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Embedded by Mbali Jali

Introduction

"Sometimes the thing that breaks your heart ends up fixing your vision." × UNKNOWN

There has to be an award I can give myself at this very moment. An award for having the best facade ever. Here I am, shaking the hands of my fellow sister's and brother's in Christ while I'm literally boiling inside with anger. Anger for the one sin I've allowed to pull me by the nose.

Abafana!

Or in simple, day to day English... Trash. Pure and evil trash. I mean look at me, yes I'm not the hottest of the hottest or even the most flattering to the eye but I do deserve love too. The forbidden love that church always prohibits us from having. I look around here one more time before leaving. Yes, today is

definitely the hottest Thursday I've lived through. Even now, I'm sweating like a pig under this thin layer of fabric.

'Maybe you should lose some weight Zanokuhle, you're getting too fat now.'

Yes maybe I should, but I'm trying. I really am.

My phone vibrates again from between my boobs and no, like the whole damn day I was not going to answer it. I'm not going to talk to him. I don't have the strength for that.

I shut the door of my Chery and bring her engine to life after three failed attempts. I don't know what's wrong with her but I do hope that even after four years together she'll come through for me like she's always done. This funny noise I'm hearing right now has to disappear!

I already know what I'm going to do when I get home. I'm going to indulge in a glass of fine orange juice, eat a slice of cake and listen to Sade while crying my eyeballs out. That seemed reasonable. I was heartbroken after all. Because of trash. I have been for the past two days after finding my trash in the sheets with another -after his phone 'accidentally' called me in the middle of the night. The forbidden things I heard on that call led me to his apartment.

Let's just say, I thought today's prayer afternoon would make me feel better than before, but it didn't. It instead made me

question a lot of things like why did I agree to this relationship and why did she have to look way better than I do, and if McDonalds was going to have that two-for-one special anytime soon.

My ride home is a short one. I get off with my bible, keys and high heels dangling by their straps on my fingers. Right. My plan has been set in motion, it even felt like my tears were ready to free themselves from me before I could even get into our four roomed house. I take in a deep breath because no one really had to see me cry or anything like that.

"Zanoooo!" The high pitched voice of my neighbor catches me off guard. In the midst of all of this I forgot about this woman.

When the heck did she even come outside?

"Yebo Mama Lilly." I yell back smiling. She has a grass broom in her hold as she stood upright facing me. Her dramatic sunhat nearly covers up her entire face.

"I see you are a come back from a church." She says.

I nearly chuckle at her words but this is what the dramatic woman speaks like for a living.

"Yes mama." I agree once again.

"That's a good

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very good my child. Greet your sibling for me okay?" she asks and I nod.

"I'll do so mama, greet Lillian for me too." I wave at her before reaching for the doorhandle.

I bump into Khaya as I was about to step in. His tall self still shocks me till today even with the facts being, I'm the older one here.

"Hau Abo ameni baphelile? (Is church over?)" He asked throwing his soccer ball back and forth. I didn't need to ask cause I already knew. He was going to his sacred soccer practice to gather sweat and that pungent smell of the sun.

"It's called church Khaya."

"I don't care, futhi I have to go." He slips right passed me and runs off to the one and only meeting area - The soccer field. Yeah, some people are brave. Even with this heat.

I forget that he doesn't really believe in God. I walk in spotting Buhle busying herself with schoolwork on the lounge table.

I greet her. She greets me back. My plan is not to disturb her any further than that because I know the importance of focusing on schoolwork to the fullest, in order to achieve nothing but the best. Which makes me wonder if Khaya even touched a book today. Not that he does that willingly though but with a little bit of encouragement you'll see him with one.

"Haibo Buhle..." Forget the 'do not disturb' plan. "...where's my slice of cake?"

"Cake?" She asks looking up from her books.

"Yes, cake. I didn't eat my slice yesterday." I didn't eat anything yesterday for that matter.

"I didn't see it when I looked in the fridge this morning." She shrugs.

"So Khaya took my cake."

"You and I both know Khaya doesn't like cake. It can't be him." She says.

Well then, there goes half my soul.

"Laze lamnandi ikhekhe boh.(What a delicious cake.)" Zonke says walking into the kitchen, holding the only evidence of what was my cake. When did she even come back here? She's been gone for almost two weeks now and believe me, I'm glad she and her baby bump look fine.

"You could've asked me whose cake it was though before eating it. That was Zano's cake." Nobuhle says.

True. She could've. But, I know my older sister. Asking is not something she has in her genes.

"Shame man, but you're already fat. So this is actually helping you." Zonke says throwing the cake tray into the trash bin before heading back to where she came from. She was right. She did do me a favour.

I take my orange juice and retreat to my room and as I promised myself, the music is playing loud enough for me to wail in peace. Wail for failing to keep my Zweli for more than these seven months. I'm a joke.

This stupid phone vibrates again. This time I take it out. It's covered in boob sweat.

"Stop calling me please." I answer.

"Just listen to me okay." He says.

"No, Zweli stop calling me."

"Space? Is that what you want?" He asks me but I end the call out of anger. With the same energy I dial Nyiso's numbers and she doesn't answer. I didn't expect her to answer my call in any case because she said she'd be busy.

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"You have to forgive me Zano. I'm sorry." I read the fiftieth message he's sent me today.

How unbelievable!

Not the fact that he's asking me to forgive him, but the fact that it's past ten in the evening and I'm actually considering forgiving that man. I want to reply back...

I toss my phone aside and switch off the stereo, pulling the blankets over my head and attempt to sleep but it barely works. All I keep seeing is him with the one girl he said he didn't even like. I choke. I'm really a whole clown right now. A joke.

That's the award I probably deserved.

Chapter one.

"Carry yourself with the confidence of a mediocre white man."

× SARAH HAGI

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"Zano! Zanokuhle! Holy balls, Zanokuhle open this door please!" The commotion from outside my door wakes me up. Nyiso!

"Go away!" I yelled burying my head in my pillow.

This is what always happened when Nyiso played cupid. I'd try it out and end up getting my fingers burned ,bad. The last guy

who hurt me like this, honestly made me swear off men...but here I am again.

Trying to remember where the hell I hid those headache pills.

"I'm not going anywhere Zano. Not until I see that you're okay."

"I'm okay!"

"Girl if you don't open this door right now I'll get someone to kick it down for me." Nyiso said.

I ignore her.

She'll go away eventually.

Or...this is Nyiso we're talking about. I sit up. There's another voice on the other side of the door. I can't hear what they're saying but It better not be what I think it is.

There's a loud bang on my door that makes me jump off my bed.

Is this woman insane?

"Woah! Okay!"

I open and there she stood with my little brother who looked ready to kick my door again. I give him a look. One that said 'I wouldn't do that if I were you.'

"Really Nyiso?" I ask, putting one hand on my waist while the other still held the door open.

"Your money Khaya." Nyiso hands my brother a R100 note which he takes without hesitation.

"I think I like you more than my own sister." My idiot of a brother says.

As if I cared.

He walks off and I'm left with Nyiso.

"So you're not going to allow your best friend in?" She asked.

I moved and welcomed her in and she already was complaining about how it reeked of sadness and wet pillows. "It's past 10 mge and your curtains are still drawn."

"I was still asleep...in fact goodnight."

"Zano, don't even start with me." She says while I climbed back into bed.

"Ngithe goodnight." I rest my head on my pillow as I stared at the ceiling. The bed moved as she sat at the edge before she heaved a long sigh.

"What did Zweli do kanti Zano?" She asks.

"Nothing." I murmur hoping she'd drop this subject since I was over it and him.

"Nothing? Why is he still texting you then? Saying he's deeply sorry and is begging you to answer his calls?"

"Why are you going through my phone?" I say almost annoyed.

"Cause you're not talking Zano. I want you to tell me what happened between the two of you."

I eye her, placing my hand on my forehead.

"He cheated. He slept with...he cheated." I repeated because I couldn't even say her name without thinking of all the lies those two fed me.

"With Mpilo?"

Death!

If I had breathing problems, I'd probably have had an attack right there and then but because I was a certified crybaby, that's what I felt like doing.

"Yoh, good riddance to bad rubbish mge! This is madness."

It was.

"Look, this can't be how you spend your day ke mge, you need fresh air...which is why I'm here right. Let's go."

"To?"

"The mall."

"The mall?"

"Yeah, the mall. Aunt Portia said she wanted me to get a few extra things she couldn't get for her wedding." Nyiso says and it's then that I remember that the wedding is tomorrow and I definitely didn't have anything to wear.

I sit up. "Fine, let me go plug some water and then bath."

After minutes of fighting about what I should be wearing as we were going out, We settled on what she wanted me to wear in the first place. Nyiso's sense of style was completely different than that of mine. She liked tight-fitting clothing while I swayed to the loose 'trash bags' as she would call them.

I knew she liked seeing me in the tight clothes but honestly having unflattering rolls, flabby arms and cellulite on my ass and thighs made me avoid them. I didn't look like her and I most definitely didn't have her smooth body with a waist and an ass to die for.

We leave. Soulful music playing on the radio as she drove to emaShazini mall. I looked out the window, unable to stop thinking of Zweli. I check my phone. The texts and calls have stopped.

Did this mean he didn't care anymore?

I should've answered his calls and replied to his texts. I should've heard him out. I should've given him a chance.

"Haibo, Zano I'm talking to you."

"What?" I state putting my phone away.

"Never mind. Anyway how are you holding up with everything at home?" Nyiso asks causing me to sigh.

"You sound like a concerned parent." I chortle...

"I'm a concerned friend." She says. I nod.

"I'm holding up okay, I guess...I just sometimes wish things were different. That I wasn't under this financial stress or the only one who brings money in that house." I breathe out. "Ever since umama died everything else nje in my life has been a flop."

"Don't say that Zano."

"Nyiso, I literally had my boyfriend cheat on me..."

"Ex-boyfriend." She corrects me.

"Yeah, that. Do you have 3 siblings to clothe, feed and basically take care of?" I continue.

"Don't count Zonke into your expenses. Mdala loya (she's an adult.)"

"An adult who can't look after herself."

"Zano, I don't want to fight with you. Plus I think my husband can give Zonke a job at his business you know."

"You and I both know what Zonke will think of all of this."

"Well it's worth a try."

"Ha.a, no."

"Mge..." She says.

"Nyiso iyeke, please."

I sit back and look out of the window again.

The mall is packed as expected and we cautiously made our way through the shops we needed to go to. I buy another cake. I managed to buy an outfit for myself that...that Nyiso peer pressured me into buying.

Another dress.

I don't like dresses.

She said it looked stunning on me and of course she'll think I'm flattering because she's my friend.



The day has arrived for Aunt Portia's wedding and my pressured self gets woken up with a call. Nyiso is honestly something else. The level of 'trust' in our friendship is clearly walking on a piece of thread. I get up, bath and get dressed.

I grab my car keys and handbag, then head on out.

Nobuhle and Khaya are hogging the dining table having breakfast. They both look up and stare at me, up until I start feeling uncomfortable.

"Guys stop it." I say shifting uncomfortably where I was standing.

"Who are you?" Buhle.

"Yeah, and what did you do to my ugly sister?" Khaya says.

I frown. "So I'm ugly now."

"You've always been ugly." Khaya says causing me to chuckle.

The nerve of this boy.

"Iyaphi indlela? (Where are you going)" Buhle asks.

"Portia's wedding." I say. I didn't even want to go in the first place but here I am.

I say my goodbyes and head towards the exit, but then I remembered something...or rather someone.

"Where's Zonke?" I ask.

"She left yesterday night, a while after we had supper." Buhle explained.

"And she hasn't been back since then ?" I ask.

"Nope...she hasn't." Buhle answers.

I nod and officially leave for this wedding.

Sometimes I wonder why I even try with Zonke. That girl honestly is something else and I hate how I talk about her like she's younger than me. I should probably give up on her like Nyiso said I should...but where would I even start?

"Zanooo!"

Oh my goodness I nearly drop my handbag out of shock.

"Mama Lilly, morning. I didn't see you there."

"How would you sees me when you looks so beautifully?" She says. Another over-the-top sunhat.

"Thank you ma."

"Where are you going?" She asks.

"I'm going to Nonkanyiso's aunt's wedding."

"Portia is getting married? Wonders shall never end. Okay leave my child before I make you the late." She says and I sigh out in relief that nothing more was asked of me.

I finally manage to start my car after countless attempts. My Chery QQ3. This baby is honestly going to be the death of me. This third hand car has been my saving grace. Not only was it beyond fitting in my price range before I got a permanent teaching job, but it made my life a bit easier. I didn't have to

walk in the rain like I used to and I definitely didn't have to worry about a taxi filling up quickly because of this tiny miracle. Even if it seemed to be giving up on me on certain days like today again.

I will get my M850i one day.

As I continued ahead, literally minutes away from the wedding venue, Chery starts sounding funny. And all too soon I'm met by a familiar sound. She gets slower and slower, and the only choice I have is to pull over. She dies immediately after.

Okay. This has never happened before. I'm in denial. Chery did not just die on me, did she? I hit the steering wheel once before trying to start her again, but nothing. I sigh heavily, getting out of my car.

I don't even have insurance.

It's blazing hot, I'm irritated, next to a semi-busy road, hungry and being stuck here is the last thing I had in mind. For goodness sakes Chery, how am I going to pay for fixing you when I'm practically broke?

I open the bonnet and instantly get engulfed by smoke. Dramatically, I cough like a madwoman and hold my chest. I can't die like this.

I make my way back to the driver side and reach for my phone. It's low, but it's enough for this emergency call. I regret not charging. I dial his number only for it to go unanswered.

"Come on Zweli..." I utter frustrated while this phone continues to ring near my ear. This is my third attempt now. "argh!"

Well there goes the glimpse of trust I had in this man and I'm pretty sure he's somewhere out there, getting wasted. That's what he did best anyway...even on Mondays. But what am I thinking...I left him. I'm the who ignored his calls and now he's probably doing this same thing out of spite.

I think of calling Nyiso, but then decide against it. I didn't want to bother her knowing very well she was probably busy. I walk over to the road and watch how a few cars drive by.

Sigh.

How is it that today of all days, this happens to me.

I was about to close the bonnet when a car pulled over. I found myself staring at the stranger who comes out and makes his way to me.

"Hey." He greeted.

"Hi." I plaster on a smile on my face, the thought of him being a kidnapper flashing by my mind.

Great job brain...but he looks like someone I've seen before....somewhere...

"Need some help?"

No, I'm fine. You can go now.

"Uhhh...I..."

"Let's see." He turns his attention to the smokey bonnet and inspects thoroughly without my go-ahead. I stare. It's so unlike me to do that, but I do. "Ah, seems to be your cylinder head. It's cracked."

"My Cylinder what?" Me.

He chuckles, shaking his head.

"This thing over here." He points to the engine. I'm lost but I nod, avoiding much further conversation about this.

I'm quite clueless when it comes to cars details and engine's... All I know is that it needs petrol and a wash. Other than that, no...

"I can call my guys to come and have it towed and then fixed right away-"

"Woah woah woah, what?"

"I said I can call my guys to come and have it-..."

"Woah sir, I barely even know you and you're busy offering to tow my car."

The man chuckles briefly before turning to look at me. "I'm Bangizwe

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a 28 year old guy who's offering some genuine help, to a gorgeous lady." He says with ease.

"Wow I-..." Was the age and the last part necessary though? "...Don't you have to be somewhere?" me.

"No. Now let me make a few calls." He says and walks off to his car giving me a chance to escape.

I still don't trust this guy.

I shut my bonnet and make a run for the driver side and before I know it, I trip over my own two feet, landing hard on my knees. I yelp.

"What the hell!" Him.

I should've known this is how things would turn out, especially being me.

"Are you alright? What the heck am I saying of course you're not alright." The man helps me up slowly and with the most caution I've ever seen anyone ever have.

"I'm fine." I lie, hoping he'd stop touching me. "My knees broke my fall"

He chuckles "

Missus, I've never heard anyone say that before, but seriously you look hurt. I have a first aid kit in my boot..."

Missus?

"I...I'm not married, plus I'm fine."

He inspects my knees even more. "You're bleeding."

"Oh my goodness, dude I'm fine!" I throw my hands up after removing his and open the door of my driver's side, reach into my bag and grab some toilet paper. I dab on my bleeding knee gently.

No I'm not fine!

I'm almost late for the wedding, Chery is still smoking like crazy, I'm ravenous, I'm with a total stranger who was all touchy touchy to my fat knee not so long ago.

He resumes his call, walking off.

I sit there. Toilet paper still pressed down onto my knee and with my other hand I dial Zweli again.

Voicemail!

Argh!

"Look, the only fast solution now is for me to take you wherever you were headed to. Your car will get towed and should be ready and fixed by tomorrow." He says.

Or...ngingakwela itaxi but what did he mean?

Fixed how when I'm practically broke?

"How much is it going to be?" I question.

"How much is what going to be?"

"The whole repairs thing."

"Oh, nothing."

"Nothing?" I half frown.

"Yes, nothing Miss." He emphasises while shrugging.

I chuckle. He must think I was born tomorrow.

"What do you want in return then?"

There's always a catch with these things.

Always.

"Just your numbers."

See...

"My numbers?" I ask. Why did he want my numbers...I surely hope he doesn't think I like him or anything because I don't.

"Yes, obviously. I need to call you after your car is fixed." He says and was I not embarrassed about my previous thoughts.

"Now come on, get your bag and stuff so we can go." He smiles briefly and walks off to his car.

This has to be a joke but waiting for someone to eventually come here is going to take forever. And like I've concluded already, I'm beyond late.

I sigh and dust my knees off before wiping them clean with a wet wipe. This was really happening. I was trusting a whole stranger with my car and life. "I love you Chery." I kiss her steering wheel before removing my keys and taking my bag and the R7 petty cash I had in there, tossing it into my bag. I lock and rush to his car.

Gosh. I don't even know it's make but I don't need glasses to tell me it's way out of my budget. Probably like a thousand times more.

"What are you waiting for, get in." him.

"Oh. Uhhh..." I mumble frozen and quickly observe his...I don't know, confused look?

I step in and close the door.

I think I'm still shocked by the fact that this was actually a two sweater. How I didn't notice that also shocks me.

The engine roars to life and I squirm. This car was definitely foreign. Even the detail inside screamed expensive. It smelt like a new car and his not so subtle cologne. I notice initials on his dashboard and practically almost everywhere.

'B.S'

As in Bullshit?

I chuckle silently.

Is this guy some type of businessman or lawyer...or what if he really was a trafficker.

"You'll direct me then, miss."

"Sure." Me.

The ride is quite decent. Far better than what I had brewing in my head and the guy's taste in music was something up in my alley.

'If you could see me now...The one who said that he'll rather roam...the one who said that he rather be alone...if you could only see me now...'

"You listen to Dobie Gray?" I make conversation.

He looks at me briefly before looking back on the road. "He's my favorite." Him.

I was not about to admit that I loved him too. No.

"I honestly would've mistaken you for a non classical music lover and..." I trail off.

What the heck am I saying?

"Don't judge a book by it's cover miss." He chuckles.

"It's Zanokuhle." Me.

"That's a beautiful name." He compliments me and I frown. I've never heard someone say that other than Nyiso when we met. Back in highschool.

I clear my throat and look out of the window. "You can pull up over there." Me.

"Woah, is this some big celebration?"

"It's a wedding." I reply.

"That's where the wedding is?" He asks.

"Yes, is there a problem?" I ask as he comes to a stop a few cars away from the gate where I see the masses.

He keeps quiet and sort of glares at me, not saying a thing. I take this as my cue to leave before he decided to drive away with me and have me slaughtered. I don't even understand why I have such a mentality but yes.

"I have to go...thank you so much for your help...and the ride."

"How about I walk you in?" he asks.

"Why?"

"I just want to walk you in."

"And then what?" I frown.

"And then probably chill...watch some wedding drama and..."

"Wedding dra-...Don't you have somewhere to be?" I give him a confused look.

"No. I don't. I told you that already."

"You weren't even invited."

"I'm sure they won't even mind." He says.

"Because you're God right?" Me.

"Don't be like that Zanokuhle."

I huff. What the hell do I do now? Bring a whole stranger to a wedding where he knows no one and have him be my plus one...or just downright refuse.

I look at him again. "You're not even dressed for the occasion."
I try putting him off.

"I have a suit in the boot." He says.

"Geez, what else do you have in that boot? A body?"

"How about you go check it out."

"Are you actually asking me to go and get your suit for you?" I ask.

"Is it working?"

I chuckle shaking my head. You accept help from people and the next thing, you're fetching suits for them.

"Unbelievable."-I mumble stepping out of the car and feel how the sun hits my skin. I can smell the food from where I am and I'm absolutely ready for that part of this wedding. There's a bunch of children looking at me...wait...nope, they're looking at the car. Of course they're looking at the car Zanokuhle.

I open the boot and take the guy's suit, crisp clean shirt and leave the tie. Jeans and a tie, have never looked good together. I end up taking two plasters for my knees.

"Here" I hand him his stuff after sitting. I could feel him looking at me as I put on the plasters.

Men.

"There's a bathroom in there that I can ask Nyiso to clear up so you can use it." Me.

"No need."

"Wait, how are you going to change...then..." I trail off as he lifted and took his shirt off.

Oh my...

The man is a dark chocolate temple. One that should be banished and never, ever be seen again. Toned arms...broad shoulders...a steady chest and a not so flat stomach. I can't believe the amount of perfection I'm seeing on him. My eyes travel up to the side of his chest. A tattoo. He has a few more on this side but this one, confused me. I didn't know what it was. I wanted to ask but believe me, I didn't.

He buttons up and puts the suit on. "This look better?"

I nod. I was embarrassed for checking him out like that.

"Let's go then and have some fun."

"Oh brother." I murmur. This was slowly becoming a thing I didn't like that much anymore. "Hey Zanokuhle... What's the difference between a well dressed man on a unicycle and a poorly dressed man on a bike?"

I shrug. He was supposed to ask me something more serious. Not this.

"I don't you know..."

"Attire!" He says, his eyebrows almost completely off his forehead and a beautiful smile on his face.

What the hell...

I chuckle.

Help me!

The stares I get from people as we walked through the gate was enough to make me want to trip and fall over my own two feet again. Some are bowing while others moved away like we were celebs. I was confused believe me.

"Bayethe, Shazi...uMalinga...Bayethe!" I hear some of the people praise and I die inside. This can't mean what I think it does. He is nodding and waving as we moved past the crowd. I spot Nyiso from not so far from me and I want her to rescue me, but the idiot doesn't. She instead smiles like a fool and pointed to the area that she had set up for invited guests. I die. Right there and then thinking of this guy just laughing at me on the inside.

"Where are we supposed to sit?" He whispers into my ear.

He knew he was important!

"T...table four." I stutter.

He knew he was a god but decided to let me continue making myself a fool.

We reach table four and he pulls my chair out. I'm shaking. I thank him and he sits right next to me before pulling his phone out. Oh geez.

I search for Nyiso again but all I see are the people around us. Taking photos. Whispering. Praising the presence of royalty. I have to apologize. I need to apologize for my demeaning attitude towards him.

"Uh...Look I..."

"Hi...hi, mge." Nyiso awkwardly greets the two of us, a bit too excited too for my liking. "I'm... I'm Nonkanyiso , Zano's best friend. Welcome."

"Oh, lovely to meet you Nonkanyiso." He says casually. "I am Ban ..."

"Haibo, who doesn't know who you are?" She interrupts, giving him a nervous chortle.

Well I didn't.

I only knew the King had two sons and a daughter, but I never bothered to stalk them, like I should've. I don't even watch the news for goodness sake. I didn't even know the man looked like this.

"Your royal highness, it is such an honour to have you here."

"Your friend here was generous enough to invite me." He lies but at this point in life, he can joke about me as much as he wanted in order for me to feel, like he's forgiven me.

"Speaking of her, can I borrow her for a moment...I just want to run a couple of things by her." Nyiso says. I'm already up.

"I'm okay with that." He says and I rush out of that tent.

"What in the holy balls was what I just saw in that tent Zano!" Nyiso. She shut her bedroom door before sitting on the bed leaving me standing by her closet awkwardly.

"I swear I didn't know."

"Wait, where did you even meet him?" She asks.

I take in a deep breath.

"Chery broke down and..."

"Wait, he saw Chery!" She interrupts. "That health hazard of yours?"

"Don't speak about my baby like that."

"She is a health hazard mge...anyway she broke down and then what?" Nyiso pushed on and I told her everything...even the changing of his T-shirt part.

I was still floored.

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The day ended on a better note than how it started. Nyiso gave the two of us Tupperwares with food. Aunt Portia and Uncle Silas said their 'I do's' and I couldn't be happier for them, I mean who knew that thee Portia would get married. Other than still feeling bad for how I acted around Bangizwe, I was okay.

He dropped me off at my place and I gave him my key. He wasn't a stranger anymore, right.

That very night I struggled to sleep again. So many things were going around in my head...especially Zwelibanzi.



The following morning my car gets here. Fixed. Clean. And in one piece. It came accompanied by flowers and a card.

Hectic.

'Thank you for yesterday. I had fun. Hope to see you around again.

PS I don't think your Chery is roadworthy anymore.'

"Yes it is." I murmur.



Chapter Two.

"Understand me, I'm not like the ordinary world, I have my madness. I live in another dimension And I do not have time for things that have no soul" × CHARLES BUKOWSKI

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It's Monday. My not so favourite day of the week, but Today's has an exception. It's the first Monday since the schools closed and I couldn't be more delighted for time off from work. My heart was set out on spending my day not crying and all those things but actually on being myself again and maybe squeeze in some time with the siblings.

I first dealt with cleaning the house before making us breakfast. Buhle walks down the passage with Khaya and their chatter has me curious. They both sit down before greeting.

"What's the occasion?" Khaya asks.

I give him a look. "Khaya seriously... I made breakfast like I...sometimes do."

"This is a feast sis ngoba." Buhle says as I sit next to Khaya who doesn't hesitate steering the conversation to his beloved soccer practice.

"Zano, I need some money for our team's new soccer kit."

I look up from my food to the boy.

"Huh?" Me.

"Please, these are essential sesi."

"How much?" I question.

"Too much I'm sure." Buhle.

Surely it can't be that much.

"No one asked you for your input." Khaya.

"Haibo, how much is it Khaya?" I ask.

"...fifty." He mumbles.

"Huh? Fifty? As in just fifty rand?" Me.

