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Against all odds by Cassie

Prologue

APHILILE LEWIS

"I don't think I want to go back "

I say, dropping my back on the floor as I throw my ass on the couch.

It was my second day and I already want to quit.

I think anyone would in my position.

"Not this again "

I can feel her irritation and I know a lecture is coming.

I don't care. My mind is made up.

"I'm 16. I have an ID "

I say as form of defence for whatever she's about to say. I'm already up, with my hand on my hip.

"Dula fatshe Aphilile and stop being dramatic. I'll bring you some food "

Now that's a first. I'm surprised because I thought she'd be throwing a fit.

Now all the anger I had dissolves and I'm absorbed by her calmness.

She comes back, handing me my plate of spaghetti with meat balls

Our January always has us indulging in different meals, not your typical cabbages like the stereotypes.

Our fridge is always filled and that is probably the only time we have it like that.

"Now, tell me about your day "

My grandma is the sweetest. She took me in and gave me the love I never knew.

I was only nine when I was dropped by her door in my rugs.

I only knew English and had never entered gates of an educational institution.

At 10, I was doing my Grade 1, which explains why I've just started high school.

I'm turning 17 when the month ends and I hate that I'm ageing.

We had to introduce ourselves today and that includes telling our ages.

You should have seen how they all looked at me. I'm the oldest in my class and as much as I don't show it, I feel it.

I'm a size 30, I'm not tall or short, I'm 34B cup with your tiny ass and tiny hips.

"One day ngwanaka, you'll look back and be thankful for all those challenges. The people who laughed at you will be at your mercy and through you, God will show his glory"

I've been crying in her arms as I told her all this.

It was better in primary school. The teachers were fond of me but now these kids are smarter than their age.

Our school is a mixed race private school that has Grade 8 to Grade 12. It's where the rich kids go to and yes, I omitted how I feel I don't fit in.

How my grandma affords to take me there, I'm yet to find out.

I go take a bath after eating. I don't do anything here and I'm happy.

I was a slave when I lived with my father and step-mom. When he died, I was kicked out like a dog.

My mom passed away when I was just 1 or so I'm told by my father. Late father.

I hate that he never stood up for me or believed me when I told him how I was treated.

He worked at the mines so he hardly spent time with us.

"Do you have homework? "

I shake my head. I'm doing English home language and it's the only subject I enjoy. I have Setswana as my FAL. Ma is the one who insisted. I didn't know the language when I first came to stay with her but now, I'm good.

It's Thursday so only tomorrow then I'll take a break.

I'm dragging that day already.

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ARIEL RHODES

"I... I'm sorry that I've wasted your money and the investment you made has been unfruitful "

I fiddle with my finger looking down and wait for them to say something.

I hear my mom sigh then she comes, sits next to me. She takes my left hand into hers.

I look up into her eyes.

"What makes you think we care about money? We have lots of it. Tell me what's, wrong now because I know you love dancing "

I feel like crying. Her voice is so sincere and soothing. My mom has a good voice. She sings to us when we're feeling sad.

It's just us (my twin and I) and the parents. The others are older and live with their own families.

"I do but... Maybe it's because I'm fat. I mean, my partner can't toss me into the air and catch me. I'm afraid I might break his back "

Daddy comes and then makes me sit on top of him like I'm a little child.

I'm 16 for heaven's sake so all this seems unnecessary.

"First of all

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you're not fat. I can still toss you into the air and catch you "

I giggle. The way he says it is hilarious.

I can't imagine that.

"No dad. I'd never allow that. Will mom even allow that? "

I look at her.

"He's my man but you're my baby "

"It's just so hard. I can't do a long routine because of my back and my weight doesn't help. "

He lifts my chin with his thumb.

"How about we go visit a dietitian? "

I think about it for a while.

"But Kamo likes me like this. What if he won't like me? "

Realising my confession, I put my hand on my mouth.

"Who's Kamo? "

That's my mother.

"Cassiel wants my help with something "

I run up the stairs as my mom shouts. And oh, she does shout.

She's the reason we have soft voices. I always sound like a little kid.

"Mom is breathing fire downstairs. What did you do? "

That's Cass coming into my room.

"They know I have a boyfriend "

She laughs.

"I don't know what you're doing with that boy"

I roll my eyes. She doesn't approve of him but I love my South African version of Idris Alba.

He's perfect with his amber eyes and mainly jaw, not forgetting his broad chest.

He has strong arms that always make me so small in his arms. If he didn't have two left feet, he'd be perfect partner.

"You're probably fantasising about him. I hate him! "

She groans. The only problem she has with him is that he's a school kid and doesn't have a car.

That unfortunately, doesn't bother me.

"Don't you want to join our agency? They're looking for plus size models "

I look into her eyes and I see the seriousness.

"I'm not that fat! "

"That's not what I meant "

She seems sincere but my mood is ruined already.

"Just get out of my room "

I say, my voice barely audible. She'll always makes my weight an issue just because she's slim.

It's that and my boyfriend that always makes us argue.

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TSHIAMO RADEBE

I run because my life depends on it, not even daring to look back.

I run for about an hour then finally, I relax.

There's no one following me. I know I'm good with speed. I've won all the competitions at school.

School. I hate school but I have to make my mom proud.

I'm working hard, making sure I pass each and every subject.

I'm doing my Grade 11 and soon, I'll be done.

I take a walk home. I'll only count my blessings when I get there.

To me, it's not pickpocketing but it's blessings. God doesn't give by the hand right? That's what it is to me.

I'm hoping I'm more lucky this time. I can't afford to starve.

The grant barely maintains me. I have to pay school fees and buy stuff around the house.

I'm woken up by loud banging on the door.

The house has six rooms, two of which are bedrooms, a bathroom, kitchen, living room and a lounge.

"Hey there sexy"

She doesn't even wait for me to reply as she throws herself inside.

"What are you doing here? "

I say through gritted teeth. I'm tired. I still have school tomorrow.

"What's wrong Tshia? Am I suppose to set an appointment to visit my boyfriend? "

She goes over to the fridge and takes out her bottle of wine.

She's the one who buys it among other things.

She does my grocery for me so I'm basically stuck with her.

Her father is the reason I'm not in jail so yes, I owe her.

"Look Pam, now is not a good time. I have school tomorrow "

She looks at me as she takes a sip of her wine.

"Are you cheating on me? " yes

"What? Of course not"

I have to be a bit convincing so I go over to her.

I put my hands on her tiny waist. Her body is a work of art.

I start kissing her neck, knowing its her weak spot.

"I hope you're not messing around with anyone at school "

She's 20 but her face and body make her look 15.

"I'll never baby"

That's another lie. I have my eyes set on someone but I fear for their lives.

Her father is a dangerous man. Not too dangerous but he has my soul in his hands.

I turn her over and we start kissing. I know this is why she's here.

I can't fall in love with her because I'm just a sec slave to her.

She always has these fantasies that she wants to live out with me.

We're never just us, talking about our dreams and stuff.

It's exhausting really.

I'm waiting for her to get tired of me and find another toy.

1

TSHIAMO

I wake up alone in bed. She's singing in the kitchen, with music playing too loud.

It's too early for this. She's made this her place. I can't believe she woke up this early.

I go to the bathroom where I take a bath then iron my shirt and trousers.

I get dressed, brush my hair then finally go check what she's busy with.

She smiles when she sees me. She has a beautiful smile.

Honestly, I don't see beyond her looks.

"Good morning baby. I made breakfast "

First of all, she can't cook so I don't want to imagine how that tastes.

"What did you make? " I ask, taking my seat.

She gives me a plate that has half burned eggs, bacon and two slices of bread.

"I'll have to do your grocery today. It seems you've ran out "

I'm already in my uniform, all ready.

She gives me a glass of juice. I'm scared to taste. She's looking at me in anticipation.

I take the fork and knife provided then try to feed myself a bite.

I choke at the food. It's horrible.

"This is... Are you trying to kill me? "

I say then gulp down the entire glass of juice.

"What? Of course not. I was trying to be nice "

"No offence babe but you can't cook to save your life "

I search the fridge for something to eat and there's nothing really.

I fry some eggs and eat with the bread, dishing up for her.

She's sulking but I'm a fairly honest person. I'm saying fairly because I still can't get her off my back.

"Are you going to sulk forever? "

She clicks her tongue. I just chuckle as I take my bag.

I don't even say goodbye but just leave.

I always walk to school, no matter the distance. I think it keeps me in shape.

I'm not Bragging but I am in pretty good shape.

"You're late"

Says the annoying head girl. I'm not in the mood for her.

"Are you going to punish me? "

She flushes, which makes me wonder what she's thinking.

Then her mean face is back after a few seconds.

"Just go Tshiamo and stop being a pest"

"You know my name? Wow "

Then I swear she blushes. I oblige and jog to the assembly.

She's a caramel skinned girl with Indian hair.

I arrive at the assembly just in time for the announcement.

I only remember when I'm on my way to class that I couldn't go through the bag I snatched because of Pam's unannounced visit.

"Fuck! "

I say as I make my way into class.

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APHILILE

I say a prayer of gratitude in my heart when the siren rings.

This morning has been a drag and I can't wait for school to be over.

Someone comes to my desk as I'm packing up. I'm not in the mood for anyone.

I'm taking my Grandma's advice. I know hers is to be trusted, it comes with age and I know old people know a lot of things. They have immense knowledge.

"Can I help you? "

I say, looking up at this girl. She's white with blonde hair and blue eyes.

"Oh Aphi, look at you "

"Do I know you? "

She chuckles and it's so annoying. I'm hungry and not a fan of missing lunch so she's definitely wasting my time.

"No but I know you. I know girls like you who clearly don't belong here. What sixteen year old is doing Grade 8 anyway? "

I hear laughter and only then realise that I wasn't the only one remaining in class.

I take a deep breath, with Ma's words playing in my mind.

"Can you get straight to the point? "

I hear gasps. This is a little girl and I'm not about to allow Her to get to me.

It's clear they weren't taught anything about manners and respect.

"Stay in your lane. "

I think that was meant to be a threat. She says that then walks away.

I breathe out.

I make my way out of class and as I walk to the shop, I hear mumbling and giggles. As I turn, it's the Blondie with a couple of other girls.

"Don't mind them"

Says a chest that I bump into as I turn my head.

My heart is too heavy. Things like this always bother me.

I look up and well, he's just like her : blonde hair and dark ocean blue eyes.

I click my tongue and walk past him.

It seems I'm not fast enough because a few seconds later

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he's in front of me.

"What do you want?! "

I ask, with my hand on my waist.

Ma has always said I'm dramatic.

"I'm Louis but you can call me Lou"

"Funny that your name rhymes with my surname "

He chuckles. His voice is husky and deep. Not too deep. Let me just say it's manly.

Why the hell am I being nice?

"Look tall person, I'm hungry and I don't have much time "

I say looking at him with my arms folded.

"You haven't told me your name "

"Aphilile, now disappear "

He's just staring at me that I end up feeling like I have something on my face. Drool maybe? Boogie on my nose?

"What? "

He shakes his head then leaves. OK, now that was weird.

I get my lunch, which is just a pie and fruit. That's what I can get with a ten Rand note and it'll hold me until I get home.

I eat a lot, maybe because when I lived with "people" , I hardly ever got the chance to.

I'd get scared thinking they poisoned my food so I survived on binge eating.

The siren rings just after I'm done and I get my ass back to class.

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ARIEL

"Am I talking to myself? "

Kamo says but I'm not in a good mood. I feel so down.

"Babe, what's going on? "

He's taken me out for ice-cream.

We're at MacDonald's and he's bought us MacFlarry's.

I sigh.

"I am not looking forward to dance. "

"And may I ask why is that? "

I forgot to mention that he's quite strict. Sometimes, it feels like I'm dating my father.

We've been together for six months.

"Kamo, please. I'm not in a good mood "

"We communicate in this relationship Miss Rhodes. I won't know what's wrong with you if you don't tell me"

He holds my hand. I'm trying not to cry. I don't want him to think I'm weak.

"I... Cass said that their agency is looking for plus size models. I'm a size 34. I have a flat stomach. She makes me feel fat and ugly and unhealthy. Today, she acted like everything is normal. On top of that, my partner can't lift me "

"I didn't know you had a problem with your weight "

He's looking at me as he says this. I can feel his eyes on me.

I sniff. Tears have managed to embrace my cheeks.

"I don't. But it seems it's becoming a factor "

"You're the one who's making it a factor"

I lift my head and look at him. He holds my hands.

"How? "

He pecks my lips.

"Baby, have you seen yourself naked? You're amazing and I can lift you up easily because you weigh like a feather "

"I do? "

He wipes my tears with his thumb.

"Let's go and I'll show you something "

He's already up so I get up too.

He holds my school bag for me and we go wherever he's taking me.

We're at some store. He takes a scale and puts it on the floor.

"I'll get on it first then you, after me"

I nod.

He gets on it and oh, he weighs 117 kg.

"What? "

He chuckles and shrugs.

"Your turn"

I inhale and exhale deeply then get on it.

"Wow"

Mine is just 60kg.

"Still think you're heavy? "

"You weigh two times what I weigh. I can't believe it"

He takes me then just kisses me.

I'm not much of a PDA fan but my boyfriend hardly takes no for an answer.

I have to struggle for air after.

"That was.. Wow"

He grins at me. We go out and my mood is better.

I walk him to the rank and we share a hug.

"I'll call you"

I smile and wave him off.

The driver has already arrived and I'm driven to the arts centre.

Getting there, I'm feeling much better and looking forward whatever we're going to do.

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TSHIAMO

"This is beautiful "

I've had a long day. I was unsuccessful this time and couldn't get anything.

I throw my ass on the couch. I could do with a beer or two.

"Why are you going through my stuff? "

She rolls her eyes. I didn't think I'd find her here.

"Can I have it? "

I'm forced to get up and I snatch the bag from her.

I open it and throw the contents on the bed.

There's a wallet and opening it, she's a cash fan.

"How much is it? "

She asks, sitting next to me.

"It's R1370"

"Nice. I... I got takeaways and bought groceries. I also got you a new pair of running shoes "

She's never tried getting me to stop. I think she likes this since she always takes the bags I bring.

I do get other things like jewellery and she always buys them from me. Those that she likes.

We all do what we have to survive.

"Nice to see you're no longer mad at me"

She rolls her eyes.

I go take a quick bath then we eat.

I need a break from this girl.

2

APHILILE

It's been about two weeks now and I've gotten the hang of things.

I also know Blondie's name, Jolene.

She's been a buzzing bee in my ear but I've never let her get to me.

I'm feeling a little blue, it's my birthday and it's on Friday.

I can't believe I'm 17. It makes me feel too old.

I haven't bumped into Louis and I'm actually glad.

I still don't have a friend but I'm fine with it. My birthday is on The 31st of January.

Ma woke me up at midnight to sing me a Happy Birthday. I appreciate the gesture but I don't celebrate birthdays. I never have.

I think my birthday is a curse. I've never felt appreciated until I came to live with Ma.

"Cheer up baby. It's your birthday "

I almost roll my eyes.

I fake a smile then sit down.

She's prepared breakfast for us. We always eat it together.

I put my bag on the table.

"I think you need a new bag"

I've had this one for two years so I agree with her.

She gives me money for a new bag after breakfast.

It's just R150 but I'm grateful.

"Thank you Ma "

She gives me another R100

"Maybe you can relax your hair or treat yourself. Happy Birthday again Lilly"

I smile and hug her

"Thank you Ma "

I'm in a better blue mood when I arrive at school. I'm a little early.

I'm still not looking forward to the day and it's good that I don't have friends. At least no one here knows about my birthday.

I get to my table and there's a small box that has my name. The box is black with a nice white bow

There's no one in class as I'm the to arrive.

I look around as if the emptiness holds the answers.

I take my seat and stare at this box, contemplating whether I should open it or not.

It could be a bomb for all I know.

"Argh, it might not hurt"

I say to myself then untie the bow.

There's a card that has an imprint of my name.

Opening it, it simply says "Happy 17th Birthday Lilly"

My heart starts racing. Who could this be?

I have to hide the box in my bag as the other kids keep coming into class.

I'm the last to leave for break. I feel a shadow hovering over me and looking up, I frown.

I thought I was rid of him.

"Can I help you? "

My voice laced out my annoyance perfectly. I'm actually impressed.

"I'm taking you out for lunch. "

I stand up, already in attack mode.

"Listen here Louis, I'm already in a bad mood so don't piss me any further. Leave me alone man"

"You talk like I've just asked for your hand In marriage. It's just lunch. Food? "

He's too chilled for my liking.

"I can buy my own lunch "

I say in defence.

"I'm sure you wouldn't mind having something out of these school yards. And it's your birthday, why are you even in a bad mood? "

He's now sitting on the table.

"How did you know it's my birthday? "

"It doesn't matter. Let's go. We don't have much time"

He takes my hand and drags me out. I yank my hand off when we're outside.

He has a car where he opens the door for me.

It must be nice being a senior. I know this because they wear a different uniform.

We're at steers. I order a cheese burger and milkshake.

He goes for steak.

"Are you the one who sent me that box? "

He nods.

"Why are you interested in me? "

He stares at me for a while, not saying anything. He's doing this thing again where I wonder if there's something on my face.

I'm staring right back at him, anticipating his answer.

"We have to finish up before lunch is over"

The ride back is silent and I still don't have my answer. I'm filled though. I ended up having some of his food.

I walk to the mall after school. I start with buying a bag at Mr Price. I went for those cute backpacks. It's not like I carry a lot of bags.

I'm someone who puts in a little effort in looking good. Ma always complains about the time I spend in front of the mirror.

I don't do anything to my hair because it seems perfect to me then take a taxi home.

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TSHIAMO

We were forced to stay behind for extra classes and I'm so tired when we're finally allowed to go home.

I see Natalie with some of her friends. She's the annoying head girl who I've been keeping my eye on.

I wink at her and I swear she blushes. I stand and wait for her to come to me.

I'm just looking at her and a few seconds later, she's making her way towards me.

"What are you waiting for? You should be home "

I put my arm over her Shoulder as we walk together.

"I was hoping I can see you"

She's looking at me with her long eyelashes. She has a lot of hair in her body. What I mean is, she's a hairy girl but I think it makes her more beautiful.

"This is me then"

I take her hand into mine.

"Can I ask you something? "

She sounds a little nervous.

I nod.

"Do you... Do you have a girlfriend? "

I snicker.

"Why do you ask? "

She shrugs. Before I could even answer

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tyres screech in front of us.

I clench my jaw -Pam.

She gets off the car then catwalks to us. Natalie is nervous, she's even shaking. This isn't the girl who's always giving me trouble for being late.

She looks at Nattie then at me.

"You're cheating on me now? "

I sigh.

"Why are you here? "

She chuckles and looks up.

When she returns her gaze, Her eyes are blazing. She's angry.

"Why am I here? That's all you can say? Who the fuck is this hairy bitvh and why are you holding her hand?! "

Natalie manages to free her hand and runs off. Great. She'll probably be mad at me on Monday and I don't even have a phone.

"Do you have to be this mean? "

Then she slaps me and I'm forced to hold my cheek.

"Why did you do that? "

"Get in the car Tshiamo"

As soon as I close the door, she drives off.

I can tell she's mad but really, what she did was creepy.

"We're having dinner with daddy tonight then we're going clubbing "

She's not asking me but it's an order.

I don't say anything.

She drives into their yard. Her father is a dirty captain. That man definitely doesn't do things by the book.

Then the waterfalls start immediately when she opens the door.

She runs in crying.

I know I'm in trouble.

His fist collides with my stomach and I fall, ass down.

He picks me up with the collar and throws two more punches.

I don't cry. I can't imagine how my face might look now.

I might not be a yellowbone but my skin bruises easily.

I wake up in her room. I feel like shit. Her father did a number on me.

"You're awake? "

I don't reply to her. She's the reason this happened.

"You're going to stop whatever you are doing with that girl. "

Then, she holds my hand. She's sitting next to me, on the bed. I don't even remember how I blacked out or who brought me to her room.

"This wouldn't happen if only you were loyal. Now we can't go to the club "

"You're sick. You... Your father. This is madness. I don't love you "

I say, feeling myself run out of breath.

"Well, I love you enough for the both of us"

I look up in hope that heaven has some answers for me.

This is not the life I want to live.

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ARIEL

i'm a little nervous because I'm finally meeting Kamo's family.

I'm sleeping over today and coming back tomorrow in the evening.

My driver will fetch me.

"I might not like him but pack some lingerie "

That's Cassiel who's helping me pack an overnight bag.

I don't know the activities we might participate in but I don't pack a lot of stuff.

My mom comes into my room. She never knocks.

"I want to meet him"

She says. I let them know about this during breakfast.

"You will, when he comes to fetch me"

I say as I zip my bag. I'm all done now, I just need to shower.

"He has a car? "

I shake my head.

"A taxi will drop him off then we'll take my driver to his home"

"I still think he's way below your standards. "

That's Cass and I'm not surprised because she's been vocal about how she feels with regards to our relationship.

"Do you also have a boyfriend? "

Mom asks Cassiel and she nods.

"His name is Matthew and he's an engineer "

She says proudly. I roll my eyes.

"How old is this guy? "

"Old enough"

She says then walks out.

Mom just sighs. I'm downstairs, holding my bag and waiting for Kamo.

He rings the bell and Mom gets the door.

He looks nervous as he gets in. He's never really been in here.

It sucks having retired parents who treats you like a little kid. They're always around so I can't sneak him in.

"Good morning Mrs Rhodes, Ariel"

"What are your intentions with my daughter Kamogelo? "

My mom sounds scary right now so I feel for him.

"Let the poor boy be Trinny. Hi son"

That's my dad to the rescue.

"Kristine, what gives you the right to interfere? "

She's sulking. Dad kisses the top of her head.

"You Can go. We'll have dinner sometime then the questions can be asked "

He breathes out as soon as we're out of the house and I laugh.

"It's not funny"

I spank his butt and he groans. He hates it.

I just laugh again.

It hurts that people just don't comment. I love reading your comments guys and they make me just want to write.

Please do comment and react. The last insert is disappointing to be honest.

3

ARIEL

It's my turn to be nervous now as we arrive in the dusty streets of his township.

I'm scared because I also don't know what to expect. I know he's the first born in his family and that he has a younger sister my age and a little brother who's just five.

Kamo is eighteen by the way and doing his matric.

The car suddenly stops and my nerves go peak high because we've arrived.

I look out. There's too much noise in the area and what looks like a tarven in his yard. He never mentioned this.

He gets off and comes to open my door. I'm suddenly scared because I've never really been out of the suburbs.

"Baby, relax "

He says, kissing my cheek.

"Are you sure we're at the right place? "

I ask as I stare at all the drunk people in the yard.

"I know it's not what you expected. I'm sorry "

He sounds hurt.

"I don't mean it that way. You never mentioned that there's a tarven here"

He has my bag and we're walking in.

"I hate staying here Ariel but it's been my home all my life "

We go to the back of this tarven, earning looks from nosey drunkards.

I don't think a female can be safe here, judging by the characters.

At the back is their house. They have a big yard though because there's some free space even with both the house and tarven here.

My ears are buzzing from the noise.

"This is my home "

He says as he opens the door and allows me to get in.

It smells like home. There's a sweet flower scent in the air and I notice it's from the vase in the middle of the dining table.

"I have my own room which we'll share "

He says and I just blush. He might have seen me naked but we haven't taken our relationship there.

His house has a small intimate kitchen with a grey silver theme. I think that's my favourite part of the house even though I can't cook.

He takes me to his room and I'm in awe.

"So much white"

I say and he chuckles.

"Do you like it? "

I look at him and his eyes are sparkling. I nod

"Where's everyone? "

I'm surprised we're alone but it's probably after 12 now so they must be somewhere.

"They should be back anytime now. They went to town. My mom wants to impress you "

I chuckle.

"I feel special "

"You are"

He says then kisses my forehead. I'm wearing a short yellow summer dress with fluffy block heels. I love heels so much that it feels weird being in flats.

Unfortunately, school forces me to wear flats.

I sit on the bed. He sits next to me then just stares at me.

"What? "

I ask. His dark amber eyes are hypnotising. I feel myself run out of breath that I swallow imaginary spit.

"I love you "

He says then kisses me. We're disturbed by someone saying "eeuw"

I giggle on his neck.

"Don't you knock? "

He says, clearly annoyed.

"The door wasn't closed. I'm Palesa, his little sister "

She gives me her hand. She's lighter than him but they have some resemblance. We shake hands.

"Mom is calling you guys"

He takes my hand as we get out of his room.

His little brother runs to him and he picks him up, letting go of me.

The young boy is Thabo and his mom asks that I just call her Lee, short for Lerato.

"So, do you talk any language other than English? "

Asks her sister. I get a feeling they think I'm white.

"I... Uhm... Not really. "

"You're making my girlfriend uncomfortable. "

Kamo comes to my rescue.

We excuse ourselves after eating and I just want to sleep.

"Are you mad? "

He sounds a bit scared.

"No baby. I always feel drowsy after eating "

I kiss his lips in assurance.

He let's me rest, thank God.

I had a good weekend with him and his family. It was hard sleeping with him and not doing anything. I must admit that there were countless times where I almost gave it up but I didn't.

He gave me countless orgasms though and Cass better not hear this but, he taught me how to give him head

It was amazing really.

I almost want to cry as he kisses me goodbye. My driver is here already.

"Please don't cry "

He begs but he also sounds said. We hug for the last time and I get into the car.

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TSHIAMO

"Nattie "

She clicks her tongue and just looks away. I'm late again. I Skipped school the previous day since I was still in pain but I feel better now.

It's Tuesday and I'm late as usual.

"Natalie"

My voice is firmer now and she looks at me then gasps.

"What happened Tshiamo? Did she hurt you? "

She says this touching my bruised face.

Her hands are so soft, almost like a baby's.

"It's nothing I can't handle. I'm a man "

"Go to assembly. We'll talk at break "

She commands and I leave, slapping her ass in the process.

My stay at Pam's house was hell. I had to pretend to be happy and in love just so her father doesn't kill me.

I really don't know how I got myself into this hole and it sucks because I don't know how to get out.

Natalie buys me lunch and I don't complain. I pay fees in instalments every month end.

I chose this school because I want the best education for myself.

At least by the time I no longer get this grant, I would be done with my matrix.

"So what happened? "

She asks, now that we've settled down.

We're sitting a bit far from other learners. I wanted the privacy.

"Her father attacked me"

I did say I'm fairly honest.

"What? Report him! "

She's being dramatic so I laugh.

"Unfortunately, he's the captain so no case goes past him. It'll be a complete waste of time "

She gives me a hug. She must really care.

When she breaks it

Advertisement

I cup her face and stare into her eyes.

"My little monkey "

She clicks her tongue and pouts, I laugh then kiss her.

She doesn't respond at first so I bite her lip gently and then I have her mouth.

I break it when she moans in my mouth.

"You gave me a boner"

She giggles shyly and hides in my chest.

The rest of our lunch is lighter. I wonder how its going to work with her doing her matrix while I'm almost there.

'Fuck ' I snap at myself because we're not even dating.

I dread going home so I spend time with Natalie until she gets fetched.

I then walk slowly and breathe out when her car is not in sight.

If this wasn't home and I was maybe renting, I'd move elsewhere.

His father is not that smart so I doubt he'd find me.

Since I didn't go hustle, I catch up on my studies and read.

I'll practice maths and accounting some time during the week but for now, I'm on the theory subjects.

That is how the week goes for me : Studying forward.

I'm glad I haven't seen Pam but somehow when I come back after scoring two bags, she's here.

I swear I feel like turning back to leave but it's too late.

She's crying on my bed. It's more hysterical as I approach.

"What's wrong baby? "

Of course I have to act like I care but I seriously don't.

I sit down and she's on my chest.

"Talk to me please "

She still doesn't say anything. I'm surprised now and confused. She only does this when she's with her father.

"I'm so sorry Tshia. I'm sorry for how I've treated you. Please forgive me"

This is new. She's never apologised.

"It's OK. I forgive you "

I give her water after she calms down.

"What happened? "

I ask since I'm interested. I won't bother asking how she got into my house. Maybe it's time I changed my locks.

"I don't want to talk about it "

She puts the glass down and gets on top of me.

"Pam"

I plead but that falls on deaf ears as she starts kissing my neck.

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APHILILE

There's always a buzz around Valentine's that I don't get.

I don't understand why people get excited about a day that comes every year, much like with Christmas.

I mean now at school, they're suddenly couples who walk together after school and during lunch while holding hands.

Trust me, I find that hilarious and unnecessary. They're kids, what do they know about love?

I've never been in love. I've had about two boyfriends whom I left because I felt they had bigger minds than mine.

The last thing I wanted was to give my virginity on a silver platter all in the name of "I love you too"

That's what boys want these days. They want you to prove your love by opening your thighs just like they think if they give you money, they're showing you love.

Ma sometimes tells me how love was in her times and I realise how much things have changed.

I want what they had in their times, not this materialistic love that doesn't last.

I think the dictionary will define it as lust or infatuation.

Someone will love you because of your bigger butt or boob's or when it comes to me, because of my smooth skin, big eyes or bright smile.

"Wake up Aphilile"

She's shaking me but I don't feel like getting up.

It's Saturday and we're going to town. I'm not in the mood for it. My periods are approaching so I'm a little grumpy.

I was dreaming about my Romeo.

"Five more minutes "

I say, not even opening my eyes.

"Nyaa man. I don't want to spend the whole day in town "

I groan and get up. She's prepared bathing water for me already.

I make my bed then go to the bathroom where I take a bath.

She gives me a bowl of porridge and after I'm done with eating, we take our bags and leave.

My grandma never goes to one supermarket and buy her stuff there, we have to go from one supermarket to the other comparing prices and it's exhausting.

When she's finally made up her mind, we go to some fish and chips takeout place and I finally sit down.

After filling our stomachs, we take the multiple heavy plastics and make our way to the taxi rank.

I don't know what happens because some guy comes and bumps into us on purpose. I feel a little dizzy and almost fall but I'm able to maintain my balance.

"Are you OK Ma? "

"He took my bag. That was my last money and I still have to pay my stokvel premium "

She speaks with a heavy heart.

I just give her a hug.

Thank God she gave me our transport Money.

Whoever that was is a pro but his face is one I'll never forget.

Please do like and comment.

4

TSHIAMO

"Are you fucken crazy?! "

I shout at this boy. I know the grandma he stole from.

She stays about two streets from mine.

"I thought -"

"Voetsek! "

I snatch the bag from him.

I had been watching him and I never thought he'd go for the old. I specifically told him to target his victims. You can't steal from someone who's struggling.

The bag is not even one Pam would like.

"I'm sorry man. I just... "

"I told you to stop with the drugs, now you're shaking "

I slapped his head.

Tyro is someone who's had my back all my life and now I'm introducing him to the hustle yet failed at first attempt.

"You should consider something else. You'll get caught and that'll put me in trouble "

I say and he scratches his head.

"Eish "

MamNomsa is a woman who goes to a church I used to go to.

I was little then, probably eight or nine.

She's very warm hearted and my conscience can never hurt such a spirit.

We go around looking for jobs for Tyro since he quit school at Grade 9.

He's lucky because he finds one as a cleaner in a restaurant.

"Don't mess it up! "

I leave him since he's required to start immediately.

I take a taxi to MamNomsa's place. She probably won't remember me.

She's sweeping the yard as I get off the taxi. It's now around 6pm.

I'm having her bag with me. She stops what she's doing then comes to me.

"Can I help you? "

She asks, Her eyes fixed on the bag

"This belongs to you. I saw the boy who took it from you then followed him"

I swear she wants to cry as she pulls me in for a hug then kisses me all over the face.

She blesses me and even invites me in for tea and cookies.

Her granddaughter I assume had even come out.

"Who's this? "

She asks with her hand on her waist. Little drama queen I see.

"This is.. "

She looks at me

"Tshiamo "

"He brought my bag. We still have young people who care about their elders. Go make us tea and bring those cookies we bought "

She rolls her eyes as she goes inside the house and we follow her.

"So, are you in school and how old are you? "

The girl is looking at me intensely. I think she's trying to intimidate me with those eyes.

I want to laugh.

"I'm in school yes. I'm 16 and doing Grade 11"

She brings the tea and though I'm not a tea fan, I have it anyway while listening to Ma brag about God, Her granddaughter and complain about what has become of the world.

I'm let go when it's almost 8pm and the girl walks me out.

"You look so young "

I'm trying to break the ice.

"I'm actually older than you "

I nod. She turns back at the gate and I jog home.

I'm glad there's no Pam so I finally have my peace.

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APHILILE

Ma has been singing this boy's praises all day since he left.

Even when we left for church, she didn't stop talking about him.

I was just glad she got her things back and I believe it was all God.

Anyway it's Monday which means school for me.

I get up in time and prepare myself.

Ma has made oats so I dish up for myself. It's the Valentine's Day week and I wish it was a real holiday.

It's weird with Louis. He just disappears then surfaces when I least expect it. I last saw him that time with my birthday and two weeks later, he sits next to me while I'm having my lunch.

"Your cologne is intoxicating "

I say, not even turning to look at him.

I'm munching on my pie. I think it's time I started getting something else, I'll see though.

"Don't you want to get some food? Proper food? "

This is when I turn to stare at him.

"You didn't even greet and why is it that you always come out of the blue nje? "

"You missed me? "

I should have known he won't answer.

I roll my eyes at that. My mind is always overflowing , why would I miss him?

"I only see you when you come to me and it's always weird so nop "

I end up joining him for lunch because well

I need the food and he just buys junk.

Fries, coke and Russian rolls.

"Do you have a phone? "

He's looking at me and I notice that he's grown a little beard through the two weeks.

"I do. "

He's looking at me as he takes out his phone and gives it to me.

"And then? "

He rolls his eyes. I didn't think boys do that too. I always thought it's a girl thing.

"Put in your number. That way, I'll always be in contact "

OK, now I get it.

I put in my number. I don't really talk to a lot of people so he might help put my phone to good use.

I just take pictures most of the time.

"Are we friends now? I don't want to get ahead of myself "

It'd be nice to have a white friend though plus I love speaking my English.

"You're friend zoning me so quick? "

He bursts out in laughter when he sees the confusion on my face.

I don't know what he means by that.

"Yes, we're friends "

He says and I nod.

"You're weird. You laugh too loud for someone who always has a serious face. I've never seen you smile"

Then he grins and I laugh. Was that his attempt at smiling?

"Your teeth are so white "

"How old are you again? "

He asks and I shut my mouth. I probably sound stupid but I am a Grade 8 learner so my knowledge is limited

I don't even know why I'm conversing with a Grade 12 learner.

I look down.

"Lilly, I'll call you"

He walks away. I make way to my class when the siren rings.

I haven't had an encounter with Blondie in a while so I'm happy.

"Aphilile! "

Someone calls my name and I turn. It's a, girl I don't recognise.

She smiles at me. I just got out of class and am on my way to the gate so I can wait for my transport.

"Do I know you? "

I squint my eyes looking at her. She's my height but is a size bigger.

"We're in the same class"

Man, I wouldn't know.

"Really? "

"Yes. I'm Samantha but call me Sam or Sammy "

"Look Samantha, my transport is here. I'll see you in class tomorrow "

I don't wait for her to reply but walk to my ride.

These people always come early for me. I don't even get time to socialise.

I'm not much of a socialite but still.

The first thing I do when I get home after eating is my homework. I want to chill and watch soapies with no worries.

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ARIEL

"I need a favour "

Says Cass who just barged into my room.

"You may come in"

She rolls her eyes. I'm glad I'm done with my homework.

"I need you to go out with me on Friday "

I laugh because she must be joking. Going out with her is not part of my year's resolutions.

"I'm serious. Stop laughing "

I fold my arms and look at her.

"Why would I go out with you? You'll leave me alone! "

"It's at Matthew's house. He's having something"

"You Still don't need me to come with for that. You can just tell mom and she'll understand "

She laughs like I've just said something hilarious. Maybe I missed something.

"Can you stop being uptight for once? And I don't care about mom"

Now I'm confused.

"What's going on? "

"Just come, you'll see"

She winks at me then leaves the room.

"I don't like this "

Kamo says after I tell him about Cass and her plans.

We're sitting in the boot of the car and having fries.

It's after school.

My man's pride doesn't allow him to have me pick him up so we always meet at an agreed venue.

"Why not? "

"Your twin doesn't like me baby. This sounds like a set up"

I kiss his cheek.

"Do you trust me? "

He nods.

"Then you have nothing to worry about "

I don't have dance today so I can spend as much of my time with him as I want.

"I just don't like this"

"The idea of me going out without you? I promise you that nothing is going to happen "

He sighs

"Just call me if you feel uncomfortable or anything. Please "

"I will daddy "

I giggle at that. He cups my face then kisses me shortly.

Friday comes sooner than I had thought and yesterday, Cassiel had forced me to go shopping with her so we also got clothes for tonight.

Kamo doesn't stop texting and calling. I've just showered and about to wear my dress when he calls again.

"Baby"

I say with a few giggles.

"Have you left yet? What are you wearing?"

I chuckle. This is so sweet.

"I'm not dressed yet. I've just showered "

"I'll leave you to it then. Send me a picture "

"I will. I love you"

He breathes out.

"I love you too Ariel"

I hang up and finally get dressed.

The dress is a boob tube and tight. It's just under my knees and I wear it with no bra.

It's white and made of cotton.

I take a picture for Kamo and send it to him.

I don't even know what to do with my curls.

Cassiel comes to the rescue and also does my face.

I wear red heels and take a purse.

"What kind of party is this? "

I ask as we're in the car that was sent to fetch us. Good thing I have my driver and Kamo in speed dial in case something happens.

"It's a classy party"

She says, rolling her eyes and sipping on the champagne.

It's held at a five star hotel.

I thought he was just an engineer but I don't ask anything.

"We've arrived "

I send the text to Kamo whom I'm suppose to keep posted about every move. I don't mind though.

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5

KAMOGELO

She's out there, having the time of her life and I'm here missing her.

I should have let her stay. She begged me to stay but I refused to be selfish.

I'll be spending most of my time at winter matrix camp so we'd still hardly spend time together.

I'm sitting on my bed while going through her instagram. She's posted so many pictures and her smile is one I cannot miss. It's clear she's enjoying herself without me.

"Shame, you look depressed "

She snatches my phone from me and I let her.

Ariel went on a family vacation. What I hate is that the Avery guy is there and I'm the one who told her to take him.

It's a guy she met at the party Cassiel took her to and they became friends. No guy would be comfortable with his girl having guy friends but she seems fond of him and I only want to make her happy.

I was happy when she came to spend the night with me that night and waking up to her sweet snoring warmed my heart.

Her twin sister is a bad girl and I always fear her influencing her badly.

"I love Ariel, I do but dear brother, she's out of your league "

Palesa says as she gives me back my phone.

The camp starts tomorrow and I haven't even packed.

"Not you too "

"I'm just saying. She's just 16 and well, they're at some island now having fun. She wears the best and most expensive clothes, goes to the most expensive private school. Girls like her want to be showered with gifts"

"Ariel is not like that "

There's no doubt about that one.

"Maybe for now. This might be an adventure to her you know, dating a normal guy"

She pats my back then leaves.

We're approaching our one year anniversary so this can't possibly be an adventure to her or could it be?

I highly doubt. In fact, I refuse to believe it.

I decide to keep busy by packing my suitcase. We'll spend two weeks at the university so I have to ensure I have enough clothes.

After that, I go join the family for our Sunday lunch.

"Are you ready for tomorrow? "

Mom asks and I nod. They'll be a bus at school which will drive us to the venue.

"You don't seem excited. Is everything OK? "

And before I can answer, Palesa beats me to it.

"He misses his girlfriend "

"I still wonder how you got that girl. I love that she's humble and not like your typical rich girls "

"How did you meet? "

My sister asks and I take a journey down memory lane.

She was standing outside the public toilets looking lost. It was at the mall and I had a holiday job.

"Is everything OK? "

"I need... You work here? "

I nodded.

"Can you please go buy me pants at cotton on? I had an accident "

She was biting her nails while bashing her long eyelashes. She looked cute.

She gave me her card and off I went.

When I came back, she took out a couple of notes to "thank me" but I declined and asked for her number instead.

The rest as they say is history.

"Beautiful "

I laugh. They're so dramatic.

In the morning, I wake up early and take a bath.

I haven't heard from Ariel since Saturday and it's Monday. I've been sending her texts but she hasn't replied. I'm hoping everything is OK.

I bid my family farewell then go take a taxi to school.

I'm going to another province so this stresses me. I won't see her for another two weeks since she's been gone for a week.

I try her again on the bus and still nothing.

I just sigh, put on headphones that she got me for my birthday and listen to music. It'll calm my soul.

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ARIEL

I've been missing Kamo like crazy. We'll be here until the end of the holidays so I can't wait for that.

Avery has been trying to cheer me up and there's also Aaliyah, Amber, Ariene Karmen, and Zayn my cousins.

It's just us the kids here with my parents who seem to be in their own world.

I'm enjoying it though.

Avery is going to teach me to surf and I'm kind of nervous.

"Are you sure I won't drown? I'm still too young "

He chuckles and that doesn't calm my nerves.

"I'll be there and you can swim so I doubt you'll drown"

"What if a wave overthrows me or something? "

I'm actually panicking now and he's forced to hold me.

"You'll be fine. Let's go"

He takes my hand and we walk to the water.

"If I die... "

He chuckles as I'm pointing my index finger at him

He shows me how it's done and soon I'm enjoying riding the waves.

I've always been a fast learner so it doesn't take me long to catch how its done.

Of course I'm not doing it like a pro but I'm proud of myself. I'm doing good for a beginner.

"I told you you had nothing to worry about "

He says as we make our way out of the water.

"It was amazing. This can even cure depression "

"The water does have a serene feeling "

I send Kamo pictures. It's Wednesday and I haven't spoken to him in a while. He must think I've forgotten about him.

"Oh, you're still alive? "

He replies and I can tell he's mad.

"I'm sorry baby for going AWOL "

"I was so worried, thinking something happened to kgante you're enjoying yourself and going surfing. Ke setlaela NEH "

OK he's more pissed than I thought.

"I hardly had time for my phone but I promise it won't happen again "

"I have classes early in the morning so I'm sleeping "

He goes offline and suddenly I can't see his last seen or profile picture. I try calling him but it takes me straight to voicemail.

He just blocked me.

Cassiel just throws herself into my room. I can't believe her.

She came with some guy named Khuhle. I wonder what happened to Matthew but you can never know with her. My parents have given up on her.

"Go away "

I'm crying while holding my phone.

You'd swear he just broke up with me.

"Is it Kamo? "

"As if you care"

I put on my earphones which she removes.

"What? "

I'm really mad now because I'm hurt and she's not making me feel any better.

"We're going out. It's some sight seeing then to the club aren't you coming? "

"No"

I can't believe she's still here. I need my space.

"Come on, you can't do Avery like that "

"I said no Cassiel! Just leave me the hell alone! "

She doesn't say anything but just walks out.

I just cry my eyes out until I fall asleep.

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APHILILE

"What's going on? Why won't you eat? "

I shrug

"I'm not hungry "

She comes to sit next to me and feels my head.

"Are you sick? Coming down with flu? "

It's July so I understand her worry.

"I'm fine"

"You never finish your food Lilly. This has been happening for a while and I'm worried. What's wrong? You don't even eat your chicken and I know how much you love your meat"

"I don't have appetite. "

I'm feeling exhausted yet it's just around 1pm.

I'm actually glad schools have closed and I don't have to wake up early and go to that hell hole.

It's a lazy Thursday for me.

"Hai if this continues, I'll take you to the doctor. You can't die on me"

I inwardly roll my eyes because she's exaggerating.

Lou calls me just after I've bathed.

We're meeting today and I made sure to put in the effort.

I don't have much winter clothes but I can put together a good outfit.

I'm wearing black high-waisted pants with a khaki trench coat and sneakers.

My hair is just in a lazy bun and I've put on some eyeshadow, mascara and lipstick.

It's around 5pm.

Ma went to church. It's a women's thing.

He's parked right at my gate and after putting the key where we usually leave it, I walk to his car and let myself in.

He pecks my lips.

"You look amazing "

I smile.

"Thank you "

How this came to be.. Well, it was one time during February when he came out of nowhere as usual.

