocked. After a while I asked to be left alone with him even if it's a few minutes and they all understood. When they were all gone I got

on the bed and cuddled up next to him and held him so tightly and I didn't want to let go. I looked at him. I went through the file to check his name and all I could see is "Experiment 7, the boy". Is that what they called him all his life? Surely he must have a name but it was not in the file. I'll ask Flinch some other time.

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Me: Bhuti, I don't know what they called you there. My name is Othunyiweyo Zweni and I'm your twin sister. I don't know if you've known about me but I only recently heard of you but I thought you died when you were just a fetus but it's not so. How I wish you could have used that intelligent mind of yours to outsmart the people who held you captive but it's too late now. I'm sure they had you believe everything they wanted you to since you were a child. I'm hoping that you at least had some happiness. I've always grown up feeling out of place and I think had you been with me I would not have. All of me wants to keep you plugged into these machines so that I won't have to bury you right after I've found you but that would make me just as cruel as those who did this to you. I don't know you but I miss you. I'm going to have twins soon and they might say I must let go of one but I don't think I'll be able to. I wish Mama hadn't allowed them to terminate you. I'm angry at her too as I am with everyone involved in this. You look so handsome one

would think you're just sleeping. Letting go is not easy but I have to. How many people can say that they got a chance to meet a sibling who died long ago? I'll see the blessing in this as time goes but for now I'm hurt and angry. The family has spoken and decided to finally allow you to rest. I hope that you'll rest peacefully. I love you. (I kissed each spot on his face)

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The family came back in and everybody else said goodbye too. I know that we all wanted to keep the machines on longer but it's torture to him too. Yandi wanted a name to introduce him to the ancestors by and Makhulu said he is Kungentando. Because she believed that everything turned out like this because of God's will. We might not understand it all but he does. We had a little prayer session before unplugging the machines. The people who work here came in after we said we are ready. They unplugged the machines and the monitor drew a straight line which indicated that he has died. Yandi did her thing to make sure that his spirit passes through smoothly. In our culture when a person dies away from home his spirit must be taken from the foreign place and be taken home. So Yandi was here to ensure that we take no short cuts. There were a few sobs but we were grateful for the hours we had to speak to him. I'm so grateful for my husband. He is just an amazing and supportive man. I suddenly felt the first kick in my belly while

we surrounded my brother. I told Craig and he immediately put his hands on my belly. We got another kick and then another. The looks on both our faces were just priceless.

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Yandi: Old life just passed on and gave way to new life. That's the way of life. (she said while busy with her work)

Mama: Forgive us for the wrongs we have done, my son. Sleep well, Wawa.

Makhulu: Thank you, Kungentando Zweni. Rest in peace, Mpinga. We all love you, my boy though we didn't know you. (the room went silent)

Yandi: He is finally home, Makhulu. He is going to rest well and be with his ancestors.

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To hear that he will rest in peace brings joy to my heart. My twin brother is home. I'm sad but at the same time I'm grateful that he first came to say goodbye in his own way. After all the processes done we once again said our final goodbyes before they took him to the mortuary. Yandi insisted that we first go to the hospital so I'll be check out and I was fearful thinking she sees something that I don't. The people came for the body and Langa said he'll take care of it. To see him take the lead as temporary head of the Zweni family made me proud. We had

Tata taken back because he has a routine but we hope that us including him made things better. Some went home and we went to the hospital. We asked that a scan be done and our doctor said it's not time yet since we monitor weekly but Yandi insisted and both she and Craig stayed in the room. The doctor did as asked and I held my husband's hands tightly not breaking eye contact. We heard the heart beats and the doctor looked at us. We smiled at each other because we knew that there is a great improvement. Our bhabha has grown more not as the other but he/she is getting there. Craig could not hold his emotions and cried which made me cry. We thanked Yandi so much. I guess I'll have to thank Flinch too because he didn't have to go get Kungentando but he did. The doctor is happy and so are we. The spirit will be take to Langa's house since it's a Zweni house. It can't go to mine because that's a Knights house. We went home to change and Chulu was sleeping since its night already. Zuko said she'd stay longer. We went to Langa's house where everyone was waiting for Yandi to complete the ceremony. She went in first and we followed as she recited our clan names and communicating with Ntando's spirit telling him that he's home now. I've never been a part of such but it felt good to be. After everything was done we had another prayer session. Deacon Funda must just propose to Makhulu again. When we are in trouble he is always near. After some time we finally went home. Ma T and Dabs willyy be with

Mama. I'll see them early morning to make funeral arrangements. Craig, Makhulu and I went home. I need to buy Yandi a big prezzie for her help. I tried to call Flinch but it went to voicemail. To hear that Ntando died by gun shot hurts but I'll take comfort in believing that his soul is finally at peace. We needed to reconnect after being separated in our mother's womb in order for my baby to grow and have a chance at life. It's painful but I'm grateful. I thank you, Kungentando and I love you, brother.

KUMKANI

The people in this center treat us like children. They dictate when I'm going to eat, bath, exercise. In fact my entire life is dependant on them and I hate each and every single second of it. Then there is the issue of Othu's twin who has been alive all these years. I wonder if I can't take the science organisation people to court and sue them for millions of dollars for lying to me. I need to get better indeed. Kungentanto was a true Zweni and to hear all about his intelligence makes me wonder what type of son he would have been. I also wish that they had waited until I got better before taking him off life support. I'm Kumkani Zweni so I would have made a plan and he would have lived somehow. They didn't even try African healing for goodness sake. All Othu did was bring her amateur traditional healer friend who has proven to be absolutely useless. My speech has improve a bit. I'm able to mumble a few simple words such as "yes" and "no". I make sure now that each day I push myself so I'll heal faster. I can't believe they gave my cows to Welile who is a gambling addict. I'm sure all that's left now is an empty kraal. I'll make sure that I get what's mine though. I didn't spend millions in raising Othu just to be left in the cold when her husband brings money. Clearly he is a rich man too by the sound of things. Maybe I must build a relationship with my

son in law. Perhaps a change is not such a bad idea after all. That way I'll win the trust of many. Maybe kindness is a weapon too and I need to learn how to use that weapon. Seeing that Poppy girl who left me to die was unpleasant. Why did they even include her? I need to have DNA tests done on that one. As for Makazi Notomato insulting me by calling me a mummy. It seems these people have forgotten who I am. I sat in my wheelchair in the general area with others who had strokes. Some smell like a dumb that's why I have to get ready to get out of here. I saw Othu, Mama and Othu's girl walk in. I suddenly felt relieved because it means they will take me outside. The male nurse pushed my wheelchair while they walked beside me. Othu has been kind and I wonder why? Is she also planning on killing but with kindness. We finally sat under a big tree.

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Makhulu: Hello, Kumkani. I hope that you're feeling better today and that there is improvement each day. We have come to tell you that tomorrow we will be burying Ntando. Don't worry we have made sure that all the rituals needed and afterwards we'll cleanse Othu and Unathi. We are planning on doing things the right way now. We have gotten so caught up in Western ways that we forgot our own and our ancestors are basically showing us that we can run but can't hide. We have

come to take you to Langa's house now because that's where everything will happen and as father of the deceased you need to be present. I really hope that you hear me, my boy. (she looked at me)

Me: Yes. (I mumbled and they looked shocked)

Chulu: Mommy is your daddy really a mummy? (I felt my anger rise)

Othu: No, he is just very sick. Don't believe what you're told about his condition by Ma T.

Chulu: But I've seen a zombie movie once and they spoke like him. (first I was a mummy now a zombie, I thought to myself)

Mama: Nunu, your grandfather is not a zombie nor a mummy. He is just sick, okay? (she nodded)

Chulu: What should I call him?

Othu: Grandpa, tamkhulu or khulu. Any that you're comfortable with just not Kumkani because kids don't call elders by name.

Chulu: I know, mommy.

Mama: They are bringing in the forms so we will sign you out for the night.

Me: Langa, no. (I managed to say)

Othu: What are you saying, Tata? Do you want to go to Kungentando's funeral?

Me: Yes.

Othu: Do you want to stay at Langa's for the night?

Me: No. (they looked at each other)

Othu: Tata, you need to accept that your son is gay. I know that the pictures that everyone speak of but no has seen shocked you into this state but you need to accept him. He is your son. Your pride and joy as you've told me to my face many times before.

Me: Langa, no. (I got angry)

Othu: You will die alone I tell you. You push away the one person who has been in your corner for being gay? I can't believe you. It's times like these where I'm grateful that Ntando never got to know you. (I heart sank)

Mama: Othu, Chulu is just playing over there so don't speak like that.

Othu: I'm tired of your son, Makhulu. I've had it up to here with his childish nonsense. Your son is gay, so what? Did you die? He is gay, Tata. Gay, gay and gay. Nothing you can do about it. Th...

Mama: Othunyiweyo, you just gave Chulu a lesson on respecting elders. Don't be a hypocrite by doing just that. (Othu threw her hands up in a surrender)

Othu: I've got too much on my plate to deal with this. You'll find me in the car, Ma. He is GAY. (she bowed and looked at me)

Mama: Othu! (she said in a stern voice and Othu took her child and left)

Me: Mm...M...Ma. (I finally said)

Mama: Hayi man, Kumkani but you can be difficult to deal with at times. She's right, you have to accept your son. If someone of my generation could sit down with Langa to talk to get better understanding of his sexuality. Why can't you? You are a pain in the neck. Don't you want to be surrounded by loved ones all the time? You're about to have two more grand babies and I hope you'll step up to the role. What an honourable roll it is too. They are the people who will look after you someday. Just look at me. I'm stress free and I've retired in peace because my nunu looks after me. Not because she must pay me back but because she shows gratitude to me for being a good granny to her. Chulu doesn't even know what to call you but she calls Welile and Fezile Tamkhulu. Don't you want that? Stop this nonsense or I'll send you to my house in the Eastern Cape and have Notomato look after you. You know she doesn't play. You'll get that nonsense slapped out of you since no other

methods don't work. Don't test my kindness because I can be strict too. (a nurse walked over)

Nurse: Mrs Zweni, these are the forms that need signing. It's just an accountability form stating that he left here without an injury so should something happen during his out stay we won't be held accountable for it. Do you need help filling it in?

Mama: No, my dear. I'll cope just fine and bring it to you.

Nurse: I'll see you now. (she smiled)

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Mama sat on the bench in front of me and I actually realised for the first time just how old she's gotten. This is a strong woman and always has been. Even when my father went away for political reasons she single handedly kept our house a home. I've never went to bed hungry and even now she is making sure that I am well taken care of. After the way I've treated her she could just have left me at the public hospital and let me die but she didn't. She just scolded at me as though I'm a boy and it took me back to when it was just me and her. When did I stop appreciating this woman? How many people can say that they still have a mother in their fifteen? Especially one as healthy as Ma Zweni. I sat and watched as she put her reading glasses on and in that moment something happened to me. I felt like a little boy again in a helpless situation and my mom is here to

help me as she's always done. Suddenly the judgement that I felt towards her for having a child out of wedlock vanished. The thoughts of taking advantage of her financially also vanished. I remember how I'd first clap my hands together and opening both hands before accepting something from her as a sign of respect. When did I stop doing that? Suddenly I wished that I could thank her and apologise to her. My mama, the one who has been the rock of our home. Being both mother and father when my father could only offer himself to us temporarily. She looked at the form again and looked at me.

"I don't know why they make these forms so complicated. Othu would have understood it all but I think that will do. And Kumkani please don't give Othu stress. The twins scared us once but we don't want that anymore. Behave, Wawa please", she said in her gently voice.

Wow, I can't remember when last she called me by my clan name. It made me feel so special. What the hell is happening to me? She asked the nurse to push me inside and she handed in the forms. They gave her a brief of my care plan and she reminded them that she was a nurse. She then pushed me out into the parking lot and Othu stood against her car while Chulu hopped around her. A part of me feels great pity for her. Yes, we all lost Ntando but I can't help but feel like the pain is much greater for her. I don't like this feeling of taking on other

people's pain and I don't know why it's happening. Othu helped Mama load me in the car and Chulu kept on looking at me and smiling. Usually I'd go and not even give much attention to it so I'm stuck looking at her smile with her one upper front tooth missing. Another thing that kind of made me have that strange feeling again. I don't hate the child but I just never liked that Othu took her and made it worse by giving her my surname when we knew nothing about her mother. We drove off and I hoped that we we aren't going to Langa's. I'm still traumatized by the sight of him kissing that boney man, Ian. I'm sure Ntando was not gay. Pity he died before I got to know him. The pain is not much since I didn't know him. After a while we arrived at a house that I don't know so I'm guessing that it's Othu's. I internally breathed a sigh of relief. Some boy came to help them get me onto the wheelchair. Mama introduced him as Bandile. He is my sister's son. They wheeled me inside the house and I thought I'd see Knights appear but not. Mama lowered herself and looked at me.

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Mama: This is Othu's house but she does not live here. Her and her family live at their other house. You didn't want to go to Langa so we came with you here.

Othu: We do need to take him to Langa's since the church people have their prayer sessions there.

Mama: I was thinking that we must not exhaust him, Othu. I think even this drive was stressful to him.

Othu: It took us ten minutes to get here, Ma. We picked him up in front of the door. What possible stress could he possibly have suffered from a drive. I know that he is your baby but let's not forget that he has babies of his own who need his support. Who will look after him here?

Ma T: Stop stressing, I'll look after Kumie. (they looked at her)

Me: Nooo. (I mumbled)

Makhulu: What do you know about caring for a stroke patient?

Ma T: But sis I didn't say anything about caring for him. I'll just make sure that he always has his stress balls in his hands to exercise those stiff mummy hands.

Me: No, M...Ma. (Ma T looked at me)

Ma T: Yes, Kumkani yes. (she said with a smile and nodded)

Othu: That's great. That way the drive to Langa's won't cause him more stress.

Ma T: Will he sleep here too?

Mama: Yes because he doesn't want to go to Langa's.

Ma T: But why when everything is happening there?

Othu: He is allergic to gay people it seems. (she said sarcastically)

Ma T: Okay, don't worry I have just the allergy treatment for him.

Mama: Don't you dare give him pills, Mato.

Ma T: Never. I love you children as though they are mine. Just go.

Othu: Let's go, Ma. Chulu

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come baby. (she ran to her mom)

Chulu: Mommy, I don't want to go to where uncle Langa lives. You don't allow me to watch TV.

Ma T: Do you want to stay here with makhulu Mato, baby? I'll let you watch TV.

Makhulu: We are mourning, Mato.

Ma T: Yes we are but the grieving parties are at Langa's. This is a Knights house not Zweni so let the Knights baby stay in her parent's house and watch TV. I'll give Kumie his stress balls and we will all be happy.

Makhulu: If he dies or gets worse you'll go to jail.

Ma T: No dying. Othu, you trust me with your baby, right?

Othu: Yes, Makhulu.

Ma T: Hle-hle follow Othu's example and trust me with your baby. (I got angry)

Me: No. (I managed to say louder)

Makhulu: We don't have a choice, Kumkani. You don't want to go to Langa's and we must be there. Mato won't kill you. (my heart sank)

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Othu said goodbye to her child promising her that her dad will come fetch her later on. They said goodbye and carried a few boxes out and off they went. Ma T gave Chulu permission to go watch cartoons and she ran off to sit in front of the TV. Ma T was busy on a Tablet doing who knows what. Well this is not as bad as I thought. It beasts seeing the gays. After a while Ma T put some earphones in my ears and held her Tablet in front of me. I thought she'd downloaded some jazz music for me since its my favourite but I was dead wrong. This woman always has been like this that's why I want her far from me. I looked at the screen when suddenly a video of men kissing appeared then it changed to another couple while they spoke romantic words to each other. I felt so disgusted and angry but I could not do anything but just close my eyes. That didn't help because what

they spoke in my ears made me paint a mental picture in my mind. After a while of this torturing she finally let it stop.

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Ma T: I told your mother that I'll have some allergy remedy for you since you are allergic to gay people. This is "Ma T's allegex". If this kills you it won't be because I let you watch it but because your dark heart is hateful. If Langa is a curse to you then you are too since he comes from you. Why do you hate people who are just loving each other so much? Are you secretly gay perhaps? To me that's all that makes sense because Langa is not bothering you. I also let you watch this as pay back for saying that my sister tried to suffocate you to death when you were a baby. What's worse is that you said that I told you that. I'm not Hle-Hle, Kumkani. I don't pray and forget. The world doesn't revolve around you. It didn't back then and it sure doesn't now. I'm sure you're planning some plot to kill me but I don't care. I am not afraid of you. I'm Mato-Mato. I've been surviving danger since before you were born. Stop your crap because it's getting old. You and your Poppy must just move to an isolated island and leave us in peace. We are tired of your unnecessary drama. If you don't like Langa being gay then stay away from him and we that love and accept him will continue to do so. If Poppy doesn't like Othu then she must stay away so that we who love her can continue to do so.

I'm a dramatic person but you two take the crown. Your name might be Kumkani but you're no king so tell your mind to stop fooling you. I'll sort you out. (she pointed at me and I wanted to reply but could not which led to tears flowing down my cheeks) Don't forget that stress reliever in your hand because I promised Hle-hle that you won't die. If you die I'll come with you to the after life and sort you out there too. I know that you're angry but sit here like a good little boy and determine why you're really angry. You'll see that you're angry at yourself for expecting so much from the world when it owes you nothing, fokol.

Me: Ma. (she laughed)

Ma T: How ironic that you call the sama Ma that "tried to kill you". I'm not going to pray for you since you're beyond that. I'll make you face reality, my boy. For years you've been facing your own made up false reality but come down from your high horse and be with the rest of us. Now you're making me be a mean person and I hate that. You accuse my sister again and you'll see. I'll have you sent to jail and you'll live the life that disgusts you so much. Don't test Mato-Mato. (she stood and left me)

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I actually had no words even in my mind. I just sat there helpless. I thought it couldn't get worse but it did. Later Chulu

came with make up and started to paint my face with it. I felt like such a toy. She finished, looked at me and smiled.

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Chulu: Look, tamkhulu. I drew you a smiley face so that you don't look as sad as you do. Makhulu says a smile brightens up even the most gloomy day. I hope that you like it and that it will brighten up your day. (she held a mirror before me and I look like a clown)

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I was about to gather energy to mumble "no" again but she kissed my cheek and hugged me before I could. Again my mind went blank as though it has shut down. She wanted to push my wheelchair but it was on brakes. I managed to point to the control that would make it move and she got it. She pushed me to the lounge where her cartoons were still on.

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Chulu: Is this the right spot? Can you see the TV?

Me: Yes. (I said softly)

Chulu: That's good. That is Sponge Bob and Patrick. They are best friends. Patrick is a star fish and we Sponge Bob is a sponge. You'll like it very much. You'll laugh too, you'll see. I'll ask uncle Nathi to get us snacks during ad break. You must not

wear pajamas during the afternoon again, tamkhulu. My daddy had clothes that might fit you. I'll ask him okay. Let's watch before we miss it.

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She sat on the couch next to me and I just don't know what to think. Here this child I've only just treated bad since I've known her is treating me like the grandfather of the month. Ma T came in laughing and taking pictures of my face but Chulu told her it's not nice. Chulu vanished out of sight and later came back with her own clown like make up. She asked Ma T to take pictures of both of us. I felt a fuzzy feeling inside that I can't describe. We watched her cartoon and actually found some parts funny.

"You're like Scwibwerd the octopus. Always serious and that's not nice. Be like Patrick and Spondge Bob they are always happy. Don't be like Mr Crabs also because he likes money too much", she said softly.

I can't believe that I just got a lecture from a child on how to be. Why am I feeling different? Later on she went to get the snacks but I can't eat on my own yet but somehow just appreciated the gesture of it all.

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#OTHU

It's been a hectic week and I didn't accept Mr Thorn's offer of taking a few days off because I know that I'm needed at work. Langa is such a darling lately. He made sure that everything is taken care of. I really think that Ian has something to do with his sudden change. Craig and I have been looking at the videos Flinch gave us and wow, my brother was a handsome man. He didn't speak much since it seemed as though he was camera shy but there was always some girl who encouraged him to say more and when he did it was heard by many in sure since he had a deep voice. We compiled a slide show that we will be playing today since we will be lying him to rest. It seems as though Tata survived being in Ma T's care yesterday. Chulu even said she made him watch cartoons and I'm sure he was swearing internally like a mad man but good thing he can't speak yet. I slept over at Langa's last night which made Craig sulk but I wanted to be here when Ntando's body arrived early morning which it did. I was in the room getting ready when I heard a knock. The door opened my my handsome Knight appeared wearing a black suit. He still walks with crutches but I'm seeing an improvement each day. He held me close to him and kissed me.

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Craig: Oh my word, I suddenly feel much better after seeing you and getting a kiss. (I laughed)

Me: Such a cry baby but I'm glad to see you too. I've missed your body heat last night. (he smiled)

Craig: We'll cuddle tonight. How are you?

Me: Surprisingly good, baby. After I was told about him I always would wonder what they did with his remains. He was a fetus when they took him out of Mama so I wondered what they did with him. In our culture burial is important. I'm glad that I will now go to his grave and talk to him.

Craig: I've got something for you. (I smiled)

Me: Only my husband brings gifts to a funeral. (he laughed)

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He went to the door, opened it and suddenly had a frame in his hands. He hopped to me again and gave it to me. I just could not believe it. He took a picture that we found of Ntando in the file and it's the only one where he was smiling and somehow he photo shopped it and put a picture of me as well making it look as if we took the picture together. I for the first time see just how much I looked like my brother and it's crazy. Tears naturally flew from my cheeks but I was smiling so they were those of gratitude. I brushed my fingers over the glass and

looked up at Craig. Oh but this man! He smiled, kissed me and wiped my tears off with his thumbs.

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Me: When did y...(I cried more and could not finish)

Craig: Well with technology these days anything is possible. (he kissed my forehead)

Me: Wow, baby it actually looks as if we took the picture together. You made the backgrounds the same and we look so happy. I love this picture of him

Craig: I know and that's why I wanted to do this. I now know what you'd have looked like had you been a man but thank goodness God didn't allow you to be one. (we laughed)

Me: I'm going to put this one in our living room. I want all to see my brother. Baby, is it bad that I love him more than Langa when I didn't even know him?

Craig: It's not bad at all. You have an idea of what he would have been like and I guess it's the opposite of Langa. You and Langa still have some mending to do. With Ntando you bond naturally since you were twins and you can hold on to the thoughts of him that your imagination believe and that's good.

Me: Yeah, you're right. He was kind, loving, humble and over protective. I see him like that. I think you'd have had to prove

yourself to him had he lived and been here when you proposed. (he laughed)

Craig: I can actually see that you are at peace and it's beautiful. When Flinch told us I thought that you'd break down and such but you surprised me.

Me: I'm grateful for his visit and I feel like he gave his life to our bhabha who was struggling a bit.

Craig: I agree. Finish getting dressed. Chulu is all ready and for some reason she likes being around your dad now.

Me: Since yesterday and it worries me because when he recovers he might be same old cold Kumkani.

Craig: Let's see how it goes. All of this might change him in a good way. I'll go see if all is still okay out there.

Me: Baby, when God made you is the day that I'll be forever grateful for. You're my rock and thank you for being here. I love you.

Craig: I feel the same and you raised my daughter well and you're about to give me two more. You're my rock as well. I love you too, Mrs Knights. (we kissed)

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He kissed my cheek and then my neck and hugged me tightly. He smells so good. I watched as he went out and soon Yandi appeared. I hugged her so tightly.

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Yandi: Please just don't break down. (I laughed)

Me: Friend, thank you for everything you've done for me and my family. After all of this you and I will go on a friendship retreat and enjoy ourselves.

Poppy: I hope I'm also invited. (she walked in and Poppy rolled her eyes)

Yandi: R 5000 contribution if you want to go. Othu, I did all that I did out of love. I love you and your little nanas and Chulu so much.

Poppy: So Othu I was thinking since our brother was a science miracle we can have the media tell his story. They will give big bucks for such an exclusive.

Ma T: What part of you can be yourself but not in an annoying way didn't you get? He is not even buried and you're being insensitive. I'm really working on that plan to transport you and Kumkani to an isolated island.

Poppy: Sorry, Ma. (she said softly)

Ma T: Nyori nyori, all the time. I'll sew your lips together. I love money but I'd never use my late grandchild to get it. Also stop going around asking why Othu got riches from your father when you and Langa didn't. All of which your father owned was hers. You think I don't have eyes and ears everywhere. I see you, Nopopi. And why are you wearing white when it's a funeral. You see that we are all wearing black like vampires but you came in white like a saint. You like attention man. (she clicked her tongue and left)

Me: Our brother won't be displayed for the world to see. Did you really go around complaining about the money that I got? You don't even know the reasons, Poppy. I'm trying my best to help you and make you a part of the family. And giving you money will be too easy. I was not always rich. Do you know that Tata cut me off financially at age 16?

Yandi: She's well aware of it since you've told us the story of how you had to be a waiter and even scrub toilets in a club to get pocket money for varsity since your bursary was limited. She knows it all. Stop explaining yourself to Poppy.

Me: I want to be a sister to you but you're not allowing me to. I don't know anymore. What should I do? Therapy?

Poppy: I'm trying, Othu.

Me: First start by letting go of the selfishness you have I don't mind your big mouth. I'm used to it but not the selfish and sneakiness. Stop that please. (she looked down)

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No further words were spoken. That's what I hate about a full house. People eavesdrop a lot like she did when I was speaking to Yandi and like Ma T also did. Yandi told me to calm down and suggested that Poppy also be introduced to the Zweni family and I have no problem with that. Craig doesn't want her anywhere near us and I'm trying to include her but she makes it difficult. I'm not perfect but she thinks I am and it causes a barrier between us. We went on with the business of the day which is to take my brother to his finally resting place. The deacon led the ceremony and I thought he'd have nothing to say but he said plenty and preached. They had us the family view the body and he looked so peaceful. They allowed for Ntando's church ceremony to be at our church though he was no member. Mama broke down again and I don't really know if it's the guilt or the sadness. The slideshow was played and I also started to cry and Chulu rested her head on my arm while Craig held me close. We spoke a few words telling him how much we loved him though we didn't know him and gave our last goodbyes. We finally went to take him to his final resting place. This is when I got really emotional. Reality sank in that I'll never

see him again when all I wished for is for him to somehow cheat death but that was not the case. A piece of me suddenly felt ripped out again. I watched as his coffin slowly lowered into the deep dark hole and my hands started to shake. Craig held them firmly in his until the coffin hit rock bottom. Flinch appeared and I thought that I'd go tell him that I've forgiven him but truth is that I haven't. Had he not done the project none of this would have happened. Maybe God would have let Mama and Tata conceive us naturally and we would have grown up together. The deacon told the family to come throw in the first dirt to say goodbye to the flesh of Kungentando but to remember that his spirit has not died. Craig held my waist and helped me walk. He left one crutch to do all that and I got a bit worried but he looked fine. One by one we threw the dirt over the coffin while the deacon spoke of "ashes to ashes, dust to dust". I took a rose from the flowers I got. I took its petals off and scattered them over his coffin. I watched as the petals first flew in the air while lowering into the hole until all finally kissed his coffin.

"Rest in peace, my womb buddy", I said while laughing softly.

"Thank you for making sure that my babies remain together. I know that it was you and I'll tell them about you. Even if it's just the little that I know. I love you Kungentando", I continued speaking in a whisper.

The rest of the people went to put dirt on his coffin too until it was all over. The people went ahead but we stayed until the hole got covered. He was a kind man that I know and I'll tell my babies that just as I've told Chulu when I explained to her. I'll forever cherish the picture Craig gave me. Someone once asked what materialistic thing I'd save first in case of a fire and I had no idea but now I do. It's the picture of my twin and I together looking happy. It might be fake but its value to me is significant. Rest well, bhuti. I'll see you next time because I believe our souls will reconnect once again somehow, someday. I love you.

A few months have passed since the family buried Kungentando. Othu had put the gift Craig gave her in their lounge for everyone to see. Everything has been going well for the Zweni-Knights family. Yandi had her traditional wedding and all her friends were there to support her. It was a proper traditional isiXhosa wedding and her in laws wanted to welcome her to the family that same day. She's now a proper makoti and stayed at her in laws for a short while to do her makoti duties. Her in laws gave her the name Alakhe because they wish for her to build/grow the family to greater strengths. Othu and Yandi agreed to have their white weddings a week apart and their husbands just nodded in agreement. Ma T has been keeping a close eye on Poppy but not just that. She's also become a mentor to Poppy because she sees herself in her and would hate for Poppy to make the same mistakes that she has. It seems as though Poppy is still Poppy but her personality is no longer so loud and many have noticed the improvement. So much so that her friends welcomed her back into the friendship circle but Yandi said she's still on probation in her books and Poppy accepted that. Othu has sat down with Poppy and explained to Poppy why she got money in hopes that Poppy will stop thinking that she's more loved by their father. Poppy finally understood that Othu didn't steal the money from Kumkani and understood that Othu was within full right of that

money and so much more. Their relationship is better, not the strongest but they are working on it. Nokulunga is now as strong as an ox which proved the predictions of the strange lady they met in the street. Bandile is now one of Craig's most reliable and hard working employees and he opened up an account to save up for the house he plans on building for his mother. Anathi will live at the school's residence next year while Bandile chose to remain living with Makhulu and his mother. Their brother, Sandiso is too accustomed to rural life so he will stay in Bizana but has started to attend skills development classes at a near by college on a part time basis. Kumkani has gotten attached to Chulu. Something that he never saw coming but for some strange reason he enjoys it. He can now move both arms and legs. His face still feels a bit numb but there's certainly an improvement. His speech has also improved.

Othu and Craig went to see a doctor for their usual planned appointments and the doctor is just blown away by the improvement of the recipient twin. Othu laid on her back with Craig's hands firmly holding one of hers while kissing it whenever they make eye contact.

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Doctor: I am a happy doctor. Your blood pressure is stable and they are both growing so beautifully. I'm so glad that we didn't

have to resort to terminating one because with identical twins the risks are much higher.

Craig: You're not as happy as we are, doctor. Their lives will just be better when they are together.

Doctor: Very true. It's believed that twins have a strong connection. You both understand that we might have to deliver them by C-section right? It's best for multiple pregnancies.

Othu: Can't they be delivered naturally?

Doctor: Yes, of course twins can be delivered naturally but your blood pressure's unpredictability worries me. I'll sit down with you after this and we can all look at the different birth plans together.

Craig: What about water birth? I heard that fathers can also get into the bath with mommy. It sounds so special and intimate. I'd like something like that a lot. (he smiled at his wife)

Doctor: Let's discuss it when we are sitting in the consultation room. So would you like to know the gender of the babies? (he smiled)

Othu: No thank you, doctor. (she answered quickly)

Doctor: And you dad? (he looked at Craig)

Craig: I know we said we will wait until the last day but I can't, baby. I'm burning to know. (they laughed)

Doctor: I could whisper it to you in your ear.

Othu: You know that would not be a problem, doctor but I don't trust my husband to keep it to himself. (Craig laughed)

Craig: Wow, thanks for not trusting me with a secret.

Othu: Our daughter is a daddy's girl of note and daddy can't say no to her so I have a feeling that he will tell her that he knows the gender and she's super excited about the arrival of these two so she'll want to know and he won't be able to say no. they all laughed)

Doctor: Then I think it's best I keep the secret.

Craig: I won't tell Chulu, I promise. I have a right to know if I want, right doc?

Doctor: Yes.

Craig: Then please tell me. Whisper to me the gender of our little bundles of joy. (he said looking at Othu with a naughty smirk)

Doctor: I'm sorry, Mrs Knights. We lost the battle.

Othu: Baby, keep it to yourself please. (Craig smiled)

Craig: I will. (he kissed her)

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After the two were happy about the progress and feedback of the doctor regarding their babies Othu wiped the gel off her belly and the three went back to the doctor's consultation room where they discussed the birth plan. Craig really wanted the water birth but the doctor advised that a C-section will be best so they chose not to question a professional. He even arranged a date for Othu's operation but things might change should the babies decide to come much earlier but provisions were made for that too. Makhulu was right when she said pregnancies aren't the same because Othu is now only getting annoying morning sickness in her second trimester. She is enjoying each second of it though and embraces the not so good days. Othu went to the restroom and the doctor had a chance to tell Craig the gender of his babies. He didn't mind what they were as long as they were healthy but the curiosity bug has gotten to him. Dr Moodley told Craig that they will be having boys and Mr Knights just could not help but smile endlessly. He would not have minded had they been girls but he is glad that they aren't. Chulu still has to enjoy being daddy's only princess before another princess comes someday. The two of them thanked the doctor and first went to the mall for some grocery shopping. Craig spotted an adorable baby grow and just had to buy it while Othu was busy looking at kitchen appliances. They went home and found Chulu playing outside while Makhulu was sewing. She ran to her parents and held her

mommy's belly. She loves doing that because she always hopes the babies will kick. They went inside and thanked Makhulu for looking after Chulu.