"No."

"Speak properly Khayalakhe." Me.

"He said five hundred and fifty." Buhle.

I choke.

"Didn't I just buy you a new one...when nje..?" Me.

"This is a different one Zano."

"Different how? Does it score for you?" I ask.

"Come on Zano, I'm begging you. I'm almost the last one in my team who doesn't have it." He even sounds like he's about to cry and that's not something I need on my perfect day. Especially since I've seen enough tears to last me a year.

"Fine. I'll see what I can do, you also need a haircut." I say and down the rest of my juice.

"Can I also get some money to do my hair too then?"

"I thought we were rocking our afros moes."

"This hair wastes my time in the morning."

I nod, I was getting paid in a few days anyway, which really would make me the worst sibling if I didn't do this.

The door opens and in comes Zonke. All eyes were on her and the bags she bought along with herself. "Hello family!"

"Hi." Buhle greeted solely. My mouth was full and Khaya probably didn't see the need to greet our sister.

"Shuu, cold much?" She sniggers and points at me. "Wena, your man is outside."

There's silence around the table before the loud screeching of my reversing chair takes over the room.

I step outside and there stood the man who saw more worth between another woman's thighs. He leaned on his car with his arms folded in front of his chest, giving me a stare that made me feel somewhat uncomfortable.

"What do you want here?" I look around.

"Oh so we don't greet each other anymore now?"

"Please, don't start with me Zweli." Me.

He chuckles, shaking his head and reaches into the open window of his car retrieving a pack of cigarettes. Courtleigh cigarettes. He offers me one and I refuse it. I don't smoke. Neither will I ever. He nonetheless sets his alight, I wait for him to say his part and leave.

"Take me back." He says.

I raise my eyebrows, taken aback by how he just said that. But, I won't show him that I wanted him back.

"What?"

"Take me back." He says taking a long drag on his cigarette.

"Zweli are you kidding me?"

"Do I look like I am?"

I step back. He must be joking. Honestly.

"What about Mpilonhle?"

"What about her?"

"Zweli you slept with her!"

"So? It was a mistake."

"A mistake? Zweli do you know what a mistake is? Breaking one glass from your mother's glass set is a mistake. Leaving out a word in a sentence is a mistake. A child swallowing a pill thinking that it's a sweet is a mistake. So please don't come here and tell me what I saw was a mistake." I say sternly.

"Zano, baby I'm sorry okay." He stepped on the cigarette butt.
"You're right. It wasn't a mistake...but a moment of weakness."
He reaches for my hand and takes it into his hold.

"Zweli."

"Zano. Please. I'm genuinely sorry for what I did to you. I didn't mean to hurt you like that." He cups my face with his other hand making me look him in the eye. "Forgive me?"

Wow! Trash! I was probably going to regret this but this is what my heart wanted. I truly loved Zweli and he knew that. Besides, I've already invested almost a whole year in this relationship to just give up like that.

"Promise me one thing...no more cheating."

He puts his hand on his chest, fingers crossed. "Me? cheat?
Never again. I promise baby."



I watched as Buhle cleared our mother's grave. A heavy task which she always volunteered to do. There blew a tiny breeze as Khaya and I stood there, with me reading the tombstone.

'Here lies Nomakwezi Deborah Dlamini. Wife and mother. 1965-2009. Forever in our minds, forever in our souls.'

Zonke was not here. As usual.

Speaking about my mother's passing is like opening up old healing wounds. Yes, it's been ten years without her here but it still brought a lot of emotion coming to her gravesite. Especially for my younger sister. Out of all of us she's the one I can truly say was the closest to our mother. She -compared to Khaya- remembered more about her than Khaya did. He was only six after all when she left us. But I always felt like coming here was

good for all of us...not because of the opening of old wounds part, no. But maybe because it would feel like she was there with us in spirit, engaging with us.

"Mama." My brother spoke. I placed my arm around his shoulder, rubbing gently. "I hope you saw the new soccer kit Zano bought me ma, it's amazing. Now I can play for the team and probably even go national and then international so that I can help our sister around the house."

I sigh. This is not what I want to hear from children who are supposed to be living their lives as kids and not worry about adult things. Maybe if Zonke helped out like she's 'supposed' to, this topic wouldn't even be discussed.

"I also hope you'd encourage her to come and watch me play one day...you know just to see what I do there. I know you would've been there." Khaya says.

Why is he making me feel terrible about this. I didn't even think my absenteeism there was this troubling to him. I wipe away a tear, ignoring the vibrating going on in my chest.

"I...We miss you mama. Everyday... And Zonke too." Buhle says.

The phone stops vibrating.

I let go of Khaya and go crouch near her tombstone, placing a single red rose there. Here laid our beautiful rock. The love of our father, once upon a time. My memories of her weren't all as clear anymore but I held onto what I could.

"Continue resting mama."

"I love you too." Khaya says as I got up. I manage to spot him wiping away a tear.

We leave soon after, heading back home. The radio was playing some of my mother's favourite music. Brandy. I was in pure heaven.

"So, you never told me why Royal men were the ones who bought your car back after aunt Portia's wedding." Khaya says peeking between the two front seats.

"Royal men?" My sister, Buhle asks.

I see I'm back on earth now.

"Yes Buhle. A whole bunch of them came on Sunday accompanying this very scrap." he says. I eye him briefly before looking back at the road.

"Haibo, Zano." Buhle.

"What?" I sigh.

"What happened?" She asks.

"Gosh, nothing huge...it was just a coincidence. Chery...I mean my car broke down while I was on my way to the wedding and then the Prince helped...it's a long story."

"The prince? As in Prince Alakhe Shazi or Prince Bangizwe Shazi?" Buhle.

"Probably Bangizwe." Khaya says.

Oh, so I was really the only who didn't know him?

"Yes, him." Me.

"What? That is awesome sis...I hope you showed total gratitude towards him and all his help, not many people would stop to help a woman... in a Chery." Buhle says.

"I...I did...and why is everyone bashing my car. Leave my baby alone." I doubt my own statement.

Did I?

Did I really show him appreciation for what he did for me for free?

"Honestly, I would've bought you a car if I had the money, but I guess for now I'll keep quiet." She says and sits back after turning the volume back up. I drive, thinking of how it felt like he thanked me for allowing him to help me again.

We arrive home minutes after. It isn't even 14h00 yet and already, I felt like I've done plenty. I take my phone out and nearly die of shock when I see who tried to call me. Bangizwe.

A whole him tried to call me?

I shake my head, deciding against calling him back. Instead I call my man who doesn't answer my calls. Wow. Don't I feel like shit.

I put my phone aside and keep myself busy with some classwork that I'd get into once schools open soon. I'd rather be far ahead than be far behind. Besides, for me it even feels better to work at home. I feel more productive than when I'm at work.

I don't even get far before my phone rings, distracting me. I sit up. It's him again.

Why is he calling?

Why am I contemplating answering the call?

Why did I answer?

"Hello." He speaks on the other end.

"Ban...Prince Shazi...Hi."

"Why are you being so formal now?"

"Formal?" I knew I was being formal, but he was royalty. It's what we call respect.

He chuckles. "Don't do that. I already told you my name, use it."

"Fine. I see you called earlier."

"And you didn't bother calling me back?" He asks.

"Was I supposed to?" I titter.

I hear him chuckle again. "That wouldn't have hurt you right?"

"Well I apologize, I got sucked into work..." I tell

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even if it wasn't the honest truth. I sigh. "Look, Bangizwe...I...would you like some lunch maybe, just for me to show my gratitude?"

"Lunch?"

"Yeah lunch...but not at those fancy restaurants, maybe something local if you're okay with that?"

"And you're paying right?" He asks.

"Of course I'm paying." I say. I can afford lunch.

"Sounds great." He says before he hangs up after telling me, he was just checking up on me for my sake. I'm fine.



Nyiso stood at my door, looking at me with a look of disapproval. I let her into my room before closing the door. She

sits on the edge of the bed, placing her clutch bag behind her. She gives me the same look all over again and I start suspecting she had an agenda, clearly.

"What?" I broke the ice, shrugging.

"What? You got back with Zweli and all you have to say is 'what'?" She snaps.

I suck my teeth, walking to sit on a chair by my dressing table.

"Didn't you say Zweli cheated mge?"

"He did." I state.

"And now you're back together?"

"We are and that's because, I forgave him Nyiso..."

"That quick? You're already posting him on your status as if nothing happened."

"Nyiso, like I said I forgave him. We're fine now." I say calmly. It wasn't even that quick.

"Mara mge, this is..." She trails off.

"Mge, I love Zweli. I know he messed up but I forgave him and I'm giving him a second chance."

"Don't you know of the saying never go back to trash ? Trash mge, trash! You even called him trash!"

"Don't call Zweli trash mge. Come on...is that what we're going to argue about? My man?" Me.

Also, only I get to call my man trash.

She sighs and sits back on the bed, seemingly respecting my subtle request.

"Fine, I'll respect your decision but if he-..."

"Messes with my heart again you'll have him beaten blah blah blah...got it. And that's why you're my friend." I finish off her sentence. "You always have my back."

"Like at the wedding when you bought the Prince as yo-..."

"Oh my gosh!" I hide my face and bury it behind a pillow.

"Whaaat?" She giggles, clearly enjoying this far more than she should.

"Stop talking about him." Me. I lower the pillow and give her a look.

"Why? He was at my aunts wedding Zano, that's a whole lot to talk about." She says. I can hear the laughter in her voice. I don't want to entertain this.

"No there isn't... And besides there are far more important things to talk about other than Bangi."

"Ooh, so he's Bangi now." She pokes my shoulder, giving me her stupid look while giggling some more.

Ground, swallow me up!



I climb in before he drives off. It's been two days since we made the agreement to go and grab lunch, so I could feel less guilty for a lot of things. I sat there as he drove to a mini kota and goods place which I suggested. This was my place. A heaven I discovered a few years back and made it an essential when I had an extra R60 to spend.

I'd drive here and stuff my face on Fridays after a short day at work.

"You're quiet." Bangizwe bursts my bubble.

"I'm...listening to the song." I lie. I wasn't. I was actually thinking of what the heck Zweli would think if he saw me in a car with another guy.

"Boys II Men huh, quite the legends." He says.

I nod. "You listen to them too?"

"I'm guessing you haven't caught on that these are the type of songs I mostly listen to." He says.

Why would I care when we aren't even friends?

"Take a left there." I direct. He chuckles and does. He parks his ridiculously expensive car right next to the growing shop and we step out. Again, it's flaming outside. The only thing left to do is roast some marshmallows out here.

I order him the one I usually buy. A deadly mix of goodness.

"So, this is what you eat on a regular?"

"No, if I did eat this on a regular you'd be rolling me around this earth."

"I'd like that." He says. I eye him, eyebrows raised.

"What?" I question.

He giggles. "I mean...that would be an interesting thing wouldn't it?"

"You want me fatter than I already am?"

"That's not what I meant."

"What did you mean then?"

"Never mind, it's not that deep." He says.

Not that deep? I seriously don't get this guy and I don't think I want to.

"It's actually quiet this side." He says.

"It is. People around here also are friendly, I'll take it you've never been around this side?"

"Not really...but I'm here now. I also think I'll be making a few more trips around here you know."

"I thought it was part of your 'job' description to visit places like these, try helping and pose for the camera for some high quality pictures." I say, biting a huge piece of my kota off.

"You're making it sound like that's all we do though."

I chuckle and briefly look at him. "It's not that deep Bangizwe."

He shakes his head and goes back to eating too. "If you must know that's the main job of the King or rather my father and older brother. I barely involve myself in that."

"Why not? With all due respect it honestly feels like your father and brother are not doing a sufficient job. If I could I would've built houses for the people who are unable to afford to build their own. This area of ours has been struggling with water for years now. I even had to buy a tank for our house and..." Woah, I trail off. Why did this conversation suddenly become so serious. I am just here to eat and that's it.

"Sorry about that. I didn't mean to offend you."

"It's fine." He says.

Well this is as awkward as it can get. I don't know what to say anymore. I don't know how many times I'm going to look at my kota, watching the steam come through the deliciousness.

"Are you free some time next week?" He finally speaks again. Not the words I was expecting though mainly because I thought this was our last encounter.

"For what?"

"Why does it sound like you don't want to see me?"

"Because I have a boyfriend." I say.

"And who said you're my type?"

Ouch!

I think my mouth drops a little in disbelief.

"Well...you're not my type either."

"And I also have a girlfriend." He says chuckling.

"That's good."

"Very good."

There's that silence again. It's luckily disturbed by a few people who spark a conversation with the Prince himself. I don't pay much attention to them though.

"It is an honour to have you around emakhaya wethu." The woman who carried a baby on her back said.

"It's a beautiful place Ma, I would love to come here more often." He says. "Do more work here too."

"People around here would appreciate that." She says.

See Prince.

"Allow me to leave my Prince."

"Oh are you buying something from here?" Bangi asks.

"Yes My Prince. Just some meat for supper." She narrates for him.

"Well in that case, here's some money. Buy yourself enough food for the week." He hands her some money.

Wow. Must be nice.

The gratitude on her face is so genuine. She accepted the money and proceeded inside still thanking the 'great' Bangizwe for what he's just done for her and her family.

"That was nice of you."

"That was nothing, compared to what I plan on doing here. I think we should head back now." He says.

"I think so too." I agree. Anymore time out here will make me feel watched and not exactly free in a sense. We both get into the car and off we went. My all time favourite started playing. I hummed through the song, watching the outside.

My song is interrupted by loud ringing. I look at him as he answered by just tapping on the screen.

"Bangizwe where are you?"

"Mama please." He clears his throat.

"Please yani? I'm getting sick and tired of your disappearing acts now. How many times am I going to keep defending you when your father asks me why you left your guardsmen again!"

Well...I never thought I'd hear this woman shout like this. From the times where I do watch the news, she's always at the back looking all poise and pretty. Not this madwoman.

"Can we talk about this when I get back home?"

"Better make sure that's soon, you know King Xhanti will be arriving here with her daughter for dinner. I don't want you to embarrass me like last time and not show up." She says.

"Of course." He answers and hangs up the call before the song comes back on. I'm not even going to hum anymore.

I chuckle. Not on purpose though. "That was quite a call." I say.

"I wish you didn't hear that."

He comes to a halt by the front gate. The people outside have me cringing, but he seems absolutely unbothered. Even mama Lilly was amongst the onlookers. "So next week?"

"I thought..." He trails off.

"I'll be expecting your call then." I say even throwing a small smile at him. He throws one right back.

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Evening came and I already had my head in the pots, cooking away what I'd call a storm. Cabbage, chicken and pap. Khaya walks in and I'm tempted to look at the clock, but I don't.

"Smells amazing in here." He says rolling his ball off into a corner.

"Unlike you. Go bath please." I say.

"Awuna patience sis, I haven't even been in here for more than two minutes and already you're sending me away."

"It didn't take me a second to smell you." I giggle closing my chicken pot. He comes to take the kettle and fills it with water and boils them.

Zonke walks in too, looking rather hot and flustered. She doesn't even give me a glance and I know I shouldn't even bother her with asking cause she'll just snap.

At half past seven, I'm seated watching the news.

Yes this has been me since I embarrassed myself the other day. I'm still confused as to how I've been watching so little news before when half of my job entails factual news and statistics...but I'd easily find all that on the internet. I think that's why.

Besides, my children have never failed Life Orientation ever. Not for the past 3 years I've taught there.

When the news ends I've learned three new things; One the value of our money has gone down, Andile Jali is a hot ass soccer player and there will be a few announcements tomorrow.

We eat and Buhle helps me wash the dishes before we go off to bed.

As I lay in bed, talking to Zweli I hear a loud yell. I sit up. Not long after that yell there's knocking on the door. "Zano! Zonke says her baby is on the way!" Buhle says on the other side. I jump out of my bed and hurriedly put on my gown...

Chapter Three.

"People in glasshouses should not be throwing stones."

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"I'm coming!" I say, grabbing my keys and hang up on Zweli. I'll explain my actions later if I had to. We meet by the passage, Buhle is helping Zonke keep up on her feet while she yelled and breathed loudly. Khaya also peeks out of his room. I toss the keys to him and tell him to go start the car while I went back into my room to get her a bag I bought her for this baby. I read on the internet that its good to have one and that's what I prepared for her. It also didn't cost that much cause I bought these things each month. Little by little. Inside I check if it still had all the things I could afford to buy. It's all there.

I find them by the front door. Chery is up and running. I run to go put the bag in the trunk and then keep the passenger door open for Zonke to come in and sit. Buhle was helping her in.

"Khaya, please go lock up." Me.

"I'm staying behind mina." He says. I nod. Zonke is in. I close the door and rush to my side as Buhle got in at the back.

Off we rush. Luckily for us it's not the busiest of hours.

"Zonke are you breathing?" I ask.

"Yeah that's a very important part of all right now." Buhle says poking her head between the seats.

"Can't your scrap go any faster?" She growls.

"This is the fastest Chery can go." I say, a bit offended by the fact that she called my baby 'scrap' when it was literally helping her right now. I'll ignore her because, it might be the hormones and pain talking right now.

I park the car after arriving at the nearest public hospital.

We help Zonke out of the car and rush to the entrance.

Buhle goes off to the reception area and talks to the nurse there who gives her a rather nasty look before getting up and strolling to us. "What's going on here?" The nurse asks.

"Can't you see I'm about to have a baby!" Zonke snarled in pain.

"Yoh awa sesi, no one sent you to get knocked up wherever you did. Don't come here shouting at me like that."

"Nurse..." I look at her name tag "...Gladys, please excuse my sister, but please we need assistance. She's about to give birth now and all we ask is for proper medical help."

She looks at me up and down. "Proper medical help? At a public hospital(i)? I'll see what I can do." She says and walks off,

back to her desk friend. I'm floored at the service here.

"Come, let's go wait by the benches" I suggest. She nods but I know this is not what she wants.

"I can't believe we're still sitting here." Buhle says as a whole twenty minutes rushes by us.

I think I'm in my head too much because I'm even thinking of reporting this so called nurse. Where's the compassion? Where's the excellent service?

Zonke yells again. I wish I knew what to do at this point.

"Here." Nurse Gladys says handing me papers. "I'm sure you can read."

The reception lady's other friend brings forth a wheelchair.

"The doctor will see you now."

"It's about time." I mumble to myself. Zonke gets whisked away while Buhle and I remained here, filling in the forms we were asked to fill in. After that she goes off to put them on the receptionists desk.

We sit. For minutes that feel like hours of uncertainty. I look around.

After exactly an hour and close to thirty minutes a doctor walks down the corridor.

"Miss Dlamini?" He says and I shoot up.

"Yes?"

"You're the one who bought in Miss Zonke Dlamini here? The pregnant lady?"

I nod. "Yes. Is she okay?"

"Ah, congratulations. She gave birth to a healthy baby girl." He says. Buhle and I basically attack each other with a hug.

"Can we see her?" Buhle.

"Of course. Room 33." The doctor says and we rush to that room. Inside we find her holding the baby looking...well rather distant more than other things. I automatically assumed it was because of this hospital and how they treated us earlier...or maybe she was tired.

"Hey." Buhle says. She looks our way and then back off into space.

"Congratulations big sis. I'm so happy you." I take a quick peak of the girl in her hold and admire her beauty. She was lighter than all of us in here too. I watched her feeding on her mother.

"Nyweratulations big tsis."

"Hau, Zonke?" Buhle.

"What's up now? Did I say something wrong?" Me.

"You two should learn to mind your own business."

"Sis Zonke but we-"Buhle

"But we nothing marn! You two idiots are just stressing me out here!"

We keep quiet as her baby woke from her mother's shouting. She let go of her boob and started crying hysterically. Zonke growls and actually slaps the baby on the head, hard causing more crying. I gasp in shock. What is going on here?

"Zonke!"

I take the baby from her and try calming her. I walk around, hushing her until it works somehow.

She eventually falls asleep.

"What was that for Zonke? You don't hit babies like that." Me.

"I don't want it. Throw it away or something." She shrugs and turns around pulling the blanket up to her shoulders.

"Throw it away? It? Zonke are you hearing yourself?" Me.

"Loud and clear Gimba (fatty)."

"This is a living, breathing human who is here now depending on you, and this is what you do?" I ask.

"Depending on me? That's never happening."

"So what are you going to do with her? I won't allow you to just throw her away." Me.

I can't even believe we were having this discussion. It's the total opposite of what I ever expected us to talk about. I even felt like I should be keeping her but I wasn't ready for that.

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The same morning I'm back at this dreadful hospital to fetch Zonke and her baby. I'm the one who named her because she blatantly refused to give her a proper beautiful name.

Luthando.

Even with everything going on right now, I knew I wanted her to at least feel loved and be loved wherever we were taking her today.

I didn't come with Buhle today and that church prayer is going to have to miss me.

With everything that I ever bought baby Luthando, we drive off to...I don't know where.

She's the one telling me where to go to. We get to this house that is all the way on the other side of our area. I park almost at the gate before she gets out with Luthando in one hand and the bag I bought her in the other. The bag has everything.

"Zonke...don't do this...think about it some more. Please."

She barely even gives me a glance. Off she went to knock on the front door of this house I've never been to and I feel myself get overwhelmed with emotions. I rest my arms on the steering wheel and silently sob. I wish there was something I could do to stop this madness, but Luthando wasn't mine. I had no say in what she could and couldn't do with her baby. I sit up again, wiping away my useless tears. My eyes were bloodshot red.

My heart was heavy.

Out she came. Alone. I breathe as she steps in. She was serious. I knew she was serious all this time but her returning without Luthando made it far more serious.

"Let's go." Her.

"Who did you leave Luthando with?"

"How many times am I going to tell your fat self to stay out of my business? Drive."



"Baby." He says waving his hand in front of my face.

I snap out of my thoughts and look at him with a smile. "Sorry about that. You were saying?"

"You ordering a salad right?" He asks me. I frowned for a second and then nodded. I did want a burger and fries, but with Zweli that was not an option.

He goes on to summon a waiter and places our orders.

I grab my phone and check the time. It's not even one in the afternoon yet but I already feel like this day was dragging. I honestly still wasn't over what my sister did. It had just been four days but I still just couldn't bring myself to understand why she'd just take her baby and throw her onto the man she claims to be the father.

Out of immense curiosity one hot evening I found myself driving back to that place to scout. I wanted to put my heart at ease...but instead it hurt even more when I saw the guy. Thokozani. He was my sister's first ever boyfriend and the last one she's bought 'home'. They broke up because he was a drunk, inconsiderate player who was highly irresponsible - so they said. But, on my scout I saw him carrying her...maybe he's changed or something.

"Here you two go. Please enjoy." Our waiter says putting my salad in front of me. It was so green. So boring. So unappetizing compared to what Zweli got himself. A well done T-bone steak, onion rings, fries and his own mini Greek salad. I sigh and tuck in.

"You enjoying the salad?" He asks.

"Very."

"I'm glad to see you're being so attentive to what you eat right now so you can lose weight."

I smile, trying to enjoy these leaves as best as I could although, I couldn't ignore the smells of his tender, juicy and sauced steak invading my nose.

"I'm also glad you have decided to give us another chance you know." He reaches for my hand and rubs my knuckles.

"It's what you do for the one you love. You forgive them."

"With the way things were going, I doubted we were ever going

to reconcile and forget about my stupid mistake."

"Just promise me this cheating thing never repeats itself." Me.

"Baby...come on. We talked about this." He says and drinks off the steak he's just swallowed with his beer.

The lunch ends and I was still hungry. He drives me back home.

"How about you come visit me? This weekend."

Visit? That's a first.

"This weekend...I have plans." I say.

"Plans? With who? Doing what?" He sounds displeased already.

"Plans with Nyiso...we're going to go shopping." I lie.

"So you're choosing shopping over your man now Zanokuhle?"

"We planned this ages ago Zweli...I can't just bail out on her now." I say.

He looks at me clenching his jaw, trying to keep himself calm.

"I can always come and visit you next weekend." I cup his face, looking at him in the eye.

Schools were opening next week but these plans won't interfere with the weekend visit. And if it did come to the point of me having to complete a few of my school things then I'd take them with me.

"And no cancelling." He says. I nod watching how he calmed down. I smiled and pecked his lips but he quickly holds the back

of my head prolonging the kiss and when he lets me go he awkwardly gives me a look I've seen plenty of times after we kissed. I didn't get it, which is why I always brushed it off.

"I have to go." I say.

He nods. Without a goodbye I exit the car and watch him drive off.

I hated these odd moments.

As per usual I find Buhle busy with her books in a quiet house. I already know where Khaya went to so I don't even ask. I close the door behind me and sit next to Buhle before greeting.

"These came for you today." She says pointing to two paper bags that were on the table.

"What is it?"

She shrugs. "Posh things...but I didn't open them. The kings men bought it here"

"Kings m..." I trail off.

Bangi!

What is this?

Louis Vuitton...

Vitang..

V.U.I.T.T.O.N.

Vuitton...

Oh!

I open the first bag and gasp in shock with what I see inside. Even Buhle joins me. It's a death black velvet dress and by the look of things, it's below the knee and too tight. The other paperbag is smaller. Inside I find a rectangular shaped box that had the words *icebox* written at the top. What in heavens name is that?

"Open it phela." Buhle encourages next to me.

I open it and lights shine towards a piece of jewellery that laid on...no wait what the fuck! I can't even finish my train of thought when it registers in my head that this a diamond piece. A whole diamond necklace? I think I look at Buhle for a moment and her facial expression was just like mine.

"Well I could never!" She exclaimed. "Are those real...I mean of course they're real."

"He's delusional." I breathed out.

"Delusional or not

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these are beautiful." Buhle.

"And expensive."

Who goes around buying mediocre gifts for people who aren't even their friends. I wouldn't even dare look in the direction of

these expensive stores at the mall because I'd just be reminded of how broke I was. Even looking in the direction of American Swiss had me squirming. Mr Price is and will forever be my best friend. Also these high and expensive brands rarely ever cater for us big women which is quiet offending really.

Oh my goodness they even smell expensive. Is there even such a thing or...

"Well if my guess is right then they're from a rich Prince who probably didn't feel a single dent when paying for these beauties." She says.

I huff grabbing the other paper bag and my handbag heading to my room.

"I didn't expect you to call me." He says after answering too quick for my liking.

"What is this you had delivered at my house?" I half shout.

"A dress and an anklet... didn't you open the packages?"

"Bang!"