I was with Sam, who's now become my friend and she excused herself.

He sat next to me and out of the blue asked if I can kiss.

"Really? "

"It's just yes or no, simple "

I didn't say anything for a while.

"I can but why? "

It was weird having my friend ask me that.

"Friends kiss you know "

"Really? "

He nodded with a grin.

He brought his face closer to mine and kissed me. It felt weird for me, kissing a white guy that is.

"You're better than I expected "

"Oh? Thanks "

He chuckled. From there, we'd kiss but I doubted it's how friends did it.

We ended up dating.

"I still can't believe you have black parents "

He chuckles as he lowers the volume on the radio.

"Happens when you're adopted "

"Makes sense "

He laughs again.

"I missed you. Did you not miss me? "

He asks as we get out of the car.

"I did. So much "

He pins me against the car and kisses me, with passion and leaves me panting.

"Are you alone? "

"Yes"

He says and I know exactly what that means. It doesn't take long before I'm screaming his name as he thrusts into me

This is something he likes and have gotten me to like it too. We do it everywhere and whenever we're together. All around the house, in the shower, on the floor, in the kitchen counter, the couches, on the wall standing and even in his car.

Once, we did it at school in the toilets.

How that started, is a story for another day.

"Please don't do that. My breasts are painful "

He's just about to suck them when I stop him.

"Why? "

We've barely caught our breath. Sam was right when she said white people are like porn stars. You wouldn't think she's 14 when you hear her talking.

I didn't know porn until she once showed me and got me curious.

"I don't know. "

He just kisses my forehead and soon, I've fallen asleep in his arms.

6

APHILILE

"I want to go home"

"Baby, I'm sorry there's no juice but we can go buy it. You know that "

He tries to hold my hands but I yank him off.

"I don't care about the juice. I just want to go or should I walk there? "

I'm folding my arms to my chest now.

"I'll take you. It's fine "

I'm dressed up now and going through my phone.

He comes back and goes to the kitchen then comes to me with a plate.

"Mom cooked "

"I'm cool "

He sighs.

"Lilly, what's going on? "

"I don't like how it smells "

He touches my forehead like my grandma did and I roll my eyes.

I would know if I am sick. I just don't like food like I used to now and I don't know why.

He goes away and comes with a fruit salad this time. I take it and eat with him watching me.

After I'm done, we can finally leave.

It's already late and I don't want Ma worrying.

"Are you sure again? "

He asks again as he's parked in my street.

"I'm fine. I thought you felt that when you put your hand on my forehead "

I roll my eyes again.

"What's with the mood swings? "

"I'm just going to get out of here before you insult me more "

I open the door and just go, not even turning to look back.

I hear him call my name but refuse to give him any attention.

I don't know why but I'm mad at him.

It's not long before I arrive and I slept immediately.

I'm woken up by Ma in the morning. She doesn't stop shaking me until I open my eyes.

"Ma? "

"Get up. I'm taking you to the doctor "

She leaves before I can say anything. Her tone told me that trying to argue with her would be a bad idea.

I get up then go to the bathroom and take a bath.

I don't know why but I'm feeling a bit under the weather.

I get dressed in tracksuits and even wear a beanie on my head.

Ma doesn't seem to be in a better mood either.

She gives me a bowl of soft porridge.

"Eat then we'll leave "

I pour milk then start eating.

When I'm done, we leave and none says anything to the other.

We had to wait since we didn't make an appointment but not for long.

"Good morning. How can I help you? "

Dr Nkosi asks and I look at Ma since she's the one who dragged me here.

I don't like the expression on her face. It's scary.

"I'd like a pregnancy test for my granddaughter "

It seems difficult for her to say that and even takes minutes before what she said registers in my brain.

I don't know why it's so slow.

"What? A pregnancy what? "

I ask, looking at Ma who's just staring at Dr Nkosi.

"Are you sure? "

She asks Ma who just nods.

It seems my consent is not needed here.

"Alright. Uhm Aphi, go pee in this and come back "

She gives the small little stick to me and I do as I'm told.

Ma even follows me and gets inside the toilet with me.

This is so uncomfortable and just so scary.

I do as I was told and we go back.

"Two lines mean you're pregnant and one means you're not "

My heart is beating out of my chest now.

I almost faint as I saw the two lines which are very clear.

Ma literally dragged me out of her office and when we were outside, she started hitting me with her bag.

"Oa robalana? Oa feba? Sies "

I just cry as she hits me because I have a feeling more awaits me when we get home.

She's cursing and swearing at me with people watching.

She only stops when she's exhausted and after catching her breath, I'm dragged outside the yard where we catch a taxi.

"Vandag, you'll know me. I've done everything for you and this is how you repay me? Otlo go nyela! "

I hear gasps in the taxi and I just sob. She pulls me by the hand out of the taxi at our stop and when we get inside the house, she goes to take a belt.

I just cry before she even whips me. This like some kind of Deja Vu except this time, I'm at fault.

Oh Louis, what have you done to me?

.

TSHIAMO

"I'm fine. Just stop fussing! "

I sigh, realising she didn't deserve that.

"I'm sorry baby. I just... This sucks"

I'm in hospital with a broken leg and arm. At least I still have my handsome face.

So

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it happened one time when I was with Natalie in my house.

We were being our naughty selves and no, we haven't had sex yet.

It was after I came from the provincials and my dream of going to nationals finally came true.

This happened last month, June.

Anyway, Pam just rocked up from nowhere and found us in a compromising position.

She charged for Natalie.

"My man? My fucken man? "

She was acting crazy. She went to Nattie, pulled her by the hand and because one of her goons was holding me, I couldn't do anything.

I watched as she beat the hell out of my girlfriend and I felt the anger built up in me and my heart was filled with nothing but hate for her.

Of course it didn't stop there because here I am right now with a broken leg and an arm.

I just came to change the cast on my leg.

My arm was healing faster though so I had an arm carrier for support.

"Why are you still with me? "

We're seating in the benches outside. We're still in the hospital.

"I love you, OK? "

"This love is the reason you had to cut your hair. It's this love that gave you those scars in your body "

I'm just one fucked up being and Pam just won't stop.

I don't know what she wants from me because it can't be sex.

We haven't had it in three months.

"I know that one day all of this will be over and we'll be happy "

I shake my head.

That just sounds like a dream. A dream is also what nationals is for me.

I don't know if I'll even be able to run after this.

I have to use a crutch to move. At least the right hand is the one that's broken and so is the left leg.

It makes things easier for me.

"But baby, we can't live like this"

I kiss her cheek then lay her head on my chest.

"I know. I know but we have to be patient. What are your plans for next year? "

"I'm taking a gap year "

Now she's being crazy which is why I remove her head so she can face me

"And why the hell would you do that? "

She bites her lip then exhales.

"I'm not sure what I want to do. The last thing I want is to end up changing courses every year at varsity "

That actually makes sense.

"OK baby. "

We take separate taxis to where we stay and getting to my house, I feel like running.

Pam's car is parked in the yard.

Remind me again why I haven't changed locks? As if that would help.

"What are you doing here?"

I haven't seen her since I woke up in hospital after what her goons did to me.

"You're still mad at me? "

"I hate you "

She laughs like its a joke.

"Don't try me Tshiamo. This is nothing. Be a good boy and sit down while I dish up for you "

"I'm going to rest. Doctor's orders"

I need a plan. I really need a plan to get rid of her once and for all.

.

ARIEL

"I'm going back home"

I announce to my parents. They're cuddling on the couch.

"Why? "

Mom asks. My eyes are still puffy and Kamo still won't get back to me.

I can't handle it anymore. His phone is still off and I've been sending texts since Wednesday. It's Friday now.

"I don't want to be here anymore "

"Are you saying we should cut this vacation short because you don't want to be here? "

I can tell I'm about to receive a mouthful from my mom but no, I just can't.

I have to put my foot down.

"My flight has been booked. "

"What's going on baby? Why do you want to leave? I've seen how unhappy you've been these past days "

I sigh and sit down.

"Kamo is mad at me and I can't handle it. I can't have fun while my heart and mind isn't here "

My mom laughs.

I can't believe she finds this funny.

"Kristen, talk to your kid. I'm out of here"

She stands and walks out.

I'm left with dad

"Why are you allowing a boy to ruin this family vacation? "

"Dad, you don't understand "

He chuckles.

"Right. What I do know is that we came here as a family and we're leaving as a family. Now, go call my wife "

"Why are you being so mean? " I ask as my tears fall.

"Because you're acting like a spoiled brat Ariel. Whatever you're going through with that boy, you'll sort it out when we go back. This vacation is not just about you "

"You're hurting me " I even have hiccups.

"You're allowing him too much control over your emotions. Just be a teenager. Go clubbing with your twin. He's probably going on like you don't exist while you're here acting like someone died" I storm off their suite.

This has been a waste of my time.

I grab my laptop when I'm in my room and cancel my flight.

I'll have fun like dad says. He knows better.

I mean I've been trying with Kamo and I can't mope around forever.

7

TSHIAMO

"Where have you been? "

I ask as I've woken up and she's still here.

"Around. Anyway, I came to tell you that I'm going to varsity "

That sounds like good news or is it?

"Congratulations "

"I know you're happy that I'll be away but that doesn't mean you're rid of me. I'll be keeping an eye on you "

As if I care.

"So, which one? "

I ask, trying to sound interested but the bottom line is, she's going away.

I'm going to be free even though it won't be for long.

It doesn't matter to me, as long as I'll get a break from her.

"DUT"

Great, it's far enough.

"So, you're registering for second semester? "

She nods.

"Though you and I will spend a week there before schools open.
"

"I can't. I'm injured "

Does she give up? No.

"We're taking a plane and stop being a baby, it's just a broken leg "

I think it's time I went to church because I could do with some good luck.

She's forcing me to go there with her where I'll have to have sex with her.

I hope she finds someone there though. This is so not on.

She gives me a plate of food that I know she didn't cook. She's the worst in that department.

I'm hungry and I also need to drink my pills.

On Sunday, I'm up early for church. Early as in around 7am.

There's no trace of Pam and I can finally breathe.

There's a box on the table when I'm done and it has a little note stuck on it.

"We'll be able to keep in contact. I've already saved my number, Love Pam"

Great.

I don't even check what kind of phone it is.

I make myself some breakfast. She bought groceries.

Anyway, I make my way to church. I have to walk slow to avoid straining my leg and delaying my recovery.

It's been such a long since I was at a church that it felt strange.

I feel lighter though and maybe I can make this a regular thing. I just fear my sins weighing on my spirit.

"Tshiamo, it's nice to see you here"

She gives me a hug.

"Eish yah. It was an amazing service. Where's your granddaughter? "

She sighs.

"Weitse thinking about her makes my blood pressure rise. That child... She's not even a child, mosadi oo is a disappointment. She's pregnant ,nagana and she's only doing Grade 8"

That's a lot to take in and it takes me a while to digest everything.

I'm walking her to her house and thank God she's old, we're walking slowly.

"Grade 8? How old is she? "

I remember her saying that she's older than me so I'd like to know.

"17. Tota I don't know what I'll do . "

"Who's the father? "

She shrugs. Poor grandma.

"I'm not speaking to her. Ke gore when I see her, I just want to ... Tjeses "

She looks stressed.

"What happened to you? "

"I had an a minor accident. I'm thankful I survived "

Unfortunately

she has enough on her plate and I can't start laying out my life troubles for her.

"I have an ointment you can use. It'll help the wound heal faster "

"Dankie o'lady"

She invites me for lunch so I go to her house.

Her granddaughter is sleeping on the couch. She looks like a mess, not the cheeky girl I saw the last time.

"Tsoga! You're sleeping here instead of going to find a job so you can support that child since you decided to get pregnant "

She wakes up startled. Her eyes are swollen, like she cried herself to sleep.

"Eish this is what I have to deal with "

Now I'm torn between the two. The girl needs support and her grandma is also in distress.

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APHILILE

It's funny how my life has turned out.

My grandma and I have become strangers. I'm now recipient of her bitter words and I feel like I'm in a corner with no one to turn to.

She's taken my phone so I can't even call Louis.

How will he take this? I wonder.

What if he blames me? I mean, I wish I knew that something like this can happen.

No one told me and Louis and I just got to it.

A baby? I can't imagine. My grandma now wants me to find a job.

Does this mean I'll have to leave school?

I dish up for them and go sit outside.

It would have been another story had I not cooked.

"Let's go for a walk "

I look up and it's my grandma's friend

He gives me his hand and helps me onto my feet.

I think a walk could do. It's around 5pm and that's just a wild guess.

"You don't seem like someone who's sexually active "

I turn to look at him.

"How does a sexually active person look? "

He chuckles.

"Don't you know condoms? You're 17 for heaven's sake "

"Condoms? "

I've seen them on TV but really, I'm clueless. I just broke my virginity and Louis didn't mention such.

"It's like a rubber and prevents the likes of HIV, STIs and pregnancy. Don't they teach you that ka L. O? "

I shake my head. I feel so stupid.

"Who's the father? Does he know? "

I shake my head. At least he's calm unlike my grandma.

"I'm going to tell him when school opens, if I'll be allowed to go"

"Your grandma will come around. Just give her time "

I walk back feeling a little better. At least he wasn't judging me.

I'm welcomed by a slap on the face. I don't have the strength to cry.

"Go wash those clothes in the basket. I see doing everything for you made you chase boys "

Did I have to be slapped though?

Anyway, I go take the basket with tears falling down my cheeks.

I'm back to this and it's all my fault.

I just have to embrace it.

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KAMOGELO

The camp was amazing and very fruitful for me

There's no doubt that I'll do well in the coming preparatory exams.

I lost my phone and now, I don't know how I am going to get a new one.

Ariel must think I've forgotten about her.

Even though we had a mini fight but I still love her.

I didn't even have money to get her a gift for our anniversary.

I hope she understands.

I don't even know how I lost my phone. I was mad at her, switched it off then suddenly, I can't find it.

My sister hugs me like I've been gone for centuries.

I hug her back though because I appreciate the love.

"I hope you behaved "

I say as we sit down in the lounge.

She rolls her eyes and giggles

"I did. I was the one taking care of the house "

"Do you have airtime? "

I ask and she nods.

"Why? "

"I need to call Ariel. I lost my phone on the first week and she probably thinks I'm still mad at her "

She gives me her phone and I dial Ariel's tens.. They're back from the vacation too and I miss her.

I haven't seen her in almost a month and I miss her.

"Hello? "

"Baby, it's me "

She doesn't reply. I know she's mad at me

"I wasn't ignoring you. I lost my phone on that Wednesday. I just came back now, can we meet? "

She sighs

"You're not lying? "

She asks.

"No. Of course not. I missed you OK and I just want to see you, feel you and just kiss you till you lose your breath"

She giggles on the other end

"Can I come to you? "

She asks and my heart dances.

"Yes, you can "

"I'm coming "

She hangs up before I can even declare my love.

"Thank you "

I say as I give my sister back her phone and she smiles.

I'm a bit tired but I really want to see Ariel.

I only found my sister when I came so my mom probably left with my little brother.

There's a knock on the door and I know it's her.

Palesa probably let her in. I'm in my room and I almost fell asleep waiting.

"Come in"

She gets in then closes the door and leans her back on it.

She looks at me, like its our first time on a, date and she's nervous.

"Come here please. I missed you "

The minute I can reach for her, I make her sit on me and just kiss her.

Then she grinds on me as my dick grows in size. She's torturing me and I feel like taking her right here and now.

I break the kiss and we're both breathing heavily

"Hi"

I say

"Hi"

She says

"I love you "

I say as I kiss her forehead.

She blushes.

I'm happy because I know we're good.

.

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???

Do you guys think Ma will come around?

Is Pam really gone ?

I'd like to hear your views. ??

8

APHILILE

I can't help but feel like everyone knows.

It's cold yes and I'm hoping this Jersey is big enough to hide my shame.

For the first time since I got here, I'm glad I'm in school because I'd rather be here than deal with Ma's wrath.

She's been spitting venom and I feel it won't end.

It's been three weeks or two if I'm not mistaken and I was hoping she'd be used to this by now.

I'm also not used to it but there's nothing I can't do except accept the situation.

I have. I mean I'm aware that there's a life growing inside of me and it scares me.

Who wouldn't be scared? This is something big.

Soon, I'll be fat with a gigantic stomach and I don't want to mention the big nose

I saw it with my stepmother and that's more scary.

Will I have to wear makeup to school? I mean I've been experimenting with it and I can contour and highlight. Maybe those skills will come in handy sooner than I thought.

I'm pulled by Louis into a corner. My mind wasn't here... Isn't here and he just sort of brought me back to life.

"What the fuck is going on with you? Why is your phone off? And who was that boy with the crutches that I saw you with the other day? "

I can't reply vocally but instead, I sob.

My heart is too heavy. I'm glad we're in a secluded space.

He gives me a needed hug and I cry into his chest. We're almost the same height and I think with a pair of heels, we'll be.

"What's going on baby? "

He's cupping my face and staring into my eyes.

"I... I'm so sorry "

I say, trying not to sob.

"What's going on? "

I have to tell him. I know I have to.

"We went to the clinic. My grandma took me and I... I'm pregnant "

I say the last part as a whisper and look down.

He let's my face go and mumbles a "fuck"

I'm still looking down and now fiddling with my fingers.

There's silence for a while and I wonder what he's thinking.

"This is all my fault "

He finally says and I look at him.

"It is? "

He sighs and runs his hand through his hair.

"I should have known better. I mean, you were new at this and I... I'm the one who knows a lot and I should have been safe.

I'm so sorry baby "

He gives me a hug and the siren rings. He kisses me shortly then we make our way to the assembly.

I'm still required to work and I'm grateful I get to continue with school.

Ma says my fees have been paid for five years so I'm one lucky woman. If it wasn't because of that, I would have been forced to drop out.

"Is everything OK? You look like you haven't been sleeping nice for a while "

Sam asks as we're having our lunch.

How can I sleep when my Grandma is treating me this way?

I do everything in the house and she always complains.

I'm even surprised that she allows me food.

It's so hard with the way things are in that house.

"Just stuff happening at home. It'll pass"

Or so I hope.

I'm so stupid though, it sucks.

"I'm here for you, no matter what. It's what friends are for"

"Thank you "

She gives me a hug in assurance.

I don't see Lou after school and I end up getting on my transport.

I'm surprised to see a familiar car in the yard when I get off the taxi.

My heart is beating too fast. I don't know what's happening.

I almost faint when I see Louis and his parents on my grandma's couch.

My throat gets dry. The look Ma gives me is enough to make me want to run.

"Tlaya. These... People are here because of you "

Louis has changed into casual.

I greet and sit down with my bag on my lap.

Mrs Vuma speaks first.

"Our son told us about Lilly being pregnant and we're here on that regard "

" Ngwana wa gago o tshotse borweetsana jwa setlogolo sa me. He has to pay for that and for impregnating her" (Your son took my granddaughter's virginity)

Mr Vuma clears his throat.

"Of course mme, we have to do right by you and by your daughter. My son takes full responsibility of what he's done, more especially since he's the oldest and mature between the two "

His voice oozes dignity and respect.

"Good. He has to stand by her side and Support her because I'm not about to become a woman's pillar. I wasn't there when she was facing the tiles so I won't be held responsible. "

She gets up after saying that and I wipe the tears which had managed to fall.

"I'm really sorry Lilly "

Louis says but I've read somewhere that it takes two to tango.

.

TSHIAMO

The beginning of August and still no Pam.

I don't want to relax though. That girl can just spring up from nowhere.

My leg is healing pretty well. I even took off the cast but it's still not completely healed.

The doctor is certain that it'll completely be healed by the end of the month.

Pam and her father are the ones paying the doctor.

To think I once thought of Pam as a sweet girl but it's true that looks can be deceiving.

"Babe? Can we talk? "

Natalie says as she sits next to me.

We haven't got together since the whole thing with Pam.

I did end up going with her and I'm still being watched.

I feel like my house isn't my own now because literally every move I make she knows and even who visits

This is why Natty hasn't visited.

She also fears a repeat of last time -her being buttered.

"I miss you too baby "

I kiss her lips and she giggles.

"This is serious "

It's Monday and during our lunch time.

"So you don't miss me? "

She bites her lip in frustration.

"I miss you. Tshiamo, be serious please "

"Fine. Talk"

I take her hand into mine then look at her.

"I... I told my father everything. About us.. You... He's Willing to help "

She says then stares back at me.

"Pam said the same thing but took advantage of my poverty. Now I'm indebted to her and her father till God knows when"

She'll have to forgive me if I'm harsh but it's the truth.

"How about you meet up with him then decide? "

I sigh.

This might not hurt.

"You must really love me "

She smiles.

"More than you think. You're also my friend and I don't want you suffering "

I kiss her cheek.

"Thank you "

I leave with her after school and we take a taxi to town where we'll be meeting her father.

I don't know what to expect really but I'm willing to give him a shot.

We're meeting him at an Indian restaurant that Natty tells me it's owned by her mother.

He's surprisingly black but I should have known because of her surname.

"Good Afternoon sir "

We shake hands then sit down.

"Baby

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go help your mom in the kitchen "

She gets up and leaves me with her scary father. I can't even look him in the eye.

"Tshiamo, right? "

He has a scary deep voice. It's one that makes you think of any bad thing you've done.

"Yes sir "

He puts away the newspaper he's been holding and takes off his reading glasses.

"My daughter has taken an interest in you. I always wonder what you teenagers think you know about love. She had herself beaten because of you and it seems this is a couple's thing. Is this what you youth call relationship goals? "

He's very serious and I want to laugh at his rhetoric question.

It seems he's a man with a sense of humour, though his face says different.

"How did you get yourself involved with Captain Magagula? "

I sigh.

"Through his daughter, Pam "

He nods. It's hard to read this man.

"I'm doing this for my daughter and not only her, for your mother "

OK, now I'm confused.

"My mother? "

"Yes and I'll leave it there. You need to tell me everything, including what hold they have over you "

Hope. This gives me hope.

.

ARIEL

"What's going on? "

My mom asks after just barging into my room.

"It's nothing "

She closes the door and comes to sit next to me on the bed.

"You haven't been going to dance. They called me. They're worried "

It sucks being under 18. Your parents are informed of everything.

"I can't... I can't stand for long "

"Are you in pain? "

I shake my head.

"I feel it at night. Back pain and sometimes I'm dizzy and I vomit "

She gives me a look.

"Are you not pregnant? "

I chuckle and shake my head.

"Kamo and I haven't done it mom. Geez "

"I'm just checking baby. You should understand "

I smile.

"I do but if we were to do it, we'd use protection you know "

She looks up like she's saying a prayer then looks at me.

"You kids suddenly think you can talk filter free With me"

I just laugh.

"Maybe we're a little like you "

She holds my hand.

"We have to see Josh if this continues. "

I nod.

"But I'm fine for now. I'm managing "

"We're going to see him. We can't take this lightly baby and you love dancing and this is not on"

I sigh

"I'm scared mama. What if it's something serious? "

She squeezes my hand lightly.

"I'll be with you. Your dad, Cassiel, Pink, Kristen, -"

"I get it mom"

She lightly slaps my head.

"This is not funny baby "

"I know mama. We'll go on Friday "

She gives me a hug.

"Good baby "

I'm dreading this day.

I've been in and out of hospital my whole life that at 16, they scare the shit out of me.

9

ARIEL

"I'm just going to lie down for a while. I feel dizzy"

"And the doctor? "

Kamo asks. He came home with me since I prefer him to accompany me to Josh.

My parents might meet me there though.

I was suppose to come and shower but I can't.

"I'm really worried about you baby "

I yawn as I'm nodding.

"Wake me up in an hour "

I throw myself on my bed and just nap.

He wakes me up after an hour and instead of a shower, I take a bath.

I couldn't eat today since I was vomiting and just nauseous.

"Please take out some clothes for me "

I don't have any strength, probably because I vomited everything I ate today.

He takes out a dress and a denim jacket.

It's still chilling outside.

We leave after and he holds my hand as we're in the car.

"I'm too young to die"

I blurt out. He squeezes my hand.

"You're not going to die"

Friday came sooner than I would have preferred.

We arrived at Josh's office sooner than I thought.

"Are you OK baby? "

He cups my face and I nod, biting my shaky lip.

I'm scared. I'm not looking forward to this.

We get out of the car and I inhale and exhale deeply for a couple of times.

Josh smiles at us. Mom and dad are already seated.

"Hi"

I say and Kamo also greets.

We sit down.

"How can I help? "

Asks Josh as he's looking at me.

"I've been having back pain that gets stronger at night. I also tend to feel dizzy and I've been vomiting everything I eat today. I'm also feeling nauseous "

"Those symptoms are very suspicious "

He says giving me the eye.

"Baby, is there something you want to tell us? "

Dad asks and I hear panic in his voice.

"I've already told mom that I'm not having sex, geez "

He exhales in relief.

"Good"

I roll my eyes.

Kamo chuckles.

"Given your medical history, I'll have to book you for an MRI scan. That will give me Accurate images of your spine, spinal cord and nerves. "

Josh says and that just sounds too serious for me.

"Is it necessary? "

I ask and he nods.

"That way, I'll know what we're dealing with. Don't worry though, it might not be anything serious "

I nod with my teary eyes.

I know if I were to open my mouth, I'd cry.

"Are you saying you don't know what's wrong Joshua? "

My mom asks and he just looks at her.

"Come on Monday, 9am sharp. This is the letter you'll provide at school "

I take the letter and we all walk out.

"Ice cream? "

Kamo asks since he knows it always cheers me up.

"Not today babe. I wish he'd given me some pills To Help with the nausea "

He just gives me a hug that makes me cry.

"Please don't leave me no matter what "

He brushes my back as I'm crying.

"I promise I'll never leave you baby "

He kisses my forehead after I've calmed down and we go to the car.

I'm driven home then I ask that he drives Kamo home.

"Everything OK? "

Cassiel asks and I just nod then make my way upstairs.

Suddenly my feet feel too heavy to lift but I do it anyway.

I don't have a good feeling about this.

I really don't.

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APHILILE

"Dear diary

Today I woke up feeling a little better. Who am I kidding? This baby and Louis are the reason I haven't taken the easy way out yet. He's been so supportive. I love him.

I really do. It's our third month in this pregnancy and he's already obsessed. I hate that I always want to do it. It's what got me pregnant in the first place but I can't help it. "

"Instead of writing

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you should be cleaning. This house isn't going to clean itself "

I put my diary away, making sure to lock it and get out of my room.

Nothing has changed. I've gotten used to it.

I can say I've just embraced the situation.

I clean the house and damn pregnancy because tears are just falling down my cheeks.

I'm always crying as if this is not something I'm used to.

Ma hates me and I have myself to blame.

I get scared though. Like what if I start showing?

It's bad enough that people don't like me more because I'm dating Louis so I can imagine the words they will throw at me.

"I'm going to a stokvel meeting. I better find food cooked"

I don't say anything as she just leaves.

I'm tired but I decide to cook first because I know I'll be woken up by a belt if I don't.

There's a knock on the door shortly after Ma has left.

"What are you doing here? "

I shout at him but he kisses me instead.

I'm breathless and feeling sticky down there when he breaks it.

"I missed you my love "

He kisses my cheek.

"What are you cooking? "

He doesn't wait for me to answer as he opens the pots.

"Smells good. How's my big baby and unborn baby? "

I did mention that he's excited.

"We're good. Ma will kill us if she finds you here"

He huffs.

"I'm like her white son-in-law "

I laugh. He's stupid at times.

"Like being white is all that"

"Not really. I wish I was black like my parents. "

The love he has for them is deep. I see it in how his eyes light up when he speaks about them.

"I have a little problem "

I say and I'm suddenly shy.

"We can't do it here baby. I can't disrespect your grandma like that "

I nod.

"It's fine. I understand "

"I want to. I really do"

He says this and kisses me for a short time.

He helps me finish up the cooking then I walk him to his car.

"How about we go home and -"

I shake my head while giggling.

"She might come back any time"

He groans but unfortunately, it is what it is.

"I hate that we never have time to ourselves"

We only get to spend time together at school.

On Sunday, Ma forces me to go to church.

"I hate it too"

What sucks is, I still don't have a phone.

We kiss once more and I go back.

.

TSHIAMO

Freedom. It smells good, tastes good and boy, does it look good.

I don't know how Natty's dad did it but I'm very grateful to him.

"Babe, wake up"

I didn't go to church and she's been here since morning.

I decided to cook for her so I'm done now.

His father now handles my school fees so I don't have to go around robbing people.

I have a lot of time on my hands now which means more time to study and spend time with her.

My leg? I'm working on it. The nationals are next month, September and I'm hoping I'll have been cleared by the doctor.

I'm not putting pressure on myself though.

"I was dreaming about you"

She says as she sits on her butt.

"I don't believe it. Go rinse your mouth so we can eat "

She does as she's told then we go to the kitchen.

I use my money for buying groceries and things I need. I'm also saving so I have enough for varsity.

The grant money that is.

"This is nice. Thank you "

I just smile at her.

I don't know what strings her father pulled but I'm just happy I get to be a kid and not worry.

Not really a kid at 16 but this is me living

"Baby, when are we making love? "

I choke on my drink.

I didn't think I'd ever hear her say this.

I've never pushed it because well... The truth is, I've been having it with someone else.

"You want to? "

She nods and I really don't know what to say.

"I... Wow"

"A lot of guys would be overjoyed. I'm surprised I still have my clothes on"

She's staring right into my eyes.

"We will baby. Just not now. "

"Oh? "

She sounds disappointed but I have to cut all ties first before we can go to that level.

"Yes. Don't worry. I was just waiting for you "

"I'm 18 Tshiamo. What do you mean? "

Yes, she's older than me. Two years older but with her, you'd swear I'm the older one.

"We've just gotten together and there was no rush"

"We've been together for six months "

She's making things harder for me now.

It doesn't help that she's also staring at me like this.

"I know. I love you and we're going to do it. You'll enjoy it. I promise "

Then she chuckles.

"You seem so sure"

She says and I laugh.

"I'm not a virgin "

"You're 16"

Pam taught me a lot but I can't tell her that.

"I'm a man. It's different with us. Are you a virgin? "

She nods and this makes things harder.

"I'll be gentle "

She blushes at that.

A Virgin? A whole virgin?

Modimo.

.

10

TSHIAMO

"You knew this day was going to come right? "

She rolls her eyes and continues chewing her gum, frustrating me even more.

I've just told her that I'm ending our arrangement and she hasn't said anything.

"You must think I'm a naive little girl. I get it Tshiamo "

Nox says and I sigh.

"Why are you giving me attitude? "

"We connect OK but you don't see that. It's OK. It was just sex and now it's over"

Then she walks away from me.

I should have never went for my classmate but it's OK.

I don't regret ending it though and right now, I Go find my girlfriend.

It's during lunchtime and I just wanted to get it over and done with.

She smiles as she sees me approach.

I sit next to her on the bench and take her lunch box from her.

"Are you sure you're ready? "

She knows what I'm talking about.

Her eyes say it

"Yes, I am. I've been waiting "

I kiss her cheek.

"OK. I just want to make sure "

We eat together and go to our separate classes after break.

The week goes by pretty fast.

Natty and I agreed on Saturday since she also has to study.

Her preparatory exams are coming soon and I want her to pass.

Anyway, I take a taxi to town. It's Friday and I'm trying to think of ways to make this special for her.

I googled up what girls would like their first to be like and at least I still have some money.

I didn't even spend anything the whole week.

I know she'll appreciate the gesture. My girlfriend appreciates the little things.

I buy snacks (chocolates, marshmallows, strawberries, etc)

I then take a bottle of wine and some fake red rose petals and scented candles.

I go to pay and take a taxi home.

My phone rings as I'm packing the things away.

It's an unsaved number. It's the phone Pam bought that time.

Me: "Hello? "

I hear sobs.

Me: "Who's this? "

Pam: "Please don't hang up"

Whatever she's trying won't work, unfortunately.

Me: "What do you want? "

Pam: "I'm sorry for everything Tshiamo. I'm sorry for how I treated you and everything my dad and I did to you"

Me: "Are you done? "

Pam: "I'm paying for it. I hope you find it in your heart to forgive me"

Then she hangs up on me, leaving me confused.

By 9am she's here. It's Saturday and damn, I just got up and I haven't even bathed.

"Babe, so early? "

I ask, rubbing my eyes.

"I'm leaving at 6pm and I want us to spend the day together "

She's wearing denim shorts with a crop top. I love her hairy skin. She knows I love it when she shows it off.

She also has a plastic with her.

"Let me go bath. Make breakfast in the meantime"

"I came with takeaways. I'll warm it up in the meantime "

I kiss her cheek then I go to the bathroom.

"I was expecting Indian food"

She laughs and rolls her eyes but I'm being honest.

She got us pancakes and waffles. My baby has a sweet tooth.

We watch movies and even cook lunch together. I'm happy she's here and we're just being silly.

When she falls asleep after lunch, it's my time to prepare everything. I prepare in the other room.

"Baby? "

She shouts and I reply.

She comes in and her jaw drops.

"This is.. Wow. Is it for me? "

I nod. I'm a little nervous. She comes and hugs me tight. I've been waiting all day for this.

"I know it's nothing much but we have rose petals on the bed

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the candles are lit and there's melted chocolate, strawberries and whipped cream "

She giggles and kisses me all over the face.

"I don't care about that baby but I'm happy you did this for me. It makes it all extra special"

I breathe out.

"Wine? It'll help us relax "

I've put two chairs for us. I pull a chair for her then we sit down.

I pour wine for her. There's even sponge cake.

She keeps looking at me

"What? "

She giggles and looks down for a bit then looks at me.

"I... I love you "

I smile.

"I love you too baby "

Then I wink at her.

I stand up then take her hand and when she stands, I'm looking down at her.

We kiss, with my hands on her waist and her arms wrapped around my neck.

"You have such a wonderful body"

I chuckle as she's running her hands on my upper body

"I should be saying that to you. You're shaped like a goddess"

I kiss her neck then go down, kissing her chest then her boob's.

She's moaning softly and I'm enjoying the sound.

I kiss her navel. gosh, she's amazing.

I bite her inner thighs. She's still moaning.

When I reach her clitoris, she's very wet.

"Stop playing with me please "

I laugh at that. She seems more aroused than I am.

"You taste so good"

I say after I've ate her like my life depended on it.

She had her first orgasm and it was with me.

"Are you sure you're ready?"

"Yes dammit "

She says and I laugh as I position myself.

.

ARIEL

"Please, stop fussing! "

I didn't mean to snap but it's annoying.

They've been like this ever since I went for the MRI scan and a tumor was found on my spinal cord.

A biopsy was done to determine the type of tumor.

I'm scheduled for surgery by the first of September and we're in the last week of August.

"Baby, are you sure you're comfortable? "

I nod, trying not to cry.

Mom and dad have went out of their way to make things easier for me since I'm now in a wheelchair.

I can walk but I lose feeling in my legs and fall sometimes.

At Least I can still go to school and be a Normal girl.

"When is Kamo coming? "

Dad asks as he's trying to change the subject.

"Soon. I think in a few minutes "

Mom had to bath me and helped me dress.

I survive on morphine To Help with the pain.

The back pain is the worst.

"This is all my fault "

Dad says and the tears come. They've blamed each other since we left Josh's office after I got the results.

"Please get out of my room"

"Baby"

Mom says but I'm not willing to listen.

They get out and I just sob. My parents make this hard for me sometimes.

I feel his embrace as I'm crying.

"You break my heart when you cry "

"They don't stop. They make me feel like I'm dying when they're like this"

He wheels me until I'm next to the bed, picks me and lays me on the bed.

I could have done that myself but the less I move, the less I feel pain.

"I have buttermilk muffins "

He feds me like a little kid and I just smile.

He then kisses me for the longest time until I'm all calmed down.

"Why are you with me? I'm just a potato "

He chuckles and kisses the top of my head.

"I guess my favourite vegetable is a potato "

"Idiot"

I smack his head and he laughs.

"When all of this is over, will you make love to me? "

I'm looking at him and his eyes are shot out.

"Are you sure? "

I nod.

"I'd love to. Fuck "

I giggle. He seems excited.

"We'll get through this my love. I promise "

I sigh as I think of the following year.

He's going away.

"What's wrong? "

I shake my head.

"Nothing. Let's go down. I'm hungry"

I stand up and he gives me a piggy back ride.

Mom has cooked so he dishes up for us then we eat.

Kamo leaves in the evening.

My phone rings and it's Avery. Mom has just helped me shower and I'm in bed now.

"Hey there" He says

"Hi" I say and there's silence for a few seconds.

"I miss you. I wish I was there physically " there's sadness in his voice.

"I'm not dying "

He sighs. I hate the pity.

"I'll be there when you come from surgery. I promise "

"Are you enjoying the beach? "

I know I have to change the topic before I slip right into depression.

"I am, it's calming. You should come here too" He says and I'm glad he got the hint.

"Maybe I will. I could use a vacation "

We talk for a while then hang up.

I sigh as I pull my teddy closer to me.

It's a big fluffy teddy that Kamo bought for me

I always hug it to sleep.

11

APHILILE

it's been such a tough ride for me.

Things got worse when I started showing. Being skinny does that to you. It became a disadvantage because as soon as I was around four months pregnant, I started showing.

Blondie and her friends were back on insulting me and I'd get random girls come to me and accuse me of trapping Louis.

When you're pregnant, I found out that every little thing gets to you.

It doesn't help that I don't have support at home.

Sam is there and Tshiamo also comes once in a while.

But they don't live with me at home.

It's November and we're writing our final year exams. I'm always tired so it makes it hard for me to concentrate when I'm trying to study.

I'm on my sixth month and I must admit that it's always an overwhelming experience for me when I feel the baby kick.

I doubt I'll ever get used to it. Louis also has to study since he's in matric so we hardly see each other.

Ma? I've accepted that she'll never change and I'll always be a disappointment in her eyes. I miss how things were between us but this has happened and I just have to focus on moving on and becoming a better person.

I have learned my lesson.

It's Saturday and finally, I get a break. I'm not writing on Monday and good thing about Final year exams is that we don't have to go to school when you're not writing.

I'm forced to spring clean the whole house.

Sometimes I think Ma doesn't want this child to survive but I always brush it off quickly.

She's not here. I was woken up early and I'm now all done with the bedrooms.

I'm exhausted and it's worse since I'm eating for two and haven't had breakfast.

I'm scared. What if I try and eat then she comes and finds me not doing anything?

I take the risk anyway.

I make myself peanut butter and jam sandwiches and pour some juice.

I sit down and eat as fast as I can.

"Hey"

I get so startled that I almost drop the glass of juice.

"How dare you scare me like that? "

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to"

I calm myself down with a few breathing exercises.

"What are you up to? "

I'm used to Tshiamo coming at random times.

"I'm spring cleaning "

He looks at me like I'm crazy.

"Are you out of your mind? "

I sigh

"It's not by choice. I do everything around here. I'm used to it.
It's my life and I've accepted it"

He sighs.

"I'll help "

"You don't have to. I don't want Ma on my case "

He rolls his eyes.

"I don't care. Just relax and let me do this "

I let him and relax as per his command.

I even cook while he's busy and we eat when he's done.

"Shouldn't you be studying?"

I ask as we're eating.

"I'll only study later on. I'm taking a break for now "

I just nod.

"This will pass you know. "

I sigh. I don't like talking about it because it makes me sad and overly emotional.

"I don't want to talk about it. I mean, I didn't know this but I guess it's results of my own ignorance. I mean like you said, I'm 17. When you haven't had someone talk to you about sex and everything else, you become ignorant. I have myself to blame"

He takes my hand into his.

"This has happened and there's no use blaming yourself. "

"I'm not blaming myself. I'm just acknowledging my mistakes "

"Sex is nice NEH "

I don't mean to but I laugh. I wasn't expecting that.

"Can I use your phone to call someone? "

I say, hoping he doesn't say no.

"You wanna call baby daddy? "

I giggle and nod.

He gives me his phone and I go to my room quickly and dial his number.

He picks up

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thank God.

"Baby, it's me. How are you? We miss you "

"Hey babe. I'm miserable. This distance is killing me"

I giggle. It's not much of a distance.

"We can hook up on Monday "

I'm hoping he's not writing or if he is, he'll spare some time.

"Come to school then we'll leave together "

"I'd like that "

We talk some more then I hang up.

"Look at you blushing because of lekgoa "

I chuckle and give him back his phone.

My smile disappears when Ma arrives, looking all around the house.

"At least there's something you can do right. Hi Tshiamo"

I'm not even surprised by that.

.

ARIEL

Phew. It's been quite a ride. There was a time where I felt like I was really dying and when I couldn't even get up from bed.

Nothings been easy but I had all the support I needed.

Finding out you have a tumour is something that you can't easily expect. You suddenly feel all kinds of emotions. There's also that recurring thought of death and that's more scarier.

I'm glad the tumor was discovered early. I'm also grateful that surgery was a success.

It took me weeks to heal from the surgery and there was even a time I literally couldn't do anything for myself. I had to miss classes and even wrote some tests and assignments from home.

I can get back to dancing now. I've missed it so much.

It's Sunday and for the first time in forever, my mom says she's going to church.

"Should we be worried? "

I tease and she rolls her eyes. Cassiel laughs.

"I'm with Ariel. Why today? "

Cassiel says.

"I'd also like to know "

Dad adds and we all laugh.

"I cheated on your father with a guy half his age"

Trust my mom to say something like this.

"What? "

Dad asks and she shrugs.

"I've long told you to get rid of that beard and well he has -"

"Trinny, don't fucken piss me off "

Mom giggled. These two are amazing.

"Charity is outside. I'll pray for you lost souls"

We laugh as dad walks her out.

"Man, they're amazing "

Cassiel says in admiration.

"True"

"How's Khuhle? "

She rolls her eyes.

"He's boring and Matthew has been texting me. I might go back to him"

She says and I'm not even surprised.

"Why did you break up in the first place? "

She huffs.

"Khuhle. He came with that gangsta feel and made Matt seem too white"

I chuckle because she's just crazy.

"I'm keeping them both "

"Girl, your life deserves to be filmed. One would swear you're not sixteen "

She stands up, rolling her eyes.

"YOLO. And look what your man is doing while your fat ass is annoying me"

She throws her phone at me (not literally) and it's a video of Kamo with some girl.

They seem all cosy with her kissing his cheek and him laughing.

"I have to... Yeah"

I stand and just go to my room.

I refuse to let it affect me

12

ARIEL

It's hard not to listen to Cassiel when the evidence is in my face.

I mean the video says it all and she's even sent it to me.

However, I can't conclude unless I hear my boyfriend's side of the story. That would be very unfair and I'm sure there's an explanation for this.

He's been trying to call me and has been texting but I was still trying to digest what I saw.

Heck, I still look back at the video like I'm some detective.

"Baby, why have you been ignoring me? "

He says immediately when I pick up.

"I thought you'll get the memo"

I say

"Memo? What did I do? "

He asks, sounding lost.

"I saw the video. Actually, I'll send it"

I hang up then send him the video and wait.

He calls after a few minutes.

"That's why you've been ignoring me? "

I roll my eyes. What does he think?

"I'm coming to you "

Then he hangs up.

"How was church? "

I ask mom who's having wine. Who drinks on a Sunday, after church? Well, that's mommy dearest.

"You should come. I'm blessed "

She says, raising her wine glass and I laugh.

"Where's dad? "

She shrugs.

"He wasn't here when I came back. How are you? Your eyes are puffy "

She looks concerned.

"I'm good. It's probably because I just woke up "

Her face tells me she doesn't buy that but let's it go.

"Please come outside "

It's a text from Kamo.

I just stand up and go.

He's right at the door. I fold my arms and just stare at him.

"Let's take a walk to the garden"

I let him hold my hand as we walk over comfortable silence.

We sit down in a bench swing that's in the centre of the garden.

"I missed you "

I roll my eyes.

"We both know that's not why you're here"

He takes my hand again. I'm awaiting his explanation.

"I'm not cheating on you. She's just a friend and I know how suspicious the video looks but there's really nothing going on"

I nod. His eyes tell me he's being sincere and honest but that still doesn't make me approve the video.

"So you wouldn't mind if I took a similar video with Avery right?
He's also just a friend "

His jaw clenches and he tightens his grip on my hand a bit but not too much for it to hurt.