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Makhulu: You now, it's funny how plans just change. Not so long ago I arrived here in Cape Town and we made plans for you to spend the December holiday at my house. Now you're married and expecting. Please never forget these blessing, my children.

Craig: We won't, Ma and if you want we can spend Christmas at your house. It's a family time anyway.

Makhulu: No, let's have it here for a change. Othu, you are so calm for a person who is having her white wedding in two weeks. (Othu lauged)

Othu: That's why we hired a planner, Ma. I've been actively involved but I don't want to stress about it.

Craig: It's best that way. I also know what our babies will be. (makhulu smiled)

Makhulu: Chulu! (she called out softly and Chulz appeared)

Chulu: Yes, makhulu.

Makhulu: Come sit your daddy is going to tell us if you're having brothers or sisters. (they both smiled)

Othu: Let me leave you all. I don't want to hear this and Knights you better make sure that they keep your secret or else...(she pointed at Craig and he laughed)

Craig: Before you go, look what I got when you were looking at kettles and stuff. (he took out a pink baby grow outfit and Othu frowned)

Othu: Baby, you promised. (she said in a sulky tone of voice)

Makhulu: Are we having more princess? I'm so happy. (she smiled)

Craig: and I've kept my promise. Look one can turn it over and the other side is blue. So Mrs Knights it's reversible so that I don't give the surprise away. Sorry Makhulu and Chulu but you'll also have to wait because I don't trust you to keep my secret.

Chulu: But I'll keep it, daddy. I'll zip my mouth like this. (she "zipped" her lips with her fingers)

Craig: Well daddy won't promote secret keeping for you and tell you will do just that.

Chulu: But it's a good secret. Like surprise birthday parties. They are good secrets. (the adults laughed)

Othu: We only have a few months to go, bhabha so wait. It'll teach you to be patient. (Chulu sulked)

Makhulu: You're right about me, my boy. I would love to know but I'll give it away. I'll most probably go buy pink clothes if it's girls and blue if it's boys and I have a hint that Othu won't like that.

Craig: I'll just take the pink and blue baby grows that I got for my boys or girls and put them away safely until the princesses or princes arrive. (Othu laughed)

Othu: You're enjoying this too much and I have a feeling you'll rub it in my face until I beg you tell me.

Craig: Which I won't do because I promised not to. (he smiled and planted a kiss on her lips)

Othu: Just go and put your shopping goods away. (they laughed and Craig left them)

Othu: He is so excited and it's making me so curious.

Makhulu: Just don't die of curiosity like that cat that once did. (they laughed)

Othu: When is Ma T going home?

Makhulu: After your lavish white wedding she keeps on saying. I suspect she'll stay longer because Fezile still guards her as though she's a teen. Here she's free. Kumkani can now be an out patient and your mother refuses to take him.

Othu: She keeps saying her flat is small.

Makhulu: Nunu, please talk to Craig and ask if he can come live with me and Lunga at the house.

Othu: If you want to then okay, Ma.

Makhulu: No, Othu. Please discuss it with your husband first. It's the right thing to do.

Othu: You're right. I still have to get used to that. I'll talk to him tonight. When are you expected to get him?

Makhulu: Whenever we as the family are ready. I thank you and Clay from the bottom of my heart for finding that place. His recovery has gone very well. I think Chulu has something to do with it.

Othu: I can't believe that she actually makes him smile.

Makhulu: Since he eats soft fruits now I'm going to go and take some for him. Is it fine if I take her with me?

Othu: If she's comfortable with it and Craig has no objections then I see no problem. Today we went over the birth plan and we went with C-section.

Makhulu: It's safer since you have that blood pressure issue. Natural is best since you heal quicker but if you can't don't force it.

Othu: When I still thought it's one baby I was actually thinking about a home birth and have you do the honour of helping me bring baby into the world. (Makhulu smiled)

Makhulu: I would most probably have fainted because I haven't done it in such a long time and I'm too attached so I would have feared making mistakes. (they laughed) . But to know that you thought of that makes me feel so special. Thank you.(they hugged)

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Craig stood in their bedroom with the baby clothing turned to the blue side and looked at it with so much pride. He could already see his boys in those. At times he'd just stare at Othu's naked body while she puts lotion on her body and would be in awe of the magic that it possesses. It's growing two human beings for goodness sake. Human beings who will look the same and perhaps even sound the same. From contract killer to family man. What a promotion God has given him, he thought. Makhulu and Chulu went to go and visit Kumkani and Othu and Craig decided to have a quiet few minutes to themselves. They used the moment to play games, make love, talk and make love some more. The two of them laid naked on their brown leather couch holding each other firmly.

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Craig: O. (he said softly and she looked at him)

Me: Mmm?

Craig: No gift that I give you will ever compare to what you are about to give me. Well what you've given me already and that's the gift of fatherhood. You could have told Tatiana's lawyer to go screw himself when he told you that Chulu is placed in your care. Thank you for ensuring that my daughter didn't get lost in system. Now you're about to give me not one but two little people. Thank you and I love you. (he kissed her)

Othu: I'm speechless. You're welcome, baby. I love you too. We are about to be parents of three. (they laughed)

Craig: I foresee lots of sleepless nights, stress and hair greying but I'm sure all will be worth it. We are actually parents of four. Don't forget Zeus.

Othu: I thought his name was furry.

Craig: He is a great dane. To name such a big dog furry is just sad.

Othu: He's what? No wonder he is too big for his age. Of all breeds though, Craig you had to choose that one.

Craig: Chulu loved him.

Othu: I thought that he was sad and you had no choice but to take him. (Craig smiled like a little boy caught in a lie)

Craig: He was kind of sad. (he laughed)

Othu: He wasn't sad and crying out for help, was he? She said she wanted a puppy and since mommy said no she went to the soft target. I give up on you, Knights. (he laughed)

Craig: Wait until we have boys someday in future. I'm sure he will have you wrapped around his little finger too.

Othu: No puppy face, sad innocent eyes or sulking shall prosper. I'm a soldier. (Craig laughed out loud)

Craig: We will see, Mrs Knights. So what will you and your girls be up to for you and Yandi's bachelorette party tomorrow?

Othu: Lots of naughty stuff that our husbands aren't suppose to know of.

Craig: Mmm we can come and strip for you. (Othu laughed)

Othu: And have other women drool over what's mine, heck no. We won't do much, baby. What will you guys do?

Craig: Play Xbox, have a few beers and just chill. I've done the heavy drinking and all week parties until I get plugged to a drip due to exhaustion. That's why I'm not fazed by wild nights anymore.

Othu: But please do meet up with friends on occasions

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baby.

Craig: I will individually and with you. We're young so let's have a young marriage with old principles.

Othu: I like that very much. (she kissed him) Makhulu asked if my dad could live with them since he is well enough for home care now. What do you think?

Craig: The house might be in our names but they live there so it's cool. Your grandpa said a son in law never finishes paying lobola but the rest he pays in helping his in laws. I guess this is one of those moments so they can have him stay. Thank you for consulting me first. (Othu covered her eyes and laughed)

Othu: I have to confess. I actually gave her the go ahead before talking to you but she would not accept my answer until I've spoken to you about it. (he laughed)

Craig: We're still getting used to each other so it's okay. I think Chulu is the only person that your father actually likes. (they laughed)

Othu: I thought the same thing when I saw how he would light up whenever he saw her. If she is what he needs to change then I don't mind. I'm not surprised though. Our bhabha is a joy to be around.

Craig: She sure is. (he kissed her forehead)

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The two cuddled until both of them fell asleep. Makhulu and Chulu finally arrived at the center that's been home to Kumkani. He sat feeling lonely and smiled as soon as Chulu ran to him to give him a hug. Just when he was planning to kill those around him with kindness Chulu beat him to it but he doesn't mind at all. The child is not even biologically his grandchild but she warms his heart up and he has stopped trying to hide it.

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Makhulu: So all you needed was for Chulu to be in your face and be herself for you to change a bit? How I wish I had known that sooner. You look good, my boy.

Kumkani: I'm no boy, Mama and I don't think her being around me then would have worked. I'm just tired of being a grump.

Makhulu: Do you know how excited she gets when she hears that she'll see you?

Kumkani: And that's one of the reasons why I can't be cold towards her anymore.

Makhulu: Is that heart finally melting? (he laughed)

Kumkani: One or two walls around it have fallen.

Makhulu: Now only the twins must come and break down the rest. To be a grandparent is beautiful, Kumkani. I'm glad that you're warming up to it all. You're not getting any younger so it's important to have these little people around you. Old age can be lonely but they make it much better.

Chulu: Tamkhulu, look what I drew for you. It's you and me and Zeus our dog in the park. You're walking in the picture, see?
(she giggled and he smiled)

Kumkani: Now I believe that I'll walk again after seeing this. Thank you, Chulumanco.

Chulu: You're welcome. You don't have space on your wall though.

Kumkani: How can I when your lovely self has decorated my wall with pictures, cards and so much more. I'll keep this one in my drawer and when I get out of here I'll hang them on my wall at home.

Chulu: You also don't sound like a zombie anymore. I kind of miss it but Makhulu says it is because you're getting better so I'm glad. My mommy went to see our babies again. They are now finally sleeping properly.

Kumkani: I'm glad because when they didn't it made you sad.

Chulu: Very much because I love them. I wish they could just come. How long does one possibly need to stay in a little belly?
(the adults laughed)

Makhulu: You stayed for nine months in there so let your siblings do the same.

Chulu: I'll go greet that lady over there. (she pointed)

Makhulu: Just stay in sight and don't eat anything you're given. Show it to me first.

Kumkani: Oh relax, Mama. No one will poison her. (Chulu ran off)

Makhulu: I asked Othu to speak to her husband so you'd come live with us.

Kumkani: I don't want to live in another man's house. Let alone my son in law's. Imagine how pathetic I'll look.

Makhulu: So where will you go? Langa is no longer ashamed of his sexuality so your other son in law visits his house often and I know you still don't want to see them.

Kumkani: I'll go home to the Eastern Cape.

Makhulu: Who will look after you there? I'm staying in Cape Town. I can ask Mato to...

Kumkani: No, no and no. I'll move in with you. Makazi will torture me day in and day out.

Makhulu: And if Craig says it's okay you need to thank him. I don't know why you can't be proud of your daughter. She has a degree, has a job and she married to a good man. I think you've "hated" her because you didn't want her too close to you affairs in fear that she's know half of what you owned was hers. Well she knows now and you have nothing so be like Unathi and build relationships with your kids. One made you rich, the other gave you never ending loyalty and Poppy gave you life for goodness sake. If you can open your heart to Chulumanco you can do the same with your own children. They are of your seed. Grow up, Kumkani. I'm tired of lecturing you.

Kumkani: I won't be a saint overnight, Mama but I'm trying. Chulu being my start. I'll thank Othu and apologise to her. I'll try my damn best to accept Langa but it's difficult. I've always pictured him with an educated woman from a good family and giving me grandkids to continue the family name. Poppy is a different case all together because she's the opposite of the children I've raised but I'll try. I've stopped wanting a DNA test so that's a start. Baby steps, Mamyirha.

Makhulu: Okay then. (she smiled)

Kumkani: Please help me with money to get Chulu a gift.
(makhulu's eyes widened in shock)

Makhulu: My nunu has really gotten to you. Oh it's so beautiful.

Kumkani: Don't get too excited but I want to do something special. Do you know that the decorations she's made on my wall and around me contributed to my recovery? She makes me feel loved.

Makhulu: She does love you so don't you dare hurt my child. I'll buy a gift and you can give it to her.

Kumkani: Thank you, Mama and I'm sorry I've once accused you of trying to kill you. Trust me you have a body guard in Makazi. She's over the top but her words still echoes in my mind.
(makhulu have him a weird smile)

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She just could not believe that it's the same Kumkani who was selfish and arrogant. It just shows that the innocent love of a child can melt any heart. Makhulu and Chulu finally went home from their visit and it made Kumkani have a great day.

Meanwhile Langa sat in the lounge while Ian was in the shower. He was glad that he is finally out of the closet. Well in a way because a part of him still felt ashamed of his sexuality but Ian is not so the "I don't care what others think" attitude is rubbing off on him slowly but surely. Ian's phone rang and Langa answered it but the person dropped the call before he could utter a word. He noticed that the phone is unlocked so he

decided to send himself the photo's of Othu's wedding that Ian has been promising to send to him for months now. He scrolled through the pictures and took those he wanted. Suddenly he saw pictures of himself and Ian in bed together but he was clearly fast asleep. His heart suddenly started to beat faster because he didn't know Ian had these and a part of him told him that these might be the same pictures that were sent to his father. He went to Ian's messages and indeed he is the one who sent the pictures. Langa's heart immediately sank. Ian came from the shower smiling widely. Langa stood and showed him the screen and Ian swallowed hard.

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Ian: Uhm, I...I can explain, my sun.

Langa: Explain what? You nearly killed my damn father. (he shouted)

Ian: The same father who was silently killing you each and every single day by not allowing you to be who...(he slapped Ian before he could finish)

Langa: You don't get to make that choice for me. I was not dying. You did this for your own selfish reasons.

Ian: You just slapped me. (he said still rubbing his cheeks)

Langa: I've actually defended you even Poppy said you sent the pictures. You've betrayed me so much.

Ian: You just slapped me. (he repeated once again)

Langa: Stop playing the dumb fool, dammit. Yes, I just slapped you. Do you want me to do it again?

Ian: I'm not going to be yet another victims of abuse, Langa. Yes, I've betrayed you but don't think I'll take abuse likely. I might be more feminine and fabulous but honey you forget that I too am a man. Slap me again and this lounge will turn into a boxing ring.

Langa: Just get the hell out of my house and life. I don't need a backstabber in life. You are a...(Ian slapped him back)

Ian: I'm fabulous and proud of who I am, honey. You on the other hand not so much. I'll hit you back into that closet you've been hiding in for all these years. I helped you get out of the closet before you suffocated to death and now you think that I'll take your shit. No, honey, no. It's over and don't you dare tell me not to come to Othu's wedding because I'll be there looking hot. (he snapped his finger in Langa's face and left)

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Langa could not believe what had just happened. The one person who he thought was in his corner betrayed him. Poppy was right when she said that he's responsible for Kumkani's stroke. Langa poured himself a stiff drink and downed it like its

water. Just when he thought that his life will have meeting this happened.

The following day came and today Othu and Yandi's friends will host a mini bachelorette party for them. Makhulu gave Othu a strict no alcohol lesson even if she craves for it because she's heard of cases where pregnant women crave beer. Chulu was going to spend the day with daddy while mommy went out to have some fun with friends. The ladies all gathered at Othu's house looking all kinds of hot and so did the yummy mommy to be. They heard the door open and it was strange because Craig and Chulu were out all day. Ma T suddenly appeared wearing a black skinny jean and leather jacket and a heel that most young women could not even walk in.

Ma T: I'm so glad that I found you, ladies. I hope that you are ready to party. (the girls looked at her while shocked)

Othu: Makhu...

Ma T: Who is your Makhulu? (Ma T looked around her trying to "find" Othu's makhulu) Do I look like Hle-Hle?

Yandi: But Ma this is for us young girls!

Ma T: Did you lose your mommy and see her face when you look at mine, Yaya? (the ladies just looked at each other)

Poppy: Nom-T, this is for young people only. Wait for the kitchen parties then you'll have your shine. Imagine rocking up at a club with a woman in her 70's.

Ma T: Maybe you're in your 70's because I'm not. The apartheid government changed my birth year to make it seem as if I'm older and now Home Affairs refuses to believe me. I'm in my 50's actually and my mind is that of a 20 year old virgin. (they laughed)

Licia: You know what? I don't care. I actually want to be as hot and have a great vibe in my 50's too. Let's go, Ma. (Ma T raised her brow). Uhm, I'm sorry about calling you Ma. What should we call you. (Ma T smiled)

Ma T: Mato-Mato, Matoz, Mariri, Nono. The list is endless. Just be creative.

Zuko: I was thinking Matoz the slay queen.

Ma T: Whose child is this? Girl, I love you and the name.

Othu: This is too awkward.

Poppy: Tell me about it.

Ma T: Then stay here and apply avocado on your faces while watching movies but Licia, Zuko and I going to slay.

Othu: Where do you even know these words from?

Ma T: I invented them. (everyone laughed)

Zuko: Let's just go and have fun and watch how Matoz do her thing.

Othu: Stop encouraging her. (she whispered to Zuko)

Ma T: I'm going to go wait in the car, darlings. To follow the queen. (she paraded out and the ladies laughed so much when she left)

Yandi: So do we always treat her like our peer or is it just for tonight.

Poppy: We'll see.

Zuko: I love your granny so much. The woman is cool.

Othu: Only because she's not your granny. (they laughed)

Poppy: Ladies, thank you for welcoming me back in. I won't mess up this second chance. It feels good to be back. I missed you guys so much.

Licia: Everyone deserves a se...

Ma T: Othu and Yandi before I forget I've got some gifts for you both. (she gave them each a bag)

Yandi: Aww, thank you, Makh...I mean Matoz. What is it?

Ma T: What else could it be but lingerie? You children go on about being the young ones but buy each other kettles. Will

your husbands ask you to make them hot cups of tea of your wedding nights? No, because you will be the hot cup of strong black coffees for them to have. Do those justice please they were not cheap. Thank me later now let's go have some fun the Mato way. The pregnant one will drive since she won't drink. I'm not mentioning and names. If you're pregnant you'll know who you are. (she gave Othu a side look)

Othu: I still can't believe that I'm going to party with my gra...

Ma T: Hey! (she pointed at Othu)

Othu: I meant with my Mato-Mato the slay queen.

Poppy: Yho. (she clapped once)

They decided not to argue with an elder and went with the flow. All of them went into the car and drove off. The ladies decided to go to places that were appropriate for all ages. But Mato soon saw right threw them and told them to take her to a place with a good vibe and once again they didn't argue. Zuko and Licia enjoyed every second out with Mato while Othu, Yandi and surprisingly even Poppy were not so convinced but they went along with it. They took comfort in knowing that this is just a pre bachlorette and not the actual one and they were hoping that Ma T won't find about the other one. Hours went by and by then all were having lots of fun. Ma T gives true definition to the phrase "age is just a number".

Poppy sat at an affordable coffee shop thinking about all the fun that she had with her girls and grandmother. She's really determined to take Ma T's advice of continuing to be herself and staying true to herself without annoying or offending people. She has been glued to the internet searching for advice on self improvement and it has really helped. She's also decided to stop complaining about her job and be grateful for it because what she does truly is an important part of society. Mr Thorn has even thrown around some hints of a promotion next year when the schools reopen. She's also realised that no one has been putting her under Othu's shadow. That was a prison that she placed herself in and didn't even realise that the key to freedom had been in her hands all along. It won't be easy but she's determined to become comfortable in her own skin. She sat and waited for her friends to arrive so that they will finalise the plans to Yandi and Othu's official bachelorrette party. They decided to meet at a low key place where Ma T won't be able to find out that they have a party planned. A guy suddenly approached her table with a bright smile on his face. She manages to smile back and he asked if he could sit down. He is not exactly the most handsome and she hoped that he would not hit on her but she let him join her out of politeness.

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Him: I'm sure you're wondering what the hell I want from you and I'll tell you now but let me introduce myself first. My name is Menzi Hana. I'm with Education First which is an organisation aimed at making education a priority.

Poppy: So why did you chose to come talk to me? Do I look illiterate to you? (she became defensive)

Menzi: Not at all, sisi. My colleague is over there (he pointed). We have spoken to most people here with permission from the manager of course. I never assumed that you're not educated but I thought that you might know of someone who has been waiting for an opportunity to get good quality education but can't afford it. We as EF are here to help such people get that education that they want so badly by offering bursaries and scholarships.

Poppy: Oh...okay that's nice but I don't know of anyone who needs help. (she looked down)

Menzi: There's always someone so I'll just leave our details with you. Thank you so much for your time. (he smiled)

Poppy: Thank you. I'll keep it for someone who might need it. Do you offer these bursaries each year?

Menzi: Yes, we do. It doesn't have an age limit either because we believe that there is no limit to education. You can also apply if you want to. (Poppy laughed awkwardly)

Poppy: I would if I had a matric certificate. (she mumbled softly)

Menzi: You can still get that matric certificate. It's never too late.

Poppy: Wow, I actually thought you would not hear that. Uhm, I'm too old for school uniform, don't you think?

Menzi: An uncle of mine completed his matric at age 45 and he didn't have to wear school uniforms. There are various colleges that has ABET programs. If you're working they offer night classes as well. I can compile some information for you. (he smiled)

Poppy: You don't even know me. Why would you go through all the trouble?

Menzi: When education is involved I'll go the extra mile any time. So what's your highest grade passed?. (Poppy looked down in shame). Look, sisi you don't have to be ashamed to speak to me. I won't judge you.

Poppy: Uhm, it's grade 10.

Menzi: See? That wasn't so bad and even had you said grade two I would not have judged you. Is completing your schooling something you're interested in?

Poppy: Well now I'm actually thinking about it but I'm guessing that these night schools require money and I live on a strict budget at the moment.

Menzi: Isn't there anyone who can help you perhaps?

Poppy: My sister could but I haven't really been the best sister to her so I'm guessing that she'll say no.

Menzi: You'll never know until you try. She might just surprise you.

Poppy: Well thing is I haven't been honest with her. She thinks that I have a degree and has been encouraging me to apply for internships but I've always had excuses. Lame right? (she faked a laugh)

Menzi: Not lame but sad because you're limiting yourself. Be honest with her and ask for help. Sometimes all one needs to do is ask. I'm wondering why your sister doesn't know that part of your life though?

Poppy: We have just recently found each other, well sort of. It's a long ass story.

Menzi: I've just knocked off so if you want I can order myself some coffee and hear it out. (he smiled)

Poppy: I'm expecting my friends soon but since I'm too early I don't see why not. You are easy to talk to actually. (they laughed)

Menzi: Great compliment from a beautiful woman so I thank you. (he bowed his head smiling)

Poppy: You smile a lot. (Menzi laughed)

Menzi: I've got no reason not to. You didn't brush me off rudely so I'm glad.

Poppy: Do I look like those girls who do that?

Menzi: I've actually done it before. (he laughed awkwardly). My colleagues told me to approach you since they were going to other people. I looked at you and recognized you from a few months ago.

Poppy: I don't remember seeing nor meeting you.

Menzi: You were at a club with friends and I saw a beautiful lady that I liked so I went to introduce myself but you told me to back off and that I look to broke to afford you. You also mentioned that one of your weaves are worth my entire monthly salary if not more. (Poppy felt total embarrassment)

Poppy: Oh my word, did I say it in so many words?

Menzi: You said more about but those are the words that I remember.

Poppy: I'm so sorry. I'm no longer like that.

Menzi: Arg, it's cool. I'm no grudge holder. It happens, I reflect and move on.

Poppy: I'm sure that you're sitting there thinking "this girl who thought she's the ish doesn't even have matric". (she laughed awkwardly)

Menzi: You are either surrounded by judgemental people or you're one yourself. Whatever the case please believe me when I say that not all are like that.

Poppy: Damn you really don't hold grudges. When I grow up I wanna be like you. (Menzi laughed so loudly)

Menzi: No one has ever wanted to be like me so thanks. Okay, I'll tell you what. Let's start afresh. Hi, I'm Menzi Hana and you are?

Poppy: I'm Poppy Thongane. Pleasure to meet you, Menzi. (they shook hands)

Menzi: Likewise, Poppy. So can I buy you a drink? (Poppy smiled)

Poppy: I'm trying to teach myself to be independent. I'm sure you've seen from that night that I hanged around old men. I'm a recovering blessee.

Menzi: Me buying you a drink doesn't mean I'll now have you move in with me and give you a monthly allowance. It's just my way of trying to get to know you better over a nice cup of coffee.

Poppy: You don't want to get to know me, Menzi. I'm damaged.
(she looked aside)

Menzi: Damage can be repaired, Poppy and you being on this independence journey is a start. I'm not saying that girls who go for older rich men are damaged but I'm sure doing it because of certain circumstances does leave some scars. Which is the case with most girls I've talked to who have had blessers.

Poppy: So in what way would you like to "get to know" me?

Menzi: I'd be lying to you if I said that I'm not attracted to you but let's just talk about life and all else that come up and take it from there.

Poppy: Like a date? I'm sorry I've just never done this before. No guy has wanted to get to know me before.

Menzi: Everything has a first time.

Poppy: You're willing to date a girl like me?

Menzi: What type of girl do you think you are?

Poppy: Uneducated, occasionally rude and have a bad past.

Menzi: I don't see that. You just said you are willing to complete your schooling. So far you haven't been rude to me, defensive on occasion but not rude and I get a feeling that you're trying to improve and change.

Poppy: Are you always this positive?

Menzi: Not always but I try to see the good in all situations. So for now let's order before your friends get here. (he smiled and called a waiter)

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He placed an order of two coffees and started to have a conversation with Poppy. She was so amazed because all men she's met have just had small talk with her and asked for sex but not him. His favourite topic being education and having a positive outlook in life. She also could not get over his innocent smile. Poppy found herself opening up to him about so many private things and he did the same to. She can't believe that she's met him before this. It's true most girls don't want to be with the good guys out of fear of boredom and Poppy was one of those. They enjoyed their coffee until Poppy saw her friends approach and Menzi excused himself before they could reach the table so that he won't disturb their time but promised to keep in touch after taking Poppy's number. The ladies all sat down and Othu looks as if she's just ran up a hill but glowing beautifully.

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Licia: Poppy next time please be late. I really can't get used to you being punctual. It's too weird. (they all laughed)

Zuko: I agree but she used to annoy the hell out of us by being late or by not showing up at all without alerting us.

Poppy: One can never please people indeed. I'll just do both depending on my mood. So I checked the venue out and it's ready for us.

Othu: This thing of not drinking while you guys are is depressing. I miss red wine. (they laughed)

Yandi: You'll be alright, mommy. Hang in there they are almost here.

Othu: Yeah, yeah. I can't stay long because I have a dress fitting. Getting married while pregnant is not something I'd encourage.

Poppy: You still look beautiful. So I have something to tell you guys. I was not planning to but someone made me change my mind.

Zuko: Could it be the man who rushed off before we got to you? He ran off so quickly one would swear one of us are his ex. (they laughed)

Poppy: I'll tell you about him after I've confessed. I'll just come out and say it. I don't have a degree. In fact I didn't finish school. (the ladies kept calm)

Licia: We actually figured it out a while ago because you always had some excuse when we gave you a job opportunity within social work.

Othu: We just wanted you to tell us in your time. That's why we aren't shocked but I hope you know that not finishing school is no shame.

Poppy: I know that now after speaking to Menzi. Thank you for not judging me.

Zuko: Okay let's move on now. Who is this Menzi. (Poppy smiled)

Poppy: He is just a friend. I don't want to be in a relationship. Not that I've ever been in one anyway.

Licia: Well all the best and if he is a good man please give him a chance.

Othu: He encouraged her to get an education so he must be a good one. I'm with Licia on this and I know you are a looks girl but beauty goes beyond looks.

Yandi: I agree if you want to get to know him more, do that.

Poppy: Thanks guys.

Zuko: So we're really not inviting Matoz to tonight's business?

Othu: No. (she answered quickly and the others laughed)

Licia: But you guys must admit that she added some spice to yesterday's mini party. You two don't want to admit because she's your granny.

Poppy: Exactly, our granny. How many people have you seen going out partying with their gran?

Zuko: Hey but I'll miss Matoz the slay queen. I want to be that woman, no jokes. (they laughed)

Othu: No thanks. I don't think the world must have too many Matoz. She's more than enough.

Poppy: And the others will steal her shine. So don't you dare tell her about tonight, Zuko. Go be besties far from us

Othu: I even had to make Craig promise using the bible to not tell her. They have their own little friendship going on so I didn't want to take chances. (laughter)

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The ladies finalized the details of tonight's celebration and Poppy asked Othu to help her complete her schooling and Othu said she'll speak to Craig but said it should not be a problem. They ordered breakfast and enjoyed being together just like old times and all of them were glad that they could find their way

back to each other. The ladies decided to go with Othu to the designer to fit her dress. Makhulu, Chulu, Dabs and Ma T will meet them there. They all got into their cars and drove off. They finally arrived and found the mature ladies waiting for them already. Othu went into the fitting room with her designer and got into her dress. Luckily it still fit but she knew in two weeks time it won't but her designer is a professional so it won't be a problem. She looked at herself in the mirror and smiled. She could already picture herself walking down the aisle with Craig waiting for her. She brushed her little baby bump and actually realized that it somehow added more magic to the dress. The ladies shouted on the other side of the curtain wanting her to come out and she finally did. The room went quiet when she walked in but their faces were those of happiness. Even Poppy's.

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Chulu: Wow Mommy, you look like a fairy princess. (she broke the silence with a smile)

Othu: I'm not sure what those look like but I'm sure they are pretty. Thank you, bhabha.

Chulu: They are more than pretty. They are magical.

Ma T: Yho you've made me speechless so you can just imagine how I feel when seeing you in that dress. Beautiful, baby.

Othu: Thank you, Matoz.

Ma T: Just because I compliment you it doesn't mean that you must call me by name. I'm in granny mode now not peer mode so respect your elders please. (the ladies laughed)

Popp: You are too confusing, Makhulu. I give up.

Ma T: As I've given up on you and your moth behavior.

Makhulu: You two stop it now. This is Othu's moment and what a beautiful moment it is. I'm thankful to God for allowing me to be a part of all this. You look breathtaking, nunu. Like you have personally been kissed by an angel.

Yandi: I agree. I'm so happy I could burst. Look at the boys making mommy glow.

Zuko: A double dose of growing magic and it shows.

Othu: Thank you and who said its boys?

Yandi: Your beauty says it's boys.

Othu: I don't believe in those myths.

Chulu: Mommy, if it's boys please get me a sister soon after. (the adults laughed)

Othu: Maybe after ten years, bhabha.

Licia: This just takes me back to my wedding day.

Othu: Wendy says all your bridesmaid dresses will be ready tomorrow so if possible please come in for a fitting.

Zuko: I'll have a hangover from all the pa... (the others have her "the look" and she stopped talking)

Ma T: From all the what, Zuko?

Zuko: Uhm...

Makhulu: From all the pancakes I'm planning to make for them after this. I'll make them extra sweet just as they like it. A person gets a sugar hangover too. (Othu looked at Makhulu and smiled)

Chulu: Whoopie I'll have extra sweet pancakes (she jumped up and down)

Ma T: If you say so. So I've been thinking about getting married. I've never been a wife.

Poppy: Aren't you too old?

Ma T: I'm not getting married to your boyfriend

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Poppy so why do you have a problem like I've stolen your man and is planning on marrying him? To forward!

Makhulu: Have you met a man so quickly?

Makhulu: My mouth has been feeling a bit tasteless so I decided to try a new flavour. I've seen a handsome vanilla man and I think he might be worthy of being Mato's man.

Othu: Okay, invite him over so we can meet him. City men aren't like rural ones.

Ma T: You already have. It's Mr Ndothuke. (everyone looked puzzled)

Makhulu: Who has met this Mr Ndothuke because I don't know that name.

Othu: Me neither.

Ma T: You all are just slow. It's Othu's second father, Flinch. Isn't flinching when a person does that sudden movement out of fear? Well in our language flinch means ndothuke. I'll be Notomato Ndothuke. (everyone laughed)

Poppy: Yho. (she clapped once)

Zuko: Notomato "the slay queen" Ndothuke.

Ma T: Yes, girl. I should hire you to be my personal (imbongi) praise poet, Zuko. You do it for me, my baby. The queen promotes you to praise poet. (the youngsters laughed so much)

Makhulu: Mato, act your age for a change.

Ma T: I'm a twenty year old virgin so I am sisi. Look at this hotness. (she stood and twirled and makhulu just shook her head)

Makhulu: Let us just go home. Othu if you're ready, nunu.

Othu: I'm ready, Ma.

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Othu went to change and they all made their way to their homes promising to meet up later. The Zweni women all went to Othu's house and found Craig laying on the couch. Chulu jumped on top of her dad and he opened his eyes.

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Chulu: Daddy, mommy's dress is beautiful. They would not let me take pictures for you though. (Craig laughed)

Craig: I'll wait until the wedding day.

Ma T: Craigzozo (Craig laughed) you're looking so much better. I'm glad, my boy.

Craig: Not as glad as I am, Ma. Excuse me for a second. (he went to Othu). You look beautiful.

Othu: I know. (she laughed)

Craig: Not the most modest, Mrs Knights but I'm glad that you know. (he kissed her)

Othu: Baby, I've been thinking about helping Poppy finish her schooling. She's been trying lately.

Craig: Let's talk about it when we are alone. I'm glad she put her pride aside and asked you and actually told you all that she didn't finish school. So you guys still haven't told your other girlfriend about the party tonight? (he laughed)

Othu: No and we won't. She says she wants to be Mrs Flinch, well Mrs Ndothuke. (Craig laughed so much)

Craig: Oh my word, I've been all over the world and met all types of people but there's no other Ma T in this life I tell you. That granny is what kids these days call Lit. (they laughed)

Othu: She puts most of us young people to shame. So what will you do with the freedom since Chulu will be at Makhulu's.