He chuckles. "I like how you say my name."

What is even going on here?

"Listen this is serious. Why would you buy me things like these? For your information, I like how I dress...I'm not even going to talk about this...this anklet thingy." I eye the bouquet of flowers on my bedside table.

"I never said anything about your dressing style. I was just walking around some stores and saw that dress and thought of you."

"Thought of me huh? Why not think of your girlfriend?"

Must be nice to just stroll around *Louis V* like that just to pick clothes out for a nobody.

"Look, I thought you'd want to wear that for Saturday...that's all. If I'm offending you then I apologize."

I heave a sigh and sit on my bed. Where's my gratitude? This is just a gift. An expensive one, but still remains one nonetheless...but wait how sure is he that this is even my size.

"I'm sorry for being so...unappreciative. Thank you Bangi for the gift." I eye the dress before pulling it out of the bag again. The quality underneath my fingertips makes me wonder how much this actually costs. There's no price tag. "By the way...you still haven't told me what we'll be doing." Me.

"Well you said something that sort of woke me up...you know."

"Which was?"

"Your area needs work."

I chuckle. "My area needs work?"

"Yeah. Lots of it...and with your help and guidance...I'm sure we..."

"...we can make a difference?" My cheeks are hurting from my

unexplainable smiling fest.

"That."

"Okay, but I still don't see myself wearing a dress if we're going to be busy."

"What are you going to wear then?"

"J...jeans...and a top." I say.

"I see."

There's a long moment of silence which none of us break, until I remember that it is my airtime that's being wasted here and not his.

"Bangi, I have to go."

"Right...wouldn't want to keep a Lady busy with people who aren't important."

Why is he even acting like this? Is he saying He's not important or...

"Okay. Bye." I hang up.

•••

My mother held my hand as she led me through this intensely dark place. I felt weird. Arms were reaching out at me but none of them could touch me."Don't let me go." She said. I didn't. I wouldn't. It was a long walk and with the first glimpse of light I saw, I relaxed. Feeling the freedom I felt at that moment. The floor was covered in diamonds

"Where are we going?" I found myself asking her hoping she'd tell me this time around but she didn't. She never did. And every time I asked she seemed to hold me even tighter by the arm as if ensuring I don't escape.

"I'm sorry I couldn't protect you." She says.

I don't know what she means by that.

"I'm sorry I didn't...GET DOWN!" She suddenly yells but I can't move. I look down at the pool of redness on the floor. " GET DOW-..." she yells again before I hear the same loud bang.

My eyes shoot open.

Oh, another nightmare. My heart is racing. A sharp pain rested on my chest for a good few seconds. When it subsides I jump out of my bed and get on my knees, praying my lungs out. I prayed my mother would stop appearing in my dreams in these unappealing ways. It always made me feel like she was restless. Like she wasn't at peace...what if she wasn't?

I head to the window to open up my curtains. I have no idea what time it was but I had no more sleep left in me. I grab my phone eager to text Zweli a 'Good morning' with plenty of heart emoticons. Hopefully he'll respond soon cause I know he's awake...actually I hope he's awake.

While I browse through my phone watching the WhatsApp statuses of my fellow colleagues, friends and beloved boyfriend

I come across the Prince's status. It's of him and his mother who looks mighty well kept. The next is of himself alone. Dressed in a fancy suit that was obviously tailor made for him. He was a beautiful dark man I wasn't going to lie.

Seeing him made me remember the gifts. I know I said I appreciated them but I don't know if keeping them was a good idea.

My phone vibrates. It's a reply from Zweli. Ah.

I get up, make my bed and then go make myself a cup of tea before tackling the hefty task of cleaning this house. Luckily there's some Lionel Richie and Boys II Men to keep me company. I don't put the music on too loud though, because I was avoiding waking someone up unintentionally.

Every corner was swept and mopped by eight O'Clock. That's when Buhle came to lend a hand.

"I was planning on doing some laundry today. Even wash our uniforms since we're going back to school soon." She says.

I make a mental note to remember to give them some money for their hair.

"Wednesday is so close." Me. They were opening on Thursday. "Anyway, you should wash them now just to avoid worries." She nods and goes off. I take this opportunity to go wake Khaya

up so he can help Buhle. I knock on his door. No one answers. I call out again.

"What?" I hear him say.

"Vuka uzo vula (wake up and open)"

There's no further word exchanging done. I hear the door unlocking and finally opening revealing my young man. The young man gives me a bored look.

"What ever happened to peace in this house?" He asks as I make my way inside his room and head for his windows to open them up.

"It's past eight. The sun is up and the birds are tweeting. You should be out there helping your sister with your washing." Me. I grab his basket full of dirty clothes before looking at him.

He heaves a sigh, sitting on the edge of his unmade bed.

"Why do I even have to do laundry? None of my friends ever do laundry but you have me doing all these feminine things."

"Feminine? Khaya, you've been helping your sister for a very long time when washing clothes...what's the difference now?"

"I'm just saying..."

"Just saying? Because washing clothes is a 'feminine' thing have you femininely grown breasts or a higher voice because of all these feminine chores?" I ask.

Some of his idiotic friends must have laughed or have said something that embarrassed and tarnished his 'street cred'. Either way, at the end of the day no one is treated differently here. What Buhle can do Khaya surely has to be able to do too. We're raising an able young man here not a incompetent one.

"Fine. I'll go." He answered me and I watched him get up from his bed and get started with making it. I smiled, remembering to ask an important question which seemed to haunt me since he mentioned it.

"When are you having a soccer match?"

"A soccer match? Are you planning on coming?" He asks looking all sorts of excited.

I nod. "Yeah. Wouldn't hurt...plus it would be great to learn something new."

The excitement on his face is inevitable. I've seen Khaya happy, but this was on another level. "Eish, for now we're still preparing for a small playoff between our school and another...the date is still not set. But I can always remind you." He says.

"Of course. I'll hear from you then." I say before leaving him to finish with making his bed. After taking the laundry basket to Buhle I get started on a breakfast they'll be able to enjoy after their washing session.

When I finish making my pancakes galore I settle down in front of the TV to reply to that text from Zweli.

'Hope you slept well. Xoxo.' I text.

'I did. I miss you.'

'You miss the same woman you saw yesterday?'

'Yes. I haven't been able to get you off my mind for a while. That's why I hoped you would spend the weekend with me.'

Cancel!

'Next week Zwelibanzi, I promise.'

'You can still cancel with that friend of yours.'

'You know Nyiso wouldn't take that well.' I text back. The Lord is looking down at me, shaking his head profusely for all my fibs.

'K.' That's all he replies with before going offline. His profile picture disappears as well as his last seen.

Have I been blocked?

I'm gobsmacked.

•••

As the evening progressed, I got more anxious about the following day. One, because I was seeing Bangi again and two because I was probably going to meet someone else from the

royal house and I was not ready for that type of embarrassment.

I get my phone and hesitantly call Nyiso. I'm not so sure if I want her to answer, but that was already too late.

"Mge. You know, there's this trend going around. It's like if a certain thing was a person neh...you know it?"

"Uh, yes?"

"Ya...well in your case it would be, if bad timing was a person."

She says causing me to giggle.

"Haibo, Mge. What am I interrupting?"

"I'm getting ready for my baby making session with hubby dearest for when he gets home." She dishes and I roll my eyes, chuckling.

When she got married at the tender age of 20, I was certain she was crazy and that I'd lose a friend...but I didn't, and she wasn't crazy. She was in Love. Nyiso met her husband at church before she stopped going. Mandla being a once-in-a-lifetime church goer started pursuing my friend until she finally gave in. He proposed a year later and they got married soon after. They still don't have children though.

Anyway after she got married she became determined with playing cupid with my love life. She tried setting me up with a Paul and a Lucas but they were just not what I wanted.

And then there's Zweli. After 3 years of not dating I finally decided to give this relationship thing a try. I met Zweli through Nyiso too.

"I guess I'll call you then after I finish working tomorrow."

"Working yani ngoba the schools open on Wednesday?" She digs.

"Not school work mge. I'm going to be doing community work."

"With who? What kind of community work?"

"Go make babies mge."

"Oh my goodness! You're doing work with the Prince now?"

She squeals.

"Haibo!" I titter.

"Why didn't you tell me you two have something going on?"

"Woah woah, nothing is going on between Bangi and I...I'm just helping him out here and there to better our community. I'm dating Bangi remember?"

She chuckles. "You mean Zweli right?" She says and my eyes go wide.

"That's what I said."

"No. You said you're dating Bangi and I definitely agree. I still don't get why you got back with Zweli who's proved to you that he's not trustworthy."

"We're not discussing my love life Nyiso."

"You know what they say Zano. Never allow a man to show you twice he doesn't love you." She says.

I shake my head and roll over to lay on my stomach.

"Anyway, since this is happening tomorrow when should I start scheduling a slot for myself to come and visit you so you can tell me everything that went down face to face?" She states.

"We'll see." I press my lips in a thin line before hearing her curse and dropping something. "Mge?"

"Holy balls, he's home and I'm not finished. Look, I'll call you later. Mwah!" She quickly says and hangs up.

I'm left to chuckle on my own.

Chapter Four.

"I always like to challenge myself, i never want to be put in a box" × Lionel Richie.

••

I slipped my jeans on and stared at my reflection on the mirror. Okay, maybe...just maybe did I look bomb today. I felt skinnier and not because of the 'breathe-in' I was doing right now. I comb my afro out and flatten the areas that seemed too high before giving myself the pep talk of my life.

"You'll be fine. You won't make a fool out of yourself. You are only going to be doing your part in helping our community...and that's not a big deal...wait it is!" I take in a deep breath before I yell inwardly. "Why did I agree to this?"

A knock on the door interrupts my fit.

"Zano?" Buhle calls on the other side of my door.

Maybe it's not what I think it is...

"Yes?"

"He's here."

"Who?"

Please say Zweli!

"The Prince." She responds and my heart drops in a funny way.

"Tell him to go away!" I joke.

"Zanokuhle, the man is standing in the sun and you want him gone because you're nervous? Come on."

I sigh. There's no way out of this. I grab my clutch bag and cellphone before spraying a bit more perfume on. Yes, it may get sweaty and I didn't want to stink.

The moment I open my door I'm met by Buhle, who's grinning like an idiot. "I thought you'd wear that expensive dress for your date." She utters.

"Date? Haibo we're just going to do some work. There's no date here." I quickly defended.

"Mhnn...okay, you look beautiful by the way."

"Really? Cause I can go and change..."

"Nooo...."she pulls me out of my room and pushes me down the passage with me still complaining and rambling on about me possibly going to change.

I see him before I even step out of the house, standing next to that famous car of his. But he's not a loner today. I guess his mom spoke some sense into him that day in the car. The guards are tall and stiff, like mannequins displayed in a clothing shop. I take in another deep breath.

"Hi." I greet, awkwardly redirecting my attention to my feet.

He chuckles. "You look nervous."

"I'm not nervous." I look up.

"Could've fooled me. I want you calm, this is not the first time you see me."

I roll my eyes. It's not like you get to meet, talk and be this close to royalty everyday.

We leave. The people gathered outside, watching from their yards. Ya neh. Being known like this is something different. I mean I'm known here as a teacher and that's all...but he, he's like the Mahatma Gandhi of South Africa. Wait, he wasn't necessarily rich now was he. But he was rich at heart nonetheless.

"So I don't necessarily get what we're going to be doing today."

"Why not ask?" He briefly glances at me before he focused back on the road ahead.

"That's what I was indirectly doing." I giggle.

"We're going to be giving a few things to the shelters around here. It's a small start."

"That's sweet."

"And we'll also be making bricks."

"Woah, making? As in cement..."

"...sand and water. A couple of shovels too."

I find myself laughing while shaking my head.

"Do I look like I'm good with shovels?"

"Nothing you can't learn." He chuckles.

"I'm sorry, but you're talking to the same woman who tripped over her own two feet, I don't think shovels will become my best friends anytime soon."

"I'm kidding. But we'll be watching the professionals forming these bricks on our behalves." He says and I sigh out in relief.

A few more minutes of driving before we get to a huge warehouse looking place. "We're here." Him. He parks and we step out with me inspecting the place like I knew a thing or two about buildings. I definitely have never been here before.

"This way Miss." A guard says from behind me.

I thought they didn't talk.

I'm followed by three of these mannequins. The other three are behind Bangi. We're heading towards what looks like the main entrance of this warehouse.

"What is this place?"

"The place where all of this will be happening. I call it little heaven." He says.

"Little?"

"This is the beginning of all we are about to embark on." He says, pride evident in his voice.

Wait...

"We?"

"Yes we. You know more about your community than I do...so who better to have by my side than you?" He answered.

goddammit.

I nod for whatever reason it may be before I hear a voice from the not so far distance. Dressed in elegance and poise-ness. She turned around and I was already thinking of the easiest way to curtsy without making a complete fool out of myself. These mannequins beat me to it, already bowing in front of her calmly.

"My Princess." I half curtsy before Bangi brings me up again.

"Don't do that Zanokuhle."

"Did I do it wrong?" I ask. He just chuckles before shaking his head.

"No. She's younger than you."

"So?" I frown.

"So, you're not about to be bowing to my younger sister like that."

"Yeah, keep talking like I'm not here." She finally speaks. I quickly clear my throat as she giggled. She has one of those tiny lovely voices that could probably just sing you to sleep.

"Ama, this is Zanokuhle... Zano this is my younger sister Amandla."

"Lovely to finally meet you Zanokuhle." Amandla says sticking her hand out for me to shake. I'm quick to firmly grasp it in my hand.

I cringe...

My damn palms are sweaty!

"Please call me Zano."

"I've heard quite a few things about you Zano." She says as we end the overdue handshake.

"Oh?" I eye Bangi who's still next to me. "Good things only I hope."

"Absolutely. I mean your 'good things' is why we're here in the first place." She says turning around. "Speaking of which, Sonele said all the boxes are ready to be loaded onto the trucks and head on off."

"Well then, what are we waiting for, get the gentlemen to start loading." Bangi says. Amandla smiles before walking off. Her heels clicking hard against the concrete floor.

I was not about to ask what other good things he told her about me. It was probably not even a good thing anyway cause, really...what good is there to say about me.

When the boxes are loaded and secured we headed out in one of the trucks. Bangi claimed he knew how to drive a truck and again, I believed him. It was a dusty, bumpy and loud ride to the home we were going to. The shelter for disabled kids who were either abandoned or were not properly taken care of by their families -financially that is. Some were abused...some were mentally ill...some had obvious disabilities while some

had ones you really had to look closely at before you see what the disability is.

I applaud the men and women who work here. It does not look easy at all.

Bangi's sister was also very attentive. I doubted her working capabilities just like how I doubted this man next to me. Those mannequins may I add did an excellent job at keeping the media out of this place.

At around 18h00 we were done and I was hungry and tired. I never thought meeting and handing out almost 100 and something boxes of stuff to people who needed them would be such an exhausting task. It also pained me to see how many children didn't have their parents as well. We headed back to his little heaven so he could fetch his car to take me home. I say my goodbyes to Amandla and she promises to see me soon.

"So, what do you want to eat?" He asked as he lowered the volume on the radio.

We were at the parking lot of some takeaway place. The mannequins were parked on each side of his car. They stepped out almost immediately after surrounding this very car. Armed.

"What were you going to be having?"

"Uh, a burger."

I sigh.

"I'll be having a salad then."

"A salad with a burger, got it." He grabs his wallet.

"No no no, wait I said a salad. That means a salad only." I emphasize.

"Salad... only? Even I don't eat salads on their own." He says chuckling.

Well, you're not the one who has to lose weight here okay.

"Just get me a Salad Bangi." I huff. Can't a lady just ask for a salad in peace? If it weren't for him we'd be eating by now too.

"Fine. The Lady wants a salad then a salad is what the Lady will get." He mumbles stepping out of the car. Four mannequins walked off with him.

I sit for a good two seconds before realising I just made a mistake...

I quickly grab my phone and dial his number and he answers immediately. I could still see him from where I was too.

"Miss me already?"

"What? don't be stupid." I chuckle shaking my head.

"What is it then? You want extra crunch in your salad?"

"No...but please get me a burger with that salad! Extra cheese."



"Okay why is no one sitting on their chairs?" I half yell as I enter my classroom. They scatter like headless chickens to their tables and pull their books out of their bags. Well at least some of them.

I chuckle and head to my desk, putting the copies of work on there before folding my hands in front of my chest.

"Well that wasn't a pretty good start to the term. But nonetheless, welcome back. I hope everyone is ready for the hard work we're about to tackle."

"Hard work in Life Orientation Ms Dlamini?" A learner of mine says, all the way from the back of the class. He's one of those that are slacking at their work but somehow managed to get to this very grade.

"I was about to say the same thing. How is running and learning about HIV hard work ma'am?" Another says.

"You'd be surprised at how many people still don't know the facts about HIV, I don't even think most of you guys even know what HIV stands for."

"It stands for 'Humanity immune virus'." The slacker yells out. I and a few learners here convulse in laughter.

"You're going far my fellow grade nines. Now the rest of you, take out your books. There's plenty to talk about." I say.

"Ha ma'am...work on the first day already?" I hear someone complain.

10h00 came and I could finally take a break. Teaching kids who think they know it all can become harder but all in a day's work I guess. I'm still in my class trying to figure out where I put my clean marking sheets when a knock interrupts me. I look up. It's Margaret. A thirty something year old mom who always gets on my nerves. I find them and put them where I'll easily find them.

"Oh, I hear you gave the kids free marks the other day. Very unethical."

I get up.

"You going around thinking I give away free marks is very unethical Mrs Radebe. May I please pass?" She allows me through. I don't know what her problem is with me.

I manage to buy myself a chicken wrap and an orange juice. I then head to the staff room. Most of the teachers here were conversing. This is where the gossiping happened. The over the coffee conversations about what happened back at home and how the children of this very school were giving them headaches. This is also where the best students were separated from the worst.

Here I'd sit with Ms Oratile Sibanda

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or Siba as I'd call her. She was one of the first ones who welcomed me here and since we're peers, our colleague friendship seemed to have conquered the odds. Even if she taught a grade higher than mine.

My heart cracks when I realise on the Notice board that there was a 'MEETING AT 14H00'

"Siba." I pull a chair closer and sit next to her.

"Mini. You look amazing." She smiles removing her reading glasses.

"Don't lie. I haven't even changed one bit since the last two weeks you saw me."

"No, you have. You look like you're even glowing"

"Girl, I still have no idea what you're on about."

"Umjolo (relationship) glow this one." She says. I titter. I still haven't received a reply from Zweli. As a matter of fact I was still blocked and I don't know if I'm genuinely okay with that.

The things we put ourselves through.

"It must be that then." I lie and stuff my talking hole before I say more stupid things.

"Yeah, anyway what did you get up to this holiday?"

"Not much."

Well lets see...I had my heart broken, then fixed. I met the Prince and did some community work with him. I also had a discussion with him about him wanting to build a place. That's just it. A place. I don't what this place will be for. Zonke gave birth and the whole thing after that happened..

It really wasn't much.

"I spent a week back home in The Cape."

"Must've been fun."

"You have no idea. Cape Town is such a beautiful place. The sights! You should come with me one day." She says.

Hectic.



I'm packing a bag. 'A bag of my rags' as Nyiso said sitting comfortably on my bed going through a few of my magazines.

"You should be helping me pack." I mumble. I see her look up from the reflection on the mirror.

"You're going to be there for two days moes, what much is there to pack?" She closes the magazine and tosses it onto the pile.

"Two important days Nyiso. What if, you know...things go down."

"Things?"

I clear my throat. Her stare turns wide eyed.

"No Zano...You aren't planning on sleeping with that trashcan are you?"

"He's not a trashcan. He just fell victim of seduction, and maybe because I wasn't giving him any."

"Zano, don't feel pressured to sleep with him just because you think he'll cheat again. Do you know that some men still get it and dump you after that. You'll feel like trash if he does that to you. I'll feel like trash if he does that to you."

"Nyiso you seem to be forgetting I'm an adult. I can make my own decisions, and besides I've never heard of a 25 year old virgin before."

"Zano..."

"Just help me pack." I interrupt her. She heaves out a sigh, shaking her head.

When I've double checked everything with Nyiso's help I go and load everything in Chery. She's been quiet ever since she helped me pack. She's even avoiding eye contact at all costs. Buhle walks through the gate, her schoolbag hanging heavily on her shoulder.

"Hey sis Nonkanyiso."

"Hey Buhle, you look tired."

"Matric is no joke." Buhle says. "Where are you going to Zano?"

"I'm going to visit Zweli for the weekend. You okay with looking after Khaya?"

"Amanzi amancani loyo." She waves dismissing the task.

"Oh okay, if you say so. You know what you have to do then." I hurriedly reach for the passenger side, retrieving my purse from my handbag. Inside I grab a R100 note and hand it to her.

"That's for emergencies only. If you suddenly need anything you can call me."

"That means I can buy myself airtime then." Buhle says.

"Not with all of it though." Me.

"Relax. Anyway, uhambe kahle (travel well)." She says and walks past me while waving goodbye to Nyiso.

"Well...have fun." Nyiso says turning on her heel.

"Haibo just like that?"

She halts. "What do you want to say Zano? I'm not particularly excited about you...aii let me just go." She continues ahead, climbing into her car and drives on off. I suck my teeth. She's just being too damn dramatic.

Chery comes to life immediately and I drive out of here a few minutes after Nyiso left. Lisa Fisher's how can I ease the pain playing loud and proud on my radio. I'm yelling all the good parts out as I take this ten minute drive to Zweli's place.

I have never stayed over at his place for longer than 4 hours and this was going to be a long weekend with him. Just the two of us. Him and I...ek en hom...

It's not sinking in.

As I drive nearer to his yard I notice another car parked next to his gusheshe. I frown.

What is Zola doing here?

I step out after parking and make my way to the door. My confused self wonders if I should be knocking or just straight up walk in. The door is unlocked, not stopping me from entering his territory. It is stuffy in here and it reeks of beer and feet.

Ah, there he is. Snoring on the couch with Zola awkwardly sleep-sitting on the floor. I sigh making my way to draw the curtains and open some windows for some air.

"Hai man, Zweli...Zweli..." I shake him. He mumbles something I can't make out before sleeping like a baby all over again.

"Zweli!" I shout bringing him to an immediate awakening.

"Yoh...Yoh...yoh...Zano man, eish." He complains rubbing the sleep off his eyes. "What are you doing here?"

"You told me to come here to visit you, what stupid question is that?" Me. He sits up, waking his friend Zola. I go sit on the armrest of his couch watching them clean their mess. All the empty Heineken bottles and pizzas boxes are telling me they had a long night. When Zola finally gathers himself and his things he leaves.

Zweli is still busy moaning and groaning in the kitchen. I watch him from where I'm seated. He fills a glass with water and takes some tablets. Painkillers I assume. He stands by his sink for a moment before making his way to the sitting area.

He reaches in to kiss me on my cheek but I back away. "And then?" Him.

"You reek of alcohol Zweli."

"So?"

"I don't like it." I say looking him in the eye.

"You don't like it? Mxm." He sucks his teeth and throws himself on the couch I'm seated at with his eyes closed. "I can't deal with you and this headache."

"Then maybe you should slow down on the alcohol." I mumble.

"Uthini? (What did you say?) Are you my mother or my girlfriend Zano cause sewuyangi dida manje? (you're confusing me now.)" Him.

I clear my throat. "I'm your girlfriend."

"Dankie. Now stay in that lane please." He says and closes his eyes while laying back on the couch. I sigh and get up to go fetch my bag, phone and also to lock up my baby. I have my bag

in my hold when my phone starts ringing. The name flashes on the screen and I feel how my eyes go wide.

Why did I answer!

"You know for a Prince I'd think you didn't have a life." I quickly say abruptly regretting it soon after. Couldn't I just greet him like a normal human would've done?

"Why would you say that?" He chuckles.

I shrug. "I don't know...I...I just find it amusing how you can just find the time to call a boring person like me."

"Boring? You're not boring Zano."

"Anyway, I know that's not why you decided on calling me. How can I help you?"

There's his chuckle again.

"I went past your home not so long ago and your little sister told me you went to visit a friend"

"Boyfriend actually." I corrected him.

"Oh?"

"Yep." My lips get jammed between my teeth, pressed into a thin line. It is mighty awkward and quiet with me glancing at my phone's screen to see if he hadn't maybe accidentally hung up on me.

"For how long will you be there for then?" He finally speaks.

"Just this...wait why am I telling you this when it's none of your business?"

"Ouch. I get it. You have a boyfriend and it is none of my business what you do with him."

I sigh. "Bangji why are calling me?" The real question should've been why was he back at my place?

"I wanted you to help me."

"Help you? Don't you have people for that? Actually don't we have Google for that?" I put my free hand on my hip?

"Well Google doesn't have a beautiful face like yours now does it?" He says after chuckling.

I don't know why I suddenly feel my cheeks burning. It's probably this stupid facial expression on my face. Keep it together Zano!

I titter. "You're being very unbecoming Mr Shazi, especially for someone who claims they're in a relationship."

"Just tell me when you're free please. I'm serious."

"Mhmm-hmm, okay I'll see how my schedule looks like and then get back to you."

I've always wanted to say that!

I hang up and run a hand across my face wondering what the hell that was. I shouldn't be smiling the way I was when I was talking to Bangi. I shouldn't be thinking of how he looks so crisp and clean. I shouldn't be thinking of his perfectly dark skin like that...or even his perfectly chiseled face.

I'm doing it again.

I quickly grab my bags and close the boot before locking my car.

I'm here for Zweli, not Bangi.

...

The time had hit the 19h00 mark and I was nearly done with my cooking. I managed to clean around here too after not finding Zweli on the couch where I left him.

Nyiso was clearly ignoring me. All ten of my text messages were blue ticked and it hurt, especially since she was bloody online. I lean on the counter and attempt on texting her again but stop when I hear footsteps coming down the passage. He's changed into decent looking sweats and a vest. He also smelt fresh and absolutely delicious.

"Hey baby." He says getting a glass and fills it with water, but instead of downing it immediately he puts it next to me.

"Hi."

"Can we talk?"

I look to my pots before feeling his fingers on my chin, turning me back to face him.

"Or just hear me out."

"Khuluma. (Talk)" I say.

"Are you angry at me?"

"What do you think?"

"Okay...that was a stupid question. Baby, I'm sorry f-for what I said to you okay. It was just a wild night yesterday, Alex and Zola bought over some booze and..."