"I shouldn't have taken it"

"It gives the wrong impression. I mean you're laughing with another girl and she's even kissing your cheek. What kind of

fool does that make me? What happened to setting boundaries with female friends? "

I actually feel smoke come out of my ears. I hate that he allowed that girl to be so comfortable.

They're wearing school uniform so it's a girl at his school. They're both in matrix.

"You look cute when you're mad"

I slap him and he seems surprised by that.

"I'm sorry baby "

He says, now holding both of my hands with his one hand.

He then pulls me to him with his other hand and kisses me until I'm all calmed down.

"It doesn't change anything "

I say and he chuckles.

"I know. I don't like it when you're mad. You're my only one"

He kisses me before I can reply and just like that, all is forgiven.

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APHILILE

I remember the day my water broke. I was in class . It was during my favourite lesson -English and I actually thought I had peed on myself or something.

I remember how everyone in class panicked while I was actually relaxed.

I don't know who called Louis but suddenly he was there and asking me countless questions.

Anyway, we were allowed to leave and when he drove me to the doctor, that's when I felt the pain.

My labour only lasted four hours. The doctor said it was probably because I was active. Well, I was since I hardly sat down and relaxed at home.

My baby? I gave birth to a Louis replica. Worse, a boy. He has his eye colour and looks like him. He's a redhead though and at least looks mixed.

He's nothing like me because I'm not even light skinned.

I love him though. When I'm feeling hopeless, I see the hope in his eyes. When I feel discouraged, his existence becomes enough courage. When I feel alone, his cries remind me that I have someone on my side.

Oh and he came on Valentine's Day, and Louis even suggested we call him Valentino

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imagine.

I called him Orefile because I believe God gave him to us. I mean we didn't exactly plan to have a baby but I know now that anything happens when you decide to have unprotected sex.

Louis named him Jaiden. It's Orefile Jaiden Lewis. Yes, he has my surname.

"Tsoga. Can't you hear that this child is making noise?! Nxa! "

It's not even been an hour since I fell asleep.

I get up and take my wailing baby. I thought Ore will change her attitude but Ma is still the same.

She doesn't even help with taking care of him. I have to do everything on my own.

At least she showed me how it's done but that was it.

I change his nappy then fed him his bottle. He sleeps right after.

He's just one month now. We're in March.

My eyes are literally shutting since I hardly slept.

It's Tuesday so I have school. Even the bath I took didn't help.

Louis's mom hired a nanny who looks after Ore when I go to school.

Ma didn't want her being a live-in nanny and she also refused when Louis's mom wanted us to live with her or when she suggested that Ore rather stays with them.

He's still sleeping even when I leave. I kiss his forehead then I'm out.

Louis is in UCT but we always talk. I have that fear of him finding someone on his level. I'm 18, doing my Grade 9 so I think my insecurities makes sense.

I still have three more years left to finish and he'll probably be a graduate then. We'll never be on the same scale.

"Shame, poor mama "

Sam says as we hug and I laugh. Yes, we're still friends. She's the only friend I have now here.

"It'll take me a while to get used to it"

She gives me a side hug.

"You're my motivation to be honest. You didn't allow being a teenage mom to bring you down "

If only she knew.

"It's not easy really. "

I say as I think of all the sleepless nights.

"But you're still standing and that's all that matters "

"How are you though? "

I ask her and she shrugs.

"I never know how to reply to that "

I take her hand and we sit on a bench while awaiting the siren.
We're both early.

"What's up? "

I ask as I'm concerned.

"I just feel this load on my shoulders "

Well, I'm confused now.

"My brother has been arrested. Just... I need prayers. Please pray with me"

"What did he do? I'm sorry baby "

She's very close to her brother and he basically provides everything for her family.

"Turns out he's not a legit business man. This isn't good because he's the one paying my fees and everything "

I give her a hug. I can imagine how she feels.

"He'll get out"

I don't know how to comfort her.

The siren rings before she can say anything and we walk to the assembly.

.

TSHIAMO

One thing my mother imparted to me was ambition.

Last year, I couldn't compete in nationals because my leg wasn't completely healed.

That hurt me so much because I was looking forward to it.

It made me hate Pam more because if she hadn't had me beaten up, my dream would have come true.

Anyway, I'm aiming to make it possible this year.

Matric. It's hectic but I'm coping. It's nice not having to stress about my next meal or school fees. It's nice being a typical teenage guy and no, I'm not cheating.

I'm committed to Natalie.

Oh, she's currently shadowing her father. It sucks being an only child and forced to takeover.

Her words, not mine.

We're in a good space but like any other couple, we fight.

Like when she found out about Noxolo. I confessed. She didn't speak to me for three weeks but I never stopped apologising.

That does come up once in a while in our arguments but I love her and I get where she's coming from.

I'm on my way to Aphilile's home. I'll be seeing her son for the first time and like I was taught, I've bought a few things for the baby.

"Oh, it's you "

MamNomsa says as she lets me in.

"How are you Ma? "

I ask as I sit down.

"Ke siame. How are you? "

"I'm good, thank you. Okae Aphilile? "

I ask as I don't see her in sight.

"Sleeping. That's all she ever does. I'll go wake her up"

She's already on her feet.

"That's not necessary "

"I wasn't asking for your permission "

I don't reply to that.

Soon she comes, rubbing her eyes.

"Hey"

She says then sits next to me. I give her the plastic.

"I came to see the lad"

She yawns. She must be very tired.

"Follow me"

I oblige and he's also sleeping.

"You really had sex with a white guy "

She giggles and pushes me lightly.

"He's gorgeous for a guy "

She yawns Again.

"OK, I'm leaving. Sleep. You need it because I'm sure he'll demand your attention when he wakes up"

We share a hug then I leave.

I find Natalie outside my door.

"Baby"

I say and as she turns, I see she's mad.

"What's wrong? "

I ask as we make our way inside.

"Where were you? I've been here for over ten minutes "

"I went to visit a friend. Aphilile? "

She sighs.

"I'm sorry "

I take her into my hands and peck her lips.

"It's OK. Would you like anything to drink? "

I ask as I make my way to the fridge.

"Some come please "

"What? "

I turn and she gives me a naughty grin.

"I think you heard me. "

I just laugh.

"What have I turned you into? "

I ask as I make my way to her.

TSHIAMO

She looks so peaceful in her sleep. I'm not saying she's not as peaceful when she's conscious but she just looks so... Peaceful. She's not the Natalie that shouts at me.

Sometimes it feels like we're married already, with me always having to explain myself. I guess the cheating made her like this and I do hope she forgets because it happened a long time ago.

"Staring is rude" she says as she now opens her eyes and smiles.

"I'm staring at what's mine moss"

She giggles and sits on her butt.

"What time is it? "

I shrug. I just know it's late.

"I have to go"

She gets up and I watch her as she puts her clothes on.

She initially didn't want us to use protection but I'm way too young and very far from achieving my dreams to think of being reckless.

I don't know. I think she's become clingy or is she just dicknified? The thought alone makes me laugh.

"Am I funny? "

She asks and I shake my head.

"I'm just thinking of something "

Her face tells me she doesn't believe me.

"Care to share? "

"Nop "

She looks disappointed but she'll be fine.

"Walk me out please "

I put on my shoes then walk her out.

Things are suddenly so awkward and I just hate it.

"Are you OK? "

I ask her and she just nods. We kiss and she gets into her car.

My phone is ringing when I get back into the house.

"Hello? "

I just hear breathing. I don't recognise the number.

"Hello? "

I say again.

"Pl.. Please don't hang up"

It's Pam. I sigh. Can't she just leave me alone?

"What do you want? "

I ask, not even caring about how weak she sounds.

This girl not only made my life a living hell, she derailed my plans. I would have made my mark but because of her, I was forced to pause my dreams.

"I need help. I know that I'm the last person you-"

I hang up and immediately block her number.

I've moved on from her and I'm definitely not going to turn back. Never.

.

KAMOGELO

"Man, I'm tired now. We've studied all day "

She laughs and rolls her eyes.

"I think you're just being lazy"

I look at the time on my phone : 11:13pm

"Wa gafa. It's almost midnight "

She starts packing the books.

"Fine. I'll leave "

Gomolemo and I are doing the same course so we always study together. She's 18, a year younger than I am.

I walk her to her res.

"Why are you so fast? I have to chase you"

She rolls her eyes.

Actuarial science is a demanding course but I have to work hard if I want to become an actuary.

"I'm leaving, aker you couldn't wait to chase me out "

We both laugh at that. I give her a hug as she's now at her room's door then I jog back to my res.

I miss my girlfriend so much. I literally never have time for my phone.

I take a chance and call her.

It rings about two times and she picks up on the third.

"Kamogelo, I'm sleeping "

Her sleepy voice is so sexy.

"But I miss you baby tlhe "

She giggles tiredly.

"I miss you too baby. More than you think. When will I see you?
"

I sigh.

"Baby, it's really tough and I don't have money"

"But money isn't an issue "

I don't like where this conversation is heading.

"Ariel, please. I don't want to argue. I miss my girlfriend and I just wanted to hear her voice "

She sighs

"I'm sorry "

"If only I didn't stay at res then you could visit "

I say, hoping we're past that little issue.

"There are hotels Kamo, come on "

"No. Baby, I have to go. I love you"

She sighs.

"I love you too"

"Please don't cry "

I say. Her voice was breaking.

"Bye"

Then she hangs up on me.

"Fuck "

I say. This is hard but years will just pass and I'll be able to provide for her, for us.

.

PAM

"My hands are tied sweetie. I can't go to jail " dad says

"So you want to sacrifice me? Your own daughter? "

I ask, not believing that this time has come

The tears keep falling that I've even stopped trying to wipe them off.

"Pam

you've known about this for a month. Why are you acting up now? "

I chuckle. I can't believe he's so calm about this.

It's my life we're talking about.

"So that's how little I matter to you now? "

I ask, wiping my runny nose with the back of my hand.

I don't even care how unlady like that is.

"Stop being a spoiled brat Pam. I did everything to make you happy with that little boy. Your involvement with him is what

brought us here in the first place, your little obsession. Just suck it up"

I wail. He gets up and goes to open the door.

I can feel their presence as they get in.

I don't even look up.

"Captain my captain "

His English sounds compressed. I don't even want to look at him.

"Don't say anything Dhlomo. You won, didn't you? "

That's dad.

The Dhlomo guy laughs and his annoying laughter fills the entire room.

My bag has been packed, everything that belongs to me has been packed. Someone was sent to do it.

"Captain, be nice. You also gain from this. Ao sshalaphala, look at me"

His voice is commanding so I slowly look up at him.

He's scary, very scary but not really bad looking. I've never seen someone so dark and he has a scar on his forehead and I think it's what makes him more scary.

"Ungowami from now on. Queen of my castle, let's go baby"

I look at my father who sold me to this man.

I still don't know how much for but I know I'll never forgive him for this.

.

APHILILE

"Baby, I'm coming to fetch you guys. I'll be there in an hour "

I almost scream. I didn't think he'd come back so soon.

It's Friday and I've been miserable the whole week. Unless I have our son in my arms but really, Ma makes life unbearable for me sometimes.

Ore just makes me sane. I wish I was doing matrix like other eighteen year olds but I know I'll get there.

I pack our bag while humming to a tune in my mind.

"Daddy is coming to get us baby"

I say as I kiss his forehead. He just looks at me with his blue eyes.

Soon, he's here. He gives me a long passionate kiss and I'm happy Ma is not here to walk in on us.

I've sent her a message to let her know and I'm not surprised she didn't reply.

I know she saw it though

"Hi"

He says when he breaks it

"Hi"

I say and giggle. He takes Ore and his bag.

"Let's go baby "

He kisses my cheek. I take my bag and we leave.

"I'm so happy you're here"

I say honestly and he grins at me.

"I missed my mini family "

I blush. He's so good with words. He gives me Ore and we get in the back. I put him in his carseat.

He starts his car and drives off.

He opens the door and I get off. he goes to the other side and comes with Ore.

"I missed him so much. I also missed you baby but at least I can call you and we talk "

His mom bought me a phone on my birthday. We're kind of close. She's like the sweet mom while Ma is the strict one that believes in tough love.

That's how I see her treatment of me, as tough love.

"Give me the baby "

Mrs Vuma says, taking Ore.

"Hello Lilly. I just missed him so much "

Louis just frowns as he takes out our bags.

"Would you like anything? "

His mom ask and I shake my head.

Louis and I go to his room.

"She's going to be all over him for a while "

He says

"Until he cries because he's hungry or misses us"

I say as I brush his cheek.

He puts his hands on my waist and kisses me.

I break it before it escalates.

"He's just one month baby "

I remind him and he groans, making me giggle.

"I can't believe we even made love a day before he was born"

He says and I punch him lightly.

"You made me an addict "

He chuckles.

"No baby. We're addicted to each other and we love each other
"

He kisses me again.

As if on cue, We hear his cries.

"I told you "

I say and we laugh as we go out of his room.

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ARIEL

"Will it be a bad idea for me to go to him? He didn't come for Easter. I thought he would "

I'm staring at my phone. I've been contemplating booking a flight just so I could finally see him.

"I know you know I don't like him but babe, I have far more experience when it comes to dating than you. "

Cassiel says but I'm battling to get her point.

"What's your point? "

I ask because I'm lost.

"It's all about priorities. If you were top on the list, he would have come. He's a man yes and I know it doesn't cost more than R300 from there to Here by taxi "

I laugh. How does she know these things?

"And how would you know? "

She rolls her eyes.

"Because I have a boyfriend there. He's doing his final year in Pharmacy "

I chuckle. I can't imagine Cassiel dating a normal guy.

"I don't believe you "

She rolls her eyes again.

"His name is Vuyani. He's very ambitious and it's attractive. He lives in the township. "

I laugh. There's always someone new. I can never keep up.

"And Matthew? Khuhle? "

She rolls her eyes again.

"They're history. I'm actually serious about this one"

She says, sounding sincere. I want to believe her, trust me, I do.

"I'm giving you six months "

I say and she laughs.

"Fine, be like that. Now back to you, just prepare your heart for anything. I have to go"

It's the beginning of May. I last saw him in January, before he left.

I'm going out of my mind really because I didn't think things would be like this.

So I'm left alone. I take a few muffins that my mom made with juice and put everything on a tray.

I go to my room and that's when my phone rings.

"Hello? "

"Baby"

He says and I sigh.

"So you finally remembered you have a girlfriend? "

We haven't spoken in over a week. Yes, I did try calling and texting.

"Come on baby. It's not like that "

I'm not convinced.

"It's like what? You don't love me anymore? "

He sighs.

"Of course I love you. I just have been so busy and-"

I cut him off

"Sending a text won't even take five minutes. You can't say you never have an hour on your hands. You're not study 24/7 for heaven's sake. You do get free time Kamogelo"

"Baby, I'm sorry. I really am"

Then the question I've been avoiding in my mind.

"Is there someone else? "

I ask with a heavy heart.

"What? Of course not. There will never be someone Else Ariel. I love you, only you "

I sigh.

"I love you too"

I hang up before he can say something else.

This leaves a heavy feeling in my heart. I hate not knowing.

.

KAMOGELO

I honestly don't have any excuse. She's right, I've been a bad boyfriend.

I try to call her back but it takes me straight to voicemail. I don't blame her.

Gomo gets into my room. She's her bubbly self but I feel like shit. She throws herself at me. My roommate is hardly ever here.

You'd think he doesn't exist.

"What's up? Why are you so sad? "

She asks and I sit up.

"I've been so focused on doing and performing my best that I forgot about the one person who means the most to me"

She laughs. I knew she wasn't going to take me seriously.

"Shame"

She says but there's no empathy in her voice.

"What are you doing here? "

I ask. I'm not in the mood for her or anybody else for that matter.

"I came to check up on you"

I huff. She's suffocating me.

"I want to be alone "

"I'm not going anywhere "

She says and I can feel she means it.

"Then I'll go"

I say, getting on my feet.

She stands up too.

I'm getting irritated now.

"What the hell is wrong with you? "

She giggles.

"When are you going home? "

She asks and I sigh.

"Obviously after exams. "

"I'm going with you "

OK, she's really crazy.

"I'm going to my girlfriend's place. I'll spend the holidays with her. I think they will be going on a vacation somewhere so she'll need company since she's doing her matrix "

She rolls her eyes.

"I wonder why you think this long distance relationship will work "

I laugh. I'm not even surprised by that.

"I'm stupid for expecting you to make me feel better. I've been a fool"

I admit and she looks a bit confused.

"You want me to yourself which is why my feelings don't matter to you. This(pointing from her to me) is not worth losing the love of my life. I'm going to ask you politely, leave my room and never come back unless it's for the roomie "

She looks shocked, like she wasn't expecting that.

She laughs but stops when she sees how serious I am.

"I'm sorry Kamogelo. I've been selfish "

Then

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she leaves.

I type a message to Ariel. I'm desperate to fix us.

My eyes have been opened.

"Baby, I'll come home as soon as I'm done with exams. I'm really sorry but I'm going to fix us"

.

TSHIAMO

"Who's Sasha? "

She asks, holding my phone. I'm just looking at her, wondering who gave her the right.

"We're going through each other's phones now? "

I ask calmly.

"Tshiamo, I asked you a question "

She says and I'm trying to remain calm.

"I also asked you a question "

She's sitting on my bed and I'm leaning by the door frame with my arms folded and looking at her.

Why does it seem like I always get the crazy ones? She wasn't like this when we got together.

I've been excusing my cheating for her behaviour but this happened a long time ago, almost a year ago so I'd be lying now.

"You're hiding something, aren't you? That's why you're avoiding my question. How could you Tshiamo? After everything I did for you? "

She's now crying. I'm just looking at her crazy. What the fuck is going on with her?

"I'm talking to you! "

She shouts and I shake my head.

"You're shouting. Look, I'm tired of this behaviour. I'm really tired "

I admit. I've managed to not get pissed. I can't have a Pam repeat.

"I don't owe you anything Pam. Yes, you and your father helped me but that's not why I'm with you. You can't keep reminding me of that "

"I.. Baby-"

"I'm not done. I'm tired of you making me feel like you own me, you don't. I don't want to think I'm in another Pam situation. Please go. I need to study "

She tries to touch me but I'm not barging.

She leaves while crying like that. I'm not going to blame myself for that because I did nothing.

So I get to my studying.

I go on until I'm ready and that's when I go make myself something to eat.

When I'm done, I eat while going through my phone. Sasha is a girl from school. We're just good friends and no, I'm not interested in her.

I actually think it's time I took a Break from girls because it doesn't seem to work for me. In fact, I should.

.

APHILILE

"Aren't you going to cook something for us? "

It's Saturday and for a change, I'm the one visiting Tshiamo.

I need a break from Ma. I'm with Ore who's on the floor chewing on his teething toy.

Louis wants us to go to him when schools close. I'm looking forward to the trip.

It's like Ma now doesn't care if I come or go. We've drifted apart so much.

Anyway, I made sure to clean and even cook. I don't want her on my case. Ore probably thinks she hates him.

I can't remember the last time she held him.

"You just got here Mara already you want food"

I roll my eyes.

"I don't want chicken. "

He laughs.

"O stout man. "

He gets up and disappears to the kitchen while I try to find a movie. He has a collection of movies.

I can't find anything so I put on a music concert Instead.

I feed Ore who ends up sleeping so I go put him down.

"Where's your girlfriend? "

I ask

"I'm single "

He says and I laugh.

"I'm not surprised. I told you to go for girls at least a year younger "

Yes I did. This thing of dating girls older than him clearly doesn't work. "Like that friend of yours? " He asks and I laugh.

"Come on, she's single and so are you "

He's talking about Samantha.

"I'm staying away from your species until after nationals. Actually, maybe I should wait for varsity "

I laugh. I'm not surprised. "Those are even worse "

He just laughs.

He walks us home around 6pm. Ore has a stroller which he doesn't like. He prefers my arms but it's not like he has a choice.

There are women in the lounge. I greet and the replies sound forced. They've probably been told something about me.

I stay in my room while chatting to Sam and Louis.

I'm called to make tea and after, I go back.

I can't depress myself. Not anymore.

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APHILILE

I look at my baby and I can't believe how big he's grown. He's trying to draw a picture.

He's just three but this baby acts like he's five. I think it's his highly expensive creche. I know soon he'll be able to write his name.

I'm finally doing my matrix. At 21 but I don't care.

I can't believe I've made it this far, after everything.

I no longer worry about being the oldest in the school even though I don't look like it or my Grandma.

Ore: "I want daddy"

Demanding as ever. He's just turned to look at me and say this.

It's like I'm looking at a mini version of Louis. I miss daddy too.

Me: "Oh, you want? "

He looks at me with those blue eyes. I think he's giving me a puppy look, which makes me laugh.

Me: "Let's call daddy"

We go for a video call. He's doing his honours this year and after that, he'll go wherever I decide to go for university. A person my age can't even think of taking a gap year.

Louis: "Family "

He says with a grin.

Me: "Daddy, we miss you "

Ore: "I want a bike dad. Sabelo has it "

And that's how they forget about me. He has my phone in his hands so I let them be.

Ore: "Bhuti wants to talk to you "

It's been an hour with them talking.

He's smiling.

Me: "Hello sir"

He chuckles.

Tshiamo: "How are you Miss? "

Me: "No no, I should ask you. How's Russia? "

He laughs.

Tshiamo: "It'd be more amazing if I knew the language more. I've tapped some Russian ass though "

I laugh. Oh God, he didn't just say that.

Me: "You're crazy. Bring us something "

He yawns.

Tshiamo: "I will "

Me: "Sleep. Thank you for finally sparing some time to call us "

He chuckles, rolling his eyes.

Me: "So gay "

We say our goodbyes.

Ore: "I'm hungry "

Someone needs to teach this child manners.

Ma comes in while I'm cooking. I'm making dinner. It's Tuesday.

Ore has a cab that drives him to and from school.

Ma: "Hai shame, go monate"

I don't know where she went. I don't reply to that.

Ma: "Do you want to know why I took you in after your father died? "

She's managed to capture my attention. We're now having our dinner. I give her my attention.

Ma: "I was convinced I'm doing the right thing. I guess, I wanted to clear my conscience and have myself be seen doing good"

OK, I'm confused now.

I know she's not expecting me to reply, at least not yet.

Ma: "When you told me what you have gone through, I tried to make this a home for you. Do you think it was easy? No but I pretended it was. I'm a horrible person Aphilile and I can't wait for you to finish school and leave "

Me: "I don't understand "

Ma: "I tried being charitable. I raised you. Your father left you money and I took you to the best school. Then you decided to fall pregnant, on top of me pretending I want to do this. I just want you out of here"

Then she stands up.

Me: "I thought... You're not my grandmother? "

Ma: "No"

She says coldly and walks away. I'm still in shock. I don't know if I should cry or just remain in shock.

She hates me. I saw it in her eyes. She meant every word she said. All the time I thought she was mistreating me because of tough love, I was lying to myself.

.

PAM

I'm throwing up again. It's been happening for a week and there's nothing I can do this time. I thought I was careful but somehow contraceptives didn't come through for me.

He comes in with his joint. I've just rinsed my mouth.

"Junior is making you suffer NEH "

I just stare at him.

"I don't think I'll be able to go "

I say, hoping he agrees with me. In the three years that I've been here

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I've become so ruthless that I don't recognise my reflection on the mirror.

There's nothing I haven't done from smuggling drugs to sleeping with the enemy for information.

Tonight, we are suppose to go for a heist but unfortunately, I'm feeling like hell.

The morning sickness isn't a morning thing.

The first time I got pregnant, I had really thought I succeeded in doing an abortion until he found out and beat me up to no recognition. He didn't touch my face or abdominal area but I felt like death.

I spent two weeks unconscious.

"Ku grant. "

I breathe out. I didn't expect him to give in so easily.

"Speedy! "

Someone says from outside our room. He gives me the joint, kisses my lips then leaves.

I know it's not good for the baby but it's always been my escape. Weed is better than heroine or cocaine. Weed and alcohol is what keeps me sane.

See, I never believed in karma until I got served.

I still know his number by head. I think of calling him sometimes but that wouldn't change anything.

He made it. He made it against all odds. I see him sometimes on sports news. He's represented South Africa all over.

I regret it all. Maybe he would have fell in love with me and we'd be together.

But now, I'm stuck here being a Criminal's woman.

He's made me a female version of him.

I didn't know anything but now, I'm like a sniper.

I've killed, I've robbed, I've lied and I've stolen. There's nothing I haven't done. The little conscience I had is gone.

It's just after 2am when he comes.

"Why aren't you sleeping? "

He asks and I just stare at him. I'm drunk. I've been drinking since he left. The alcohol makes life bearable for me.

I know I can never terminate my own life . I'm just not that brave.

"I can't "

I say. He snatches the bottle of wine from me and throws it against the wall. He's angry.

"Are you trying to kill my child?! "

He gives me a back slap. It almost sobers me up.

"You've never had a problem with it"

I say, calmly.

"I lost a man. Things just spiralled out of control. We have to disappear "

He sounds stressed. Yes, that's why he suddenly remembered his child.

He becomes human when he's stressed. I think he has many personalities but he's never really hurt me physically in two years.

I don't think a back slap counts.

I try standing but my knees are failing me. It's what happens when you drink while you're sitting.

"Go pack! "

He drags me to our room. I start with the packing. I only take what I can.

We rush out, with him pulling me since I can barely walk.

This is our life. I wonder where we're headed this time.

.

ARIEL

"Tell him to leave. I don't want to see him"

I say to Cassiel.

We're sharing an apartment in Cape Town.

We're both studying at UCT.

"Just give him a chance. He's been coming her for two months now "

I look at her surprised.

"What? You love him"

I feel like crying.

"He hurt me. I don't think I can forgive him, just like that "

She's engaged. My twin sister is engaged guys and I still can't believe it. I never thought she'd consider marriage at 19 but the Sabelo guy stuck along and tamed her ass.

He literally humbled her and my parents are very fond of him.

I'm happy for her and I do wish the same happiness upon myself.

Kamo and I... Sigh. The past three years have been a headache. Yes, we did sort things out but things got worse on his second year then I just found out that he's been having flings these past months.

"Let him in"

I say. I don't think I want to hear it. Six months? I've been loyal to him.

"Baby "

I look up at him. He looks aged with the beard. He's looking so untidy.

He tries to hold my hand but I shake my head.

"Explain "

I say and hear him sigh loudly.

"I'm so sorry baby. Ariel, I love you. I love you so much and life without you is just meaningless. The past two months have been hell"

He says but I'm not about to cry.

This man is my weakness and he knows it.

"Six months is a long time Kamogelo and it wasn't just one girl. I'm being labelled as the rich snob who's got you tied up because of her surname "

That's what the side chick and her friends are saying. They're dragging my name through the mud or at least attempting to. I don't care.

"I just need a second chance. I love you Ariel. Only you "

He says and as sincere as he sounds, he still hasn't given me an explanation.

"You're the only guy I've slept with. Only you "

I say.

He looks at me with those eyes which aren't my favourite features right now.

"I just... I thought I'd sleep with one guy for the rest of my life. "

I admit. I guess I gave up my virginity too soon.

I stand up then go to the door and open it.

"Come when you have an explanation for me. "

He looks at me. His eyes are glassy but he has to go.

He sighs then leaves.

I close the door and just sit on the bed. I breathe out.

At least I was able to stand for that long without falling. He can't see it. Not even Cassiel. They can't find out. Not even my family.

A tear escapes my eye. I wipe it and pull the big teddy bear to my body and cuddle.

Yes, I still have it.

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ARIEL

"Happy Birthday to us, Happy Birthday to us, Happy Birthday, Happy Birthday "

I giggle as I open my eyes and rub them. The lights are on and my phone tells me it's just after midnight. She has a cake.

"Happy Birthday twinny"

She kisses the top of my head.

"Well, Happy Birthday to you too"

The cake is small and has a two candles. One is 2 and the other a zero. We're officially twenty now.

"Don't you ever sleep? "

I ask as we're now having the cake. She forced me to eat with her. We're using our hands. Ratchet if you ask me.

"I'm just so excited. I'm twenty! "

I have to cover my ears because of her voice. We have the same overly soft voice. I blame mom.

"What did you get me? "

I ask. I'm trying to suppress the pain on my back. It's gruesome.

"What did you get me? "

We both burst out in laughter. She suddenly gets serious.

"I'm worried about you "

She says. She's sitting next to me on the bed. I have my back against the big continental pillow.

"Me? "

I ask. I'm hoping she's not feeling anything.

"I just have this feeling "

No!

"I'm OK. I'm still sleepy so I'd like to go back to sleep "

I say because I want to terminate this conversation. She looks at me, more like stares.

"What? "

I ask and she just shakes her head.

I wake up again around 7am. I'm going to the mall. I want to do my hair, stuff my face and exhaust my bank balance.

To be honest, I think I've gotten a bit over what Kamo did. I should have expected it with us living in different cities.

Anyway, I'm able to take a bath because a shower means greater chances of falling.

I lotion while sitting down. I wear black high waist floral pants with a red lace top and black sandals. I tie my hair up, put on a little makeup then I'm out.

Breakfast is made. I dish up for myself then I'm off. As risky as it sounds, I'm driving.

My vision gets a bit blurry but thank God we stay about ten minutes from the mall. I find a parking space then park. I'm a fan of big cars so I'm driving a Jeep Cherokee in charcoal.

I take my bag and phone then get out. I'm feeling very dizzy, like I haven't eaten.

"Are you OK? "

He's looking at me with concern. I nod but just after taking two steps, I know I'm about to fall. Everything happens in slow motion.

"We're taking your car "

This guy has one hell of a deep, hoarse voice if that makes sense. I didn't even see him.

I can feel the car moving when I decide to close my eyes.

They're too heavy anyway.

I'm woken up by the beeping sounds. I can feel someone holding my hand. I know I'm in hospital. I open my eyes and

look around before my eyes land on his. He just stares at me until I can't do it anymore so I look elsewhere.

"Did... Did the doctor say something? "

I ask but I'm still not looking at him.

"No. How are you feeling now Mrs Radebe? "

I can't help but laugh.

"I'm not married "

I say and continue laughing.

"Yet. But seriously, how do you feel? "

I can feel his eyes on me.

"Numb"

I say, turning to face him. He presses some button. The Doctor comes. It's a woman who looks to be in her late thirties. She's Indian.

"I'm Dr Pillay

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how are you feeling Miss Rhodes? "

She has a sweet motherly voice.

"I'm just feeling numb"

She runs some light through each of my eyes, jogs down something then goes to my feet. She takes out a teaspoon and tickles me.

"It tickles "

I say with a giggle. This guy is still holding my hand.

"You need to come on Friday for an MRI scan. From what Mr Radebe told me, you were trying to walk then fell. I'm going to take a look at your spine, spinal cord and nerves to come up with a diagnosis. Is there something I should know? "

I sigh. I might as well tell her.

"I had a surgery when I was 16. They found a tumor on my spinal cord "

I don't want to look at him. I can't.

"The possibility might be that it wasn't fully removed. Please come. We're keeping you overnight. A nurse will bring you food"

Then she leaves. It's back. I know it's back.

.

TSHIAMO

She's been down ever since the doctor came yesterday. She didn't talk much. I could see the sadness in her eyes. I borrowed myself her car and I'm fetching her with it.

"Ariel"

I say as we're now walking out of the hospital. She had to get a doctor's note because she's a student. She said something about a quiz.

She looks up at me for a while then looks down.

"I know I'm just a stranger who caught you before you fell, took you to hospital and paid your fees even though you can afford it. But, I'm here for you. I've always heard that sometimes it's better to confide in a stranger "

She gives me a genuine smile.

"Thank you Mr Radebe. I'm just so nervous. I mean, I might have to go for chemo and that can fuck a person up "

I laugh because I didn't think she's the type to swear.

"It's not funny "

She says, pouting. I open the door for her then go to the drivers seat.

"You look so sweet and innocent. I didn't think you swear "

Then she giggles.

"I don't. It happens when I'm frustrated "

I nod.

"I still don't know your name Mr Radebe"

I laugh. I just love the way my surname rolls off her tongue.

"Tshiamo"

She's looking at me like she's trying to remember something.

"What? "

I ask. I haven't started the car because I don't know where she stays or where she wants to go.

"I've seen you somewhere. On TV I think "

I laugh.

"Really? "

She nods while still looking at me.

"I'll remember you "

She says and I just laugh.

"Where are we going? "

I ask as I now start the car.

"Home. I just want to sleep. "

So I drive her to where she stays as per her instructions. I give her her keys then call a cab.

"I don't stay here but I'll call you. I'll be here on Friday so we'll go together "

I give her a brief hug then I leave. I came to Cape Town because my father wants to See Me.

Yes I have a father but the man is in jail. He's been there all my life and I could only see him when I made enough money to travel. Things looked up for me when I won at nationals during my matric. So now running is literally my life. I want to study though but only next year. Anything can happen so I need to have something to fall back on.

As for the love department, it didn't work with Samantha but we're good friends. Yes, Aphilile did succeed in hooking us up but I was just always busy.

I'm good with Natalie's father. He's like the father I never had. Natalie still hates me but I'm cool with it.

I've just come from Russia with a gold medal. It felt so good to arrive at the airport and had all those people cheering for us. I'm living my dream and I know that my mom is looking down at me with a smile.

"Radebe"

He says and I don't reply. I just stare at him.

"Son? "

"When are you getting out of here? "

I ask after a two minutes silence.

Our relationship is sort of Rocky. Maybe I blame him for my mother's death or maybe it's because he left us to fend for ourselves.

"In two years. Tshiamo, I'm proud of you and how you've turned out "

I nod. How will I reply to that?

Anyway, I call Ariel as I walk out of the prison.

She doesn't answer so I just assume that she's sleeping.

.

APHILILE

Things have been soar and tense in the house since Ma's confession. I think there's something she's not telling me but I can't ask her because she's not even talking to me.

My son probably thinks she hates him and I wouldn't blame him.

I look back at the time when I started high school. I'd come home feeling discouraged and she'd encourage me and honestly, Her words of wisdom are what got me to matrix.

As much as she changed after I got pregnant, I never forgot her good words.

"Tshiamo is coming on Sunday. He wants to take us out "

That's Sammie. We're having our lunch at school.

"I miss him. He's been gone forever "

I say. It's been months with him gone and he did well.

"He's in Cape Town. "

She says.

"What's he doing there? "

Tshiamo hasn't even talked to me about all this so I'm a little mad at him now. I might be older than him but he's like my brother. Big brother.

"I don't know. We'll ask him when he comes "

I nod.

I call him when I get home. He owes me explanations.

"Lilly"

He says immediately when he picks up.

"Don't Lilly me. Why do I hear from Sammy that you're coming?
"

He laughs but this is a serious matter to me.

"Why are you saying it like that? "

He asks, still laughing.

"I'm a joke now? "

"What? Noo. I'm sorry I didn't tell you. I knew Samantha would
"

He says.

"You guys are back together? "

He chuckles.

"No. I met someone actually "

"As long as they're not Russian "

He laughs.

"No, but they ain't black either. She's from here "

I think I can deal with that.

"Tell me all about it when you come. I have to go "

I hang up and take Ore who has his arms opened for me.

"How was school? "

He's kill me if I said creche so this is me being on the safe side.

"Good. We drew and they're going to teach us how to write "

"That's good baby "

He helps me make dinner while telling me about school.

As we're talking, I hear voices and the other sounds like that of Ma. She's with someone else.

It sounds like a man.

"That's her. Aphilile"

I wipe my hands and go to them. I'm surprised she's talking to me.

"This is Speedy "

I nod. I'm actually lost because I don't know what's happening.

"She's perfect plus she has a child. That's good "

He says. This man looks very scary.

"Ma, what's going on? "

I ask because he's making me shiver.

"Just go dish up for us and stop asking stupid questions! Nx!

17

SEVENTEEN

APHILILE

He's been looking at me and it's giving me the creeps.

I wanted to go eat in my room but Ma wasn't having any of that.

I'm now forced to sit here and pretend like I'm enjoying this man's company. I do wonder why such a character would be acquainted with Ma.

Something tells me it has to do with me but I don't want to listen to that.

She's a church goer, a Christian and wouldn't be involved in anything sinister.

I clear up the table when we're done. I dished up a small portion for myself because I lost my appetite the minute this man entered.

"Go play in our room"

I tell Ore, giving him my phone.

He's still here even when I'm done doing the dishes.

"Walk Speedy out Aphilile"

Ma says then walks to her room. He's looking at me with a mischievous smile.

"Wa muhle"

He says and I just fake a smile. My heart is beating out of my chest.

"I think you should start getting used to having me around "

"Why? "

I finally gather the courage to look at him.

"Because I'm not going anywhere "

He winks at me as he gets into the car. What is this man speaking about?

Ore is talking to his father when I get in my room. He never runs out of things to say.

He gives me the phone then runs out.

"Baby"

Louis says and I realise how much I miss him.

"When are you coming back? "

I ask since the March holidays are approaching.

I miss him so much, more now that I'm talking to him.

"I was thinking you guys come to me"

He says and man, I love that.

"It's actually a good idea. I'd love a break from this place "

"What's going on? "

He says, sounding worried.

"Same old, same old. Ma brought some creepy looking man here and I just have a bad feeling about it Louis "

I know I'm not exaggerating. That man is creepy, scary and all things bad.

"I'll book you guys flight immediately when you close. "

We're closing on Friday next week so I'm happy.

"I also think I'm sexually frustrated "

He laughs on the other side making me chuckle.

"I wouldn't want you anymore frustrated. I'll satisfy you thoroughly "

He says in a sexy tone.

"I can't wait "

We talk more then hang up. I study until I'm drowsy then sleep.

.

ARIEL

I have been struggling to concentrate on anything since I went to the doctor. I'm trying not to go crazy and trying to act Normal like I'm not going through shit.

I'm going to tell my family when I get the results from the scan.

It's Kamogelo again who I've just let in.

At least he looks better this time. I'm not in the mood for him really.

"I miss you "

He says and I roll my eyes.

"What do you want? "

I ask

if only he knew what I'm going through.

I have the doctor's appointment today and that alone is stressful.

"Ariel please. I want us to sort things out"

I'm having dizzy spells and that makes it a bit hard for me to act normal. At least I'm sitting down.

"There's nothing to sort out. You took me for a fool. What are you even doing here? Don't you have an honours to complete?"

"You don't look OK. What's going on?"

He asks, his voice filled with concern.

"I'm fine"

I hate that he knows me so well. We've been together for almost five years so it's understandable.

"Ariel, you can never lie to me. Just put aside the issues we're having and talk to me"

This time, he's holding my hand.

"It's back "

I whisper but I know he got that and he also knows what I'm talking about.

"I thought the surgery helped"

"Me too. I'm going for the scan again and we'll take it from there. I might have to go for radiation or chemo to completely get rid of it. I just hope it hasn't spread "

He pulls me for a hug and we remain silent for a few minutes in the embrace.

"I'll be here for you, just like the last time "

There's another knock on the door before I can reply. I get away from his chest but he's quick to stand up.

I know it's Tshiamo.

I hear his voice as he greets Kamo and he comes following him. He smiles when he sees me.

"Are you ready? "

I nod, wiping my tears.

"Are you fine? "

I can see Kamo getting pissed but I don't think this man cares because he caresses my cheek.

"Just having dizzy spells "

I admit and he nods.

"I'll carry you on my back "

I laugh. I can't remember the last time I got a piggy back ride.

I was probably ten.

"Nooo "

Kamo clears his throat. I've sort of forgotten about him.

"I'll call you "

He says then just leaves, banging my door.

"And that? "

Tshiamo asks and I shake my head.

"Let's go. I hope I won't break your back "

I say with a giggle.

"Nop. I'm going to have fun holding on to your ass"

He says with a cheeky smirk.

"Hey! "

I say, punching him a bit.

"Abusive much? "

I roll my eyes.

"Let's just go"

18

TSHIAMO

Yesterday was a drag for Ariel. She was so emotional after the scan that all she did was cry. She couldn't eat since everything she tried eating came out and she'd cry once more.

I took her to the hotel with me where I can keep an eye on her.

It's morning, on Saturday and she's just woke up. I've ordered breakfast for us and just got from the shower.

She looks beautiful, even after waking up. Her eyes wander a bit until they end on me and shoot out, which makes me laugh.

"Good morning "

I say and walk over to her and sit on the bed next to her.

"How did I... What am I... Morning "

I laugh and suddenly she looks all shy. She covers herself with the duvet .

"I got us breakfast. It's a bit of everything "

"Thank you "

She says, still covered.

"Hayi Ariel I want us to eat together. Go brush your teeth man "

I say as I uncover her. She has no choice but to get up.

"So, who's that guy I found you with? "

I ask as we finally have breakfast. She decided to shower instead of just rinsing her mouth.

"It's complicated "

She says but I feel she's not saying much.

"You're not saying anything "

She sighs.

"He's my boyfriend I guess or was... I'm not sure where we stand "

I nod. At least that's something.

"You've been together for long? "

She nods.

"This is our fifth year "

I nod too.

"Well, tell him his time is up. I'm not going to let go of my chosen one because he's been there for five years "

She laughs, rolling her eyes. I like it when she's happy and not stressing.

"He's probably mad at me now"

"He'll be fine. Do you have plans for today? "

She shakes her head.

"I'm just so anxious about the results "

She says.

"We're in this together Ariel. Don't you worry, I'm here "

She gives me a weak smile. I'm glad she's eating.

"Heh so this is the guy who's giving Kamo a run for his money? "

Then she claps her hands. I look at Ariel then at her.

I didn't know she's a twin.

"Tshiamo, this is my annoying sister Cassiel and Cass, this is Tshiamo"

Ariel says. I have my hand on her waist for support.

"You want to sit down? "

She nods so I walk her to the lounge and help her to her seat.

"It's nice meeting you Cassiel "

I say to the sister as she's looking at us suspiciously.

"I have to go"

I say, looking at Ariel.

"When are you coming back? "

She asks and Cassiel laughs.

"Is Wednesday fine? "

She nods. We share a hug then I leave.

.

ARIEL

"OK, spill it out "

Cassiel says immediately after Tshiamo leaves. I giggle and roll my eyes.

"There's nothing to tell "

I say and she sits on the coffee table so we're facing each other.

"I disagree. There's a tall, chocolatey mister with a sexy voice who's just walked out of our apartment and you say it's nothing? "

I laugh. Did she have to say all that?

"The tumour is back Cassiel "

"What?! "

She says and I sigh.

"On our birthday, I drove to the mall because I wanted to do my hair and shopping. I got out of my car and suddenly felt dizzy.

He caught me before I could fall and then took me to the doctor "

She's hugging me for dear life now.

"And you didn't tell me? "

I can tell she's crying which is exactly why I kept it to myself. I need support

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not pity.

"This is not exactly the kind of news a person happily shares. This is like my worst nightmare coming true"

I say, trying not to cry. I need to be strong.

"I know. I'm sorry. Did you tell the parents? "

I shake my head.

"I'm waiting for the results then after that, I'll tell them "

"I hate this but we're in this together "

She says then pecks my lips and I giggle.

"How's the wedding preparations coming? "

She laughs and rolls her eyes.

"I've been telling her to pick a date"

She screams and just like that I'm forgotten when she throws herself into Sabelo's arms.

We didn't even hear him come in. I watch in admiration as they make out like I'm not there. He stops when she moans.

"Geez guys "

Sabelo laughs.

"Hey twinny, unjani? "

He says and gives me a hug while I'm sitting down

"I'm good, it's lovely seeing you"

I haven't seen him in over a month. Work keeps him busy. He's trying to establish himself in the pharmaceutical industry.

Now the hard part is having to excuse this two and making my way to my room without falling. I'm feeling numb so I wonder how that's going to happen.

"Babe? Are you OK? "

She's wiping my tears. I didn't even realise I was crying.

"I want to give you guys space but I can't... I'm feeling impotent "

Sabelo offers to take me to my room and as much as I hate being a burden, I let him.

My phone is ringing and as much as I'd rather not talk to him, I answer.

"Kamogelo? "

"Baby, hi. How are you feeling? "

I sigh.

"I'm fine. What do you want? "

"Forgiveness. I just need you to forgive me and give me another chance. It's been the longest two months with you wanting nothing to do with me"

I sigh.

"Why did you do it? "

I need to know.