Craig: Braai with the boys. Please watch your drinks tonight. People do horrible stuff at clubs.

Othu: We're not going to a club. We got an exclusive venue to do our party. We'll be safe, I promise you. (she kissed him)

Dabs: The joy of going love. (she smiled)

Othu: Dabs, we spoke to Makhulu a bit and suggested night school for you. Did you agree?

Dabs: I already have a great teacher in Chulu but she herself is still learning so I will do it. Thank you and your father is coming home tomorrow I'm looking forward to that.

Othu: Don't be sad when he says things that aren't friendly because he's not used to a warm family environment especially one where he is not the head.

Dabs: I'll remember that. I'm actually just here to get some water. Craig, you should have seen how beautiful your wife looked. If you don't cry when she walks down the aisle I'll peel an onion and force those tears out. (they all laughed)

Craig: Heaven forbid. (he smiled)

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Dabs have them some more marriage advice and Othu said she could write a book with all the words of wisdom. Hours went by and the other ladies left with Chulu who was too excited to even know why. Othu got ready and Craig watched as his wife made herself even more beautiful. She wore as beautiful white maternity dress that was just so sexy yet classy. Craig drove Othu to the venue and promised to get her when she is done. All the girls surprisingly arrived at the same time and with taxis of course. There were a few cars clearly indicating that some guests are here already. All women and Ian of course. They all looked hot and both Yandi and Othu wore white and it was

planned no other person was allowed to wear white. When they stepped inside the venue they were never ready for the sight before them. It's Ma T looking beautiful. Everyone looked at Zuko but she promised she didn't say anything. Ma T smiled and walked towards them. She put her finger behind each of their ears and nodded.

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Ma T: Yup, just as I thought. You are all still wet behind the ears. You thought you could fool Mariri? Ladies, you have plenty to learn but I forgive you.

Othu: How di... (Ian approached and greeted cutting her short)

Ian: Today we party until the sun comes up. Shame Othu I got you non alcoholic drinks. How I wish it was possible for you to transfer those babies to Craig's body but hey we ladies have it tough. (the girls laughed)

Ma T: You're wondering how I knew and I won't tell you. All I'll say is I'm Mato-Mato. (she patted her hair with attitude)

Zuko: Yes, Mrs Ndothuke, yes. (she screamed and laughed)

Ian: Stop with the politics and let's just party. The strippers are on their way.

Yandi: No, Vuyo won't like that. I'm marrying a young yet traditional man here.

Ma T: Who here is a gossip fly who will fly out and go tell, Vuyo? You'll never touch another naked man again so use this chance girl. You, Othu aren't allowed. I can't betray my son in law like that. Look but no touch or else...heeee. (she pointed at Othu)

Poppy: That's why you shouldn't not be here. Now we will sit and hold back.

Ma T: Why? You make it sound as if I said I'll glue you to the seats. I'm here to have fun, my girl not babysit. I'm now in Mato mode. (everyone laughed)

Ian: Oh but you are life, Mariri. Adopt me please.

Ma T: So you think I remained childless all my life only to adopt a grown man with beard? Go look for another mommy because I'm not her. Try Othu she loves kids.

Othu: But why involve me? (they all laughed)

Licia: Let the party begin. (she shouted and the other ladies cheered)

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Drinks got served and Othu checked each label of what she drank to make sure that it doesn't have alcohol in it. They decided to make peace with Ma T's presence and enjoy the night. Ian got handsome dark skinned men to come strip for the

ladies and the room was just in such a hype. Ma T watched Othu like a hawk while enjoying the sight of half naked young men. The night was wonderful.

Mean while the men were having a chilled braai with some beers. They plan to have their parties much later.

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Nate: I'm sure that the ladies are now putting money in some male strippers undies. (they all laughed)

Vuyo: Not my lady.

Thabiso: You never know but as long as they are having fun.

Craig: The only man my wife wants is me so that stripper can do dirty dancing all he wants he won't get her.

Nate: So imagine she touching his six pack and going lower.

Craig: Okay shut the hell up. (Nate laughed)

Bandile: Sis Othu she sis Yandi won't allow that. I'm sure they chased those men away if they got hired by friends.

Craig: I like having Bandile around.

Nate: Because he comforts you with a lie.

Vuyo: I agree with Bandile. They are church going women so they won't agree to such.

Nate: But you'll want strippers on your night right?

Craig: Get them for your own enjoyment.

Vuyo: Agreed.

Nathi: We will go sit that side so long. Bring the meat soon please, brothers. (they laughed and left Nate with Craig)

Nate: Are you sure you want this?

Craig: For you to hire strippers for yourself?

Nate: To get married. Don't you miss the dangerous life?

Craig: In married already and I'm a father so I miss no part of my old life. I buried the past for a reason. Get a damn hobby, Nate and stop wanting to go back to that life. I'm happy, man and you'll understand when you meet your rib.

Nate: You sound like a pastor.

Craig: Nothing wrong with that. Let's take the meat that side.

Nate: I think I'm cursed. I'll never find a woman who inspires me to settle but I'm happy that you did. I think I'll start a private investigation agency.

Craig: Do that and shout when you need help. Stop talking about strippers and Yandi in the same sentence. Vuyo is not like us. He is traditional.

Nate: What a serious guy.

Craig: Not everyone lives on the edge like us. Thanks for agreeing to be my best man.

Nate: I look forward to that so much. (they bro hugged)

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Nate felt a bit lonely and even more so now that Craig's about to enter a new phase of his life. A part of him wishes that he'd meet a kind girl but it seems SA is not the place where it will happen so after the wedding he is planning on leaving the country. The men chilled and enjoyed their night.

Meanwhile Flinch got to his hotel room feel exhausted. He was about to switch the lights on but someone beat him to it. He looked to see who but the person was seated facing the other direction. Flinch is not a man that's easily spooked so he was curious rather than scared. The chair turned and a man wearing black was in it. Flinch could not see who it was because he was looking back and had a black cap on. Finally the stranger looked up and Flinch didn't say a word just walked closer to see clearly. He could not believe his eyes when he recognized that face. His heart nearly stopped.

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Guy: Good evening, father. (he said with a deep voice and he stood)

Flinch: Bu... but how is that possible? They buried you.

Guy: Not a question I imagined a scientist would ask. I'll give you the answer though, reproductive cloning.

Flinch: Impossible, it's not done on hu...

Guy: Not done on humans? You clearly don't know the world you live in. I'm not here for tea. I just wanted to see the man who they say created me. I'm passing through.

Flinch: But the traditional healer said that old life gave way to new life. Your sister's baby started to be healthy when you died.

Guy: I heard about that shit when I went to that facility you took my double to. Maybe it's because the old imprisoned me died and a free man was finally born. I'm no longer anyone's property. I can't believe you believe superstitious shit. What type of scientist are you?

Flinch: Let me call them to tell them the news.

Guy: Like I've said. I'm not staying, just passing through to meet you. My donors aren't my parents and their child is not my sister.

Flinch: But they even have you a name. Kungentando.

Guy: I've been to my grave. It means it's God's will but they were wrong. My life is as is because of the will of men like you. Who create artificial things.

Flinch: How did you successfully clone your DNA? Many have failed.

Guy: Good, "father". Don't you dare tell anyone about me. Well do and see how they see you as a crazy man. (he was about to walk out)

Flinch: What do you go as? (he turned to look at Flinch)

Guy: X, just X. Not that Kunge shit because I don't believe in God. Bye, father. (he walked out)

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Flinch threw himself on the chair trying to process what just happened. Reproductive cloning is not legal on humans yet. How did they pull it off? Flinch suddenly felt as if the project he thought was his never was. He looked at the door and could not believe it. Othu's twin is alive. They buried a clone. X or Ntando certainly doesn't sound like an African man as his DNA indicates. He had a certain coldness in his voice that sent shivers down Flinch's spine and he was not a man that got scared easily but now he thinks X will make him pay for his part in his life. Flinch went to lock his door and searched his room for anything unusual. The way he kept on saying "father" was creepy to say the least. If he doesn't believe in God then he sure won't have mercy when making all involved in his life being as it was. Did his clone work for the military all those

years or did he? Did he figure out that they plotted to kill him and let his clone take his place on the last minute? When was the clone created? Flinch thought X clearly is too smart to outsmart everyone like this. And how did he get to be free? So many questions went through Flinch's mind but the questions he asked himself most were. Why has he come here? It can't be to just pass through. Flinch also asked himself this question. Should he tell Othu?

FLINCH

Today is Othu and Craig's big day and I decided not to bother her with this X character. So far he has not made any contact with me and I. guess he was right when he said that he was just passing through. I've been making endless calls to many important people trying to figure out what is going on but not one has been willing to speak. The rich and powerful clearly pull all the strings and I hate it. After the wedding I'm going to go to Hawaii and retire there. I'm tired of this life. I'm not getting any younger so it's time that I finally enjoy my money. I got up very early and went for my usual morning jog then went back to the hotel. My phone started to ring just as I entered. I ran to it and answered without looking at the caller ID.

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Me: Flinch. (I said out of breath)

Caller: I hear you've been calling around and asking about X7.
(my breathing suddenly went back to normal)

Me: And who are you?

Caller: Someone who has the answers to all your questions but it will cost you.

Me: Stuff you and your information. You're not getting a cent from me. For all I know you're trying to make a quick buck. (the caller laughed)

Caller: Then I guess you don't need my help. Have yourself a good day.

Me: Wait!..Okay you got me. So how do we go about this?

Caller: I've just sent you my banking details. Transfer the amount that I stated in the message and once I get a notification that it's in, we will talk. (I took a deep breath and exhaled silently)

Me: Okay. Let me check it out.

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I checked my phone and indeed a text was waiting for me to view it. The account is clearly an offshore account so this person must be a corrupt man. I did as he instructed and sent the amount he wanted. After I did that I waited for him to call me back since he called with a private number. He finally called back and said that he got the money.

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Me: You got what you want so give me what is due to me. Your information had better be accurate or...

Caller: Just relax yourself. I'd never risk my life by giving you false information. The man that you saw is the clone of the original X.

Me: So the X that got shot was the real one?

Caller: Yes he was. You see the organisation made a clone of X right after he was born. They got raised in different labs but they were fed the same information about who they were. When the military wanted to buy X after hearing of him the organisation decided to give the clone and not the real one.

Me: But how did they master reproductive cloning?

Caller: You're the scientist so figure it out yourself. Back to the story. The military X the clone worked for somehow found out that they got fooled and you can imagine the rage that came with. The real X has always been at the lab he was created all this time working on inventing new science and benefitted the science organizations a lot. He was part of the family. While the clone was not exactly treated like in the military but as an object. I'll cut the long boring bull and go to the end. The military then came up with the plan to take what's rightfully what they paid for and kill the clone. They managed to get him but instead the clone ended up killing the original and also half of the people he worked for before escaping.

Me: You spoke so many things one could write a damn novel with it. Okay, so they buried the right person which is good. Why was the clone then in my hotel?

Caller: No fucken idea. I did my part and told you what I know. Perhaps he still believes that he is the original. Bye.

Me: Wait! (I shouted but the caller had already ended the call)

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To know that the Ntando that we buried was really him does bring me some comfort. Good thing I didn't tell Othu about her fake twin. Now I have to make sure that I find out what he wants. A part of me already knows that it's me he wants but for what reason. I went to shower and when I came back X the clone was here. He had a smirk on his face.

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X: You don't look as terrified as you did when you first saw me.

Me: What do you want?

X: A father. (he said sarcastically)

Me: Cut me the crap and just tell me. Do you want money?

X: I want you to help me bring down the people who imprisoned me. I managed to take out some but I need help. I know that you have extra skills beyond those of a scientist.

Me: I don't owe you a damn thing. So if you wish to sign your own death warrant by taking on a government then do it alone. I still want to live.

X: Then I guess I'll have to go visit my dear sister and make her meet her twins a bit earlier. (my hands were around his neck before I could say anything and he didn't even react)

Me: She's not your sister and you know it because you killed her brother. If you lay a single hand on her I'll kill you.

X: That won't help much. So just help me. I can't trust anyone else. I did my double a favor. He was trapped in that lab like a caged science rat. Dead is freedom itself. So help me. You have the money and I need it in order to get my revenge. You'll be dead broke after we buy all the ammunition that we need but I think it's better than meeting your "grandchildren" prematurely.

Me: Okay but I have a wedding to get to. She's invited me so I'm going.

X: You'll have to pass because I want us to leave now. (I laughed in disbelief)

Me: Do you know how long I've waited for her to include me in her life and she actually personally asked me to go to her wedding and you want me to screw that chance up? Never!

X: You leave me no choice then. Don't worry I'll make sure to not stain her wedding dress with her own blood when I take out her babies. Who knows maybe I could make them as I am. (he laughed and punched me in my gut)

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The hotel room soon became a battle field and he really knows how to throw punches. He had his knee on my chest while punching me and the door suddenly opened. Why don't people ever knock these days? Both me and my opponent looked to see who is going to enter and it was Kumkani. His eyes widened in pure shock when he saw X.

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Kumkani: That is going on here? (he banged the door behind him)

Me: Go out and call for help. I know you're thinking that this in Ntando but it's not.

X: The only way you'll be able to make me stop is if you kill me.

Me: Kumkani take the gun out of that drawer next to you. It has a silence...(X punched me before I could finish)

Kumkani: You want me to kill my own son?!

Me: For once just do what's fucken right. (I got punched again)

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X stood in a hurry and went to Kumkani and but he was not fast enough because Kumkani had the gun out, pointed and shot him. The gun made no sound but X fell to the floor and I breathed a sigh of relief. I slowly sat up and stood. I went to get the gun from Kumkani who was still pointing the gun forward looking at X.

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Me: Don't pretend as if this is the first person whose blood is on your hands.

Kumkani: I killed my son.

Me: Correction, you killed the person who killed your son. I'd explain it to you but it's too complicated.

Kumkani: Summarize it dammit. (he shouted)

Me: A clone of your son was made years ago.

Kumkani: Impossible because that's not done on humans.

Me: Well you and I both thought so, my friend but are clearly wrong. He is proof of that.

Kumkani: I'm not your friend. If he is a clone doesn't it mean that he has the same DNA as Ntando? My DNA?

Me: Well yeah but he was not good. He was not going to go to your next family reunion and hold your hand while praying. He wanted to hurt Othu so you did good. And another correction you are my friend now because we are bound by this secret.

Kumkani: Your calmness is freaking me out.

Me: You look calmer than me so I should be freaked out and not you.

Kumkani: It was self protection. I could see in his eyes that he was going to kill me. My gut just told me to listen to you.

Me: You did good friend. So why are you here?

Kumkani: My mother has forced me to come apologise to you. I won't because you nearly killed me. Let's just remain enemies who tolerate each other because you're right in saying that this binds us. If the police know about this they will investigate me and will uncover some other dirty businesses of the past. What do we do with him?

Me: I have friends all over so I'll sort it out, dear frenemy. Thank you for saving my life and don't think I owe you anything.

Kumkani: I'm trying to change. I'm doing it for my granddaughter because I owe her my life. I'd never have recovered had it not bee...

Me: Spare me the sappy crap. Just keep what happened here between us. (I cut him short)

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I called my guy she he arrived immediately. He has gotten rid of even more complicated crime scene consequences. I explained to Kumkani the whole story and he understood. After some time the "clean up" got finished and it looked as if nothing happened. Kumkani and I agreed to let no one know what just happened. I'm actually glad that Othu didn't know about X. She would have thought its her brother and tried to change him. I decided there and there that I'm done with the dark life. I'll go to Othu's wedding and after that retire on an exotic island.

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#OTHU

The day that most women dream of has finally come for me. It's my wedding day. Well I've already had a beautiful traditional wedding but I've always wanted to have a fairytale white wedding. I can't believe that time has gone by so quickly. Not so long ago Craig and I were wondering if a relationship is what we wanted and I'm glad we chose both love and friendship. I haven't slept a wink and I woke up feeling exhausted. The nerves just wouldn't allow me to shut my eyes. Chulu and I

went to spend the night at Makhulu's keeping the traditional of "the groom is not supposed to see the bride before the wedding". It was strange to follow that belief since we are already husband and wife but Ma T insisted. I was sitting alone in the lounge when Ma T, Dabs and Makhulu came to join me.

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Ma T: You look as if you partied all night long. Did you even sleep, Othu? (I laughed softly)

Me: Not really but I'll be fine.

Ma T: You need two big slices of cucumber over those eyes. Why are you so nervous that you couldn't even sleep? You're sharing the bed with the man and you're clearly doing the deed because you're showing the proof each day. (she pointed at my belly and I laughed)

Makhulu: Mato, just for once don't talk too much. It's normal to be nervous on such a day.

Dabs: I've never had a white wedding and I've never been to one either so I very happy to be a part of this.

Ma T: I must take a lot of pictures today at that fancy venue. My friends will die of jealousy. Othu, have Craig do the Photoshop like he did with that picture of you and Ntando. But instead have him do one of me and Jonathan from top billing but it must be a picture where he's shirtless. (I laughed)

Makhulu: We're not here for that. Othu, my baby we have come with some gifts for you. Neither of us had white wedding but we went and read up on the traditions of such a celebration. We found that a bride must have something old, something borrowed and something blue. So I have something old for you. This is a pin that has been in the family for years. I got it from my grandma. I know it will fit in nicely in with your dress and it will hold your hairstyle in place. (I started to cry)

Me: It looks so beautiful, Ma. Thank you and I'll keep it so I'll also pass it down to Chulu.

Makhulu: That's the idea of all of this, nunu. (she kissed my cheek)

Dabs: It is not my turn and I come with something blue. This is a pin that I made for you using blue beads. We will find a place under your dress to pin it to so that it won't clash with your colour them.

Me: I love it, Dabs and I don't want it to be hidden. I'll pin it on my veil somewhere. Thank you.

Dabs: You're most welcome, baby. (she gave me a kiss)

Ma T: I'm sure your expected that I'll be the one who comes with something borrowed because I want it back after today. (I laughed) Oh, Othu I'm so proud of you. I might be a bit crazy and seem like I don't take notice of most things but believe me I

do. I've noticed long ago that you're a girl destined for greatness. Thank you for never giving my sister a hard time and thank you for blessing the family with a son like Craig. This is my most expensive jewelry. It's a bracelet that I got long ago but never really had an occasion to wear it too. Today is the perfect occasion but I've chosen to borrow it to you instead since it's your day and I want you to shine. (I smiled while wiping my tears off)

Me: I love it, Makhulu and I'll return it I promise. Thank you.

Ma T: You better or I'll have you go look for it should you lose it. (I laughed)

Dabs: We love you so much. (they all hugged me)

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I honestly never even thought about the something old, borrowed and blue but I feel blessed to be surrounded by such special women. My bridal party arrived and I decided to include Poppy. The house was suddenly filled with so much noise. Chulu was so excited to be surrounded by so many people but I think having her hair done and wearing a new dress is what had her more excited. The hairdressers and make up artists did their thing and made sure to enhance our beauty for this special occasion. I wonder if Craig is as nervous as I am? The twins were kicking like crazy and I guess they feel the positive

energy around us. When my hair and make up were done it was time to put on my dress and I could not wait. The designer helped me dress and she zipped the back up but it only went half way. I started to panic so much.

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Me: But how when it fit perfectly just last week? (tears threatened my eyes)

Yandi: No, friend don't cry. I'm sure they can fix it all. (she crushed my shoulder)

Makhulu: You're pregnant, nunu and Yandi is right it's no train smash. I have a machine here.

Me: There is no extra fabric, Ma. Just force it up.

Ma T: And suffocate whose unborn grand babies? (I started to cry)

Wendy: I have a piece of fabric that was left over at my studio so if you can give me time I'll just go and alter the dress a bit more. You'll be a bit late for the wedding but hey that's a bride's right. Take it off and let me go and fix this. No one will notice the extra piece of fabric. (I took the dress off and she rushed off)

Chulu: Don't be sad, mommy. Daddy said he'd marry you even if you wear a sack. (that made me smile for some odd reason)

Ma T: Whooo! That can't happen because I've been here all these months waiting for this wedding.

Dabs: No event goes smoothly, my baby. You'll think about this moment when the day ends and laugh.

Chulu: You can wear that other dress.

Me: That's for the reception. Oh my word, what if it also doesn't fit? (I started to panic)

Poppy: I'll get it and you can try it on. It's right there. (she came with it and I put it on)

Me: Please pull up the zip.

Zuko: I'll do that. (she did) It also won't go up. (my heart sank)

Licia: Wendy will go fix that one and having one dress is not a bad thing. What's important is that you'll be marrying your man and you heard Chulu. He'd marry you even if you wore a sack.

Chulu: You look beautiful in anything so don't be sad, mommy. You have many other dresses. (I smiled)

Me: Thank you, bhabha and you're right having one dress won't hurt.

Chulu: You two are making mommy's dresses small. (she touched my belly and everyone laughed)

Makhulu: We have been so busy with the chaos of the morning that I forgot to pray. If you don't mind could we please close our eyes and pray? (she held out her arms)

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We all held hands, bowed our heads and she started to pray. I had my own silent prayer asking God to let the dress issue be the last crisis. My heart won't be able to take more. We all said amen after she finished praying and she hugged me. Suddenly all felt much better. Wendy came back after a long while and I put the dress on again. I closed my eyes while she zipped me in and I felt her hands reach the top and I knew it went all the way up. I turn to look at the side she put more fabric on and I could not notice the extra work much. My heart was pained by the fact that I had to give up my dress for the reception but I'm glad that I didn't have to resort to wearing a sack. I also felt grateful for the dress being small in a way because it indicated that my bhabhas are growing. I soon heard more voices on the other side of the door and I realised more family and friends have arrived. Mama came into the room and she got me a set of pearls and they took my breath away. I decided they would be the jewelry for the day. After some time all was finally done and Makhulu joined me wearing a gold dress suit and a medium sized hat to match. She looked so beautiful. She stood in front of me and scanned me with her eyes from head to toes. He

then put her hands over her mouth and blinked away the tears. I hugged her and neither of us could contain the tears.

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Makhulu: I know that I cried at your traditional wedding too and I said that I won't cry today but I can't help it. You look like an angel. I'm proud of you, Othu. Don't ever doubt that. You're biologically my granddaughter but in my heart I see you as my daughter. I love you.

Me: I know that you're proud of me, Ma because you tell me each chance you get. All the gifts I've gotten from you and the other ladies compliment each other so well. I love you too. (we hugged)

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She held my hand and we walked out where everyone was singing already and one would swear I'm walking down the aisle with Craig for the first time. Ma T was the one singing the loudest and grabbed hold of my other hand. The singing from the family was beautiful and I had to blink away my tears a few times. I'm sure my make up will have to be touched up again. Makhulu, Chulu, Yandi and I got into one car while the others went to the others. The singing had made the neighbors most of which were white stand at their gates staring at us. I'm sure some were annoyed but I didn't care at all. The car started to

move and made way to the estate where everything will be. I could not wait to walk down the aisle to my man. We finally arrived and made our way out. Singing is just a part of the African culture so my family and friends started a song once again to alert my husband and his people that the bride and her people are on the way. We sang and danced our way to the entrance of the church and my family went to join the rest of the guests inside. Suddenly there was complete silence. The wind blew gently and the photographers were taking pictures while we got ready to go in. We got a boy from church to be the ring bearer and I got word that he is inside already since we decided that he's with Craig and his groomsmen. Chulu had to walk in and I kissed her forehead telling her how beautiful she is. The music started to play and I watched as my bhabha walked in holding a bucket filled with white rose petals. One by one my bridesmaids walked in until it was Yandi's turn. My heart started to beat so fast as I stood at the entrance waiting for them to reach the front. Chulu scattered those delicate petals so gratefully. The music changed and I knew it was my turn to go in. I took the two steps forward to makhulu and put my arm in hers.

"Let us all please stand to honour the bride, the deacon said to the guests and all stood at once.

All attention was on me and my hands started to shake. Makhulu brushed one hand gently and I looked at her.

"I'm here, nunu. Calm down and take this beautiful moment in. It's your day", she said in a whisper and I smiled.

I held on to the woman who has been my pillar of strength since before I even knew what that meant. I'm sure had she not been by my side I'd have fainted due to nerves a long time ago. I looked at our guests as some waved at me. Most had wide smiles on their faces and a few had their phones out taking pictures I'm guessing. I managed to smile through the nerves and gave some low waves. I finally focused to the front and I saw him. My husband, best friend, lover, father of my children and all else. He had Chulu in his arms and both of them had wide smiles on their faces. The twins started to kick again and something about the beautiful moment made tears of joy flow down my cheek. The aisle suddenly felt longer than it was when we were practicing. I looked into Craig's eyes and I could swear I saw a tear flow down his cheek. I love this man to the moon and back. He looked to handsome in his navy suit. Yandi was crying as though she the one who is walking down the aisle and I let out a soft laugh. I'd have been content even had she been my only bridesmaid. Makhulu and I slowly made our way to my hubby.

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#CRAIG

I was very calm before the traditional wedding but this morning I woke up feeling so nervous. When I saw Chulu made her way to the alter in her cute white and gold dress I could not help but smile. She would throw the petals on the aisle as she made her way to the front and would wave in excitement when she saw a familiar face. Traditionally she's suppose to stand with O's bridal party but she walked straight up to me so I picked her up and complimented her on her flower girl skills. The bridesmaids and maid of honour walked in and took their places. Then the moment I was waiting for finally came. O came walking down the aisle with Makhulu and my heart felt as if it would beat out of my chest. She wore her beautiful ball gown themes dress which would not hide that bump that grew perfectly and I was so glad. She looked at me and immediately smiled which made my eyes tear up. I smiled back and a tear fell from my left eye and Chulu wiped it off. I waited for them to pass the seats that were decorated with white flowers. I suddenly could not hold my tears and they came flooding out. I'm grateful to God for her. Nate patted my shoulders trying to comfort me but I didn't need comforting because these are tears of joy. I looked at Chulu with a smile and we both smiled while she wiped my tears of.

"I love you and mommy so much, daddy", she whispered and laid her head on my shoulders. I kissed the top of her head. Finally O and Makhulu made it to the front. I stepped forward and kissed Makhulu's cheeks to thank and greet her.

"Who gives this beautiful young woman to this handsome young man?", the deacon asked.

"I do", Makhulu answered.

Makhulu put Othu's hand in mine and put hers over them for a while. She kissed both our hands and smiled. She then took Chulu from me and the two of them went to sit down.

"Damn you look so beautiful. Are you really mine?", I asked and O laughed softly.

"Yes and I'm yours alone. You're looking handsome too

Advertisement

baby", she replied.

"You two can whisper sweet nothings in each others ears after the ceremony", the deacon joked and we all laughed.

We stepped forward to stand in front of the deacon and there's no better person I'd rather have bless this union.

"Dearly beloved, we are here to witness the love of Othunyiweyo Zweni and Craig Knights. Traditionally she's

already a Knights but today we will put that on paper", he went on with his speech. O and I made prolonged eye contact and she'd blush and look down on occasion. We said our I do's. After a while the deacon said that it's time for the vows and we decided last minute that we'll make our own.

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Me: Baby, I still remember the first day I met you. You were a shy teenager and I was the boy who had a crush on you since day one. I've always told myself that I'll marry you but life happened and we got separated. I thought we'd never find our way back to each other again yet here we are. There have been moments when our union was tested yet we once again found our way to each other. That to me proves that we are meant to be one. I've already been your husband for a couple of months now and it's been the best time of my life. I look forward to many, many more years with you until death do us part. I love you, Mampinga. (her family ululated and she smiled)

Othu: I've had a crush on you since the first day that I met you as well but I'm glad that God decided to separate us so that we can grow before reuniting us. We are now able to maturely handle all that life throws at us. You're my best friend. To have this marriage be founded on friendship make things so much more special. Thank you for being a wonderful husband to me, a great father to our kids and an amazing son to our family. So

much happened in just a short space of time but I'm grateful for it all. I look forward to seeing that handsome face of yours grow old. I love you too, my husband.

Deacon: After those heartwarming words I have nothing further nor better to say. Little man please stand closer with those rings.

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Thabo, our ring bearer stood close and the deacon took the rings. He first blessed them and then he gave them to us. He asked that we repeat after him while putting the rings in each others fingers. We did as told and finished that part. After speaking a few more words he finally declared us husband and wife.

"You may kiss your bride, son", he said with a smile.

I was waiting for this part since I saw her walk towards me so I first wiped my lips off to make sure there are no lose dry skin and the guests laughed. I held her neck gently, leaned forward and kissed her soft lips and I didn't want to stop. The guests suddenly just vanished while we got lost in the moment.

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Ma T: Craig, save some kissing for tonight. Don't overwork those lips. (everyone laughed and we suddenly came back to reality)

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Chulu came to us and I picked her up. I no longer use crutches though I'm limping a bit. O and I both kissed either side of Chulu's cheeks.

"We all look so pretty. You two are like a King and Queen and I'm your princess", she said with excitement.

The deacon called us to the side table and we sat down. Our marriage certificates were on the table and he told us what to do. Now O can finally change her name to mine. Othunyiweyo Knights sounds perfect. Our guests walked out of the chapel in great song and cheering and we followed soon after. They threw confetti at us as we made our way out and Chulu enjoyed each second of that part. Our close friends and family came to take pictures with us while the rest of the guests went to get drinks. Ma T wanted to be in each photo so that she'll send it to her Eastern Cape friends. After about an hour the photos were done and we went back to the reception where our guests were seated already. The bridal parties went in with a dance and we also followed with ours until we reached the table. A friend of mine was an MC and he was good. Had great jokes too. We saw Flinch and Kumkani enter the reception.

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Othu: Now that is a strange sight.

Me: What makes it more strange is the fact that Flinch is pushing your father's wheelchair. When did they become friends?

Othu: No idea, baby. I know Makhulu has my dad go apologise to Flinch but I didn't think it would be so effective that they would arrive at the wedding together. I thought they won't come actually.

Me: Your father blamed Flinch for his kidney issue so I thought he'd take revenge. I guess people really do change.

Othu: I guess so but let's enjoy our day and not worry about all else. (she kissed me)

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She was right about that. The drinks came in their numbers and the MC called us to the dance floor for our first dance. I took hold of my bride's hand and helped her stand. She told me about her second dress but I don't care because even had she wore a garbage bag I'd still think she's beautiful. We polished that old dance of our we came up with at our old dance class and made it more mature. The world faded away the second I held her in my arms and danced. She would kiss my neck on occasion and I'd melt in those moments. Usually at a wedding the first dance will be soon interrupted by family and friends wanting to share the dance floor but not now. They let the song

go on and watched as we just got lost in each others eyes. The boys kicked and I held mommy's belly and bowed down to kiss it. They are a part of our dance so why not include our eldest. We both signaled for Chulu to come and she ran as though she'd been waiting to be called. I picked her up and she put her hands on O's belly feeling the occasional kicking of her brothers. The "five" of us danced together and it felt magical. Othu signaled for Makhulu to join us and we held hands while dancing. Suddenly the circle grew bigger when the deacon, Yandi, Ma T, Dabs and more joined. We formed a circle with those closest to us. Those who are with us no matter what and made them a part of our first dance. Once that came to an end the real party started and so did the feast and speeches. It was a special day. We were all so busy enjoying the moment when we suddenly heard a soft voice speak. It's Chulu.

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Chulu: Hello, everyone please keep quiet. (the room went quiet). Uhm, to mommy and daddy I love you so much. I love it when you give me forehead kisses and read stories to me. I'm so happy that God answered my prayer for a daddy. He also gave me more than I prayed for. He gave me more Makhukus, more Tamkhulus, a dog and soon I'll gets siblings. He has outdone himself and I thank him. Thank you, God for the family. I love them, amen. (she closed her eyes in the last part)

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O was just beyond herself with emotions. We aren't sure if it was a prayer or a speech because she closed her eyes too but we don't care at all. She ran to us shyly when the elders cheered and hid her face in my neck. I'm just a lucky man. Flinch walked over to us to congratulate us and Ma T followed.

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Ma T: You know, Flinch you can also have a beautiful goddess of your own if you want.

Flinch: I can?

Ma T: I can see that you're a bit slow so that science brain doesn't have a romance section in it so I'll spare you the torture. I want you to go on a date with me. (we tried not to laughed)

Flinch: Oh? As in a date, date?

Ma T: Is there any other?

Flinch: What happened to the man being the hunter?

Ma T: Do I look like a piece of meat to you? We live in the 21st century, Ndothuke. Get with the program. Othu, tell you second father who I am.

Othu: Notomato Tyini.

Ma T: The other name that you call me when I'm your friend and not your Makhulu.

Othu: Oh, Mato-Mato the slay queen.

Ma T: Mmm have Zuko give you lessons on how to say it properly but no bother. So Flinch tomorrow it's you and me and yes it'll be a date, date. (Flinch was speechless), And don't wear those karky clothes that make you look like Jane's father in the Tarzan cartoons. No wonder you think that you are a hunter. We are not in a jungle and I'm not a spingbok.