"Were there girls around?" I interrupt him. He licks his lips.

"Yes, but I swear we didn't do anything. They came with Alex and I told them all to leave." He keeps explaining. "I'm sorry baby, please say something."

"I don't like you drinking Zweli..."

"And I know that baby...I'm trying to stop okay. For you."

I find myself eyeing my pots again before he makes me face him...again. "Please..." He pecks my lips multiple times murmuring "...please..." In between each kiss until I feel my frown diluting.

I giggle gently pushing him away. "Okay...okay...It's okay. I forgive you."

"Thank you." He kisses me one more time.

"You hungry?" I ask. I feel him placing his hands on my waist, pulling me closer to him.

"Yes." He groans before I slither out of his hold.

"Good, I made grilled chicken,gravy and pap." I say grabbing two plates.

"Hau...I thought..." I hear him mumble from behind me.

"You thought what?"

I hear him suck his teeth before he starts walking away.

"Never mind."

Chapter Five.

"Nothing can dim the light that shines from within" × MAYA ANGELOU.

••

"You're kidding me, right?" He sounds pissed at my suggestion. I hug myself, awkwardly standing on the other side of the bed, finding it hard to look him in the eye for long.

"Zweli I- I don't-..."

"You want me to sleep on the floor while I have a whole bed here that I bought with my own money?" He states after interrupting me.

I sigh.

I know I may be a bit dramatic, but I didn't want to share a bed with him. I know I was a bit determined about probably doing the deed this weekend, but no. I wasn't feeling it.

"Fine, I'll sleep on the floor then." I grab a pillow.

"Why can't we just share a bed...like a normal couple would Zano? Why should the other person have to suffer on the hard floors."

I forgot the couch can also be an option.

I watch him lower his hand after clenching his fists hard. I nearly flinch.

"Fine." He throws his hands up, seemingly defeated by my request. "I'll sleep on the floor."

I give him a nervous smile and help him set up his floor bed which doesn't even look that uncomfortable. I grab my pajamas and head to his tiny bathroom to change after locking the door. I section my hair and braid it, to avoid my hair tangling into a mess. I put on my bonnet before heading back to the room. He's already on his floor bed, busying himself with his phone. I go switch off the light before climbing into bed.

It is dead quiet in here. I could hear my own breathing. I could even hear my own thoughts and those bloody crickets outside.

Most importantly I couldn't sleep, even after trying to force myself. I turned to the side Zweli was sleeping at and he was sound asleep, snoring away the evening. Why couldn't I sleep like he was for goodness sakes.

I reach for my phone and unlock it. I check the time. It wasn't even 12pm yet!

I choose to busy myself with a sprinkle of social media, maybe I'll induce my sleep with that.

My phone vibrates. Who's texting my ass at this hour?

'Why isn't the lovely Lady asleep yet?' his text read.

'Who's this lovely Lady you keep talking about?' I text him back.

'The same woman who's texting me back right now.'

'Oh? So you go around calling everyone 'lovely' and 'Lady'?''

'Nope. Just the particularly pretty ones who drive cars that breakdown.'

I am yet to hear those words from Zweli. The *'pretty's'* and *'beautiful's'*. It's either A I was or B I wasn't and clearly my man does not think I am.

Well do I even find myself attractive? *Sometimes.*

Would I date myself? *No.*

Would losing some weight make Zweli love me even more?
Absolutely.

'That literally happened once.'

'One time too many.' he texts. I chuckle.

'You talk like you'd buy me a new car.' I text back with a smirking emoji.

'Let's say I probably would. What car would you want?'

'Hypothetically speaking it would be a BMW'

'What make?'

'A 2019 8 series'

'The M850i? Good car. Great engine too.'

I knew he had a thing for cars. I shake my head. I blinked a couple of times, feeling like there was sand in my eyes.

'Enough about cars that wont be happening anytime so why why aren't you asleep?'

'Paperwork.' he replies.

'Oh. Well get back to it then. I have to sleep now.' I text.

It takes him minutes to finally send me a reply.

Wait how long does it take to type a mere *Get your sleep, goodnight*

I sigh. He probably was giving his hands a rest...or something stupid like that.

Before I can even lock and put my phone away it vibrates twice. It's messages. Who else is also awake and not asleep at this hour?

Ah! it's Vodacom telling me about my depleted data bundles. Great. Just amazing. I'll buy it the very moment I awaken. Where's the other text?

Oh.

It's Bangi again. I mean Prince Bangizwe. I've really got to stop these weird thoughts going on in my head...especially since I have a man of my own.

And why is He sending me a heart emoji?

His finger probably slipped.

•••

When I awaken to the sound of one of the doors here closing, I'm met by a freshly showered Zweli. I frown wondering what time it was.

"Morning baby." He says and comes to give me a peck on the lips.

"Hey." I say briefly, getting hit with a whiff of my bad morning breath. I wonder if he smelt it or if it was just me smelling myself.

"You slept well?"

I nod. I know it took me forever to finally fall asleep but it did eventually happen and I did sleep like a baby after that.

Yoh, I'm lying. I slept and that was just that. Also I don't feel as rested as I should be but that's my fault too.

"Good, I want you up and ready in the next 30 minutes, we're going somewhere."

"Somewhere?" I beam, sitting up.

"Yes, wena go shower nje." He says. And I'm out of bed in a second before pulling my bag filled with clothes and wondering if I had an outfit for this 'somewhere' we're going to.

Aha! My yellow top and white jeans. I'll pair this with my white sandals.

After picking my outfit I rush to shower. In mere minutes I feel satisfied with myself. With my body dried and moisturized I had the hefty task of getting my clothes from the bed where I left them. I shake my head, I'm not going out in only my bra and undies.

Not now.

I unlock the door and peek out to find him sitting on the unmade bed busy with his phone.

"Zweli." I whisper. He doesn't hear me. "Zweli!" I call out louder this time and he turn his head and looks at me with a confusing look on his face.

"What?" Okay. He looks like someone whose peace I disturbed.

"Can you pass me my clothes and shoes please."

"And why don't you come and take them yourself?"

"Because I'm not dressed."

"I know that."

"Zweli. Please." I say. He chuckles, getting up and grabs the three items and brings them to me. By now I've slipped back

and only my hand is sticking out, waiting for my things. It's after his second chuckle that he puts them in my hands. "Thank you." I close and lock the door before getting dressed. I comb out my afro and decide to leave my face bare. I step out when I finished repacking my bathing essentials and...nothing.

He says absolutely nothing.

Not that I was fishing for a comment or anything but did he have to be this quiet?

I clear my throat before going to make the bed. He leaves the room. Is he serious? Is he really not going to fold and put away the blankets he was sleeping with? I shove them into his wardrobe after folding them and shut it close. I grab my phone and purse before I head out to find him drinking a beer. Isn't it a little too early for him to be drinking one of those.

"I'm done." I murmur.

"Let's go then." He says taking his keys and beer with him. The radio fills the tangible silence in the car with much needed music while I busied myself with my phone. I watched Siba's status, then Nyiso's which was just her and her husband smothering each other. I eye Zweli who's gently moving his head to the song that was playing. I'm back on my phone again. It's Amandla's status, then her brother's. They're of a similar day, but from different point of views. It's that day at the shelter.

Oh my gosh is that me?

When did he even take that picture?

The last status I view is of Zweli and I frown after reading it. I look at my jeans, top and shoes. This was posted minutes before we left the house. I lock my phone, confused...

We arrive at a damn pub and I was in absolutely no mood for this outing. This is the somewhere he was talking about?

We get seated in one of the corner booths that were almost at the far end of this place. I had to endure people giving me stares and a couple of unwanted compliments. I hated them since they made me very self conscious. It also seemed like Zwelibanzi over here was a regular. He was greeted left, right and centre.

"We'll order when Oscar arrives." He brings me out of my thoughts.

"Oscar is coming here? Why didn't you tell me?"

"I wanted to surprise you."

"Surprise me with someone I don't even like?" I said.

He looks at me. I have never said it out loud but it was true. I loathed Oscar. I avoided him since the beginning of Zweli and I's relationship, but he's somehow always managed to pop up.

"Why are you being so dramatic and since when do you not like Oscar?"

I sigh as I see the man himself approach the table with a slender girl hanging on his arm. She's dressed in the shortest skin hugging dress I've ever seen. They're laughing when they reach the booth.

"Yes Mazwelisto!" The loud Oscar greeted. Zweli got up and fist bumped his bestie. I didn't want to be here. I'd rather go and milk a cow and count grass than be in the presence of this man. "Hola Oscar. I see you bought a beautiful guest with you...igama? (Name?)"

She puts her hand in Zweli's palm and he kisses the back of it. "This is my exotic...what should I call it...my exotic delicacy boy. This is Yolanda."

"Yolanda, it's a pleasure to meet you. Hai muhle boy (she's beautiful)"

"Thank you." Yolanda says.

"I see you're still going strong with your girl over here." Oscar says.

"Eish, ya." Zweli says, turning to look at me.

"Konje what's her name again..."

"Zanokuhle."

"Oh, Zano! I see you haven't changed one bit. You're still fat." Oscar says and breaks out in his weird laugh. Zweli joins him with a chuckle. "Boy, I thought you would've...You know..."

"Nah boy." That's all he says sitting down next to me again.

I'm embarrassed. How could Zweli not say anything while his beloved friend was clearly disrespecting me. I even felt like crying, but I was not about to do that in front of someone like Oscar. I roll my eyes and sit back on this booth seat.

"Right

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let's order some beers and meat." Oscar says. Zweli agrees as well as that Yolanda chick. I just order a coke zoning out completely from whatever was unfolding on this table. I didn't even touch the meat.

•••

After a mini fight we left with me driving his car since he was shit drunk. He kept mumbling out the songs that played now on his USB. He was usually loud and annoying when like this, but luckily he wasn't annoying me as of yet.

I park and I step out to help his drunk self out of the car and into the house. He headed straight for his bedroom, threw himself onto the bed before gradually dosing off. I go sit in my car. My calls to Nyiso don't get answered. But Buhle answers almost immediately.

"Zano, hey I was just about to call you."

"Don't lie." I chuckle.

"I'm serious, aren't you wondering why I answered so quickly?"

Her.

"Makes sense. Where's Khaya?"

"Out. Soccer practice. You know the drill."

"I hope he's been doing his homework and at least studying something."

"He's finished the homework part, but we agreed on the studying one when he returns." she says and I find myself smiling.

"Good."

"And I hope you're doing good over there."

"I am"

"Errrr...okay."

"Yeah." I say. "Oh and why did you tell Bangi about where I was?"

She giggles on the other end of the line. "He asked me nicely hau, and besides what did you want me to say?"

"I don't know, but a simple lie would've been okay."

"You wanted me to lie to the Prince, Zanokuhle?" She laughs.

"A little hau, it wouldn't have hurt moes." I giggle.

"Awulunganga wena (you are not right.)"

"Anyway, I have to go okay. I love you and tell Khaya I love him too."

"Okay, cool love you too sis."

I hang up and start my car. I drive to a small takeaway place to buy myself something to eat. I buy a grilled cheese sandwich and small chips that I destroy in the car while listening to Michael Jackson. I cleaned up after myself and got out to dispose of the containers.

"Wezanokuhle...(she brings goodness.) " I turn to the sound of that voice to find an old man looking at me. He's not smiling, but he sure was focused on me.

"Sorry baba, are you talking to me?" I question looking around me like an idiot.

"Yebo Zanokuhle."

"How did you know my name?"

He finally puts a smile on his face and looks up to the sky.

"Wezanokuhle kulo mphakati (she brings goodness to this community)."

Okay, this is becoming a bit weird now. I was about to leave when the old man stopped me.

"Take this."

He holds his hand out and inside it was a pure white beaded bracelet.

"Hai cha baba, ngiyabonga. (No thank you sir.)" I say backing away.

"Thatha. (Take.)" He half demands and I was just so confused. Looking around I see no one looking my way. No one was

paying attention.

I take the bracelet hesitantly.

"Your mother is with you. Have a good day." He says and walks away balancing on his stick. It's only now that I notice that the man is walking barefoot on the gravel road. The red and black fabric that covered his body blew gently.

Who is this man and what is this white thing?

After throwing away my empty containers I head back home, still thinking of the old man. I'll ask Nyiso when she eventually answers my calls if she knows of any old man around here that might be mentally ill. Okay...no, the man is not mentally ill...he might just be a witchdoctor...but still.



My leg is numb from the uncomfortable sleeping arrangement I took on last night. My neck is in shambles too. This couch is the pits. I fold the blankets and go put them where I shoved them the last time. Zweli slept through the whole of yesterday and to say I was an inch impressed with how this over hyped weekend went, I'd be lying to myself.

I try waking him up but, he's still dead asleep.

I grab all my bags with me to the bathroom and lock myself in there again. I quickly shower, lotion and get dressed. I pack all my belongings and go put them in my car.

'I'm sorry, had to leave early for church. Call me when you see this. Love you.'

I place the tiny note on his bedside table before leaving, heading to church.

I'm early as I park at my favourite spot. It's blazing out already. I lock Chery and prepare to head inside. I first make a quick turn by the trashcans that resided at the back of the church to dispose of those beads. They made me feel weird and the fact that I got them from a man I didn't know was not helping.

"Sanibonani. (greetings)" I greet walking down the church aisle looking at the few people who are just as early as I am. They greet back.

"Zanokuhle, please come assist me here." The pastors wife calls me. I put my stuff on a chair and rush to go help her with the table she wanted to move. "Unjani ntombi? (How are you miss?)"

We lift the table.

"I'm good Mrs Nkosi."

"That's good. And what about everyone back at home?" She asks.

This woman was like my mother when we lost it all. She's the one who motivated us to stay in school and strive for *better*. The '*better*' Zonke tossed out of the window. And you wouldn't

even think Mrs Nkosi was 53. She just looked so amazing for her age.

"They're doing good ma."

"That makes me happy to hear. You can go sit."

I nod and go sit.

Church started at exactly 9h00 and it was uplifting. Pastor Nkosi preached about the importance of staying close to the light of God because the darkness has no beauty. He read 'Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man. — Psalm 112:4'

And I was touched by that powerful promise.

'Just as evening passes into dawn, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous, dawn comes even in the worst nights of deep spiritual darkness. The Holy and powerful Spirit is reminding us the people who believe in Him and his blessed word that even in those worst times of cultural decay and decadence, Satan's darkness will not rule forever. His darkness cannot stay where Jesus' disciples reflect the character of the Light of the world.' He preached and it reminded me of a song we used to sing about letting your light shine.

I finally drove home feeling a whole lot better with myself.

A white Toyota is parked outside our yard. I don't know the car and surely it shouldn't be my concern.

Huh?

I bend down to pick up the white beads that laid on the stoep in front of our house.

Didn't I throw these away?

With my bags in hand I head in still flooded with plenty of unanswerable questions.

I freeze dead on my tracks when I'm met by Thokozani. My sister's ex...the one she went and left Luthando with.

"Hi." My voice suddenly cracks.

"Zano, hi."

I put my bags down. "Wh-What are you doing here?"

"I was hoping to find your sister, Zonke. To talk."

"Oh, well I doubt she's even here."

"So I've been told." He says and hushes the moving Luthando.

"That's why I waited for you."

"Me?"

He gets up from the couch and makes his way to me. Gently he hands me an awake Luthando and I'm smitten with the eyes that stare back into my soul. She's so beautiful and precious. Her skin was still smooth and delicate and didn't even have a single scratch on it. I still can't believe she was just tossed away like that. I sniff, blinking profusely trying to keep my tears in.

"I need help with her. I'm not coping with her and work here."

"I thought your mother was helping you out." I say, putting my finger in her tiny hold.

"She actually said she doesn't want bad luck."

"Bad luck?"

He shrugs.

"How am I supposed to help you?"

"Well I figured that since wena you work during the day and I work in the nighttime we could take turns looking after her."

"You work now?"

He nods. "As a security guard."

"I see." I hush her. "I don't know...I just don't know."

"Please. She's a peaceful baby and I'll make sure I buy her everything she needs." He says before I hear the door burst open.

I knew it was Zonke.

I turn to face her and I see the anger raging off her face. She looked at Thokozani and he looked to the floor, seemingly afraid.

"What's going on here Thokozani?"

"Uhhh...he's here-..." I try to speak, but she interrupts me.

"I was talking to Thokozani, wasn't I?" Her.

Ouch.

"Talk!" She snaps.

"I can't look after her alone Zonke." He explained.

"Alone? Do you even know what being alone is or you just think you can use that word whichever way you want."

It's quiet. I don't think I should be here.

"Where are you going?" her.

"Uhhh...I'm giving you guys some privacy..."

"Privacy yani when you've already overstepped your borders? Bring that baby here." Zonke says. "Entlek no, give it to him."

I open my mouth to speak, but swallow my words handing over the baby to her father.

"Now you listen to me. You bring that thing around here one more time, I'll strangle her."

"Haibo Zonke!"

"Stay out of this wena Gimba!" She snaps at me before moving from the door. "Leave!"

"You're a vile woman Zonke." Thokozani says.

"Ngifana nawe. Hamba!" Zonke commanded.

Thokozani picks up Thando's bag and slowly I watch him exit the house. Zonke clicks her tongue and walks past me knocking almost my whole shoulder with her.

Chapter Six.

"You deserve a love that is a safe place for your soul." ×
MORGAN LOVE.

••

I probably didn't hear her correctly and I'm probably having hallucinations because I definitely threw these beads away.

But...Who in their right mind carries a child for nine months full and threatens to kill it just like that. I sit up after a hectic four hour sleep session that didn't do me good. I knew my alarm was just mere minutes away from ringing but I could feel that there was no more sleep left in me.

I get up to go and boil myself some water to bath in. After that I take the bath. A quick and well deserved one. Somehow the little tiredness I had in me vanished. I get dressed and check on the time. It's nearly 6h00 and those two are still sound asleep I'm sure.

After waking them both up I go get started on some porridge for breakfast. While I was at it in she walked still in her gown and slippers.

"Lend me R400." She says.

"Good morning to you too Zonke. It wouldn't hurt to greet me."
I say and close my pot.

"You have the R400 or not?"

"Why do you need so much money?"

"Yoh, yeka (leave it) you should've just said you don't have it.
Nxa." She clicks her tongue and walks back to her room. The
one she shared with Buhle.

This was probably the perfect time to mention the fact that
Nyiso offered her some work but I'll bring that up later.
I switch off the stove just as Khaya walks into the sitting area,
carrying his tie and shoes.

"Haibo, someone did not bath properly." I say preparing 3
bowls. "6h20 and you're done with everything?"

"I have to be at school at 6h40."

"For?"

"Soccer meeting. We're playing this weekend." He says tying his
shoelaces.

"And you didn't tell me, why?" I quickly pour him two full
scoops of porridge accompanied by sugar and milk.

"You were gone. When I came back yesterday you were already
sleeping."

I bite on my bottom lip. "Oh. Makes sense. So it's you and I this
Saturday?"

"And you better keep your promise." He says.

"When have I never kept my promises?"

He shakes his head, eats three full scoops before grabbing his backpack and dashing out of the door, yelling a quick "Bye"

Wow.

"Eh, was that Khaya?" Buhle asks walking in carrying her bag.

"Yep. He said he has a meeting."

"Ohhh, he told me about it."

"You're going with me, right?"

"Nope. I can't, I have a study session with some friends."

"I hope these friends don't have penises." I say, shortly after hearing her gasp.

"Zano!" She said embarrassed.

"Whaatt? I'm serious."

"I don't have a boyfriend if that's what you're trying to ask me."
She says settling down and serving herself.

"Good. I'm not saying you can't have one but you need to focus on your schoolwork right now. Matric is an important year."

"You sound like Mrs Nkosi right now."

"No I don't." I chuckle and join her with breakfast. After she leaves, I'm out next .

I arrive at school at 07h00 and immediately head to the staffroom.

Great, the gossipers are at it again.

Siba waves at me. I give her a small smile before heading to where she was sitting.

"Hey." She greets me first.

"You're in a good mood."

"It's called love my darling."

I see.

"I thought you'd be a happy chappie too since you spent the weekend with your man."

"Well, it wasn't as fun as I thought it would be." I say, not wanting to talk about this any further. I had a terrible weekend and that's that. And what else is there to brag about? Your boyfriend being drunk for half of the time?

"Ag shame man. Maybe next time it will go better." She says.

Minutes later we're stuck in an early mandatory meeting.

•••

"So who can tell me what the difference is between an STI and an STD?" I ask looking around the classroom. Some are looking at each other. Some are shrugging. Some just seem absent from the lesson I'm trying to teach here.

My eyes dart to my boy at the back of the class. At least that hat of his is off today.

"Siya?"

"Haaa, ma'am. Why should I answer?"

"Because I think you know the answer."

"I don't ma'am."

"Come on ke, try." I encourage putting my textbook down.

"Uhhh...one is an infection and the other is a disease." He says sounding unsure.

"Okay. I can take that. Who can tell me more about this?

Mbali?"

"Well Ma'am Dlamini, I think the difference between the two is that not all diseases begin with infections, but many of them do." She answers and I reward her by clapping twice.

"Good. As you heard my two answers from those who are listening there is a clear difference between the two that can confuse you guys, especially in the exams."

"Yohhhh ma'am, why are you mentioning exams when we've just returned from the holidays?" A learner of mine asks.

"Because, you'll close your eyes and when you open them again it's your year end exams and you're sitting there trying to remember what the hell I said to you guys about this very topic, in period three." I say and turn to pick my book up while they laugh at whatever they found amusing in my statement.

"Next page my determined bunch."

"When are we going outside again Miss Dlamini?"

"Soon, for now focus. Who can give me an example of an STI? Without looking in the book."

"Ma'am, I still don't get it."

"Where did I lose you Thandeka?" I ask.

"At the difference part ma'am."

I sigh. "Okay." I'm pretty sure that she wasn't the only one who was still confused. "Grade nines, these two term stand for two different things. One is a Sexually transmitted infection and the other is a Sexually transmitted disease. Now listen, an STI is only considered an STD when it causes symptoms."

"Ohhhhh." I hear the class say.

"Yes, my fellow lost souls."

"Okay, thank you ma'am." Thandeka says and I nod.

I like it when we're all in understanding like this. I know I still have to repeat this very topic to 3 more classes but it is what it is.

"Now back to the examples..." I say.

"Chlamydia ma'am Dlamini. "

"Why is Chlamydia considered an STI and not an STD?" I ask.

"No symptoms ma'am." A learner of mine says.

"We're getting somewhere. Now, trick question is HIV an STD?"

"Yesss ma'am!" Some of them yell in unison.

I chuckle.

"Manje iAIDS yona?" I ask.

"Yoh ma'am No!" They laugh.

•••

"Mge, I'm sorry for reacting the way I did, it was uncalled for."

Nyiso says on the other end of the line.

It was still break time here at Malinga High. I'm sitting in my class, half relieved at the fact that Nyiso was okay, but pissed at how she treated me. She has never done such before and I think that's why it didn't sit well with me.

"Mge are you there? Hello?"

"I'm here Nonkanyiso." I clear my throat.

"Then why are you so quiet? I'm apologising here phela."

"I hear you. Oh and your wish did come true...Zweli and I didn't do anything." I say rolling my eyes.

"That's...sad...So you forgive me?" She asks. The first part wasn't genuine and I could tell.

"No."

"Hau Mge, I'm sorry. Like I shouldn't have insulted uZweli like that."

"Ya vele, you shouldn't have talked about my man like that. In fact you owe me lunch." I say.

"How does that new take away place that opened in Mega park sound like?"

"It Sounds like you're going to be paying, and I'm okay with that." I say and hear her laugh.

"I'll see you at 15h00 then, is that enough time for you to freshen up?" She asks.

"Make it 15h30, somaar a late lunch."

"Okay done...can I ask one more thing?" Nyiso.

I look up to see Siba walking in carrying two wraps. I smile. She sits on a table that is not so far from my desk.

"No."

"Come on...it's a harmless question."

"Pffft, wena harmless? hai go ahead...ask." I say.

"How are things between you and the Prince?"

Yoh! Jesus is Lord!

"Things? Mge what things?"

"You two are close moes."

"Close in what sense? I'm just helping the poor guy out." Me.
Siba passes me a wrap.

"Thanks" I mouth to her.

"Holy balls! You think the Prince needs your help?"

"Yes." I answer rather confidently.

"Mge, I just think he wants to spend time with you."

"He has a girlfriend."

"I know, but..."

"Nyiso there are no but's here okay. He and I are just...working partners. And can we please stop talking about him, Yoh."

"Okay, okay okay...fine."

"Good, now can I enjoy the rest of my break?"

"Sure." She giggles and I hang up, rolling my eyes again.

What the hell was that?

Nyiso is definitely in her own world.

I look up to Siba who's just starring at me probably wondering who I was talking about. I feel a little embarrassed now.

"And who is this guy you were talking about?"

"Hai, some guy nje. No one important. Let's eat."



We've been sitting in this car for minutes, with me listening to him laugh on the phone with someone I'm not even sure I know. The only thing I have running through my mind to aid in distracting is thinking how beautiful this park is. And of course how much better it would be with some proper Tender, Love and Care. The grass would be greener. The swings bright and renewed. Even those benches would do with some revitalising.

I eye him as he breaks into more laughter with the stranger on the other end.

How funny can one person be?

I'm sure they don't look like boiled eggs when they wear white Jeans and sandals and yellow tops.

I can't even believe that I'm still thinking of that stupid status. It's ancient news. Ancient being 5 days ago. I lightly shake my head. The love of my life remembered to finally call me today. Imagine. I was pleased though and happy he was okay.

He laughs again.

Yoh, I could just toss his phone out of the bloody window if he laughs like this one more time.

Was it Zola or Oscar or any of his other friends making him laugh this much?

I try distracting myself once more, hoping this call would end soon. I notice he has a whole unopened pack of Courtleigh cigarettes.

My own phone is such a bore right now.

Why is nobody calling me too so I can laugh like Zweli?

What are they even talking about?

"Mpilo

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look I'll call you later. Yeah. Bye." He hangs up and chuckles once more before typing something on his phone.

"So...is this Mpilo person a new friend?" I ask after a few more awkward quiet seconds.

"Huh?"

"You heard me Zweli."

"Awume wena, what's with the million questions?" He asks looking me in the eye.

"I asked you one question."