"I was just stupid baby and allowed myself to fall into the snares of temptation. I just can't lose you Ariel, I love you too much and I can't imagine my life without you "

I sigh.

"OK. It's fine. I've already forgiven you "

"I'm going to prove myself to you Ariel. I'll never do you like that again "

He says sincerely. I hope he means it.

"One last chance Kamogelo"

"That's all I'm asking for baby "

.

TSHIAMO

The attention I get every time I'm at the airport is overwhelming. I never thought it'd be like this but damn, I love it.

It's great knowing that I have the support of the whole country.

It's those greetings that I get from kids when I'm walking around that make my day.

I knock at her home and it's MaNomsa who opens. She gives me a hug then let's me In.

This woman is one good actress. You'd think she's this warm hearted good person but get to know her deeds.

She wouldn't even pretend in my presence that she hates Aphilile.

"How was the travelling? "

She asks when I'm in the house.

"Smooth. Where's Lilly? "

"Mxm. In her room"

That doesn't even surprise me.

I go through and knock on her room. She opens with a big smile and throws herself in my arms. Someone missed me.

"Can I breathe now? "

She giggled and let go of me.

"Where's the young chirp? "

I ask, looking around the room.

"He's with the grandparents. Let's go"

"One would swear you knew what time I'd be here"

She rolls her eyes, takes her bag and we leave.

I'm driving so we go pick up Sam from her home then drive to get a bite. I'm surprised her grandma isn't at church or maybe it came out early.

"Tell me about the girl who had you locked up in Cape Town "

That's Lilly who never forgets. I laugh.

"Couldn't you at least wait for dessert? "

She laughs and shakes her head.

"Nop. I'm interested "

"I'd also love to hear this"

Sam adds.

"Her name is Ariel and I like her. She has a boyfriend though. Some nigger she's been with for about five years "

I say and they're just staring at me.

"Five years is a long time man"

Aphilile says.

"I know but I'm a patient man. I know our meeting wasn't in vain. It could be fate. "

So we spend the whole day together and I drive them home, dropping Aphilile off first.

Samantha however insists that she sleeps over and I don't decline.

I switch on the lights when we get home because it's a bit dark.

"I wonder what you're thinking "

I say as she pours herself wine. She's been taking care of my house in my absence.

"I'm not thinking anything "

She says as she throws herself next to me.

"Really? "

I say, tucking a few strands of her hair behind her ear.

"Yes"

She says, turning to face me. I nod and get closer.

"I'll believe you "

I whisper into her ear. With my hand behind her neck, I pull her face closer to mine and kiss her.

I did say we're good friends.

She kisses me back and it starts off slowly then escalates as she gets on top of me.

This is exactly why she wants to sleepover. I do know that little sleeping will be done tonight though.

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TSHIAMO

She's up before me and I find her in my kitchen, making breakfast.

"Shouldn't you be on your way to school? "

I ask, seeing that she's not even dressed in her school uniform.

"I still have time. Good morning "

I go to the fridge and take out a bottle of water.

"Morning. What are we having? "

I ask, sitting down.

"Omelettes "

"So, there's really another girl? "

She asks as we're now eating.

"You want to go back there now? "

She shrugs.

"I'm just asking, not a big deal "

She says and I nod.

"I like her "

I admit.

"I'm happy for you "

This is turning awkward. I don't say anything afterwards but just focus on my food.

She leaves after doing the dishes and I decide to shower.

I don't do much when I'm at home so I spend the day just lazing around. I'll only have a break for a month then it's back to the gym.

I decide to call Ariel just to check up on her.

She answers on the second ring.

"Hi"

She says. She sounds like she's been sleeping.

"Are you OK? You don't sound too fine"

She sighs.

"I'm fine. When are you coming? "

I laugh.

"Someone is missing me "

She giggles.

"I'm just asking. I want us to talk "

"Sounds serious "

I say. She doesn't say anything for a few seconds.

"Ariel? Are you there? "

"I am. I have to go. I'll see you when you come "

Then she hangs up.

Was I not the one who called kgante?

"Please, you may get in "

She rolls her eyes then sits next to me. It's around 5pm and I'm still thinking of getting something to eat.

"Let's go buy pizza "

I say to Lilly .

"Plus I need your advice on something "

She says as we go out.

"We will talk when we get there. Where's the little one? "

I ask as we get into the car.

"With the grandparents. He's safer there "

She says and this has me worried and concerned.

"What do you mean safer? "

She sighs.

"Ma is bringing scary men at the house. Even I don't feel safe "

"What's going on Lilly? "

We get into Debonair and I place an order for pizza and we go sit down.

"There's this man she came with, Speedy. He just gives me the creeps and I think they're in cahoots. I think it might have to do with me "

Speedy?

"Oh no. I think I know him"

Yes, I've just remembered.

"You do? "

She asks and I nod.

"He's some lowlife criminal. That man is very dangerous Lilly and I'd suggest you make a plan to keep yourself safe. "

She looks scared.

"But I... How? "

"Talk to Louis. It's time you moved out of that place "

She exhales loudly. I'd help but I'm hardly around and her living alone isn't ideally a safe option.

.

ARIEL

"Don't you have a degree to complete ? "

I ask Kamo after we hug. He's always here.

"Oh, I missed you too"

I roll my eyes and he chuckles and kisses my cheek.

"But really babe, I'm concerned "

He kisses my forehead.

"Don't worry, I'm still on track. It's my honours so I don't have to be at campus all the time. You can relax "

He cups my face and kisses my lips. I've missed this.

"How are you feeling? "

"I should get a dollar every time someone asks me that. You're all making me feel like I'm dying. This is why I kept it to myself "

But really

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I'm just tired of everyone on my case. Asking me how I feel won't change reality. The tumour is there.

"I'm sorry "

He kisses me again. I feel like he's torturing me with these kisses. I break it before it leads to more.

"When are you getting the results? "

"Tomorrow "

I say. My stomach grumbles.

"I haven't eaten "

I admit shyly. This is embarrassing.

"Are you crazy Ariel? You've already lost so much weight and you need to eat, for strength "

I roll my eyes. I'm happy with how I look.

"I'm sorry daddy "

He clicks his tongue then storms off. He comes back with a plate of food and literally feeds me. I'm glad I'm able to eat without vomiting.

Kamo accompanied me to the doctor for my results.

It's Tuesday and yes, I'm a little nervous. Heck, I'm very nervous because this could turn out bad.

"Miss Rhodes, you may take a sit "

Kamo squeezes my hand as we sit down. I'm almost shaking.

"I'm surprised you're not with Mr Radebe"

Snoopy much?

"Can we get right to it? "

I say because my personal life is none of her business.

"Of course Miss Rhodes "

I watch her as she puts on her goggles then goes through a file that has papers.

"I have your results. You have ependymoma "

OK, now I'm lost.

"What's that? "

"Ependymoma cancer is a rare tumor that occurs in the brain and spinal cord. In this case, yours is in the spinal cord. It's most common in children but it can affect anyone. What causes it is still unknown "

Dr Pillay says and all my hope shatters. I'm back there again.

"It is uncommon for it to spread and there are of course treatments "

She adds.

"What treatment options are available? I've already been through surgery "

My voice is breaking. Kamo holds my hand tight.

"We'll start off with surgery then radiation therapy to remove any traces of the tumour. "

I'm feeling down as we go home. It doesn't help that I'm also feeling weak and that I can barely walk.

He suggested us going out but I can't. I just want to cry myself to sleep.

The first thing I do is send a text to both my parents informing them about this then I switch off my phone.

"Baby? "

"Please Kamogelo, just let me be "

He doesn't say anything again. I pull the pillow to my body and close my eyes.

The tears keep falling.

Tshiamo is on my door just when I wake up.

I slept until the following day. Cassiel had to go to campus. My phone is still off.

"I got us coffee "

He says, swaying it in the air.

"I didn't think you'd come so early "

He kisses my cheek and goes to sit down. I'm in the kitchen and I only get to take a few steps then fall.

"Shit! "

He says then comes to pick me.

He wipes my tears with his thumb but they keep falling that he embraces me and brushes my back. He gives me water when I'm more calm.

"I feel like such a burden"

I say while looking at the glass that I'm holding.

"You'll never be a burden to people who love you and care about you "

He says and looking up and into his eyes, I see the sincerity.

"So you love me and care about me? "

He chuckles.

"You wanted to talk Ariel"

"Kamo and I fixed things. I got the results yesterday and it's Ependymoma cancer. It's in my spinal cord "

I say, with my eyes fixed on the glass.

"I'm not going anywhere Ariel"

He says as he's made me look at him with his finger on my chin.
I'm now forced to look at him.

"I'm loyal to him"

I say and he chuckles.

"I don't care. I'm not going anywhere and that's it"

I just smile.

.

APHILILE

I've been extra cautious ever since my chat with Tshiamo.

I told Louis everything and I'm glad that it's finally Friday and we can work out a way forward.

I wish the year was over and that I already had my matrix but I have to be patient.

Mrs Vuma fetches me and Ore is so happy to See Me.

We put my bag into the boot then she drives us to the airport.

I'm so happy to see him when we've landed but Ore is more happy because he runs off to him the moment he spots him and I'm left standing there with our bags. Louis comes to me with his hand holding Ore against his hip. He gives me a side hug then kisses me shortly.

"Hey baby, are you OK? "

I nod.

"We missed you daddy "

Ore says and I chuckle. He gives him to me then takes our bags.

We get takeaways on our way to his flat. I'm so happy when we get there because I feel the peace. It's great being with someone who loves me and knowing I'm where I'm wanted.

This is a feeling I only get when I'm with him.

"So my love, we have to talk "

He says as we're cuddling on the couch and I'm having wine. We've eaten and Ore fell asleep immediately after that.

"She told me she's been pretending and how she can't wait for me to finish high school so I can finally get out of her house. Now this man comes and Tshiamo tells me he's very dangerous.
"

I take a sip of the wine as I anticipate his reply.

He gulps his glass then pours another.

"I think it's best you both move in with my parents. They'll understand and there's more than enough space. You should do this when she's not there and we should get you safer

transportation to and from school. I don't want to take any chances babe "

I pull him In for a kiss and I know he's smiling through it.

"Thank you "

I say when I break it.

"I'd do anything for you baby and I'd die if anything was to happen to you or Ore "

" I love you "

I say and he kisses me again.

"I love you too"

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APHILILE

"You Still haven't showed me just how much you missed me"

Louis says just after I put Ore down.

It's evening now. I've bathed him and everything.

"But you also haven't showed me "

He chuckles and nods.

"It's like that now? "

I fold my arms then look at him.

"What do you think? "

In a speed of light, he has me against the wall. I can feel his breath on me. He licks my chin.

"I guess we owe each other than "

He whispers while running his hand on my inner thigh. My breath hitches.

"We do"

I whisper back. He holds my hands above my head then smashes his lips on mine. I gasp. He caught me off guard.

He stops, let's go of me then scans me up and down.

"Strip"

He says and it seems today, he's taking full control.

"I'm moving out. You're finally rid of me"

Nancy, Louis' mom is with me. I have my suitcase next to me.

I've already moved some things to the car and she got in Just as I was wheeling the last suitcase out.

"Moving out? "

Ma says Then claps her hands. I had a good time with Louis and it made e more happy to see Ore receiving all the love and warmth from his father. We got time to bond and I've been missing him since we left.

I don't reply. I thought I'd just disappear but It seems I thought wrong.

"Shame. If only you knew "

She says then takes out her phone. I look at Nancy who just shrugs.

"Go well"

Then she walks to her room.

"That was very strange "

Nancy says as we walk to the car. I agree. She didn't seem fazed Or shocked. It's very suspicious.

"I'm just glad I'm finally getting out of here"

I say but she shakes her head.

"It was just too easy "

We get into the car and I have an uneasy feeling. Ma has been hanging out with some strange man and again, why did she take out her phone after I announced my departure?

Maybe I'm overreacting.

"Shit, I can't reach my husband "

Nancy says as we're driving.

"Something isn't right Aphilile"

She adds and now my heart is racing.

"We're In trouble? "

I ask.

"We're being followed and my car can't go any faster. I don't know what's up"

I look out the window and notice the two black cars which are really following us.

We are approaching the robots and luck deserts us because it's red and we're forced to stop.

Guns. There are gun shots. I count in my head "bang" 1, "bang" 2, "bang" 3, "bang" 4.

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PAMELA

"How is she? "

Speedy asks, getting into one of the theatre room. It's where he does all his black market transplants.

Oh yes, I got to discover that he's a qualified surgeon.

"Better"

I say. I'm yet to get used to the idea of living with another lady. She's just invaded my territory and seems to have captured his heart.

She's younger than me and seems too innocent.

"They weren't suppose to shoot her"

He says. We're now both staring at her. She was shot in the ribs. The bullet missed her heart by a few inches. She's been in a coma since they came with her

It's been two months and I'm now on my sixth month of pregnancy.

"Why is she here? "

I ask because I'm curious.

"To take care of the baby. You're not suppose to ask questions "

I roll my eyes.

"So she's the reason we haven't moved? "

I want to know.

"No. Go make me something to eat "

I go out to the kitchen and do as I'm told.

"We're getting married tomorrow. Someone will bring you a dress and make you all pretty "

He says as we're now having dinner.

"What? "

"Your father will be there "

He adds and I don't even say anything.

I'm stuck with him and there's nothing I can do about it.

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LOUIS

"Where is mama Louis? "

He says, stomping his foot. What do I say when we've been searching for two months and In those, I had to bury my own mother.

I've been a mess and my dad is even worse. He's trying to be strong but the woman who've always held us together isn't here.

I had to come home.

It's tough. I'm forced to not break apart in my son's presence and though I'm trying, I feel like I'm failing to be strong for the both of us.

He's even resorted to calling me by my name. What do I say? We don't even know if she's alive wherever she is.

I blame myself. I feel like I should have acted sooner. Fuck but how would we have known this was going to happen?

Dad blames himself for everything. Mom tried calling him and when he could finally get back to her

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it was too late.

"Tata, I want mommy"

He says when dad comes. We're both just living corpses. He looks drained.

Jayden starts crying and that breaks my heart.

He picks his grandson up and I walk to my room.

Nothing numbs the pain. Alcohol doesn't help. Drugs don't.
Being strong doesn't. Faith is gone. Hope? It's slowly deserting
me.

.

ARIEL

"My girls"

Dad says as he gets into his room. Mom and I are cuddling on
their bed, watching a movie. I love the attention. I don't know
but it feels good to be treated like a baby.

I usually hate it but I'm just grateful to be around people who
love me at this time. People who care about me and who'd do
anything for me.

He kisses our foreheads then takes off his tie.

"You smell like a woman "

Mom says and I giggle.

"I do? I didn't realise "

Dad says. Their "fights" are entertaining. It's like some sort of
role play.

"And now that you know? "

Mom asks, pulling me to snuggle tighter.

Dad rolls his eyes.

"You can choose whatever punishment you feel suits me"

OK, I don't think I should be here.

"I'm going to uhm... Get water"

They laugh as I walk out. The radiation went well and I'm recovering at home. I have to deal with nausea but that's it.

"Mm, hey there "

Cassiel says, pouring herself juice.

I scream. I didn't know she's coming. We share a long, tight hug.

"You could have at least told me "

I say and she chuckles.

"It's called surprise for a reason "

She says, rolling her eyes.

"Are you done with exams? "

I ask as we're now sitting down. I had to pause my studies for a while but I'll be going back for the second semester.

"No. I just came to see you "

"I feel special. Thanks twinny "

She doesn't look fine though, which worries me. She's usually chirpy.

"What's up? "

I ask and she sighs.

"I think I love him too much "

I know she's talking about Sabelo.

"You Still think he's cheating? "

I ask and she nods.

"A woman's intuition is never wrong. Just like with you and Kamo "

I can't help but laugh.

"You're being crazy. Stop it"

"He's my fiance, why is he doing this to me? "

"He's not cheating "

I repeat but she shakes her head.

"I'm leaving him"

That's it, I'm done. I just laugh out loud. She's crazy. I know she won't leave him.

Everyone is just being crazy today.

.

TSHIAMO

"she could be barging in here and then start talking nonstop. I just... It all doesn't make sense "

"I no longer know what to tell our son. I thought he'd forget or something but he asks about her every moment "

Louis says and we both sigh.

"I feel so helpless. I mean, it feels as if I took everything too lightly. Her concerns... I failed her"

I whisper the last part.

"What kind of man am I? "

I add.

"If only that witch hadn't disappeared "

Louis says. Aphilile's grandma is nowhere to be found.

It's like she's disappeared without a trace.

"Speedy is good. That bastard is like a ghost. We can't catch him"

I say hopelessly.

"I'll never stop trying "

I'm on her instagram and I'm stalking her again.

We haven't even spoken in about a week and my pride is not going to be the first to call.

I've given her a lot to think about and I'm waiting for her to miss Me.

I'm punishing myself, I know but she has a man.

My phone rings. It's her. She's video calling me.

"Ariel Rhodes" She looks nervous.

"Hi" I'm right. She's nervous.

"Ariel" "I.. Uhm.. How are you? "

She asks. I shrug.

"I'd be lying if I said I know. How can I help you?"

"I want to visit you " She says, blushing which makes me laugh.

"Are you sure? " She nods.

"I'll book a flight for you "

I say and she smiles.

21

ARIEL

I don't know what I'm doing. I really don't. I mean Kamo has been good to me, maybe too good but here I am, visiting another man.

I've just arrived at the airport and I'm waiting for him to fetch him.

I'm so nervous. Anything can happen. I see him approach and my heart beats even faster.

He gives me a side hug.

"Hi"

I say and he chuckles.

"Relax. I don't bite"

He says then takes my Small luggage bag.

"I don't know what's going on with my mind "

I say when we're in the car.

"I think this more like you listening to your heart and ignoring your mind "

He says. Well, at least he didn't laugh.

"Do you need anything? "

He adds.

"Mm. Cake. I need cake "

Thinking about it makes my tongue water.

"Anything else? "

I shake my head.

He takes my hand now that we're out of the car and have arrived at the shopping complex.

I buy buttermilk sponge cake and vanilla ice-cream. I also get dry red wine and wine gums. He buys biltong then he pays.

"Are you tired? "

He asks when we're at his house.

"No. I'm just sticky "

I say.

"Go Bath. I'll make us something to eat "

"And where's the bathroom? "

I ask as I've not been given the tour of the house.

"This house is not big Ariel. You'll find it"

I get a call from Cassiel just after having my bath. I'm wrapped in Just a towel.

I sit on the bed and answer.

"Half? "

"You sneaky hoe"

I laugh. That's expected from her.

"How are you Cass? "

I ask.

"Uh-uh. We talk about you. Kante What about Kamo? "

"I'm not getting married Cassiel. I'm just visiting a friend "

She laughs.

"Keep fooling yourself. Just call me when something happens.
Use protection! "

Then she hangs up on me. yep she's crazy.

"Hai finish up. I miss you! "

He shouts from outside the door.

I giggle for a bit. I get dressed in paperback shorts and a black top. I wear my flops, let my hair loose then get out, leaving my phone on the charger.

"Smells good in here"

He's already sitting down so I sit beside him.

"It's not the fancy food your chef cooks but you'll enjoy it"

"I eat anything really "

I say and he smiles.

"Good. "

The food is great. I eat until I'm full. I don't eat much naturally but I always finish what I dish up.

"It was good. Thank you "

"You're welcome. Let's do the dishes"

I wipe while he washes.

"So, you missed me so much that you just had to come to my house? "

He asks, looking at me. He's putting me on The spot.

"I... I just... Maybe "

He laughs.

"Don't be shy now "

"You're making me shy"

I admit.

"Sorry "

He says, still staring at me.

"For the record

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I'm glad you're here"

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APHILILE

Pain. It gushes all over my body. All I remember is the voices. It's of two people, a man and a woman. They've been Coming here and they'd talk.

Sometimes she comes alone and shouts at me. When he comes, he tells me I'm his possession. I never imagined being owned

I remember my step mom. She used to tell me how much she owns me. She's force me to do everything because she owns me. When my father came, I couldn't say anything.

I wished for a mother's love. I yearned for that warmth.

How did I get here? I wonder. My eyes are heavy but I force to open them. It's blurry at first. I blink a couple of times. There's a shadow at the far corner. It's a bit dark.

I clear my throat. It's very dry.

"He.. Hello? "

The lights are switched on. He has a big gun and he's wearing all black. He's dark, big and scary.

'Where am I? ' I wonder.

It looks like a theatre room. That should explain the pain. He says something to some device.

I can't hear what he's saying. He hasn't even looked at me yet I've been staring at him.

The door opens and a man comes in. He looks creepy and familiar.

He comes to me then stares at me. He's scaring me.

"Water "

I say and he takes a bottle out of his pocket and a straw. He opens, puts the straw and helps me drink. I cough after.

"How are you feeling? "

He asks and I recognise the voice. It's the same voice I heard when I couldn't wake up.

"In pain. "

"You were shot on the ribs"

He says plainly.

"You weren't suppose to be shot. You almost died. "

He's making me dizzy with this revelation.

"Who are you? Where am I? "

I ask because my memory is sort of blank.

He smirks.

"Speedy. You're mine"

"What do you mean I'm yours? "

"Kusho I own you. You should rest. Your sister will bring you medication for the pain"

He turns but I'm not about to let him leave.

"No no. What do you mean you own me? Do I look like an asset? "

He chuckles.

"That's what your grandma saw you as. She sold you to me"

Ma. I remember her.

"You! "

I start hyperventilating.

"We're going somewhere. Just breathe. You can't die on me now"

'Breathe. Breathe. Breathe' I repeat in my mind. I've been sold.

"Louis... No... "

He takes out a syringe.

"Ore... "

I whisper before it knocks me off.

.

LOUIS

It's been four months and she's still not here.

I don't know what to say anymore. I mean it's too soon to give up but having buried my mom makes it impossible for me not to think she's dead.

"I don't know Louis. I don't know if I can keep up with the search"

Dad says. We've just had dinner. Ore went to sleep right after.

"But dad, it's only been four months. It's too early for us to give up "

I say

"We should just start searching for her body "

He says and I keep quiet for a bit.

"I can't allow that "

I finally say.

"Louis, I lost my wife. I haven't been able to mourn her. At least we have Ore with us"

I stand up, unable to believe him.

"Really dad? You're being unfair. We can't just forget about Lilly. I love her dad "

"I love your mother! I just... I need a break. I'm sorry son but I'm done"

"Dad... Dad please"

He just walks away.

What do I do? I mean I also didn't mourn mom but I'm not giving up.

I can't. Lilly is the love of my life and I can't just forget about her.

APHILILE

She comes in carrying a baby. It's a girl. I know because she's wrapped in a pink shawl. She's his wife. She has a big diamond ring on her a finger.

She doesn't like me and she's never hidden it. I'd hear when I was sleeping and she'd talk to me.

Even after I woke up, she came and reminded me how she feels about me.

I don't want to be here. I have no interest in her husband or being part of their lives in anyway.

"Aphilile, I still wonder why I didn't just switch off those machines while you were laying unconscious "

She says. She's too pretty to be so bitter.

"Did he buy you too? "

I ask and she laughs.

"I've done some pretty bad things, I deserve to be here. Wena, you're just too innocent. "

The baby cries, making me miss my son more. It would have been better if I had some sort of amnesia.

I miss Louis too and it scares me. What if they move on? What if he finds someone else and he raises my son with her?

It's possible. There's no hope of me ever being free.

"That doesn't make me feel any better "

I say honestly.

She chuckles.

"Shame, poor thing. It's life baby, just put on your big girl boots. Soon enough, you'll be travelling all over the world trafficking drugs"

She laughs loudly as she walks out.

I'd pray but how will that help? I'd cry but even That Won't help so I just stare into space.

It's Saturday. She told me that. I also know that we're in the last week of August.

"You seem better"

It's him. I open my eyes and he's looking at me.

I don't reply.

"I'd hate to think that I'm talking to my self "

He says in a scary tone.

"I was almost there"

I say, now looking at him. He looks a little confused but quickly covers it with his scary stare.

"I was doing my matrix. I had plans. Plans to make something of myself. To make myself proud and to work hard and provide for my son"

"I sympathise with you "

He says and I know he doesn't mean it. His tone backs me up

"Go shower. You're getting out of this room"

He says, looking around.

"Where am I going? "

I ask nervously.

"A room next to ours. It's the nursery. You'll be taking care of pumpkin while her mom and I push the hustle. It's good that you have a son so this will come easy for you "

So just like that my fate has been decided for me. What else can I say?

Maybe I can hope that I'll get out but I do know that all that I ever dreamt of was just that... A dream.

.

TSHIAMO

"I need your help"

I can't believe I'm doing this.

"Good day to you too son"

I huff. This is not a friendly visit.

"Are you going to help or not? "

I ask. I'm getting impatient.

"How? I'm in jail "

He says.

"My friend has been sold to some gangster unwillingly. The grandma has taken a run for it. "

He's just staring at me.

"That's sad"

He says after a while.

"We need to find her. She has a three year old son who won't stop asking for his mother "

"Are you the father? "

He says

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just after I finish talking.

"No. "

He leans back on his chair. He's being difficult about this.

"What do you want me to do? Break out? "

I huff.

"No. Can't you do something from here? "

He laughs.

"You must think I'm some superman. "

"Why are you being so difficult about this? "

He shrugs

"I'm enjoying my son's visit. It's always good to see Mzansi's star require my presence. "

Oh God.

"Father, please "

"I mean I know you're a busy man. She must mean something to you "

"He's the sister I never had "

He nods.

"It's a pity I got caught before I could nut. Your mom and I could have gave you a sister"

"Really now? "

He laughs.

"I'm sorry. Do you have a name? "

Good. I think we're going somewhere.

"Speedy"

"He's still alive? "

I just look at him. Would a ghost take Aphilile? Definitely not.

"Eish, I've been gone forever moss. So he's the big thing ekasi?
"

He seems more interested in Speedy than the issue at hand.

"Yeah"

I say with a bored expression.

"Two years is nothing. I'm just going to behave and who knows,
I might be out by the end of next year "

"Are you saying... I can't wait for then"

He has to be kidding.

"Don't worry boy. He won't kill her or anything. It'll be a life
lesson to her. Angithi we all go through shit that only makes us
stronger at the end"

He's too chilled, not even fazed.

"She has a son. He's only three "

I say.

"He's not yours moss. Wena relax, enjoy life. You'll grow old if you keep on stressing like this. I have to go. Visit again man. Don't be a stranger "

Why do I feel like this visit was a waste of time?

Louis calls me when I get back to the hotel.

He knows about this trip.

"Sure jita "

I say when I answer

"How did it go man? "

He asks desperately. I sigh.

"There's hope but it's not going to happen anytime soon "

"What do you mean man? Is he going to help? "

I breathe out.

"He is but only after he gets out. We'll just have to be patient "

I say. We're not speaking of a lot of years so I'm hopeful. He's a man of his word. That I am certain of.

"how long? "

"Minimum is a year "

He sighs.

"It's something. Thank you man "

.

ARIEL

"Your mind doesn't seem to be here "

Kamo says. We're in his flat. I've been here since Monday.

"Why do you say that? "

I ask, looking at my phone.

"I've realised that I'm having a conversation with myself. You keep staring at your phone "

He says, forcing me to put it away.

"I'm sorry "

I say and I mean it.

"Are you expecting a call? "

He asks and I shake my head.

"No"

"What's going on then? "

He doesn't seem to want to let this go any time soon.

"It's nothing "

That's true though. Perhaps I'm hoping that I'll get some text from Tshiamo miraculously.

I've deleted his number and blocked him.

"Give me your phone "

He says and turning to look at him, he's not playing. I slowly take it and hand it to him.

I watch as he goes through it, knowing that there's nothing incriminating that he's going to find.

He hands it back when he's content I assume.

"Ariel, I love you "

"I know. I love you too"

He pulls me to him and kisses my cheek. I inwardly breathe out.

I made the right choice.

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BOKAO

"Ntwana, what am I going to do? "

I say, running my hand through my hair. I'm not the type to get scared easily but this is a big deal.

"First, relax "

"Relaxing won't help! "

I snap, getting more frustrated.

"Snapping at me won't help. Le wena I told you to stop losing your temper "

"This is not the time for bo 'I told you so ' "

I say then hang up because she's not helping.

I sigh and get back into the car. I have no choice. I also know that I'm fired.

"Lord help me"

I say then start the car. The boss is standing at the gate and he stops me just as I'm about to drive in.

"Phuma "

I look at Isak. The bastard was suppose to cover for me.

I receive a text on my phone when I get out.

"Tell him the truth "

Nop, I'd rather lose this job.

"Car keys, go get your shit and make sure I never see your face again "

I roll my eyes, as if.

"And then, where's my beer? "

My mom says immediately when I get home. I'm still in my work overall and I have the bag which has my clothes.

"Driving you to the clinic then home cost me my job so I don't know where it's going to come from"

I say, sitting down.

Isak promised to cover for me. He's my coworker but that bastard has always been after my ass.

We never got along from the first time I started, which was six months ago.

"I told you to let-"

I cut her off.

"Nyaa, I wanted to do this. I had a car and you needed a ride. I'll find another job "

Which of course is going to be a mission.

"Did you cook? "

I ask, looking at the kitchen. I'm trying to change the subject.

"Bokao, you're 28 years old. Aren't you tired of moving from one job to the next? "

There's always a lecture when she's sober

"Let me call Mbali, maybe she cooked "

She shakes her head as she takes out her yellow sneif container.

"And when will you stop using the poor girl? "

"She loves me"

I say defensively.

"She's not the one for you. This is just going to hurt her, not you "

I sigh.

"Ma, you've been saying that for five years now. When is that one going to come? Just accept her because she makes me happy "

I kiss her cheek then go to my room. I don't bother bathing but just change back to my clothes, those I wore to work and dismiss the overall. I doubt I'll be wearing it again.

I'm a 28 year old qualified engineer but it's hard for me to find a decent job.

I went to university immediately after completing my matric and four years later, I had my degree.

Unfortunately, it was a waste of time because I never got a job. After two years of job searching, I settled for anything I could find.

I live with my parents. My father works at the mines and comes home only in December.

I have a little sister who's now at varsity.

"Baby"

She says when I get into her room.

"How are you love? "

I ask, opening the pots.

"I'm fine, though it would have been better if you were here for me and not the food "

I take out a plate and dish for myself.

"How was your day? "

I ask, hoping she doesn't ask about mine.

"Fine

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same old. At least I had five customers today "

"So o popile? "

She laughs.

"I have to pay rent , buy this food that you always finish then pamper myself just so you don't leave me for a slay Queen "

I laugh. She's crazy.

"Imagine leaving all this booty for a slay Queen. Never babe, kana you're the whole restaurant "

"Vele, and you should never forget that "

We both laugh as I pull her in for a side hug.

We're sitting on her bed.

She's renting a room that has a small bathroom which has a shower and toilet.

She does people's hair while also studying to be a nurse.

"You coming to church with me on Sunday? "

I ask, pulling her to lay on my chest.

"If I don't have customers "

"I lost my job "

She doesn't say anything for a while.

"I'll find another one"

I was just a mere mechanic anyway. An underpaid one for that matter, considering how hard I worked.

"And for how long will you remain employed? "

"Don't say that. You sound just like my mother and I remember leaving her at home "

I say. She's working on my nerves.

"What twenty eight year old still leaves with their mother? I'm 24 but I'm not "

I laugh. Right.

"It's like that now? "

She sighs.

"I'm sorry baby but we're not getting any younger. We should be saving up for a house now "

I sigh

"I know but we'll get there. I'll search for posts online and see what comes up"

"We can start now "

"No. I have other things on my mind "

I say, turning her chin so she can face me. I place my lips on hers and we start kissing.

.

APHILILE

Freedom. I think it was suppose to bring me joy, peace and calmness.

It's been just a month since I was rescued.

It's not a blur, the image is clear and precise.

I remember men just coming in, OK it was about three of them who just started shooting people.

We heard it outside and that time, I held on to Candice like my life depended on it.

We were in all in the lounge, watching TV.

They looked at me and one said something to the other and they pulled me and rushed me out with the scared Candice.

I know they killed them. I still hear the scream Pam made as she took what I assumed was her last breath.

"Mama? "

I look at my son who's become like a stranger to me.

I'm surprised he calls me mama. I think it's because Louis told him to.

It's been more than two years after all.

It's September. I'm 23 now.

"Where's Candice? "

I ask, still staring into space.

"You hate me"

He says then runs off, crying.

"Baby "

It's Louis. I don't reply.

"Where's Candice? "

I ask after a few minutes.

I haven't turned to look at him.

"Mama, mama "

She says and I turn to pick her, kissing her all over the face.

"Did you miss me? "

She nods and I kiss her lips.

"Mama missed you too"

I kiss her again.

"Candice, go to your brother while I speak with your mother "

She jumps off me then runs off.

She's two years and very energetic.

"Aphilile"

He says sternly and when I don't turn nor reply, he sits on the coffee table before me.

"Baby, this is me. Your man "

I'm just staring at him.

"Why can't you see us? "

"You're in front of me Louis and I'm looking at you "

I say bluntly.

"Our son just ran off crying. He thinks you hate him and it doesn't seem to bother you . Why can't you treat him how you treat Candice? She's not even your daughter! "

"Don't shout at me"

I say, folding my arms.

"I waited. I waited for you for more than two years, holding on to the love we share. I waited even when people had given up and now you come and -"

"You regret waiting. A lot can happen in two years "

I say and he sighs.

"I love you dammit! "

I get up.

"What would you like to eat? "

"Dammit man Aphilile! "

"Chicken? "

I ask.

He clicks his tongue then storms off.

I go to the kitchen and get started on the cooking.

.

TSHIAMO

"Are you sure you don't need anything? "

I ask him again.

"I'm a man, I can take care of myself. Although I won't mind if you find me a, woman, plus I miss the warmth "

He winks.

"Really father? "

He laughs

"Lighten up. How's your little sister? When am I meeting her? "

"I don't know. I haven't heard from Louis. I think she's fine "

He shakes his head.

"I doubt. We don't know what she went through in that house with Speedy. "

"Yeah but she has Louis. I'll go check up on them soon. I'm just giving them time to get used to each other again "

I say. I'm about to go out to town.

"It's been a month. I need to meet who I saved. "

"You will dad. I'll call Louis "

He nods. I dial his number as I walk out.

"Sure man "

"Awe"

"Howzit? "

He sighs. That's not a good sign.

"I wish I had good things to say. "

"That bad? "

He sighs again.

"She's impossible man and I hate how she treats Ore "

"How? "

I ask because I remember her loving her son dearly.

"She hates him and he can see that. He's always crying and doesn't talk much. "

"Dad wants to meet her"

I tell him.

"You can both come for dinner "

"Cool. We'll come tomorrow "

I didn't think things were this bad but like dad said, we don't know what went down in that house.

24

ARIEL

"I'm done, I'm so done"

She says, taking off her heels.

"That bad? "

She jeers and I wait.

"Firstly, he lacks table manners. The man talks with food in his mouth, where would I go with him? He can't use simple fork and knife. On top of that, he eats like a dog. I don't want to mention the bill which I had to settle. Secondly, he talks all about himself. He didn't give me a chance to say anything. Thirdly, he has an awful sense of humour and he lacks style "

"He looks good though "

I say and she shoots me a look which makes me laugh.

"Sorry "

I say and continue laughing.

"I'm just done. I don't know what kind of bad luck leaving Sabelo left me with but I'm just done. I'm done with guys and in just going to focus on being a career woman "

Whatever happened to the Cassiel I loved to hate.

"What happened to you? "

I just have to ask.

"Argh, it gets tiring. I mean all I've done is move from one guy to the next. It never works. I thought it would with Sabelo but we never made it to the alter. I've invested too much and I'm focusing on what works now "

"But you've been single for a year. It's like you've turned celibate "

She laughs.

"You're one to talk considering you've only slept with one man your whole life. I can't believe you let Tshiamo go, just like that "

I laugh, rolling my eyes.

"You can have him, since you're such a fan "

"Nop, I'll pass. He's too tempting but no. I'm cool on my own "

"If you say so"

I shrug.

"How's the wedding coming? "

She asks. We're getting married by the end of the month, on the first of October.

"So far so good. You'd know if you weren't always so busy"

She rolls her eyes.

It's funny how I thought she'd pursue a career in modelling but it had just been a hobby like she says.

She going corporate, pursuing a career in financial accounting.

"Have you gotten any replies on that add? "

She shakes her head.

"No one I like. Let's talk about your bridal shower "

I laugh.

"I haven't got my dress yet and already you're thinking of that "

She shrugs.

"It's a party. Are you sure about this? "

"About what? "

"Marrying him"

She says, sounding concerned.

"I am. I know you're probably worried because it didn't work out with Sabelo"

She shakes her head

"It was a mutual decision and we're good friends now. I'm asking because I care about you and yes, I still don't like him"

I laugh, embracing her then kissing her cheek.

"Thank you but I'm sure. Mom asked me the same thing and my answer is still the same "

"We all want the best for you "

I nod. I know they do.

"You have nothing to worry about "

I'm at home. In fact, we both are in preparation for the wedding.

Kamo is taking me out for lunch. It's Saturday and it's hot outside.

Anyway, I wear a yellow flare dress with flops. I don't put on any makeup and get my purse.

"Hi mom, bye mom"

I say and run off, knowing she'll derail me.

"Hey wife"

He says, kissing my cheek.

"Hi babe "

I think the best decision I made was forgiving him that time because we're in a good space now and I'm so happy.

.

TSHIAMO

My life has been pretty much busy. I have a manager now, who's also my agent and gets me into all sorts of endorsements and adds.

It's crazy. I also have a coach and I only took a break because of Aphilile.

I'll be going to Joburg come last week of September and I'm also attending Ariel's wedding. We're not exactly enemies, though I know she wants nothing to do with me.

Anyway, who knows who I might meet there?

"Are you ready? "

I ask dad. We're having dinner with Louis and Lilly.

"Yes. Let's go"

I take my car keys and we leave in my car.

I can imagine how Louis feels

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knowing that he stopped living, waiting for Aphilile and then she becomes a completely different person.

He's the one who opens up for us. My dad insisted on wine and flowers, all for her.

"Nice house"

Dad says as we get inside. I know how his mouth just runs.

"Thank you Mr Radebe"

"Oh, just call me Senzo. Where's the lady of the house? "

He asks, still holding the flowers and wine.

"Aphilile! "

Louis calls and she comes in shortly. She's dressed in a black dress and a doek.

"This is for you "

Dad says and she accepts

"Thank you. I'll put these in water "

She looks like herself to me or maybe it's too early to judge.

"Where are the kids? "

I ask, as we now take our seats in the dining table.

As if on cue, they come in running.

"Candice, stop running! "

"Sorry mommy "

They sit down and both greet.

"I have to ask"

Dad says as we're now having dessert, the kids having been dismissed.

"I'll just go do the dishes "

"Hai no, I want to know what I was saving you from cause all you come back with is a shitty attitude "

"Dad! "

I say but he's just looking at Aphilile.

"No. We need to know what happened there. What makes her care this much about a child who's not hers but be so cold towards her own? "

I look at Louis and he doesn't say anything.

My dad has a way of making you shake with fear. Just his voice.

Aphilile looks scared.

"I... Nothing. "

She says, looking down.

"You're saying I had people killed over nothing? "

"I... No. The... His wife did what I was used to... The mistreatment, being forced to do everything around the house with her daughter on my back. The worst was being forced to watch them engage in sexual activities. He... He would show me clips of Louis and Ore going out and having fun without me. It hurt so much and that made me think they don't need me"

"Babe, it wasn't like that. If we didn't need you, I would have moved on with someone else and have Louis call her mama "

Louis says, holding her hand.

"He never forced himself on you? "

She shook her head.

"But he did hit me when his wife would lie about me. They treated me like a dog and Candice, she didn't even like her. She said we just came to steal her man's attention and I guess knowing she hated us made me love her more. "

"So why you acting like this? "

Dad says while Lilly looks really sad.

She shrugs.

"I'd convinced myself they don't care. In my mind, only Candice does"

"Do you know how stupid that sounds? "

"Dad, please. People don't react the same to situations. "

"Yeah right. Let's go"

He just stands up and leaves while Aphilile cries.

"I'm sorry guys "

I say then follow him.

"That was unnecessary "

I say when I get into my car.

"It was. Trust me, it was "

I don't say anything but just shake my head. What does he even mean by that?

.

APHILILE

I'm a bad person. I'm such a bad person.

"Yes you are "

I look at my hands. When I touch my face she also does it simultaneously.

OK. I'm going mad.

"Who are you? "

I ask and she laughs. That was stupid. She looks like me and is even wearing my clothes.

I take off the doek. She does too.

"This is.. Who are you? "

Her laugh fills the room and I look around, am I going mad?

"Aphilile, Aphilile, don't you see that they don't want you? You're a horrible person and the world would be a better person without you "

She says and laughs

"No. You're wrong "

"Your father didn't want you, your mom left you and your so called grandma sold you. "

"Aphilile? Are you OK in there? "

Louis asks, knocking on my door.

I look at the door and when I turn back, it's just me.

"I'm going crazy "

I say then I go open.

"I'm fine"

He comes in. We're not sharing the bedroom.

"You've been crying "

I shrug.

"I just... I'm a bad person "

He comes closer and holds me.

"You've been through a lot "

"Yes, he hit me and they called me horrible names but others have been through worse. He never raped me"

He brushes my back as I cry.

Why did it take Tshiamo's father coming for me to realise how horrible I've been?

25

BOKAO

I spent a week without a job and I've never been so bothered.

Yes, I'm used to moving from one job to the next but I usually get replies quick on what I apply for.

It's now the second week of unemployment and second weeks since I applied for a few jobs online.

It's the it thing and I have to move with the times. I'm not that old anyway.

I didn't go out the past weekend. I wanted to be fresh today and that I am.

"Do you have everything? "

Mom asks as I sit down and she pours me coffee.

"What exactly do I need? I submitted my cv and that's it"

She nods. I get rude when I'm nervous and she knows this.

Heck, I don't know why I'm nervous but maybe it's because a lot rests on this job. I'm tired of disappointing Mbali and the last thing I want is for her to give up on me and find someone else. That woman has been with me through the most.

"You're going to get it "

"I'll buy you a case if I do "

She laughs. We share a hug.

"Let's pray"

She says and starts before I can even reply. That's new. Maybe having a drink once in a while instead of daily is cause of all this change.

I hug her again then kiss her lips.

I had to borrow a clipper from Mbali so I can catch a taxi and perhaps grab something to eat.

We're meeting at a cafeteria which I assume is of the company.

The building is huge and standing before it, I feel so little.

I arrive first then sit down.

"OK, you can do this. Be yourself "

I hear a laugh behind me and clear my throat then turn.

"Bokao Sibiyá? "

I stand up.

"That's me, Mrs Rhodes "

We shake hands.

"Just call me Cassiel. "

We both sit Down and she waves her hand and someone comes to us.

"I didn't think you were so... Young"

She chuckles.

"Of course and it's not Mrs, It's Miss"

"I'm sorry. Of course "

"Lighten up B, I'm not a bad boss "

I breathe out.

Young, sexy and successful. That's intimidating enough.

"OK Miss Rh... I mean Cassiel. I'm not trying to be forward or anything but the add didn't say much "

She looks at me. I hope I didn't just make a fool of myself.

"Cassiel? "

She shakes her head.

"I'm sorry, I'm hungry. Can we eat first? I'd appreciate if you go check on our food "

I clear my throat.

"Of course "

Just as I'm about to leave, the waitress comes so I sit back down.

We eat silently and for the first time in my life, I'm trying not to embarrass myself.

"Right, your duties "

it's about time. I nod.

"No firstly, do you have a partner? Family obligations maybe? We'll be doing a lot of travelling together. I need to know you'll always be there when I need you "

I clear my throat.

"I have a partner yes but I'm not married. The only obligation I have is to build a better future for us and my mom of course "

She smiles.

"Great. Anyway, you will also be my driver. Even when I'm going to the club, you'll have to be on standby "

OK, this is a lot.

"I.. Uhm, will I get a break? "

I have to ask. I have Mbali .

"Of course, how does Thirty sound like? "

She'll have to be more specific.

"Thirty? "

She rolls her eyes.