Flinch: Wow. (he said softly clearly still speechless)

Ma T: That's what you'll say when you see me slay for our date. I'm not Mariri for nothing. My kids, once again congratulations and Othu use that gift, baby. Craig, you'll thank me later (she winked) Flincy-Flincy, I'll see you soon. (she blew him a kiss and left)

Flinch: What just happened? (he really looked confused)

Othu: You just got asked out on a date (we laughed)

Me: More like told and you best be at her house at 7pm tomorrow or she'll really come hunt you down.

Othu: Just speak more than her, doc if you're not interested. She hates it when someone does Thai so she'll see you as a turn off.

Flinch: I can't believe that just happened. No woman has asked me out before. It actually is refreshing. Uhm, congratulations once again. Wow! (he left looking impressed)

Othu: Do you think he'll go?

Me: Do you think he has a choice? (we laughed)

Othu: Yeah, you have a point.

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The party went on for hours and hours until it was night time. We cut our cake and I put on some icing on O's lips to kiss it off. Ma T told us to get a room and that actually didn't sound like a bad idea. We will go on honeymoon only after next though since Yandi's wedding is next Saturday. Chulu fell asleep and I'm not surprised. After some dancing and eating we finally called it a day. I said a thank you speech on behalf of Mrs Knights and I and later said goodbye to our guests and family. I put Chulz in the car and we drove home. I had someone come in to decorate our house to amore romantic setting and O could not believe it. I went to put Chulu in bed and kissed her goodnight. O and I wasted no time at all and kisses passionately without saying anything else to each other. The kisses grew intense and I picked her up sweeping her off her feet. I could see she surprised but I made her a promise and that was to heal so that I'll be able to pick her up to our wedding night bed. I put her

down and unzipped her dress. She then told me to stop and wait while she goes and freshen up. I sat on the bed while she disappeared into the bathroom. I loosened my tie and unbuttoned my shirt. She appeared after a while wearing a black lace lingerie and my jaw dropped to the floor. It had a slit around her belly so the one side blew open revealing her baby bump. Such a mixture of sexiness and innocence. She reached me and I kissed her belly and had her sit on top of me. I was so turned on.

"You're looking so hot", I kissed her.

"It's all for you", she whispered.

"I love you, Mrs Knights", I said brushing her inner thigh.

"I love you too", she moaned with eyes filled with intense passion.

I couldn't wait any longer so I kissed her. I laid her on the bed and a part of me didn't want to unwrap this gift before me but I had to. We first had some intense foreplay that drove us both over the edge before we made love. I loved it when she was in control but now it's my turn. I still can't get used to the warmth and tightness of her fold. It drives me crazy. We made love like two lovers who haven't seen each other in months. I introduced her to a few new tricks which she loved. Feeling her legs shake when she reaches a sexual edge is such a turn on. Good thing

Chulz is a deep sleeper or our pleasure noises would have woken her. After the hot passion we laid in each others arms and I felt so complete and content. O was fast asleep and I just looked at her and smiled. No other woman will make me feel like this. Should there be I'll most probably blame witchcraft if such even exist. I kissed her and held her tight. She's finally Mrs Craig Knights in legal terms. Something I've daydreamed about since I was a teen and now it had really happened. May we be blessed with eternity together and may we find each other even in the next life. I love her so much.

It's the morning after their beautiful wedding and Craig's eyes were the first to open. He stretched his arms out while yawning and looked over to Othu's side. She had her back turned to him and she smiled when he got sight of her partly bare bum. He got closer to her and kissed the back of her neck removing the rest of the sheet over her body and caressed her body gently. A soft moan escaped her lips and he knew he had her attention. She wanted to turn around to look at but he held her tightly in the spooning position. He continued to caresses her entire body and when he knew she's ready for him he lifted her one leg onto his as he slowly entered her until they became one and got lost in the morning love making bliss. After a while they both reached the edge and Craig held on to her from behind while they both tried to return to reality. They finally did and Othu turned her head and smiled at her husband.

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Othu: What a great way to start the day. (he kissed her)

Craig: Good morning, Mrs Knights. (she smiled)

Othu: Good morning, My Knight. Is it just me or does the morning after our white wedding feel different then the one of our traditional wedding? (she turned to face him)

Craig: That's because your husband could not do much back then but now he is back to health. (they laughed). I also like that we came back to our house. You look beautiful.

Othu: And you're looking like you've just woke up. (they both laughed and their lips touched once again)

Craig: Well you better get used to this morning face and breath because you'll have to deal with it until we die.

Othu: I don't mind. Yesterday was perfect, baby and Chulu's speech was the highlight of it.

Craig: I have many highlights. The first was seeing her throw those petals as she made her way to the alter, when you walked in was my biggest highlight though. You even made me cry, woman. (Othu laughed)

Othu: I saved you because Dabs had her union in her purse ready to bring those false tears. (they laughed).

Craig: The other highlight was opening the dance floor with our dance. We thought that only one of us would be lucky to have it but God decided that we both deserve to have it so He made us dance it together as husband and wife.

Othu: All of yesterday was special. Even though I started the day with tears. Baby, will you still find me sexy when I'm as big as a house with swollen ankles? (he kissed her forehead)

Craig: Always because your body is changing to give life to our twins. That's magical, O. Imagine the type of scum I'll be should your body turn me off when I'm also responsible for it. I love you, all of you.

Othu: Will you help me shave my legs when my belly gets too big to bow? (Craig laughed)

Craig: I'll help you shave any part you want me to. I'm sure these two are still sleeping after all the kicking they did yesterday. (Othu smiled)

Othu: Mommy's bhabhas didn't want to miss out. Do you want us to go shower before Chulz wakes up?

Craig: Yeah. (he kissed her passionately)

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Craig got up and lifted Othu off the bed which made her laugh out. He put her down when they got to the bathroom and they brushed their teeth while dancing naked. They love fooling around, it keeps the friendship alive. The two went into the shower and sang while showering and danced once again. Craig banned shower sex fearing that she might fall. After they were done they went back to the bedroom and made use of the free time while Chulz is still asleep to explore each others bodies. Othu wore a beautiful dress shirt that showed her beautiful legs and soon after Chulu knocked on their bedroom door and

entered. She greeted her parents and jumped on their bed while they made their bed.

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Othu: We have just changed the sheets so I hope those feet are clean.

Chulu: They always are. Mommy, you're looking too pretty. Where are you going? (the adults laughed)

Craig: We are going to the beach. Well we'll first have breakfast then beach.

Chulu: But no, you can't leave me here. I'll go get dressed quickly. Can I wear the dress that I wore yesterday?

Craig: Rather wear your swimsuit and shorts, princess. It's more comfortable.

Chulu: Okay, daddy. Will Zues come with?

Othu: He isn't trained enough to be out in public and he is so big.

Craig: I'll have him on a leash all the time, baby. We can eat here and just go have a walk at beach if you fear that he'll disrupt other customers at the restaurant.

Othu: Okay poor guy has never been to the beach so it's okay. Chulz go look for your swimsuits and choose the one you'll wear. I'll join you after we've finished making the bed.

Chulu: It's going to be yet another awesome day. I'm so happy. Whooooo! (she said while running out with arms in the air and her parents laughed)

Othu: After effect of spending too much time with Ma'T perhaps?

Craig: Could be. I actually believe her when she says she's in her mid 50's. She just looks way too young for late 60's. Not even good gene can do that.

Othu: You're right, Ma T is just hot and she knows it. Makhulu always reminds her that she's in her 60's though.

Craig: Well Makhulu is probably hoping that it will make her act more like an older person. If she can get her birthday certificate I think I can help her.

Othu: She'll be so happy because she really gets annoyed when someone says she's almost 70 so you might be right. Hopefully she still has her original birth certificate. Are you still sure about not looking for your family?

Craig: I don't want anything to burst my happy bubble right now. If I do decide to look them up it will be when the twins are a bit older. I know you at times feel like I get sad when your

family visits and stuff but I don't because I'm one of you. I know traditionally a the woman joins the man's family but I'm not one to follow all the rules. I'm happy so please don't think I lacking because of that mystery in my life. (Othu smiled)

Othu: Okay I'll wait on you to be ready because I also don't want our bubble to be burst. (she hugged him)

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Craig went to make sure that the water temperature of the shower is okay for Chulu. The last thing he wanted was his child to get third degree burns. Othu went downstairs to get started on breakfast and Craig went to give Zues his. The puppy is almost at Craig's knee in length and he is a tall man so Zues will grow to be a huge dog but they love him and he is friendly towards Chulu and her friends as well. Chuli wore her yellow swimsuit and denim jeans and she was beyond herself with happiness. The family sat around the table and Chulu offered to say grace. They all closed their eyes and bowed their heads.

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Chulu: Good morning, God. It's me Chulu Knights. My daddy said I'll be a Knights soon and no longer a Zweni so please don't get confused. Thank you for my life, it is a happy one. Thank you for mommy, daddy, Zeus and the little babies. Also thank

you for my Makhulus, uncles and for Tamkhulu Kumkani. Thank you for the nice smelling food too, Amen.

Adults: Amen. (they said with smiles on their faces)

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The Knights started to eat the delicious breakfast prepared by the lady of the house. After breakfast they packed the dishes in the dishwasher and packed all their beach essentials. Othu changed into a bikini and wore a lace sarong dress over it. Craig just could not take his eyes from his wife. She always managed to pull off the sexy yet innocent look that got him hot each time. They finally reached the beach. The sun umbrellas got up and sunscreen got applied and Othu let Craig, Chulu and Zeus go explore the water while she sat and watched them have fun. Chulu's laughing was so contagious that the elderly lady next to Othu would look whenever she laughed and smiled. Soon Othu joined her people though she's not the strongest swimmer but Craig is the opposite. They got ice cream and other sweet goodies. Even the dog was having the time of his life in the water but Othu hated when he would shake his entire body when emerging from the water and it seemed like he wanted to do it even she was near so he'd splash her. After a couple of hours they decided to go back home. They first went to get take away lunch then headed home. They found Ma T standing by

their gate with a big sun hat and sunglasses. Looking so stylish.
Chulu ran to her as soon as the car stopped and so did Zeus.

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Ma T: Craig and Othu you had better tell your horse to not come near me. (everyone laughed)

Chulu: Zeus is a dog, Makhulu not a horse.

Ma T: What type of dog is that big when he's still a puppy? Pure witchcraft. I see you kids were at the beach and Othu you look so hot in that bikini covered by that lace dress. I'm sure Craig was drooling and nearly drowned. (Craig laughed)

Craig: How did you know, Ma?

Ma T: I got her those. Mato just knows what makes a man go Grrrr. (Craig laughed until eyes formed in his eyes)

Othu: Let's go inside. You're looking beautiful, Makhulu. (Ma T twirled)

Ma T: Thank you, my Thu-thu. (they walked inside)

Craig: I'm guessing that you'll be going back home now since the wedding is over, Ma. I've really enjoyed having you around.

Ma T: I enjoyed being around you all too. Hle_Hle does think I'm too much though and she's right so I have to give her space.

Othu: Well I'm sure you'll be getting your dividends from the businesses on the Tyini land soon, so buy an apartment in the city that way you can come anytime.

Ma T: Why didn't I think of that? Zuko is my praise poet and you can be my adviser.

Chulu: What will I be, Makhulu.

Ma T: You're Makhulus princess and future queen. (she kissed Chulu's cheek)

Chulu: And I have two princess dresses now so that's perfect and mommy will keep the dress she wore yesterday for me for when I'm queen.

Ma T: Yes, future queen, yes. (she said snapping her finger)

Craig: I'll leave you royal women alone and go check on my grass. Bandile has been trying to revive it. Ma, don't leave without saying goodbye.

Ma T: Never

my boy. (she smiled and he left with Chulu)

Othu: What will you be drinking, Matoz?

Ma T: Nothing for now. I've actually come to borrow a dress and get my bracelet. It's borrow for borrow. (Othu laughed)

Othu: I only have conservative dresses.

Ma T: Perfect because I don't want to look like a shebeen queen. I'm hoping you'll give me that red, knee length pencil dress with the little side slit. I'll pare it with gold accessories.

Othu: No problem but you just used the word give.

Ma T: You won't wear it anytime soon since your body is home to two humans. Please, my baby I'm sure a man like Flinch eats at the finer places so I can't go in jeans.

Othu: You can go raid my wardrobe but I'm just afraid that you'll get disappointed. He didn't say yes.

Ma T: He didn't necessarily say no either.

Othu: Yeah, you're actually right. So are you in love with him?.

Ma T: I'm in like with him and even in lust but it might grow.

Othu: So you still do the...uhm, the deed? (Ma T laughed)

Ma T: Let me tell you a secret. It's much better when you're mature. So don't think young people enjoy themselves most. (Othu stood like a statue)

Othu: Okay that was more awkward than seeing you touch the strippers butt at the party. Let's just go see what you'll like. I've got wider hips than you so I hope it fits.

Ma T: It'll be my dress after you've handed it over to me so I'll have Hle alter it.

Othu: So I can keep the bracelet.

Ma T: Follow wedding traditions, Othu. It was something borrowed so give it back. (Othu laughed)

Othu: Wow okay.

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The two ladies went upstairs and Ma T felt like she's in dress heaven after seeing Othu's classy dresses which showed a bit of skin. Just what she wanted. She tried on the dress that she wanted and it fitted like a glove. Othu offered to take her shopping but all Ma T asked was, "why go shopping when I found a once off exclusive boutique in your closet?". Othu let her take what she liked since she might never fit in some of the stuff after this pregnancy. After they finished Ma T went to ask for tips on how to charm a man from Craig. He said all men are different and all she needs to do is be herself but occasionally allow him to take the lead. He also asked her to bring her original birth certificate so that he can help correct her birth year and she almost jumped on him but managed to hug him appropriately. Ma T made her way home with great excitement. Hours went by and "the slay queen" got herself ready. Makhulu entered.

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Makhulu: You remind me of our grandmother with that tiny waist. You look beautiful and I'm glad you went to Othu for fashion advise.

Ma T: Sisi, do you think he'll like me?

Makhulu: If he comes then it might mean that. I still say you're brave to ask a man out but your unique and brave so be yourself. If Ndothuke doesn't see that he must go away. (they laughed)

Ma T: I know that I am over the top and always seem happy which I am but I get lonely too.

Makhulu: You and Flinch already have a few things in common. You're both single, never been married and don't have kids so after the awkward ice breakers talk about those things. You have a good heart, Mato and I might seem like I get annoyed by your presence at times but when you're not around I miss you. We were raised together.

Ma T: I wish I had noticed that you had a big secret. I would have helped you. I would have gone to the royal house and threatened to announce the news to the entire village if they didn't do right by you. At times big mouths like myself are needed to ensure that quiet and sweet ones like you are protected.

Makhulu: You were still a baby back then but thank you. (they hugged)

Ma T: So sisi when he comes call me and I'll come parading down the stairs. I even got this feather scarf to add to the drama of it all.

Makhulu: No, you don't need that. The colour red already signifies drama and power so it alone will speak volumes and your dramatic entrance of course. (they laughed)

Ma T: You know I want everything to be extra but Othu said the same so you must be right. You had better give bhut Thami another chance. The man is practically family because Craig involves him a lot in their family stuff. I know you never enjoyed your marriage to Nkosi because of his travels and once that was over he had issues with having to depend on you and then the cancer got him and he died soon after. You were married but you never had a marriage. Lunga is sorted now and will soon go to her family. Sisi, grab that chance at a happy marriage with a present man now while you still can please. Put all else in the backseat now and be selfish by seeking happiness for yourself. Othu is well looked after too and I know she wants you to be happy. Life is too short. Why do you think I became the hunter and not the springbok as women are expected to be? Follow Mariri's advise. Call me when Ndothuke arrives. Say

something like "And I now present Motoz, the queen".

(Makhulu laughed)

Makhulu: I won't do such. I'll say Notomato Tyini, Ndothuke is here. (they both laughed)

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Makhulu helped Mato with her jewelry and she looked like the first lady of some country. Beautiful would be an understatement. She had makhulu take pictures for her album she's compiling to go show her friends.

Meanwhile Flinch has been doing some investigations to see if anyone was tailing X and so far the coast seemed clear. He has been thinking about being asked out by a woman all night and he actually decided to give it a go. The first thing he had to do was look for a decent outfit and stop looking like a hunter. The saleslady helped him a lot because he was clueless. All his clothes were army colour. He also asked for tips on what to get a lady for a first date and the young lady laughed a bit but helped him. He got a huge bunch of flowers and expensive dark chocolate. He remembered that Craig said 7pm or else so he drove to Ma Zweni's house quickly and made it in time. He knocked and Ma Zweni opened the door. She greeted and told Flinch to wait. Flinch sat feeling so very nervous and he had to wait a long while. Ma Zweni joined him soon after Mato appeared on the top stair and paraded down each stair. Her

walk filled with grace and a bit of drama. She put the feather scarf that Othu and Makhulu advised against anyway. She looked at Flinch and was impressed by his clothing. He had a black pants and a white shirt on. The flowers made her smile. Kumksni wheeled himself in and laughed. She finally reached the bottom of the stairs and Flinch greeted her and gave her the flowers.

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Kumkani: Aren't you too old for such drama, Makazi?

Mato: I won't make you a mummy like Langa did. With me you'll become stiff forever because you'll be a corpse when I'm done with you. Stop testing me. (she pointed at Kumkani)

Dabs: You look beautiful, Makazi.

Flinch: I agree and these are for you as well.

Mato: Thank you, Ndothuke but dark chocolate?

Makhulu: Mato. (she said in a whisper)

Mato: They taste like strong sugarless coffee. (Flinch laughed)

Flinch: I like honestly so thank you. Next time I won't make the same mistake. Unlike all the women I've been with who pretended to like something just to please me and in arguments accused me of not listening when they weren't honest.

Makhulu: She can be too honest believe me. I'll leave you two and enjoy your evening. Flinch bring my sister home safely please.

Flinch: You know I'd never harm any of your family. (he suddenly remembered that, that's a lie because he has hurt Kumkani)

Kumkani: I guess I don't count as her family. (he said sarcastically)

Mato: Let's leave, Flinch. Don't wait up. (she winked at them and wrapped the scarf around Kumkani's neck which annoyed him)

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She blew kisses to Lunga and the two of them went to Flinch's car. He opened the door for her and she went in. He complimented her and she blushed endlessly. Flinch was planning on taking her to a mediocre restaurant but he'd be fooling himself if he said he was not impressed so he decided to go all out and take her to an upmarket restaurant. He even had to bribe the door person because such places require reservations well in advance. So many eyes were looking at them as they walked in due to the racial difference and one would expect Mato to shy away but no. She held her head up high and paraded through the tables until they reached theirs.

They both sat down and ordered a bottle of their most expensive champagne.

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Flinch: I must admit, I'm impressed with your level of confidence. You're a breath of fresh air. Mato. (she blushed)

Mato: I've been called so many things but never a breath of fresh air. Thank you.

Waiter: Are you ready to order, sir?

Mato: Is the sir the only person you see sitting around this table?

Waiter: Uhm, I'm sorry mam. Usually the ladies who come with partners here let the man order for them.

Mato: Well I'm not your usual ladies. I'm guessing that they order salads without dressing too for their ladies. Flinch, if you're looking for a rabbit I'm not one. (Flinch laughed)

Flinch: Not at all. I was actually going to ask you what you feel like having.

Mato: Dear boy, if I eat more salads there will be nothing left of me. I'll be like those skeletons in science classes. (she said to the waiter). Get me anything with lamb in it.

Waiter: Yes, mam I'll have the chef be creative with your dish. And you, sir? (Flinch smiled)

Flinch: I'm sitting with a woman with a colourful personality. So I'll have that creative dish she'll have. (he looked at Mato and they flirted using their eyes only)

Waiter: A creative dish for the lady with the colourful personality and the same for her date. I got it. (he smiled and left them)

Flinch: I'm actually glad that you won't starve yourself.

Mato: I actually feared that you'd be embarrassed. Craig said I must let you take the lead tonight and I guess I should have let you order on my behalf.

Flinch: Are you kidding me? You just impressed that young man. Clearly he has never served a lady like you. Sometimes opposite attracts. So, Mato please tell me more about yourself. Do you have any kids?

Mato: No, imagine the torture those poor kids would have felt due to my craziness. (they laughed)

Flinch: I know what you mean by that. Our crazy might differ but I actually get you. I actually don't want any either. To clean up after another human for all my life was just not an option.

Mato: Oh my goodness, I share that sane sentiment. They are just cute when they aren't yours. When they mess up you can give them to their parents and not be bothered. But I have a feeling you feel differently about Othu. I hope that you didn't swap Kumkani's sperm with yours and are keeping it from us. (Flinch almost choked with laughter)

Flinch: Wow, you really don't filter your words. I think it would have showed don't you?

Mato: With you scientists one doesn't know. Maybe you did your thing so she'll have melanin when she's indeed yours.

Flinch: Clearly you're a deep thinker. Let's talk about something else. Why do you call me uhm, Ndo...

Mato: Ndothuke? (she laughed and he nodded) I'm not swearing at you don't worry. Like you've said I've got no filter so if I wanted to swear at you I'd do it in all languages just to make sure you get the message. Ndothuke is the translation of your surname in my language. (he laughed)

Flinch: That's interesting. So do hot always ask men out?

Mato: Only the shy and slow ones. (they laughed)

Flinch: I'm actually enjoying myself. I can't remember the last time I laughed. Thank you. (she blushed)

Mato: You can't be in my presence and not be entertained. You'll also have to get used to my shine because I'm not dimming my light. (Flinch smiled)

Flinch: I think your light is what keeps me seated. So don't dim it at all. I'd like to do this again.

Mato: That's good. Will you stay in South Africa for good?

Flinch: I'm planning on going to Hawaii soon but I'm not sure for how long.

Mato: Then what's the point of all of this if you'll leave?

Flinch: I'm actually hoping that some of our dates will be in Hawaii. (Mato's eyes widened)

Mato: You want me to come with you?

Flinch: Like I said I'm attracted your light so I don't want to be in the darkness on a island. You can th...

Mato: I don't have to. I'll go with you but only after I get to know you. You might be a serial killer. (Flinch laughed)

Flinch: Never.

Mato: But even so if you kill me I'll haunt you until you find a way to bring me to life with your science. Even if I'll have to be a mummy like Kumkani. I can make any condition look hot. (Flinch laughed until all eyes looked at him)

Flinch: If I turn out to be a serial killer I'll make sure to not kill you then. So when is the right time to go?

Mato: I want to see my twin grandchildren. I thought it's the lavish wedding I looked forward to but now it's their arrival. They must know that granny Mariri was there when they were born with a bottle of champagne. While Othu pops them out I'll be popping the champagne (Flinch was in awe and entertained)

Flinch: Is it weird that I want to listen to you all night?

Mato: I hope you're not implying that I spend the night at your place. I'm a lady of virtue, Mrs Ndothuke.

Flinch: I don't mind waiting, Miss Tyini. (he raised his glass and they toasted.

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Mato has not been with a man for years so she misses the strong arms of a man around her petite body but Flinch will have to prove himself. Flinch on the other side also hasn't been in a relationship for a while now and he always thought he wanted someone younger but here sits a woman his age with a young heart and he enjoyed her company a lot. Dating a black woman is not a new thing for him so he doesn't have a problem with that. They have a lot in common yet they are different people. Flinch is glad that he came because he's been laughing all night long. So much that the stuck ups around them

complained. They had their food but decided to have desert elsewhere. He got her a small tub of ice cream that was topped with a brownie and they went to stroll on the beach. Mato had never had such a romantic date before and she took a lot of pictures. She likes Flinch but she will take it slow. Othu's babies won't come until next year so it's enough time to get to know him. If they form a relationship they can go on that trip but not forever. The night was beautiful and who know maybe she might someday be Mrs Ndothuke (Flinch).

A few weeks have passed. Yandi had her dream beach wedding and the Cape Town weather favoured them so much. Vuyo once mentioned to Craig that he can't afford to give Yandi a honeymoon so Othu and Craig got them a two weeks stay in Zambia as a wedding gift. Othu and Craig decided to keep it local and went to visit all South African provinces for their honeymoon. Chulu went with of course and Zeus was left in Langa's care. Poppy caught Yandi's flowers and she's also been getting close to Menzi but she's still sceptical about having a serious relationship though he's been hinting at one for a few days now. Ma T and Flinch have started their touring nationally and are enjoying each second. They still aren't sure if it's a relationship yet but neither care because they are having the time of their lives. Makhulu still has not given Funda another chance and it seems that he has also given up on that happening. The twins are growing well and Othu had become so curious about their gender that she asked Craig to tell her but he would not break the promise. She knew she could ask their doctor but she felt like it would be more special if it came from him because he is so excited about their soon arrival. Christmas has also come and went. The Zweni family and the Knights family spent it together. Poppy is working on forgiving Kumkani since he actually went to her to ask for her to forgive him. Langa has not gotten back with Ian because he can't

forgive the betrayal and the fact that what Ian did almost cost his father a life. His relationship with his father is not as strong as before but they can at least remain civil with each other. Flinch's "clean up" guy had X's body cremated and they threw his ashes in the rubbish bin hoping that it'll be the last of the projects consequences. Today is the 31st of December meaning that it's New Years Eve. In a few hours they will all be entering a brand new year with so much to look forward to. Poppy met up with Menzi for breakfast to ask him to join their New Years party later at Othu's. When she got to their favourite cafe he had already been seated. He stood when he saw her and pulled out a chair for her. She smiled and sat down.

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Poppy: I'm yet to get used to that. You're the only man who has ever pulled chairs out for me, walked with me to the parking lot to see that I'm safely in my car. Thank you for being a gentleman. (Menzi smiled and sat)

Menzi: I was raised by one so I can't help it. So how have you been?

Poppy: Actually great. My relationship with my family is great and my father apologised for all he did to me. You were right in saying that I'd be freeing myself by forgiving him. I won't get him arrested either. I'll let karma do her work without me interfering.

Menzi: That's great and I'm glad to hear that. So do you still remember when you said your name mean nothing? That your mom named you that because you most probably reminded her of a doll?

Poppy: Please don't tell me you wasted your time to go search for the meaning.

Menzi: Google helps a lot. I found out a Poppy is actually a pretty, delicate flower that is red in colour. So you're a flower. (Poppy blushed)

Poppy: Thank you for doing that. I thought about doing that for years but a part of me feared that the definition of the name would be trashy. It would have explained a lot. (she let out an awkward laugh and he held her hands)

Menzi: You might see trash when you look at yourself but I don't. I see a strong woman who made mistakes but has learnt from them. That takes courage. Someday you'll see what I mean, dear Flower. I thought you'd be with your family today.

Poppy: That's actually why I've asked to meet with you. I know you're family are in Mpumalanga and could not come visit you so my sister and her husband said it's cool for you to join us later on.

Menzi: Are things better between you and your brother in law now?

Poppy: A bit especially after I apologised to him from the bottom of my heart. I know he still has his doubts but I'll prove him wrong. You won't be a part of some awkward moments if that's what you're worried about so don't worry.

Menzi: As long as I won't be the only non family member I'll come. (they laughed)

Poppy: My grandma will be inviting her boyfriend too.

Menzi: The young at heart one? (she nodded and they laughed). I'm actually looking forward to meeting her. Okay, I'll join you and thank you for the invite. What must I bring?

Poppy: Othu will be grateful if you bring an extra bottle of apple juice trust me those two little people love apple juice. It's going to be a party though so bring wine and beers or snacks.

Menzi: I hope some shops will open today then. Let's have our breakfast so I'll go check. Arriving empty handed is a no no. (they called the waiter and ordered)

Poppy: Menzi.

Menzi: Yes, Flower. (he looked at her and she blushed)

Poppy: So were you serious about us being more than friends? (he nodded). If so then let's do it. (he smiled)

Menzi: That's the best news I've heard in a long time. I'll be good to you, Poppy and all I ask is that you do the same please.

Woman get bored by a guy like me so should that happen please tell me rather than cheating on me.

Poppy: I've never been in a real relationship before just flings so my faithfulness has never been tested but I will try to be a good girlfriend, I promise. The difference between me and your ex is that I've been with men who held me at no regard at all and treated me like nothing so now I can appreciate a kind man like you.

Menzi: There is also the sex issue. I've decided two years ago to abstain until marriage and I'm not about to go against that. I just want you to know what you're getting yourself into.

Poppy: So you're a virgin?

Menzi: Not at all. I've done it and that's why abstaining has been difficult because I know how good sex feels but I want the next person I do it with to be my wife.

Poppy: That's special. I've also not done it since the...uhm, the operation. I can't believe that I managed actually. I guess the thought of that doctor touching me down there while I was completely unaware traumatised me more than I thought.

Menzi: There is always counselling. I'll also be a shoulder to cry on should you need one.

Poppy: I feel like you're too good for me. I'm sure people will be shocked that I have such kind boyfriend.

Menzi: Wow, I can't believe that I'm actually your boyfriend.
May I kiss you? If you aren't into public affection I'll understand.

Poppy: Just kiss me already. (they both laughed)

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Poppy actually thought that his kiss would be lame but the man could kiss. So much that she forgot that they are in public. She found him staring when she opened her eyes after that great kiss. Menzi smiled and kissed the tip of her nose. The romance made her feel awkward not because it felt bad but because it's not something she's used to. She's never gotten a kiss on the nose. The no sex issue is not a problem yet and she will take his advise on the therapy. The two of them went to shop for gifts to give their hosts for tonight's party. He held her hand in public. Her blessers have always just wanted to be in doors fearing their wives would see them but no here was a man who held her hand while people stared. She could not help but feel special.

Meanwhile in the Knights house Othu was busy getting everything ready for tonight while Craig went out to get drinks. Chulu asked for Kumkani to come over so the two of them are in the lounge watching their favourite cartoon. She'd hear her father laugh so much and a part of her wondered why she could never evoke the same emotions in him when she was a

little girl. She stood by the door and watched as the two sat and talked.

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Chulu: Will you stay for the party later on, Tamkhulu? My mommy say it'll be special because we will have friends and family over.

Kumkani: Well I don't look forward to sitting at home alone so I'll come but I'm old though. I might sleep before we reach midnight.

Chulu: Don't worry I also sleep early but I'll make sure we stay awake tonight. I heard coffee helps.

Kumkani: But coffee is not good for someone your age, berry. We will sleep an hour before the guests come and be fully charged when they come.

Chulu: That's a nice plan. When will you walk?

Kumkani: Soon I'll be walking on my own.

Chulu: Why don't you and grandma Una live together?

Kumkani: Because I took her for granted and she left.

Chulu: Then apologise. (Othu smiled)

Kumkani: I have many times. Adults are just too complicated, berry.

Chulu: Give her a kiss on the forehead like this. (she kissed his forehead). Doesn't that just make you feel better? When my mommy and daddy do it to me I feel better. Especially if I was naughty. They ask me to apologise and when I do all gets better and they tell me they love me and kiss my forehead. You were not nice so apologise and kiss her forehead. You'll see she'll feel better. (Kumkani smiled)

Kumkani: I'll definitely try that. That's one of the reasons why I love spending time with you. You still see the good in the world. Hold on to that magic for as long as you can.

Chulu: Makhulu slay queen said that I'm like a fairy (Othu laughed softly). I sprinkle fairy dust everywhere. She said she'll get me glitter so I'll have real fairy dust.

Kumkani: You were born with it so you don't need fake glitter. Just be yourself.

Chulu: I like that you like me now, Tamkhulu. I know you didn't before. (Kumkani's heart sank)

Kumkani: I was a bad man back then. I was a like Mr Crabs and only wanted money and more money. Now I don't have a cent.

Chulu: Does that make you sad like Mr Crabs when he loses money? He cries so much.

Kumkani: At first it did but now that I've gone through this sickness it made me realise that money is not the most important thing.

Chulu: It buys sweets but I don't get sad when I don't have any either. Mommy always makes sure that I have all I need and sweets occasionally too. You live with Makhulu and she's your mommy so I'm sure she makes sure you get what you need to right? (he smiled)

Kumkani: She indeed does, Berry and I'm thankful.

Chulu: You must be because the people in the street don't have mommy's who can look after them like we do. Do you want a daddy? (Kumkani laughed)

Kumkani: Aren't I too old for a daddy?

Chulu: A daddy is a daddy no matter how old you are. You can ask God if you want one. I prayed for mine, was patient and boom my special daddy came. (she giggled)

Kumkani: You know what I'll pray for now? (Chulu shook her head)

Chulu: What?

Kumkani: To be a better grandfather to you and your siblings. I was not a good daddy and I'll fix that mistake through you guys.

Chulu: You don't need to pray for that to happen. Just be a nice person, Tamkhulu. My Sunday school teacher says kindness is free.

Kumkani: I'll remember that. Who knew a six year old could teach an old geyser like me so much? (Othu cleared her throat and they looked at her)

Othu: Chulz, please pick up the toys, Bhabha so that Tamkhulu can move freely.

Chulu: Okay, mommy.

Othu: Are you two hungry? I can make sandwiches for you.