"Indoda ayibuzwa (You should never question a man)"

"Wait, is Mpilo the same...no marn Zweli...you're cheating on me again aren't you?"

"No!"

"Then why are the two of you calling each other! L-laughing like there's no tomorrow?" I ask my fist held up to my lips as I felt how anger was just ready to consume me.

"We're just friends." He shrugs.

"Friends? You have no right to be friends with that girl Zweli!"

"You will not shout at me wena!" He shouts and I go mute, sitting back on my seat. "I said you will not ask me any questions cause I'm the man here."

I look away.

"Besides Mpilo gives me more attention than you do." He says, very arrogantly even. I slowly turn to look at him, frowning hard with my mouth stupidly hanging open.

"I don't give you attention Zweli?"

He chuckles coldly.

"Zweli I came to visit you for two days and you decided to drink yourself to death angisho. How dare you say I don't give you attention? I make sure to text you when I can. I make sure to call you when I can. This visit even made me do something I've never done before."

"Yeah but that's not enough."

"Then what do you want from me?" I half yell.

He gives me a cold look. The hair at the back of my neck stood up in attention as the coldness of this car became prominent. "Zano, raise your voice at me one more time I swear!"

"You visiting me and making those useless calls is not enough! I need more."

"More?"

"Yes! How-how long should I wait?" He stutters. "Which relationship have you ever heard of is sexless for 10 months straight huh? So that means you don't see me as a man neh? You don't respect me, that clearly means you don't care about me. I have needs you have to satisfy as my girlfriend!"

"That is not true Zwelibanzi and you know that."

"You know what...Tsek, phuma! (Get out)"

"What?" I ask taken aback. He can't be serious. We have an intense eye contest, with him consumed by his sudden anger.

For a moment there my mind just wondered how the heck we got to this point. How did he just go from laughing to a full out fuse blowing attitude.

"Phuma. Uit. (Out.)" He commands again, reaching over and opens my door from the inside.

"Zweli, why are you doing this?"

"Zano, get out!" He hisses.

I swallow. With a tail between my legs I step out of the car and he pulls the door shut.

No, he must be joking. He'll laugh, probably open the door again and apologise letting me in.

I hear the engine roar to life before he drives off, leaving me stranded at this hideous and dull park. I sigh, going to sit at those old unkept benches. Taxi's rarely come through this side at this time. The few people here are luckily just minding their own business.

I grab my phone out of my bag to check the time and to see if Nyiso can't come get me. It's almost 16h30.

I should've just stayed at home and prepared for the outdoor activity I'll be giving those grade nines.

"Please pick up." I mumble as the phone rang near my ear, waiting almost impatiently for Nyiso to answer my call.

What if she doesn't?

Uber? How much are those?

"Bestie." A deep rustic voice answers and my eyes go wide.

"Uhhmm...Hi." I answer awkwardly.

I hear some movements.

"Hello Zanokuhle, my wife is in the bath." He says humour evident in his voice. Is he laughing at me?

"Oh. I take it I can't talk to her then." That was supposed to stay in my thoughts only.

"I can take the phone to-..."

"No no, it's fine really. Thanks."

"Okay. I'll let her know you called." He says and I quickly hang up.

I've spoken to this man once and that was it. It wasn't even a long conversation at that but it happened and he seemed like an okay person then, just like now.

Well at least Nyiso is enjoying herself.

It was moments like these where I wish Buhle or even Khaya knew how to drive. Look, now I would've called one of them to come and fetch my deserted ass. I get up from the bench and hook my bag around my shoulder as I begin this long journey back home. The sun is on another level today too now that I'm outside. It's like it saw me and then it decided to worsen.

I knew I'd probably smell like the sun after this. Just like Khaya after his practices.

As I was walking I thought of calling Zweli and apologise for how I spoke to him and for how I should've reacted in a proper way.

I dial his number, but it hangs up.

Maybe I've run out of airtime and minutes. I quickly check my balance...hau.

I dial him again and it does the same thing.

I have full network coverage yet this happens.

I try again, but this time it just tosses me straight to voicemail.

Wow. Just wow. He must really be angry at me. I sigh and put my phone away continuing ahead. The streets are empty. People are in their yards enjoying shade from their trees and cold beverages. Kids are playing under the watchful eye

enjoying their after school rest. This place -as poor as it was- was a not so bad place to be.

A Vibration from my phone is what stops me on my tracks. I frown answering.

"Hello." I say.

"Lol. Mge it's me. Sorry about earlier, Mandla was being extra." She says.

"Yoh Mge, I felt so awkward." I wave at the lady that passes me.

"He apologizes for that too. Anyway what's up?"

"I needed a ride home. I actually still need one."

"Why? Did Chery break down again?"

"No."

"Also aren't you supposed to be on a date with Zweli?"

I clear my throat.

"Talk mge."

"We fought and he left me."

"Left you where?"

"At the park." I say in a low tone.

"Holy balls! Kude sio! (so far)"

"Imagine."

"Must've been a serious fight then for him to do that to you. Aren't there any taxi's around?"

"This wouldn't be the conversation if there were any." I say.

"Okay...call Bangi mos."

"Who? Are you insane?"

"Do you have another plan?"

"Can't you come and fetch me?" I ask.

"Hubby made plans I can't change."

I sigh. I don't want to call Bangi. There has to be someone else.

Yes, I'll try Siba.

"Call Bangi. Simple."

"I'm going to call someone else."

I hang up and dial Siba's number but I'm told the "I'm busy."

Line again. So everyone is just suddenly busy? And no one is even going to come get a friend? Why are there no taxi

here...wait there's one. I jog towards it, only for it to drive off. It looked full anyway.

Great, so now I have to call this man.

Great. Great. Great.

Just Great.

"Hey."

"Great." I blurt, face palming myself shortly after.

"Great?" He chuckles.

"I meant hey...look sorry for just bothering you on such a busy day and whatever since I know you're a busy guy and busy

people shouldn't be disturbed."

"What's wrong Zanokuhle?" He asks.

"I need a ride back home."

"Your road hazard broke down again?" He chuckles once more.

"Not you too." I roll my eyes.

"I'm sorry. Dry joke. Where are you?"

"I can send you...my location."

"Perfect. I'll be there as soon as I can." He says and I hang up.

The location is sent as I find my rest on a big rock that is pocking on my behind.

I can't believe I just did that. The man must really think I'm a bum who cant have anything go right for them.

'I can't see you.'

'you're here already?'

'Affirmative'

That was quick! I sent my location 20 something minutes back.

'are you driving and texting?'

'no. I'm parked on the side.'

'oh. What do you see?'

'red roofed house. Two big trees.'

I look up. Two big trees?

'do you know of any park around here?'

'no.'

Gosh!

I get up from my rock and start scouting for an out of place looking man, mannequins, two big trees and a red damn roof. I even ask a woman who directs me to where she thinks this place is. I text him where to drive to and after another 5 minutes of being lost I see him drive up the street I'm at.

No mannequins?

He steps out of his car with the biggest smile on his lips. I find myself returning it, not wanting to be rude...

"You look beautiful"

"Don't lie."

"I'd never lie to you like that." He says opening a door and signals for me to get in. I do, sinking into that seat once more. He closes the door before I watch him walk gracefully to his side.

I buckle up before we drive on off.

"Thank you."

"For what?" He slightly looks at me before focussing back on the road.

"You came to my rescue. For that I'm grateful."

"It's nothing." He says.

He has to be lying. No man of his status is ever not busy.

I'm glad he's not even asking how I got here in the first place.

"Where are your mannequines?" I ask.

"Mannequines?"

"I'm talking about your guards."

He clears his throat and my eyes are on him in seconds.

"It doesn't matter."

"So your safety doesn't matter too?"

"You Care About my safety?"

"Of course I care...I mean...if someone attacked you or something and you're with me I'm going to get blamed and..." I trail off, averting my attention from him again.

What am I even saying?

"You hungry?" He asks.

"Yes." I blurt out too fast.

Yoh hai Zanokuhle!

"Then it's food that you shall get."

"No, just take me home, I'm sure there's something I can make there."

"I know a great joint not so far from here."

"Did you hear what I said?"

"It's just food Zano."

"Okay. Fine." I raise my hands in defeat.

A few minutes later we walk into the restaurant and its like I painted myself yellow. I felt so out of place. "Private table for two please." He says to the Maître d'hôtel.

"Most certainly my Prince. Thandi, take the Prince and his guest to our private dining area."

"Of course, please follow me." Thandi says and starts leading us past the eyes that kept themselves on me. Yes, I was the 'guest' in jeans and a black top, with my arm hooked to Bangi's.

The chandeliers here!

Oh crap...he pulls me up but it's already too late. I've already landed on the floor with both my knees after tripping over my own two feet. I hear a few laughs from people. We're at the bottom of some stairs? Why am I laughing at myself too?

"Goddammit Zano, are you okay? You can't keep falling for me like this." Bangi says.

What?

I giggle, nodding. "My jeans broke my fall." I'll just ignore what he said in the last bit.

"You keep falling like this I might end up thinking you need to see a specialist." Oh he's giggling too.

"Feed me please." I state as we start making our way up these stairs.

Our waiter shows us our private table. Its only us and another couple here. The lights are a bit dim and it smells of mouthwatering food. The classical music plays ever so gently. He pulls a chair out for me before I sit. Never have I ever had someone do that for me. Thandi hands us each a menu and I nearly fall off my chair when I see the prices. R340 for a crab dish. I lower my menu to see Bangi nodding as he looked through the menu. He looks up and our eyes meet.

"What will you be having?" *Your sexy lips...*

Wait, what the shit! That is not what I just thought...nope, it can't be. I have a boyfriend. I love him. I avert my eyes from his and drown myself in this menu.

What is Coq au Vin?

Confit de can...can- what canard?

"I...I don't know..." I swallow. He chuckles and looks up at Thandi, putting his menu down. I mirror his actions.

"We'll have one of everything." He tells Thandi.

"What would you like to drink?" Thandi asks.

"Juice, orange juice." He says. I order the same. I don't drink. Our waiter leaves and its a moment of taking in my surroundings.

He asks me how my day was. I tell him about my short day at work. I don't tell him about being left behind by Zweli at the park. I tell him about Khaya's soccer game this Saturday - I don't know why. Thandi brings our drinks. He whispers something to her. She nods and walks off after telling us about when our first course will be arriving.

"So who are you going with to your brother's match?"

"No one." "So I can go with you?"

"No." "Why not?"

"I don't want you to go with me." I say sipping my juice.

"Ouch, that hurt my feelings." He says.

"Its about my brother this Saturday, not you." I say.

"How will me being there affect his game?"

"Hello...have you not been awake for the past 28 years of your life to not see that your presence never goes unnoticed. No one will focus on the game with you there."

He rolls his eyes. Never have I ever!

"Fine, point taken. I'll respect your wishes."

I give him a genuine smile.

The music goes from songs I've never heard before to one that has me grinning.

"I hoped you'd like this song too...would you like to dance?" He asks already up on his two feet and his hand out for me to take. I go from grinning to a mouth open in shock.

"Dance? I can't dance." I shake my head.

"Come on." He pushes. The couple is staring. I sigh getting up, he takes my hand into his and its only then that I notice how big his hands are. We walk to the side of our table and he leaps forward almost closing the space between us. The man is almost a head taller than me. He smells of good dreams, success and expensive cologne.

He puts his one hand at the small of my back. Mine goes onto his arm. Our other hands are clasped together. He takes the first step forward and steps on my shoes. I giggle stepping back.

"I may have forgotten to mention I can't dance too." He giggles.

He didn't have to tell me that twice.

"Those are some nice beads." He says his eyes glued to my hand. Something told me wear them and here they are. I tried disposing them again a day after they reappeared on my stoep and guess what...

"Sheesh, just nice? I got them from an old man."

"Old man?"

"Creepy right?" I laugh it off.

I'm sure he was thinking that I'm crazy for wearing beads I got from an old man I didn't know.

*" Everyone stands in judgement
People watching as the curtain falls down
See the lights do a long slow fade*

*The show goes on
And the sad eye sisters go walking on
Everyone watching all along
The show goes on
As the autumn's coming
And the summer's all gone
Still without you
The show goes on*

*Some say she's alright
Some say she'll never learn
Some rush into things
Some stand and wait their turn..."*

As the song continued ahead we got used to whatever it was that we were doing. A not so perfect dance with dumb laughs in between.

How the hell did I end up here?

Chapter Seven.

*"Impossible is a word to be found in the dictionary of fools." ×
Napoleon Bonaparte.*

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"2!" Siya says holding up two fingers.

"Ma'am can't we just go once?" Another one says.

"Do you want me to make it three times? Come on now." I say and they start rushing away tackling the warm up activity I just gave them.

Well how hypocritical I wouldn't be able to jog even once around this field like these kids are but here I was grinning at my hard work. I should be the one running off the 10 mains and 6 delicious desserts I allowed myself yesterday. The Crème brulé has me shaking in my size 40 jeans. They're definitely resting on my hips and belly now...or maybe my second chin...or my arms?

Point is, they were somewhere in my body right now, figuring ways to make me feel even more unflattering.

But that doesn't dismiss the fun I had yesterday. Yes, that's what I had...and I wasn't going to deny myself that luxury especially when I had no regrets. He was an absolute sweetie the whole time we were at that place.

"Siya! Jog boy!" I yell out, seeing him and his tiny gang walking on the field.

"You are making the one and only Siyabonga Xaba and his friends run? Who are you and what do you have against the boy?" A voice startles me.

Oh.

"Michael...I mean Mr Jones."

"Michael sounded better." He sits down next to me on the bench, very closely too at that.

"Why are you here?" I ask.

"I always come here on my free periods Zanokuhle...you don't mind me calling you by your name right?"

I slowly shake my head.

We have an iffy past. He likes me, I don't. We have been avoiding each other since I rejected him the third time he asked me to be his girlfriend. Only Siba and Nyiso know about this and probably that old hag Radebe, but other than those three, it's tight. Actually knowing Radebe as the leader of the gossipers, she might have told all of them what a terrible person I was for rejecting such a nice young man.

I myself wouldn't lie and paint him as this ugly guy when he was in fact the opposite. He's colored, tall and quite easy on the eye. Even if I rejected him because I was already with Zweli. But

given I was single, I would most probably have given him a chance.

"Nope, we're cool." I say focusing back on the young adults on the field. The athletic ones were already on their second lap.

"I'm glad, I thought you hated me."

"Why would I hate you?"

"Well, I laid my feelings out even after I got the feeling you would say no again. I mean, you're a sexy, voluptuous young woman...I don't know what I was thinking asking so much from you." He says, opening the can of Coke in his hold. "Sip?"

I shake my head.

"You're making me feel guilty." I say looking down at my knotted fingers.

"No don't, please." Him. I look up. "Besides, you know what they say, never date your crush."

"Because it ends up terribly?"

"Yep. And I doubt I'd be able to continue my life knowing that we ended up hating each other for stupid things that probably would've happened in our relationship."

Relationship huh...

Did he really have to say I'm voluptuous?

I nod, focussing back on the field as some of my learners finished their second laps.

"You guys can sit on the grass. Relax." I say.

"Thank you ma'am." This one boy is still stretching. Talk about determination.

When they all return, I allow them to have a moment of relaxation on the grass. Some were mad tired, the others not so much. After about five minutes I get up from the bench to give them their task.

"Okay, grade nines it's time for you guys to complete a few things for marks."

"Ma'am can't we start at the following outdoor period?" A learner asks.

"Yeah, can't we chill?"

"Chill? Grade nines you really don't take Life Orientation seriously hey."

"Ma'am we'll do the push ups later."

"Yes!"

"Oh so now everybody is ganging up on me?" I ask.

"No, we're just giving you the period off ma'am, see it's a win-win situation." Siya says.

I find myself chuckling as I sit back down again. Okay, these kids win for today, but the next outdoor period is not for these games. I'm here to do my job.



"Sis Nonkanyiso, can you drive faster?" Khaya says sticking his head between the passenger and driver seat.

"Haibo, how fast do you want us to be on this gravel road?" She asks.

"Patience Khaya." I say.

"I'm late!" He sobs.

"It's not even 8h00 yet." I say shaking my head.

He sits back with a heavy sigh that has me chuckling. Now this is what I call utter and pure passion. You'd swear he was getting paid for all of this. I asked Nyiso in the late hours of the previous night through text if she would like to come with me to this match.

A few minutes later we're parked by a few feet from the field. Khaya left us the moment we parked here. I watched him from where we stood. Nyiso busied herself on her phone, surely chatting up a storm with her soulmate. It felt like he was here with us and I was their third wheel at some point.

And I wish I could do the same, but we all know how my man acted two days ago.

"Mge."

"Mhnnn?" I eye her as she put her phone away. I hug myself.

"Can I tell you something?"

"Something like?"

"I think I have a problem." She says after a long pause.

"Problem?"

"Yes, like a fertility problem."

"Haibo what makes you say that?"

"We've been trying for two years now and still nothing has happened." She sighs.

What a conversation to have on a soccer field...

I pout. "Why do you think you're the one with the problem here? It could just as well be him with the fault here."

"I think not."

"Mge, you know I'm right...plus it just might not be time for you two to have this child, you know God and his timing."

"Can't God see I'm getting old kanti?"

"Nyiso you're only 25, where's the old in there?" I chortle. I know it was an awkward time to just laugh, but I felt like she was putting unnecessary pressure on herself. "Also if you feel like something is wrong then maybe you should go see a professional."

She heaves out another heavy sigh before nodding.

When the clock finally strikes 10h00, is really when a lot of people started showing up. The dramatic ones bought cooler boxes, camping chairs, speakers and huge beach umbrellas.

We the -not so dramatic ones- just shared a standard umbrella and *Cool Time* ice blocks we bought from a young fellow. I

could tell there were some proud parents and siblings around this field. I was now one of them. May I also add that it was mad loud and it reeked of smoke and *boerewors*.

The soccer match started nearly 30 minutes ago and it's been me yelling at the boy to do what I would assume to be correct. He ran fast on that field. One minute he's on this side, the next he's on the other far end.

"Go Khaya!" I yell again.

He passes the ball, but unfortunately an opposite team member gets to the ball first and rushes off to his team goal. I'm crossing my fingers and he actually misses. He's tackled, tripped and the next thing I hear is a whistle going off and a card being pulled out.

"Come on!" someone yells sounding frustrated.

"And then?" I ask looking at Nyiso who looks just as irritated.

"That was a yellow card."

"I saw that."

"It means he has a warning."

"Oh." I nod. That did look painful.

The match carries on for a little longer than an hour before it ends with a final score of 3-2. Khaya scored that final goal and they went ballistic. Even me. You should have seen me hug and high five complete strangers out of pure joy. I now kind of see

what makes Khaya love this like crazy and dramatic sport...well apart from the fact that this will probably make him get the ladies like crazy -when older of course. It's the fact that he was really good. Those late practices and sweaty afternoons are showing when he's on that field.

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Nyiso dropped us off a few hours ago before leaving after having a glass of water. I was tired, but getting here and seeing Buhle busy with the laundry made me feel guilty, and with Khaya complaining about being tired as well, I had to force myself to work.

The hooting of a car makes me look up and my face immediately frowns.

What is he doing here?

He parks, gets out and sets alight a cigarette. I dry my hands with my baggy pants before excusing myself from Buhle's side to go to chase him away. How dare he set foot here!

"What are you doing here?" I ask even before I reach him.

"I know you're pissed at how I acted the other day."

I chuckle in disbelief. "Pissed? You left me at that park like I was just some *tramp* you wanted nothing to do with." I half shout. He was pissing me off.

"I'm sorry. I was just angry as well. It seemed right for me to

just chase you out of my car than to listen to you talk." He says.
"Zano you know I care about you and I don't want to lose you because of my stupid actions. I'll work on myself...for you." The smell of smoke nearly makes me cough as he huffs it out.

"Can you stop smoking?" I plead looking him in the eye.
"It's almost finished." He brushes me off. I shake my head, crossing my arms in front of my chest.

"Uncle Zweli." I hear Khaya say from behind me, causing me to turn almost immediately with my eyebrows furrowed.

Hau, isn't this one resting?

And since when does he call Zweli 'uncle'?

Who died and even made him that to my little brother?

And for what good reason?

And why did I not like that title to his name?

"Khaya! My boy." They fist pump.

"Ufunani la? (What do you want here?)" I ask.

"I heard a familiar voice so I thought I should come out and greet." Khaya says.

"He's a good kid. Great on the field too." Zweli.

"Ah Thanks." Khaya.

"Since you're up, go help Buhle with the washing." I say.

"But Zano..." I can hear he's embarrassed about me saying this in front of his so called *uncle*.

Come to think of it...when has Khaya ever started talking to Zweli like that?

"I'm not about to argue with you. Go." I say.

He mumbles something I can't hear, storming off in anger. I don't have the energy to argue with a 16 year old.

"Why are you letting the boy do a females job?" Zweli.

"Females job how? You do your own laundry mos." I say. "Also, I do not want you saying what I can and cannot do when raising these kids."

"Okay. Anyway I bought you something." He finally discards the cigarette butt before opening the backseat of his Gusheshe and coming back holding a bouquet of roses, a Teddy bear and a box of assorted chocolates. I think I feel my lips twitch.

"What is this?" I ask trying hard to keep a straight face.

I know what it is but...

"This is my apology."

"Zweli..."

"Please, I'm sorry Zano baby. Take..." He hands them to me, and I hesitate on taking these things. "Please."

I sigh and take them. Talk about determination. Even the teddy held a heart with those *'I'm sorry'* words written in cursive.

"So am I forgiven?" He asks me coming closer

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and takes a hold of my elbows.

I find myself looking at him. The stubble on his face...his light skin...that trimmed hairline and neat ass haircut. He was a sight to behold. He widens his eyes, reminding me of the answer I still had to give to him.

"Sure." I mumble. Next time, I won't be so forgiving.

He tilts my head up and places a soft kiss on my lips.

"Excuse me!" I hear mama Lilly yell causing me to break it. That weird feeling again, that has us feeling awkward. I spot her in her yard wearing one of her larger than life sunhats and her hands firmly on her hips.

"Oh, Hello Mama Lilly." My eyes can't stay on her...maybe on the floor...Buhle and Khaya giggling...the five kids playing *umathashane* and the loose dog wandering these gravel streets...but just not her.

"Zanokuhle, why are romancing a boy in front of children? During the elders? Don't you see us anymore?"

"I...I..." I hear Zweli chortle right next to me. "I'm sorry mama."

I watch her shaking her head before heading inside her house leaving me with laughing idiots. "Its not funny."

"Did she say 'during the elders'?" Zweli asks and I shake my head. Let us not continue talking about what just happened here.

"You want to come in for a drink?"

"Is it a beer?" He asks before I give him a bored look.

"Zweli don't start with me."

"I'm joking baby. I'll come in for some holy water." He chuckles.

I force my gifts into one arm hold and take his hand into mine before heading off inside. Once inside I give him a glass of my very own juice instead of water while he settled down by the table.

"You should come visit me again"

"Awa, Not a chance"

"Hau, why not?"

"This past visit wasn't even all that. Also I'm not...I'm not ready yet." I sit down right across him.

"Zano."

"No, I'm serious. Don't you at least want me to be... in some sense ready for this?"

"You talk like you're some virgin, what's the big deal vele?" He says carelessly.

I choke.

"Wait, baby...you've never had sex before?" He leans forward quickly, nearly knocking his glass off the table.

Yoh haii.

"When do you want me to come visit?"

"Baby, Zano wami...there's nothing to be afraid of. Kanti, why didn't you tell me this before?" He gets up, grabs his chair and comes to sit next to me.

Yeah, maybe I should go around with a board written '*I am a virgin hello.*'

I look at my knotted fingers, ignoring the strong nicotine smell coming from him. He was so close to me, I could hear him breathing. I lift my eyes and meet his.

"I'm sorry."

"You don't need to be Zano. I love you."

I frown. "Just because of my virginity?"

"What? No no no, I love you because of many other things Zano."

"Yeah, like?"

"Like...like your innocence...I mean your personality and uh, your kindness." He says.

That's all? In the struggling 7 months of our relationship that's all he can say about me?

I nod and watch how he reaches behind him retrieving his wallet. Inside he takes out R200 notes and hands them all to me. I frown looking around me.

"And then? What's this?"

"Money. R1000."

"For what?" I ask.

I question this because I've never received money from this man here apart from these tiny gifts. I would 'spoil' myself with whatever money I had left after taking care of all the needs of the Dlamini household. I would buy my own stuff, including things like airtime. I'm not saying Zweli had to do all those things. In fact, I think I didn't see it as a big problem or whatever because I am working just like he is.

"Spoil yourself." He says simply, taking my hand and shoving the money in there.

"Zweli I can't take this." I attempt on shoving it back into his hand.

"Why? Is someone else giving you money now Zanokuhle?"

"Don't be crazy. You've already given me so much and now this."

"Yes. Take it."

I sigh.

"I'll pay you back."

"I wasn't borrowing you this money the last time I checked. Zano just be a good girlfriend and use this money on yourself." He says, reaches for his juice and downs it in almost one go.

"Thanks I guess..." I mumble.

"There we go, now give your man a kiss." He says pointing to his cheek. I lean in to quickly plant one when he quickly turns his head and my lips land on his. I giggle. He used to do these stupidly cute gestures back in the early stages of our relationship. I realise how I actually did miss this- Us being like this and just having a simple talk. Even if it wasn't a talk...or not worrying about a so called Mpilonhle.

His phone starts ringing in the midst of whatever this was and I hear him curse taking it out. He eyes go wide for a short period of time before going back to normal with him clearing his throat. "Work calling even on a Saturday."

"You can answer it."

"No, they'll call again if they're serious." He hangs up. "I have to get going anyway."

"Oh...okay." I say.

Yes, that was my heart breaking a little. I was hoping we'd do some more talking .

We both get up. I collect his glass and put it in the dish washing bowl. I walk him to his gusheshe. "I guess I'll text you later then." I say.

"So you're coming this weekend and no butts." he says.

No butts?

I take in a deep breath.

Why does it still smell like cigarettes out here?

I hear his phone ringing again. They must really need him at work and here I am keeping the man at bay for just a simple yes or no answer.

"Fine. I'll come, but only if you promise it's not going to be like last time." I say making a mental note to remember to tell Bangi that I'm cancelling on our plans for community work. I know he won't like this but right now he has to understand that I have priorities too. Just like my relationship. Besides I'm sure he'd do the same thing had something similar come up.