"Thirty thousand. It's sort of like a package with benefits such as your car premiums, car insurance, retirement package Instalments, life cover and your medical aid "

This is overwhelming. I look up and thank the heavens. This is amazing.

"It's perfect "

I'll be left with more than enough after all the deductions and Mbali and I can get that place and move in together.

"Great. I'm still waiting for my lawyer to finalise the contract. You'll be on a one month probation. "

She stands up and throws some car keys at me.

"You start next week and get your tuxedo ready because we're going to a wedding "

I stand up.

"Uhm, of course ma'am. I mean

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Miss... Cassiel "

"It's parked outside, you can order anything on my tab. Yours will be ready next week "

"I... Wow "

"How about you call your girlfriend and celebrate? Or boyfriend "

I laugh.

"Will do"

.

APHILILE

"I'm so sorry baby. I really am"

I hug him tightly and he hugs me back with his little hands.

"I love you OK "

I say, holding his hands

"I love you too mommy "

I hug him again.

"Mom, school "

We both giggle. Louis comes and kisses me on the cheek.

"Bye baby "

"Proper kiss? "

I ask and he chuckles.

"I'm coming over at lunch. I love you "

"I love you too. So much "

I'm left with Candice. She has a fever and is still sleeping. I decide to clean around the house.

The past week was of self-introspection and I've realised what matters.

I do think of seeking professional help but I'm not ready yet.

I'm not ready to tell all to a stranger. Having Tshiamo's father force it out of me might have been a blessing in disguise but I can't imagine myself reliving all of my life.

"I made soup for you "

She's waken up and I was able to bath her.

"Thanks mama"

I'm feeling so anxious and get so excited when the clock hits lunch time.

I know Louis won't disappoint me. He never has. I'm working so hard to get back to my old self and I want us to go back where we were.

I've moved my stuff into his room and I'm hoping he won't mind.

Candice is sleeping and I decide to cook while waiting for him. I hear his car outside and immediately wash my hands.

"Finally! "

I say when he comes in and he laughs.

"Hi baby, we don't have much time "

He says and immediately comes to me and starts kissing me.

It feels so good to have his hands all over me, touching me and exploring me.

This reminds me of who we were before the whole trafficking.

He gets rid of my clothes, planting kisses all over my torso.

"Are you sure? I can still wait"

I shake my head.

"I'm sure "

He kisses me shortly. I'm on the dining table, legs spread and slowly, he slides in.

It's not easy since its been so long but he manages and it feels great.

I can't help the moans that escape my mouth and I try to keep it low because of Candice who's still sleeping.

"I cooked"

I say, after I'm able to catch my breath after all that hotness.

"I'm going to take a quick shower then leave. I'll eat in the evening "

I smile.

"OK "

"Get dressed. You're tempting "

He says and I laugh.

"You're the one who undressed me"

I say with a shrug.

"Candice might just walk in "

He says then leaves to the bathroom.

I get dressed, wash my hands and resume my cooking. I'll shower later.

.

TSHIAMO

"When are you seeing Aphilile? She misses you. You two were best friends "

We're at a restaurant. She's studying at Rosebank college.

"I thought you wanted to meet because you missed me"

"Samantha, Aphilile has been through hell"

She sighs

"I know OK, I know but I don't think she'd want me as a friend "

Now, I'm confused.

"And why would you say that? "

"Because I... I almost thought I could replace her "

"She's your friend "

I say, trying to wrap my head around this.

"I know OK and that was stupid. I'm a bad friend and she doesn't need me"

I touch her hand.

"She can understand. Make her understand "

She yanks me off.

"Understand what? That she got trafficked and I thought I can just step in huh? Mother her son and be a lover to her boyfriend? That's horrible and it's best I stay away and she never finds out "

"What? Did you... I hope you didn't sleep with him"

I can't believe she did this.

"He never allowed it and I'm glad. He loves her OK, too much.
You should hate me"

"You're right but I don't. It's not my place to judge but it's good
that you stay away. Just know that she'll ask"

She sighs.

"I know but she won't ask me. I have to go"

I don't even stop her.

I spend the whole day working on the concept for the ad and
it's so exhausting but exciting at the same time.

It's a sports drink and they're talking billboards so yes, it's
exciting.

I'm just walking out of woollies when I see Ariel, someone I
haven't seen in years though I'm going to her wedding.

She stops on her tracks and just looks at me. Well, I take the
moment to admire all of her, all the curves and edges. She
looks good.

"Hi"

She says nervously which makes me chuckle.

"Hey, you look good "

She smiles.

"Thank you, you're not too bad yourself "

"Where's Cassiel? "

"Working. She's become such a workaholic "

I laugh.

"A lot has changed. Congratulations on the wedding "

"Thank you "

"I hope you'll stop running, that's more my thing "

She's confused.

"You didn't have to block me. You could have just told me you don't want me and I would have backed off. See you at the wedding "

I wink at her then walk away. I can feel her eyes on me.

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ARIEL

I didn't want a big wedding. Cassiel wanted me to go all out but it's more her and not me.

I've dreamed of this day. The day that I finally marry the love of my life and yes, we live happily ever after.

Of course happy endings are never guaranteed but I do believe we'll be happy.

So I'm here, dressed in my wedding dress and looking at my reflection on the mirror.

It's a beautiful lacy dress, that is one handed and is a mermaid dress with a long tail.

"Is it safe to come in? "

My mom says at the door and I turn and smile at her. I haven't put my veil on yet.

She's with Cassiel who's my made of honour. I didn't want bridesmaids.

"Mommy"

I say, giving her a brief hug because I don't want to cry and ruin my makeup.

"I do hope you get to say I do"

She says, looking at Cassiel who laughs

"Come on mother, you don't have to throw any shade "

I laugh.

"But really, why do you kids get married so young? Now I'll be left alone with that grandpa "

"I hope I'm not that grandpa "

Dad says, coming in. My parents have a two years gap.

He comes to me and we hug too.

"Are you ready? Even if you walk away now, that boy will understand. Marriage is a lifetime commitment unless you're Palesa "

We all laugh while he remains serious.

"That's my best friend and look at how Tony turned out. He's happy "

Tony is my uncle, moms brother.

"All I'm saying is, this should be what she wants, what she's sure of. I was sure when I asked your mother to marry me after not seeing her for two years and we're still here, no matter how much she can drive me crazy. Marriage is no walk in the park. You work it and make it worth staying for. I don't want you to stay when you don't want to. If you feel he's not treating you

like the princess you are then leave. If he dare pushes you, call me before that turns into a slap. We love you baby "

Dad has managed to make me cry and we hug again.

"Thank you daddy. I love you too "

"Where's our bride? "

That's Palesa, mom's best friend. She comes in with Uncle Tumi, her husband who's also my mom's best friend.

Soon, we have my uncle here with his wife and my sister and brothers and cousins and everyone seems to have something to tell me, which I'm grateful for.

They all leave then I'm left with Cassiel and daddy

"This is it Twin"

She says, squeezing my hand.

"It is "

"I might not like the guy but you love him and I hope he makes you happy and that you never shed a tear. "

"Thank you "

I say and she perks my lips and helps put on my veil.

She walks out first and dad holds my hand.

This is it.

There's that feeling I got when I finally said "I do ". It was more than just a vow but more of a commitment and of saying that I mean it, I mean all of it and I'm committing myself to you for the rest of my life.

At 22, I didn't imagine it but love has nothing to do with age.

"Dear wife, can I have this dance? "

I giggle.

"Of course you may "

He stands up, takes my hand and helps me stand. Beyonce's Dangerously in love is playing and dance to it.

Someone taps me on the shoulder and turning

it's Tshiamo. Kamo just smiles then leaves me with him.

"Hi" I say.

"Mrs Phiri. You look exquisite "

"Thank you "

"He makes you happy, right? He loves you, does he? "

He's suddenly serious

"Yes and yes "

"Good because that's all that matters. Love is the foundation on which your marriage stands. Stay blessed. I'll come for the baby shower "

He kisses my cheek and let's go of me.

My eyes meet with Cassiel's who winks at me.

Dad comes and we dance.

The day went smoothly and I'm glad.

.

BOKAO

"This is fancy. These people are rich NEH "

"So it seems "

I took Mbali with me to the wedding. Cassiel said I can bring her and she was more than willing to be my date.

I told her the news and she was just so excited and happy for me. Even mom is, this is a big thing for us all. I might not be doing what I studied for but I know I'll get there. I might make enough money and open my own garage. I may make machines, tools and such.

I'll get there, I know I will. No matter how old I'll be when it happens.

The bride and groom have just left and it's turning into a party.
I'm not drinking thou, just eating.

"Where's your boss? "

I look around and see her approach.

"She's coming "

"She? "

She asks and I nod.

"Hey guys "

Cassiel says and Mbali looks from me to her.

"Hi "

I hold Mbali's hand.

"I hope you enjoyed. Is the food good? Did you guys have the cake? "

Cassiel asks with a smile.

"Yes we did. The hospitality has been amazing, thank you. The food is good, I even wish I can take all of it with me"

Mbali slaps my arm.

"What? "

She shakes her head but I'm just being honest. Cassiel laughs.

"That can be arranged. We can't have all this food go to waste. I'm glad we didn't bore you. Have some wine, it's amazing. I'll send someone to help with the food. Enjoy the rest of your night "

Mbali and I remain quiet for a good five minutes until I Break it.

"Do I embarrass you? "

"What? "

She asks as if she doesn't know what I'm talking about.

"I'm not a fan of impressing people Mbali and there's food here, what's wrong with leaving with some of it? "

"Because you're acting like you don't eat at home. I feed you, your mom feeds you "

A hostess comes with a fancy container.

"Mr Sibiya? "

I nod.

"Miss Rhodes sent me. "

"I'd like a bit of everything "

She nods and walks away.

"I don't want to fight. I don't want to so I'm terminating this conversation. These are people like us and we don't have to

pretend for their acceptance. This is not a professional environment or something of that nature. Relax baby, loosen up"

She sighs then smiles.

"Fine. Let's go to the cakes table"

"That's more like it"

I say then kiss her cheek.

"We still have to talk about your boss "

I laugh. I'm not surprised.

I'm exhausted when we arrive at her room and she's drunk.

I had to help get her out of the car.

"I hope she doesn't seduce you "

I laugh as I'm now undressing her.

"I don't think I'm her type "

"Really? These rich girls think they can have anyone they want because they're rich. They feel entitled and... They're used to getting their way "

I nod.

I undress myself too and we get into the blankets. I just want to sleep, that's all but she's not stopping.

"I mean she's hot and -"

I kiss her because really, she has to shut up.

.

TSHIAMO

My head is banging. I really went hard on the alcohol yesterday or was it in the morning?

Hangovers just make drinking alcohol unattractive. It's so nice when one is drinking with no water in between but the consequences are always a killer.

I look besides me and there's someone.

Wait, what happened last night? OK, I was at the wedding and I was drinking then what?

Oh, I wasn't alone, that I know but who's this?

I uncover the sheet and I'm more confused.

"Cassiel? Hell no! "

"Why are you... Tshiamo?! "

She gets up in the speed of light and starts pacing around. Mind you, she's naked.

"Where are we? "

I ask, looking around because I don't remember much.

"Are you fucken kidding me?! "

Eish, did she have to shout?

"Keep it down. I got a headache from hell"

I feel a sting on my cheek then it clicks that she just slapped me.

"What the hell? "

"You did something to me. I wouldn't... This isn't me. I've been celibate for a year and I... No. I just can't believe I slept with you. I can feel it but no... I couldn't have been that drunk "

She throws herself on the bed and then I realise we're in my hotel suite.

My mind is a bit fuzzy.

"We're both in the dark because I don't know how the hell we made it here. I know I was drinking and that's it"

There are bottles of vodka and wine on the floor.

It's actually a mess with our clothes and used condoms and their wrappers.

"Ariel is going to kill me. This is... This is not on "

"Can you put something on? You're distracting. "

She clicks her tongue then gets up and disappears to the bathroom.

I know I have no choice but to try and tidy up. I even forget I have a headache.

To think I never even kissed Ariel and now this.. Yes, she's married but I would never even dream of going for her twin sister.

This is sort of a nightmare that I wish to wake up from.

I put on my pants.

I order food because I'm hungry. She's still in the bathroom even when it arrives and I know she's done showering.

"Cassiel? " I say as I'm knocking.

"Please give me my clothes " "There's a bath robe in there"

"Tshiamo please. I just want to get dressed and leave "

She opens just a bit and I hand her the dress and heels.

When she gets out , her eyes are puffy and red.

"You've been crying? "

"I feel like shit. Like I betrayed her. I just... I'm not a fan of myself right now "

I'd hug her but I doubt she'd allow it. I just watch her leave.

It's one fucked up situation that I can't remember.

APHILILE

"So I've been thinking of going back to school next year. Of course I can't possibly go back to the uniform considering my age but I want to complete my matric"

"That's good. I'll look over available options for you but I know you'll have to attend "

I breathe out.

"Did you think I was going to disagree? "

He asks and I shrug.

"I don't know why I was nervous "

"I want you to accomplish your dreams. I'll give you all the support you need "

I smile. I'm blessed here.

"I've been meaning to ask"

I say, staring at him this time. We'd been watching some night movie.

"Yes? "

"Samantha, I thought she'd have come to See Me. Didn't she know?"

He clears his throat.

"She'd never come "

He says blankly.

"Why is that? We're best friends, were. "

He sighs.

"A lot happened when you weren't there Lilly. "

"What? "

He looks away.

"I don't -"

"No Louis. What the hell happened? Did you replace me with my best friend? "

"I'd never do that. Never "

He sighs.

"She's the one who wanted me. Somehow she was convinced she could replace you. I thought she came here to show us support but... No. "

This makes me a little dizzy. She'd do that? To me?

"I guess no one ever really has my back. First it was Ma, now her. "

I sink back on the couch.

He pulls me into his arms, holding me tighter in an embrace.

"It's their fault, not yours. I'm here, Tshiamo too and we got you "

"How's your father... You know, with your mother's passing "

He sighs.

"It's not easy but he's made peace with it. I think he's lonely and buries himself in work "

I nod.

"Just don't think of setting him up with a younging "

We both laugh.

"He can do that on his own "

He perks my lips.

"Is it now? "

"Yes"

He kisses me fully now and just as I'm starting to feel the heat, there's a bang on the door.

I look at him, suddenly getting nervous.

"I'll check it out "

He kisses my forehead then gets up. The banging is too loud like someone is trying to break our door.

He opens and it's a man with two guys in police uniform.

Why are they here so late?

"I'm here for my granddaughter. "

It's the man without the uniform.

"Your granddaughter? "

"I'm not going to repeat myself. Where the hell is Candice? "

"No! "

Louis holds me as I'm now standing up.

"Who are you? "

Louis asks but doesn't get an answer.

"Do you want to do this the easy way or the hard way? "

I look at Louis who doesn't say anything.

"You can't let them do this"

"I guess we'll do this the hard way. Seize them. I'll go get her"

I sob as I watch him take her away. She's sleeping and when they leave, they leave with a huge part of my heart.

The cops leave us and go and that's when I wail, feeling my heart breaking into a thousand pieces.

Louis embraces me tightly but that doesn't make it hurt any less.

.

ARIEL

"Welcome back to South Africa "

I laugh and inhale deeply, welcoming the feel of home.

"Is there someone picking us? "

He lifts my chin with his thumb then kisses me.

"Let's go Mrs Me"

He takes my hand and we leave. There's a car waiting for us. I'm guessing he organised it since he didn't answer my question.

"Where are we going? "

I don't recognise the road we're taking.

"Our new home"

I rest my head on his lap for the rest of the ride. He wakes me up when we've arrived.

"Looks expensive "

"It's a gift from your parents. I know you'll love it"

We get out of the car. There are two tall trees and the house is a double Storey

He takes my hand, the driver following with our bags and we go inside.

"Surprise! "

They all shout and I smile happily.

Mom comes to me.

"Welcome home baby. Mommy missed you "

Our honeymoon was for a whole month which means we spent the whole of October away.

"I missed you too. "

I walk around giving hugs to the rest of the family. My cousins

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brothers and their wives and close friends.

It's overwhelming and it leaves me crying.

"Where's Cassiel? "

I ask Amber.

She's my cousin.

"I don't know. She wasn't here when we arrived. "

That's unlike her.

Anyway, mom gives me a tour of the house since Kamo is familiar with it then we go eat with everyone and they leave.

I'm so exhausted when they do.

"I finally have you all to myself "

I laugh.

"I'm tired baby. And why wasn't your family here? "

He kisses my neck.

"They couldn't come but mom said they'll visit during the course of the week "

I don't know where his kisses end because I soon fall asleep.

First thing on Monday, I drive to Cassiel's workplace.

I miss her and I've been trying to reach her to no avail.

I don't need an appointment since I'm familiar with everyone.

"Who are you? "

I ask the guy inside her office.

"Bokao. "

"Her boyfriend? "

He chuckles.

"No. I work for her. "

"Oh "

This is interesting.

"Where is she? "

"Boardroom. I was actually at your wedding but I get you won't remember everyone "

I nod.

"Can I get you anything? "

I shake my head.

"I like your voice. So deep and raw "

He laughs.

"Thanks"

"How's working for my twin? "

"She's a good boss, very professional though she's a bit of a slave driver "

That sounds like her. We both laugh.

"I'm sure I don't pay you to... Ariel"

She looks surprised.

"Aren't you going to give me a hug? "

She comes and we hug.

"I'll give you guys some space "

She goes and closes the door after him.

"This is quite a surprise "

"Why are you like this? You're being very weird "

She sighs.

"It's guilt. I... Tshiamo... We sort of... We had sex"

"So? "

I say, laughing.

Her eyes are popping out.

"Kamo and I also had sex, fucked, made love. It's natural"

I say, with a shrug.

"You're cool with it? "

She seems surprised by that.

"Yes. I'm married "

I say, waving my left hand.

"Besides, Tshiamo and I never dated. We never even kissed and even if we had, I'm married. "

"I... Wow. At least I can stop feeling so guilty "

I chuckle. "You've really grown up. How was it? Do you like him? " I'm glad to see she's relaxed now.

"I don't know. We just woke up naked next to each other. The day after your wedding. It was probably drunk sex and we both don't remember. I don't even remember leaving with him"

This time, I really laugh.

"You're really something else. So, you haven't seen him since then? What if you're pregnant? " She chuckles.

"No. We used protection or so I think but I bought morning afters and even went to test for HIV and STIs. I'm clean "

I breathe out. "Good. I have to go. Call him. "

I say, standing up.

"I'm not going to do that. No. He's not even my type "

I laugh. "He wasn't meant for me but that doesn't mean he's not meant for you. It's worth a shot "

As I leave, the door opens wide. It's Bokao and he's with someone. It's Tshiamo. "Your 11am ma'am "

I giggle and wink at her. He's looking at her.

"Bye"

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TSHIAMO

"thank you for agreeing to meet with me. "

I say, sitting down.

"I didn't think... I mean I knew I was meeting with a Mr Radebe but I didn't think it's you "

It was clearly obvious from how shocked she is.

"I'd prefer we keep this strictly professional Miss Rhodes "

She clears her throat.

"Of course. How may I be of assistance? "

"I want to buy a house somewhere in this city "

She looks at me with a raised eyebrow.

"I'm not in property. I think you're at the wrong place "

I shake my head.

"No. I'm definitely at the right place. You're in finance right? "

She nods.

"Then it means you can be able to help me determine a budget with regards to that. More like a financial adviser "

She chuckles.

"Wouldn't you go to your bank and perhaps meet up with a financial consultant or something? "

I nod.

"Probably but I'm here. "

"Why? "

"Because I want you "

She chokes on her own saliva and I almost laugh.

"Did I say something wrong? "

She shakes her head, taking a gulp of water from a glass.

"What do you mean you want me? "

"I want you to help me"

She exhales.

"Right. This feels like you're creating more work for me "

I shrug

"Maybe. Or maybe I think all you do is sit down on that chair and look pretty. "

She laughs

"Right, probably because this is my father's company. Mr Radebe, can't you meet up with an agent To Help you find a house? "

"I think 'we' should do that, right after you give me that budget "

She laughs.

"So basically you want me to know your worth? "

I shrug.

"Not really but I want your help. "

I take out my card.

"Call me when you've arranged everything "

I stand up.

"Wait, can we talk now? It's personal "

I tilt my head.

"Personal? "

She nods. I sit down.

"You said we should forget about the sex we don't remember "

"I know. I just... I told Ariel so we can both stop feeling guilty "

I chuckle.

"My feeling guilty ended with my hangover. She's married and it's not like we dated. I'd rather have us reminisce on our first sexual encounter "

She huffs.

"How? When we don't remember? "

I lean closer.

"The image of you pacing around in the room naked the night after is still rather vivid in my brain"

She flushes, which makes me laugh.

"You have quite an appealing body"

She clears her throat.

"I think we're done here. I'll call you "

"Weren't you taught to accept compliments? "

She rolls her eyes.

"Just leave and stop playing with my mind"

I stand up.

"Fine, I'll leave but just answer this question "

"What? "

"Weren't you thinking of how it was? "

"I don't remember "

She quickly answers.

"That's not the question I asked. "

She huffs.

"Fine, I have. Can you believe that feeling in my vagina lasted two days? "

I laugh.

"I'll be expecting your call. Take care Miss Rhodes"

.

CASSIEL

I have to get a grip. I really have to pull myself together.

"Heh, tell me you've made it official! "

She claps once.

"Why do you guys love barging into my office ?"

She rolls her eyes and throws her ass on the chair Tshiamo had been sitting on.

It's Karmen, my cousin.

"The way you guys were all over each other.. Nc nc.. Tell me he's at least good in bed. His ugliness is attractive "

I laugh.

"Are you now tired of the runway? "

We haven't seen each other since the wedding. She had to fly back to Paris.

"We're not going to talk about me now. You've been single since Sabelo, did you really love him that much? "

I roll my eyes.

"There are more important things than men and my focus is on that. I don't want to be distracted "

She laughs.

"Right. You don't want to be distracted by a world record holder athlete ?"

"Why are we still talking about this? "

She's annoying me.

"Because you're acting uptight for a 22 year old. You need to loosen up. You're now like Ariel, definitely not the Cass I know. You're too young to be acting like this "

"I think I'm way past the stage of being irresponsible "

She laughs.

"Who said anything about being irresponsible? Or do you know want to get married and have babies? "

I don't want that, definitely not at this stage.

"No"

She smiles.

"Then loosen up. Or are you rather interested in your driver, assistant or whatever he is? "

I laugh.

"No. He's not even my type. Besides, he has a girlfriend "

"Good though That Won't stop me"

"Karmen, no. Don't even think about it"

She giggles.

"Too late. Besides

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I'm not planning on marrying the guy. Let's go shopping "

"I'm working "

She doesn't listen but instead, goes out and comes back with Bokao.

"How's her diary looking like? "

"She's free for the rest of the day "

"Good, not that it would have mattered. Let's go. Mm, you have such strong arms "

"Stop flirting with my employee "

She rolls her eyes.

"I don't even listen to my mother, who do you think you are? "

I keep quiet because saying more won't help in anyway.

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APHILILE

it's been a month, a month since she was taken away.

Louis' father tried intervening but we had no leg to stand on.

I've slowly accepted that she's no longer here. I'm trying to focus on the people I have and I guess I'm learning how to deal with this separation anxiety.

It's never easy Letting go of things above our control, which in my case Is letting go of Candice.

I still feel empty and Louis is trying to fill that void she left and I'm trying not to make him feel useless.

"Maybe we should try for another baby. I hate seeing you so miserable "

I laugh. Yes, I do after feeling like death for a month.

"That's crazy "

He chuckles.

"At least it made you smile and I don't think it's a bad idea "

I take his hand into mine.

"I appreciate it but I'm cool babe. Ore is enough "

"But I want more kids "

I giggle.

"Fine but not now "

"We haven't been using protection "

I roll my eyes.

"We've never used it anyway. "

"Look at it this way, he could be one that we've actually planned "

OK he's speaking sense.

"Can we talk about this when I'm at least half way through my matric? "

He nods.

"We can do that. I'm proud of how you're taking this "

"I'm trying for both you and Ore. I'm in no position to be selfish."
"

It's just after dinner when I decide to call Tshiamo.

He's become quite a stranger, all busy in the city of gold. I guess that's what happens when you're a celebrity.

"Ntwanas"

"Habe, your phone works? "

He laughs.

"Yes, it does. I'm sorry little one, things have been hectic "

"Really? "

He laughs again.

"Come on "

"I'm mad vele. Are you ever going to come back here? "

He sighs

"I can't. My life is here but I'll visit you, I promise "

I smile.

"It's fine, I understand. We're all very grown up now. Have you found me a sister? "

It's funny how he's like my big brother while I'm older than him.

"Argh, no. My focus is on getting a place to stay. I can't keep staying at the hotel "

"I'll be waiting for my house warming party invitation "

"You'll get it, I promise "

We talk for some more then hang up.

Louis is working late, probably because of the extended lunch time he spent with me today.

I'm forced to go to bed alone.

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ARIEL

"I've tried ironing your shirt. I still think we should get someone "

He's preparing himself for work.

"Why get someone when I have a wife? "

"I can't do everything around this gigantic house. I still have to go to the academy and I'm going to go on tours"

He takes the shirt and examines it.

"I should have done it myself "

I fold my arms and look at him. I spent an hour trying to get that right. Heck, I woke up early too.

"There's something called gratitude. "

"Ariel, you're my wife. It's your duty. Why does it seem like you're failing everything? Now I have to do everything for myself like I'm not married "

I clap my hands once.

"Really? Then you should have went for someone who's domesticated! "

I go out so I can make breakfast for myself.

I don't know why it seems like we're having problems when we've just got back from honeymoon.

We're suppose to be enjoying our marriage and staying together.

"I made breakfast "

I say, when he makes his way into the kitchen.

He doesn't say anything but just takes his plate and starts eating.

It's our third week in this house.

"You know Ariel, you have to learn to respect me. I've done all I can to make you happy, it wouldn't hurt to return the favour "

"You're not happy? "

I'm confused because last time I checked, he was only displeased with the shirt.

"I'd love if my wife could prepare bathing water for me, do the bed and iron and wash my clothes. I'm not saying clean the whole house but I'm just asking for that. I love you "

He kisses my cheek then leaves.. Hell, I can't do all of that.

I put the dishes in the dishwasher then go to the master bedroom. I take off my clothes then go shower.

We have a two weeks tour in January which we're practising for.

We're touring in New Zealand.

I arrive back at the house around 8pm and my whole body is in knots.

It happens when you miss practice for a month because you're in your honeymoon.

"Hi baby "

He's in the lounge, watching soccer fixtures.

He doesn't reply but just looks at me.

"Did you cook? "

He jeers.

"Cook? Where are you coming from at this time? "

"Dance Rehearsals. You know this "

He chuckles.

"Right. Go cook because I'm hungry "

"I'll just order in "

He shakes his head.

"I want food cooked by my wife. Make it snappy because I'm still working tomorrow "

It's Tuesday and I'm already wishing for the weekend.

I wish I couldn't cook. I don't know why the hell Cassiel and I took those classes because I wouldn't be forced to.

I prepare some chicken breasts stir fry for him, dish up and go give him.

"My hands are dirty "

"I think you know where the sink is. I'm going to shower "

I don't wait a minute.

This is basically how things have been since we moved In here.

"I wonder why I wasn't invited to the wedding "

I woke up early and drove to his practice. It's Joshua, the family doctor.

"Good morning Joshua "

I take a seat, not even waiting for him to say I can.

I only made breakfast for my dear husband, which I didn't eat then left.

"You look like hell. It's Wednesday and for a professional dancer, I was expecting energy "

I laugh.

"They're killing me at rehearsals and... Anyway, I'm here for my injection "

"Injection? Didn't you just get married? "

I nod.

"So... I'm confused "

"I don't want kids. I'm only 22 and definitely not ready for children "

That's my honest opinion. I have to make sure I'm on contraceptives to avoid any unplanned pregnancy.

"And how does your husband feel about that? "

I huff.

"Can we get right to it? "

"Of course but can I be honest with you? "

Like I have a choice.

"Yes? "

"Your life is about to get very interesting. "

I'm confused.

"What do you mean? "

He just smiles.

"Man, I need to get married. It's been centuries "

Then

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he laughs.

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TSHIAMO

"We're going to see the last house. I'm hoping you'll like it"

I shrug.

"We'll see. After you "

She stares at me with her eyes squinted.

"Are you saying that so you can stare at my butt? "

I chuckle.

"What butt? "

She clicks her tongue and I laugh.

The only reason I haven't got a house yet is because she hasn't seen one she likes.

"I hope you like this one. It's modern with a nature feel and it's perfect for a family home too. The garden has Lillie's and white roses with a little fountain just at its front.

There's a Jacuzzi in the balcony of the master bedroom and if you're planning to have kids, there's a room you can convert into a play room. "

She goes on as she shows us around. I'm not really paying attention to her but my focus is on Cassiel.

I know she knows I'm staring but is just acting blind.

"That's more like it"

They both turn to look at me. I'm looking at Cassiel.

"He's taking it. My feet are killing me and I'm hungry. "

The estate agent looks at me.

"I'll take it "

Then she smiles. Vele she's just scored.

"I could eat a cow, like a whole cow "

She groans.

"You're not vegan? "

She gives me a look.

"You're not kidding? "

I shake my head.

"I mean your body is on point, like that supermodel cousin of yours and it seems well taken care of. Your skin too, No spot, no stretch marks and no cellulite. "

"Oh shut up. Seeing that you've gotten your house, are you going to leave me alone? "

"I'm not even holding you. Now we plan some housewarming party. I don't want many people all up in my space but family and close friends "

"I'll hook you up with someone who -"

I cut her off.

"You'll do it. Contact Lilly so she can help you. I think she could do with a break "

She jeers.

"You're crazy, definitely crazy. Are you perhaps on drugs? When are the Olympics happening so you can go run or something? "

I laugh.

"What would you like to eat? Beef? "

She huffs.

"You're so annoying! "

I laugh.

"I think it's the hunger that's making you so grumpy. Let's get in. I'll go first "

She groans and I laugh.

"I hate you. I so hate "

"Yeah, yeah "

Her phone rings just after we're done eating. For someone who cried hunger, she didn't eat much.

"Yeah? "

"Hey wag "

She looks at me. Her phone is quite loud.

"Hold on"

Then she picks her bag and walks away, just like that.

I wonder how long she's planning to run. I thought I was the athlete.

.

BOKAO

"So tonight I'm going to the club with my two friends. It's ladies night "

We're on our way to her home. She still lives with her parents.
Which isn't a bad idea considering her age.

"Should I drive you? "

"Yes. You'll also have to come get us when we can't stomach
the alcohol"

I smile.

"Of course. Just call me and I'll be at your service "

"Good. I have to warn you though "

I pay even more attention.

"Yes? "

She giggles.

"My cousin has a crush on you. Weird "

"Your cousin? "

I'm just asking guys.

"Karmen. She's used to getting her way. Typical rich kids"

I laugh. She's one to talk.

"I'm not like that! "

I laugh again and she joins me.

"Anyway, just be careful of her. She's even more of a handful when she's drunk "

"Noted "

I drive home after so I can spend some time with Mbali.

Cassiel said I should fetch them at 8h30pm so there's time to spare.

"Baby "

She doesn't reply but rather comes to me and gives me a long heated kiss.

"Wow"

I say when she breaks it and she giggles.

"I missed you baby. You've been working so hard "

I hug her again, squeezing her then kiss her forehead.

"Oh me too. It's been crazy but I'm here now, for some hours "

"I can work with hours. How's the princess? "

"Uh baby, I don't gossip "

She laughs and rolls her eyes.

"I just want to know how life is on The other side "

She gives me a glass of juice and I sit down.

"Heh you'll be pleased to know some athlete has taken an interest in her. That boy who endorses that energy drink or sports drink"

"Tshiamo? "

I nod.

"That one. Anyway, she's going clubbing tonight. I have to drive her there then she'll call me when she wants to leave "

"I'm just glad her focus is not on you. Anyway, how about we make use of these hours? Kana time wasted is never regained "

She says this ,sitting on top of me.

"I love how you think "

I place my hands on her waist and we kiss.

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BOKAO

"I wish you didn't have to leave "

I peck her lips.

"I'll be back. I'm just collecting them "

"I have to study. "

I nod.

"It's cool. I'll go home. I'm sure my mom misses me too"

She sighs.

"I'm looking forward to us getting our own house though "

I smile.

"Me too. It's long overdue "

My phone rings.

"I really have to go"

I peck her lips then leave.

"Almost thought you weren't coming. Punctuality is everything
Bokao "

"I'm sorry boss, I lost track of time "

She's outside, with her phone on her hands like she's texting time.

"This should never happen again. What if I was going to a professional meeting? "

"It will never happen again "

She puts her phone in her purse

"Good. We have to pick Karmen and Aaliyah at their homes"

I follow the navigator to their places. First Karmen then Aaliyah.

They are loud. These girls are loud and drinking champagne in the car. I'm hoping they don't spill it.

"Why don't you join us? "

Karmen says now that we've arrived at the club.

"Rather not. This isn't my type of place "

And I'm being honest because it's way too fancy for me and definitely not my style. I prefer something with a kasi feel, close to the heart.

"Oh, and what is? "

I look at the back and realise that the other two have already gotten off.

"Something less classy and snobbish "

"Let's go there then "

I chuckle because I think she's joking.

"I'm serious "

"What? "

She's beautiful and all but definitely not my type. Wait, why am I thinking about this?

"Your favourite joint or whatever "

"I'm on the job "

She laughs.

"Right, then you'll watch me get drunk. You can play bodyguard for the night "

I know about her crush on me, which is another reason why this isn't a good idea.

"I can't. I'm sorry"

"I'm not asking that you jump into bed with me. I just want to go where you like to go. What's the big deal? "

I turn so I can face her.

"I'm on duty and secondly, my girlfriend wouldn't approve of that "

She laughs.

"How old are you? "

"What does that have to do with this? "

I ask because I don't get why it's important.

"Everything because right now you're acting like an old man. "

"I'm 28"

"If she was important, you would have married her. "

"Are you going to get off any time soon? "

She laughs.

"Nope. I'm going to sit here until you agree to my simple request "

"I could take you out "

She laughs.

"I'd love to see you try. I wouldn't mind having those arms around me. Actually, I dare you to"

I sigh.

"Karmen, get the fuck out and stop seducing my employee "

She literally drags her out, leaving me in stitches.

Thanks Boss.

.

CASSIEL

"He's off limits! "

I say just before we enter.

"Lighten up Cass, you're only 22"

Then she walks in and I groan.

Right, I really should lighten up.

I get myself a cocktail which I down then request another one.

"That's more like it "

Aaliyah says and I laugh.

It's great being with them, sort of reminds me why I should go out more. We're in the VIP section.

Gosh we drink

we dance and talk nonsense.

"Cassiel "

I turn and it's Sabelo who gives me a smile.

"Hey"

I say and we hug.

"You look good "

He says and I giggle.

"Thanks. Are you here on business? "

He laughs.

"Nop. Strictly pleasure. I was actually about to leave when I saw you "

I look at the time and it's 1am.

"You've never been a club person anyway "

He smiles.

"You know me too well. Walk me out "

The two are on the dance floor. I hook my arm on his and we make our way out. More people have come and it's even more packed at general. We finally get out the exit.

"You smell good too"

He says and I laugh.

"That's me. "

"I miss you "

He says as we're now by the wall.

I'm drunk and we both know how that ended the last time.

"That's... Uhm.. Unexpected "

"Is it? "

He's now standing in front of me, his hand on the wall just next to my face.

"It's been a while, yes. "

I say, avoiding his question.

"Didn't you miss me? "

He asks. I would have if my mind hadn't been filled with images of a certain athlete.

"Maybe "

That's partially true.

"There's someone else, right? "

"We broke up Sabelo, it shouldn't matter "

He touches my cheek with his other hand.

"I don't care Cassiel. We were engaged to be married. We were good together "

"We were "

I admit. He kisses me and I push him.

"We can't "

I say.

"We can "

He kisses me again, this time picking me up and pinning me against the wall.

I let him, wrapping my arms around his neck. He's grinding against me while my back is pinned against the wall.

"Cassiel?! "

I break it and put myself on the floor.

"Karmen. What are... Why are you outside? "

"I was worried. You disappeared "

"She's fine "

Sabelo snaps. I clear my throat.

"I have to go "

"Cassiel, no "

I shake my head and walk towards Karmen and we both walk back into the club.

"Let's take shots. You need them "

I laugh.

"I definitely do"

"Don't let him confuse you. It didn't work out then and it won't now "

"I can handle myself "

.

ARIEL

I wake up feeling rather happy that it's Saturday. The whole week has been a drag. Kamo is still sleeping besides me and for a moment, I stare at him.

It's like he's become a completely different person since we got married.

I don't want to begin questioning if I made the right choice. My mom also got married at 22 if I'm not mistaken and she's still with dad. I'd like to believe my marriage can also work out.

I want it to. It has to.

"Staring is rude "

He says then opens his big, brown eyes.

"Not when I'm looking at my husband "

He perks my lips.

"Morning wifey "

He says with a smile.

"Morning baby. I'm sorry I'm waking up this late "

"It's Saturday, relax "

He says then kisses me. His hand travels to my thighs and parts them with us still kissing.

He lifts my thigh and slowly, I feel him get in.

"That's more like it"

He says after our morning quickie.

"Wake up geh "

I laugh and kiss him shortly.

I take a quick shower then go to the kitchen where I make us breakfast.

"I told you she's cooked"

That sounds like my twin sister who's just entered my door.

She's with Karmen.

"Morning better half "

She says and hugs me. I also hug Karmen.

"What's with the shades? "

"Hangover "

Karmen says and sits down.

"I don't like you having my house keys "

I say and she rolls her eyes.

"You'll get over it. "

She sits down too, taking a piece of bacon from my plate.

"We're hungry, dish up"

"No eggs for me though "

Karmen says.

"Are you pregnant? "

I ask and she laughs.

"I'm not even having sex unless I'm mother Jesus "

"Good morning ladies "

"Hi "

Karmen says while Cassiel doesn't reply.

"My food please "

She says.

"Unless you recognise the man of the house, you're not getting any "

She rolls her eyes.

"Dumela Kamogelo. My food now "

We laugh.

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ARIEL

"This thing of your family just barging in is not on"

Kamo says just after I come from walking them out.

"I agree"

"And why does your sister have our house key? "

I look at him.

"I did say I do not like her having my keys "

"You didn't ask for them back "

I sigh.

"Why didn't you since this is such a big deal?! "

"Don't snap at me"

He warns. I sigh.

"I'm sorry "

I get up and walk to our room.

He comes shortly after.

"I think we should start working on our first baby "

He says, putting his hands on my waist.

"We just got married "

I say as a matter of fact.

"So? "

I take his hands off me.

"What do you mean 'so'? "

I'm failing to understand where he's going with this.

"We've been together for a long time and I don't know about you but I don't want to be a father in my old age "

"Then why not carry the baby if you're so eager"

I throw myself on the bed. I'm not liking this conversation at all.

"Excuse me?! "

I roll my eyes.

"I don't want a baby, definitely not now "

"And why is that? "

Is he even asking?

"Firstly, I'm way too young to be thinking of babies and secondly, I'm not ready for a child "

"Or maybe you don't want a child with me"

I can't believe he's just said that.

"Or maybe I don't want a child at all. How about that? "

He groans.

"Then why the hell did you marry me?! "

Did he just yell at me? I breathe out. I'm going to be the calm one in this situation.

"Because I love you. I want to be with you "

"If you loved me, you'd care about my needs "

I sigh.

"What about mine? Do I matter in this marriage? "

"I'm going to get some air"

He storms out. I sigh. Why does it seem like all we ever do is fight?

"I want to learn how to iron. Kamo is complaining "

I say to mom as we're having tea.

"Oh? "

"Yes. I also need help with finding a cleaner "

She's having cake which I can't have at the moment.

"How are rehearsals coming along? "

I wonder why she's changing the topic.

"Good, I've finally managed to catch up"

She nods.

"That's good. Are you happy? "

Am I?

"I am. "

"You know you can talk to me, right? "

I nod.

"I know. You don't have to worry much about me "

"Am I getting grandkids soon? "

I laugh.

"Nope. You'll just have to wait "

She laughs

"Oh well. If only I could still have children "

"Mom, no"

We both laugh. She's amazing.

.

CASSIEL

I've had meetings all day like its not a Friday. OK, I've had them for like half of my day. I even Skipped lunch.

I can't wait for the day to be over so I can soak in a bath tub with a glass of white wine in my hand and music playing all over my bathroom.

"You shouldn't work so hard "

I look up and it's Sabelo with a paper bag. He's wearing formal and looking all kinds of handsome.

"I get paid for it "

He chuckles.

"Do you even need the money? "

I laugh.

"Yeah, I do. What do you have there? "

"Greek salad and dry lemon. "

He gives the bag to me.

"Thanks. "

I start eating immediately.

"I've been thinking about Wednesday night and what would have happened if we weren't interrupted. "

I should have known.

"Nothing would have happened "

He chuckles.

"You seem to forget that I know you "

"It was a moment of weakness and I was drunk "

He snickers.

"Really? We were snogging "

"And that's all it was "

He chuckles.

Someone clears their throat. My eyes travel to the door and it's Tshiamo. Why the hell do I feel so guilty?

It's like I've been caught cheating or something.

"Hi"

I say nervously. He looks so serious. His eyes are on me.

"Are you busy? "

He asks, his eyes digging into my soul.

"Uhm, no"

"I just wanted to know when should I send someone for your staff "

"My staff? "

I ask because I'm confused.

"Today or tomorrow? "

He continues, his eyes still fixed on me.

"I'm not sure I follow "

"Tomorrow morning then. Bye"

Then he walks out. What the hell was that about?

"Earth to Cassiel"

He's snapping his fingers in my face.

"I have to go "

I say

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my mind still on Tshiamo.

"We're still talking "

Sabelo says but I smile.

"We're done. You'll walk yourself out "

I grab my phone then call him as I'm getting out. I luckily catch him waiting for the elevator.

I drop the call.

"What were you talking about? "

"You chose the house. It needs you to make it a home "

I laugh. He can't be serious.

"Did I utter a joke? "

He says, with no crack on his face.

"You're serious "

I say, more as a statement than question.

"You're moving in with me Cassiel and it's not up for debate.
Tomorrow "

He says then gets into the elevator.

When I turn, Sabelo is looking at me. He looks sad.

I clear my throat.

I think he heard that.

.

BOKAO

"Ma'am, we've arrived "

We've been sitting outside her home for ten minutes now and I've been trying to get her attention with no success until now.

"Oh, we have "

"Yes, is there anything you need? "

She clears her throat.

"Nothing you can assist me with"

Then she sighs.

"Oh "

"Can I ask you something? "

She says and as I look at her via the mirror, her eyes are close like she's deep in thought.

"Of course "

"Would you take a risk based on a hunch? "

That's quite difficult.

"I'm not sure I follow "

She sighs.

"I mean... Argh, I don't even know what I'm saying. Never mind "

Then she gets off. Weird.

I take a bath when I get home. I'm glad I knocked off earlier today. I think it has to do with the athlete but of course it's non of my business.

I had left my phone in the charger which my mom brings because it's making noise. Her words.

"Hello? "

"Hey, I'm outside "

"Who are you? "

I don't recognise the number.

"There's only one way to find out. It's a red Lamborghini "

That can only be one person. I wear shorts and a tank top then my slippers and walk out.

"And then? "

"Just focus on your drink "

She laughs.

"I'd say bring me one but the fridge is always full "

She's parked right at the gate. Thank God my mom is a drunkard. She'd ask a lot of questions.

She's gotten the attentions of neighbours though, some which are Mbali's regulars.

This is going to get to her.

I'm glad Karmen didn't get out. People are even out in their yards, some taking pictures of the car.

She rolls down the window and smiles. Get in.

I get in so she could drive off and she does.

"Why are you here? "

"I wanted to see you "

She passes by Mbali's place and thank God her door is closed.

This would have given her ideas. I could just say it was my boss.

Fuck, I feel like a little kid.

"How the hell do you have my phone and address? "

She laughs.