Kumkani: That would be nice. Thank you, Othu. (she just stood and stared at him for a long while)

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Kumkani's kindness is even more strange to her than Unathi's so she had to process that "thank you" from him first. She smiled faintly and nodded. Othu then went to get something from the TV stand when she suddenly lost her balance.

Kumkani stood so quickly to catch his daughter before she could land on her side of the tile floor. Something that could have deadly consequences for a woman in her condition. Othu held on to her father so tightly. She could feel his arms shake clearly her weight being too much for him. He sat her down gently before he sat beside her. Chulu went to her mother

looking concerned but Othu gave a reassuring smile. Othu looked at Kumkani and smiled.

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Othu: Thank you, Tata. I'm sure that was not easy to do in your condition.

Kumkani: I'm in minor pain but I'm glad I could reach you in time.

Othu: Let me help you sit back on your chair.

Kumkani: Please help me to the couch instead.

Othu: Okay. Bhabha, please go get water for Tamkhulu.

Chulu: I'll get a bottle for you too. (she rushed off)

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Othu balanced with a chair and stood slowly. She's never been more grateful to her father than she is now. Miscarriages happen due to falls at times. She helped him up and he was not so heavy since he's lost weight. The two got to the couch and she sat him down before sitting next to him. They first sat awkwardly.

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Kumkani: Othu, I'm really sorry for what happened in the past. I was a greedy fool then and might still be but now I know what's

more important. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of Chulu's life when I know I don't deserve it. I look forward to the twins' arrival too.

Othu: Like I've said with Mama, Tata it won't be easy. We allow you into Chulu's life because you bring her joy. I can't let go of anger easily and I guess that's a personality flaw of mine. That I don't always forgive easily. I need to get used to you.

Kumkani: I understand. You have done me proud. (Othu's heart started to beat quicker)

Othu: Thank you. I'm glad you've accepted Dabs and her kids.

Kumkani: Who dares to reject royalty? (he laughed)

Othu: I hope you don't think she'll be your link to the royal family, Tata.

Kumkani: No, I was just joking. I guess I'll have to prove myself. Would it be okay if I stay to enter the new year with you all?

Othu: Tata, I'm not evil so I won't let you sit at the other house alone while we have fun. Please have kinder intentions with Chulu because her father will kill anyone who dares to harm his daughter. That's a promise.

Kumkani: I've heard of him from Flinch so I'd be a fool to. All I want is to be a grandpa.

Othu: Are you and Flinch friends now?

Kumkani: Some things can just bring the most unexpected people together. We tolerate each other. He will be my uncle after all. (Othu laughed)

Othu: If you say so. I'll go finish up with the cleaning before the other ladies come make sides for tonight's meat. I'll bring you your food now.

Kumkani: It seems Chulu went straight to the river to get this water. (they laughed and Chulu came in with a wet top)

Chulu: Zeus knocked me over so the water fell. I had to wipe off the floor first.

Kumkani: That dog is too big for the in doors. Thank you for the water, Berry.

Othu: Thank you, bhabha. You could just have brought in while in the bottles.

Chulu: But Tamkhulu struggles with the lid so I wanted to help.

Othu: That's thoughtful of you. (she stood, kissed Chulu's forehead and left)

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Grandfather and granddaughter sat on the couch talking, school, cartoons, the colour pink and much more. Othu made them some snacks and served it to them. Craig came with so many beverages. Both alcoholic and non alcoholic drinks. Chulu

ran to her dad telling him all about her mommy's fall. Craig didn't even let her finish because he ran upstairs to his O to check if she's okay. She told him the rest of the story and he breathed a sigh of relief. Craig went downstairs to thank Kumkani. The two men shook hands afterwards. Hours went by and the family was here to prepare. The men were outside while the woman were inside. Flinch arrived and Ma T went to greet her man with a kiss. He gave Othu his gifts and made his way to the other men but Ma T grabbed his butt tightly first which made Flinch turn red in the face. Not because of anger but blushing.

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Ma T: Grrrr. (she said behind him while forming her hand into a wild cat's claw)

Makhulu: Since when are you a tiger?

Ma T: Since I met another tiger. (she looked at him until he disappeared from her sight)

Dabs: So you two do it?

Othu: I know I'm married and it was said that I can get involved in conversations with my elders but this is too much. (they laughed)

Ma T: Says the number one ass grabber. You think I don't see you. (she pointed at Othu)

Dabs: Is Po...(Poppy walked in with Menzi before she could finish)

Makhulu: You came at just the right time, nunu. Who is this handsome friend of yours?

Poppy: This is Menzi Hana, Makhulu. (she made introductions)

Othu: Welcome to our home, Menzi. I've heard a lot about you.

Menzi: Thank you so much, Othu and I've heard just as much about you. These are for you. Had I known there would be so many beautiful ladies I'd have gotten extra bunches.

Ma T: That's no problem, boy boy. I'm the queen so I'll take the entire bunch and give them all a flower. (she took the flowers and did just that)

Makhulu: Those are for the host, Mato. That's Othu in case you've been wondering.

Ma T: Craig got her flowers and so did all the other male guests we have here. Only the mummy didn't get anything but then again how could he shame.

Poppy: Wow, I can't believe this. I'm sorry.

Menzi: Don't be.

Othu: You'll get used to us, Menzi. Come through so I'll introduce you to the men of the family. (Poppy got a kiss on the cheek and they left)

Dabs: He is such a handsome young man.

Poppy: Thank you, Dabs. (she smiled and looked down)

Ma T: Why didn't you tell me that you'll bring your man? I'd have made sure Flinch arrives after you. You missed the moment, Popza. For that you're not getting a flower.

Poppy: They aren't even your flowers. They are for Othu.

Ma T: Do you want your sister to die of sinus? I'm doing her a favour. He's a bit on the thin side but he is handsome.

Makhulu: Don't listen to her, Poppy. Thank you for introducing us to your friend. (Poppy smiled)

Ma T: You don't waste any time. (she smiled)

Poppy: Something I suspect I get from you, makhulu.

Ma T: That's why it was a compliment, darly. Here is a flower for finally getting your own meal and stopping to drool over other women's. That's how queens do it. (she gave Poppy a flower)

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Othu returned alone because the men accepted Menzi as expected. Makhulu and Dabs did wonders with the food and the young ones (including Ma T) sat and had snacks while peeling if needed.

Meanwhile the men were laughing up a storm and talking sports. Nate seemed a bit off to Craig and he decided he'll ask him what's up when they get a chance to be alone. Menzi seemed like a good guy so they had no reason to be cold towards him.

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Craig: What do you do, Menzi?

Menzi: I'm a graphic designer by profession but I work as a youth developer of an education program.

Craig: Sounds great, man. So how exactly do you develop the youth. I'm asking because a friend and I have taken on a group of youngsters from church to mentor so perhaps what you do might help us.

Menzi: We help the youth realise their full potential through education and skills development. We offer bursaries, scholarships and even in service training for a few students especially those of TVET colleges.

Bandile: You do good work

Menzi. So many young people need men like you and Craig. He is going to pay for my studies next year and is teaching me skills in the security business.

Menzi: Then we need to sit down Craig with your friend of course. Let's see if we can help your group with some work and bursaries.

Langa: I also ask to be included please.

Kumkani: Just don't develop any feelings for the poor boys. (the moment became awkward)

Langa: Tata, I might be gay but that doesn't mean that I lust over all men I'm around. I feel nothing for these men I'm around right now.

Nate: I'm sure your father was just joking, man.

Craig: A terrible one. O and I invited everyone to ensure that the family unites and not to make snide remarks about Langa's sexuality. I'm sorry, Mr Zweni but not in my house, sir.

Kumkani: You're right to be disrespectful in another man's house is unacceptable.

Langa: If you don't want me near you say so. I'll go to my house and watch TV.

Craig: Calm down, Langa. You're staying put until we welcome the new year together.

Kumkani: I'm sorry, Langa. (Langa nodded)

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The mood lightened up a bit but Langa kept his distance from Kumkani. Nate finally went to the other side of the house to empty his bladder and Craig waited at a distance until he finished.

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Craig: That will be the last time you pee on my flowers because Bandile and I work very hard to get that garden as is.

Nate: You sound like a damn housewife.

Craig: Well so be it but remember the what I said next time you want to kill my garden.

Nate: Cool. (he walked off but Craig stopped him)

Craig: The hell, man? Go wash your hands before going to touch the meat. I've got a pregnant wife and small child who will also eat that meat.

Nate: Why are you following me? (he raised his voice)

Craig: Good thing I did or you'd have touched your dick and went to touch the meat. Who knows where that thing was at?

Nate: What's that supposed to mean? What did Othu tell you? (he became defensive)

Craig: How the hell is my wife suppose to know where your dick has been? What's going on?

Othu: Baby, can we bring out the other trays of meat? (she said and gave Nate a weird look)

Nate: I'll go wash my hands before I infect anyone. (he rushed off)

Craig: Mind letting me in on why you two are awkward around each other?

Othu: It's nothing, Craig.

Craig: Baby, please. There's clearly something you two know and I won't get it out of him. (she looked down and stood closer to him)

Othu: Okay, I guess you are eventually going to find out anyway. Nate and Licia had a moment of weakness.

Craig: Did she cheat on her husband with Nate?

Othu: It gets worse. She's three weeks pregnant and is not sure who the father is.

Craig: So why the hell does he go around angry as though everyone around him sent him to do it?

Othu: I think because he fell for her but she told him to stay away from her.

Craig: She can't just do that. He might be the father of her child and if so no DNA test will be needed since Nate is a black man and Brandon not.

Othu: That's what has her worried.

Craig: One would think that when they do something like this they'd at least use a bloody condom to prevent such.

Othu: Let's not judge, Craig.

Craig: O, Nate doesn't like sharing. He never has and never will. Even if Brandon turns out to be a forgiving saint, Nate won't let any other man raise his child.

Othu: That's if it's his.

Craig: You said that they have been trying for months and even tried IVF which has not been a success. She sleeps with Nate then suddenly she is pregnant?

Othu: Let's wait and see but don't confront him about it. Licia told me in confidentiality. I haven't even told Yandi this.

Craig: I don't have a problem with not involving myself. I'm just saying that Licia must not think she's seen the end of Nate.

Othu: Do you think he'd hurt her?

Craig: No but I'm saying that he will make his presence in her life known. Let's wait and see if she'll get a black or white baby.
(he laughed softly)

Othu: That's not nice.

Craig: They are adults so let them sort it out themselves. And yes, you can bring the other meat. In fact I'll follow you in to go get it.

Othu: Thank you. (she kissed him)

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The two made the way inside and Craig got the meat. Craig thought the mood inside was much better because the ladies were all laughing so loudly. He took the meat to the others and called Nate aside. He indeed confirmed that he is in love with a married woman. Apparently sparks started to fly at Craig and Othu's traditional wedding. He promised Craig to stay away from Licia though but with a baby involved Craig knew he's trying to fool himself. The fireworks started and they put Zeus in the garage so it doesn't scare him. Chulu was playing all alone but didn't mind. Hours went by and the party mood started. It felt great to have the entire family together. Flinch and Ma T were like love stricken teens. After the delicious meal Makhulu suggested that those who want to say what they are thankful for before entering the new year.

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Makhulu: I'll go first because as much as this year had its painful moments it also had good ones. I'm firstly grateful for this moment and being with you all. When I came to Cape Town I thought it would be like any other visit but I was wrong. Othu and I faces difficulty with the land issue but thanks to Flinch that was all sorted and he did it selflessly so.

Ma T: That's my Ndothuke. Not just a yummy vanilla but also selfless. (she said out loud and all laughed)

Makhulu: That's true, Mato so thank you once again Flinch. My son got sick twice but in both tines God decided that is not time yet. I also found my beautiful daughter whom I thought I'd never meet. I got to witness Othu and Clay's beautiful love and will soon be welcoming more great grandchildren. I'm just thankful for the growth of this family in just a few months. Thank you.

Craig: You're right in saying that the good outweighed the bad, Ma. I'm also just grateful for this family moment. Last year this time I was drunk in a club because I was avoiding being alone but this year I'm with my wife, our daughter and the rest of the family. Soon the family will have two more additions. I'm also grateful for my new relationship with God. Thank you.

Othu: My husband said it all.

Ma T: Yes, girl. I love you two so much. (Craig laughed)

Othu: All I'll add is my gratitude to God for allowing me to meet my twin brother and for the the health of my babies. I'm grateful for marrying this handsome man of mine and that Chulu is such a happy child. I'm grateful for the family as well. For my great relationship with my Makhulu and the new one I've formed with Mama. Welcoming Dabs, Bandile, Nathi and Sandiso was also a great highlight of this year. Dr Flinch, we've had a rocky relationship but you've really just had my best interests at hear so far. Thank you all for being at our home and are about to asher a new year with us. It's one of those moments that'll make our house a warm home. Thank you.

Mama: I won't say much but my highlight was when Othu forgave me. Thank you. (she smiled)

Langa: Mine was the day that I decided to live for myself and not for others. I'm gay and I've accepted myself. Thank you to you all who have been supportive. I'm glad to be here instead of at a business trip like last year. Thank you.

Poppy: I have been a pain to most people here in this year and all I want to say is I'm sorry. I'll use the fresh beginning the new year comes with to be a better person. Thank you. (she smiled at Menzi)

Kumkani: Like Poppy I've also been a pain but one twice as worse but I'm working hard to be a man my grandkids will be proud of. To all those who I've wronged around this table, I'm sorry. Next year will be different. Thank you.

Chulu: Can I also say thank you?

Makhulu: Of course, nunu.

Chulu: I had a great year. The only thing that made me sad was when my mother and I got attacked, when my daddy left for a while and came back hurt and when our babies didn't sleep nicely. All other times I was happy. I love you. Thank you. (the adults all smiled)

Bandile: Oh if I had to list all the things I'm grateful for this year I'll speak until even next year passes. (all laughed). I'm grateful to God for this family. Not because of all the things you've done for us but for the love and acceptance you've shown us. I know next year will be a year of many new things. Thank you to the Knights and Zwenis.

Ma T: And the Tyinis, Ndile. (he laughed)

Bandile: Yes and the Tyinis.

Dabs: Like Bandile my list of good things are endless. I'm thankful for the good health. For my mother, the additional children, a brother and so much more. Next year my biggest

highlight will be to be a grandmother once again. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

Nathi: I'm just grateful for the love I've gotten. Even when my mother had nothing love she never lacked. To the additional family I love you all a lot. I look forward to varsity next year all thanks to you. Thank you.

Flinch: I know that I've been the bearer of bad news since my arrival. I'm sorry for all of that. I'm grateful to be here at present. It makes the past as horrible as it was worthwhile. Thank you.

Ma T: Haaa and you're not thankful for your Mariri? (Flinch laughed)

Flinch: I'm also grateful for my slay queen, my Mariri, my Matoz, my bright light that I don't want dimmed.

Ma T: Oh stop it man, Ndothuke. (she blushed and all laughed)

Menzi: I know that I'm new but I'm grateful to be a part of this moment with a clearly great family. Thankful for the people I've met especially the lady next to me. Thank you. (all looked at Nate)

Craig: Nate?

Nate: I've got nothing to be grateful for this year. Let's have this session again next year. (there was awkward silence)

Ma T: Finally you all are done. I thought you'd never give Mato a chance. Okay, I'm grateful for all the great experiences I've had since I've arrived. I've met a mini Mato in Poppy who still needs training though. I've become much closer to Othu which I've always wished for. I've finally seen Unathi in Makoti attire which I thought she burnt the day she walked out of Hle's house.

Mama: But Ma T. (she looked down and laughed softly)

Ma T: Don't let me give you a lesson on moth tendencies as I've had to give Poppy many times. You had your shine, Litha so sit down. As I was saying I'm also thankful of my million dollar son in law. I'll go tell my friends that the women in our family import their men from far away. (she looked at Flinch). Hle yho you're my rock I'm most thankful for you. Kumi even you shame though I've wanted to put you in a coffin made of gold and go put you in a tomb in Egypt like the mummy that you are but I'm glad you're healed. Chulu, the next queen. You have your own suite in Mato's heart, my baby. Poppy I see that you're becoming you're true self, nana I'm proud of you. Menzi I hope you have millions because hey...

Poppy: Hey?

Ma T: He can use his imagination. Lunga thanks for making being a makazi a jol, nana. You allow Mariri to be crazy. My lovely boys I'll still hook you up with those girls in Othu and

Yandi's girl group don't worry. Flinch, oh my Ndothuke. You allow me to be me and that is amazing. Thank you for being young at heart with me.

Flinch: Always. (they kissed)

Makhulu: That was a mouthful but I didn't expect less from you Mato. Thank you for the conclusion.

Craig: Before we get ready to start the new year I've got a surprise for all of you. O has been bothering me with revealing our babies gender and I've decided that I'll do that tonight. So when we do a count down while others shoot fireworks up in the air I'll release the balloons that indicate the genders. Pink ones would mean it's girls and Blue ones boys.

Othu: Aww, baby that's sweet. I can't wait. (they kissed)

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The mood was a happy one and Nate passed out before midnight which came with some relief to Craig. Hours went by and the party officially started. Craig went to get the box with the balloons and the family gathered to end the year. Even Chulu stayed up for the moment but won't last long.

"10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 HAPPY NEW YEAR", they all shouted at once and while other homes fired festive fireworks Craig opened the box and a lot of blue balloons flew up in the air indicating that little Mr Knights are on the way. Everyone was

so happy and even cried. Then they released their fireworks and just got lost in the festivity of the night. They all were looking forward to what 2018 had to offer.

The family started the new year on such a good note. A few months have gone by and life has been good indeed. Nathi and Bandile have started varsity. Nathi is a full time student who lives at the university residency and Bandile decided to study part time while working full time for Craig. He knows the ins and outs of the business now and Craig is impressed. He has also asked Makhulu to help with food and utilities and she understood why it's important to him. He is saving for his mother's house and by the end of 2018 he was sure he'll start building his home as a gift to his mother. Sandiso is still a distant one but calls his family frequently. He got a job at a construction company too as a builder and painter. He has also offered to put in some money in the savings account Bandile created for their home. Poppy she Menzi are now dating full force and he is encouraging her to finish her schooling so she'll actually be the social worker she had always wanted to be. Menzi is a member of the Seventh Adventist Church and has on occasions gone with Poppy. She found herself loving the church a lot and no longer waits for an invite from him. She's been told the beauty of abstaining from sex until marriage and she and her man are committed to continue their relationship without sex though they have had some steamy tempting moments they managed to control themselves. Mr Thorn promoted her to assistant supervisor of the school's cleaning staff. She still

has to clean but now she is able to decide which duties she wants and toilets are a no go area to her. Menzi got her into a very good group therapy for people who got affected by being from a broken family. Othu has also helped her get into private therapy and her relationships with those around her have been so much better. Ma T and Flinch have travelled the entire country in preparation for their international touring. He has even promised to finally take her to Japan. The two are living the lives of young people and they love it. Chulu has finally started big school. Othu even cried when she saw her in her uniform on the first day of school. She still doesn't get what's taking her brothers so long to arrive though her parents have explained countless times. She and her friends love being a part of big school. Kumkani went to beg Unathi for forgiveness as Chulu advised and after a few months Una's heart softened. The two now live together once again in Una's small apartment. Kumkani offered his knowledge and expertise to construction companies as a consultant but Mr Yenge has made sure that no company uses his services. So he is now a house husband because Unathi had gone back to being a social worker for a children's home in Gugulethu and she's enjoying each second of it. Kumkani now feels like history is repeating itself through him because his father was once a stay at home husband while his mother brought home the bacon. On his free time he goes to visit his favourite person, Chulu. Makhulu

is still the glue of the family. Making sure that everyone is well looked after but still has not taken the advise of many and that is to give the Deacon another chance. Lunga went to visit her father's family since chief Khaya asked her to in order to meet other family members and he absence made Makhulu think about speaking to the Deacon once again and plan a way forward. Langa got promoted at his new job to Managing Director and suddenly life seemed good again. He's never tried to win Ian back and he doesn't want to either. He too decided to go for counselling and it revealed that he has a lot of issues that he never knew existed so he'll work on that first before dating again. Nate has been his grumpy self since New Years Eve and even wanted to leave the country but Craig sat down with him and told him not to because Licia might behaving his child and he needs to be there for her. Licia has asked him to stay away and he is forced to watch another man go to appointments with her when the baby might be his and that made him so mad. But he loves her so he'll do what's best for her at the cost of his own sanity and peace and he's never done that for anyone. Vuyo and Yandi at first were struggling after their December holiday visit from his home because his sisters tried their best to make Yandi seem bad in front of the family and her husband. They didn't succeed because bhut Vuyo finally realised just how much abuse and bullying his wife had to tolerate from his sisters and aunts. He told his family that he

had chosen Yandi and if they aren't happy they must get out of his parents' house and go look for husbands and jobs. The youth group that the new married couples started are both going well and Ma T indeed put in a good word for Bandile and Nathi. A girl named Zola got charmed by the thought of Bandile and Ma T organised a date for them. It's yet to happen. Othu and Craig have been doing great. They like Yandi and Vuyo were inspiration to many young married and unmarried couples at church. Craig has now even started to preach at youth ceremonies which made Othu's heart warm each time he does. They managed to keep Mr Funda's advise and that is to put God before anything else. Before themselves, their children and family because that's how they will remain one. Othu is now heavily pregnant and could feel the twins lower which put a lot of pressure on her bladder. The doctor has scheduled them for a planned C-section and their main goal was for her to carry to term which she has. She's now 40 weeks pregnant and can't wait to meet her little people. Chulu has a habit of drawing faces on her belly when she's sleeping but it's all part of the beautiful journey. Tomorrow she'll go in for her procedure and the family has been committed to prayer to ask God to let the boys make a safe arrival and keep mommy healthy too.

Othu and Craig went through the list of essentials for the baby bag and her bag too to be ready for tomorrow's trip.

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Craig: I can't believe that this time tomorrow our boys will be born. I'm so excited, O. I can't wait to touch them and smell them. (Othu laughed)

Othu: I think we all can't wait, baby. It all feels so surreal. Being pregnant is one thing but to actually know that tomorrow they will be here, well not here at home but in the world is a totally different story. Do you think the paint in their room has dried enough? (Craig smiled)

Craig: We painted two weeks ago so don't worry they won't breathe in fresh paint fumes. I'm nervous though.

Othu: Me too, baby. What if I don't supply enough milk to feed both?

Craig: With the size of those beautiful, tender twins now I doubt that will happen. (he kissed her breasts and she laughed)

Othu: You're silly. At least Makhulu will be here to help out. She came with her clothes yesterday. Dabs will arrive later today too. We are having babies. (she said in a cheerful tone and they kissed)

Chulu: Mommy are you going to the hospital already? (she walked into their room)

Othu: Not yet, bhabha. Do you still remember what we said would happen?

Chulu: Yes I'll stay home with Makhulu slay queen. You and daddy will go to the hospital and the doctor will give you an injection so that you don't feel pain when they take the babies out. Then I'll also go to the hospital after that is done to meet my brothers. Makhulu will stay with daddy and I while you heal and then you will come home with the babies forever.

Craig: Daddy's smart girl. Soon you'll be a big sister. (Chilu smiled)

Chulu: I told everyone at school that. Will I be able to take the babies to school for show? My teacher would like to see them. (the adults laughed)

Othu: Mommy will go visit with them a few weeks after they are born. Makhulu said no baby leaves this house until they are at least one month.

Craig: She said three actually. That's why I scheduled the photographers to come here for the newborn pictures. Which Makhulu didn't permit until they are ten days old. Apparently outsiders aren't allowed to see nor touch them before then only close family.

Othu: I agree because I know energies exist and our energies are not the same.

Chulu: I'll kiss their cheeks. Makhulu said they will be soft. What will we name them?

Craig: Uhm, I guess we'll know when we meet them.

Chulu: Okay, Daddy. Can I stay home like mommy?

Othu: I'm staying home to heal and to take care of your brothers once they come. Why would you be staying home?

Chulu: To play with the babies.

Craig: You won't miss much, princess. They'll be sleeping most of the time during the day to grow so you'll get bored. I'm sure they'll wake up after you come from school.

Chulu: That's a lot of sleeping. They are sleeping in the belly and now they will again when they are home. I think we got lazy babies. (the adults laughed)

Othu: Says the miss who has the longest afternoon naps after school. (Chulu laughed)

Chulu: I'll go and tell Zeus to be ready for babies. (she walked out)

Craig: She's growing so much and as her dad it pains my heart. (he sighed and Othu laughed)

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The two continued with what they were busy with while talking so much. Chulu ended up falling asleep on the couch and the adults decided to use the time to give each other some loving because after tomorrow they will have to put that aside for a few weeks.

Meanwhile Poppy sat on Menzi's couch while he warmed up frozen pizza for them. She still can't believe that she once overlooked such a great man. The level of love and respect he shows her at times doesn't feel normal to her since its never happened. Menzi looked at his lady who sat with the remote in her hand changing channels each second. He wants to watch sport but he'll allow her to have her way today. "She's beautiful", he thought. Even more so with her short hair instead of the long weaves she used to wear. He finally finished with the food and went to her with it. They kissed first before they ate.

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Poppy: Dali wam, I've been thinking.

Menzi: About what?

Poppy: I would like to be a full time member at your church and also get baptised. (Menzi smiled in excitement)

Menzi: Wow, that's great. You'll of course have to attend classes first before that could happen but it'll be worth it I promise. Thank you so much.

Poppy: What for, silly? (they laughed)

Menzi: I want this to be long term, Poppy. In fact I want it to be forever. Not now since you asked to finish your studies first but I love you. I say thank you because you made things easier for me as far as church is concern. Our church encourages that we marry within the church. You being a member will make it all good so thank you.

Poppy: So you want me to be your wife?

Menzi: Don't act is if I've never mentioned it.

Poppy: I love you too and being your wife will be great but I'm afraid, Menzi.

Menzi: Is it still the fear that some girl will tempt me to cheat on you with her someday when you're my wife?

Poppy: Karma is like that I tell you.

Menzi: Not all men cheat, Poppy. We get tempted all of us but there are a few who actually look the other way. I'm not a cheater and I doubt I'll betray you like that when I vowed not to. We still have time before you finish your schooling so you'll realise not all men are pigs.

Poppy: I know that you aren't. I guess the phrase "what comes around goes around" makes me afraid of marriage because I've been with peoples husbands in the past.

Menzi: Husbands that allowed you to be with them. No woman can take a man that doesn't want to be taken. Yes, what you did was wrong but you can't hold yourself prisoner to that.

Popp: Okay, nana. Thank you.

Menzi: So I've been thinking since I've met your family maybe it's time you meet mine. (she smiled)

Poppy: I'd love to a lot. When?

Menzi: We'll plan around our leave days during the year.

Poppy: I've never ever been introduced to "the parents" by a man. Thank you for thinking I'm good enough for you to take home.

Menzi: I'm dating with purpose, Dali and not to pass by time. (he kissed her)

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The two sat and enjoyed their pizza while watching a movie. Poppy will take a while to get used to the special treatment but she knows she's blessed to have met Menzi.

Nate sat on the couch playing X box and having his third beer. He's planning on being at the hospital when his buddy has his young bucks. There was a knock on the door and he could not help but wonder if the person isn't aware of the doorbell. He went to open and Licia stood in front of him. She scanned his muscled chocolate body and lightly shook her head to return to reality.

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Licia: Aren't you going to let me in?

Nate: I did say come in but you were clearly busy drooling to hear that.

Licia: You know what? Never mind. (she was about to leave but he held her arm)

Nate: I'm sorry. Come in. (she did)

Licia: He found out and wants a divorce.

Nate: If you're here to blame me for telling the sucker than you're at the wrong place.

Licia: I told him myself and I thought that he'd listen to me but...

Nate: You cheated on the man. Did you expect a thank you card from him?

Licia: I cheated with you. I had to tell him. The doctor that's been in charge of our IVF procedure found that he's actually infertile.

Nate: So you cheated on him back then when you were pregnant too?

Licia: You're a piece of Shit. Of course I didn't. The doctor said that he must have lost his fertility after that. Brandon wanted to know why I'm pregnant when he can't get me pregnant.

Nate: You could have blamed the doctor and said he injected you with another man's sperm if you wanted to keep your precious Brandon.

Licia: You do know what this means right?

Nate: That you're going to have a beautiful African baby. (Licia laughed)

Licia: You are such an ass.

Nate: You didn't think so a few months ago. So what's the way forward?

Licia: Do you want the baby?

Nate: Is the sky blue?

Licia: It's actually grey now because of the clouds. (they laughed)

Nate: Look I'm sure you heard from your white friends how black men run from their responsibilities but that's bull shit.

Licia: I actually don't have white friends and I didn't ask that question based on your race. I'm carrying your child whom I will keep. I just want to know what you want.

Nate: I want in, Felicia. In every damn thing that involves our child, I want in.

Licia: That's great because I want you in this too.

Nate: You can fix your shit with your hubby though. I won't stand in the way of that.

Licia: Brandon and I have been having problems since my miscarriage years ago. I even had to deal with his relapse to cocaine. We thought that a baby would fix it all but I'm glad it didn't happen.

Nate: I'm not going to go into a relationship with you though. Fix your business first and if you still see me as a potential partner after that we'll talk. I'm not the best at such but hell if Snipe who was known to have the coldest heart on earth that made me look like a saint can do it. I'm guessing I can too.

Licia: Who's that?

Nate: No one. I'm sorry about your divorce.

Licia: The marriage has been dead. You just put in the final nail in the coffin.

Nate: Still doesn't make this any easy on you. Does your family know?

Licia: They do and they are just happy that I'm finally going to be a mom like I've always wanted to. And yes, they know you're black. What they don't approve of is the manner in which we went about it all but chose to see the blessing of a grandchild in it.

Nate: I'm glad. Do you want something to drink?

Licia: I just want to sit and play X box with you. I would appreciate popcorn with melted peanut butter though.

Nate: I'll organise the popcorn. Go and sit. When is your next appointment?

Licia: Tomorrow.

Nate: Can we move it? My brother is having his babies and uncle Nate has to be there. I'll be godfather after all.

Licia: Okay that's good because I know Othu will appreciate me being there too. Thank you I thought you'd throw me out.

Nate: Let me go put on a shirt because I don't trust you. You've most probably been starved for months now. (Licia laughed)

Licia: Go to hell.

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He went to get dressed and organised some popcorn for her. She didn't want the peanut butter microwave melted but on the stove and Nate knew he is going to be kept on his toes but he didn't mind doing it for his unborn child. He immediately sent Craig a text telling him the good news.

Ma T and Flinch sat in a hot tub overlooking the city while fooling around like teens.

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Flinch: Now this is the life. I finally feel like I'm living.

Mato: That's such a shame. I've been living all my life.

Flinch: And that's why I love you. You don't just exist but you are living. Which is why I have a surprise for you.

Mato: Surprises each day. I might at well change my name to No-surprice. (they laughed)

Flinch: You deserve it. (he took out a box from the side of the tub)

Mato: Are you asking me to move in with you? (she smiled)

Flinch: I'm asking you to be Mrs Ndothuke. (Mato could not believe it)

Mato: Are you being serious?

Flinch: I know we're young at heart but we must realise that we're not getting younger in age. Let's not wait. Let's get married and travel the world.

Mato: Yes, yes I'll be Mrs Ndothuke the jet setter. I love you too, my Flinchy. (they kissed)

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Flinch put the ring in her finger and she just screamed in excitement. They both could not wait to live the suitcase life and it's possible because non have children who will cry after them.

Makhulu went back home to get a few more essentials before going back to Othu's. She walked into the house and didn't expect to see what was in front of her. The house was filled with yellow roses which were her favourite. Mr Funda appeared from one of the rooms and put some classic jazz on. He didn't even greet just extended his arm and smiled. Makhulu put her hand in his, he kissed it and they started to slow dance.

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Makhulu: Where did you get so many yellow roses?

Funda: Craig helped me organise it. Do you like it?

Makhulu: You know they're my favourite. You and Craig though. What is the meaning of this?

Funda: To show you that you still make my heart skip a beat. I don't know if you thought that I will look at you differently after I've found out about Lunga but I assure you that I don't. Wait, I actually do but not in the bad way you assume. You're a strong, God fearing woman Nomhle and I love those qualities about you. I ask that you please consider being my bride and enjoy these golden years with me.

Makhulu: I'm going to move in with Othu to help with the babies.

Funda: I know but that's a bad excuse. I know mothers are there for that but it will only be a few months. Please, Nomhle allow my old heart some joy.

Makhulu: I won't live in the Eastern Cape and I know that's where you planned to move to this year.

Funda: I have a big house here and I live alone in it. I don't mind that we live in Cape Town all our days. I've spoken to Lunga and she doesn't have a problem with my presence in your life. She's now healthy too.