Zweli makes a promise to me, telling me that a repeat of last time is definitely not going to happen. We share a brief hug before he disappears into his car. I hear the roar of his engine next, followed by the distinct smell of exhaust fumes. The man blows me a kiss before driving off, leaving me all giddy inside. I watched his car vanish from view a few seconds later and when

I turn back to my two siblings, I find them staring at me like hawks.

I shrug. They look at each other and chuckle.

"I won't be explaining myself. Qhubekani lapho. (Carry on there)" I say and head back inside with only one mission in mind ; attacking those chocolates.



"Siyabonga sit down boy." I order walking into my classroom with their new classwork activity. He's quick to find his seat as I greet the whole class. I have a few of them open a few windows to allow the air to circulate and have their minds thinking with fresh oxygen.

"Get out your textbooks, we have some work to go through." I say placing the work on the tables of my front row learners.

"Please hand those out for me."

"Ma'am I forgot my textbook at home." Someone says. I look up to see Andile looking like the culprit and I sigh.

"And what did you think you were going to be doing in my class the whole 40 minutes?"

"I'm sorry ma'am." He says.

"Fine, but the next time you forget your textbook, I'll have to send you out. And that goes out to the rest of you guys. I can't

have you distracting one another here while you're supposed to be learning. Come borrow mine, but I want it back." I say.

He gets up.

"Does everyone have today's activity?"

"Yesss ma'am!" They say in unison. I nod and open my book on page 43, where the rest really should be too.

"Right, we last spoke about those nasty and sneaky STI's and STD's am I correct?"

They agree.

"And everyone can remember what each is and how you can differentiate between the two?" I ask and they agree once more. "Good, that means you guys are going to be passing Life Orientation with flying colors moes. Anyway, we are still on this topic but today we're going to be focussing on HIV and Aids. Now I'm sure many of you know what that is cause it's been shoved down your throats so many times already and guess what? I'll be doing the exact same thing."

I hear some of them chortle and some complain.

"But ma'am you said it yourself, we know these things."

"Yet some of you still fail."

"Ma'am it's the kids that don't focus in class." A girl says.

"Siya..."

"Hai ma'am, ngenzeni manje? (What did I do now?)" He asks sitting up.

I chuckle, shaking my head.

"Relax, my boy. Give me an example of how you can contract HIV?"

"Uh, ma'am through sex."

"Unprotected sex with an infected person. Keyword, unprotected. If you wake up and decide to have sex someone without a condom, especially someone you don't know cause lets face it, you guys know about these things. You're at the stage where it may sound cool to just sleep around. And idiotically you'll only worry about pregnancy forgetting that there *are* things like STI's and STDs which are also worse than other things." I say.

"Ma'am, can you have an HIV negative baby when you're positive?" I get questioned.

"Absolutely. I'm not a 100% percent certain about the facts but it sure is possible." I answer.

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Break time came and I was already tired of the day and it's tasks. Lucky for me though, I was off for the following period which meant I'd be relaxing and see if I could go and take a quick nap in Chery...

I chuckle. Who was I kidding?

I had stacks of grade 9 scripts that weren't going to be checking themselves out. I had to do that before I get any surprise visits from our inspectors. I hated not being prepared cause I've endured the stress of not being up to date with your mark sheets, projects and even the mere task I'm tackling right now - checking of books. I was told that's all I knew...waking up to sign in at work to do absolutely nothing but eat and take your salary.

Yeah, I remember crying my lungs out for that mistake.

I get up to go grace them with my presence at the staff room. I cannot spot Siba anywhere, but I do spot Mr Jo-...I mean Michael grinning and waving at me. I return the awkward wave quickly hoping he doesn't leave his friends and heads on here. I'm glad we're not being awkward anymore since our talk on that bench.

When I finally spot Siba I sit next to her and silently greet her too.

"I swear if I get those grade 10C's again, I'll go crazy." She says.

"What did they now?" I ask.

"Yoh, They wouldn't listen to me, ngapha I'm trying to teach...yoh it was chaos. I even chased half of them out of my class."

"And you reported this?"

"Of course I did. I'm sure the Principal will deal with them kahle nje." She says. I nod.

I can imagine having to deal with children who think they've got it all figured out just because they got to choose their favourite subjects at the end of last year.

Also, isn't it too soon for them to be causing such drama?

I already know I'll be spending most of my afternoon stuck at this meeting.

How exciting.

Chapter Eight.

"Never let fear dictate how you live your life" x UNKNOWN.

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"Ngiphe futhi." The woman prompts holding her hand out not so far from my face. I quickly tried shifting my dead buttocks in hopes of reviving them. The one side is already getting pulled at as her friend finished off my braid.

"Same size?"

"Sesi, sesiyoceda inhloko yonke lena usangibuza lokho.(we're almost done with your whole head yet you still ask me that?)"
She says.

Hau?

The friend on my other side laughs a little at the words this woman just spoke. I sigh. Buhle did warn me about her hot mouth but I was determined to come here cause her work was excellent and cheap.

"Okay." I mumble. I was just making sure. I take a small strand out of what was left of the hairpiece in my hold and give it to her. She wastes no time in painfully braiding it onto my hair. She was definitely doing this on purpose now and if it wasn't for the fact that she was almost done with my whole head, I

would've been out of this yard. Leaving it behind with it's uncomfortable wooden chair.

Would it kill the woman to at least give me a pillow to sit on?

"Anyway chomie, as I was saying neh...he refuses to give me child support money and mina uyangazi ngiyahlanya. (You know I'm crazy)"

"Haibo mngani, kanti unjani lo baby daddy wakho?"the friend asks.

"He's hot and cold chomie. Angazi bengiyaphi kuye nje." She says. I've been listening to them go on a rant and rave about their lives for the past couple of hours and honestly it was entertainment galore. There's a lot one misses when their lives revolve around working and staying at home.

"Sesi, are you in a relationship?"she asks popping her head to my view.

"Mina?" I ask, eyes wide.

"Ya." She nods slightly.

"Yes." I answer. She was about to move her gaze from me when she quickly looked at me again.

"Children?" She asks once more.

"No." I shake my head.

Where is this going?

"You see chomie, nami I could've waited." She returns back to braiding my hair.

"So you're saying you'd rather not have Qhophelo?" The friend asks.

"I'm not saying that my friend. I'm saying I'd have rather had a different baby father yaz. A rich one befuthi. People like judging a girl when they want a rich man but know very well that they won't support you after the fact. "

"It's the same as these anti-abortion people who keep telling you about keeping your baby but know very well that they won't help you with it when it's born and giving you sleepless nights."

"Ucinisile wena chomie, that's why I aborted my first pregnancy back in highschool."

Iyoh!

"Highschool friend?" The friend sounds shocked.

"Ya, its a long story."

"I'm sorry but can't you guys use condoms?" I ask.

"Sesi, icondom iyaquma. (Condoms burst)"

"That is very rare though...Okay what about iprevention?" me again.

"Prevention makes me ill." The friend says.

"Mina it makes me gain weight." Ms braider says.

I can't believe I forgot her name.

"So you'd rather fall pregnant and then kill the fetus, rather than going through this prevention thing that you claim makes you sick? Or fat?"

"Sesi why ngathi you're one of those anti-abortion people nje?"
Ms braider asks.

"Abo Pro-life." The friend adds.

"I'm not anti-abortion. I just believe there's a time and place for everything. Like if you've been raped then you can have an abortion. At a safe place too. You can't just go around killing fetuses just because you decided to hit it raw and without protection. What did you think was going to happen?"

They go quiet, with the one pulling my hair a little.

"Ngiphe futhi. Same size."

•••

I open my eyes to the vibrating going on somewhere on the bed.

Haibo...who's holding me? I widen my eyes as a cold thought runs through my mind...

We did not...did we?

I quickly jump out of the bed and grab a blanket from the bunch he left on the floor to cover my not so dressed self. I grabbed

my phone as he opened his eyes giving me a questioning look. I on the other hand am panicking with thoughts of what could've happened yesterday that led me to allowing this man to sleep in bed with me.

"And then? Why are you looking at me like that?" He asks sitting up.

By now my phone has stopped vibrating. I couldn't even check to see who it was that was calling me.

"Did we...?" I ask.

"Did we what?"

"Zweli you are in the same bed as I was." I explain trying very hard to stay calm.

"Yeah? So?" He scratches his head.

"Zweli!"

"Haibo! Awume wena, We didn't do anything."

"Then why are you there?"

"Relax Zano marn." He sits up. "I just moved from the floor back to my 2 year old comfortable bed."

"What?" I ask.

"Dude, it's like eight in the morning and already you want me talking."

Dude?

"I'm sorry." I sigh.

I hear him sucking his teeth.

I wanted to say more but I can't be acting like something went down here. I think I was more pissed at the fact that he disregarded my wish of him sleeping on the floor because I was uncomfortable with the thought of us sharing a bed as yet- but we're too late for that I guess.

Also if something did happen I'm sure I'd feel it...

He gets up from the bed, stretches and excuses himself before heading to the bathroom.

It really was past eight and I frown looking at the missed call notification. What in the hell does he want?

Before I can even think further it vibrates again in my hand.

A hint of panic runs through me and I find myself sitting on the bed.

"Hello." I answer in an almost whisper.

"Why are you whispering?" He asks. I look up. The bathroom door is still closed.

"I'm... Why are you calling me?"

I hear him chuckle on the other end of the line before I actually remember I forgot something huge.

"Oh my goodness I forgot to cancel...Bangi I'm so sorry."

"You forgot to cancel?"

"Yes. I'm sorry. I really am...but I'm sure you can manage without me."

"The main reason why I wanted you here is because I don't think I can manage."

"Come on, I'm sure you have rich friends to help you out with all of this."

"Rich friends?" He chuckles again. I hear the door open and out comes Zweli with a weird questioning look on his face. He stands by the door with his arms folded in front of his chest.

"Zano...are you still there?" Bangi says.

"Listen we'll talk later." I say and quickly hang up.

The look on Zweli's face becomes intense and I squirm under his gaze.

"I..." He cuts me off.

"Who was that?" He asks. No color in his voice whatsoever.

It's quiet for a while with me trying to find the perfect words to describe the man I just hung up on a few moments ago.

"A friend." I answer blandly.

"A friend? You mean that stupid friend of yours?"

"Stu- what?"

"That one that puts too much make up on her face." He says.

"Her name is Nonkanyiso and she is not stupid." I say.

"I don't care...anyway what did she want?"

"It wasn't her on the phone that I was talking to."

"Oh so you have more of these people around you?" He asks.

I shake my head in disbelief. He's calling all of my friends stupid now for what good reason?

He could've just asked properly who this friend was and not insult my friendship ring at all. I get up start folding the blankets that were on the floor. I felt like it would be useless to keep covering myself anyway.

After all the blankets were folded and the bed was made I visited the bathroom for a quick shower.

I spent close to 4 hours braiding my hair yesterday with almost half of the money Zweli gave me. Also I have been waiting for Zweli to say something nice about it since he hasn't...

I walk into the lounge area and find him watching TV with his feet on the table. I frown. Yesterday's takeaway containers were still on the table. His empty cans of beer were still next to his couch and the curtains were still drawn.

"Zweli...I thought you'd have cleaned up here by now." I mention and start collecting the mess.

"I was going to." He says, his eyes still glued on the TV. He was watching something that had to do with cars.

I believe him since I know how the television can suck you into watching, making you forget a few important things. He changes the channel to something that has horses running on. This is not something I'd watch but then again, we don't really have a lot of channel options back home. I open the curtains and welcome in a fresh breeze of air.

I end up sweeping the entire house and washing the 2 bowls of cereal after breakfast. After that I got the time to finally relax as well on an empty couch since Zweli went to shower. I manage to change the channel after trying to watch what he left playing.

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"So...what did the doctor say?" I ask slicing some bread on the kitchen counter making Zweli some lunch.

"She said a lot of things Zano, but I'll hear more when I go for my results next week."

"I hope you took Mandla with you."

"I did. He's still mad at me though."

"For what?"

"For challenging his manhood and questioning his fertility."

"That's nonsense."

"I get him though. Children is something he's always wanted."

"But he still could be the problem."

"I know that...and God I hope its not the case here. I'd be shuttered."

There's a knock on the door that causes me to lift my eyes.

Who could that be?

I eye Zweli who's busy on his phone. I'm sure he didn't hear the knock that came from here but I don't mind getting it for him. I'm closer to the door anyway.

"Don't put yourself in that mindset yet okay. Have some faith." I open up the door and I'm shocked to see who the guests are. I think they're shocked too cause I see Zola's eyes go wide.

"I know."

"Look, mge I'll call you back later. There's something I need to attend to." I say and hang up.

"Hi." I try smiling but the fact that I could see Oscar was here too, talking on the phone didn't allow me to be absolutely free. I had nothing against Zola though.

"Medi ka mngani." Zola rubs his hands together. "Is Zweli around?"

I slowly nod and call Zweli. "Babe, you have visitors."

"Awu, Zola. Come in mfwethu." He says coming to the small kitchen.

They walk right past me and go sit on his beloved couches. I return to my sandwich making in an aid to distract myself from

my thoughts. I would've appreciated a heads up from Zweli just so I would at least know that I should stay in his room. I'm not even in the mood for this sandwich anymore. I wish I could just shove it into a dustbin and forget I was even making it.

Why did I even think polony was a good idea anyway?

My behind is spanked and I quickly turn to look at Zweli.

Wait what?

"Wenzani?" I ask shocked backing up.

"Baby?" Zweli says from the couch. My eyes are on him and a confused looking Zola.

"Ay it's nothing Mazwelisto, I just bumped into her by mistake." Oscar quickly chipped in before I could even say anything.

I turn my attention back to him and he has his gaze on his friends. I know for a fact that he didn't bump on me by 'mistake' as he claims again.

The last time he '*accidentally*' bumped into my chest.

"Askies." He gives me a smirk and moves right along. That's it. I cannot be in the same room with this man without wanting to vomit.

I shut the bedroom door and throw myself on Zweli's bed not knowing what to do with myself. I was definitely not going back in there no matter what.

"Zano...and then?" Zweli asks standing by the door. I can smell the cigarette smoke from where I'm laying.

"Oh it's nothing. I thought maybe I should give you and your friends some privacy."

"Oho, okay." He nods as well and returns back to his friends.

I suck my teeth and reach for my phone deciding to check up on the man I left hanging. I hope he's not too angry at me to that extent where he doesn't answer my call.

"The one that forgot to tell me she won't be making it. Hey." He answers.

"I thought I was forgiven about that."

"Not with how you hung up on me today." He says.

"I'm sorry about that too."

"Mhnnn...all is well."

"Yeah just like that?"

"Yeah. I'm not the type to hold grudges anyway."

"And I'm not the type that breaks my promises. If I say it, I'm going to do it."

"I don't know, did any of them not get a hamper?"

"Huh?"

"Then organise some!"

I frown and get up from the bed. I can hear Zweli and his friends laugh at something. Whatever it was, surely was funny. I peek out of the window, running my hand down the burglar

bars. This man was literally having a conversation with whoever was there with him. I shift and turn back to face the bed again.

"Zano? Hello are you still there?"

"Awkwardly

yes. What was that all about?"

"Unexpected shortages. You see if you were here..."

"It would make absolutely no difference because the same would've happened. I'm starting to get the feeling you just want me around you."

I chuckle nervously after face palming myself on the forehead.

Why did I say that?

That was so cocky, I just couldn't deal. My body sinks to the ground as his agitating silence becomes too much to bare.

"I didn't mean to say that."

Way to kill the conversation Zano. My eyes wander to underneath the bed where I see something.

He clears his throat. "What do you call a man who can't stand?"

"Uhhmm..."

"N-E-I-L, Neil "

"Neil?"

He give me an awkward laugh. His awful jokes are a habit I see.

"He has no legs...so we call him neil...like K-N-E-E-L."

"Ohhh! Why didn't you just say that?" I chortle not exactly sure if he has forgotten the words I said, which I hope he has.

"Look, Zano I have to go...the things have arrived." He says.

"But..." I stop myself. He's a busy man and I'm busy holding him up with my stupid calls that have no value in his life. Come to think of it I should've hung up ages ago before this conversation started being as awkward as it was. "I...that was quick...I should let you get to it then."

Somewhere deep inside my fat surrounded heart I would've preferred to be all the way there where he is and not here, stuck with my boyfriend who is with his chommies. After I hang up, I can't stop myself from sighing. I then remember something else. The box. I crawl to the bed and pull it out from under this bed. Its about the size of a shoebox but it was heavier than pap in a pot that you've left overnight.

I contemplate whether I should or should not open this box because once I did I'd be invading his privacy. If he wanted me to know and see what was in this box, he would've showed it to me.

I lift my hand up to scratch an itch when I accidentally hit the lid causing it to go skew. My lips press into a thin line when I proceed to open the box up, because I just couldn't. The itch

was gone too. And the feeling in my knee was also starting to go.

"Awww." My heart melts when I see Zweli's baby pictures. I take out the top one. He's held by his mother I think and I'm sure he wasn't even 6 months old in this one. The other one is of him too. He looks a bit older in this one...probably 10. Again a handsome young man indeed. There's another one in here too that I find but it's not an old looking photo.

It's him though...I think. Or it could be his little brother. I don't know. I've never met the whole family, but he has a brother.

What in the...why are there condoms in here? Why is one of the packs open? Unbelievable. I take all three of the Trust condom pack still trying to figure out what I'm going to do with them when I freeze. The grip in my hands goes numb as I hear the packs drop to the floor.

I think I sit back too looking at the black machine in here. Why does Zwelibanzi have a gun?

A gun that I'm not sure if its loaded or not.

I don't think I want to know.

I quickly return the things just the way I found them before closing the box and pushing it back under the bed. I get up still in a daze when I decide I need some air. I pull the door open and struggle down the passage.

"Baby where are you going?" I hear Zweli ask me.

"I'll be back." I replied without looking back.

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"Where did you head off to earlier today?" Zweli asked moisturizing his arms in long swift motions. He smelt fresh. I look away, thinking of something but decide against lying since it wasn't going to help me in any way.

"Uh...I went to the Tuck shop."

"Oh to do what?"

"Hau Zweli, to buy."

"To buy what?"

"Yoh. Airtime!"

"Why are you becoming so aggressive then?"

"I wasn't aggressive."

"Is this about my friends coming around here?"

I sigh.

"Zweli this was supposed to be our day and you decided to spend time with your friends again." I look at him. He has halted the process of wearing his T-shirt too.

Worst of all, when I came back they were gone. I know I spent up to two hours at the tuck shop bench thinking of this stupid gun thing, but them leaving to go enjoy themselves out there made me regret choosing to come here even more.

"Dammit" I mumble and take the lid off before the whole room gets smothered in this smoke. I turn to look at a confused looking Buhle who soon after folds her arms in front of her chest.

"So...I take it you're done with your homework?" I speak.

"What happened here? You were literally right next to the stove Zano."

"Hai marn, I was chatting to Zweli and..." I trail off.

"So we're eating cremated chicken because of Zweli now?" She asks.

"Come on Buhle it didn't even burn that badly, plus I'm sure it still tastes amazing." I say reaching for my used spoon and take a tiny chunk of a thigh and put it into my mouth.

Yoh, how much salt did I put in here?

I chew nonetheless and swallow facing Buhle with a hopefully convincing look on me.

"Still tastes good. Now where's Khaya?"

"Don't you remember he said he was going to be held up in a meeting with his team yesterday night...oh konje you were busy with your phone. I'm sure texting Zweli."

I clear my throat.

Why is she making it sound like me talking to my man is a bad thing? Also she knows I'm an adult with many things on her

mind. It's human to forget. She turns to go back to her room again after that not so enticing conversation.

I quickly grab my phone to read his text and then go back and try to resurrect today's supper.

'Maybe you and I should go and meet my parents this weekend.' His text read.

Wait what?

Me? Zanokuhle? I chuckle.

I know this whole week of being showered with love and affection has given me some hope about trusting him in the near future.

I remember bringing up the gun issue and he answered me rather validly after being pissed about me snooping.

He said "what's a man without protection and control."

Besides didn't we make other plans for this weekend? Plans that didn't involve his parents.

'You're joking right' I text him back and quickly lock my phone before taking in a deep breath. I needed to focus on my pots cause I was really wasting electricity.

The same electricity that I buy with my hard earned money. I get our jug and get water from the bucket and drown my meat in all of it. I was going to try and wash out the salt and most of

the burn. When it looked a bit better and obviously tasted of water and burned bits I put it back on the stove again, with plenty of spices and hot water. This better make up for all the good flavour I've lost.

'Nope, baby I think it's time we took our relationship to the next step.' His text read.

'Isn't it a little too soon mara Zweli. We're literally still getting to know each other. What's the rush for?' I text him back.

I wasn't going to mention the fact that he also cheated on me not so long ago. Now he wants us to take things to the level?

He's offline and I'm confused. He was typing not so long ago, that's why. Okay. The front door opens and Khaya come in and rolls his ball off to it's corner.

"And then?" I ask as he gave me a piece of paper.

"It's about our team."

"Your team?" I open up the letter, thinking of what could be in here before I even read it. At the back of my mind I was hoping it's not something that could crush his dreams like being kicked off of the team or suspension. "R1200! Haibo Khaya!"

He just looks at me as my eyes landed on him.

"Dear Parent slash guardian of our fellow soccer mate. This letter is to inform you of a mandatory trip to Ndumezulu

conference and sport resort that will take place on the 5th of April." I eye him.

"The trip will be covering accommodation, 3 nutritious meals and a free hamper. The team will return on the 8th of April. Parents slash guardians can pay a deposit of R500 out of the R1200 before the 4th to Mr Nkosi. Wow. You got this today?" I fold the letter with a sigh.

"Yes." He says giving me a look.

"Okay...since there are not a lot of days left I'll need you to write down everything else that you'll really need okay." I say. The joy on his face instantly warmed my heart. Even if it meant that I was going to adjust my budget plan a little for the coming month. The boy even gives me a hug before rushing off to his room. This trip better be beneficial because R1200 plus, was a lot of money.

'Mxm, whatever.' A text from Zweli read. He sent this about 3 minutes ago. I couldn't see his last seen anymore, nor his profile picture... Did he...did he just block me? Again! This was getting tiring.

"You know what, fine." I mumble alone and go to my own settings to block him too.

'Saturday?'

'I thought you said you'll be busy.' He texts me back rather very quickly.

'Not anymore.' I shrug to myself.

'Well then, you just made my night 10 times better.' My lips twitch into a smile as I allow my fingers to swim across my android keyboard.

'I'm glad.' I text him back.

'Can I call you?' He texts.

'Rather not. I'm not in the mood to talk.' I was probably going to be a sour grape all through the call.

'Oh. Okay. Tomorrow then?'

'Sounds like a plan.' I text with a smiling emoticon. He send one back. **'Cool.'** Bangi texts.

'Cool' me. **'Cooler'**

'Coolest.' What in the hell!

'Lol, stop.'

'You started it.' I text back chortling.

"Awa Zano are you trying to burn the meat again?" Buhle says again coming down the passage.

Oh crap!

Chapter Nine.

"Sometimes you may be the whole package, just sent to the wrong address."

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"Here. It's yours. My little apology." I say and hand him the Pin Pop lollipop.

"I haven't seen one of these in years...thanks." He says with a smile on his lips. I liked how his eyes almost looked closed when he was smiling like this. "I like what you did to your hair."

Oh so they aren't invisible.

"Your Highness, we may leave." One of the mannequins interrupt.

They came to fetch me today, from my humble abode to this ridiculously massive palace. I didn't go in though and luckily I wasn't forced to go in either. I would've hated that type of ambush.

"Thank you Zakhele. Shall we?"

"We shall." I say.

He opens my door for me and I step in before he closes it. I watch him walk gracefully to his side before another mannequin opens his door for him. He climbs in and sits next to me. Too close. He unbuttons the single button from his suit and sits back.

"Drive." Him. With that single command, I feel the engine of this very SUV come to life and the motorcade drives on off. I don't know how to feel. I don't know what to think at this point too.

"You ready for today?"

"Brick making? No."

He chuckles. "Well you better be. It's going to be a long day."

"I have church tomorrow."

"Does that mean I don't have a lot of time with you?"

"I guess." I look out of the window. There are a few people I spot outside waving at spares the and raising this kingdom's flag high as we drove past them.

"Yes Zano. I like having you around me." He says. My gaze is quickly on him again but I find him and his eyes closed as he laid his head back.

We get to this huge piece of land before the cars come to a halt.

There were trucks and tall ass grass everywhere. A subtle smell of sand and cement in the air and the loud roaring of the machinery that seemed to arrive here in numbers. Men and women in overalls were everywhere on this land where the land was purely sand.

"What do you think?"

"What can I think? Is this what you meant with a place."

"Places actually. You did say if you could you would build houses for people who can't afford to build their own. Well now you can."

Well now I can?

"Bangi!"

I can't believe he heard me when I said that. He actually was paying attention to what I was saying. He remembered something I said over ikota?

"About 200 houses are going to be built here"

"200?" I can't keep my mouth closed. My arms are around his neck in seconds, embracing him. "You are such an idiot Bangi!"

"Thank you." He chuckles before his hands rest on my curves. I hear his take in a sharp breath. It felt so warm in his arms...so genuine too. I didn't want to let him go. His hold around my waist tightens and if it were to be any tighter, my feet would be off the ground.

"Bangizwe?" I hear a voice before I quickly let the man go.

Who is she?

He gives her a quick glance and his face drops almost instantly.

"Noluntu? What are you doing here? How did you know I was here?"

"Your mother told me."

"She what?" He eyes me. I think I know who she is now. I take a step back before his hand grabs mine stopping me from disappearing. "Where are you going?"

"Who is your guest?" Noluntu asks.

"Zanokuhle, her name is Zanokuhle."

"Oh I'm sure she knows who I am then?"

I give him a confused look. Why is still holding my hand?

"Zano, this is Princess Noluntu. The Princess of the Momane kingdom, second daughter of King Xhanti the third."

Oh...do I bow now?

"Also his fiancée."

"Not yet." He says quickly.

"But..."

"No Noluntu, we are not engaged." He interrupts her. She nods.

"Okay."

"Now please I'm going to ask you to return to your rented place. I'll call you later."

"You can't just send me away like that."

"Noluntu please." He says. He doesn't even sound angry or pissed, just annoyed.