"Ask no questions, hear no lies. "

"Are you fucken crazy? "

She sees this as a joke.

"So I've been told "

I give up.

"Where are you taking me? "

I forgot to mention that she's driving like a maniac which makes the ride a thrill.

"Where I'm going to tie you up and have my way with you "

Then she winks.

If she thinks she'll succeed then she has another thing coming.

BOKAO

I think I've given her enough time to think she's in power. In my mind, I'm laughing because she should have asked my girlfriend before taking such a drastic decision. She's one person who knows me very well and knows how I react to situations.

I can act calm but I hate girls who think they can just come and do with me as they please.

I'm no one's submissive, definitely not of a young supermodel who thinks she can have any man eating from the palm of her hands.

"You're very disrespectful "

I say when we arrive in this hotel suite.

She chuckles.

"I've been called worse. Would you like anything to drink? "

"Double on the rocks "

I take out my belt. I'm wearing denim shorts and most of the time, I always have a belt on.

"I am not a fan of games "

I say as she hands me my drink.

"It's nice to see you all casual. You have a beautiful, sexy body."
"

"Karmen, I don't like being disrespected "

The smirk that was on her face disappears.

"What do you mean? "

"You're very disrespectful. Do you even know what you're doing? "

She looks confused.

"Come here"

I say calmly. She comes to me and I sit her on my lap.

I run my thumb on her shoulder. She has silky soft skin.

My hand moves to her boob and I start squeezing while looking straight into her eyes. Her breath hitches as I pinch her nipple.

"Do yourself a favour and walk away "

I whisper in her ear. She clears her throat and turns to face me,
Her legs on my sides.

"And if I say no? "

"I don't want to hurt you "

She giggles. I see she sees this as a joke.

"I'm far more experienced than that "

"How about I see what's under this coat? "

She giggles.

"OK "

She stands up and unties her trench coat.

"It's Victoria's Secret lingerie "

"It's underwear, what's the difference? "

She rolls her eyes.

"It's lingerie "

"Still underwear "

I really don't get what's the big deal.

"Turn around miss thing"

She turns around and really? I mean I left my girlfriend with a nice, firm full butt. Why the hell would I want this?

I chuckle.

"Something amusing? "

"I'm just wondering where's the rest of the butt"

I say with a shrug

"That's not nice"

She says with a frown, folding her arms.

"I'm not a really nice guy. "

I stand up with my belt in hand.

She looks at me then at the belt.

"What... What are you doing? "

"Nothing. You said something about tying me up. Maybe we should do this all rough and dirty, what do you think? "

My eyes glance at her body, at each exposed part. She's skinny but not anorexic skinny. She has the boob's but that's not my thing.

"I... Bokao, what's going on? "

"Oh, you're disappointing me dear. Why does it sound like you're getting cold feet? "

We're the same height with her heels on and suddenly, she can't face me.

I put my finger on her chin then make her face Me then I kiss her.

At first she's unsure then she relaxes, even puts her arms around my neck. I break it but still keep her close.

"I'm going to spank your arse, hard. You might not be able to sit properly for a few days. That's what you wanted right? Me? "

From how she battles to swallow spit I can see she's very scared. Good.

"I... I don't think... Uhm "

"Askies? You're not making sense "

I say, now squeezing her behind hard. I don't even know what to call that thing she sits on. OK

that's impolite but she's gotten me so mad now.

Then she starts crying.

"I'm sorry. I'm really sorry "

"I haven't done anything yet or are you all talk and no action? "

She shakes her head.

"I... I'm not what you think. This isn't... I'm sorry. "

I let go of her as she's crying.

"I... I'll call a driver for you. He'll take you home. "

OK, I didn't expect things to take this direction. I thought she was brave but this.. It's like I've triggered something.

"Karmen?"

She shakes her head

"You'll see yourself out. I'll never bother you again "

.

CASSIEL

Tshiamo is really something else. A part of me wishes that it turns out he's bluffing about the whole moving in thing.

I wanted it to be a joke maybe. I mean I've never thought of moving out, definitely not with a man.

My priorities changed after my failed engagement and I decided to focus on climbing up the corporate ladder and one day taking over the family legacy.

Now he's here, having tea and cupcakes with my mother.

I wonder when he got here because it's early. My mom is a morning person. She usually wakes up to make breakfast.

"Good morning "

I'm all ready for work.

"Hi baby. "

"What's going on? "

I say, looking from her to him.

"Oh, we're just having cupcakes. I thought for an athlete, he'd watch what he eats but he's had four already "

Then she laughs.

"Are you sure there's nothing here? I can't stop eating them"

Dad follows and he's also surprised.

"A guest this early? I don't smell any breakfast Trinny "

"I'm not your slave Kristen. "

Tshiamo has his eyes fixed on me.

"What are you doing here? "

"Thought I could give you a ride to work "

"I have a driver "

Dad clears his throat.

"Who's this Cassiel Rhodes?! "

Why is he shouting?

"Oh relax Kristen. I only have eyes for you "

"Oh but you were giggling like a school kid with this asshole "

Tshiamo laughs.

I shoot him a look.

"Sorry. Can we leave? "

"Cassiel! "

"Relax Dad. He's a client "

He looks at me with a raised eyebrow.

"Let's go"

I take his hand and drag him out, figuratively of course.

When we're outside, I slap him.

"What the? "

"What are you playing with my family? My mom? Really? "

He holds my wrist tight but not too tight.

"Firstly, it's the first and last time you lay a hand on me cause I'd never slap you and I don't want us being violent. Lastly, I'm not a criminal so you should stop talking like I'm a threat. I'm very adamant about you moving into our house and it's happening. I'm not planning to be a temporary part of your life, I'm permanent now can we leave before you get late for work? You still have to eat "

I sigh.

"How did you know where I live? "

"Everyone knows where you live Cassiel plus I had a meeting with your mom "

"About? "

He looks at me with a raised eyebrow.

"None of your business. It's between her and me"

I roll my eyes.

"Bokao will be here soon "

"Good because I've just remembered that I came with the truck that's moving your stuff "

It seems I have no say in this and I don't even protest. I don't know but it's a little exciting.

"I hope I'm the reason you're smiling like that "

"Oh shut up"

He laughs.

.

APHILILE

"See? I'm not pregnant "

He laughs.

"Damn, it would have been such a good thing because I wouldn't have to even initiate it"

I laugh.

"Initiate what? "

"I'd just blink and you'll turn into a wet mess"

I laugh, pushing him a bit.

"Oh please, you're not all that "

"Yes but I love you ". I smile. "I love you too"

My face turns serious when a thought crossed my mind.

"Louis, we were... I mean we're... I know of your high sex drive, did you really never ever sleep with someone? I know I've asked this before and I promise, I won't be mad "

He sighs. My heart starts racing. "I'm just going to be honest "

"Was it Sam? "

I hope it wasn't. He shakes his head and relief washes over me.

"It happened twice and that's after Tshiamo said something about his father saying we should wait for his release "

"Were you safe? " I'm so calm through this.

"I was " I nod.

"Well, I'm going to Tshiamo tomorrow. He booked a flight for me. I'll be helping his lady organise the house warming "

"That's good. You're not mad? "

I shake my head. Am I not? I'm not pretty sure.

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APHILILE

"Hey stranger "

He laughs as we hug. I'm still in awe by this whole place. It's amazing and we're just at the airport.

"Baby, how are you? "

I smile.

"I'm great, I'm good. I'm amazing "

He chuckles and kisses my cheek.

"And the boyfriend? Was he happy with you leaving? "

I laugh.

"He's actually sulking. Let me call him"

He takes my bag and I follow him while calling Louis.

"You're coming back? "

I laugh.

"No. I've actually just arrived. "

"Well, I fucken miss you "

"You agreed for me to come "

He sighs.

"I know baby but I just don't like you being away from me, especially after the trafficking "

I understand where he's coming from.

"I know baby but I'll be back. I love you and take care of my son"

"I love you too"

I hang up and stare outside the window, just admiring where we're headed and the city.

Anyway, Tshiamo is playing music on the low.

"This is your house? "

I ask when we've arrived.

"Yep. This is it"

I'm in love.

"It's beautiful "

He chuckles.

"You're not inside yet"

I roll my eyes. The yard is amazing so I bet the house is ten times more.

"This is like those Top Billing houses. Wow, you've really done well for yourself "

He puts his arm over my shoulders.

"It's all God. He's amazing"

"To think you went from pickpocketing to this. Yours is an inspiring story "

"What are you thinking? "

I laugh.

"I'm not thinking anything. Where am I sleeping? Wait, do you stay with someone? It's way too big. This looks like a family house but with a twist "

"You talk a lot "

I snug him with the elbow.

"Yes, I stay with someone. "

I nod.

"I hope it's not Samantha "

He chuckles.

"No. You'll meet her"

He takes me to the guestroom where I sleep it off. I don't know why I had to come here so early but hey, I'm here.

He's shown me the bathroom and everything. The room has been prepared for me.

I go to the bathroom so I can refresh. I don't know how long I slept but I'm hungry. He offered to get me something when he fetched me from the airport but I was still full.

So, I get dressed in a pink A with a black cropped bra and my flops.

I go to the balcony with my phone where I snap pictures of the view and myself, which I send to Louis.

"Tshiamo! "

I shout as I'm going down the stairs. I hope he didn't leave me all alone in his monstrous house.

Instead of him, some girl comes. She's dressed in a short white jumpsuit and black heel sandals. She's coloured.

"Aphilile, right? "

I nod.

"Who are you? "

"Cassiel. Tshiamo told me me... More like coerced me to take care of you "

She rolls her eyes. I laugh.

"I really don't need to be taken care of. I'm hungry though "

"Good. I cooked "

"So, you're the girlfriend? "

I ask as we're now eating. She's a good cook, I give her that.

"What? No. I'm not even his friend. He just bullied me to move in with him "

I laugh.

"Really? Your eyes said something else "

"Yes, for real. I don't even want to be here "

"So why don't you leave? "

She opens her mouth but doesn't say anything then closes it again.

"Exactly"

I laugh while she groans.

"Maybe a tiny bit of me wants to be here"

"Then it's a dominant. Anyway, I think we should go shopping. We can't spend the whole day cooped up in here "

"That's not a bad idea. Let me call my driver so he can take us"

I clap my hands.

"Great"

.

CASSIEL

Aphi is such a ball of energy. Like really, she's amazing and so funny

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I haven't had a second of boredom.

One would swear we've known each other for ages.

"So, what's his favourite colour? "

I'm not sure I follow. I just stare at her, waiting for an explanation.

We're now buying lingerie.

Then, it all clicks and she laughs.

"I really don't know. He's not my boyfriend "

"Don't you get tired of saying that? I think we should go with red or black or maybe both "

"Aphi, no "

She rolls her eyes.

"Come on Cass, don't be such a bore"

I giggle.

"Fine, let's do this "

She gives me a side hug then kisses my cheek.

"Red and black are like a combination of evil and bad. It means you're in charge and definitely not up for submission. "

"Oh? "

"Yeah. Then white means you're going to be a little angel. It's what you use if you want to give yourself to him so he can use you as he wills "

I laugh.

"Where do you get that? "

"My overly crazy mind. I think pink means you're willing to submit yourself but you'll both be in charge. Purple should be what you wear when you want to have your way, like if you want to ask him for something "

I laugh.

"Thank you for the lessons. I think I should get pieces on every colour "

She laughs.

"Awesome "

So I do it and she also buys for herself. I've noticed she's a makeup lover because she also bought that.

I'm so exhausted when we get back at the house and it's because I had so much fun.

Tshiamo said he has a busy day and is only coming later on.

"Hair. We should have done our hair "

"Tomorrow is another day "

I say as I pour us wine.

"Thank you. I just remembered that you have a twin. She's the married one, right? "

I nod.

"You know her? "

"Yeah, I'm following her on instagram. Can I do your face? "

"Makeup? "

She nods. I smile.

"OK "

"Tomorrow, I want you to surprise him. You have to know where you stand with him. You can't leave it at housemates "

I laugh.

"I actually don't have a problem with it"

She shakes her head.

"I do. We'll go early for the hair and nails, even some waxing "

She winks and I laugh.

"Though my boyfriend is probably going to murder me for exhausting his credit "

I hold her hand.

"No. I'll take Tshiamo's card and we'll both exhaust his credit "

We laugh and high five.

"Great. It's on "

.

ARIEL

I'm so tired. I'm really tired but I've managed to make supper. Kamo hasn't come and it's so unlike him to be late.

Anyway, I dish up for myself since I'm hungry and pour myself a glass of wine. I'm half way through my food when he finally graces me with his presence.

"I didn't know you're working late"

He takes off his jacket while looking at me.

"So you decided to eat without me? "

"I waited for an hour for you. I'm tired. I just want to eat and sleep. "

He comes and kisses my cheek.

"I'd like to eat too"

I nod, get up and dish up for him.

"A basin to wash my hands and a cloth to wipe them "

I do as I'm told but there's just something bothering me that I feel we need to address.

I wait for him to finish so we both remain silent for a few minutes.

"There's something I'd like us to talk about "

I say now that he's done.

"What?"

"Do you think it was immature for us to get married? "

"So, you regret marrying me? Is it that athlete again? "

"What? No, of course not "

I sigh.

"I just hate that we've been fighting for so long. Things weren't like this when we were just dating "

"So you do regret marrying me"

"Don't put words into my mouth "

Gosh, this isn't going how I thought it would.

"It's exactly what you're trying to say "

"Will you just listen? "

He was just about to stand but remains seated.

I exhale.

"I love you Kamo, so much and that's why I agreed to marry you. I just hate what's happening in our marriage. I want us to be OK, to get along well "

"Then give me a baby "

"This is pointless. "

I stand up and just walk to our room. Why does he have to be so stubborn?

I might never have been a mother but we can't bring someone Else into whatever we call a marriage.

If things are this bad, I can't imagine how they'd be with a baby.

I also don't understand why he can't accept my decision to wait. I'm not saying I won't give him children. I just don't want to do it now

Surely that's not asking for too much.

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TSHIAMO

Things have been hectic since the chase stopped. My manager is working hard to make sure my pocket never dries.

Anyway, at least I'm able to spend the night with Cassiel.

For someone who's vocal about her rejection of me, her actions speak otherwise.

I'm forced to wake up early. It's around 4am and my alarm has just rang. I slowly detach myself from her so she doesn't wake up then go take a shower.

When I come back, she's sitting on the bed and rubbing her eyes.

"Morning babe "

I say and kiss her cheek.

"I just want your card. Aphi and I are going shopping "

"Didn't you go yesterday? "

I ask innocently.

"Yes but we used our money. "

I laugh.

"OK baby. Anything for you "

"And stop sleeping on my bed. We're nothing "

I chuckle. Yeah right.

"Do you want a ring now? Should we get married? How about I give you a baby, that way we become parents "

I shrug. I'm dressing up now. I can't believe we haven't done anything since she moved in here. OK, since I moved her here.

"Your card will do for now. I mean I have to know if you'll provide. Besides, I'm running low on cash "

"It's not a problem. Just keep our future children in mind when you're spending. I know how bad of an influence Lilly is when it comes to money "

She laughs.

"Oh, I love her"

I look at her with a raised eyebrow.

"Should Louis and I be worried? "

"Relax. I'm going back to sleep now "

"I promise I'll come back just after sunset tonight. I wanna lick something, bury my dick in some warmth "

Her cheeks turn pink. It happens when you're very light skin.

I bend down and Kiss her hard. She's panting when I break it.

"Be good for me, OK? "

I keep getting the notifications that I end up putting my phone on silent.

I think if I wasn't used to always being on my feet and getting little sleep, I'd be tired when I go home but I'm not.

In fact, I'm looking forward to it. I hope Lilly doesn't think I'm deserting her since we haven't really spent time together since I fetched her.

On the bright side, she's getting along well with Cassiel.

They're in the dining hall and I'm just in time for dinner. Great.

"Good evening "

I say as I sit down, putting my bag on the floor and phone on the table.

"Hey brother "

"Hi"

"Who cooked? "

I ask as I dish up for myself.

"Cassiel did"

This is rather shocking for me.

"You can cook? "

"How else would I be able to poison you if not through food? "

Lilly giggles.

"Is it edible? "

She burst into laughter while Cassiel clicks her tongue.

"Ass"

She mumbles.

"Those hands don't look like they can do anything, no offence "

"Wow bro, you're something else "

Anyway, I take one spoon and it's amazing.

"Wow "

I don't stop eating but even finish up within a minute and dish up more. I swear this girl has already captured my heart. She's now a permanent resident.

"I'm sorry I underestimated you "

" I'm not just a pretty face Tshiamo "

I nod.

"I'm sorry baby. Oh, I love your hair, looks good on you "

She smiles. It's short Bob in chrome.

"Thank you "

Lilly also did her hair.

"You too Lilly "

She rolls her eyes.

"I know. I'll excuse you guys. I have to call my family "

She winks at Cassiel then leaves. She stands up and that's when I notice she's wearing a red silk gown.

"Baby, what's the occasion? "

God she smells good too.

"What are you talking about? "

She's wearing red heels which are very high but she's rocking them like its just sneakers. She's clearing the table.

I follow her to the kitchen.

"The makeup, shoes and this gown "

"This gown? "

She's looking deep in my eyes as she unties it. It's short, revealing her perfect legs

What is she playing at?

She drops it, revealing black lingerie. I swallow hard.

She comes to me and stares into my eyes. Gosh, her eyes. Her eyes I can't look away from.

It's like I'm frozen on the spot, hypnotised maybe.

.

CASSIEL

The reaction on his face is more than what I was expecting. I should thank Lilly for this. She's only been intimate with one man but girl knows things.

"Tshia, are you OK? I've been talking "

He clears his throat.

"Uhm, what were you saying? "

I giggle.

"Let's dance "

He looks confused. I close the distance, putting my arms around his neck.

"Where's the music? "

"The beat is in our heart "

His hands rest on my waist and slowly, we move. I can feel the acceleration of his breathe. He starts kissing me on the neck and I'm trying not to surrender. I'm suppose to be in charge.

His hands travel to my butt and he presses our bodies together.

I cup his face and kiss him, tongue and all. He groans then picks me up and puts me on the kitchen counter.

He removes my thong while staring right into my eyes.

"I said something about licking "

And oh he does lick. Firstly, my face and starts descending to my neck, my chest

stomach and all the way down.

It's amazing yet it makes me surrender all power.

"So, what were you thinking when you got all pretty? "

He says, while I have my back arched and legs spread. I can feel his breath in my inner thighs.

He kisses me there, biting a bit and I can't help but moan. What is he doing to me? Waxing was definitely a good idea.

"I'm the one who calls the shots Cassiel but I appreciate your efforts "

I lift my pelvis and there I am giving myself to him on a fucken silver platter.

His breath is now hitting my vulva and my need raises. I think he's doing this on purpose. He's deliberately getting me overly turned on.

He bit my clitoris with his lips, pulling a little then he licked.

"Tshiamo"

I moan, he's amazing which makes me wonder if that's how our first time was like.

"We should have gotten our bedroom sound proofed though I doubt we'll get there "

"Can you just shut up and eat? "

He laughs.

"Yes ma'am "

I wince in pain when I sit, closing my eyes and Aphi laughs.

"Morning "

I say. I feel like putting a fan between my legs just to get some air in there

"Mm, rough night? "

She's giggling and I feel like slapping her. Of course I'm kidding

"It's always nice going on from slow love making to rough fucking but the aftermath thereof is rather unpleasant "

She laughs.

"He's an athlete, a record holder. What were you expecting? "

"You're not making it any better "

"You'll be OK, don't worry. So, did you get the message through? "

I sigh.

"I don't know. I really don't. I mean, we didn't even talk. Not that much. Aphi, I think... I think I'm falling in love "

She claps.

"Yeiy. Love is a beautiful thing and he deserves it. You do too Cassiel and I don't think he'd force you to move in with him if he didn't love you "

"I'm just a little scared "

She takes her hand into mine.

"Love can be scary but you need to relax. Go with the flow and follow your heart's pace. You're both young and the risk might be worth it. Just keep in mind it won't always be all sweet "

"Wait, how old are you? "

I ask and she laughs.

"I'm 23 "

"Wow. You're amazing "

"Not really. I've just been through a lot, got over it and I'm living now. "

"Man, I love you "

She giggles. My phone rings and it's Ariel.

"Hey babe "

"Great, Cassiel. I need... I need a driver. That guy of yours. My car broke down"

It sounds like she's been running or something.

"Where are you? "

She tells me and I hang up immediately, call Bokao and let him in on it.

"Everything OK? "

Aphi asks and I nod.

"Just my twin needing some assistance. Hey, won't you like to meet her? We can all hangout before you leave "

She smiles.

"I'd love that "

.

BOKAO

"You promise you'll come back? "

I kiss her forehead.

"I will baby and I'll also be able to get you meds and food"

She has period pains.

"Thank you "

They always make her a baby and so clingy. She literally becomes needy and I love it. I love when she's like this because I get to take care of her then after her periods, her libido goes out the roof.

I just hate that she's in pain.

"I love you "

"I love you too "

Mbali kisses me again then I leave.

I find The twin crying. It's not that I'm prying but wouldn't she have called her husband seeing that she's married?

"Uhm Hi, Cassiel sent me"

She throws herself into my arms and I remain shocked.

When it washes off, I hug her back.

"It's OK "

She let's go of me.

"Sorry. Look I called my insurance and they told me to wait. It's been an hour and I just got scared "

"And your husband? "

She sighs.

"He's.. He's busy, couldn't come. I have rehearsals but I cancelled. I'm going to my mommy "

We wait together for the insurance company and after an hour, they finally come.

I get her tea at the garage then drive her home.

"Thank you "

"It's my pleasure "

I receive a message from the boss and now I have to pick up Karmen. Great.

Anyway, it's this job that pays the bills.

"Do you really have to go? "

"Oh come on mom, you always say that "

"Just don't be a stranger "

They kiss and hug. Her mom waves at me, I wave back and she gets into the car. I'm the one who put the bags in the car.

I think she's still mad at me. Anyway, I drive her to the airport.

"You're very loyal to your girlfriend "

She says after a few minutes.

"I love her and I'm committed to her"

"You're a good kisser, I give you that " "Karmen "

She sighs.

"Don't worry, I'm not going back to that. I got the message loud and clear. Besides, I don't like making the same mistake twice "

I chuckle. "Good girl "

I see her rolling her eyes as I'm looking at her through the mirror. "I'm far from being a good girl "

"Being bad isn't for you either. You should stop hiding behind the brave girl facade. Stop pretending and maybe, just maybe I might like you " We've arrived at the airport now so I get her bags. After that, I get my baby's things and go back to her.

"I didn't think you'd take so long "

"Were you crying? " I told you guys.

"Just come hold me"

35

ARIEL

"No. No. No"

"For a dancer, you're quite unfit "

I don't pay him any attention as I try to zip my favourite jeans.

My phone rings.

I ignore it and take off the jeans, which is also a struggle.

"Will you just pick it up? It's making noise. I'm trying to sleep, you know "

It's Saturday morning and definitely not my morning. I end up wearing a yellow Maxi dress with white sneakers.

It's one I bought last week when I went shopping.

I can't believe I've gone from 34 to 38 in just a year.

"Hi"

"I'm at the gate "

"I'm coming "

So I hired Bokao as my driver because I never replaced my car.

I'm actually surprised he's still with us.

"I'm leaving babe "

He doesn't reply so I just kiss his cheek then I'm out .

"We're starting at the doctor "

"Good morning Ariel, how do you do? "

I roll my eyes.

"Definitely not a good one for me. Will you just drive?! "

"Yes ma'am "

He starts the car and no words are exchanged further.

"Joshua"

I say when I get into his office.

"Mrs Phiri, it's been a while. "

I give him a look.

"Can we perhaps stick to Ariel? I love the name you gave me"

I sit down.

"I thought we were seeing each other next Month which is like next year "

Yeah, it's December, the second week which means Christmas is approaching and it's going to be a drag at the Phiris.

"I... I have decided to stop with the contraceptives. I think they're the reason I'm this fat "

He chuckles.

"Are you interested in being a doctor maybe? "

I huff.

"This is not funny "

"A baby won't save your marriage Ariel and it definitely won't make you less thick. It's not working, face the facts "

"I didn't come here for marital advice. How long will I have to wait before I can fall pregnant? "

He laughs.

"You're hilarious. I give you that. "

I'm really losing my patience.

"Will you stop with the games? I'm actually serious. I mean babies are noisy and quite a handful. I mean they poop, cry and suck on titties all day but I think I can... OK, I might be able to handle all that with minimum suicidal thoughts every hour "

"Man, Trinny surely gives birth to herself. "

"Joshua "

"Go home Ariel. Everything will work itself out. Also, check on your twin sister. You've been such a stranger "

I click my tongue and walk out. Again, he wasn't much help to me.

"I need... What do you do when you're beyond pissed? "

We're now in the car.

"It depends. I mean my girlfriend is a good calm-downer "

That's interesting.

"What do you mean? "

He laughs.

"I mean I drown in that pussy, eat that booty like groceries. Sometimes, I think she gets me mad on purpose "

"Eeuw"

That's definitely not what I was asking.

"And yours is like the entire store "

He didn't!

"Can we stick to the employer-employee relationship? "

He laughs.

"You asked, I answered "

I sigh.

"We going to Cassiel "

"Yes ma'am "

.

CASSIEL

"I swear"

I giggle.

"It's impossible "

"I'm not lying. She kicked, I felt it "

I laugh.

"Get up. It's impossible because I'm only five weeks pregnant "

I help him get up and we kiss shortly.

"But you're not going back to work next month. You have to take it easy "

I roll my eyes.

"I'm pregnant, not sick "

Someone clears their throat.

We turn and it's Ariel.

"Good morning "

"Hi"

Tshiamo kisses my cheek.

"I'll leave you ladies to it. "

Oh, he's good friends with Bokao and don't ask me how that came about.

"Hi"

Ariel. I just nod.

"I'm surprised to see you here "

I say as I pour us juice.

"I'd like something a bit stronger "

She says.

"So, to what do we owe the pleasure? "

She sighs.

"I'm sorry Cass. I'm really sorry for everything "

"What exactly are you sorry for Ariel? For coming into my house then insulting me instead of simply asking for your keys which I only used about twice to come into your home uninvited? Or for not coming to the party I threw my boyfriend because he won a gold medal and not even stating reasons why? We didn't even celebrate our birthday together like we usually do. You didn't even come to celebrate mom or dad's birthday. It's like you've completely cut off the family from your life "

She's crying I'm also crying but I just had to get my feelings there. Ariel has become a different person since she got married.

"I don't have any excuses. I mean I've been working hard trying to get my marriage to work and it's like I've alienated myself from everything else "

I sigh.

"We asked if things are going well and you snapped at us. We used to talk about everything Ariel"

I say sounding brittle

"Things have been bad since we got from the honeymoon. I just don't know Cassiel. "

I take her hand.

"What's going on? Talk to me"

She shakes her head then withdraws her hand.

"I have to go "

"Ariel"

"No Cassiel. Your life is perfect. You have a man who loves you, you're happy and skinny and you're pregnant. You don't have any real problems "

Then just like that she storms off.

Wow.

.

BOKAO

"Man, she's breathing fire "

He says just before Ariel comes.

"Let's go and stop laughing! "

"Man, see you "

She gets into the car and even bangs the door.

"That went well "

"I wanna die. "

"What? "

She weeps and I'm forced to pull over and get into the back with her.

"What's wrong? "

She continues crying like she's really pained and I just hold her.
My God, I never thought that rich people have problems.

"I'm fine"

She says

after crying for an hour.

"Talking helps, you know "

She frees herself from the embrace.

"I said I'm fine! "

I nod, get off and go back to my seat.

"Where to? "

She sighs.

"My place "

"Stress might be the reason you're gaining weight "

"Are you calling me fat? "

I laugh.

"So gaining weight means you're getting fat? I didn't know "

"Know what? You're fired. I'll find myself another driver "

I laugh again.

"OK, I'd like a good recommendation letter "

"Fuck you "

She says then gets off. Damn, what a character.

"Honey I'm home"

I say as I get into our house. Yes, you heard that right. Mbali and I finally got our house. We moved in like last week so we've only been here for a week.

"I didn't think you'd come so early "

She gives me a peck on the lips.

"Yeah, me too. Anyway, did you cook? I'm hungry "

"Yeah, I'll dish up for you "

"Thanks angel "

I wash my hands then go sit down in the lounge. She comes with my food shortly and I start eating immediately.

"So, there's something I'd like us to talk about "

"Hayi, I'm eating. It'll have to wait "

She waits for me to finish, comes with a cloth for me to wipe my hands then we can Finally talk.

"We've been together for six years Bokao "

"Yeah, so? "

"I just... I feel like it's been so long and you're not getting any younger "

I don't know where this conversation is headed.

"So I'm too old for you now? "

She giggles.

"What? No. I just... I mean we've moved in together and I... I don't want to have a baby out of wedlock "

"I hope you're not suggesting we should get married "

"I'm just saying "

She shrugs.

"Tota Mbali you're demanding. You wanted a house, I gave you one and now you want marriage? Will you ever get satisfied? "

"What? I'm sorry but we've been together for so long so a conversation about marriage isn't far fetched "

"I don't want to get married, get that into your head "

I get up and go to the bedroom, pissed.

.

APHILILE

"I can't do this alone "

"Then talk to your friend, I'm sure, she can help "

I shake my head.

"I need a wedding planner Louis"

Yes, we're getting married. He actually proposed about two days back and I'm already thinking of the The actual wedding.

"What else do you need? "

"Just that, for now "

He chuckles.

"Do you remember what you promised me? "

"I haven't gotten my results yet Louis, relax. "

"How do you know what I was going to say? "

I roll my eyes.

"We've been together for years Louis, come on "

"I love seeing you so chirpy, happy and care free "

"I love seeing you naked "

He laughs.

"I should have known. Last time you were like this... "

I groan.

"Don't start with me. "

He kisses my cheek.

"I'm just saying babe "

"Have you called your father to check on our son? I miss him "

Ore is visiting his grandfather and I miss him so much.

"They left like a few hours ago "

"You're not a mother, you wouldn't understand. Pour me a glass of wine while I go through these mags "

Well, I went shopping and came back with wedding magazines just so I can put together what I'd like.

This is really so exciting for me and I'm looking forward to it.

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BOKAO

Things have been a bit tense in the house. It's been a week now and she's still sulking.

I'm wondering if it has to do with what we talked about because she hasn't spoken with me since that altercation. OK, she only speaks to me when she offers me food and that's it.

I hate that things are this way.

It's Monday and I've just taken a bath. I haven't heard from Ariel since "fired " me but I know she's just in her feelings. Even a blind person can see that she's taking strain but you can never help someone who won't admit they have a problem.

Tshiamo told me how she's distanced herself from everyone and to think I thought she had it all figured out.

Her husband treats her like shit and that makes me wonder if that's how marriages are.

I've never wanted to marry and I definitely don't think of marriage as proof of commitment. Being tied down by a marriage certificate doesn't mean that you're committed to each other, people still cheat, become dishonest and betray each other.

"Morning "

I say, not even anticipating a reply.

She puts my plate before me.

"How long will you keep with this silent treatment? "

"Is it enough or should I dish up more for you? "

I sigh.

"Mbali, I hate this. I hate the tension "

I hold her hand.

"I love you OK and I want to be with you. I don't want to fight "

"Your phone is ringing "

I watch her as she wipes her hands then leaves.

I sigh and answer.

"Hello? "

"Why the hell have I been using uber while I have a driver? "

"Oh, good morning Mrs Phiri "

"I'm expecting an answer "

"Last time I checked, I was fired unless I'm missing something "

She sighs.

"I'm reinstating you then"

"What if I've found a job? "

"I'll double whatever offer you got. Be here at 10am"

Then she hangs up on me.

I think it's time I put her in her place.

.

ARIEL

I look at the time Again and he's now fifteen minutes late.

I cannot afford to be more late.

Finally, he comes and I get into the car just when it comes to a stop.

"I don't pay you to come thirty minutes late"

"Where to? "

I huff.

"Don't you dare change the subject! "

He increases the volume and the car is even vibrating. He's playing Migos but I don't know which song.

I didn't even tell him where I'm going and I now regret sitting in the back.

I take out my phone and call Kamo. It rings to voicemail. I'm worried because I last saw him on Saturday and it's now Monday.

I know he's a grown man and would probably have a good explanation. I'm really freaking out.

I had been so zoned out that I didn't realise the car has stopped.

"We're going to do this again. Where do you want me to take you? "

"Oh, so now that you-"

"You shut up. Firstly, I'm not your servant nor am I your slave. You do not own me. I've tolerated your stinky ass attitude for too long now. I'm not your bitch and do not submit to you. It's high time you learnt how to speak with me because we're not even the same age! "

I don't reply but just get out of the car and start walking.

Who the hell does he think he is?

"Yeah, keep walking Jonny Walker. Exercise is good for weight loss "

He didn't!

I storm back to the car and open on his side.

"What did you say? "

I'm fuming.

"That you're fat. Fat ass, fat cheeks, fat boobs. Fat everywhere "

I slap him. I hate that this road is so quiet and cars hardly pass.

"If you -"

I slap him again and again, even throw fists while crying.

"Stop! "

My hands are shaking when I do. I step back and face away from him.

"Are you coming or not? "

He asks. I get into the back.

"Home. Please take me home"

He starts the car and I look out the window as he drives.

I don't want to go back to that place because I can't bear it anymore.

"Are you OK now? "

"Bokao

don't act like you care"

I get out then walk inside the house with hopes of finding my parents. I find dad in the lounge, reading a newspaper.

I go to him and he sits me on his lap and I just let it out. I'm tired of being sad. I'm tired of fighting. I'm just tired of being unhappy and fat like Bokao said.

"I don't want to go back daddy "

I have a glass of water that he got for me after I'd calmed down.

"Talk to me pumpkin "

I have my head laid on his chest.

"Kamo doesn't love me. Our marriage is a shame. He's been gone since Saturday daddy and he always does this. He's mean and calls me names. "

"Baby "

He kisses my head

"I've been trying. Ever since we got back from the honeymoon, things weren't the same and when I tried to talk to him, he would bite my head off. It got worse when I told him I'm not ready for children. I'm tired of pretending like everything is OK while I'm dying inside. "

"You want to leave him? "

I nod.

"He doesn't deserve my love "

He kisses the top of my head again.

"I'm glad you decided to come home and talk to me. I hate this boy for mistreating my princess. Your mom and I will be with you every step of the way"

"Thank you daddy "

.

TSHIAMO

"this is quite a house "

"It is. My woman chose it "

I give him a glass of brandy. My father is finally visiting us and Cassiel is so nervous since they've never met. He's been out of the country.

"When are you making an honest woman out of her? "

"We're both not ready for marriage. She told me and I agreed with her "

He nods.

"As long as you love each other. Now, where is she? I'd like to meet her"

"She went to do shopping for Christmas but she'll be here soon.
She knows I have to eat "

"Did you not say she's pregnant? We have to pay damages "

I laugh.

"Relax dad. She's not even two months pregnant. "

"Honey I'm... Good afternoon sir "

"Afternoon little girl. You look familiar "

I look at dad.

"What? "

He ignores me.

"Who's your mother? "

Cassiel look at me then him. I think she's also shocked.

"It's -"

"Trinny. Yes you look like Trinny "

"How do you know her? "

I ask and he chuckles.

"Oh, I know her. Do not worry yourself about the details. Come
greet me properly "

She shrugs looking at me then comes to him and they share an embrace.

"My father and I haven't eaten "

She nods.

"Your father and I await an introduction "

"Of course. Father, this is Cassiel and baby, he's Kgothatso"

"Just call me Mr Radebe. This boy is disrespectful "

"OK Mr Radebe. I'll go make something quickly. Can I bring you anything in the meantime? "

He's looking at dad.

"No. We're fine "

We sit in the lounge while she goes to the kitchen. I think she left her shopping bags in the car. I know she'd never carry them herself.

"How do you know her mother? "

"The less you know, the better. "

"Dad! "

"Drop it. "

And I do but my mind doesn't. It wonders how they could know each other.

.

BOKAO

I get into the house and find her sitting on the couch with suitcases besides her.

"What's going on? "

I ask, immediately when I see that.

"I'm leaving "

"Leaving? What do you mean leaving? "

I say, sitting next to her.

"Why should I stay when you refuse to do right by me? "

I laugh and no, I am not amused.

"Where is this coming from all of a sudden? "

"All of a sudden? How long have I been with you? I've stuck with you through every thick, hoe and thin. I'm not even asking for much"

"I bought us a house "

She's crying now.

"I want more than a house. I don't see myself as just your vat-en-sit. I want to be your wife "

I breath out, brushing my hair.

Why does she see the need to complicate things?

"I thought we're good. "

"Just think about it "

She kisses my lips, probably to stop me from replying so we kiss

.

ARIEL

"Kristen told me everything. I feel like I've failed as your mother
"

It's evening now and I've just let her into my room.

"You didn't mom. I'm the one who didn't cry out "

She gets into the bed with me and we cuddle like old times.

"Just know we're here for you. You're still young and have only
known one man. It's normal that the first prince we kiss turns
out to not be our Prince Charming "

I sigh.

"I don't think I'd ever fall in love again mama. Even my driver
called me fat "

"Why does it bother you? "

"My weight bothers me. It always has. I hate being fat. Why can't I be like you and Pink and Cassiel? Why do I have to be the fat one? "

"I hate when you think like this. You're a beautiful thick woman. I don't want you to perceive yourself as fat or the odd one out "

"I can't even bear children "

I sob.

"There's nothing like that. I'm sorry baby but I am glad you don't have a child with him. Maybe Cassiel foresaw this, that's why she never liked him"

"I don't want to live mama. I have nothing to live for "

"That's silly. You have me and the entire family "

She doesn't get it.

"They've never had a failed marriage "

"Wrong. Anthony did but he's happy now with Boity. "

"And the weird doctor? When is he getting married? He needs to get laid" We both laugh.

"That fossil will probably marry your daughter. I'd be lying baby "

"I love you mama "

"I love you more "

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CASSIEL

First thing I do is open the fridge. I don't know if it's pregnancy or what but I can't stop eating. I'm at my parent's house because I want to ask mom about Tshiamo's father.

Don't look at me like that, blame curiosity.

I take out two jumbo muffins and eat.

"Food thief! "

I giggle as I close the fridge and turn.

"Hi daddy "

"My god Cassiel, have you seen the time? "

"It's 8am. You guys wake up late "

I go over to him and kiss his cheeks.

"Where's mommy? I'm hungry "

"You have food on your hands. Gosh, seems like you're going to turn into a little hippo in this pregnancy "

He pulls my cheek.

"Dad! That's mean "

I frown and he chuckles.

"Make us tea while we wait for your mother. I apologise on her behalf, we had a long night "

He winks.

"Eeuw dad, aren't you too old for that? "

"Too old for what? "

Ask mom as she comes out way.

"I have no idea what she's thinking of "

Mom kisses dad first then comes to me.

"It's nice to have my little girls in my house"

She says after our hug.

"Little girls? Is Ariel here? "

She nods.

"Help me make breakfast "

Mom says.

"It would be my pleasure, plus I'd like to ask you something "

"I hope you women are not going to gossip about me"

Dad says and I know it's only because he wants to hear what I want to ask mom.

"Oh relax dad, it's nothing big. It's just that yesterday Tshiamo's dad came and he knows mom "

"What's his name? "

Dad asks and mom laughs.

"Sometimes he forgets how much I love him"

We both giggle.

"Khothatso "

I say.

"Oh, no wonder he's so ugly "

I laugh and push her a little.

"That's my man mom. Be nice "

"But the fact remains baby, he's just as ugly as his father "

"He's not that bad"

Dad adds.

"Now Trinny, who's Khothatso? "

Mom giggles.

"My virgin breaker. He's Tumi's brother "

"I heard one never really forgets their first "

I say with a stifled giggle.

"I beg to differ. I only remember him because he's Tumi's brother. I thought he was in jail "

"I don't like that we're staying in this conversation for so long. I'll go check on Ariel "

"Is he upset? "

I ask mom now that dad has excused us.

"No. He's just being a man. No man wants to hear who else was there before him. He'll be fine "

I nod, knowing she's right.

So they come down when we're setting the table for breakfast.

Ariel looks like she's been crying and my heart breaks. She comes to me and we share a hug.

"I'm sorry for what I said to you "

She says when we break it.

"I've long forgotten about it. How are you? "

She shrugs.

"I'm just trying to convince myself that I'm not a failure and I'm worth more"

"We're here for you. All of us"

We share a group hug.

"Thank you guys "

"We love you "

.

ARIEL

For the first time ever, I eat until I'm full and satisfied.

Today, I'm going to the house so I can fetch my clothes. Dad wanted to go with me but I assured him that I'll be fine.

I'll kindly ask Bokao to get in with me if Kamo is there. He's unpredictable and I've realised that I don't really know him.

"I don't like this one bit. Don't you have clothes in your closet? Or you can just go buy a new wardrobe, on me"

"Dad

Advertisement

I'll be fine. I'll ask my driver to act as bodyguard if that'll make you happy "

He sighs.

"Fine but be back in an hour "

I chuckle.

"Dad, I'm 23 not 15. Geez "

I kiss his cheek then leave. Mom went somewhere with Cassiel and I couldn't tag along because of this.

All my clothes don't fit me because they are size 34 and I've gotten way bigger.

He opens the door and I get in. I'm in the front because I want to apologise.

"You look much better than you were yesterday "

"Oh I am. Coming home was a good decision "

"I'm just glad you're not grumpy. It's so unattractive "

I laugh.

"Right. I'm sorry for my behaviour the past few weeks. I've been an ass and I apologise. I shouldn't have taken my frustrations out on you just because I'm your boss "

"Apology accepted. You said you're going to your house? "

"Uh yes and I need a favour "

"I'm listening "

"Because you're quite buff and dark, I need you to also act as my bodyguard. In case things turn sour "

He laughs.

"I don't know if that was a compliment or an insult "

I chuckle.

"Let's call it an observation. So, Will you? I promised dad you will. "

"Only on one condition "

"Anything "

"You have lunch with me after. "

That's definitely not what I was expecting.

"I thought... Don't you have a girlfriend? "

"You have one crazy mind Ariel "

He shakes his head.

"I'm asking "

I defend.

"I'm not saying have sex with me, not that I would ask because I know you'll be more than willing to have me make you come.

It's just lunch "

"What the hell? I'm married nigger "

He laughs.

"I know you're thinking of it "

He looks at me briefly then turns back to the road.

"I am not! "

"When's Karmen coming? "

"I'll give you her number "

He laughs.

"That's not the question I asked "

"She's coming today for Christmas. We'll have a big lunch as family. This year, we're going to Aunt Charity's house. "

"You seem like a big family "

"We are "

Finally, we arrive and he parks just by the door.

I think Kamo finally decided to come home but I don't care anymore.

"Should I come in with you? "

"Just give me ten minutes "

He nods. I take a deep breath before I enter.

"Great, you're here. I don't know what to do with her"

I look around. What the hell is this man speaking about?

"I'm here to fetch my clothes "

"You're going away? Is it with your dance academy? "

"I'll just pack quickly "

I get on the stairs and go pack most of my stuff. Some things still have price tags.

"Where are you going? "

I've already packed two luggage bags. I know that Bokao has probably entered now

"Home"

I continue with the packing. I don't want to come back.

"You're taking everything? What the hell is going on with you woman? "

"I'll have my lawyer draw up divorce papers. Once I'm out, we'll communicate via lawyers "

He chuckles.

"You're crazy. Ariel Phiri, you're not leaving me "

"Oh watch me. I'm done with you Kamogelo. It's so over. You've treated me like shit for way too long "

"Shit? I made an honest woman out of you. Who in their sane mind would want to wife an insecure, fat pathetic chick like you? "

Tears fill my eyes. I can't believe he's the one saying this to me.

"You're saying this to me Kamo? After everything? "

"Oh please. Do you really think I loved you? I only wanted your money. You seem to forget that we're married in community of property. I met Lilian in Varsity and my baby refused for me to let go of a cash cow "

"Well, congratulations then. You won "

I take out my phone and call Bokao so he can come help me with my bags.

"Please come up "

I hang up after.