Makhulu: Let me first think about it all and speak to both my children. (Lunga and Kumkani appeared and Makhulu was surprised)

Kumkani: I've watched you live for me while Tata was away and even when he returned you never stopped living for me. I've watched you live for Othu when Una and I failed to but now when she's a family woman. I've spoken to the deacon man to man and I told him that I will hurt him even in his old age should he hurt you. Chulu had made me see things differently

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Mama. I'm no longer that man. I'm no saint but I'm no longer the devil's right hand man either. If this is what you want, you have my blessing.

Lunga: Ma, when I heard that you ended your engagement to Tat' Funda to give your undivided attention to me so I won't feel as lonely as I had it showed me just how much you love me. You went against what your heart wanted for me. Like Kumkani I realise that you are now living for me and I'm grateful but I'm okay now so live for yourself. It's long overdue, MamZondi. I've had three boys so I too can go help Othu if you wish to do something else. If you wish to marry the deacon you have my blessing. We love you. (Makhulu wept but tears of joy)

Funda: Thank you so much for your blessing, Kumkani and Lunga. (they nodded and said goodbye)

Makhulu: Oh you're full of surprises today. I expected Lunga to give her blessing but never Kumkani. Chulu is just a light that

shines in that heart of his. Uhm, my biggest concern were my kids and they agree so I guess I've ran out of excuses. I'll marry you, Thamsanqa.

Funda: Oh my God is with me each and every single day of my life. Thank you, Nomhle. I'll no longer get embarrassed in front of the congregation with creased shirts and those other woman will stop bringing me food in hope of finding a husband in me because my house will finally be a home again.

Makhulu: You've never worn creased shirts so stop being silly. I'm guessing I'll anger a few ladies but that's okay. (they laughed)

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Deacon planted a soft kiss on her small lips and hugged her. She put her arms around his waist and they danced like that. Ma T went to the Knights house to look after Chulu. They could not miss that big rock on her finger and they congratulated her. Makhulu also came with her news and Ma T said it's a "Tyini women thing" to charm even in their old age.

Hours went by and Craig and Othu went to the hospital to finally have their boys. Makhulu, Deacon, Dabs and the rest of the family waited in the waiting room in prayer. Othu was plugged into a monitor to keep track of her blood pressure. The nurse asked Craig to go suit up in hospital gear so he'll be able

to be in the room when their twins are born. Othu watched as her hubby went out and soon returned ready. The nurses told Othu they will push her to the delivery room and prepare her.

"I'll see you now after they say it's okay to join you, okay", Craig whispered to his wife.

"I hope they won't be long because I want you close to me all the time. Our family is praying I know but we must too", she replied.

"I'll do that while I wait for them to get me. I love you so much", he kissed her.

"I love you too", she smiled.

Othu got wheeled away to a brightly lit room and waited for the hospital staff to prepare her. Their doctor finally joined them with an another doctor. They explained to her what will happen. The second doctor turned her on her side to inject her in the back. Her contractions weren't bad though but she glad that they will soon fade away. They let Craig in and he held her hands while kissing her cheek so many times clearly excited. The staff cleaned Othu's belly to make sure it's smooth. The screen was put up in front of her and she finally felt the numb feeling in her lower body. The two of them said a prayer together and right after they said Amen the doctor told them he is about to start and in a few minutes will meet their boys.

Her water broke soon after and she actually felt the warm gush. Craig had his cheek against hers all the time asking if she's okay. He took comfort in that she said she's feeling no pain just tingling in a way. After a few minutes of being cut open baby number 1 was born and the doctor held him up.

"It's a boy", the doctor shouted.

The healthy Knights' cry filled the room soon after. Craig kissed Othu so many times and he was given the honour to cut the cord. Baby number two was born.

"It's another boy", the doctor said while holding him up also and soon baby two also cried this Knight cried much louder. Craig kisses Othu again and followed the nurses to the little area where they examined his boys. Othu laid on the bed and could not wait to hold them. The doctor explained that stitching her up will take much longer. Craig watched as the nurse cleaned, weighed and warmed up his boys and he could not help but shed a few tears.

"They are perfect, O. One is a bit smaller in size but not much.", he said to Othu and she smiled.

The nurses didn't see a need for intensive care. They were healthy so one was given to Craig and he was so nervous but managed to hold him. The nurse took the other and put him on Othu's warm bare chest. She kissed him and cried so much.

Craig showed him the other one and she cried more which made him cry.

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Craig: Thank you, thank you and thank you for these strong, beautiful gifts. I love you so much. Thank you. (he kissed her)

Othu: I love you too. They are perfect. They look so much alike.

Craig: That's baby number two in your arms because of the size I know. A hero is iqhawe in your language so I asked the makhulu how I can put that in a nice name and she suggested Liqhawe. What do you think?

Othu: I love it a lot. He fought and really came out victorious. Baby one has been a mark of hope for his brother maybe we can name him Luphawu. (Craig smiled)

Craig: Liqhawe and Luphawu Knights.

Othu: No Western name like daddy?

Craig: Let's here what the family says. Once again thank you. They are perfect.

Othu: They smell so new. (they laughed)

Craig: Hey, my boys. (he kissed each on the forehead.)

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The staff got busy preparing Othu to return to her normal room. After a few hours they finally did and allowed her to see family. Their family all walked in with huge smiles on their faces. Makhulu being the mother bear of course came with a home cooked meal for Othu. She asked a cleaner to warm it up for her and Othu dug in immediately. Makhulu held one twin while Dabs held the other. The twins moved from one person's arms to another until they finally reached Chulu's who sat on the bed with a huge smile on her face.

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Chulu: They are so warm. Mommy, please open their eyes I want them to see me. (the adults laughed)

Othu: They will soon, bhabha. They are still sleeping.

Chulu: I can't believe that they are finally here. I think we must call them Aiden and Jayden. Those are nice names. (Craig looked at Othu)

Ma T: I was hoping that one will be called Tomato. (all laughed)

Poppy: Heavens no.

Ma T: Says, Nopopi.

Othu: We already have names for them. That's Liphawe on the right and Liphawu on the left.

Craig: And their big sister just gave them other named. So they are Aiden Liqhawe Knights and Jayden Luphawu Knights.

Makhulu: Sounds perfect. Makhulu will have to keep herself from kissing those cheeks until they are red. (all laughed)

Chulu: Look they opened their eyes. They look swollen. Maybe they have allergies.

Langa: That's just how newborns look.

Kumkani: I can't believe that I have three grandchildren. I love the names a lot. I'm more glad that you named the one who was struggling Liqhawe.

Ma T: So I said that I'll be popping champagne so I came with a bottle to celebrate. (she opened opened the bottle and the cork flew up)

Unathi: No man, Ma T we have babies in here. What if that thing hit them?

Ma T: I've been opening champagne long before I even knew I'd meet you. It's 2018 and you still doubt Matoz? This is to celebrate my babies. So please sit down.

Makhulu: How did you even get that in here?

Ma T: I've got my ways. Othu will you be able to drink a glass now or will that make my grand babies alcoholics? (Othu laughed)

Othu: Let me rather not, Makhuli because I'll breastfeed soon.

Makhulu: Funda and the rest are in the waiting room. They are all happy to hear that they arrived safely. We prayed so much.

Craig: Thank you to all of you, Ma. We appreciate it.

Dabs: Othu, if your milk takes a long time to come or they don't get how feeding works yet don't worry. It's normal.

Craig: They are so alert. Even following my finger movements.

Makhulu: Othu did that too when she was a newborn. That's when the doctors confirmed that she'll be a smart one.

Craig: I'm sure they are smart babies.

Chulu: When will we go home? They are like dolls. I love them so much.

Othu: I'll have to stay a few days but not long.

Craig: They need to make sure that the babies are fine and mommy is healing well.

Chulu: Okay. (she smiled and kissed them)

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Ma T took so many pictures but soon the family had to go home. Othu was shown how to breastfeed and they both got the hang of it easily. Craig hated that feeding them came with more pain to Othu but it soon faded. Chulu and Craig stayed in

the room for a while longer until it was time for mommy and babies to rest. Craig thanked his wife again and kissed her goodnight. Chulu kissed her brothers and her mom before she and her dad said goodbye. Othu looked at her perfect gifts who were fast asleep and said a little prayer of gratitude. They have her pain medication and they soon started to have its effects.

After four days since Lumphawu and Liphawe's arrival they were finally discharged. Craig had the car ready with two blue newborn car seats ready to take Othu and the boys home. By then the close friends also met the babies and were smitten. They held a late baby shower when Othu arrived and a welcome party to welcome the little additions home. Othu looked around her and could not believe that her family has grown so much. Not so long ago it had just been her, Chulu and Makhulu. It made her grateful for even the hardships because she knew that even those moments played a part in shaping their lives today. Grateful that Liphawe and Lumphawu are born into a family and that Chulu finally got the family she asked for. It proved that God indeed listens and answers prayers. She knew that more obstacles would come but she felt ready for them all because now her back up is even stronger. With God and family nothing could bring them down.

.....**Chapter one is end here**.....

.....**The End**.....

Season two- Chapter one

CRAIG

I was busy taking off my watch when I heard the door behind me open and close once again. Excitement rushed through my entire body, especially inside my pant. I smiled to myself before placing the watch on the bedside drawer and I felt a hand disappear under my shirt caressing my upper body and the other hand gave the same kind attention to my bulging manhood. I turned around to face the woman who was making me lose all of my senses. As expected she wore something lacy and was just enough to cover up all her special spots. I've been getting these unexpected summons from my lover for the past two months and each meeting was at a different place and I never knew what to expect. I'm not one to let people just control my movements but for the sexy woman in front of me I dropped everything in a heartbeat. Her lips met mine and we shared a deep kiss. She gently pushed me backwards until I landed on the bed. She eased herself on my lap and my hands cupped her curvy behind to support her before I placed kisses down her throat until I reached the spot between her breasts to take in her perfect scent and small bumps rose on her soft skin. I love knowing that my touch sends shivers through her

body. Usually things would be exciting and a bit rough during our secret meetings but today I felt she needed the opposite.

"You okay?" I asked between kisses. I knew that by doing so I broke the most important rule, to never bring our problems with us, not to the seductive love nest we created.

"Make me forget," she pleaded and she did not have to say more as her wish was my command. I stood with her firmly in my arms while still kissing her and placed her on the soft cushion by the hotel's window. It was a comfortable place to sit and read a book while watching the few occasionally not for sleeping on but she fit perfectly. I loved how the light that shown from the window complimented her skin. I loved that I had a view of all of her. I also loved the sound of the rain on the glass of the window. My mouth traced all the bare spots on her body. I did not want to take off the sexy lacy number she had on but what I craved was beneath the fabric so I had no choice but I made sure to take my time in unwrapping her as she did the same with me. She arched her body as I teased her nipples and I feasted on her sweet nipples that looked as though they had been dipped in dark chocolate. I wanted her then and there but I promised to make her forget whatever dampened her mood. My lips traced kisses downwards and she eased her legs

apart and I made sure that she could think of nothing else but the pleasure I offered her. Her loud moans filled the room and I was sure that even those who occupied the rooms next to ours could hear her but I did not care. I loved that she could let go. I'd take in the erotic view of her welcoming all the love I offered until she reached the edge. I knew that she would want to explore my body but all I wanted was to be one with her. The place by the window was too small for me to be comfortable but I did not want to leave it so I told her to hold on as I lifted her against the wall. Our eyes met and I eased myself into her moist warmth. I was so aroused by the feel of her that I had to halt my thrusts because I did not want it to end too quickly. The sound of her moans mixed with the rain was so erotic and I increased my thrusts while kissing any part my lips could touch until I felt her tighten until she had another orgasm. Watching her reach the edge made it impossible for me to hold on any longer. I gripped her thighs and growled loudly as I released. I held on to her as though my life depended on it until the pleasure subsided. There was complete silence, all we could hear was the rain against the window. I started to feel my legs go a bit numb as I was kneeling on the cushion and her legs wrapped around me. I decided to endure a bit because she was not ready to let go yet. I kissed the side of her neck until our eyes met. I brushed my lips against hers and would occasionally kiss them. Once I felt the grip of her legs loosen I gently got

myself to my feet while she was in my grip. I wanted to carry her whether emotionally, mentally or physically when she was having a bad day. I put her on the white covered King size bed and settled between her warm thighs. It was not our ordinary sex meet ups where we would act out sexual fantasies so I could not be in character today. I had to be who I am, her husband because it was one of those days she needed extra loving.

Othu: "We are breaking our own rules with all this sobby moments" she laughed softly.

Craig: "I'm in no mood to be in character today"

Othu: "I miss him, Craig" she said before her eyes got filled with tears. "I'm sorry" she added. Having been married for almost fourteen years, we always found things to keep our marriage exciting. To O that meant summoning me to steamy quickies at the most bizarre places. It felt like I was having an affair but without the guilt and I loved it. I loved being at her mercy most times. I am a happy man with a happy wife and children. Chulu though in varsity and could move out preferred to stay at home and we had no problem with it. We don't believe in the whole

thing of kids moving out at 21 just because they are classified adults. When she's ready she'll move because she has an independent spirit. Qhawe and Phawu are fourteen years old and growing into tall and masculine young men just like their father. Everyone was good but the sudden car crash which claimed Langa's life was unexpected and it hit hard. Kumkani had to bury yet another son and for a father who valued heirs and stuff it hit hard but not as hard as it hit O. I have exhausted all the words of comfort during the past few weeks and to say more would make me sound like a broken record so I instead just held O against my chest until she finished crying. Sometimes silence is all a person needed. She wiped her tears off and looked at me.

Craig: "Maybe the party that the kids are planning for Makhulu is what we need. It won't take the pain away but it's the first celebration we have had since we buried Langa" she nodded.

Othu: "Not many get a chance to turn 88 so she does need a celebration" Makhulu remained Othu's comforter during situations I can not fully understand. O's relationship with her mother is much better than before the boys were born but everyone who has eyes can see her bond with her grandmother

is stronger. Me on the other side have been unsuccessful in tracing any extended family of my own but I'll keep on looking.

Craig: "I imagine I will need lots of Viagra once we reach that age because you have inherited Makhulu's non aging genes so I would still want to tap that even when I'm over 90" I moved my brows up and down and she laughed.

Othu: "You better stock up now because I will make you sweat" she laughed. Making me sweat is what she indeed does. I'm a fortunate man to have a wife with a sexual appetite that almost matches mine.

Craig: "I love you" my friends claim that O fed me love potion and that's why I don't have a wondering eye. Thing is I've had my player days until I got tired. Another thing is that I've been without O after we had a thing when we were teens. I remember how it felt as though my heart stayed with her when my parents said we're moving. Unlike most of my friends who have not seperated from the women they love I know I've found home. They also didn't enjoy their youths much and were too serious before the expected age now they want to do fun things which I outgrew Kong ago. When you're young do

youth related things so you won't crave then once you're older. I've lived but now I've found a home in my wife and I'm happy. I'm not blind, I of course am able to notice that there are other beautiful women around but none are worth throwing the life I've built with my wife away. phone rang and Poppy's face filled the screen. I went to the bathroom and left her talking on the phone. I finished my business and wet a towel with warm water before making it back to the room. I helped my wife get decent and deliberately moved circles around her love bud and watched her close her eyes. The voice on the other side of the phone brought her back to reality and I heard her agree a few times while letting out softly moans until she ended the call.

Othu: "They ask that we pick up the cake on our way hoooo..." I did such wonders with my finger that she forgot what she wanted to say. She did ask that I make her forget., didn't she?

Chulu

My brothers and I independently arranged a party for our great grandmother Nomhle. The matriarch of the family. The glue that keeps us all in tact. Well basically I did all the planning but I don't mind sharing the praises with the twins. Phawu read a

comic book while he occasionally adjusted his glasses as they would slip off his face. Mom has been wanting to get them tightened but Phawu said it would only give him headaches. I went to check on the other deserts and found someone had swiped their finger across one of the cakes.

Chulu: "Liqhawe!!!" I shouted because I knew it could only be him. I swear Qhawe gives me as many grey hairs as he does our parents. He came cruising down the passage like a crown prince. with no sign of guilt. "Explain this;" I pointed to the cake.

Qhawe: "Phawu is sitting next to the crime scene yet I'm the first suspect. Black sheep

you're on your own" he said to himself and I could not help but laugh.

Chulu: "This is for Makhulu, wasekhaya. So let's put all else aside please. The pranks and all are to be put away"

Phawu: "Tell yourself that too because you two are the biggest pranksters" all of us laughed. My brothers, my best buddies. I

don't say this but I haven't moved out because I do not imagine waking up to a quiet morning alone in a flat when all the fun is at home. I love my tribe. "Okay, Professor Xavier put the comic book down" I looked Phawu. He is the nerd between us and he loves X-man so that's the nickname we gave him. "You stay away from the cakes" I pointed at Qhawe and he lifted his arms up. We stood to finish with the decorations. When mom comes home I do not want her to lift a single finger. It's clear to everyone that she took a hard emotional knock after losing her brother so we tried by all means to not burden her but the three of us usually fail because we are cry babies who are at each other's throats most times but dad has been keeping the peace in his own little way. Soon I'll be an art graduate. One of my paintings has been bought by a profound art exhibitor and most hang on my parents wall. Non of them have given me the "how do you intend to make a living because art doesn't pay" talk as some kids claim their parents have so I'm very fortunate. The door flung open and I peeked thinking it my parents with the birthday cake but instead Makhulu Mato walked in. We have not seen her in over a year and she looked as though she had come from a place where goddesses were bred which held the fountain of eternal youth. I do not know how old she is but I know she's old by years but her physical structure says otherwise. The boys ran to greet her. Phawu is not one to show excitement much but Mato was always able to make him

express his happiness. I also ran to hug her and was surprised to not see her husband following behind.

Mato: " I'm sure everyone is angry at me for not attending Langa's funeral. I act strong but honestly funerals are too much for me and knowing Unathi she most probably wanted to throw herself in the grave as she watched her son's casket go down" she was spot on. That's exactly what my grandma did.

Qhawe: "But you were able to come to a party. I see you sneaky Khuluz" he wore a smirk on his face before they both laughed.

Mato: "No corpses and drama at such, my boy. Go put my bags in the guestroom, Qhawez. Phawu-Phawu get Khulu Mato's other bags in the car please boy-boy"

Phawu: " I thought you'd stay with Makhulu Hle and Tamkhulu Deacon at the retirement village" Qhawe and Phawu grew up hearing everyone call Makhulu's husband deacon so they thought it was his name and till today they refer to him as Tamkhulu Deacon.

Mato: "There is "tire" in the word retirement. Do I look tired?" we laughed. We love all of our extended family members but we liked Mato most.

Phawu: "I'll go get them Makhulu" she gave Phawu her car keys. No one asked about Flinch because we thought it was a question best coming from the parents. Just as Phawu made his way out of the door dad showed up holding a cake carved into two perfect eights. Mom was behind him and I could see they were shocked to find Makhulu Mato in our home. They greeted and dad did not waste any time and asked about Flinch. Mrs Flinch flinched when asked about her husband and gave a vague answer I don't think any of us understood but we were just happy that she is home. Dad and I went about our business.

Mato: "Othunyiweyo, you are glowing" she turned to face my father. I knew she was insinuating that it was the joys of marriage that made mom glow. I'm old enough to know what sex is though I have not done it. Yes, I'm 21 and untouched which has made me a topic of jokes in my circle sometimes. I have a boyfriend. My handsome Imange whom I've been with for six months now. I've introduced him home because dad wanted to see who I was dating so that should anything happen

to me he'd know where to start looking for answers. Mom blushed when Makhulu pointed out her glow. If there's one thing my parents don't lack it's affection for each other. We grew up watching them show love for each other of course not explicitly. Things such as holding hands. Dad stealing a kiss when he thinks we are focused on the TV. Mom fixing breakfast and putting in on a tray for her husband so he'd be served breakfast in bed. Dad carrying mom literally when she heard about Malume Langa's passing. It's just the little things. Hours went by and we all were dressed and waiting for the birthday granny. I have so many grannies there is no way I could ever starve in life. The deacon brought her and we all started to sing as soon as they made an entrance. Makhulu leaning on her cane was crying. Granny Nokulunga called her mother as she could not make it from the Eastern Cape. We are blessed to still have her. They are old but still independent which is why they prefer to stay in a retirement village. They have their own home while having neighbors who are their age. Mom at first saw it as an old age home and cried saying it's not in the African nature to leave elders at old age homes while we still lived but Makhulu assured her that once she's too weak to do everything for herself Mom would be the first she'll come to for help. I understand my mom's concerns as our bond is as strong as that she has with Makhulu. I know I'm not biologically hers but for the first years of my life it had mostly been me and her against

the world. We had a great birthday lunch and it was filled with laughter. Tamkhulu Kumkani was still wheelchair bound but he had feeling in his legs but they weren't strong enough to hold his weight. Him and grandma Unathi patched things up and my grandfather was able to start another construction company. Our family was just a joy even with the recent tragedy. I looked at Makhulu Hle, Makhulu Mato and Mom and I swear these women had the secrets of youth. Pity Mom's genes aren't a part of me.

Makhulu: "Soon we will be celebrating our baby's graduation" she looked at me. Typical Makhulu to put the shine on another person when it was her day.

Kumkani: "I have been telling all my art lover friends about my Chulu's talents. I swear soon she'll have her own exhibition in one of the top galleries in Southern Africa and beyond"

Chulu: "Yes but I have to earn it by merit, Khulu so no pulling strings."

Mato: "I'll be buying a house soon. I'll need you to do a few pieces"

Makhulu: "Will you and Flinch settle back in South Africa?"

Poppy: "The way you were always traveling we thought that you would return home permanently only when you were dead" she joked and laughed alone. Makazi still had to learn to not think out loud. Her husband gave her a "was that really necessary" look. They were a beautiful family and I adored my little cousins

Mato: "I am sure you can not wait to scatter my ashes in the sea" Mato said sarcastically. I haven't quite figured out how these two felt about each other.

Othu: "No one is dying and if Makhulu Mato is not ready to tell us what happened between her and Flinch then we must not force her to. I'm just happy to see her"

Kumkani: "She is able to get to parties but not funerals" he mumbled. I said my family was happy but I didn't say we are without drama.

Phawu: "I'm out" he took his cake and headed to the door with his book under his arm. Phawu hates drama. He'd rather be alone. Then there is Qhawe and I who like drama so we can have inside jokes later on. Nothing beats family jokes.

Mato: "I did make it when we buried your legs all those years ago remember?" everyone had their mouths wide open.

Qhawe: "I'm out too" he put every sweet treat there was on a plate and joined Phawu. That was the last thing we expected Mato would say. Khulu still had legs they just weren't as functional as ours.

Makhulu: "One would think old age would make you two a bit better"

Mato: "That one is old" she pointed at Kumkani. "I'm a middle aged woman" she added with confidence.

Kumkani: "I'm shocked Flinch tolerated you for so long"

Makhuku: "Stop it, man! You are not children. Chulu get Makhulu some water please" I knew she wanted me gone. I was no kid but she did send me so I nodded and went to the kitchen. I heard them talk behind me as I walked but could not hear anything. I got Makhulu her water just as she likes it. Half of it ice cold from the fridge and the other half room temperature water. I made my way back and gave it to her.

Mato: "I won't say why I'm alone yet because it's not about me today"

Kumkani: "That's a first. Usually it's all about you.

Makhulu: "You don't have to Mato. let's enjoy the day. My great grandchildren went through so much trouble and your endless squabble chased them out"

Mato: All I will say is this "Notumato undenzile bo

Wand'thathel'uthando lwakho

Notumato undenzile bo

Wathathel' imali yam

Tiki tiki ndiyakhala

Tiki tiki ndiyofunda

Tiki tiki wandibonisa

Tiki tiki ndiyaxolisa"

Tiki Tiki ndakwazi. she sang her own version of Tiki Tiki by Phinda while dancing. "I'm sure that is what Flinch is singing

now but that's all I'll say since it's not my day" she zipped her mouth. I think everyone was trying to figure out what exactly it is she was trying to say. Soon the mood was good again once the adults who drank got their strong drinks. I went to sit outside between my little brothers.

Phawu: "After you've heard your friends talk about their families. Do you ever wish you were born in a different family?" All three of us raised our top lips as though we were disgusted but in actual fact we were thinking. Dad does that, I don't know if it's something we inherited from him or if we just mimicked him. We look at each other.

Us: Hell no!" we shouted simultaneously before we burst out laughing. I swear I'll most probably leave my father's house once some man comes to ask for his blessing to marry me. I know it's not what my peers are doing but I don't care.

NB: I changed the year the story was based in so the kids would be grown in this current time we live in

S2-INSERT 2

Othu woke up with a dry itchy feeling in her throat. She gently made it off the bed and couldn't figure out why she bothered because only a bomb could wake Craig up from his deep sleep. She checked the clock and it read 5:30am. It was a Saturday morning so she could return to bed after having dealt with the irritation in her throat. Navigating through their bedroom in the semi dark was easy as Othu decorated it herself so she knew what was where. She made her way to the kitchen quietly to avoid waking anyone up on a Saturday morning. There was a phone that kept on ringing and it got louder as Othu moved forward. To Othu's surprise Mato was sitting with her phone face down on the kitchen counter. A week since she had returned and she still had not said why her hubby had not followed. Everyone in the family knew them as inseparable. Mato snapped out of her deep thought and literally put on a happy face as soon as she was aware of Othu's presence.

Othu: "I wish you didn't have to do that, Makhulu. That I'm always happy act you pull when around people. Yazi as a mother I've come to learn that it's okay to be sad and sometimes even make my children aware of it because they lift me up. I know you need lifting up and that's why you're here"

Othu said while she put on the cattle. Suddenly the quick water sipping turned into a tea gathering with Mato.

Mato: "Not all of us can live without walls, Thu-Thu" Othu placed a hot cup on tea in front of Mato. Perfect for the cold weather.

Othu: "I know but sometimes the walls hurt the builder more than it does those who the builder is trying to keep out. I'm not going to give you the whole I'm 40 and now I've got a better understanding at life, Makhulu but I've been around long enough for you to open up to me. I love it when you're happy but admit that you sometimes do it on autopilot"

Mato: "I think he's having an affair" she blurted out and Othu almost burnt her lip by holding the hot cup to her lips for too long. Why would a grandpa like Flinch cheat? Where would he get the energy? Those were the questions in Othu's mind.

Othu: "You think?"

Mato: "No actually I know. He's always pre occupied with whatever. I recently found a secret cellphone and when I asked him about it he was plain rude. I won't beg a man to love me as if I don't have family who already does. So I packed up and left. Don't give me that whole "a woman must endure" talk those old women tell us on our wedding day because I will deal with you" she pointed at Othu.

Othu: "No endurance speech from me. I'm sorry, Makhulu to hear that you're hurting"

Mato: "I'm going to do a Tina Turner and get myself a younger man. Hers apparently gave her a kidney so I might need one someday and an old train like Flinch won't have enough steam to power me up" she joked and laughed. Mato masked pain with laughter and non serious conversations. It was not a strength, not according to Othu anyway. Mato did everything in her power to divert the topic away from her. "Have you and Craig stopped trying for another little one?" Ahh another disappointment Othu and Craig had to got through in their marriage. Right after the twins were were born Othu had some serious fibroids and for some reason that affected her ability to ever get pregnant again well except for that one time which led

to a miscarriage. She was not infertile but things have just not gone as they hoped.

Othu: "I think I'm too old to be a mom to a newborn now. Craig and I are facing retirement" Mato looked at Othu as though she was insane.

Mato: "Why are people comfortable with aging young? You're a child, Othunyiweyo Knight!" she banged her hand on the table and Othu laughed.

Othu: "Okay yes that's true but it won't happen, Makhulu. We are not using any precautionary measures so if I was ever going to fall pregnant again, it would have happened"

Mato: "I know you're not going through menopause because we don't get that early just ask Nomhle. You got our genes, I can see it. Have you thought about adjusting your diet to a plant based one?"

Othu: "Eat salad all day?" she frowned.

Mato: "No I will introduce you to plant based recipes. Why do you think I look this young? Yoga and clean eating"

Othu: "And gene privilege" they both laughed.

Mato: "If you still want to try and the doctor's can't help then let's see what nature can do for us"

Othu: "I don't know if Craig is still up for it"

Craig: "Up for what?" the ladies turned to look at the man of the house and looked like two mice caught stealing cheese. Craig looked at Othu while waiting for her to speak. Othu took a deep breath. Since the miscarriage about six years ago the baby topic was not one they touched. Mato took a sip of her tea waiting for Othu to answer.

Othu: "A baby" she said softly. Craig's facial expression went from curious to unable to read. He was there when they lost the baby and he's been there when Othu was desperate for

another child. He was also there when they thought the fibroids were cancer. He wanted a child back then but not at his wife's expense. If it cost him Othu's health, it was too expensive. Othu explained the suggestion Mato made.

Craig: "Rather do it for health purposes, O not for hope of getting pregnant. We are good as we are" it was concern speaking. He watched the subtle excitement vanish from Othu's eyes. Sometimes he had to make tough choices in the best interest of those he loved. "I love you" he assured Othu. She smiled and nodded before she watched him disappear down the passage.

Mato: "He's scared

Advertisement

Thu-Thu. Go cuddle with your husband. He was here to check why the other side of the bed was cold. I will be fine. I am Mato-Mato"

Othu: "That's exactly what scares me" Othu walked with her tea back to the room to get a few more hours of sleep. Sleep she and Craig had been deprived of due to raising kids but now that

they were grown they were free to move as they pleased. Mato's situation was one that left Othu concerned. Mato's phone rang again.

Mato: "You call me again, I will have Craig find you and deal with you" Mato threatened Flinch. She knew Craig would not return to his old ways for her and she did not expect him to but at least Flinch stopped calling. She lifted her silk pijama top to look at the big blue bruise on her the right side of her ribs and broke down in silent sobs.

It was mid afternoon and Chulu sat with the twins in the car. She didn't have a car but Othu was willing to let her drive hers. It made Othu's life easier as she couldn't always pick the boys up from school. They had come from doing some mini grocery shopping. Luckily they all had the same taste in music so no one fought over what to play.

Chulu: "So when do you two intend on giving the parents the letters you got from school yesterday stating that you must

bring your parents to school?" Chulu was their confidant. A friend they could talk to about most things except those things which needed male advice. She glanced over at Phawu who was nodding his head to the tune and check the mirror to find Qhawe doing they same at the back. They heard her but non had the answer to her question. "I can tell them..."

Them: "Nooooo" they both said.

Chulu: "So they speak! Look guys if you did nothing wrong then you have nothing to worry about. You would have told me if there was more to the situation right?"

Phawu: "You know we would have. Allow us to trace back our actions to see if we really are clean"

Chulu: "Okay but tonight you tell them"

Qhawe: "I think the car behind us following us" Chulu rolled her eyes before checking the mirror. She'd noticed the car but to say it was following them was too dramatic.

Chulu: "Luphawu and Liqhawe you know how upset dad gets when it comes to school matters like these"

Phawu: "Turn here to see if what Qhawe says is accurate. Hijacking is real and I do not want to have to beat some thug's ass for putting his hand on my sister"

Chulu: "I give up. If they ask if I knew about it then say no"

Phawu: "Take the turn, Chulz" Chulu did as her brother suggested. The car took the same turn and it was then that her heart started to beat faster.

Chulu: "Should we call dad?"

Qhawe: "Take another turn ahead, if its behind us after that then yes, we call dad" none of the kids knew that their father was a sniper in his youth days but they trusted him. Chulu took the turn and breathed when the car went the other direction. Phawu rubbed his sister's shoulder.

Phawu: "Even if it was something. We would have had your back"

Qhawe: "Always" Chulu laughed. She was the one who was supposed to say that but for some reason they were more overprotective of her even when she was seven years older.

Chulu: "If only you two had licenses you'd take the car home. I'm meeting Iimage later"

Phawu: " We are skilled drivers but not legal ones unfortunately" Even Chulu learned to drive before she turned sixteen. Something Othu did not like because she feared the kids would steal the car in the middle of the night to please friends but none of that has happened. Craig made it clear that he would lose trust in them if they took advantage of the skill and possibly end up killing another road user in an accident. The boys respected their father so they only drove when he was present and in empty open parking spaces. Othu didn't dare get into a car with unlicensed drivers out of fear but she loved Chulu's careful driving. Chulu dropped the boys and the food home. The parents were out, something they did a lot

lately. Mato was at Makhulu Hle's. Chulu went to grab a taxi to meet Imanage. They were from two completely different backgrounds and she did not want to go with assets which aren't even hers to him. She found him waiting at some of the popular food outlets. He was a beautiful dark young man and Chulu's knees melted at the sight of him. Imanage stood to greet his girlfriend. He hugged Chulu and got the scent of her dreadlocks that smelled like a tropical island. She grew it when she started varsity and had her parents concerned thinking she'd start smoking weed and such because according to them art students were very expressive.