"Fine. You better call me then." she says and looks in my direction. I don't know what she's thinking but I surely hope she's not thinking I'm trying to steal her man.

She turns to leave. She also has mannequins following behind her as she headed back to her car. I watch them open her door and she gets in before they close it for her again.

"She's beautiful." I blurt out. Our eyes meet again and he looks at me briefly before shaking his head slightly.

She was.

"Let's go." He drags me with him. It slipped my mind that we were here for a moment. My arm is touching his as we made our way through the site. I picked the wrong day to wear my white tekkies it seems. We are given boots and a helmet. Bangi gives his suit and tie to one of his mannequins before we head out of this tent.

"Mr Dube."

"Your highness, welcome." The man climbs off of his John Deere tracktor and sticks his hand out for a shake.

"This is Miss Dlamini." Bangi says as the man reached out to shake mine too with a slight nod of acknowledgement.

"She is the one who inspired this whole initiative too."

"I think it's a great thing that you are doing here Miss Dlamini."

Mr Dube says.

"Oh please..." I brush him off. I'm not even spending a single dime here yet I'm getting most of the credit.

"It would be an honour for us if you were to form the first few bricks that will build the future homes of many members of this kingdom and community, my Prince."

"Of course." Bangi says and we follow the man past more huge trucks. Some people came to shake the hand of the Prince and some bowed from a distance. I chuckle remembering the day of aunt Portia's wedding and my official embarrassment.

"Over here we have Mrs Ngwenya." Mr Dube says. More handshakes. The woman instructs us on how to use this huge machine in front of us. A moist sand mixture is supposed to go into a mould, get shaped and viola we have bricks. I'm also told the actual bricks that were going to build these houses were going to be delivered to the site soon. So this was just for show and pictures.

Bangi watches me as I waited for the sand mixture to be filled up on the machine. I'm then told to press down on the thing that looked like a handle.

Wasn't this *His* job?

I try to pull the handle down with not much strength but the thing feels jammed. Even when I try harder, it wouldn't budge much. How great.

"Let's do it together." He says before he's standing behind me. Too close. "Come on."

"I...I could do it myself Bangi." I watch those big hands clasp the handle. The contrast of my skin and his was just so...beautiful?

Wait.

Are those...

"It would be so much easier if we do it together."

I have no idea what is happening right now. It is as if my mind had taken a journey of it's own to a land of milk and honey. Me being the milk and him being the honey. My arms move down and the next thing I hear are a few cheers, cameras and a vague round of applause. When did we press down on this thing?

"You okay?" He asks still behind me. I nod and he moves away.

"Those were the first few bricks that are going to build this new and upcoming community. I think we should leave you professionals to get started then."

Our hands touch again as we made our way somewhere else. Another huge looking piece of machinery. More handshakes. The man informs us about how fine this piece of land is. I was just happy we weren't going to chop down any trees to benefit this project. Bangi climbs onto the riding lawnmower and sticks his hand out for me.

"Bangi I'm not getting on that."

"Why not?"

"Have you seen me?"

"Have you seen me?" He asks the question right back.

"Don't do this to me."

"Zanokuhle come on." He leans in more with his hand still out and I eventually take it. He holds me tight as I put one foot on the stepper. I'm sitting on the edge of the seat here

"I probably should've asked to be at the back. This seat was not made for two people."

"I want you in the front. I'll get off soon anyway"

"Bangi I can't drive this thing."

"That's why I'm here."

"What exactly are you going to do?"

"I'm going to guide you."

"Guide who? Me? You have a licence in driving lawnmowers?"

"No."

"Then how are you going to 'guide me' as you say?" I unintentionally mock him. He chuckles.

"You see by now we would've already been far ahead with this cutting of grass task if you weren't challenging my skills." He says. I look to my side to the man who was minding his own business. How respectful of him.

"Okay fine. But if I lose a limb..."

"You won't lose a limb, now come on start the engine." He says. I look left and right but I can't find the key ignition.

"Where exactly am I supposed to start this?"

"Over here." He points with his manicured finger.

"Oh I knew that."

"Yeah right." He says. Its after one failed attempt that this machine shakes to life. I'm vibrating.

"Your Highness, you still got this?" The who was minding his own business not so long ago asks. He was on his phone...which explains why he wasn't paying attention to us.

"100% Charlie." Bangi says.

The man nods and goes off to the group of onlookers. The other workers. What a great way to embarrass yourself.

A piece of this land has been cut already, which meant I could see how it was supposed to look.

"Okay now I need you to step-..." He doesn't even finish. My foot is pressing on a pedal and our bodies pulled forward as this mower reversed. "Woah!"

I release my foot from the pedal and face palm myself. "I'm sorry."

Why is he laughing at me?

"Wrong pedal Zano. It should be this one." He gently taps on my right thigh.

Oh.

"I got this." I clear my throat and clasp the steering once more. I rest my foot on the pedal and we shoot forward slowly. The more I stepped was the faster it started moving.

"I'm doing it!"

"Good! You're doing great. See you still have your limbs."

I cant believe this was me. They should just hire me now because wow. I yell out in excitement as the thrill of this new skill overtook me. The smell of cut grass and petrol becomes more prominent in the air.

After a few minutes of me going on like a baby who just pulled out their own tooth, I climb off the lawnmower after I'm shown how to turn it off too. "Did you see how well I cut that grass?"

Oh my goodness." He meets me halfway

"Ha, I've seen better." He shrugs blinking profusely as I stared back at him.

I punch his shoulder. "Aw! Why would you do that?"

"Because I just did an amazing job back there and you just sounded jealous."

"Okay, fine. You did a good job at cutting the grass Zano." He

claps for me.

"You know it." I say, allowing myself to smile.

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My vision returns as I looked right ahead. It's dark in here. Where am I? Oh. I shift before I feel his hand on my shoulder. I don't even remember when I fell asleep or how I fell asleep on his lap for that matter.

I sit up, gazing outside. We were stationary right outside my house and it was dark out because of the lack of streetlights.

"Why didn't you wake me up?" I attend to an itch in one of my eyes.

"You looked so peaceful, plus I'm sure you're exhausted after everything I put you through today."

"Haibo, what if I drooled on you?" I ask patting on the sides of my mouth to feel for any saliva.

He giggles.

"Ew." He says as I searched for my phone. Its 20h04, way beyond the time I had given myself to be back here.

"How long have we been here?"

"About 15 minutes."

"What? I would've cooked something for supper by now, Bangi!"

"Relax, I bought you something you can eat with you family."

He says. "Zakhele

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the food please."

This man and feeding me!

"I hope you guys like it." He says as the paper bags get passed onto him. I think I manage to count four of them. What the hell.

It smells so mouthwatering.

"Thank you." I say. "Would...would you like to come in and have supper with us?"

Where did that come from?

"I don't want to intrude Zano."

"Nonsense. I'm sure there's plenty of food in here either way." I say. "Please."

"Okay." He says after sighing and I hear a door opening. It's Zakhele's. He runs all the way to my side and opens my door for me. I wouldn't have mind doing that myself but either way I step out. Cool air hits my exposed skin. He's next to me in seconds and we make our way to the inside. I hope it was somewhat presentable in there.

"Ah, Chery."

"Don't." I warn and I hear him laugh.

"I'm actually very appreciative of your Chery. If it wasn't for her we wouldn't have been on this date."

"Date?"

"I meant, meeting."

Oh. Right. Obviously cause I'm still not his type.

I open the door and let out a sigh of relief. It's clean. Khaya and Buhle look up and they meet my wide eyes. "Guys, we have a guest." He walks in before I close the door.

"Hi." Bangi says.

"My Prince." Buhle and Khaya acknowledge already on their feet.

"Please, call me Bangi." They eye each other.

I clear my throat as I step forward.

"He's... He's joining us for supper, I hope you guys don't mind."

I put the heavy take away paper bag on the table. He mirrors my actions.

"I'll get the plates." Buhle says.

"This looks fancy." Khaya peeks into the bag.

"Khaya. Behave..." Me.

Why is he acting like we don't eat well in this household?

I could just smack the back of his head once.

"...ah, Bangi you can sit here." I offer him a chair. He sits down. I have my eyes on Buhle as the plates clink loudly. "Is Zonke home?"

"Nope." Khaya says.

Okay. Good. One less worry.

Buhle brings the cleanly rinsed plates to the table. I finally go get some glasses for my famous juice that I'm about to bring here too and serve.

"It feels so surreal, dining with royalty. My friends would go crazy to the thought." Khaya.

"Bro!" Buhle agrees.

"Guys." Me.

"Relax sis. We won't embarrass you." Khaya.

Iyoh.

I quickly rinse the glasses and rush to the table with them on a tray, careful with my step.

Yes, we even bought out my mother's fancy guest plates that get used once in a lifetime for this man. "I forgot the cutlery." I mumble.

"I'll get them." Buhle shoots up and goes to get them.

I sit down next to him and reach for a bag.

Why am I shaking?

He reaches for the bag instead. "Here."

"Thank you."

"Zano, please don't forget I need to pay the full amount for my soccer trip tomorrow."

"Oh. Okay." Me.

I completely forgot.

"You play soccer?" Bangi asks.

"Like his life depends on it." Buhle.

"That's good. I was junk at soccer back in my school days. Never tried it again."

"I can teach you."

"What position do you play?"

"Midfielder." He says, chest out and proud.

Even I didn't know that.

"Yeah, that's the position I sucked at."

"It's never too late to learn again."

"I think the Prince would rather spend his day indoors, reading a book about the science that include Astronomy, biology, chemistry, earth science..." Buhle.

"Yoh Buhle, you'll give the Prince a headache."

"You mean I'll give you a headache right?"

"No."

"Guys."

They go quiet.

"And I thought I was talk active." Bangi says.

"Zano talks just as much." Khaya.

"I don't."

"Besides that have you ever heard your laugh." Buhle says.

"Its like the sound of a dying cow." Khaya.

I put a hand on my chest, highly offended.

"I do not!" Me. Khaya starts imitating my so called dying cow laugh. Bangi is laughing at this impression of me. Oh my goodness, this supper thing was a bad idea from the get go.

I finish dishing up for everyone the *Dros* meal. Cheesy Garlic rolls, barbeque chicken wings and a generous helping of chips. We eat with even more embarrassing conversations from these three. I honestly expected him to not be like this but the man seems to just enjoy chatting to my siblings. I like that. It's refreshing and makes me like our friendship or whatever this is. I found out there was dessert in one of these bags, but he was not staying for that. Because of Noluntu...

I walk him out. More wind blows outside, a bit cooler than when we went in.

"I am so sorry for the awkward dinner you just had to endure back in there."

"It wasn't that bad. Your siblings are very good company."

"If you say so."

"I'm serious Zano. I had a great evening today. Awesome company too."

"Maybe I enjoyed myself too, who knows. I'm exhausted though."

"You get yourself some sleep then. I'll call you tomorrow... To check up on you."

"You don't have to."

"I want to."

I shake my head. "Fine. But you should go rest to. I don't need you passing out in this yard." Me.

"Goodnight hug?"

Argh, why the hell not.

I take in his scent once more as the warmth of his arms shield me from the winds aggressively blew.

"Dream about me."

"What?" I ask as he lets me free clearing his throat.

"Go sleep." He says.

I watch him walk off and the loyal Zakhele opens his door for him. He disappears just as fast as his cars.

Back at that land...I remember something...those beads. He had the exact same beads as mine.



I found Buhle lazing on the couch when I returned from church. I sink into the couch and drop my heels by my feet. Being exhausted from yesterday and then attending a 3 hour service was not doing me any justice whatsoever. I needed sleep or a full body massage.

"Khaya took the money right?"

"Yeah." Buhle says.

Okay, that was one less thing to worry about.

I was just about to get up and head to my room for a nap when a knock came through.

Lillian!

"Haibo!" I say shocked as we share a hug. "When did you come back?"

"A few minutes ago! Hlehle unjani?"

"I'm good." Buhle says.

"Mge, I have so much to dish out."

Oh gosh. She hasn't changed one bit.

•••

Zonke walks into the house. For a moment there I had completely forgotten about her and her drama but like all the other times she went missing I was glad she was okay.

"Yini?" She snaps me out of my thoughts. I avert my eyes from her and focus back on the onion I was chopping.

"Uphi uKhaya? I want to send him to etuck shop."

"It's late Zonke."

"Late? There are still a few boys running around the streets outside. It's not that late."

"He's bathing."

"I'll wait for him to finish."

It's quiet for a moment before I look up again. She's busy with her phone.

"Have you checked up on Luthando?"

"Huh?"

"Luthando, have you checked up on her?"

"Who's that?"

"Your daughter."

"You mean Thokozani's daughter."

"She's your daughter too."

"Haibo Gimba, ungenaphi?"

"That's my niece we're talking about here. I care about her safety and wellbeing too you know. She should be here with you, experiencing motherly love and protection."

"Motherly love?" She chuckles bitterly. "Uzodlani uMotherly love?"

Breast milk!

"Why do you hate her so much? It's like you didn't carry her for so many months only for you to not care like this. If money was a problem then we could've applied for a grant for her...or I could've helped out where I could. Look at Thokozani, he's working now fo-..."

"Grant?" She interrupts me. "What is that?"

"Government money."

"Money."

She looks to her phone again for a few seconds before getting up from the chair and heads down the passage without a word. I should've kept quiet.

Chapter Ten.

"It's not your job to be everything to everyone." x

THEOPENINVITE.

••

In she walks carrying a crying Luthando. My eyes go wide as I stop with checking these grade nine's books. I close and put the book that was on my lap aside, standing almost immediately.

"Zonke...and then?"

"She won't keep quiet. Shut her up while I go make a call." She says shoving Luthando into my arms. She's almost red with all the crying she has been doing and that can't be good. I search her bag for some milk and when I find it, feed her it's contents. She sucks hungrily on the bottle and almost calms down. My butt is on the sofa again before I carefully wipe her precious tears away.

What is Zonke doing...and where is Thokozani?

She nearly finishes the entire bottle when I decide to put it aside. I put her on my shoulder and pat her back gently, encouraging her to burp. I remember our mother used to do this to Buhle, and as young as I was she'd show me how to do it too.

Minutes after Luthando burps, Zonke returns to the lounge looking rather pleased with herself.

"Zonke, why did you bring Luthando here?"

"Haibo Gimba, wasn't it you who was complaining about me not giving a shit about her and now that she's here you still ask me stupid questions."

"This is not what I meant."

"Whatever, anyway I need this thing's birth certificate." She grabs Luthando's bag off the floor and opens it up, searching for this certificate.

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Hello, the money!"

"You...you mean the grant?"

"That one."

So, this is not at all because she cares about Luthando?

I focus my attention on this tiny beautiful soul as she started to fall asleep in my hold. I regret informing Zonke about this money thing now and also putting this child through so many unnecessary things. I should've kept quiet and left things as they were.

Somewhere deep inside my heart I wished Thokozani would just come and get her, and even skip the country with her. More especially now that I see Zonke really doesn't care about Luthando at all.

"Here it is." She squeals putting Luthando's bag down again. She's texting on her phone. I get up. I'm going to go put Luthando down in my room. I put my pillow down on the center of the bed and gently position her on it. She wakes up. I rub on her belly gently and to my luck she drifts back off into her peaceful sleep.

I sigh out in relief as I sit down on the edge of the bed. My phone vibrates and chirps from between my breasts. I retrieve it and unlock it. It's a message. The twitching of my lips has me opening the message at a rather quick speed.

'Hey, you back from work yet?' His text read.

'Yes.' I reply with a smile emoticon.

'So, can I call you?'

I'm indecisive, wondering if I should grant him this opportunity or not. I want to give a stupid reasoning for him not to call me, but then again I wanted to hear his voice once more.

'Yes.' I text back getting up from the bed and head to my window. Not even a minute later my phone rings.

"You know, khani ngidla that lollipop you gave me and the thing is so sour." He says.

I laugh sparingly. "You can't handle sour?"

"Of course I can. I just didn't expect it to be this sour."

"I'm guessing you didn't read the wrapper then." I say and hear him chuckle.

"What are you doing?" He asks.

I breathe out as I play with my braids with my free hand.

"I'm watching over my older sister's baby."

"What's her name again?"

"Zonke."

"Oh the one I didn't get to meet Saturday?"

"Yes her." I say.

"I see...anyway, I just wanted to hear your voice. I'm about to head to a long ass meeting involving my decisions."

"I hope you're not in trouble though."

"Relax, I can handle it. We'll talk later okay?"

"Okay." I say and he hangs up.

I head out of my room to find the lounge empty. I wonder where this woman rushed to or where she is but I don't think I have time to worry about that. I sit back down and continue where I had left off with checking these children's books. Not even five minutes of me being in my zone, I hear the screeching wheels of a car in a not so far distance. I peek outside and it's a white Toyota and not even a second later a furious looking Thokozani comes out banging the door.

"Hey ey! Wenzeni lana!" I hear Zonke say as she comes into view.

"Where my daughter?" Thokozani.

I move the books from my lap again, getting up. This could get ugly.

"Go back to where you come from!" Zonke yells.

"I'm not going anywhere without my daughter."

"Well that's a shame ke cause you're not getting her back."

"I'm not getting her back? Are you hearing yourself Zonke? Are you hearing yourself?"

"Loud and clear. Now fuck off!"

"You wanted nothing to do with Luthando, you even threatened to kill her! Why do you all of sudden want her with you." Thokozani states.

"That's none of your business."

"It is my business! Or should I remind you of the parental rights you signed away and over to me not so long ago."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I'm talking about this paper Zonke! This paper says I have full parental custody of Luthando and you have no right to take her from me." He shows her a sheet of paper.

"I don't care what that thing says. You think a piece of paper can stop me?"

"You want me to call the police?"

"Call them Thokozani. I don't fucking care!"

He reaches out for his phone from the back pocket of his jeans. I can't let him do that.

"Wait, Thokozani please. It doesn't have to get to that." I chip in walking to the outside. Mama Lilly and Lillian herself were outside watching all of this unravel. I was certain Lillian would spread this news like wildfire to anyone who would listen to her speak.

Khaya and Buhle are walking back here when I spot them too on the other end. Goodness, they don't need to witness us grown women and a man bickering about a child that's not even 2 months old.

"Where's my daughter, Zanokuhle?"

"She's sleeping, you can co-..."

"Woah woah woah woah, no you can't. I need this child for grant money."

"Oh so that's what this is all about? Grant money? This is not about you caring about our daughter or you suddenly realising that you want to be around her and mother her into a whole adult?"

She keeps quiet.

He looks at me and then back to Zonke before shaking his head. "I hope you never fall pregnant again just so your kids don't go through what Luthando is going through. You're toxic to yourself and people around you." He says before pushing past her. "My baby please Zano."

I think I stare at Zonke for a while too before actually following him inside.

He carefully picks up a sleeping Luthando as I stood at the door thinking of how different things would've been if my older sister wasn't like this. If she was still the caring and genuine Zonke she was when mom and dad were around. I missed her laughing with us, crying with us and all in all just being with us. It being just us three girls and one boy. Us having each other's backs and fronts.

"I apologize for what happened here."

"It's good. I'll probably deal with this the professional court way"

"You're going to have her arrested?"

He heaves out a sigh, coming to the door. "No, only because I know you care about your sister. But if she does this again, I won't think twice about doing that."

I fully understood that. I make way for him to pass. We make our way down the passage. Buhle and Khaya are seated by the

table, quiet and probably confused. They probably also wanted to see Luthando and bond with her, but with the tense atmosphere it was impossible.

I grab Luthando's bag and we walk outside. The birth certificate is on the ground with Zonke nowhere to be seen. He bends down and picks it up. We continue to his car. At least Lillian and her mother have long moved away from where they were standing.

Thokozani opens the backdoor and puts Luthando in her seat. Yeah, she was in good hands. I shouldn't have doubted him and his ability. I give him her bag and he soon after leaves.

I head back into the house and join my younger siblings by the lounge table.

"I know you two are grown enough to see what is going on right now. I don't want this to distract you guys in anyway. Just know that Luthando will be staying with her father from now on. I'm not sure about any visiting cause it's still tense and your sister signed away her parental rights."

"What?" Khaya asks, sounding as shocked as he should be.

"She's never getting Luthando back?" Buhle.

"Yeah. Unfortunately. But, I want you guys to know that she's fine. She's healthy and well taken care of. Okay?"

They nod and I smile briefly.

"Now, go change so you can eat and do your schoolwork." I say.



"Siya, sit down the bell hasn't rung yet."

"But ma'am, it's almost 14h30."

"And I'm almost 30

Advertisement

but you don't see me rushing to it before I even get there."

He sits down.

"Now, I'm going to give you guys homework."

I say and quickly write their homework on my board. They write it...well some of them write it down in their diaries. "Watch me chase you out of my class tomorrow if your work is not done."

The bell rings and they practically storm out of here with a few of them screaming their goodbyes to me. I pack up my things and lock up my class.

"Hey." Michael says nearly causing me to drop my stuff. "Let me help you with those."

"Thanks." He says taking the stacks of class tests from me.

"You good?"

"After such a long day, no."

"Grade nines give you rough time?"

"Yeah. These kids are a handful." I clear my throat as it goes awkwardly quiet after I said that. I just want to get to Chery and drive home just to rest. I see Siba leaving her classroom too. I was going to call her when I realised she's on the phone. All she manages is a quick wave. Cool. We make it to my car without any further conversation and I was glad.

"So I'll see you tomorrow?" He asks me.

"Obviously. I mean of course. I can't stay at home."

"Oh."

I clear my throat again. "Bye."

"Sure." Michael says.

I quickly get into my Chery and bring her engine to life.

Cautiously I made my way out of this parking lot and onto the road. Hunger made itself known as I drove past a chips joint. I shook my head, no. I was not going to fall into that temptation. There's food back home. I pull my phone out of my bag when it vibrates from inside my handbag.

"Mge."

"Wena awunandaba nami yaz. (You dont care about me)"

"Eish, mge askies. There was just a lot going on."

"You found Zweli cheating again?"

"Ah loyo. (Ah that one)" I roll my eyes. I can't believe I just did that.

"Haibo, what happened to your precious Zwelibanzi?"

"Well we haven't talked since he blocked me and I blocked him back."

"You what? Friend tell me this means you two are over!" She squeals into my ear.

"We're still together wena, we're just going through a...a fight."

"Has he tried calling you?"

"Nope."

"Then peyiye irelationship Zano!"

"Nyiso please."

"Okay whatever. I just hope you dump that scum, and find someone else."

"I'm surprised you didn't just blatantly say Bangi nje."

"I mean I didn't want to seem all pushy. How is he? Have you two been talking?"

"There's a lot, which I'll probably tell you when I see you."

"That better be soon. I'm tired of nursing Mandla and his tantrums really."

I'm sure these tantrums were from those doctors results that explained why Nyiso was still failing to conceive after so many years. She broke down in tears when she told me his sperm count was too low, and that it would take them a while before they could actually conceive...or a couple of bucks.

Either way, both were for them to decide and finalise. I was not going to interfere, but rather just pray for them. It's all I got.

"He'll come along friend, give him time..." I trail off as I frown squinting my eyes to the crowd of people standing at my gate. The big vans and even my neighbours outside of their houses. What is going on here?

The closer I drove was the more confused I got, and when they spot my car things seem to just go haywire. They rush to Chery. Cameras, notepads, recording devices...loud voices.

"Zano! What's going on there?"

"Mge I'll call you back." I quickly hang up on her.

I'm literally driving at a slow speed and just so I wouldn't drive over these people's feet. When I manage to finally drive into my yard, I switch off Chery's engine. I don't even know how I'm going to get out of here now because these people blocking my door. I try opening it and thankfully they move.

"It is her!" I hear someone say.

"It's the woman in the pictures!" Another one says and then it's just a whole lot of speaking and not a whole lot of sense. Is this a joke? What are they talking about? Which woman in the pictures?

"Please get off my property." I say. It falls onto deaf ears.

"Can we please get your name miss?" A woman holding a

notepad right in front of me asks.

"Uhhh...Zanokuhle, Dlamini." I close my car door and attempt to lock her.

"What is your relation with Prince Bangizwe?" someone asks.

My eyes go wide.

Oh so this is what this is about?

"Are you two friends with each other?"

"How long have you known Prince Bangizwe on an intimate level?"

Intimate level? That sounds so wrong.

"Are you aware of the relationship he has with Princess Noluntu?"

"Aren't you a bit below his standards?"

"What?"

"Are you his mistress?"

"What! Mistress? Please get out!"

"Miss Dlamini could you comment on your relationship with the Prince."

"No comment!" I finally shove my way through this disrespectful press mob.

I couldn't believe how they just called me Bangizwe's Mistress! I unlock the door with shaking and hurriedly hands and finally push it open. It's just as hard to close the door.

I let out a heavy sigh, locking the door. So many things are going through mind right now. How are Khaya and Buhle going to come back to this place filled with so many people? Where's Zonke?

I dig my phone out of my handbag and dial Bangi. I'm wondering if he even knows about what is going on here.

"Hey." He answers.

"Bangi there's a press mob right outside my house!"

"What?"

"I just got back from work and I just found them here bombarding me with questions I have no idea about."

"Okay okay calm down."

"Bangi this is terrifying!"

"Relax, I'll send some security there immediately. Don't panic. Don't leave the house. Don't say anything to them. You hear me?"

"Yes."

"Good, I'll check on you in a few." He hangs up.

I then call Buhle and tell her to stay put with Khaya at the nearby tuck shop until it was clear here.

It didn't even take long before I heard more commotion outside. I peek out of the window and notice a few Mannequins and...policemen? They're forcing the mob out of here.

Immediately after, the vans drive away and it's somewhat

calmer outside now. I unlock the door and open it but as soon as I was about to step out I'm stopped.

"Miss Dlamini, please stay inside."

"But..."

"His Royal highness gave us strict instructions to keep you safe. We'll only allow you out once we've conducted a thorough safety check."

"I-...okay." I shut myself up and move back into the house. I send a text to my siblings alerting them to return. Bangi sent me a text message too. He asked me if I was okay and I told him I was fine. I thanked him but he warned me about the possibility of them returning.



I got called earlier this morning just to be told that I could stay at home today. I couldn't believe I was just given the day off like that. But what I did believe was how all those people who were here yesterday, were not just here because the wind blew them to my house. They were here because of all the pictures on the web. Old pictures, just last Saturday's pictures of Bangi and I together. All of our meetings were just out there now. Leaked for the world to see.