"Look at how big you are. If you could see her, you'd know how a woman should be"

A loud baby cry fills the house.

"Shit. She's awake "

He leaves the room. I can't break apart now, though he's seen my tears. I wonder if he was ever in love with me.

Bokao helps me with my bags like I asked and I only hold one. I have five luggage bags which not only has my clothes but shoes, bags, jewellery and my makeup.

I'm sad and angry. To think this house was a gift.

I'm very bitter and Kamogelo will regret messing with a Rhodes!

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BOKAO

"Thank you for helping me with the bags and bringing me home"

I've helped her get her bags inside the house.

"I'm just doing my job Ariel but you still owe me"

She sighs.

"I just need a few days. I'll call you in two days then we can do it "

I nod.

"Fine with me. Just one more thing "

"What? "

"I love your chubby cheeks "

She giggles, rolling her eyes.

"Right. Bye Bokao "

I drive home because I haven't seen my mother in a long time.

She refused to move in with us because well, she doesn't get along with my girlfriend. There is a car parked in the yard.

I park mine besides it and get out. The door isn't closed either and as I approach, I can hear people talking.

My mother is giggling like a school kid. I find them in the lounge, sipping on tea.

My mother is not a hot beverage person so this is definitely interesting. They don't even notice my presence until I clear my throat.

"Oh, why didn't you tell me you're coming? "

"Who's this? "

I ask, not even bothering myself with answering her question.

"None of your business. What are you doing here? "

"Do I need a reason to come see my mother? "

She clears her throat.

"No but I... Thank you for coming to see "

"Introduction maybe? "

I ask, looking at this gentleman.

"Go to your room and stop asking questions "

I laugh. Surely she thinks I'm a little boy to order me like this.

"I'm not going anywhere "

I go to the fridge, take out a beer then back to the lounge.

I sit down on a one seater and switch on the TV.

"I think I should go. Your son is acting up. Walk me out "

I laugh. This is just ridiculous. I don't want to think my mom has a boyfriend. She's old for heaven's sake .

"What was that Mara? "

"Who's that guy? "

She clicks her tongue and takes my beer.

"This showing up unannounced should stop. I have a man "

I laugh. Yes, I knew she'd be that blunt.

"I'll keep my distance "

"Good"

I laugh again. I saw my mom drink tea because of a man. She just made my day.

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MBALI

His words keep running in my mind and I know I have to do this.

Did I really think Marriage is a solution?

He's really all I've known. He's the love that I've always craved and needed. A man who would do absolutely anything for me except walk down the aisle.

My heart is heavy. I'm hurt. We've been together for six years. How will I move on and start over with someone else? It's really not as easy as it seems.

I've packed everything and this time, I'm leaving for real.

I bumped into someone today at the mall.

He said that marriage won't change fate. At first, I was confused but I remembered an old woman I met who told me its better to leave now.

They both said he's not meant for me, that the more I stay, the more it'll hurt when he leaves.

So I made a decision that instead of waiting, it's best I leave.

My cab beeps outside. I take a deep breath then exhale.

I've put the letter on the table. It doesn't explain much but assures him of my love.

The truth is

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I'll always love him.

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TSHIAMO

"You're telling me that my father is your mom's first fuck? "

"Don't say it like that. That's my mom"

She punches me.

"It's the truth babe. Facts! "

"Mom says that's why you're so ugly "

I laugh.

"It's like that now? "

"Her words, not mine "

"But you love me like this, just like she loved father with his ugliness "

She giggles.

"True but I hope our child looks like me "

"Uh, I can't count on that. She might look like me"

"That's her fault. "

She says and starts kissing me. I never thought I'd love someone this much.

The kiss escalates that she gets on top of me. We're sitting on the couch and I lean back on the couch so we can be even more comfortable.

"How's Ariel? "

I ask when we're drying ourselves after our bath.

"She's getting there. Kamo really fucked with her heart and confidence. "

"He's always been an arse "

"I'm just so worried about her. I know she's with my parents but she deserves all the love and happiness. She's been through a lot I mean from the cancer and now this "

I can tell this is a very sensitive topic for her.

"She'll be OK. We just have to be there for her"

I say and I mean it. Ariel is a great person and never deserved that guy.

"I'd say she should have chosen you but now we wouldn't have our baby "

I laugh.

"This is how things were meant to be babe. She'll be fine. "

We get dressed and I have to go since I'm meeting up with Bokao.

"You're really leaving me all alone? "

"Come on baby. Pack our stuff then, you know we're visiting Lilly and Louis "

"Don't take long "

She pouts.

"I won't. I promise "

I kiss her then leave. I find this man drowning his sorrows in alcohol on the lounge. The door is wide open and music is blasting through the speakers.

I switch off the music and grab a beer from the table.

"And then? "

"I've been dumped by a girl I saw myself spending the rest of my life with. She left, just like that "

"Did you do something? "

"We just had a disagreement regarding marriage but that's it. I mean we made love then all was forgiven or so I thought. I don't even know where to start searching "

I thought they were good so this is new.

"Man, I'm sorry. "

"I don't know how to feel man. Women are just something else "

"That they're. You'll be fine. "

He chuckles.

"Right. On other news, my mother has a boyfriend "

I chuckle.

"What? "

"I'm telling you. I even found her drinking tea. My mother loves her beer "

"So she's found you a father? "

We laugh.

"Voetsek man "

So that's how I end up drunk.

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APHILILE

"I can't believe you guys are really here"

I hug both of them. Louis had to go see his father because of something.

"I missed you so much babe"

She kisses my cheek. I bend down to greet the baby. Cassiel is wearing a crop top.

"Don't you think you're freezing the baby? "

Cassiel laughs.

"Nop "

"I also asked the same thing "

Tshiamo says in irritation.

"So there's beer and all kinds of meat. There's snacks and drinks for us foodies "

Tshiamo gives me a look.

"Fine, I'm pregnant "

Cassiel squeals. Louis forced me to take a test and it came positive. I'm two months pregnant.

"I want to get married by the end of next month before I start showing "

"I can't believe we're both pregnant. You're also wearing a crop top "

She laughs.

"I know. Where's Ariel? I thought you'd come with her"

"I promise she'll be there at the wedding "

Tshiamo went to get himself a beer so Cass and I are in the living room and stuffing our faces.

"So we need to start dress searching. "

I groan. I don't even know what I want.

"I think we need to go overseas. "

She claps once.

"Overseas? I have a budget babe "

"Uh don't worry, I'll pay for the trip. Take it as a gift "

I smile.

"Thank you "

So we talk about the wedding, about babies and everything. Louis comes with Ore later on and I'm so happy my baby is here.

Cass has only seen pictures. He runs to me and kisses me all over the face, making me giggle.

"Greet my guest "

"Hi guest. I'm Ore and you? "

"I'm Cassiel. Lovely meeting you "

He takes her hand and kisses it.

"You're beautiful Cassiel "

"Yey, don't you go Charming my girlfriend "

Tshiamo says and he groans.

"Hi bhuti"

They do a handshake.

Louis kisses my forehead and greets Cass.

Cassiel and I cook dinner together then we all go to our rooms after dinner.

"I love seeing you happy "

Louis says. We're now in bed.

"You make me happy. How's dad? "

"He's fine. He asked about your family "

"I don't have family "

"No babe, like your father or mother's family "

I shrug.

"I don't know. My parents died and that's it"

"I didn't mean to upset "

He says and I sigh.

"It's just... I wish I knew them. I know I have you and dad and Ore and Tshiamo and Cassiel "

He laughs.

"So many ands "

I chuckle.

"Argh, you know what I mean. It's just... It's complicated "

He sighs.

"Let's focus on the wedding then after we can track them down"

"What if they don't want me? "

He kisses my lips.

"Their loss "

Oh, I love him.

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FOUR MONTHS LATER

APHILILE

"I don't think I want to do this "

I'm so nervous. So Louis and his father managed to track Down my mother's family.

"Baby, come on"

"Look at me Louis. I'm pregnant with my second child. What would they think of me? "

"Oh relax. You're like 25 now and we're married. There's no perfect daughter "

I breathe out.

"OK, let's do this"

He takes my hand into his and we walk inside the yard.

It's a huge yard with a house that's not so big but isn't small either. We're at a, location I think, judging by how it is.

We drove three hours Or so to come here.

I knock and we wait for an answer. It's just before lunch so I'm hoping we're not catching them at a bad time. The way I'm clinging onto Louis' hand, I might break it.

We see the door knob turn and someone opens. It's a girl child, probably Ore's age.

"Hi"

I say nervously.

"Come in"

She says with a smile. I'm really so nervous.

"Where are the adults? "

Louis asks and the girl just tells us to follow her.

We get into the lounge and that's where everyone is seated. There are five people and they're all looking at us.

"Good day everyone. Is this the -"

"This can't be"

Says a woman coming from the passage. She starts shaking, tears falling down her eyes. Someone quickly runs to her and holds her just before she falls. I think we're at the right place because she kind of looks like me.

"Please, take a sit "

So we do like we're told. There are three people on the couches now, the girl excluded.

A man, an old woman and a teenage girl.

"I'm Mihle "

Says the teenager

"I'm Jace "

The man says.

"Mariam"

The old woman says.

"I'm Aphilile and this is my husband Louis "

"You're married? You look so young "

That's Mihle.

"I am. We got married this year "

So the woman was taken to her room so she can get over the 'shock'

I don't know why she fainted but she'll probably tell us when she wakes up.

They offer us food and I can't say no because I'm pregnant and the moment the smell hits my nostrils, hunger strikes.

So we have lunch silently but I have a whole lot of questions in my mind.

No one has asked why we're here and I don't think they're going to.

She comes after we're done eating and looks at me.

"I'm so sorry Lilly"

I look at Louis. How does she know my name? He shrugs, like he can read my thoughts.

"How do you know my name? "

Now everyone looks at her. She clears her throat.

"Because I... I'm your mother "

"My mo... What?! "

"Baby, relax "

I stand up. I can't believe this woman.

"Aphilile sit down "

Ma Mariam says but I'm not planning to. I'm mad, damn mad because last time I checked, my mother was dead.

"No, you're dead "

"Lilly"

She says, pissing me off even more

"Louis, let's go"

He doesn't stand up. I'm boiling

"You need to calm down Lilly, think of-"

I don't even wait for him to finish.

"I'll call a cab "

I need some air. I go out and I know he's following me.

He grabs my arm and I turn, boiling with rage and look at him.

"What?! "

He cups my face then pecks my lips.

"You need to breathe baby, think of our son"

Yes, we're having another boy. I'm now six months pregnant.

He leads me through a breathing exercise until I'm calm then it sinks in. My mother is alive.

"Is she OK? "

Mihle asks and I just cry In my husband's arms.

She comes back outside with water which I drink then go back inside.

"So

you have a daughter? "

Jace asks.

"You owe the child an explanation Nikiwe. You owe all of us"

She sighs. I'm holding Louis' hand. I need strength. This is overwhelming.

"I thought... I was told you died. I gave birth to you via C-section. I had a few complications and woke up from a coma three days later. That's when I was told you didn't make it"

"That's quite interesting "

I say, after processing the information. I stand up again.

"Thank you for that Nikiwe. "

I turn to look at Louis.

"Take me home, I'm done here "

"Lilly "

I'm already out the door. I don't need this. I don't want to believe that my mom was alive while I was struggling. She was alive when I was made a slave by my stepmother. She's been alive all along when I was trafficked. I had to start school at 10 and completed my matrix at 24 while she's alive.

I don't say anything on The drive back. I don't even know if I want anything to do with those people.

It's been 25 years and this story isn't adding up.

I was told my mother died when I was 1. My father isn't even here to guide me with answers.

I don't know who or what to believe. In the meantime, I need to be far away from my so-called mother.

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ARIEL

I never really thought I'd add 'divorced' to my biography or whatever. I've been seeing a psychologist for the past two months to help me deal with all of this.

I must say that I've finally made peace with my failed marriage but I still hate Kamogelo and want nothing to do with him.

I've went back to my old weight. Bokao was right, stress is the reason why I had gained the weight. I'm just grateful I wasn't pregnant with that bastard's child.

"Like I said, I don't have to impress him"

She rolls her eyes.

"Who said anything about impressing him? "

"This dress "

I say and she laughs.

"There's nothing wrong with showing some skin. You're giving him something to think about "

I have one crazy twin sister.

"It's just lunch. Besides, I'm not ready to get back into the dating scene "

"Yah but you need to get laid "

I roll my eyes.

"Not everything is about sex Cassiel"

"Relax man Ariel. "

My phone rings. It's Bokao and I'm still in my thong.

I don't answer. She laughs and throws the dress at me.

"You have no choice now "

I click my tongue as she continues laughing. It's a navy blue long sleeved dress that's flare from the waist and reaches above my knees. It has an open back so I don't wear a bra.

I put on my heels then run out. OK, not literally. I rush out.

"Hi"

I say when I'm finally outside and trying to catch my breath.

"Bokao? "

I wave my hand in his face and he finally snaps out of it.

"I'm sorry. Hey, you look uhm... Great, beautiful "

I smile.

"Thank you but I'm late for my lunch "

He clears his throat.

"Of course ma'am "

He opens the door for me and I get in. I hope you weren't thinking I'm having lunch with him.

"We're here"

I don't know where my mind was because now the door is open. I get out and take a deep breath.

"Thank you "

He nods.

"When should I come pick you up? "

"I don't know. It might be in ten minutes, depending on how this will go "

"Just call me"

"I'll do that "

I don't know why I decided to do this. I mean Blind dates are more of Cassiel's things.

This is not exactly a blind date since I met this guy and decided to give him a chance.

He smiles as I approach and stands up. I'm five minutes late. He pulls a chair for me and I sit down.

"Wine? "

"I think you forgot to greet me, ask me how I'm doing maybe "

"You look good to me"

He says. I text Bokao. I'm so not doing this.

I stand up.

"And then? "

"I just realise I made a mistake "

Then I walk out.

"What happened? "

"Let's go somewhere "

I say when I'm in the car. I wasn't even there for two minutes.

Thing is, I like my driver more than I should. I don't even know what I'm saying right now.

"Are you hungry? "

I nod and he smiles.

"I can't wait to see all of you after this "

He says with a smug grin.

"What? "

He just smiles. What the hell is he on about?

.

BOKAO

So it's been four months since Mbali walked away from us, our relationship and I've never heard from her.

I tried calling and tracking her down but nothing. I had to accept that she's gone.

I hate that she left, just like that. She didn't leave a letter to explain or something to give me the closure I need.

She just left.

"You're one interesting woman Ariel. I think you made this up so you can spend the day with me"

I say, looking at her through the rearview mirror.

"You're not all that Bokao. I just wasn't feeling the guy. I mean the first thing he asks me after I sit down is , 'wine' ?"

I laugh.

"He's asking what you're drinking "

"It's midday, why would I have wine? I mean he didn't even greet me or ask how I'm doing "

"Yah, he just wanted to get laid "

She laughs.

"By getting me drunk? " I shrug.

"Wine makes some people horny. Think about it "

"Then he's a loser. He should have thought of ways to seduce me or something " "So, you want to get laid? "

I ask because that's what she's implying.

"What? No. I'm just saying " "Mmmm"

"Don't do that. I was just... Argh, forget it "

She giggles, covering her face.

"It's great to see you happy and cheerful "

I say truthfully. "I'm actually happy I'm happy. I deserve this "

"True, just like you deserve an orgasm or two "

I swear she blushes. I might get into an accident if I continue watching her like this.

"Not everything is about sex "

"Your face says otherwise " "Just focus on the road "

I laugh. "Yes ma'am "

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BOKAO

"you don't have to keep doing that "

"Doing what? "

She asks but I know she knows what I'm on about.

"Stealing glances at me. Ask what ever's bothering you "

she giggles.

"It's just... I don't know. The food is great"

I laugh.

"You're bad. I bet you're thinking something dirty "

"Me? Never "

"Don't play innocent with me Ariel. I can see right through you "

I wink at her.

"I actually wanted to tell you something "

I say and she drops her fork and gives me attention.

"What? "

"That I quit with immediate effect "

She seems shocked.

"Why? "

"Because I'm not about to date my boss. The other reason would be that I'll finally get to put my degree to use. I found a job as an engineer "

"That's amazing. Congratulations "

She calls the waiter and asks for their finest champagne.

"Are you flexing on me? "

I ask and she chuckles.

"Definitely not when you're the one paying "

I laugh.

"Little gold digger "

"I should have asked for the most expensive bottle. I'm happy for you "

"I'm happy for me too "

I smile. The waiter comes with the champagne and pours for us.

"Before we toast, I also have something to celebrate. You're the first person I'm telling "

"Why am I getting worried? "

She clears her throat.

"I'm moving to Barcelona "

"What? "

This is a bomb. I was expecting anything but this. Barcelona?

Wow.

"Yeah. I'm moving in June"

"Why? "

She smiles.

"I'm expanding my horizon "

She winks. I frown.

"I don't like that "

She touches my hand on the table.

"It's April and I'm leaving in June, maybe you can make the remaining months memorable for me "

"Are you flirting with me? "

She giggles.

"Maybe. It's an offer. Take it or leave it"

"Oh I'm taking it"

We click our glasses in a toast.

We get dessert and I love seeing her stuff her face.

"How long will you stay there? "

"A year or two. I don't know. It'll depend on how it is "

I nod.

"I'm going to miss you though "

"Oh come on, I don't want us to be sad about this"

I call the waiter so I can settle the bill. Once that's done, I get up and take her hand then we leave.

My phone rings and it's my mother. After our chat, I drive home.

"I'm sorry about this but my mom wants to See Me about something "

"I'm not in a hurry so it's OK "

I arrive at home and open her door after I'm out.

She looks around the area.

"Never been here? "

"It just reminds me of something. Someone"

"Your ex husband? "

She nods.

"Let's go in "

So I find her in the kitchen, waiting.

"Ma? "

"Go buy me a 48"

I laugh.

"Here I was thinking its an emergency "

She rolls her eyes.

"I'm hosting friends here"

I look at her with a raised eyebrow.

"Friends? "

"Yes, friends. Who's this? "

She asks, looking besides.

"Oh, it's Ariel. My now former boss "

"Mmm. Go and I'll stay with your Ariel "

"Will you be OK? "

I ask Ariel and she nods.

I leave.

When I come back, music is playing out loud. My mom is really something else. She's gotten Ariel drunk which makes me

laugh. They're dancing like crazy people and you'd swear these two aren't decades apart.

I put her booze on the kitchen counter.

"Let's go "

"Thanks son. I like her but she's not the one"

She's started with her craziness.

"What am I going to do with you while you're this drunk? "

She just laughs. Great.

"Take me home"

And that's exactly what I do.

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KAMOGELO

Being back at my mother's place is something I never thought I'd see happen. I'm thankful I extended and even built myself a three room for when I visit.

I just didn't think I'd use it like this.

Lilian is visiting me with our daughter.

"Can you not drink in her presence? "

I sigh

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thinking of the life I had. Some days, I curse having gone to varsity. I'd cure meeting Lilian but regardless of everything, I love my daughter.

I lost everything after the divorce. I think my mistake was not looking into the Rhodes. They made sure to wipe me clean like they're not already rich. I even lost my job and they made sure I'll never be hired anywhere.

I feel like a complete fool. Yes, I love Ariel. Things just changed when I got to varsity and met Lilian. When Ariel found out about my cheating, she convinced me to make sure she takes me back.

I already had competition from the athlete but being her first became an advantage. She was easier to manipulate.

"I wanted to ask you something "

Lilian says.

"What? "

"That offshore account, it's still there? "

"No. They took everything "

"Fuck. They're good"

As if I don't already know that. I guess this is my punishment for hurting a girl who only loved me.

Even my mom and little sister don't talk to me. Yes, they loved Ariel.

I don't know what I was thinking.

"I see the regret In your eyes "

"Well, it's too late. I can't believe I treated her like shit and said those words to her. She had always been good to me"

She rolls her eyes.

"You failed to make her pregnant "

"They would have taken my child from me. It's a blessing in disguise "

She hits me on the head.

"And then? "

"You're just a stupid man "

"And you're smarter because? "

She laughs.

"How long will you remain miserable? I'm tired of having to support your ass. I want you to be the man I fell in love with, not this ass who's miserable because he lost his cash cow "

I roll my eyes.

"So what should I do since you have this all figured out? "

"Just stop drinking. I have something up my sleeves "

"What? "

She just smiles.

.

APHILILE

"Baby, just give them a chance "

I shake my head.

I'm not about to let him bully me into this.

I'm not going to buy anything. My father is not here to give me answers. I'm just stuck between a rock and a hard place.

"I don't need to do anything. I refuse to believe my mother's alive. I can't "

"But baby -"

"Just let it go Louis. I'm not doing it"

I stand up so I can go make food for Ore. He follows me like a tail.

"Babe, it's your mother. I know how you've felt about not knowing your family. "

I sigh.

"We'll revisit this conversation when it's all sinker in. Right now, I'm still overwhelmed by everything "

He kisses my cheek.

"Thank you babe "

I roll my eyes.

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CASSIEL

I've had quite a smooth pregnancy so far. I'm so glad I can now feel the kicks and we now know the gender. It's a girl and Tshia is so excited.

We've already painted the nursery and he's so obsessed. I think it's cute that we're both looking forward to her birth.

"I have bad news "

He's been here for a week now. Thing is, his career has been keeping him very busy.

He's had to travel in and out of the country but I'm glad he makes time

for us.

"What's up? "

I've just taken a shower and I'm now doing my makeup.

It's a bit chilly outside since we're in May.

"I'm going to Rio"

"For how long? "

"I'll be back in August "

I stop what I'm doing. I'm due in July and he promised he'll be there with me in the delivery room.

I can't contain my tears. He knows about my fear of labour and he promised he'll hold my hand.

"Baby "

"Don't. "

He tries holding me but I'm not having it.

"You promised! "

"Baby"

I stand up.

"No Tshiamo. You know my fears. You promised you'll be there, that you'll hold my hand. You said you'll be the one to cut her umbilical cord "

"I'll be there "

I shake my head.

"Don't lie "

He sighs.

"Cassiel I'll be there "

I don't pay him anymore attention as I walk into the closet and get dressed.

I'm having tea with my mom and Ariel.

When I'm all dressed, he follows me downstairs. Now the stairs always remind me that I'm in my third and last trimester. It's an exercise on its own.

"I'll hire a jet that way I can fly back any time "

I roll my eyes.

"That's an unnecessary waste of money. We're having a baby Tshia "

"I'm trying to think of something Cassiel"

"You're still leaving "

He sighs.

"Babe, I'm sorry. I don't like this one bit "

"It's fine. I mean this is your career so I can't do anything about it. "

I have my bag so I grab my car keys.

"I'll drive you "

He says so I throw the keys at him.

"Babe-"

"Tshiamo please just let me be. "

"I don't like when you're mad at me and I don't think Wawa likes it "

I roll my eyes.

"Don't use my baby "

"Our baby "

Mxm.

"Kiss kiss? "

I give him a kiss on the cheek Instead and get out. I know I'm probably a bit late.

We're at a restaurant. They're already going through the menus.

"Good morning "

I kiss them then sit down.

"You don't look fine"

Mom says and I sigh.

"I'll be fine. "

"What's up? "

Ariel asks and I shake my head.

"Tshiamo is leaving for Brazil so I think I should move back home until I give birth. I don't want anything happening while I'm alone"

"I agree. Your father and I would love to have you home. You know I'll be more than willing to assist with my granddaughter "

I smile.

"Thank you mom "

"Aren't you scared? "

Ariel asks.

"I'm freaking out. What I've read so far about labour has done nothing to ease my nerves "

"Shame, my baby "

I laugh. My mom is just something else. She's the best.

.

ARIEL

I'm really enjoying my time with them but I know I have to tell them sooner or later. Bokao is still the only person who knows so far and I don't know how this will go.

"I'm moving to Barcelona "

I blurt out.

"What? "

They both ask, shocked.

"That... Yes. I am. "

"Why? "

Mom asks.

"Change of scenery. It's just going to be for a year or two. I'll be working "

"I'm having a baby Ariel. I just thought you'll experience that with us "

I sigh.

"I know and I'm sorry but I won't be gone forever "

"That's not making me feel any better Ariel. You've really succeeded in drifting a wedge between us so congratulations "

She stands up.

"Cassiel "

"You know Ariel, at one point I thought you cared about me, that we were one but I was wrong. Enjoy Barcelona and I hope something makes you stay there forever! "

That breaks my heart. I didn't think things would go this way.

"As mad as I am at you for this, I'm sorry for Cassiel's outburst."
"

"She hates me mom"

"She'll come around. Pregnancy just makes all crazy. She's just hurt. Tshiamo is leaving and now you, it's too much for her"

I nod, hoping that it's nothing big like mom says. That she doesn't hate me and that she'll come around.

.

APHILILE

"Mom, why can't we take him out? "

"Because he's not ready yet"

He brushes my stomach and our boy kicks again.

"He's so strong mom"

I giggle.

"He is

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just like his big brother "

I kiss his cheek

There's a knock on the door. Ore helps me get up and we go get it.

"What are you doing here? "

I ask because I can't believe she's here.

"Can I get in? "

"Let her in mommy "

I roll my eyes and let Nikiwe in.

"Thank you "

"I bet Louis gave you our address "

"Are you going to offer me something to drink? "

I roll my eyes again.

"Mom, that's not polite "

"Why don't you make yourself at home Nikiwe? "

I say sarcastically.

She does, going to the coffee maker and pours herself coffee.

"Ore, go play your Xbox "

"OK mom"

He kisses me then runs off to the playroom.

"I'd like us to talk "

She says

"It's not like I have a choice "

"Aphilile, I know that you probably don't believe me but I'm being honest "

"How did you know my name? "

I have to know.

"Because I gave you that name the minute I knew I'm having a girl "

"How great"

She sighs.

"Do you know how happy I am that you're alive? "

I laugh. Yeah right.

"Happy? You're happy? Do you know what I've had to go through? Well, let me tell you mother. My father married a woman who made me her slave. She deprived me of education and had me licking her arse while kids my age became kids. She kicked me out the minute my father passed away and I ended up living with a woman who sold me off! Where were you? Oh, I know. You were living lavish with your family while I had to suffer. "

I breathe, remembering that I'm with child and the last thing I want is my blood pressure being off the roof.

She gives me a glass of water which I reluctantly take. I'm only doing it because of my baby.

"Aphi, I didn't know. I really didn't. I had a C-section so I didn't get to hold you after you were born. I slipped into a coma and waking up, I was told you died. I saw the baby who's supposed to be you and I've never thought that you might be alive. I was devastated then decided to move back home"

She sounds sincere and maybe she's telling the truth. I don't know.

"And my father? "

She sighs.

"He called me when I woke up and told me he had to go back to work. I understood since he's a miner and I was used to not seeing him frequently. It never crossed my mind that he'd do this"

I sigh.

"I don't know what to say. I'm torn between what you're saying and what my father told me"

"And it sucks that he's not alive because I also need some answers. It makes me mad to know that he kept you away from me"

I shrug.

"I guess. "

"So, you never went to school? I mean you talk perfect English "

"I only knew English until I went to live with an old lady I thought was my grandmother. She taught me Tswana "

"Aphilile, I would really love to know you"

My phone rings before I can reply.

It's a number I don't recognise. "Hello? "

"Mrs Aphilile Vuma? " "Speaking, who's this? "

I don't know why but my heart starts racing.

"I'm calling With regards to Mr Louis Vuma whom I believe is your husband "

I have my phone on loudspeaker which Nikiwe takes from me.

"It's about Louis "

She walks away with it after putting it off loudspeaker, leaving me wondering who that was.

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APHILILE

"Why did you do that? "

"Aphilile, you cannot be under any stress "

"That's my husband we're talking about! You have no right coming in here and taking control of my life. Who the hell do you think you are?! "

"You cannot talk to me like that. I'm your mother"

"A mother I didn't know existed until now. Give me my phone "

I snatch it from her and call the number back. I can't believe she just did that.

"Good afternoon this is -"

"Hi, I'm Aphilile Vuma. I believe you had a message for me"

"I spoke to your mother, she agreed to pass the message "

Just like that she hangs up on me. Great.

"Nikiwe, I believe you have a message for me"

She sighs.

"As much as I was also wronged and robbed of the chance to mother you, I understand why you're being like this. However,

this doesn't mean you should disrespect me because I am your mother"

I roll my eyes.

"I'm sorry mother"

"We should go. "

"Go where? What's happening with Louis? "

She takes my hand and I yank it from her hold.

"He's... He's been involved in an accident. They just need your consent so he can go to theatre "

"And you couldn't let them tell me that? Do you realise how much you're messing with his life? I'd be on my way there if you didn't decide to Interfere "

"Aphilile"

I don't listen to anything else she says but I rather Leave to call Ore.

She's on my tail.

"Ore! "

"I can stay with him"

I look at her.

"I don't trust you "

"Aphilile, please "

"No. "

My heart is so heavy. It hasn't sunk in yet that my husband is in hospital. If it requires theatre then it means it's bad. He comes running down the stairs.

"Aphi, you cannot do this to him. Rather go hear how your husband is before this. He's a child "

I sigh. She's speaking sense.

"If anything and I mean anything happens to him, I swear "

I kiss my baby goodbye and call my driver.

He comes and drives me to the hospital. I'm praying in my heart, not forgetting to also breathe for my baby's sake.

I know I can't lose Louis, which is why I don't want to think of the worst.

"Will you be OK ma'am? "

I nod and get off. My heart races as I walk into the hospital.

I reach reception and tell them why I'm here.

The nurse tell me to wait for the doctor.

As I'm seated on the bench, I say a silent prayer in my heart.

God can never be deaf to my prayers.

"Mrs Vuma? "

I look up and nod.

"I'm Dr Moodley. "

"How's my husband Doc? "

"He lost a lot of blood but thankfully, there's no internal bleeding. The bullet almost -"

"Bullet? What bullet? "

I can't believe what I'm hearing.

"Your husband was shot on the ribs and abdominal "

"What? "

I feel a little light headed. Who would shoot him?

"The bullet missed his heart but my concern is the spine. We need to operate as soon as possible so we can remove the bullet on his abdominal and give him a blood transfusion.

"When did this happen? "

I can't help the tears that flow out of my eyes.

"He was admitted here three hours ago. "

"I don't understand "

"Ma'am, please sit down. You cannot stress the baby "

Is he kidding me? Louis is my family. I can't lose him.

"I don't understand. "

"We don't know what happened, only that he found abandoned on the road. We believe it was a hijack "

"I can't... I can't... "

My vision gets blurry. I can't breathe.

"Mrs Vuma, you need to breathe "

I'm crying, shaking my head. I can't breathe.

He holds me and I breathe as per his instructions.

"You have to take it easy "

"Take it easy? My husband has been shot twice! "

"Your baby "

I hold my stomach and close my eyes.

How will I raise two kids on my own.

"I'd like to sign the forms"

They have to save him. There's no way I'm losing my husband.

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BOKAO

It's my first day at this new job. I'm excited because I'll finally do what I've always wanted.

Working for the Rhodes was by far my most paying and beneficial job.

They treated me well and as young as they were

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never disrespected me.

I'm actually grateful for the experience. I wish Mbali was here to witness this with me.

We had so many goals together and at one point, I wanted to be a Better man for her.

Anyway, I've accepted that she left me and I'm putting my focus on my job.

I can't really start anything with Ariel because she's leaving. I'm not getting any younger now.

Now I'm here, in this house that I bought to start a family yet I'm alone.

I thought Mbali and I were on the same page but I was wrong.

My phone rings and it's Ariel. I'm having breakfast.

"Miss Rhodes"

She giggles.

"Cut the formalities, I'm no longer your boss"

"But I love how it sounds. I hated the Mrs "

She chuckles.

"Ah, I'm so glad I have my surname back "

"Until you meet some guy in Barcelona and have little foreigners "

She laughs.

"Oh please. If that happens, I keep my surname. So, can we do a celebratory dinner tonight? To celebrate your first day "

"Tempting "

"Oh come on B"

"Fine, we'll do that "

She screams.

"Yeiy! Enjoy your first day "

"Thank you "

That's sure a start to this day.

I drive to work looking forward to the day.

So I arrive at this mine which I'll be working at. It's a huge gold mine and I'll be working in the engineering section.

I'm excited to be honest.

The day goes well and I'm welcomed with open arms.

They let me in on what I'll be working on with other engineers and show me how everything works.

I'm let in on the rules and regulations of the company and it's conduct.

I have a productive day which has me looking forward to dinner.

Just as I get off the elevator, I bump into this girl and both our phones fall.

I was just about to call Ariel.

"I'm sorry about this. It's not like me to be clumsy "

"Good because you almost killed me! "

OK, she's exaggerating.

"And I've just apologised "

"And that's suppose to undo the damage? "

She clicks her tongue and walks away. OK.

I just pick my phone then go. I dial Ariel.

"Hello, who's this? "

"Hey, it's me. I thought you had my number "

"You're calling with a private number that's why I'm asking "

"Are we still on for dinner? "

I'm hoping she hasn't changed her mind yet.

"Yes, we are. Come get me"

"I'm coming right up "

I call her again when I'm at her gate. I need a shower before this dinner.

"You just had to make me walk all the way in heels. How romantic "

She rolls her eyes and gets into the car.

"So I don't get a kiss? "

I ask, after I've also got in.

"You don't deserve it"

"But tonight's all about me. I deserve all that and more"

She chuckles.

"Yeah right "

"Look, I need to take a shower then you'll take me out "

"Shower? "

I look at her for a second then back at the road.

"I've had a long, sweaty day. "

"Thank God my nose is blocked "

I laugh.

"But it's the same as when I'm sweating on top of you "

She giggles.

"Maybe I can give you a back scrub. That way, I'll be done in no time "

"If I do, we'll never get out of the shower "

"Good point "

I pack in the garage then get out to open her door.

"Don't you get lonely living alone? "

"I do. I'm actually glad I'll have my job to keep me busy "

She nods "True. Will you miss me when I'm gone? "

She's looking at me. "Is that a trick question? "

"I just... I love spending time with you "

"I do too. Let me go shower "

I kiss her cheek then run to my room so I can shower.

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FORTY THREE

TSHIAMO

"she's so perfect. I think she looks like me"

I kiss her forehead once again.

"Thank you babe. You did well"

She smiles at me weakly. I know she's tired.

I made sure to come for my baby's birth and what Cassiel doesn't know is that I have a week to spend with them.

"I'm glad you're here. I thought I was dreaming when I saw you coming "

"OK love birds, time for mommy to rest. "

That's Josh, Her doctor.

He takes the baby from me.

A day later, we can finally go home. She gave birth vaginally and everything is good. She didn't tear much so there was no need for stitches. However, we're still required to wait before having intercourse.

Her doctor named our baby Rory and Cass told me that he named her and Ariel as well.

"Did you really just give birth? "

She laughs.

"I still remember the pain "

The doctor comes in. It's Friday.

"All set. Please don't make another baby. My ears are still bleeding from her screaming "

We laugh.

"I wasn't that bad! "

She defends, which makes me chuckle.

"I think your boyfriend can agree that you're quite a screamer "

"I'm not going to entertain that Joshua"

"Cassie, I want you to make things right with your twin sister. You're no longer pregnant "

Then he leaves.

"Let's go family "

It's so cold outside, which is understandable since it's July.

We'll be staying with her parents since her mom is going to help with Rory.

"Are you going to do as the good doctor said? You can't stay mad at her forever "

I'm looking at her via the rearview mirror and she rolls her eyes.

"Why me? She's not doing anything to make amends. She's probably enjoying Barcelona with some new fuck "

"She's not like that "

She rolls her eyes again.

"I forget you know her so well "

"Stop with the sarcasm, definitely not when you're holding my daughter. Ariel spent these few weeks trying to make things good with you. She just got out of a shitty marriage and thought, 'hey, why not go see what awaits me on the other side of the world'. The fact remains, she's your twin and she loves you. You shared a womb at the same time so cut her some slack "

She huffs.

"Fine. I'll answer next time she calls"

"Good"

Her mom is the first one to take Rory when we get there.

There's a small welcoming party for little Rory.

Even Bokao is here so I go to him.

"Yoh man"

We do a manly shake.

"So, your ass is a father? I hope it's not a handsome baby girl "

I laugh.

"Really? She's beautiful "

"Only if she doesn't look like you, phela o mobe " (You're ugly)

"Everyone just keeps reminding me"

His phone rings and I see him smile when he stares at it.

"And then? "

"Your father just made an entrance. Focus on that "

I chuckle and go to my father who gives me a hug.

"I didn't know you were coming like now"

"I don't have much time son. Where's my granddaughter? I don't want to miss my flight "

The baby's been fussed over by everyone. So I find her being held by Pink, Cassiel's sister.

I give her to dad.

"She's pretty. I got her a gift, it's in her room. Thank you son. "

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APHILILE

Being a mother again has been bitter sweet for me.

Louis wasn't there when I gave birth and what's worse is, we had to be moved to some safe house.

Ore remained with his father.

I gave birth on the first of July so Cassiel and I have babies in the same month. I knew she was due this month and has probably given birth now.

I had my baby way past my due date.

"Louis

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what happened? Who did you mess with? Why are we here? "

He woke up yesterday and I just had to come see him.

The doctor says he'll be here for one more week.

"I'm so sorry "

"Sorry? Sorry? I want answers "

I'm holding Samkelo who's fortunately sleeping.

"I'm in shit Aphilile. "

"What are you on about? "

I'm so mad at him for going around in circles. I want answers. I need answers.

"I've been... I haven't been honest with you. "

"Well, Now is the time to come clean. What's going on? "

He sighs.

"I just... I messed with the wrong crew and I... "

"I thought you were hijacked. What are you talking about? "

"It wasn't. We're here because I came clean to the cops. I'll have to testify against them "

All of this sounds dangerous.

"How much danger are we in? "

"They want to kill me. Without me, there's no case "

"Why? You're not saying anything "

"I can't tell you OK. I'm freaking out as is"

I click my tongue and stand up.

"Lilly"

"You and I aren't talking until you tell me what shit you've gotten us into"

Then I leave.

I'm driven back to the safe house, so mad at him.

I miss Ore. Heck, I can't even call Cassiel to hear if she's given birth already.

Things just spiralled out of control so quick.

Could I be with a man that I don't really know?

The thought alone is scary.

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ARIEL

I've been here for a month now. It's summer and so hot.

I've made a friend Elena who's also helping me with my Spanish lessons. She's been here for two years and is American.

I do go over to the library where my official Spanish classes take place.

"I think it's time we went out "

"No, no"

"Come on Ariel. You've been a bore for too long. If it ain't dance, it's Spanish classes. You need to live a little "

I roll my eyes.

"Fine. What is it? "

"Soccer match. "

"That doesn't sound exciting "

She chortles.

"Oh, you know nothing. I got us T-shirts because Barcelona is playing! "

"Uh, thanks"

"At least fake some excitement "

I roll my Eyes.

"I'm just not a soccer fan "

"Well I am and we're doing me today. Go shower. "

I hesitantly go shower, making sure to take as much time as I can.

I wear black high waist jeans and the T-shirt she bought me. I tuck it in and tie my hair up.

I put on lipstick and we finally leave.

They're drinking beer in this car that fetched us.

It's his boyfriend's who happens to also be a big Barcelona fan.

"Here"

She gives me a can of Heineken.

"Really? "

I might drink but definitely not beer.

"What do you want princess? Champagne? "

Mxm.

"Open for me then"

She cheers.

"Good girl"

Yeah right.

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BOKAO

Not much has happened since Ariel left.

I hate to admit it but I miss her. Things between us were just crazy and I loved the craziness.

I mean we were just moving with the flow and had absolutely no labels but above all, I just miss her.

She's a friend I'll forever cherish. She just sent me a picture with a can of beer, something about going to a soccer match.

I'm happy that she's enjoying herself. I never thought she'd ever drink beer.

OK, so going back a little, remember the time I bumped into that rude lady? Turns out we had somehow switched phones and oh did I have people calling me the next day.

She also shouted at me like I knew about this and I didn't even get a chance to ask how she has Ariel's number.

It's Finally Friday which means I can get a break, grab some beers with the guys.

"Bokao Sibiyá? "

I look up and it's her.

"Can I help you? "

She sits down and chuckles.

"It's really you. My little sister told me you're such a challenge "

"Little sister? "

She nods.

"Karmen? "

Oh no.

"I wondered why you have Ariel's number. Small world "

"Yeah yeah. Anyway, the big boss is impressed with your work.
"

"How do you know that? "

She chuckles.

"Don't worry about that. What's the deal with you and Ariel? "

"What's it to you? "

"I might be looking at my future thing so I need to know "

I lean back on my chair

"Thing? "

"Mhm. Anyway, you'll hear from me soon"

"I think your little sister didn't tell you everything "

She chuckles.

"We talk about every thing. I'm not her so don't think you can easily get rid of me"

So unbelievable. I really thought I had got rid of crazy but this..
This is on another level.

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FORTY FOUR

ARIEL

I think my enjoying the match had more to do with my company than the game. These two didn't make me feel like a third wheel and I liked that.

Their team lost so here we are now, on our way to some joint to drown sorrows.

"Did you have fun? "

Elena asks and I nod countless times.

"I didn't think I'd enjoy it this much. Thank you for forcing me to leave "

She laughs as she hugs me.

"It's my pleasure "

I've never been anywhere other than where I needed to be.

I guess Elena is right, I need to live a little.

I think the beer that I've been drinking has us all a little drunk.

I finally got used to the bitter taste but I'm still not a beer person.

"Let's go get drinks"

Elena says, grabbing my hand when we're at the club.

We go over to the bar but there's a whole lot of people awaiting their turn.

All my life in clubbing, I've never had to stand in a line for drinks.

"Frustrating, isn't it? "

I had not been expecting strangers who speak English.

"I get that a lot "

"Are you fucking kidding me? I don't want to think you're reading my mind "

I turn to look at him and he doesn't even smile. This guy is weird. Which black guy has blue eyes?

"You've been staring for a while. It's your turn "

I think I'm going mad.

"Gosh, I've been calling you Ariel "

Elena says and she's right at the front. OK, maybe I'm drunk.

"Sorry, I was... What were you saying? "

"What are you drinking? "

"Two margaritas and a bottle of water "

We walk back to our table and find her boyfriend with two other guys.

I can never go out and not dance.

Anyway, a margarita later and the weird guy is forgotten.

Elena and I get up to dance. The vibe here is amazing and definitely not what you'd get in a VIP section.

That familiar feeling. That feeling of being watched is what wakes me up. I don't open my eyes immediately but when I do, I find someone inches away from my face and that makes me scream, pushing him away.

I think he wasn't expecting that because he almost falls on his bum.

"It took you long enough to wake up. You were snoring "

"Why the hell are you in my room? "

He gives me a bored look.

Why can't I remember anything?

"It happens when you drink like it's your last time."

He says and I roll my eyes.

"Will you stop with being so freaky? I mean yes, I remember the margaritas but that doesn't explain why you're here "

"We came together. You dragged me here and I only agreed because... Actually, I don't have to explain myself to you. You made me miss my flight "

"Flight? "

"Yes, you've been sleeping forever. That's why I was staring at you, I wanted you to wake up"

I'm just glad I'm in my clothes because that means nothing happened.

As for this guy and his weirdness, I'm not about to dwell much on.

"What? "

He's staring at me.

"I'm waiting for you to offer me food "

"I just woke up"

I roll my eyes.

Anyway, he's a patient man because he still demands that I make him food after my shower.

"You haven't told me your name "

I say as we're now eating.

"You never asked"

He shrugs. I huff.

"What's your name? "

"Ezra "

Very weird.

"Interesting name "

"Just like Ariel. "

I roll my eyes again.

"Where are you from? "

"South Africa, just like you. "

"How do you know that? "

He looks at me like I'm suppose to know.

"What? "

I ask.

"You should never drink like that if you going to forget what we talk about. It's not nice. Very impolite "

"Excuse me?! "

He's trying me.

"You're excused "

I click my tongue and just eat

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pissed at this guy.

I'm not going to entertain him any longer.

"Aren't you leaving? "

I've washed the dishes and tried cleaning but he's still here. I only tidied where I could.

"Dad has a wife who can't cook, mine can't clean. Great"

"That's insulting! "

"I actually don't have a problem with it"

He says calmly.