Imange: "You look beautiful. Did you manage to do all your chores before coming here because I don't want your parents to think I'm taking you away from important things"

Chulu: "It's good to have little brothers to bribe, you know" they both laughed. Chulu's life was different from Ima's. She had both parents while he only had his mom. He lived in a very dangerous gangster prone township when she was in a quiet suburb but they were both equally ambitious. Imanage is studying Civil engineering. His dream is music but he had to choose what he felt would bring money once he's done. The strange thing is they met at Craig's office. Imanage wanted apart

time job and all Craig had at the time was a cleaning job. He didn't hesitate in taking it but he got promoted to assisting with security installments. The fear of her father firing him for dating her was what made Chulu afraid to openly be with Imange. At first it was tough as he thought she did it because she was ashamed to have a boyfriend who cleaned for a job but she couldn't care less. Chulu spoke to her bestest best friend, her mom and she was the one to break the news to Craig. Craig liked Imange for his hard work and dedication but him dating Chulu made Craig put up the fatherly armor. When Craig heard Chulu was dating he wanted to meet the boy and deep down he was happy it was someone he kind of knew. Imange constantly being forced to join a gang did not have an easy upbringing. It reminded Craig of himself when he was forced to be an assassin due to circumstances so he tried by all means to keep Imange motivated.

Chulu: "Is your mom's ulcers better now?"

Imange: "She's a strong woman. She just hated that she has to stop eating tomato" Chulu laughed. She blushed when she felt Imange's lips touch her cheeks before he stood to go get their order. He returned in no time and handed Chulu her favourite. Chulu appreciated him. She knew he first had to save

the change he gets after paying his expenses in order to occasionally take her out. Fortunately he did not mind being spoiled every now and then. Whenever they wanted something from Craig and he was not able to they would remind him that he had the money. "Exactly, I have the money Chulz not you" was Craig's reply when he felt buying them unnecessary things was a waste. It kept Chulu humbled and she noticed it did the same with her brothers. Had Craig allowed everything Chulu might have seen Imange as being beneath her and missed out on love. He respected her choice to wait until she was ready to have sex and he loved her.

Chulu: "Thank you for this, baby. I was starving. It's strange how one becomes the designated family driver as soon as they get a licence" Imange laughed as he listened to her complain.

Imange: "Don't worry. One day when I have a car you'll relax because I'll come pick you up anytime but I need you to be patient" Chulu smiled.

Chulu: "I know you first want to fix your mom's house before buying such and I respect it. Even if it's 20 years from now I'll

hold you to this promise, Mange" she pointed at him and they laughed.

Imange: "It will not be tomorrow but it will most certainly won't take that long. In 20 years time we must already have like six children" Chulu almost choked as she laughed.

Chulu: "Six, Baby?" she held up six fingers and he smiled and nodded.

Imange: "Since you have twins in your family. We could have them in pairs of three" Chulu's eyes welled up as she could not contain her laughter. To Imange just seeing Chulu happy while with him warmed his heart. With so many young ladies settling for men with cars and money he felt lucky to have one like Chulu. He understood that some of them did it out of desperation which was not something Chulu knew but he knew some did it because they did not want to be independent. A guy that pulled up with a GTI walked in and he had no shame in winking at Chulu though she was with someone. Imange pretended not to notice but deep down insecurity was what he felt. Chulu wore a look of disgust before focusing her attention back at him. After a lovely afternoon filled with strolls in the park and bench kisses Imange ensured Chulu got into the taxi

safe. He opened his wallet and Chulu saw only a R10 note in it and his own ride home costed R18. Chulu saw the look of shame in his face. She hated that he felt obligated to do such but she did not want to embarrass him in front of the other passengers.

Chulu: "I love you" Chulu planted an innocent kiss on his lips and without him even noticing slipped a R20 note in his pocket and took the R10 as he insisted on paying for her trip. Once the taxi drove off Imange's taxi pulled up. He tried to negotiate with the driver but the driver refused. To walk would be suicide. It's a weekend and it was nearly dark. He searched his wallet and as expected it was empty. He searched the small pocket on his shirt and then his jeans and found a R20. He smiled out of relief. He had a habit of not emptying his pockets so he thought it was one of those lucky moments where he forgot he had money and watched as it popped up when he needed it most. He got on the taxi and went home. Chulu arrived home safe and the parents charged her with "do you know what this is about?" as they held up the letter the boys got from school. She shook her head because she did not know about any trouble the boys caused at school and doubted there was any.

Chulu: "If it was something bad they would have called. Dad did they tell you that we thought we were being followed? I consider myself a good driver but I nearly forgot what's what when I thought we'd get hijacked" Chulu laughed but the parents were dead serious. She told them the rest of the story before she went to her room to ask Imange if he was home safe and blush as they reminisced the day.

Othu: "Are you worried?" she looked at Craig.

Craig: "No but I'll take precautionary measures anyway. Want me to help you peel veggies?" Othu smiled.

Othu: "Thank you but these days you peel the skin off the potatoes so thick that there is nothing left if the poor thing" they both laughed. "Just sit and occasionally tell me how great my food smells" she added.

Craig: "I can taste it too if you want" his tone was clear to Othu that he no longer referred to veggies. Othu blushed.

Othu: "Rather leave me all together and go play games with your sons. I don't need that distraction in here." Craig laughed and left her alone before he made her burn their dinner.

Bonding time with the boys was a must to him. He tried fishing for any lies regarding the letter but they seemed to be as clueless as he was. The car following his kids could be coincidence but Craig knew better than to just dismiss it.

3

Othu and Craig sat nervously as they waited for the school principal to join them. Craig lifted Othu's hand and brought it to his lips to calm her.

Othu: "What if they did something that can make them expel them?" she whispered her question as though the walls had grown ears.

Craig: "Then we will deal with it but try not to overthink the situation. We might be making a mountain out of an ant hill" Othu nodded. The principal came in and apologized for making them wait. After shaking hands the three of them sit down. The head Master thanked the Knights for making time to come see him and Othu wished she could just shake him and tell him to get to the point.

Principal: "I can assure you, Mrs Knight that your kids have broke In no rule" Othu held her chest as she breathed out. She knew her children were not perfect and would make their own mistakes to learn lessons from but she hoped they raised them to think before they act. They listened as the principal said they want to upgrade the twins to a much higher grade.

Othu: "What on earth would 14 year olds do in grade twelve?"
Othu's eyes shot open as she looked at Craig and then back at the man in front of them. The boys were already ahead of their peers in school.

Craig: "The boys already skipped two grades in primary phase"

Principal: "I'm aware of that, Sir and you Mam but they are wasted in grade ten as is. So much so that they give teachers mathematics solutions that our own educators had not even known. Honestly even grade twelve might be a waste of time"
Othu sat back shaking her head. "Mrs Knight the world has a few child geniuses. I actually think we must tell the local newspapers about our very own,"

Craig: "No, my boys will not be in any paper to promote this school. My wife and I need to discuss this before we make a decision"

Principal: "They might not say it, Sir but I imagine these mediocre lessons to be torture to them. Imagine listening to

someone teach things you already know somehow but have to endure it because of your age" Othu knew exactly what he spoke about since she was once like that but it seemed Qhawe and Phawu were on a level of their own. The Knights thanked the principal and were on their way. They were going separate ways but Craig sat in Othu's car so he would find out what her state of mind is.

Othu: "I want them to be kids, Craig. They are babies. Can you imagine the pressure they will feel in a senior class? Wanting to do what the big kids do. Tata put so much pressure on me and sometimes paraded me in front of his friends to brag" her voice was shaky. Craig held her chin so she'd look at him but she didn't so he leaned forward to kiss her cheek and she turned to face him.

Craig: "We are not your father. Baby intelligent kids are born everywhere in the world. This has nothing to do with how you were conceived and the chemicals the likes of Flinch fed you as an embryo. They might have inherited this from my family for all I know. Since I don't know them it's possible. We can't save them from everything, especially life's pressures but we can continue to have an open mind policy when they come with their issues. Think about how much pressure it already to dumb

yourself down to fit in which I suspect is what they are doing. They make sure to never reach full marks because the last time they corrected a mistake a teacher made during lessons they were reprimanded for something they can not help" Othu kept quiet. "O" Craig said softly and her shiny eyes met his.

Othu: "You're right. I need to get back to work" The bell rang for breaktime and before Othu and Craig could move their sons were in the back seat with their heads between their parents waiting in anticipation to hear what the meeting was about. Craig explained and apologized for assuming the worst.

Phawu: "I saw their text book. I can repeat 90% of the things on it. Heck I could give a lecture"

Othu: "Why didn't you tell us this?"

Qhawe: "Well you were sad for days when it happened while we were in primary school so we thought it's best we just try to keep it on the low" Othu felt terrible after hearing her son's confession. She apologized sincerely. She just wanted them to be children and enjoy it.

Phawu: "Just enrol us into university now" he joked and Othu's brow went up.

Qhawe: "Let's give senior grade a chance then take it from there. Maybe it'll challenge us more" Othu looked at Craig.

Craigs: "Go eat, we must go back to work. We'll talk about this later. "

Phawu: "Uhm actually we came to your car to ask for some change. Just small nyana change"

Qhawe: "Small nyana" Othu laughed as he showed the small nyana change with his fingers. Craig reached for the silver in Othu's car and have them.

Craig: "Use those mathematics skills of yours on making a proper budget with your money" he handed them the coins. They said their thanks and went out. "So?" Craig looked at his wife.

Othu: "Let's give it a shot. Let's put our fourteen year old babies in matric when it's almost mid term exams" Craig laughed at how she said it.

Craig: "Don't worry. They will still be too young to live on their own. So the law still gives us four years to have them under our roof, mommy bear" Othu did not want to smile but she failed. "Never a dull moment in our family, I swear" they laughed. Craig kissed Othu before going to his own car. They drove off to go about their business.

Mato was sitting with Makhulu to avoid being alone at home. Makhulu held her rib area gently to tell her that they must go outside to get some air but paused when Mato gave a loud "Ahh" as one who was in pain. Makhulu was not Othu when she sensed something was wrong, she inspected and she found an ugly bruise on Mato's upper body. It nearly made her fragile heart stand.

Makhulu: "Notomato what it this?"

Mato: "Nothing, sisi" Mato pulled her top back down.

Makhulu: "Do not nothing me when you have a bruise that hideos ma" Makhulu said in frustration. Mato let out a bitter cry as one who held in heaps of pain. Makhulu comforted her and waited for her to calm down.

Mato: "He hit me because I found out that he is cheating" Makhulu's fist clenched and she wished she could introduce it to Flinch's lips. "I was all alone while he went galavanting. I didn't see you for over a year because he controlled my money too"

Makhulu: "I knew that you not coming to Langa's funeral was unlike you. Why didn't you call, Mato man?"

Mato: "These ones who brag fall the hardest. I told everyone who cared to listen about how perfect my marriage was and now I return as a victim?"

Makhulu: "Rather than you staying with him. I had to ask poor Bandile to help me with money to return. He had to borrow from the bank but I will return it. I will strip that small prick naked. He doesn't know me"

Makhulu: "You are the one who doesn't know Flinch. Divorce him and come live with us. We aren't as rich as Flinch but we will not fail in taking care of you"

Mato: "After all that so endured I deserve what's owed to me and the law agrees with me. Don't tell Othu. She and her family are at a good place. I love being there because the kids keep my mind busy with their stories.

Makhulu: "Divorce Flinch and come home. You don't deserve what could be dirty money. Craig's business took a hard knock last year and Othu had to help him. I know financially they aren't as strong as before but I will give you money so you can give it to them to help with food. Make as though it comes from you and do not give in to them declining"

Mato: "This is what I do not want. Depending on you or Sandile again"

Makhulu: "Rather your loving siblings than a woman beater. If I see that Flinch hey" she raised her cane in warning and Mato laughed softly. "Let us go to the doctor to have that checked out because you might have fractured a rib. You must also go to the police station to report it

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Mato: " The doctor I'll go to but no police. They won't even bother in finding him when they hear he isn't in South Africa" Makhulu tried to convince Mato to at least try but she failed. Makhulu was not tech savvy but she managed to snap Mato's bruises for when they would need evidence. They made to the doctor and there were no broken ribs. Mato felt ashamed and wondered what the doctor thought of the situation as he examined her. Flinch must feel shame, not her but she could not help it. She intended on getting her half of Flinche's estate as they were married in community of property. She had to pay Bandile back the money he lent to her. Makhulu was concerned but let Mato go back to Othu's house. She was just in time for

dinner and noticed Othu's plate like hers had nothing but veggies. The family had mixed emotions about the kids going to upper grade but Kumkani was too proud to hide his joy. Craig made it clear that no heirs would be groomed for his construction company. Kumkani was still too much sometimes but luckily the boys had a father. Othu's mind was too busy earlier on and she did not even realize that the car that followed the kids had been behind her. She didn't know what precautionary measures Craig took but it seemed the driver outsmarted Craig's safety measures and went unnoticed so no one was aware that there was shady business. The doorbell rang and Craig went to open while the family ate. Othu stood when she saw a woman walk in with Craig.

Craig: "Family, this is Maria Rodriguez and she says she's Tatiana's sister" he said hesitantly. Othu could see the strong resemblance between Chulu's late mother and the woman in front of them. She stood as the lady of the house to welcome their guest but Maria fixed her eyes on Chulu and walked straight to Chulz before Othu could reach her. She cupped Chulu's face while smiling.

Maria: "Talía"

Chulu: "Chulumanco. I prefer to be called Chulumanco but hello," Chulu smiled. Othu knew she was uncomfortable. Chulu hated to be touched by strangers.

Maria: "You look so much like your mother, your real mother" she had an American accent and she made sure all heard the "real mother" part. Chulu looked at Othu to see if her mom was fine.

Chulu: "Yeah" she smiled awkwardly.

Maria: "I'm sorry to just go straight to my niece. I just saw my sister in her and couldn't control myself" she walked to Othu and they shook hands.

Othu: "It's okay and welcome to our home" Othu introduced her entire family. Maria had apparently heard years ago that her sister had a child but had difficulty tracing Chulu down.

Mato: "So what now? I mean now that you've found her?"

Maria asked the question no one had courage to. Maria looked at Craig as though she wanted him to say something but Craig was waiting to hear what she had to say.

Maria: "If it's okay with her dad then I'd like to get to know her"

Craig: "I didn't raise Chulu alone and she's an adult who can see whoever she wants. There she is right next to you, ask her if she'd like to be known better" Mato clapped her hand once subtly as she liked Craig's answer. She saw María and in the 5 minutes hated Maria.

Chulu: "Uhm let's take it a step at a time. For now I'm just overwhelmed because I never cared about Tatiana's family because my mom's has always been around" Maria nodded.

Maria: "Is it fine if I come back tomorrow once you have processed everything?" Chulu looked at Othu.

Chulu: "Leave your number. If I have time I'll call" Maria smiled. She was expecting Chulu to welcome her with open arms and tell her to put her stuff down so they can talk but Chulu's reaction was not what she expected.

Maria: "Uhm okay. I will wait. Thank you for welcoming me into your home"

Othu: "Would you like to join us for dinner?"

Maria: "Oh no, I do not want to impose and I'm tired" she looked at Craig and then at Chulu. "Luckily I asked the taxi not to go. This is where I live" She handed a card to Chulu. Chulu smiled and nodded. They had a brief conversation before Maria excused herself bro go settle into her B&B.

Chulu: "That was so unexpected. Dad do you know her?" Craig shook his head.

Othu: "She is a spitting image of Tatiana though so I'm sure what she's saying is true.

Mato: Whenever a snake enters your house do not take your eyes off it because it will slither and hide . You will think it's gone but it is growing until it gets strong enough to bite"
Mato's whisper into Othu's ear left Othu with a cold chill.
Flinch's cheating must have made Mato suspect every person.

Qhawe: "You look so much like your mom. I mean your real Mom" he said in a soft voice to mimicking Maria before settling down to eat. Phawu followed behind and so did Chulu and Mato. It seemed the kids were not too impressed with María emphasizing that Chulu was their half sister in her subtle ways. They knew but they didn't like hearing it so it made sense why they would not like Maria's approach.

Chulu: "That was an odd meeting. Why didn't she try to get our numbers so we'd ease our child into the news?" Craig wrapped her arms around Othu's shoulders for behind.

Othu: "Maybe she did not know to get them"

Craig: "Yet she got our house, baby? I'll have to check this out. I know she's an adult but that's still my princess" Othu tilted her head to look at her husband. "I'll be right back" Craig kissed Othu before he went to their room. Othu went to sit down and the mood was not as it was before. She checked the note Maria gave Chulu and knew the B&B. The kids stood to wash the dishes after having dinner and put their father's food in the fridge.

Mato: "It's strange that Craig doesn't know this woman when it's the sister of a woman he dated"

Othu: "Well it seems Craig and his colleagues kept anything family related secret since the lives they lived didn't allow them to have weak spots"

Mato: "Even so, why didn't Tatiana leave Chulu with this so called sister but instead chose a friend to raise her child" Othu shrugged. ", Don't trust easily and don't you dare invite her to come stay at your house no matter how sappy the story she tells you" Othu nodded. "Don't just nod, Othunyiweyo"

Othu: "I'm not Makhulu"

Mato: Hmmm!" she raised a brow while giving Othu a side look. Othu had a big heart and everyone knew that, everyone. She found Craig turning their room upside down before he called Nate whom he went years back with. Othu didn't really see what the fuss was about. She was not intimidated by Chulu getting to know members of of her biological mother's family. There was no doubt that Maria was Tatiana's sister or at least related in some certain way. Othu left Craig to go to Chulu.

Chulu: "To be honest, Mama I don't feel anything. Have you ever not felt anything towards someone? "

Othu: "A few times' Othu wanted Chulu to do the talking.

Chulu: "I'll meet up with her but she should not think she'll be my best friend. That spot is filled already" Chulu put her head on Othu's lap and closed her eyes as she felt her mother's finger's glide through her hair gently. Othu looked at Chulu while she was falling asleep and smiled. It felt like just yesterday when Othu had no idea how she'd raise Chulu alone

but they pulled through for six years before Craig came into the picture. Of all the gifts Othu got from her friends Chulu was the most precious. Deep down inside she was concerned about being replaced but she thought back on all the memories she shared with Chulumanco and smiled before kissing Chulu's cheek.

Othu: "I love you, Bhabha"

Chulu: "Love you" she said in a sleepy tone.

4

Craig did some intense digging, well Nate did it for him and found that Maria was who said she was. To Chulu it brought no new excitement because she felt it did not add anything to her life but instead filled her with questions she never had. Imange advised that she go and meet Maria and ask her those questions personally. A part of Chulu felt like she was betraying her mother but Othu gave her blessing so Chulu called María to meet. Chulu sat at the spot where they agreed to come together but Maria was late by thirty minutes. Chulu being punctual was angry that someone would waste another person's time like that. Just as Chulu stood to leave Maria arrived. Chulu could not help but notice the change in Maria. When they first met she wore the most blend clothing but not on that day. She looked like a Victoria secret model and she was as thin as one too with a gap between the legs that was too wide for Chulu liking. She noticed she's body shaming and regretted it immediately.

Maria: "I'm so sorry for being late, Talia" she gave Chulu a tight hug before giving her a peck on the lips. It was too intrusive to Chulu but she'd address it later on. She was a people's person and didn't mind affection but within limits.

Chulu: "I won't say it's okay because you did not even call. I have other plans" Chulu blurted out in frustration but took a breath to calm down. María laughed instead which made calming down more difficult for Chulu.

María: "Feisty just like all the Rodriguez women. Next time I will be on time. Come sit down. I have so much I want to know about you" she pulled a chair out and Chulu eased into it and watched Maria sit opposite her. "So how are you?" Maria added with a smile.

Chulu: "I'm good and you"

Maria: "I've been having my phone on me everyday waiting for your call so now that I'm sitting with you, I'm overjoyed"

Chulu: "I first had to see if my mother was okay with this. I know I'm no child but still" Chulu looked at the menu.

Maria: "Don't tell me that woman is trying to keep you from me. I'm the only link to your mother, your re..."

Chulu: "My real mother, we got it the first hundred times you said it, Maria. My MOTHER" Chulu put more emphasis on the word mother. "she is a great woman whom you should be grateful to for raising your blood. Actually why are you only coming now that I'm a grown woman?" Chulu could not hide her anger. It was evident in her voice.

Maria: "Ahh so you are angry because I'm only coming now. Well I only found out about you five years ago and even then I didn't have full details so I had to trace your mother's journey to this country to find you"

Chulu: "Why?"

Maria: "You're my sister's child. Why else, Talia?"

Chulu: "I don't like that name"

Maria: "Well deal with it because I can not pronounce your African name" Chulu's brows drew closer "your aren't even

trying" was what went through Chulu's mind but she kept it to herself.

Chulu: "Understood. I don't normally snap at elders but I just don't know why I'm doing it now"

Maria: "I told you, it's the Rodriguez fire. Your granny had it, your mom and me so why wouldn't you" she laughed. "Did you have a good upbringing? I know your father only came into your life when your were about seven. How was life? Stepmothers can be cruel" Chulu was shocked at how serious the conversation became and so quickly too.

Chulu: "I had a great life before and after dad came into my life. I don't know what having a stepmom is like either because I never had one. Are you trying to bash my mom?" Chulu looked into Maria's brown eyes.

Maria: "I just want to know if there is any childhood trauma I should know about so that I know what to be sensitive to when I'm with you. I'm happy to hear that your mom....gave you a good life"

Chulu: "I didn't grow up in a broken home so I have no trauma following me but thank you for your concern. So when was the last time you saw Tiana? What happened that made her leave you guys?"

Maria: "Your father didn't tell you about the life he and her lived?" Chulu shook her head. "Well I don't know why she left home but I found that she lived on the edge. She met your father in that life" Chulu: "Was she a prostitute?" Maria coughed as she didn't expect that assumption.

Maria: "No! They just had very specialised skills...in the uhm law enforcement industry. Let's order I am starving" Maria raised her hand for assistance. Chulu was having some terrible period pain and wished she scheduled another day for this because everything Maria said seemed to rub her off the wrong way. She blamed it on PMS. They ordered and had small talk and awkward silences until Maria asked about Othu's parenting skills. It was as though she expected Chulu to say she had a terrible childhood and was happy that someone from her biological mother's family came to save her but Chulu had only good things to say. If there was one thing Chulu loved talking

about its her family so her mood became better when Maria allowed her to tell her about her life without the weird sounding questions.

Maria: "It sounds like you've have a good life. I must go thank your mother for raising you so well. I actually should have done it that night we first met"

Chulu: "My brothers and I show her how much we appreciate her every chance we get and dad too. I'm sure even Tiana is at peace where she is"

Maria: "I would have given you a great life too if Tatiana didn't give you to a stranger, you know" the moment became awkward as Chulu didn't know what to say. "But she sounds like a good woman and Tatiana had her reasons"

Chulu: "Why do you say it like that? Like you know something that I do not. Do you know something about my mother that I don't?"

Maria: "Don't be silly" she fake laughed. "B&B life is getting expensive. I'll soon have to go back home" she immediately changed the topic.

Chulu: "We'll keep in touch. Smartphones make distance a bit bearable"

Maria: "I was hoping for more of these kinds of meetings but beggars can't be choosers" she smiled. The same gentleman who winked at Chulu when she was with Imenge made an appearance again and smiled at the ladies. "You can go talk to him if you want. I'm not an uptight grown up" Maria looked at Chulu.

Chulu: "I have a boyfriend"

Maria: "I hope he takes care of you because that looks like a man who knows how to take care of a woman"

Chulu: "My boyfriend loves me and I already have a man who takes care of me, my dad" Chulu said politely.

Maria: "Yes you are right. I'm sorry for that. I'm sure Tatiana got some money from her previous job. I hope she at least left you some"

Chulu: "Yes she did. My mom..."

Maria: "Let me guess, she spent it before you even knew what the word inheritance means?" she cut Chulu off.

Chulu: "My mom made smart choices with it so it would grow and when I learned what the word inheritance really means, she made sure to give me financially literacy lessons" Chulu finished her sentence.

Maria: "There I go again just assuming the worst of the poor woman" Maria put her hand over her eyes and shook her head. "It's just that I've seen cases of adoption going bad where the kids are mistreated. I'm a social worker so I know first hand what it can be like. People taking in kids just so they can have their social services money but don't even buy the kids food with the money"

Chulu: "Well as you can see I'm well fed" Chulu laughed "I know such exist but not in my household. In fact I think I'm my mom's favorite but don't tell my brothers" she chuckled. Maria zipped her mouth and laughed.

Maria: "Tell me about this boyfriend of yours" she watched Chulu's face light up. Chulu told her about her Imange who was the same age as her. It was good when Chulu described his character but Maria's impression changed when Chulu said Imange had nothing but not only that, but also that he came from a family who had nothing. She thought Chulu would aim higher but never said it out loud.

Nate and Craig sat with tall glasses of ice cold beers in front of them. Such meetings were rare because both were so busy.

Nate: "So Chulu went to meet Maria?" Craig nodded. "She looks as hot as her sister was judging from the pictures of her I saw"

Craig: "My definition of hot differs from yours, man"

Nate: "Let me guess. You only see Othu" he joked.

Craig: "I love my woman with curves in all the right places, especially the behind. I love having my hands full" Nate laughed.

Nate: "Nha the slimmer and less ass there is

the better"

Craig: "My point exactly. Which is why Maria is sexy in your eyes" they laughed.

Nate: "So you're happy with just one woman when there are so many to feast on out there?"

Craig: "This is the reason why the deacon says married men shouldn't have single friends" they both laughed. "You know how I used to play back in the day. I'm talking booze, danger and lots and lots and lots of women but non of that filled the void I had, if anything it depleted the remaining energy I had.

Then came my ex high school sweetheart with her daughter and I found myself wanting more of them and less of that life I had" Craig smiled.

Nate: "You've become domesticated" they laughed. "You were a wolf but now you're a house pet" Craig laughed.

Craig: "Wolves have to hunt and sometimes go days without food. House dogs get food everyday and treats between meals" they both laughed.

Nate: "I heard some house dogs starve"

Craig: "I pity those but not all can relate to poverty" Nate shook his head while smiling

Nate: "I tried that settling sit with Lucia but nha it's not for me. I take care of our daughter but nha I can't do the white picket fence life"

Craig: "Do you still do jobs?"

Nate: "Yeah but this country has some small fish but at least it keeps my soul alive. Don't you miss it?"

Craig: "Tracking people's movements only to silence them?"

Nate nodded "Nothing beats going to my family with a clear conscious at the end of the day, nothing"

Nate: "But you're clearly taking a knock financially if you had to ask me to bail you out last year. You're no security system installer, Snipe you are the damn security itself. You asked me to look into Maria but years back you'd have known even who the midwife who helped her mother give birth to her was in five minutes of looking"

Craig: "It's no secret that you get cut off from the connections once you're out and those are connections I don't want to owe favours to. I'm cool. I'm raising boys. I can't tell them what to do, I've got to lead so they can follow the traces of my footsteps and I don't to lead them astray. I'm also the standard in which Chulz will judge men. If I'm a thug, she'll think dating one is good. It's no longer about me but them. If the chain is not strong in one generation the other generations might

suffer. The Knights are keeping their chain strong and clean" Nate knew it was time to shush. To him what his daughter didn't know wouldn't hurt her. They talked about sports, women, cars and other general things before Craig went to fetch Mato at the mall.

Craig: "So much food?" Are we starting a soup kitchen for the homeless" Craig laughed while putting on his seatbelt.

Mato: "We must actually consider that but no this is for us at home. Since your wife refused to take my money I decided to shop myself" Craig laughed.

Craig: "Makhulu Hle told you about the dip we had last year? It's okay I'm not ashamed of it. That's business. One month it's good and the other it's not but we're good now, Makhulu"

Mato: "I'm not doing it out of pity but as a good gesture. I'm no guest at the house, Craigy. I want to contribute too so..." she stopped talking when a man that looked like Flinch passed in front of the car. Her heart started to beat faster and her ears went deaf until she felt a hand on her arm which she hit off her

but remembered she was with Craig. Craig looked at the man and saw the resemblance to Flinch but it clearly was not him. Personally to Craig all old white men looked alike but Mato's reaction worried him.

Craig: "He hurt you? The bastard hit you didn't he?" Mato looked at Craig and did not see use in denying so she nodded. "What the fuck, Makhulu?" Craig regretted his use of words as soon as he said it "Why didn't you tell us? We thought you are happy sipping cocktails on some island when you were hurting? Where's that fucker now? Is he in the country?" It seemed the words just slipped out of Craig's mouth. "I'm sorry for swearing but damn man" he added. Mato was wiping her tears off.

Mato: "I do not know where the fucker is" she laughed between tears. Craig's reached for the tissues Othu always kept in his car and gave it Mato. "Don't tell Othu about this. Makhulu Nomhle knows but she promised to not say anything. Othu only knows that he cheated. Nomhle said I must just leave it be and divorce him"

Craig: "I have a feeling you don't want that!"

Mato: "Oh leave I'm leaving but not silently. One a scale of ten how dangerous is he?"

Craig: "Maybe not him personally but people like Flinch are a part of twisted systems and are protected by their "bosses" so I'm with Makhulu on this one. I know we usually want to serve the revenge cold but sometimes the best kind is the one where you choose yourself and leave" Craig laughed softly.

Mato: "What are you thinking?"

Craig: "The old me would have served the cold revenge for you without you even asking. In a week you'd have been in Flinch's Will reading with his lawyer. I guess Nate was right, a lot has changed.

Mato: "Do you regret it?"

Craig: "No, Makhulu but when I thought the kids were being followed I actually didn't know what to do. Like now I want to help you but I don't know how. Old Craig would have"

Mato: "Sometimes we must bury our lower selves, Craig. Since I can't deal with Flinch on the low level he is at, I will do it properly so I don't sink to his level. You've actually helped me see he's not worth the energy and I do not want his blood on your hands. If I am in a Will reading it'll be because that old heart stopped by itself" they both laughed.

Craig: "Let's go home before the frozen food start to melt. You'll be fine. I know" Craig's phone rang and he looked around as he spoke to the person on the other end of the line. "It's Chulu, wanting to know if it's my car that's parked here because she was on her way back home too" he said when he ended the call. Chulu ran to the car and greeted the elders.

Chulu: "So much food? Are we feeding the destitute?" the elders laughed.

Mato: "You're your father's daughter indeed. Chulu told them about her meeting with María. All Mato heard was "blah blah blah and Maria questioning Othu's love for Chulu but she kept quiet.

Othu had gone back to Langa's grave for the first time since he was laid to rest. It had fresh flowers so she knew their mother made a turn too. She put her own flowers on the tombstone.

Othu: "Isn't it weird how people tend to show care only when we are gone? I think Tata wishes he had spent more time loving you than judging you. We miss you so much. I..." a firm hand blocked Othu's mouth from uttering another word. She tried to fight but it felt like what was holding her from behind was steel as it didn't even move while she wiggled. She thought about how defeated her family would be to find her lifeless body on top of their other child's grave.

Person: "Shhhh!" said a whisper in Othu's ear "I'm going to remove my hand and remember we are in cemetery during the week so don't scream, it'll be pointless" the voice was so deep that it sounded like the man mumbled while speaking. With women going missing in numbers Othu could not help but wonder if her family would be posting pictures of her on social media pages soon asking for the country to help find her. Dying was not what she planned on doing so that day but life is strange. She nodded and agreed not to scream. The hand

slowly got removed to test if she'd really keep quiet. Othu kept her promise but remained frozen. Her tazer and pepper spray were in her handbag which she left in the car. She did not know how many there were behind her so she could not risk running only to anger her intruder. Othu saw black boots like those worn by soldiers on top of Langa's grave as she did not look up. Finger's rested under her chin to lift her face up but Othu hit the hand away with attitude. She was angry that the sacred resting place of her brother was being disrespected . She lifted her head and was greeted by a man with a cap over his eyes. When he slowly lifted the cap Othu's eyes widened and she was sure she was going to have a heart attack as her heart started to beat abnormally fast.

S2-INSERT 5

Othu's mind hit a blank like it had never done before. The lips of the man in front of her were moving so he was clearly saying something to get but she seemed to have gone deaf. She felt strong arms lift her up and held her as though he knew she would not be able to balance on her own. Her hands trembled as he brought them to his face so she would feel that he was real. Othu looked at him and she saw herself but a muscular version of herself. He was a big man. If a child could walk beside him Othu was sure that child would think he was walking next a moving tree. Othu sank to the grey marble tombstone and he sat right in front of her. A sane person would run for the hills but Othu felt all emotions except fear.

Othu: "Kugentando" she said softly and was not even sure if she could call him that because he was given that name after he had died.

Ntando: "Call me Babini. I asked an elder what a perfect African name for a male twin was and he said Babini so I stopped being a number" Othu broke down in tears before she knelt down between his legs to hug him. Babini went on his knees to

literally receive the very first hug in his life and it did not just come from anyone, it came from his other half. It was all that he ever wished for since he was aware of the fact that he had a twin. Othu was the reason why he escaped from the secret systems that used him as a weapon for their own gain, that tried to turn him into an animal, a killing machine. He felt Othu's grip around his neck loosen and she wiped her tears off. "Are you happy or sad?" he asked to determine what his presence brought to his sister exactly.

Othu: "I don't know" she answered honestly while wiping her tears off. Othu let him help her sit on Langa's tombstone once again. To sit on the fresh grave of her brother who recently died while she watched the brother whom she thought she buried years ago sit right next to her was too chilling of a moment to describe in words. Othu stared at him for the longest time and could tell physical affection and crying women were out of his domain so to not overwhelm him she wiped any traces of tears with the sleeve of her top. He was looking at her and she knew he was trying hard to determine what her state of mind was like. There was no way that he would know because she herself did not know what her mind was thinking. He unexpectedly just got straight to the point by dropping some shocking news. News that Flinch was actually the owner

of the lab he claimed he only worked for. That to bring Othu and her brother was another one of his exortienents not that of people he supposedly worked for. Manipulating the genes of embryo's so they could be exact matches for rich patients who needed organ donors and did not want to wait for the waiting list to get shorter like normal people do. Othu knew about Flinch's past but she always thought he was forced into this secret scientific experiments because that was what Flinch told them. Othu felt herself feel disgusted with the lengths the some filthy rich people would go through to add five or so more years to their lives artificially and could not believe that there were people who created technologies to make such happen. To create babies only for the vital parts of their bodies just because someone was afraid to die was just too much for Othu to procees. She thought she and her brother were worse cases but at least no one put a price on their organs.

Babini: "Africa is far too behind with such so I understand why you do not understand it. I've worked with groups of people who did thing that I will not even bother you with as they are disturbing. I didn't do it because I wanted to but because Flinch made me. My mind works in ways that even he can not get so he's rented me out to secret agencies to bring down big names all over the world. That is why they let you go, you according to

them was a failed experiment, the dumb one" Othu had heard many descriptions of herself before but dumb had never been one. "But I am glad they thought that because you did not have to witness things that I have and you are happy. You are happy right?" Othu could not take her eyes off him.

Othu: "Happy? Yes...I am" she stuttered as she hadn't been asked that in a long time.

Babini: "This Notomato person who lives with you. Do you love her?"

Othu: "I do. Why?"

Babini: "Because I want to protect what's yours so you will remain happy" Othu tried to wrap her mind around what he meant by he "what's yours".

Othu: "You mean you will protect my loved ones because you know that should they hurt, I will too?" he was strange. Siblings

should hug and sing kumbaya if they met for the first time but with Babini it felt like a shady business meeting.

Babini: "Yes because I saw what your other brother's death did to you and I do not not like seeing you hurt"

Othu: "Have you been stalking me!"

Babini: "No, I just know things. I have however been stalking you since this Notomato person came to your house because Flinch will follow her" Othu expected on her doorstep to come beg Mato to give him a second chance as most cheaters do.

Othu: "You know this how?"

Babini: "Because that's what you do when someone has your heart"

Othu: "I don't think their love runs so deep anymore"

Babini: "No, I mean she literally has his heart, well the one he wants to claim as his. His own is giving up quick and she is the only match. He is desperate too" Othu stood to her feet to look at him. She remembered Mato's joke about kidney donors and wondered if her grandma was trying to hint at something. Babini stood and Othu's head tilted up as he rose to his feet. "The irony, the one who harvests organs for others can not find one for himself so he tries to kill his wife for hers" Othu nearly collapsed so she sat back down to process things. She had seen Mato jump in fright when there was an unexpected noise outside but she would never have guessed that she was running to save her heart

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literally.

Othu: "How are you alive? What did we bury?"

Babini: "Details I can't get into now. I had to do it to escape that life for good. Flinch thinks I am dead so he will not look for me but if the death of this Notomato will hurt you, then I want to prevent that from happening" Othu just came to put fresh flowers on her brother's grave not to hear such. Their lives were so good.

Othu: "She is your grandmother too so you must protect her for that reason"

Babini: "I do not love as you do, Othunyiweyo. I'm connected to you because we are twins so I feel I must protect you and since you have many that you love they too become a part of my protection" Othu suddenly questioned the meaning of love. Maybe it's not the warm fuzzy feeling she got when she saw loved ones. Maybe Babini had the correct concept of love. He was blunt and did not mince his words. Like when he said she's dumb most would stutter but he said it as though it was not offensive.

Yandi: "Othunyiweyo!" suddenly Othu remembered that she left Yandi in the car. Yandi made her way towards them and Babini suddenly felt his heart beat rapidly. He was a fearless man so it was not fear but rather intrigue he could not understand why the beautiful smooth chocolate skinned lady making her way towards them made his body react in ways he had absolutely no control over. Babini breathed deeply before putting his cap back on and heading the opposite direction. He ran back to Othu as Yandi made it through the many graves.

Babini: "I will also need your help if you want to keep Notomato safe. I will find the right moment to contact you so we can have a proper conversation but for now tell no one about this, not even your dog" Othu watched him run through the graves until he got into a black car.

Yandi: "Who was that?" she asked while out of breath as she was walking too fast to reach her friend.

Othu: "Cemetery security, I wanted to know who steals Langa's flowers" Yandi laughed.

Yandi: "Are you sure?" Yandi looked around. "I don't know I feel strange"

Othu: "It's the thirst. It's been two years since you divorced Vuyo yet you haven't been to a single date"

Yandi: "I'm not doing this with you" she laughed while pointing at Othu. Othu kept looking back as they made their way to the car.

Othu: "Yandi, when you did the traditional processes years back with my brother. You said his spirit was at peace right?" Yandi cleared her throat. I

Yandi: "I actually felt nothing. It was as if my gift was blocked. I went against the ancestors so I and said thst to not upset you more" After so many years Yandi confessed. Othu just nodded. If she was not allowed to even tell the dog that could not speak that meant Craig was to be kept in the dark too and it was going to be a struggle. She wondered where Babini was for all these years? Then there was Flinch the heart snatcher who made Othu sick. Yandi drove Othu home and found the entire family home. Her husband gave her a long kiss when they were alone as though he had not done so in days. There was a secret between them and it ate at Othu. She didn't understand why she could not tell Craig who might be able to help Babini more than she ever could. Mato and Othu washed the dishes and when everyone else went about their business Othu stood in front of Mato.

Othu: "I know things, Makhulu. Tell me what you know so I can help you" Othu's eyes bore into Mato's. and Mato swallowed hard.

Mato: "He said that my heart is his but he did not mean it in some romantic way and once I realized that I made plans to get as far away from him as possible. He forced a healthy lifestyle on me so and at first I was flattered thinking my husband wanted us to have a long life together but it was only for his merchandise to be strong when the right time to rip it out came. I found sick things once I started digging and I realized the demon I had married. There it is Othunyiweyo. Are the things that you know what I know?" Othu hoped Mato would say that she and Flinch just had an infidelity issue they could deal with but she knew that this was bigger than Mato that's why she had not been herself. "I did not want to tell you all because I know it might bring troubles. Hell I didn't even want to come here but amongst the entire family Craig's house is the only one Flinch might hesitate to...to...to come get me... because he knows Craig's past" she broke down. "I'm...sorry Othu. Please do not be angry at me. He wants me not any of you so I had to choose to go where I would be safer. I have nothing. All this I'll strip Flinch of his money is cover up, truth is

I want nothing more than to just keep my life. I have not asked your husband for help, I promise...but since I have told Flinch during the last phonecall that I'll tell Craig and if he is stalking me he has always seen Craig pick me up from places so I think he got scared" Othu never having seen Mato broken and defeated felt herself get weak. She felt as though a mountain had just been placed on her shoulders, a huge one. So much so that she didn't even have energy to ask Chulu about her day with María but she did not sense any troubles so she was not worried. After calming Mato down and giving her herbal tea to sleep better Othu went to her room and found a bath ready for her. She was kissed, undressed and soaked in the warm water with her husband. She feared breaking Babini's trust but she feared keeping such from Craig even more. Both her husband and brother were alpha males so she did not know how they would be around each other should they meet. Especially Babini who seemed to want to do all the protecting. Craig would never agree to another man protecting his family when he was the protector, he especially would not want to be protected either.

S2-INSERT 6

Chulu

I loved living at home but I admit that I also like having space to myself and house-sitting for the Fredricks family who was on a family trip to Zambia was great. All that I needed to do was make sure that their pets are fed and that their house would not burn down. I watched as Maria packed her bags to get ready to leave the country. It's been a few days since we've been meeting up but I can't say I'll miss her much but I will call her. I do love Tiana even though I do not remember her so to have a link to her was good. Apparently I have an entire extended family too and I promised to visit soon once I'm comfortable with the idea. I was busy chatting with Imange on WhatsApp as we were both excited to have some privacy. He said he lives in a room in his mother's yard but because of the criminal activities and his former friends pressuring him to join a gang, he preferred that I not visit him at his home. Sometimes when the parents are at work and the boys at school I invite him over to our house to chill.

Maria: "I wish you were that excited when talking to me" I put her phone away and smiled.

Chulu: "I'm sorry and I know I'm being rude. Okay I've put the phone away, you have my undivided attention"

Maria: "I wish I didn't have to but money doesn't grow on trees that's what my granny used to say"

Chulu: "Plus you've got to return to work right?"

Maria: "I actually put in unpaid leave so I could spend time with you but I didn't expect the flight and other expenses to be so high. One would think Africa is cheaper" she laughed and I suddenly felt guilty for sounding like I wanted her gone while she took unpaid days to meet me and spend time with me. "Let me go to reception quickly. I need to tell them about an important item I can't find" she searched through her things "Nope it's definitely not here. I'll be back. Please take my hygiene products and put them in the vanity case" I watched her make her way out. I'm not sure why I'm bothered by her extremely thin body especially now that she wore what seemed like a

bum short. I did as ordered by going to the bathroom and packing her toiletries. Once I was done I went to place them on the bed where all her other stuff were. A cute pink steel case caught my attention because it was identical to that which Tiana put in the letters and other things she wanted my mom to give to me in. I opened it and the first thing that popped up was two little girls with pigtails on their heads. It was Tiana and Maria and I smiled to myself as my hand glided over it. but I looked exactly like them when they were kids. Beneath the pictures were letters written on small pages like the ones Tiana used to write me all the letters she gave me. I opened the first one.

"Dear hermanita (sister)

I know I left home without a word but now I wish I had not"
Chulu scanned through the parts where the words explained how the written missed family. "I want to come home but my papers mysteriously went missing. I suspect the chica (girl) I live but the name Othunyiweyo with has them because she knows should I leave, I will leave with my money" My heart raced as I

read my mother's name. I paged to the next letter and only saw "I'm sick and the chica is not helping with anything. She takes my money and sometimes leaves me to starve and I would sleep in my own urine for days. I have no choice but to leave Talia with her so that the day you find this letter and you look for my hija (daughter) you will not struggle in finding her. My heart is pained because I do not know how Othu will treat my hija as she treats me like garbage. I will die soon and I will send this letter to our old address I hope it finds you before I die so that you can come get my child. Love Tatiana" I shook my head as I folded the letter to put it back again. I opened it again and took a picture of them with my phone to make sure that the handwriting was identical to that of the letters Tatiana wrote to me. Those letters and the ones I just read paint two different perspectives of my mother. I put María's things back and went to sit where she left me. The door swung open and I tried to act as normal as possible. She explained what had happened to the item she thought was lost while continuing to pack.

Chulu: "I have money. The money Tiana left me so if you want I can help you. You'll have to find somewhere cheaper but yes I can help" I blurted out without thinking. I suddenly didn't want her to go. The money was for when I really needed it. I knew

my dad's business had hickups last year but even then he did not want me giving him my inheritance money.

Maria: "No, I can not expect that. Tatiana left it to you, no Khulu" she for the first time tried to pronounce Chulu.

Chulu: "Yes but she would have wanted us to spend all the time you have available together so I'm sure she would have said the money will go to good use"

Maria: "The B&B down the road is much cheaper. I checked it yesterday when I checked Joe long I could stretch the money I have"

Chulu: "Then pack up do you can go check in there. I have R200 in my purse now. Will it be enough for tonight?"

Maria: "I can cover tonight. and am so happy that we will have more time together. Won't your parents be upset?"

Chulu: "I'm an adult and was given full control of my money when I turned 21 so I'm not committing a crime" I felt her arms wrap around me tightly. I hugged her back awkwardly. I excused myself as the Fredricks wanted to give me the keys to the house. Once I came from them I headed home and ran straight to my room to get Tiana's letters. My hands were shaking as I checked my phone screen and the letters to find the handwriting matching. I threw myself on my bed not knowing what to do. Imange called to say he was on his way so I took my bag and went out.

Othu: "Chulz, please call if you get scared okay?" I just stared at her for the longest time.

Chulu: "I'll be fine, Mama. It's not the first time I have house set for the Fredricks" I didn't want to say that I was going to have Imange over. I watched as she moved closer to hold me. I flinched at first like one who was scared.

Othu: "Hey, you okay? I don't think you must go sleep there tonight. You look a bit pale" she placed her hands on my cheeks.

Chulu: "I'll be fine. I'll see you in a few days"

Othu: "A few days is a bit too much don't you think? You're right around the corner. I'll bring you dinner as usual"

Chulu: "Stop fussing, Mama!" I snapped and even the boys turned their heads to look at me disrespecting our mother. "I'm fine" I said calmly.

Othu: "Okay, I love you" I nodded. I never just nodded when my mom says she loves me. I tried to picture her leaving Tiana in her own waste for days and it disturbed me to even imagine it.

Phawu: "Chulu can we come to the pool tomorrow? I promise we will clean up as we usually do"

Chulu: "Mr Fredricks drained the pool for cleaning" I lied.

Qhawe: "Okay just to chill with you then"

Chulu: "No!" I snapped. "I'm having friends over so no!. I'm leaving I'll see you" I said goodbye and went to the door. Mom called me and I turned to face her.

Othu: 'You know I'll be here should you need to talk about anything right?'"

Chulu: "I'm fine, Mom. I just messed up a project"

Othu: "You're the most talented young artist I know so I'm sure it's not that bad. I'll bring dinner"

Chulu: "I'm having dinner with Imange"

Othu: "Say hi to him then" I could hear the subtle pain in her voice. Was it there for a while or did my attitude bring it on?

Chulu: "I love you" she smiled My beautiful mother who was my everything. I waved and headed down the road and found Imange waiting not so far from my home I wrapped my arms

around his slim waist and felt him wrap his around my upper body.

Imange: "Bad day?" Our fingers entwined as we made our way to the Fredericks house. I didn't tell him anything on the way but I just wanted him to kiss me as soon as the door behind us closed and he did just that. I'm no robot, I get aroused and so does he but he has been the perfect gentleman. He picked me up and went with me to to the tall leather couch with breaking the kiss. His full lips were perfect as they danced with mine. He broke the kiss and kissed my forehead before laying von his back and putting me on top of him. I listened to his heart beat fast, clearly the kiss made it excited but it was not only the heart that was excited but his manhood too as I felt it against my thigh.

Imange: "Tell me what's going on" I told him everything while drawing heart shapes on his chest. "That doesn't make sense. Your mom would have dropped you off at some church and ran away if she was as cruel as you say your biological mom wrote on the letter. Plus the letters you have and those you saw at your aunt's contradict each other because your Tatiana never mentioned I'll treatment, Manco" I lifted my head to look at him.

Chulu: "Mange

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the writing is identical"

Imange: "Well this is tricky. Do you think your mom has another side to get that you don't know? But Chulu if your mom only wanted Tatiana for her money why would she keep yours?"

Chulu: "Technically Tatiana's lawyer kept it but whenever there was a smart investment, my mom would ask him to invest and keep the returns so my inheritance would grow"

Imange: "But still no money hungry person does that. I've watched movies and if money is tied up such people don't bother raisig those inheritance babies. Speak to your aunt she must explain. a like and respect Ma Othu and I refuse to believe that she would leave a sick woman in her own waste for days! Where would you be while your mother supposedly wet herself and was alone in the house?" I shrugged. "Be careful to not trade treasure for dust, baby"" I kissed him deeply as I didn't want to discuss what happened earlier on during one of the

rare moments we get to be together. I could feel his manhood throb and she felt herself get aroused by his sensual touch. It was not the first time we got steamy but had to calm themselves down right after but she did not want to cool off. Imange gently turned me so I'd be on my back. His hand went over my bare hips as they disappeared under my dress. When I felt him settle between my legs I could not help but let out a soft moan. Did I want to have sex? I was not sure but I didn't want him to stop touching me in all the places his hands traveled.

Imange: "Chulu," he said after his lips parted with mine. I looked into his eyes that had gotten smaller for some reason. "Manco, I don't have protection and I'm not sure if you will be glad that we did this when you wake up with a clearer head tomorrow" he spoke so softly as one who was in a semi hypothesis.

Chulu: "I think I'm ready"

Imange: "I don't want you to think, Chulumanco. I want you to be sure. I want you in all ways a hot blooded young man would his beautiful girlfriend but I don't want to wake up wondering if

I took advantage of your emotional vulnerability" I kissed him again not to sleep with him because he was right, he wouldn't feel good about himself if he felt he took advantage.

Chulu: I hear you and I love you"

Imange: "I love you too and I hope this fancy house has extra cold water coming from their shower because girl you damaged me" we both laughed. Let me go to the bathroom quickly so I can make you my famous dish" I watched as he skillfully got up so I would not see the damage I caused. I fixed my dress because I was just as "damaged" as he was. Maria called and I picked up.

Maria: "I know you saw the letters Because they weren't as I left them. This was why I kept asking if you had a good childhood because to me Othu is a person who didn't give a rats ass about my sister while she was sick" I heard her sniff a few times. "We changed addresses so only when I went to visit an old friend did a neighbour say letters came for me years ago. I should have been there to take care of her" she cried.

Chulu: "I don't believe you. It's not what Tatiana wrote in my letters"

Maria: "We don't know if my sister wrote those letters willingly or forcefully. You can clearly see that my letters were written imperfectly so she must have done so when Othu was out"

Chulu: "Where was I then because she mentioned me in your letters" she kept quiet for the longest time.

Maria: "You clearly didn't get to them all. Uhm...in one it says Othu would kick you up alone in a room when you cried to much and Tatiana was too weak to get up to hold you do she...she would listen until you cried yourself to sleep I wiped a tear of quickly. Imange leaned against the frame of a door and my phone had speaker problems so I had to put it on loud speaker to talk on the phone.

Chulu: "But she treated me well"

Maria: "Wake up, Talia. You had inheritance while she was a junior teacher so of course she would treat you well because you were her ticket out of struggle when she no longer benefitted from Tatiana. but now she can't mistreat you because your father is there. I have other proof" I ended the call without saying goodbye. I had a fairly easy childhood and my teenage years weren't hectic as puberty didn't hit me hard but in this moment I felt like a teenage. Imange sat opposite me and drew me close to him.

Imange: "You know the truth. It might not feel like it now but you do deep down"

OTHU

I sat anxiously on a chair in a public place I would never have chosen to come to voluntarily but Babini wanted to see me. He was right in saying that he had means to contact me because he had professional company deliver a letter to me. It's been hell keeping this from Craig. I'm also concerned about Chulu's

behaviour earlier on. I'll be honest and admit that I haven't sat down with my girl to keep track on her relationship with her aunt. I wonder if she picked up that I have been too busy with all else aside from family. Craig was no fool when I withdraw which is what I did when stressed he would notice. Mato and I now have each other strange looks over the dinner table whenever there was a knock on the door. I do not want Craig to be Snipe ever again so I kept quiet. I was startled by Babini sitting down and he froze to see if I was fine. He was strange but I actually wanted to know him. He first had to explain why we had to think he was dead. He gave me a vague answer about managing to fool Flinch into thinking that he was dead.

Othu: "In all fourteen years you keep quiet and expect me to believe that you are not following Flinch's orders now. I don't mean to insult you but I can't be sure" I whispered like a thief.

Babini: "I would have been more disappointed if you just went ahead and trusted me. During the fourteen years I have been kidnapping babies" my eyes widened and I felt my heart collapse. "Not the way you're thinking. Flinch has these little "orphanages" for the kids whose organs he wants. So I have been taking these children in small groups of two or three and I'd cross borders with them to leave them in real children's

homes which I established so he won't trace them in places he won't likely be able to trace them. Him thinking I'm dead makes me move freely. No system can outsmart me. So I am proud to announce that the first few kids are now teenagers and live normal lives. I would have done more but this past year they have nearly caught me numerous times. I have to be like a ghost and move without leaving traces"

Othu: "My husband will be able to help you" he laughed.

Babini: "If the levels of work we did could be compared to Kingdom roles your husband would be a servant and I king that's how how little power he has. He might sound dangerous to you but in my world he would be classified an intern."

Othu: "Well I am nothing then if you see him as such"

Babini: "Have Notomato take a the next trips alone as he would think she let her guard down. The bastard is like a chameleon lately can't be see anywhere"

Othu: "I will not put my grandma in danger" I said through gritted teeth.

Babini: "Do you want to find her body somewhere with a hole in her chest?" I breathed loudly while looking around before shaking my head. "Also, Flinch didn't stay close to you because he likes you. He wanted to see how your children will turn out" my mouth remained opened as my jaw seemed to have been frozen. Suddenly I thought about the twins being way above average in their school work. "Don't worry, they are smart kids but not the genius the likes of Flinch are after. I'm the one who must never dare have children"

Othu: "Are you saying my children are dumb?!"

Babini: "Do not catch feelings because this is not the time" I was certain we just had our first sibling rivalry moment. "Do as I say your proper to bury your grandmother without a heart"

Othu: "Geez can you be more sensitive and choose better ways to put things"

Babini: "Reality is reality and I will not make a lalabay of things that aren't fantasy"

Othu: "You know what never mind"

Babini: "I have to go. I'm watching you guys so don't worry" we both stood to leave because the smoke in the place was too much for my lungs to handle. "Othunyiweyo" he looked at me and I turned to face him "Can I have a hug? Uhm

... I mean it will make these people stop looking at us as if they are about to call the cops" for a moment I saw vulnerability. I called to him with my arms held out and wrapped my arms around his broad waist.

Othu: "When this plan of yours works, you must come home, Ntando. This drifting like a soulless being who needs no one is no way to live honestly" I felt his grip get tighter after I said those words. I looked up at him. "You know in African culture a father must have someone to pass the spear on to do that the family would be led. The Zweni spear must be picked up by you when our father passed someday. Your might have your

strange accent but you are an African man at the end of the day with a clan who needs you"

Babini: "Trust me, I know I'm an African. That's why I chose an African name for myself. Family is not a system that I know but if there is something I am good at its studying systems to understand them fully.

Othu: "I don't think even you will fully understand family but luckily you don't have to. You must just be open to it and sometimes drink vodka to deal with it" he laughed. My goodness he laughed and I saw another side to him. He has our grandfather's smile and was a handsome man and I am not being biased. He nodded and I watched him move like he was floating. I swear my brother is the like a superhuman. Kidnapping kids to give them safe homes. Faking his own death. Thinking Craig's coast makes Craig an intern in the game when we saw it as the most dangerous thing ever. Make me wonder what type of life he lived. I went home and cooked for my family. I told Mato what he said but I didn't say who. I just said someone who could help. My poor grandmother shook her head and licked herself in her room instead. I sat on the kitchen counter while Craig stood between my legs as we are ice

cream. He paused the spoon mid way to my mouth and dropped it in the bowl again.

Othu: "Craig!" he didn't respond but instead looked at the windows. The blinds were open halfway and it was dark out. He looked like one who was trying to hear a pin drop as he was focused outside.

Craig: ", Someone's watching" I turned around to look at the dark and before I could reply Craig had a gun in his hand. I knew we had one but he would have had to go to our room to access it but it seemed he drew out out from somewhere in the kitchen. I jumped down thinking it was Babini. "Lock after I've gone out" he added.

Othu:"You're going out there?"

Craig: "Lock Othunyiweyo" Ahh when my full name is called it's business. He went to the door and I followed behind. I watched him move to the door and as if he knew I would not kick him out, he took the key and locked it from outside. I turned all the inside lights off and left the ones outside on. I was butting my nails but soon he returned and he said there was nothing. I don't know if I'll be able to keep quiet about Mato's situation any longer. I don't want to.

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There was a strange vibe in the Knights household because everyone seemed to harbor their own secrets. Communication was one thing that they never lacked but ever since Mato arrived it seemed to be the one thing that was not done, not openly anyway. Mato sensed the shift in energy and felt terrible because when she came they were the Knights that she knew. They weren't perfect but even the blind could see the close knit they were. Chulu walked around with an attitude that only seemed to be reserved for Othu and her brothers. Maria made her listen to an audio that was not too clear but she could hear Othunyiweyo's name being called and the person who did so seemed to be begging that Othu shouldn't beat her. The person had a Spanish accent and Maria claimed the tape came with the letters from Tatiana. Chulu didn't want to insult Othu by confronting her so she kept quiet. It is true when they say that if you do not speak up about your feelings to prevent conflict, you are starting a war within yourself. Chulu had a raging war within her and she was not even aware that María kept on providing her with weapons to fuel that war. She felt like a child that could not choose sides and she saw just how indecisive she was. Imange was undoubtedly on Othu's side as he tried to extinguish the flames Maria caused by making Othu's name

dirty. Chulu watched as Othu and the boys ran around like headless chicken trying to get to work and school on time. Othu took a sip of the coffee that was definitely standing to long to still be hot.

Chulu: "Mama, I need to talk to you" she jumped from the chair as though it had just hit her with an electronic volt. When she could not share things with her mom then she felt she had no else to do it with. Othu took a moment to scan Chulu's face. She knew her girl has not been herself lately but Chulu was like that. She wanted something to stress her out first before telling anyone. Othu kept her patience as always because she knew she was the one Chulu usually went to to talk but at that particular moment there was no time.

Othu: "I'm listening" she said quickly while looking at Chulu.

Chulu: "I'd like to hear more about your life with Tatiana please" Othu smiled.

Othu: "Get pizza for us after work and we'll sit down and talk"

Phawu: "Mama, come on!" he shouted from the door.

Chulu: "Mama, I am dealing with something and I'm conflicted so I need to talk now please" Othu dropped her bag when she noticed Chulu's eyes got shiner. Othu knew that she had not held Chulu's hand during her "get to know better" process with María. She could only imagine the flood of emotions Maria's presence came with to Chulu. Chulu watched her mom move the three locks of hair that hung over her face to the back.

Othu: "I've been distant haven't I? When I return from work and I promise to come straight here, we will talk about what you've been through over the past few days. I will tell you everything about my life with your mother again and again. I will never get tired of telling you about her. So pizza date after work?" Chulu nodded and felt Othu's arms around her. "Plus Dad is not here and the boys have that sleepover. It'll be just me and you" Chulu nodded again.

Qhawe: "Maaaa! I have debate first thing in the morning and I need to read my facts on the topic again before it starts"

Othu: "There are actually other things I haven't told you. I loved Tatiana but I admit sometimes I felt like strangling her" Othu laughed and Chulu's brainwashed mind sent warning signals. She watched Othu take her stuff and run out of the door with the boys. Chulu sent Imenge a text message on their conversation. The phone beeped within seconds. "I feel like strangling my siblings too when they work on my last nerve but it doesn't mean I will do it or mean it but anger does that. Are you telling me that you never wanted to shake sense into your brothers when they drive you over the edge?" the text from Imenge read. Yes, Chulu's wanted to kick her brothers many times before due to anger. She put her hand over her face while shaking her head as she realized that even she had started to doubt her mother. Craig has been out of town on business for a couple of days and Chulu noticed Mato has not gone out since her dad left. She went to knock on Mato's door and waited until she was told to enter.

Chulu: "Would you like to get your nails painted a new color?" Chulu smiled. She knew Mato loved pretty things but lately she let herself look too plain. She was depressed.

Mato: "When will your dad come back, Chulu?" Chulu shrugged and watched Mato sit up when there was a knock on the door.

Chulu went to open and her aunt stood in front of her. She no longer wanted to hear anything until she spoke to her Mom later on but she let Maria in anyway. Mato made her way to the living room and felt sick when she saw María.

Mato: "Were you waiting for the lady of the house to leave so you can come teach Chulu more disrespect?"

Chulu: "Haa, Khulu"

Mato: "Don't you Haa me. I see you disrespect your mother because of this fong kong replacement"

Maria: "If I am the fong kong then why is it your sweet Othu who meets men in shady places?" Maria held out a an A4 picture of Othu hugging Babini. Because he always had a cap over his eyes they could not even see the strong resemblance between the pictured people.

Mato: "Hey

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devil! Are you stalking my child, huh?" Mato went to get the kettle that still had hot water in it and made her way to Maria. Chulu's eyes were fixed on the picture and a betrayal to her dad felt like betraying her. When she noticed what Mato wanted to do she stood in front of Maria so Mato retreated.

Maria: "Chulu your mother is not who you think she is. You know where to find me" Maria clicked her tongue and walked out.

Mato: "Coming here with fake pictures as we live in the dark ages with no knowledge of photoshop rhaa. You should have let me burn her so that the devil will see how it's done"

Chulu: "Maybe Mama really is not someone that we know. Lately she has been like Casper the ghost. One minute she's there and the next not and now we know it's because she is cheating on my dad" Mato slapped Chulu and regretted it the second she realised how improper her actions were. Chulu had never been slapped before so she was fuming.

Chulu: "You just proved that I do not know you well either. When Othunyiweyo comes, tell her I've moved out because I will not look my dad in the eyes knowing that his wife has some extra activities he knows nothing of"

Mato: "Chulumanco!" Mato put her hand over her mouth in shock of the Chulu that seemed to be possessed. Chulu went to pack her things and Mato forgot about her own pain as she dialed Othu's number but it rang until it went to voicemail. She dialed Makhulu Hle's number and in short told her what she just witnessed. "Our Chulu has demons because the devil's wife just showed her lies" was Mato's words when she ended the call. She walked to Chulu's room and apologized for the slap but Chulu was set on packing and leaving. When she was done she made her way out of the door and out of Mato's sight. Babini saw the commotion going on as Mato called after Chulu but he could not go and ask what is going on and he did not want to involve himself in drama either. His phone rang and he answered quickly because it was the man who was helping him track Flinch. Africa was territory he admitted he was not familiar with so it was easy for Flinch to hide because he knew every corner.

Caller: "I tracked the package and it has been destroyed" Babini shifted in his car seat.

Babini: "Did the old heart give in?"

Caller: "Someone sped up the process" Babini's jaw clenched and he hit the steering wheel a few times. Had he heard Flinch died naturally he would not have had a problem but if he was murdered it could open another can of worms, one that could even make Mato a murder suspect even if she was no where near the scene. Babini knew Flinch had other enemies but now his aim was to find who did this and why. He wanted to know who pulled off tracking Flinch when he struggled to do so. He went to Othu's work and paid a cleaner to send a note to her. "Flinch is dead, your aunt might need you home. You won't hear from me for a while" the note read and Othu tore it to shreds as she'd done with all his letters and just to be safe, she even put the pieces in her bag instead of the bin. She faked illness and was told to go rest her tired body. When she came home she found Mato looking like she had seen a ghost. Othu pretended to not know about Flinch's news as she listened to Mato tell the story. Mato didn't seem to know much only that Flinch got shot. Mato put her issues aside though and told Othu about Chulu who left with her clothes. Othu tried to call Chulu but she didn't answer. She even called Imange and her friends but no one knew where she was. She called the number Maria

gave them but it went straight to voicemail. The B&B got called only to hear that Maria checked out in the morning. Othu was beyond herself with worry. She didn't care about the picture because she would tell Craig the truth which she knew she should have done long ago. Her concern was her daughter who was most probably disgusted where she was as she thought her mother was cheating. Othu suddenly knew Maria came with an agenda. Babini was so focused on Flinch that he could not even pay attention to the one or two people who sat around them when they met at the shady places he summoned Othu to. It made Othu think he exaggerated his skills a bit too much but then she remembered that he was only human and not some sensing machine. Othu drove around and went to most accommodation places but no Chulu, Talia or María checked in. She was also concerned about Mato but when she returned home she found Makhulu Hle comforting Mato. Yes, Flinch was a dirty dog but they could not deny that for most years he made Mato happy and it was the good memories that flashed through Mato's mind that made her mourn. Craig was not answering his phone but Othu asked him to come home immediately in all the voicemail messages she left him. Othu wanted to call the cops to report Chulu missing but Makhulu said she had a feeling that Chulu just needed time to think so she went into hiding. It was late at night and the door flung open. Craig walked into the heavy mood that hung in the air.

Othu went to hug him and he was told what happened. He only seemed to be concerned about the Chulu issue.

Craig: "Sometimes Will's need to be read, Makhulu Mato" he looked at Mato and Othu and Makhulu Hle wore confused looks on their faces but Mato seemed to get it. "I'm going to look for Chulu and bring her back here so she can explain the attitude she's been having lately. I've been patient with her long enough"

Othu: "Craig, I first need to tell you something" she wanted the Babini issue out in the open so Craig would know why she stood hugging another man in the picture should Chulu have it and show it to him.

Craig: "Let me bring our daughter home first" he like Babini seemed to just float as he walked out and Othu had not seen him be so mysterious since before the boys were born. She knew she could not stop him so her only hope was that Chulu would give her a chance to explain before involving Craig in the false cheating accusation.

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