"I'm not your wife. Heck, I'm never getting married again "

He chuckles. It's the first time I see his mouth curve.

"I'll remind you one day. I'm leaving, take care Miss. Till we meet again "

Then just like that, he leaves. I need to sleep So I go back to my bedroom and do exactly that.

.

CASSIEL

"I've never said it but I'm so glad you're here. I don't think I would have made it if you weren't there holding my hand "

He kisses my hand then my lips.

"I love you Cassiel "

"I wish you didn't have to go though "

I sulk and he chuckles.

"I know baby and I so wish you guys could leave with me but I know your mom won't allow it. I'll be back before you know it"

I sigh.

"I know. I know. I love you "

"So baby, can't I get one for the road? "

I laugh.

"Hell no. Just go "

He spent the week with us and that made me so happy.

I hate when he leaves but I know he has to.

"I love you so much Cassiel, never forget that"

"I never will "

He kisses me again, slowly and longer. I know this is it.

"Don't cry please "

He says after we break the kiss. I can't help it. I wipe my tears with my hands.

"I'll come back "

We go to the nursery and He says goodbye to Rory then I walk him out.

Coming back into my room, I can't help but cry.

I cry until Rory wakes up and I put on my big girl boots.

I find mom holding her in the nursery.

"You beat me to it"

She chuckles.

"I can't get enough of her "

"Yeah, me too"

She sleeps again after finishing her bottle. Mom and I go to my room.

"I know it hurts "

I sigh.

"Yeah. I'm just so addicted to him"

She laughs.

"I know the feeling. God, you've grown so much. I'm proud of you baby "

She gives me a warm snuggle.

"I love you mommy "

"And I, you. I want to talk about Ariel though. When are you reaching out to her?"

I sigh.

"I'll call her"

"Do it now? "

I laugh and take my phone and dial Ariel.

It rings to voicemail and mom isn't having it so I'm forced to call until she answers

She does and she sounds asleep.

"Hello? "

"Hi"

"Cassiel? "

Mom gives me a smile then leaves

"That's me"

"Wow I... I can't believe it"

I chuckle.

"I know. I miss you, though I'd love to hate you "

"I'm very sorry Cassiel. I don't blame you for hating me but I need this "

I sigh.

"I know. It was very selfish of me, considering everything you've been through. I'll visit you when Rory is a few months older "

"I'd love that then I'll tell you about the mysterious man I met"

I scream.

"You lie! "

"He's weird. You know I've always thought Joshua is as weird as they come but this one is worse"

"I'd love to hear all about this man. I wish I didn't have to wait "

We talk more and I'm glad my mom forced me into this.

I didn't realise how much I missed Ariel until I called her.

.

BOKAO

"Coming "

There's a knock on my door, more like a banging.

I don't remember anyone saying they'll visit so this is definitely a surprise.

"Hey lover "

I groan.

"You? "

She rolls her eyes, pushes the door wide and gets in.

"What do you want? How the hell did you know where I live? "

She laughs.

"Really? We work in the same company dude. "

"Fine, why are you here dressed like that? "

She giggles.

She's dressed so formally in a black tuxedo.

"Because I mean business Mr"

I chuckle.

"Right and what business is that? "

"You"

She looks around.

"Do you want to do it here or your room? "

"I'm not having sex with you"

"Who said anything about sex? Relax. Sit"

I chuckle.

"You're starting to piss me off "

"What are you going to do? Hit me with a belt? "

"You came all the way to provoke me?"

She laughs.

"So, you do have a temper? Sit down BK"

I sit and she stands behind me and massages my shoulders.

"I just came to chill "

"Chill? "

She whispers in my ear.

"Yes. "

I just don't buy this.

"You haven't offered me a drink "

"Go pour for yourself "

"a glass of chardonnay "

"I don't drink wine "

She rolls her eyes.

"Yes but Ariel does "

"She doesn't stay here"

She groans

"I'll have someone come with stock for your wine cellar "

"Why engineering? "

She asks, out of the blue and well, we start talking about that and other things.

I find out that she's actually an interesting person.

45

APHILILE

"what options do you have? "

Well, I had a week to be mad at him but he's my husband.

He's home now and I just want this mess over.

"I'm just going to testify and hope they don't kill me"

"What? "

He laughs. Is this funny to him? I click my tongue.

"Relax baby, we'll get through this"

"Yes but at what cost? "

He sighs.

"Well, we might have to move in with my father which means no more expensive shopping sprees "

"I don't care about that Louis. I just want all of this over "

"It will be. You'll start varsity next year like we planned "

He kisses my cheek.

"I feel like we're in jail, we're so restricted here "

"I'm sorry baby "

A month later and we're finally out of this 'jail'.

I'm just glad I can finally breathe.

We're living with his father and I'm just fine with it.

I did vow that I'll be with him for better or worse and through thick and thin.

He comes holding Sam. We've sort of lost everything. Actually, we lost everything in his name and he's still not told me why.

"I got you cake "

Ore is the one holding it.

"Thank you "

It's Saturday and they came right after I took a shower.

"You don't think I'm trying to make you fat? "

I laugh.

"Maybe I want to be fat "

I shrug.

Ore walks out after giving me a kiss. Louis puts Sam in his crib.

My phone rings and he passes it to me. It's Cassiel.

"Hi"

"It's about damn time! "

She sounds so mad and I don't blame her.

"How are you? "

"Are you really going to ask that after you disappeared without a trace? "

I sigh

"It's a very long story but I'm finally back "

"Everyone seems to have a story for me. Are you OK though? "

"I'm fine, we all are. How's the baby? What's her name? "

I ask.

"She's good, growing every second. Her name is Rory "

"Send me a picture please. I'll get my app up and running again. Things have been pretty crazy "

"I knew there was a reason why I couldn't reach you. I might fly there after Barcelona "

"You're going to Barcelona? "

She chuckles.

"Yep. I'm going to see Ariel "

"You guys made up? That's good "

"Yeah, I missed her. If you weren't married, you'd come with us "

I laugh.

"Yep anyway, you're leaving With Rory? "

"Yeah, Tshiamo will join us later. I'm leaving next month when she's three months "

The more we talk, the more I miss her and we go on until she has to attend to Rory.

We say our goodbyes then hang up.

"I can't believe you're still with me even after the mess I put us in "

He kisses my chin.

"Unfortunately, I love you "

He laughs.

"I don't deserve you "

He says and I shake my head.

"You've always supported me Louis. I'm the one who never deserved you. I mean you loved me when I was just 17 and years later, you made me a wife. I still think I wasn't worthy. You could have had anyone "

He kisses my forehead.

"I didn't want anyone else then and I still don't want anyone else now. Any woman could have left when I lost everything but you're still here. You've given me two beautiful kids and basically made me a man. I love you. More now than I did a minute ago "

I giggle.

"I love you "

We kiss.

"I can't believe I cannot stay mad at you for more than a week "

He laughs.

"That week was like a year to me. I don't like disappointing you "

"We've been through so much together. I just want the happy now"

I say and he hugs me.

"Me too "

.

TSHIAMO

Being back home with my family is one thing I'll always treasure.

Moments like this are one I wouldn't trade for anything.

"Baby

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I'm starving "

I say to Cassiel who's in the kitchen, cooking up a storm.

We're back in our place now.

"I'm almost done "

"Dessert is included, right? It's been too long "

She laughs.

"Maybe "

"Why should I beg? "

She's laughing again and this isn't funny.

"Bona tlhem "

I say, pointing at my crotch.

"You're not the only one who's starving "

"Mxm. Bring my food up. I'm going to nap "

She laughs even as I walk away.

I didn't even nap ten minutes when she wakes me up and I eat.

"Still sulking? "

"Nope. "

I say and continue eating.

"Good"

"That's because I'm going to a strip club. "

She chokes on her drink.

"What? "

I laugh.

"Yep. It's Moss the same as me looking at you are not getting any "

"You're not going to a strip club! "

She bellows.

"Why not? "

I ask calmly.

"Because if you do, you and I are done "

I laugh.

"I think I'll take my chances "

I stand up with my plate.

"Thank you for the food babe "

She stops me as I'm about to leave.

"You like making me mad NEH "

"We make each other mad baby "

She laughs.

"Come here "

She gives me a hug.

Just as we're about to kiss, Rory cries.

"Oh oh "

She says with a chortle.

"Mxm"

"Let me go feed her then I'll come feed you "

She perks my lips then leaves.

Oh, I love her.

.

BOKAO

"Why the hell would you do that? "

Amber has just told me she resigned. We've just been getting to know each other these past few weeks and we've been going out a lot.

"So we can be together "

"Are you crazy?! "

She sighs

"Why are you mad? "

"I thought you loved your job "

She wraps her arms around my waist.

"I do but I wouldn't leave if I didn't have another plan. I don't even have to work but if you should know, I've already got another job lined up "

I sigh.

"If you say so"

"Isn't it funny how you didn't want anything to do with me?
Look at you caring now "

I chuckle.

"I would have never imagined "

"I'm a patient woman but I'm glad I didn't have to wait long "

I put my hand on her back.

"You're smarter than I thought "

"I know "

She says.

"So that's why you're not checking up on me? "

It's my mother, who didn't even tell me she's coming.

"How can I when I have to set an appointment to see you? "

I let go of Amber so I can hug her.

"Do you have beer? "

I laugh.

"In the fridge "

We go back into the house and she goes straight to the kitchen for her beer.

"Your mother? "

"Yep"

She comes back and we all sit in the lounge, with Amber next to me.

She opens her beer and takes a sip.

"So, you're dating coloureds now? "

"Really mom? "

She shrugs.

"I'm just asking. "

"What happened to that boyfriend of yours? "

Amber giggles.

"You're not changing the topic "

Mom says

"I'm asking, though I don't remember saying I want a father "

She rolls her eyes.

"You're an old man Bokao. Why the hell would I seek a father for you? "

I laugh.

"Exactly mother. Why do you have a man? "

"I think I should go "

Amber says, attempting to stand but I put her back on the seat

"You're not going anywhere "

She groans.

"So, who is he? "

I ask mom.

"None of your business. I haven't asked about her, have I? "

I laugh

"OK "

46

ARIEL

Cassiel is finally coming to visit and she's bringing her little family. I can't wait to meet Rory.

The baby girl is so adorable, though she looks more like her father.

Elena is visiting her family in the states so I'm all alone.

"I've been calling you "

I turn and he's standing right at my door.

"Not you again "

I say, rolling my eyes.

"I wouldn't be here if you answered your phone "

"I don't remember giving you my number "

And I'm really being honest.

"There's a lot you don't remember about that night "

I sigh. He's right.

"Look Ezra, I have guests coming and maybe I'll get back to you when they've settled in "

He sits down.

"I'd love to meet them. Who are they? "

"My twin, Her boyfriend and our daughter. "

He nods.

"So it's family, nice "

I roll my eyes.

"Why are you still here? "

"Because I want to meet them. That way, your twin will know exactly who you're talking about "

This guy is weird and a little creepy.

"Why would I talk about you? "

"Really? "

"Mxm"

I say. My phone rings and I'm assuming it's Cassiel.

"Hola doble "

I laugh.

" ¿Dónde estás ?"

"Eh, you've lost me"

I laugh.

"Where are you? "

"About to knock on your door"

I scream.

"No way "

"Yes way "

I hang up and go to the door and she's there.

I hug her, probably squeezing the life out of her.

"Don't kill my woman wena"

I laugh then give him a side hug. I let them in.

"Is this little Rory? "

I take the baby from him.

"Who's this? "

She asks.

"Ezra. He's the weirdo "

"At least he's hot"

I laugh, Tshiamo frowns.

"Don't worry baby, I love you just as you are "

"Cassiel! "

She laughs.

"What? "

"That's mean. "

Tshiamo just clicks his tongue then goes to Ezra.

It seems he'll be staying for a while.

"She's beautiful "

I kiss her sleepy face.

"I have to go amante"

Ezra says.

"Don't call me that "

" Walk me out. Lovely meeting you family "

I give Rory to Cassiel and walk him out.

"Hug? "

"Oh, you can ask? "

He rolls his eyes.

"So gay"

"That's homophobic "

I don't reply to that but just give him his hug. Instead of this being a normal

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friendly hug, he just has to grab my ass and squeezes it hard.

"Ouch"

He breaks it and my ass can breathe. He pulls my cheek.

"no me extrañas demasiado " (don't miss me too much)

"Yah, bye"

I go back and push him to the back of my mind. They aren't on sight so I'm guessing they've made themselves at home.

.

CASSIEL

"But you can't be mad about that "

"So it's fine for my girlfriend to throw shade at me? "

I sigh.

"I'm sorry baby "

"I know a way you came make it up to me"

I laugh.

"I'm taking a nap. Please go Inform her "

"Fine"

.

APHILILE

I wake up in the middle of night because I'm pressed and want to pee.

The weird thing is, Louis isn't by my side and the light is on.

I go to the bathroom where I do my business then walk out of the bedroom to find him.

I can hear his voice at the far end of the corridor.

I follow his voice slowly until I can hear more vividly.

He's in a room, I think the study.

"She should never found out about this"

He says and my heart starts racing. Why am I eavesdropping?

I think he's on the phone.

"I'll come. I'm not losing my wife over this. I'll kill you with my bare hands! "

That cannot be my husband. I open the door and he hangs up, his eyes fixed on mine.

"Baby, why are you up? "

He asks, taking a few steps towards me.

"Who was it? "

I ask, with my arms folded.

"No one. Let's go back to bed "

He tries touching me but I yank him off.

"Who was it Louis? What are you hiding from me? "

"I'm not hiding anything "

"Stop lying "

"Baby"

I shake my head.

"you wouldn't sneak out of bed to here for nothing. What don't you want me finding out? "

He runs his hand through his hair.

"Lilly, I can't tell you "

I chuckle.

"You can't tell me? More secrets Louis?! You didn't tell me why you got kidnapped, didn't tell me why you lost everything and on top of that, you can't tell me why you're sneaking? Then why the hell am I your wife ?"

"Aphilile"

I shake my head.

"No. Don't bother answering. Don't come back to my room until you have answers for me. I'm giving you 48 hours or I'll take Sam and go live with Nikiwe"

I'm tired. I'm tired of the secrets. I'm tired of being made a fool.

I go back to the bedroom where I toss and turn until I finally fall asleep.

47

APHILILE

I've stuck by my words and Louis still hasn't come clean to me.

I'm really going to leave him if he doesn't tell me.

Just thinking about it saddens me but I'm not about to be with a man who doesn't take me seriously.

I've been with him through it all and yet he still can't come clean to me.

"I love you mommy"

"I love you too baby, enjoy school "

He gives me a kiss on the lips and off he goes.

I sit down and eat my breakfast. Louis's father comes and joins me.

"Good morning kid "

"Morning "

"Are you OK? "

I shrug.

"I'm alive so that's something "

I'm one person who's unable to conceal her true emotions. I can't pretend I'm OK when I'm not.

"Where's Louis? "

I shrug again.

Tomorrow, everything may change. I might be out of here and living with Nikiwe is not something I'm looking forward to.

She's too much and well, I spent more than two decades unaware of her existence so it'll take me a lot for reality to sink in.

When I'm done with my breakfast, I put the dish in the dishwasher then go back to the bedroom.

I start packing. I might as well. I know Sam will wake up in about two hours so I have enough time to do what I'm doing.

"Can we talk? "

I'm halfway through packing. I stop what I'm doing and give him attention.

Louis sits next to me on the bed but doesn't face me. I'm the one looking at him.

He remains silent for a few seconds.

"Well, I'm waiting "

He sighs.

"I was talking to Jolene. She's the one who got me into the scam and I did it because I wanted us to have the best life. I wanted you to be happy and I knew more money meant that to us. I'm the one who helped the gang put together the pyramid scheme. At first, no one noticed because we did give back to some people but the guys got greedy and the guilt got to me. The state gave me immunity in exchange for my testimony but of course they had to cease everything. I lost my job because of this "

"But that only explains one part "

He sighs.

"Jolene"

I nod.

Isn't that obvious?

"Why are you guys in contact? Actually, what's the deal with you guys? Let's go back to high school "

"It's... It's complicated "

I chuckle.

"Complicated? OK, you come to me and the bitch backs off and now eight years later, Her again? She's the one who got us in this mess! "

"Baby, calm down "

"Don't you dare tell me to calm down! Tell me the truth man "

I can't believe she's involved in this, after all the years. This story just has many voids. I need answers.

"We were working together at her Father's company. "

"Please tell me she's not the one who you... Who you slept with "

He keeps quiet.

"Wow "

"Baby "

He tries touching me but I yank him off.

"Don't Louis. Not when you haven't told me your relationship with her "

He sighs.

"I don't have a relationship with her. She's just someone who I could always talk to and she was there for me during your disappearance and... I'm sorry "

"And I just have to keep taking it? "

The tears just fall.

"Lilly "

"All I ever did was love you Louis. I'm just tired of the pain and the lies. I can see it in your eyes, you're lying. There's something you're not telling me about her. "

I exhale.

"But it's fine. I'll stay but for the kids. I'll pretend everything is OK but I promise you this, it won't be until you come clean "

I wipe my tears and leave him in the bedroom.

I got married to him and I can't just leave. I love Louis, I love him so much and I don't want to think that he's been lying to me all these years.

I can't.

.

ARIEL

"Thank you for coming. I don't understand why you guys have to leave so soon"

"Work, work and more work "

Tshiamo says and I frown.

"Yeah well, money doesn't fall from the sky or grow from trees"

He laughs.

"You're one to talk, seeing that you don't work "

I roll my eyes.

"Argh, just leave already "

They laugh. Cassiel and I hug again and I kiss my niece goodbye.

The house is going to be so lonely.

They only stayed with me for a week.

At least Elena will be back come the end of the month.

"Lonely? "

I huff

"How do you always know? "

He chuckles and comes in.

"We're connected amor

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soul mates "

"That's overrated. I don't think soul mates exist "

"You've only been with one man. There's a lot you don't know but I'm a good teacher "

I roll my eyes

"Are you? "

He nods

"Yep. But how long are we going to stay here? "

"Why are you here? "

"For you "

I chuckle. Yeah, right.

"It's not like this is your first time here"

"The first time was in the club. I did Spanish in school "

I nod.

"You were right. I'm lonely "

"There's a lot we can do"

He takes my hand and pulls me until we're close to each other.

"What? "

He takes strands of my hair and puts them behind my ear.

"Tell me your fears "

He says, looking right at me, his eyes staring into my soul.

"My fears? "

He nods.

"That's the kind of naked I want to see. Not you without your clothes but I want you to bare your fears for me "

He takes my hand, as I think about this and we go to the living room.

He sits on the couch and sits me on top of him, with me facing him.

His eyes are still on mine. I look down and sigh.

"My biggest fear is death "

I chuckle.

"I mean that's what always scared me every time I got cancer. I feared it killing and even now, I fear it reoccurring. I'm scared of getting pregnant (chuckles again). When my marriage was on the pit end, I was willing to have a baby just to save it but I still can't imagine myself in that state. Lastly, I fear falling in love and marriage because well, the last time either happened, it didn't work out "

Getting this out of my chest has me feeling lighter. It's like a burden I didn't realise I'm caring has been lifted off my shoulders.

"I'm glad you're feeling better "

I smile.

"Yeah, though this position is making me feel funny "

"Oh? "

"Yeah. "

He nods and perks my lips.

"You're not the only one "

I laugh.

"I can feel. Don't you want anything to drink? "

"A kiss first "

I giggle and kiss him.

"Happy now? "

"Go cook please. I Love experiencing what my dad never will "

I laugh.

"Which is? "

"Food cooked by my wife. "

I roll my eyes.

"The wife thing again? "

"Go Ariel and stop being lazy "

"Lazy? "

He nods.

"Vele, go "

I laugh.

"Mxm"

I grind on him a little and get up.

"I'm not going to allow you tempt me. As hot as you are, I'm celibate until we're past your fears "

"You want me to cry? "

"I told you Ariel, I'm a good teacher "

This just makes me smile.

.

BOKAO

My mom has sent me to buy her groceries.

I have three days off work and she's using that to her advantage.

Amber agreed to come with me.

Just as we're passing from one isle, to the other, I see someone who really looks like Mbali.

I can't see her face but her behind. We were together for a long time so I know her very well.

"Give me a moment "

I leave her with the trolley and walk towards her.

I clear my throat and she turns. I am right.

She's shocked, Her eyes wide and popping out.

"We meet "

I say.

She looks behind me.

"Bokao, this is for the best "

"Mbali "

She just goes away and there's nothing I can do.

I sigh and walk back to Amber.

"And that? "

"I'd rather not talk about it. Not now "

She nods.

"But I'm not letting it go "

"Let's go before my mom starts calling "

Mbali owes me answers, lots of them and I need the closure.

48

BOKAO

"We had so many goals together. She understood me and could read me well. One day, she spoke of marriage. She knew very well how I felt about it and had previously been fine with it. She got mad at me but we made up, make up sex and all. One day I came back from work and she wasn't here. She didn't leave a note, nothing. I tried calling her, called her friends but no one knew her whereabouts. It was my first time seeing her there and I really thought we could talk. I just want to know why she left"

"Do you love her? "

I chuckle.

"Love NEH. I'd be lying if I say I don't. I love her but I'm not in love with her. I don't want to be with her "

Amber nods.

"I don't like that you have unfinished business together. I know you're saying you need closure but some things are better left like that "

I look at her.

"You're right. I don't know "

She holds my hand.

"I'm not about to force you into something you don't want. It was just a suggestion "

I kiss her cheek.

"Thank you "

"I'll check on your mom. "

I laugh.

"Just don't let her bully you into drinking "

She laughs.

I'm called after about an hour.

"We're eating in the kitchen? "

"Yes. That way the dishes will be at closer reach when you have to wash them. "

Mom says.

"Our makoti will do it, not me"

I say.

"Those hands don't look like they do any chores. Don't abuse the poor child "

"Iyoh mama "

"We'll do it together then "

Amber says.

Weeks and months later, it's December and we're having lunch with her family.

My mom is coming with me and her 'boyfriend '

I don't even say much to the guy.

My mom is old and doesn't listen. I think the honeymoon phase is not over because she drinks wine in his presence.

My mom loves her beer so she must really love this guy to go all the way in impressing him.

"How do I look? "

My mom asks and I laugh.

"Like you looked in your previous outfit, beautiful "

She rolls her eyes.

"Wabona what dating in your fifties does to you? "

"Mxm"

Finally, she's done and is wearing black pants with a purple blouse and black pumps.

Amber has been sending me countless messages.

We find the boyfriend sitting down in the lounge.

I just kiss my mom's cheek and leave.

They have the address.

I call Amber when I'm outside the gate. I didn't realise so many people will be here.

She comes after about twenty minutes. I kiss her cheek.

"Is this some sort of celebration? "

"why do you always do that? "

I'm confused.

"Do what? "

"Kiss my cheek like we're friends "

I laugh.

"I'm sorry "

I put my hands on her waist and kiss her until she breaks it and we're both panting.

"That's more like it "

"Now you can answer my question "

She chuckles.

"Oh, the whole family is here "

"What? "

She didn't tell me this.

"Like my big brother, his wife and kids then there's my aunts and Their husband And my cousins with their partners. Many people are here and oh, their families. It's a family reunion type of vibe "

"I don't know. I feel you should have told me so I can prepare myself. What if they're racist? "

She laughs.

"Really? We're not white man, we're mixed. Anyway, my mom is completely black. You don't have to worry "

"What if they ask about marriage? "

She chuckles.

"Don't worry. I'll handle it "

Like the house is big and tall enough to make me dizzy.

I just didn't think she's from a family this rich.

"Are you coming or not? I don't want dad coming here to pull us in? "

The yard is big and the cars are really fancy.

I see my mom and her boyfriend and they come to us.

"Why are you standing outside? There's no parking space even "

"Exactly "

I say. Anyway, we all go in.

Things go better than I had accepted. I find out that the man who's dating my mother is Tshiamo's father and it's only then that I notice the resemblance.

Karmen is actually cool with me being with her sister and we actually joked about it. She came with some buff dark guy named Jody. I thought I was Dark but he takes the cup.

The family is huge but they're all good people who welcomed us well.

I didn't think her father is this old. He's older than my own father.

I don't regret coming.

.

ARIEL

"They all will be happy to see you. Enjoy "

He hugs me Again.

"I wish we could go together but I understand "

It's late in the evening and I came because I'll be spending the festive with my family.

I never got to really spend it with them the previous year because of my marriage to Kamogelo.

Ezra says it's best I go in alone and he can meet them later.

I'm going to meet his mother tomorrow and I'm looking forward to it.

He says she's such a character but very nice. I think our mothers have similarities in their personalities.

I know most people are drunk now. This always happens.

I watch him drive off then go in.

Cassiel is the first to spot me and runs to me. I lift her off the ground and spin her around. One would swear we're still little kids.

"Where's your weirdo? I can't believe you're here "

We break the embrace.

"I wanted to surprise y'all. He just dropped me off. "

"Come

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the women are in the pool "

"Am I not going to change into a swimsuit first? "

She shakes her head.

"Nope. We all missed you"

The hugs and kisses I get are a million. I really appreciate all the attention. Everyone just had to kiss my lips.

"You're glowing "

Mom says and I giggle.

"Is that a compliment? "

"It's an insult "

She says, rolling her eyes.

I hug her again.

"Thanks mom, where's dad and the men? "

"Getting drunk somewhere. Go change, you'll see them tomorrow "

Mom says and Cassiel pulls me away. I have a room here which has some of my clothes. It's like that even at Aunt Charity's house.

I change into a red two piece and join the ladies in the pool.

"So, what's his name? "

Aunt Charity asks. I laugh.

"Who said it's a he? "

"Argh, whatever gender the person is"

We all laugh.

"There's no person really "

"She's lying. Someone dropped her off "

Amber says.

"It could be uber "

I say, shrugging.

"No, he came out and you hugged. I saw him grabbing your behind for dear life "

Now, I'm blushing so much, I feel my cheeks will fall.

"Did you really have to? "

I ask with a chortle.

"Yes, now out with it"

I tell them all about Ezra and that I'm meeting his family tomorrow.

"But you should have brought him in Just to say hi "

Mom says

"OK, enough about me now "

And thank God they listen. We talk about other things now.

They have me drinking Which has me waking up very tired.

I take a shower and that's when my phone rings. I know it's Ezra. I haven't checked the time yet.

When I'm done with everything, I get dressed then go to my phone.

I am right. It's him.

I think I answer his sixth call.

"I've been waiting for you "

"I'm sorry, I woke up late "

"Come please "

I roll my eyes and hang up. I have to rush my greetings to everyone.

I'm hungry because I didn't even eat and I need the strength.

I only took a bottle of water which I've finished.

I get into his car and he drives off.

"You're grumpy "

"I'm not "

I laugh.

"Yeah right, what's up? "

"I waited for twenty minutes "

"I'm sorry. I'm hungry "

I say.

"You'll eat at home "

"And what will your parents think of me if the first thing I ask of is food? "

"My mom knows more about you than you think "

That's scary.

"Does she read minds too? "

He chuckles.

"I don't read minds Ariel. Your thoughts are too loud "

The rest of the ride is silent.

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ARIEL

"I had to come out so she doesn't think of running away "

I look at Ezra.

"That's my mom "

He gets out of the car first then opens for me. I might as well get out because I don't have a choice.

"Mom, this is Ariel and babe, this is Susan"

She pulls me for a warm embrace and I just let her, hugging her back.

"So pretty "

She pulls my cheek.

"Come on in kids "

She says and Ezra takes my hand and we walk in.

"Welcome to our little haven. My husband will join us soon. He went to fetch his mom. Anything to drink? "

"I'd like a glass of white wine "

Ezra coughs.

"I'm sorry but we don't drink "

OK now I feel embarrassed.

"Not even a little? "

I ask and she chuckles.

"Yep "

OK, this is confusing.

"But I... I met him in a club, in the bar area "

She chuckles.

"Ezra, go buy the kid her wine "

"I'll get it in the car "

I'm really hoping she doesn't think I'm a drunkard. OK, maybe wine isn't the best choice when you're meeting parents for the first time.

I'm now regretting this.

It's early for heaven's sake. I guess I'm just so nervous.

"She does this a lot "

"Shit! "

This is more than embarrassing. I cover my mouth with my hand.

I feel like running out right now.

"Ariel, just relax. We're normal people "

I can't believe I'm about to breakdown in front of his mom.

"I can't... Please take me home "

His mom laughs.

"I think you should give her two drinks to relax "

I run out. I don't know why but I'm too embarrassed that I just cry when air finally hits my face.

"Why are you so upset Ariel? There's nothing wrong with being yourself "

Ezra says. I feel his presence behind me.

"Your mom must think I'm such a brat "

This is beyond humiliating.

"I think you're done with beating yourself up. Come in so we can laugh about you "

He didn't!

He tries touching me but I don't let him. He chuckles.

"Is this like our first fight? "

I click my tongue and he laughs.

"This is a joke to you? "

He shakes his head.

"I just don't get why you're upset "

He shrugs

"I just want to go home "

He hugs me from behind and allows me to cry.

"Did you just... Why the hell am I feeling your penis? "

Someone laughs

It's his father.

Oh, so that's where he gets the eyes.

"Ariel, pleasure to meet you. Let's go in. I didn't cook for you to stand here "

He's not taking no for an answer so we go back in.

"Great, can we eat now? "

At least they aren't talking about what just happened.

"So Ariel, whAt makes a beautiful girl like you don't herself so much? "

His mom asks

"I don't understand "

"Give me your hand "

"Mom, not today please "

She just rolls her eyes.

I give her my hand, wondering what the hell is happening.

"It's so soft. She's a baby this one. My son is very rude, I hope you'll manage "

Then she let's go of my hand.

"Ariel, please convince my wife to give me one last child "

"she doesn't even want kids "

Ezra says.

"Because she's too busy being a baby. You have to be strong girl

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grown a backbone. I don't want you running to mommy everytime you encounter a challenge. They're there to strengthen us. Challenges I mean. "

Why do I feel under attack?

"I'm not like that "

I say, trying to defend myself.

"You felt embarrassed then I laughed and you ran out crying, what do you call that? "

OK, I thought we were over that.

I don't say anything but just look down.

"You're scaring her Sue "

"That's exactly what I want to do. I get that you're the last born but you're in your twenties now and have been married. It wasn't easy yes and you're probably not into marriage because of that. My point is, you're not getting any younger. I know your parents spoil you but baby, grow some backbone especially because you're dating Ezra "

"Babe, let's go get that wine. I think I kept some in my room "

Ezra says.

I get up because this is just overwhelming. Her mom seems to know way more about me like we haven't just met.

I don't see myself ever agreeing to this again soon.

I don't even think she likes me.

"She doesn't hate you "

He says when we're in his room.

I throw myself on his bed.

"Sure, whatever "

"Ariel "

"Just take me home Ezra. I met your parents, didn't I? I just want to leave now! "

"I'll be in the car "

He says then walks out, banging his door.

Can this day get any worse?

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CASSIEL

"Let's get hitched"

Tshiamo says, throwing a popcorn at me.

"Yeah sure, now keep quiet because I'm trying to concentrate "

We're watching a movie and he won't let me concentrate.

"Just put this on and I'll leave you alone "

When he takes my hand and slips something on, it all clicks.

"What the.... No "

He chuckles.

"Too late, you said yes "

"No Tshiamo. No "

He laughs

"We're officially engaged "

The movie will have to wait.

"I wasn't paying much attention to you! "

"I love you too "

The ring looks beautiful on my skinny finger.

It's a platinum band with a white small diamond.

It's stunning.

"I'm not accepting such a lousy proposal "

Does he listen? No but just kisses me instead.

I have one crazy partner.

.

APHILILE

"We need to talk "

"Dad, we're busy "

Ore says.

"I'm just borrowing your mom for a minute. Go check on your little brother "

He mumbles as he walks out and I giggle to myself. He doesn't like it when he's not getting his way.

"What do you want? "

Louis sighs.

"You've been mad at me for weeks Aphilile "

"Why are you here Louis? "

He sits next to me.

We're in our room. I didn't throw him out or anything.

We're just like strangers who sleep on the same bed.

I haven't left because of the kids and I'm still hoping he'll come
Clean to me.

"I've treated you so bad while you've only been good to me and
loved me. You've given me two amazing kids and have
managed to be the best wife I could ever ask for. You have
been faithful to me and loved me even when I felt worthless
and less of a man. I really don't deserve you "

"Yet here am I "

He sighs and keep quiet for a while.

"This isn't an easy decision "

Now, my heart beats faster. Where is this leading?

"I can't keep hurting you like this Lilly. You deserve better and
that isn't me. "

"What?! "

I stand. I can't believe this. I feel like my ears are deceiving me.

"I'm not the man for you. "

I slap him. I can't help it.

"You're not the man for me? You'd rather walk away than be honest with me? "

"This is me being honest "

I look up.

"Wow "

"Aphilile"

I look at him.

"Why are you doing this to me? "

"I'm doing what's best for you "

"You're breaking my heart Louis. The more you talk, the more it shatters. Each word twists the knife you've stabbed my heart with"

He stands too.

"I'm not worthy of your love "

"You're not saying anything! "

"You love me too much "

He says and I sink down on the floor.

He's right.

The tears just fall and he crotches to embrace me

Maybe he's playing. Maybe this is some role playing.

I hope it is because losing him will surely kill me.

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FIVE YEARS LATER

TSHIAMO

If I were to count the blessings God has showered me with, even the stars of the skies wouldn't come close to the amount.

I've been at a point where I had nothing and no one and I'm now at a point where God has shown me his grace and mercy.

I'm not the type to preach nor talk too much about the Almighty.

well, that was before I became friends with Ariel's boyfriend.

His mom is the one who made me get closer to God.

Yes, I did go to church previously but I only did it as a norm.

Cassiel and I got married a year after my proposal and had a baby boy a year after that.

Leseli is just three now While Rory is five. I love my kids.

It's actually funny that Leseli looks like his mom while Rory looks like me.

I didn't see this coming.

This makes Leseli lighter than Rory but she's not dark.

It's when Leseli came into this earth that I had to cut the travelling so I can spend more time with my family.

I didn't mind so I focused more on endorsement deals and Cassiel went back to work.

She's now a CFO and I'm proud of my baby.

I'm also working as a coach and no, I haven't stopped running.

It's really in my blood.

She comes while I'm sitting on the bed after taking a shower.

She didn't want us taking a shower together because she claims we would have never got out.

"I miss her so much. I mean she'd be here and talking nonstop. I know she would have come to support Ariel"

I sigh.

"I know baby. I know. I hate that she didn't talk to me. A letter isn't much "

She kisses my cheek.

"Yeah. Let's go "

She says and I laugh.

"You're just in a towel "

She hits her head and chuckles.

"Let's go get dressed "

"Is it a formal event? "

She nods.

I'm not a fan of formal but I have no choice.

I'll be wearing like Leseli where the outfit is just tuxedos mine with a black tie and his with a bow tie.

Cassiel wears a pink short tight dress With her very high heels.

Her hair is curled and of course she doesn't forget the makeup.

The kids are ready when we get in the living room.

"Dad, I look like you "

Leseli says, hugging my legs.

"You look handsome "

He smiles.

"And me dad? "

"You're beautiful like mommy "

Cassiel chuckles.

"You look like a princess dear daughter "

She says.

"Thank you mom, now can we leave? "

Cassiel looks at me and we burst out into laughter.

Rory is so impatient.

We all leave, get into the family car which mommy's driving.

I look at my little family and get filled with contentment.

I must say I didn't see this coming while I was in Pam's claws.

The girl made life unbearable for me but I still kept on pressing and pushing.

Natalie helped me but she got just so obsessed and had me feeling like she owns me. I understand why she felt that way.

I mean she was the reason her father helped me and somehow had me feeling indebted to her.

The only relationship next to normal for me was that with Sam but it didn't work out.

I thought Ariel was the one only to find out that her twin sister is and I've never been more happy.

What more could I ask for?

I'm happy, dad's happy and that's it.

I wish Lilly was here, I miss her so much but I guess everything happened as it should.

.

ARIEL

"Kamogelo, I have nothing against you and I've forgiven you even when you didn't ask for forgiveness. What I don't understand is why you're still after me and my family. What more do you want from us? Didn't you learn from the previous time? "

I'm not mad, no but I'm just confused.

It's been years and still, I find out he's been plotting with his girlfriend.

She tried Blackmailing dad and even tried causing a wedge between the family.

She opened healed wounds but nothing worked.

"I'm sorry Ariel. I really am. "

I laugh.

"Right. I don't care about that. Just walk away and stop with this obsession you have with me and my family "

He even wanted to ruin this day for me. How petty can someone be?

Ezra just comes in and finds me with him.

"The masses are waiting baby"

"I'm nervous "

I say and we communicate, oblivious to Kamo's presence.

"I'll be holding your hand. I always do"

I smile.

"I love you "

He kisses me slowly and so passionately that I moan into his mouth.

He breaks the kiss and plants a wet one on my forehead.

"What did he want? "

It's only when he asks that I notice Kamo left.

"To sabotage me of course. He wanted to cause a power cut. I don't even know how he has a map of this building "

"Shame. Are you ready? "

OK, so today is the official opening of my arts and culture centre.

Yep, you heard that right.

Moving back home from Barcelona, I did a course in choreography and came up with this idea.

This is my way of giving back to the community while doing something that I love.

The centre is in the township so that kids who can't afford the expensive lessons in the city can come here for dance, drama and music.

Ezra is the one handling the music department. My man is a good singer and is so obsessed.

Of course I'm handling the dance department and we got someone for drama.

The place looks amazing. I didn't want this to be a profitable business so I partnered with the department of Sports, art and culture as an NPO.

It makes me so happy seeing all these kids happy.

So, the launch. I have to say a speech. The MC has been waiting for me.

"Good day parents, kids and everyone else. I'm not... I'm not a fan of public speaking. I'm thankful to everyone who's here today, even the media. I started this because of a vision I had and it was all fuelled by my love for dancing. I've been a dancer since I was five and my parents are my biggest supporters. That made it possible for me to become who I wanted to be and have always been my side. I won't lie and say I grew up underprivileged because I wasn't. Most people know who my parents are and yes, I do come from money. I can, however imagine how it might feel like when you have dreams and

money becomes the reason you can't make them come true. This is for the parents who'd do anything to see their kids smile. It's for the young dreamers who see themselves as the next big thing. This is me saying that those dreams won't end as just that. I'm saying that it's possible and that as I go up, I'll lift who I can. I believe in the proverb that 'umuntu ngu muntu nga Bantu '. I've worked hard with my team to ensure that we produce the best and parents, I'm confident in saying that your kids are in the best hands. I'd like to thank everyone who made this day possible. Firstly, the God Almighty who gave me this vision and breath to make sure I live to see this day. Secondly, my parents who have always believed in me since I was a little girl. My siblings who've given me so much love and this goes to the entire family. Last but not least, to my wonderful Fiance who's had to deal with my endless crying and nagging. He's amazing and I'll forever be grateful for having him and my other parents in my life. Thank you to everyone I didn't mention for their contribution. Thank you "

I'm crying after completing my speech. Not because I'm sad but because I'm really happy that this is a success. I'm here and looking at my dream.

Ezra squeezes my hand. I kiss his cheek.

We have lunch with my family.

I look around the table and just smile.

I once thought his mom hates me but Sue is the best mother-in-law ever.

I love having two moms, it's amazing. I'm still the cry baby but I've grown a backbone.

I didn't know what she meant when she said I'll need it especially because I'm with her son. Ezra... See being with a soccer player slash DJ isn't a walk in the park. Yes, that's why I met him in Barcelona.

He plays for the team. Now, I had to educate myself about soccer and such.

Anyway

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I have to fight off hoes and bitter exes and the stories that come with it.

I'm happy though and he made me see myself as a Mrs again, hence the ring on my finger.

I see myself as a strong woman more than as a survivor.

Yes, I do give motivational talks especially to people battling with cancer.

In case you're wondering, no I still don't have a baby.

I'm still so scared and maybe in this marriage, I might consider having a baby.

Besides, Cassiel has two so there's no pressure.

I wonder about the Eyes though. Will my babies have green, blue or will we see grey?

Only God knows.

.

BOKAO

"She deserves all the good and more "

"I proud of her, I really am. We all are "

Amber and I are talking about Ariel's new centre and the success of its launch.

We're back home now. Yes, home.

We moved together to North West where we started our own company.

Mom remained behind. I extended the house and she's staying with Tshiamo's father.

The man and I... Well, we do get along. I'm kidding, we're great. He's like a father to me and we even go out for beers with Tshiamo when I'm visiting mom.

Amber and I agreed to sell that house when we came here.

We did buy a stand and built a block of flats which we rent to tertiary students.

She's so business minded that at times, I think she's even smarter than Me.

Don't let her hear that though.

There's a knock on the door.

"Go get it "

I tell her. We've just got from work and decided to unwind with drinks.

It's Mbali.

"Hi, I'm just passing by"

I give her a hug.

"You look good "

She smiles and brushes her bump.

She's pregnant.

She told me exactly why she left and what happened. I didn't know she believed in this whole God and prophets things but oh well.

Anyway, Amber's the one who told me she's around here, working as a nurse at a private hospital.

She went there when she was pregnant but we lost the baby.

Sometimes I worry that she'll slip into depression because of that.

We were both so excited and now, she doesn't want any babies.

It happened two years ago. We've been here for almost four years.

Mbali got married and they're having a baby boy

She's good friends with Amber and we get along with her husband.

I'm glad she's happy.

"We're having a braai, I just came to invite you guys "

"Anything we're celebrating? "

Amber asks.

"Life. Just come. It's tomorrow "

They have these braais and parties every time they get a break.

Her husband is a doctor.

"We'll come"

Amber says and she walks her out.

She's glowing and very happy.

"Don't you want to get married? "

She chokes on her drink.

I can't believe I just said that.

"What? "

"Yes. You love me, I love you "

I shrug.

"I just... I thought it's not what you wanted "

"I know but I want you to have my surname "

She smiles and hugs me.

"I'd love to get married to you "

She kisses me after. God, I love her.

I guess I had to meet her in order to want things I didn't imagine I ever will.

She does that to me.

LOUIS "Mom says hi "

Sam says and runs off to his room.

He's happy and I've stopped trying to explain that she's dead.

That she took the easy way out and left us, she left them.

Ore hates me. My own son hates me and refuses to accept that I've moved on.

He's thirteen and I guess that's expected.

Yes, I wish I could take my words back. I wish I could go back to the moment I left her and tell her the truth.

I wish I had had the guts to tell her everything instead of walking away like a little bitch.

I didn't move on with another woman, no. I just accepted that she's no longer there and it's only me and the boys.

I take out the letter I found in the room she'd hanged herself in.

The image is still vivid in my mind. I read it, like I do every day.

"If you're reading this, it means I'm no more. A life without you is one I cannot live. I know this is selfish but I don't see myself getting over this, over you. I don't see myself moving on. The boys are in good hands, I know that and I hope they don't hate me for this.

I'm just tired of the pain Louis. It hurts so much. I can't do it anymore. I can't be strong. So I've decided to end it. I know I'll go to hell and it's nothing new compared to my short lived happiness. I don't want you to stop living without me.

Live, be happy and love. Take care of my babies. Find a woman who'll love them like I did and even more.

Tell them I love them and I'm sorry. Apologise to Tshiamo and Cassiel.

We all get to the point where we can't go on and this is my point. Know that I loved you till death. That's the vow I made, till death do us part. I love you "

I wipe my tears. I always cry every time I read this.

"Louis! Louis! "

I groan. I'm not in the mood for her. She opens my door wide.

"What do you want?! " I rant. I loathe her.

"I'm tired. I can't keep on with this. I'm done "

"Good ,now leave " She clicks her tongue.

"Take care of our daughters, you're doing good with the boys so you'll manage with them. I'm moving to Russia with Az "

I chuckle. It's not amusement, I feel like crying.

I wonder if Lilly would have accepted them.

That's the only thing I can do, wonder.

The girls are 8 and 6 respectfully.

I just couldn't. How would I have told her that I have kids with Jolene after everything? Now I'm here, all alone with four kids.

How will I manage? I don't know.

I think of taking my life but I can't. They need me and this is the least I can do for Lilly after everything.

.....**The End**.....

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