I felt so exposed. So misunderstood and just plainly judged. I'm called names and mistress was just a delicate one. Some article

went as far as calling me a homewrecker. I have never ever felt this shitty and confused too.

How did they know where I lived?

How did they connect me to these pictures?

Why did I give them my name?

That was a stupid move. I roll off my bed and avoid opening my curtains. I didn't even want to know what was happening outside. I head to the kitchen to make myself a quick and heart pleasing breakfast. Eggs, sausage, canned beans and three slices of brown bread.

I sit there, thinking of how it would be if I was with Bangi. I chuckle at the thought.

No.

I'm still not his type.

...but what if I was his type?

What if I was Noluntu?

Slim, toned and no waist at all. Big pearly eyes and silk pressed hair that rested on a probably overly educated head. Clothes that fit me to the T. A walk as confident as Hercules. Now that is a dream.

But why couldn't I be the dream. My mother used to always call me her beautiful baby girl and I never doubted that. She always

did tell me that I was different from most girls and most girls aren't me. She'd tell me some people even envied my body and looks...

I'd laugh at her.

Some people want to look like Zano kuhle Dlamini?

The same girl all the boys avoided in highschool because her peers looked peng. The same girl who didn't necessarily get approached by her type.

Pfftt.

"Zano...are you okay?" Buhle brings me back to earth. I wipe my tears away and get up with my plate of untouched food. I place it inside the microwave before turning back to her.

"Yeah. I just need to go back to bed." I say.

She nods and I make my way back to my room.

"Did Zweli say something that hurt you Zano?" She says stopping me dead on my tracks. Why would she say that?

"No. He didn't."

"Oh. I'm sorry for saying such but, I just don't trust him."

I'm quiet for a while before I actually clear my throat and continue ahead to my room.

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There's banging on my door that brings me to immediate consciousness. It takes me a while to remember that I'm in my room and it's still Tuesday.

"Zano!" The voice says on the other end calls out. More banging.

"Zweli?" Me. I fix my gown and head to the door. As soon as the door opened he plunged into my room looking frantic. He scouts my room some more before landing his eyes on me again. "What are you doing here?"

"What do you mean what am I doing here? Didn't you miss me?" His face softens.

I didn't even think of him for so long that I just don't know how to answer that question. "Why did you block me?"

"Didn't you block me first?" "I was angry Zanokuhle."

"Then, I was angry too."

"Zano..." He chuckles shaking his head. "...okay, I get it. Can I get a kiss?" He asks but His lips are already on mine before I can even answer.

I hear the door closing behind me. His hands are on my ass . I remove them. He backs me up into a corner forcing his hands under my gown. Theyre are cold as their touch penetrates through my pajama top's thin fabric. I try pushing him off me.

I turn my head to the side, breaking the kiss immediately. He goes for my neck. "Zweli stop it..."

"Please Baby." "No stop. Get off me."

"Just let us do this. You'll enjoy it."

"No Zweli Stop!" I push him off me. He looks at me, his eyes dark as he heavily breathed in and out.

I scratch the back of my head right under my braids, thinking of something I could say to aid in this situation.

"It's not you its me. I'm just not ready yet."

"Come on!"

He pins me against the wall with his hands around my neck, he painfully tightens it digging his fingernails into my skin, bringing instant tears to my eyes.

"Zweli!" I try gasping for air but nothing was coming in properly. My throat started to burn with each second that went by. I use my hands to try and get his hands off me but they fail me. It was like he felt nothing at all.

"Njalo nje wena awusiready nje? Why huh? Cause of that stupid man you're with in all those pictures that are everywhere! You thought I wouldn't find out that you're fucking someone else? You fucking lied to me about being untouched yet that man is getting it! "

"Zweli please..." my hot tears steam down my face right after I

said those two words. He looked so angry at me that it made me scared.

What if he never lets me go?

What if I've really upset him to the point where he really hates me?

He'll kill me for nothing and I'll leave my siblings to suffer.

He can't do this to me!

"Zwe..." He lets me go and I gravitate to the ground landing on my knees, forcing some air into my deprived lungs. I cough out countless times, easing and rubbing on my neck to try and make it feel less painful. My eyes find his in the midst of all of this and he's just blankly staring back at me and did I not feel stupid.

"See what you just made me do to you Zanokuhle!"

I try speaking but for the love of me, nothing solid could come out. "This is all your fault marn you cheating bitch!"

"I'm sorry." I force. My raspy throat forces me to cough again.

"I need to smoke." He opens the door. Freezes, glances at me briefly before walking out. I hear the front door closing shut.

Footsteps come closer and Khaya peeks through. I hope he didn't hear all of that.

Chapter Eleven.

'If someone ignores you always remember that the door can be locked from the other side too.'

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The marks on my neck where Zweli's nails dug into my skin were still a little noticeable even after the fact that it had been two days since it happened.

Or maybe I was just being too paranoid, which should explain why I haven't left this house since. I just couldn't bring myself to do that. But, in other news Khaya and Buhle were back to going to school again after that one day off. They seem to be doing fine but it just wasn't a clear environment anymore around here.

After putting on my warm hoodie and a pair of sunglasses, I took my bag that had everything I was going to need for today. I look out first to see if anyone was outside in my yard. Nobody. Good. I lock up and rush to Chery, nearly throwing myself in there. I sigh out in relief as she came to life.

I see Lillian from a distance. No. I'm not in the mood for this. Not her. I quickly revved out of here and once on the gravel road, rush out of sight. Pretty reckless of me to do that, but I didn't want to talk.

Minutes later I'm parked in the parking lot of Shoprite. After a proper scan of the place, I step out making my way to the entrance. It's full inside the place. It feels like the world has changed but in reality, it hasn't. A quick glance to my side and I freeze.

Is that me again?

Oh my God.

It's the last magazine available too. I shake my head in utter disbelief.

"New lover or undercover mistress." Is the topic they decided to put on this one? Really?

"Are you going to take that sisi?" A guy appears from right beside me. I look at the magazine and then back to him before shaking my head.

"No. Here." I give it to him and he makes his way to the till.

I take in a deep breath and go do what I came here to do. Khaya's expensive list is in front of me as I made my way through the aisles. Searching for this protein shake he wrote down here. When I eventually find it I move on to the next item on this list. Energy bars. More energy stuff. Only 10 percent of this list was purely junk the rest has me wondering how it tasted like.

I go to cash out once I'm done .

Paranoia is at it again. I feel so watched by all these people around me. The line moved closer and closer. I prepared my credit card...but then I noticed my initial and surname was written on there. What if someone notices it. I couldn't. I put it back into my purse and take my cash out instead. I counted it, wondering if it was going to be enough or not. It didn't look sufficient. So the card it is. Haii marn, I'm sure they won't even know its me.

"Sisi, sicela uyephambili." Someone says behind me. Oh. I unpack all those things I bought and the young lady at the till scans them all.

"Are you paying with your card?"

"Yes." I answer.

"Plastic?"

I nod. "Two please." After I type in the pin and it actually accepts I calm down. I help her pack my stuff away before leaving.

Now I have to go buy other essentials. New underwear, a few gym tops. This all probably cost just as much as the whole trip itself but it had to be done. I manage to buy myself and Buhle something too while at it .

When I get back home I go put his things in his room. I do the same with Buhle's goodies before going to the lounge to sit

down and eat. I haven't been eating properly since. Maybe because I wanted to see if I could lose some weight, which didn't happen by the way.

I finish my food and then head back to my room and search my drawer for my phone. It takes a while starting up again and as soon as it was lit, notification after notification started piling in. it didnt stop alerting me from missed calls, to massages...to emails.

I call Nyiso first.

"Kanti usaphila."

"How nice of you to check up on me."

"Hau, Zano you were the one who wouldn't answer my calls so I figured you wanted some sort of space. Mandla said the same thing too"

"Its fine. "

"Yeah? How Are you dealing with all of this? Did you see the King's statement about this whole situation on TV?"

"TV? Err...no"

"It's hectic I tell you. But basically he's just saying the royal family should be respected and kept out of the tabloids for pure rumours. He asked for privacy too as they dealt with the situation."

"And clearly the people care about that." I roll my eyes.

"I think its because they want to hear this from Bangi and not someone irrelevant to this story."

"Oh."

"How is he vele? This must be a lot for him too."

"A lot how when he was made out as a saint in most of these articles and me...they made me sound loose and just like another homewrecker."

"But its not true."

"Still, they dont know that."

"Then maybe you should clear the air. Mention your relationship."

"With Zweli? I'd rather not." I shake my head.

I didnt want to talk about Zweli or even think about him. The thought of him alone made want to scream. I never thought he would hurt me the way he did, physically that is. Also thinking about him made me wonder what he got up to the whole week we didn't talk.

Did I care though?

"You left him?" She asks.

I clear my throat.

•••

I'm going to go crazy if I stay in here another second. I need air. I need freedom. I grab my car keys and my shades before

heading out of here. I find Buhle busy cooking something for supper. I'm pretty sure Khaya was bathing at this hour. I try slipping past her without her noticing me but it fails miserably.

"Uyaphi?"

"I'm going out for a drive. I just want to clear my head."

"Oh, okay. Drive safely out there."

"I will." I say and pop my hoodie's hood on. I jog out of here and drive out.

I don't why or how I end up at Zweli's street but I'm there, not very far from where his gate is.

Is that...a female?

I lower my shades to have a better look and...my heart drops to my stomach. He lied to me. That bastard lied to me. He said he would never ever go back to her but she's right there with him. And they're kissing.

He's taking her inside!

I can't do this. I can't stay here. I drive past his house and just continue ahead. I've been down this road before. I'm not about do this to myself again. I'm not about to cry for him again when he's clearly doing this on purpose.

I shouldn't have taken him back. I shouldn't have allowed my heart to get this invested again cause he was clearly not the same Zweli who asked me out all those months ago.

This one hurt me.

This one lied to me.

This one tried to kill me.

Maybe Nyiso was right. Is this what she meant with don't go back to trash mge?

This is the very same pub Zweli bought me to that day. I chuckle to myself, it wasn't even that long ago yet here I am again. Only this time around I'll be doing the drinking.

Just one drink...

It smelt like Zweli's room in here. It isn't that packed yet...even for a Friday. The barman gives me a look as I stood by the counter. It was probably because he knew his regulars and I wasn't it. Okay besides the fact that I look like I committed a crime and I'm hiding from the Police..

"Uh...a drink please. Your strongest one."

He chortles shaking his head. "Sure."

In a tiny glass he pours me something that looked like a clear liquid. I'm frowning as he puts the thing in front of me.

"What is this? Water?"

"Phuza wena, uzangitjela." He says. I shrug taking the tiny glass and bring it to my lips. I gulp it down my mouth as it burns my poor innocent throat. This is disgusting!

"That's tequila for you. Another shot?"

"Yimbi lento."

"Let izidakwa hear you say that." He says and brings me more of this tequila stuff.

"Why are there no chairs here?"

"Because they're over there."

"No I mean, the ones for here at the bar."

"This is not the fancy side of life hau sesi. If you want those chairs then go there or go to a club. Not here Kwa Zwane."

"Okay, askies."

On the sixth one is when I start feeling better. A bit immune to what I felt inside my heart.

I felt a bit giddy too.

"You know you look like that girl wh-..."

"What girl?" I interrupt him.

Is this what it feels like to be drunk?

"The one who's sleeping with the Prince..."

"Kshhhhh...kshhh..." I put a finger on my lips trying to show him that I didn't want him talking further. I even try to reach over the counter just so I could close his mouth.

"It is you."

"Thula! I'll pay you marn, juss don't tell the whole fuckin' world." I have a hiccup that is followed by a short burp.

Sies.

"Okay vele I'll shut up if you pay me."

I roll my eyes and take my phone out. I bring it close to my face just so I could see the words better cause they wouldn't stay still. After pressing on the name with the most missed calls I put it near my ear. Listening to it ring.

"Zanokuhle..." Bangi.

"Woah yello...it's me, the girl that's not you're type calling."

"What are yo-...Zano are you intoxicated?"

"Look at him using such big big fuckin' words for a simple 'ngidakiwe'...Bangi ngidakiwe not into-what what." I indicate to my new barman friend to bring me something else to drink. He shakes his head.

"Where are you?"

"Why you asking? No-no My Prince. I not telling you in case ya decide on ruinin' my night by fetching me."

Yoh, my eyes feel like they're zoning out, but my energy was still on a hundred. I even felt like dancing this tequila off.

"Zano, it's not safe for you to out there at this time of the night."

"Oh and what is safe huh? Being around you and your 16 million thousand mannequines..." I question giving the second person coming to me a voetsek.

Umuntu uvela kay one eTV and they think she's a celebrity.

"Zano I..."

"No Bangi lemme talk. D'you know my boyfriend hurt me because of you huh? All you've done is use me and ruin and complicate my life."

Bangi is quiet on the other hand.

"Oh so now you're quiet huh? You no wanna talk to me? Is fine, Mxm."

I hang up and go dance my energy away.

It was definitely fuller than when I came in here by now. The songs playing here were not up my alley. I didn't like them but they surely did make me want to move...or was it the tequila?

The song changes as I was still getting it on.

Wait! I know this song!

Zweli always plays it on the speakers of his Gusheshe. Konje ithini?

"I naa naa girl, I make her mime, asakh' umgod. Are baby are you common? Are you common!"

I think that's what it says. Yoh the speakers blast out a sound I've never heard before. Why did I ignore this song so much?

"...Are you common? Are you common? Are you common...Yebo!"

Yuu!

People started to surround me, cheering me on and taking pictures...or was it videos? I don't think I care as I danced like a madwoman, sweat dripping off my forehead down to my chin because of this stupid hoodie. I take it off and tie it around my waist. The shades slip off.

I untie my braids and find a table. The crowd gathered even more still following me as I climbed on it and nearly tumble over.

"Asakh' umgodi! Yebo!" I shake my God given body to the loud song. Nothing could stop me now...well...maybe this weird feeling brewing in my throat.

I nearly tumble over the table as I quickly climb off it. These people are still around me and I can't seem to avoid them. My mouth is filled with a hot sour and bitter liquid and it's out of my mouth before I even make it to where I think the toilets are. Luckily I was not going towards the wrong direction as I do make it to the toilets and vomit some more.

My butt is on the cold and dirty floor as I rested my banging head on the cold wall. I felt like shit. I smelled like trash and my whole body just felt sticky. I can't drive in my state. I feel tears

escaping my eyes before pulling my feet up to my chest, burying my head on my knees.

Why am I still crying?

My phone vibrates and I search for it in one of my pockets.

Yoh its 22h00?

"Buhle?"

"Oh thank heavens Zano... where are you?" She sounds worried.

"I'm okay. I'm... I'm at Kwa Zwane."

"Kwa Zwane? What are you doing there?"

"Buhle please."

"Okay, fine. Just come back. In one piece. I beg you."

"Ba-bye." I hang up before heaving out a heavy sigh.

I think I sit there for a good few more minutes, collecting my thoughts. How did I even end up here?

I get up balancing with the door handle and wall.

I don't pay attention to the stares I'm getting, but I do get irritated by the shoulder pats and the name calling I'm receiving.

"Majaivane!"

"You sure know how to get it down mamas!"

"Royalty stress! Soft life problems."

"Can I have your numbers?"

The weather is looking shaky outside as a cold wind welcomed itself on my skin. I pat my sides for my hoodie, but I can't feel it, dammit! I must have tied it too loose back in there. But I'm not heading back. I Can't.

I search for my car at the parking lot. I see a couple making out, a group of guys and other cars but not Chery. Wait...there she is.

I stumble ahead, digging my keys out from between my boobs.

Figures start coming at me blocking my view. What the hell! I try walking to another direction but there is another man there too.

"Excuse me." I look up.

Wait!

I've seen these tall grumpy mannequin men before. "What is going on? What are you guys doing here?"

"Miss Dlamini

the Prince has given us strict instructions to return with you to the palace." The one in front of me now says.

"Uyahlanya. (You're crazy.)"

"Ma'am."

"I'm going home." I say.

"Miss we will not allow you to do that."

"Haibo, I'm an adult, I'm over this number." I try to hold my fingers up to show this mannequin in front of me that I'd manage to drive home.

"You've already put your life at risk here ma'am, we will not allow that."

"Oh so what? You're gonna just forcefully take me against my will? Take me then. Take me to this your Prince."

They don't even allow me to speak any further as they lift me. One on each of my legs and one on each side of my arms. They literally lift me up like that. Am I a joke to these men? How demeaning is this!

"Put me down, now!" I yell.

They stop and put me down. I miss a step as I try balancing.



I turn around as I open my eyes welcoming the light of a new day. It's like I barely slept. My body felt like I was lifting trucks. I stretch out my arms before something stops me completely from that miniature task. This is not my room. Where am I ?

I sit up.

Did I die?

How did my room get this big and fancy?

I get out of the bed and notice I'm only in my bra and panties.
What the hell?

Gold bedside lamps, white carpet, deep red curtains with gold tassels at the top. There's a huge eagle statue at the far corner of this room., carved out of wood.

I go open the curtains and yell my lungs out. What floor is this!
The door shoots open, making my body jerk in reflexes as another yell escapes my mouth. I cover my exposed body.

"Amandla?"

"Are you okay? Why are you screaming?" She asks.

"I'm fine, what are you doing here? I mean what am I doing here?"

She closes the door behind her.

"My helper fixed you these, and I figured I should come here and wake you up anyway. Also, you mean to tell me you don't remember anything from last night?"

"I...no.."

"Well let me jog your memory then." She says with a big smile on her face. She puts the basket on the bedroom bench that was at the foot of the bed. She takes out her phone and makes her way to me. She turns the screen towards me and a video starts playing. It's first just a loud mess and then...

No!

Amandla breaks out in laughter as it gets to the part where I climb a table. "I'm sorry, I told myself that I wouldn't laugh at this but this is my favourite part."

"Where'd you get this?" I ask ashamed.

"Everywhere. You're trending."

"What! You mean people are seeing this? No. I'm a teacher, my students can't see me like that. My siblings can't see me like that. I cannot see myself like that."

"Okay. I'm deleting it." She stops the video. "I promised myself I wouldn't watch this again." She shows me the deleted notification.

That is not going to help one bit. Didn't she say this was everywhere? My life is officially ruined.

What if I lose my job because of this?

What about my church mates. Mrs Nkosi! Oh God why did you allow me do that?

"Did Bangi see this?"

She nods, "That's what he's doing out there...damage control."

"Dammit."

"Look, don't worry yourself too much. Go get showered and come down to eat with us."

"Eat with who? No. Cant I just shower and go home."

"That would be considered as rude. Breakfast is at 08h00 sharp."

She turns and leaves.

"Zano why did you do this to yourself?" I whine and take the basket with me to the bathroom. This place just mocks where I come from honestly. The shower was big enough to fit 10 people. The tile is so clean, making me fear stepping on it too.

I wonder where my clothes went to cause these were not them.

Soon, I'm dressed in these fitting jeans and a peplum top that showed no cleavage or my shoulders. The open toe sandals are what I put on next. I tie my braids up with the elastic that remained on my arm the whole night.

And now...I have to head downstairs . I heave out a sigh. 08h00 is just around the corner. I step out of the room and I'm met by two ladies. They lightly curtsy, causing me to do the same.

"Good day Miss Dlamini, please follow me." The one Lady says. I just nod, not sure what to say. The other one heads inside the room. We walk down the bright and airy passage. Down some stairs. There are art pieces on the wall which I was sure were the real deal. I clear my throat, anxious to speak.

"Uh...will the King and Queen be present for this breakfast?"

"His Royal Highness and the Queen will indeed be present."

I swallow hard. Just as I was about speak again the woman halts in front of me holding her hand up. I stop too looking ahead as the King and the Queen grace this dining hall with not much chitter and chatter. They are followed by Prince Alakhe and his wife. Those two were talking, holding hands and looking so cosy. The Prince turns his head this direction and then subtly turns back to his wife. Amandla is next. She's with two children. Boys. They look so adorable.

The woman lowers her hand and I watch how the people who were still standing like me either bowed or curtseyed. I do the same. "Come Zanokuhle" Amandla motions to me.

"You better not dance on my table." The Queen says.

Is she serious? The table laughed quite subtly. I want to run out of here and never look back. How dare I go through this without Bangi! How dare he leave me with the lions.

"Mom." Amandla.

"I'm just playing with you. Have a seat." The Queen says.

My chair is pulled out for me and I sit down. Food comes out in trays and nose numbingly good smells fill the room.

"When Is Bangizwe coming back Senzo?" I hear the Queen asks.

"He should be home soon." The King answers.

I don't get how I made it through that breakfast in one piece. They didn't necessarily bombard me with a lot of questions that

had me feeling uncomfortable. They asked me the basics; the 'where are you from?', 'what do you do for a living'. 'Why I got their son working on my community'

I'm sitting in the guest room again, waiting for this man to return with my keys. I got my phone back from the mannequins. I assured my siblings that I was alive and well. Also since I got my phone back, I didn't want to see what was going on out there. I didn't want to hear anything about my bad decisions. Shutting it out should help...right?

There's a gentle knock on the door that pulls me out of my thoughts.

"Come in." I say focussing on the door. It opens and in he comes, dressed in a clean shirt and pants that fitted him too perfectly. "Hi."

"Hey." He greets me back before closing the door. He comes to sit next to me on this bench. "Your keys." He says, breaking our silence.

I attempt to take them from his hand but he captures mine instead. His hand is soft. He puts his other hand on top rubbing on the back of my hand.

"Zano, I'm worried about you."

Okay, I did not expect those words from him.

"Is this about me drinking? Cause I'm never doing that again."

"You better not majavaine."

"Oh Lord..."

"I'm sorry for complicating your life...also for saying you're not my type. I didnt think it would hurt you like that." He chuckles.

"But I'm serious. Are you okay? I tried my best to stop what was already in the possessions of many. It's still out there though."

"It's okay. I'm fine now." I reassure him.

"I'm glad, because I really thought you hated me after everything the media said about us."

"I just...needed space...time, I don't know."

He smiles briefly, but its not that full gorgeous smile that makes his eyes looks almost nonexistent.

"I missed you."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah."

I'm the one smiling now, for no good reason at all.

"Do you believe in soulmates?"

What? That's another question I didn't expect. I shrug.

"I...I believe that there could be a person that is immensely compatible with you in this whole earth. One that understands

you and will love you just as is...but just it being one person out of millions? Doesn't make sense to me."

He chuckles before nodding slowly. Where is this going?

"What about love at first sight?"

"Love at first sight? No. I mean you can lust at first sight, absolutely but I highly think it isn't possible."

"Well I think people work differently."

"So you believe in that? Love at first sight?"

"Yes." He says rather confidently, letting my hand go.

I lean back, putting my elbow on the edge of the bed and resting my head on my palm.

I'm still looking at him...

He's still looking at me...

"And how has that worked out for you in the past? Have you gone for someone you thought you loved at first sight?"

"Not really...well at least not until recently."he says. I pout.

"Oh? And?"

"I'm still working on it."

"Working it out with this girl or...?"

"Yes. Her." He licks his lips, a hint of a smile playing there too.

"She must be really special then."

"She is. She's just as beautiful, caring, kindhearted and smart too. You should see her one day."

"See her? No. Don't put me in an awkward situation Bangi." I sit up shaking my head.

"I'm serious...come here." He gets up and holds his hand out for me to take. I take it and stand up before he leads me somewhere.

"Where are you taking me?"

"We're going to meet her."

"Bangi I just sai..."

"Shhh..." We halt. I'm not playing with him. "Turn around."

"What?"

"Turn...around..." He says slower this time. He looks a little nervous now but I ignore him and turn around, "...do you see her?"

"What?" I breathe out. He stands closer behind me, taking both my hands into his.

"You're her Zano. I don't know if it's my mind playing games on me but it's been you, you, you since I met you that day."

"No. You can't."

"Zano...I want you."

"But...what about Noluntu?"

"What about her? I don't want her."

"Bangizwe...you can't."

"Why not?"

"I...You..."

"Why not?" He turn me to him. "Look at me."

"Why are you doing this?"

"Because I love you Zanokuhle Dlamini and I know you can feel it too. I know you know that this is right . I know you feel the attraction...I know you saw these..."

He shows me the beads on his hand. I lift my hand with the beads up too.

This is a joke.

Chapter Twelve.

"A man is not a necessity, a man is a luxury." x CHER.

••

There's a saying I once read on the internet. A horse may run quickly but it cannot escape its tail. I never got to search for its meaning but it feels like it's stating the fact that you can run, but you can't hide pretty well. There are two things I hate, pressure and lies.

Today I'm facing that one thing. Pressure. I don't know how many times I've filled my glass with water, staring at the clock ticking away on the wall. I didn't even go to church yesterday maybe that's why I feel so abandoned.

It's 09h00. An hour since I've been summoned to the principal's office and I wanted nothing more than to just vanish and pretend as if nothing happened Kwa Zwane. Honestly I thought ignoring what people were saying about me by avoiding my phone would help, but it only made me more and more on edge about how far it has spread.

I look back and see the two mannequins behind me. Yes, Bangi preached about my safety over a long voice note I got on WhatsApp. I couldn't say no to them cause I did need them since things were an utter mess.

The red door on my far left shoots open and Mrs Phakade walks in with a thicker than life book jammed between her arm and bust. She closes the door, staring at my mannequins for a good second before gradually making her way to her seat. I'm filling my glass up again. At this rate, I'll be making frequent trips to the toilet.

"Miss Dlamini." She sits down and pulls her seat forward. The book resting on the table.

"Principal Phakade." I answer. Dammit. Why didn't I clear my throat.

"Gentlemen."

When I eye them they're bowing ever so slightly at the greeting.

"Miss Dlamini, I'm sure it is of no surprise why I've called you here."

Okay, now I want to act dumb.

"I think...I think I do." I take in a deep breath.

"There's an inappropriate video circulating the community. Also a few I assume rumours about you and the Prince."

"Ma'am" a mannequin from behind me warns.

"Please. Let her finish." I sigh.

"As you wish Miss." He replies.

"Do you have a drinking problem Miss Dlamini?" Phakade asks

me. I gawk at her.

"I do not."

"Then how do you explain the video of you drinking in a public area"

"That was the first time, ever, in my life taking alcohol, and it's only because I thought it would help me deal with everything I've been faced with."

"So you, a whole Life Orientation's teacher didn't think for a second that one of her lessons may apply to real life? Drinking doesn't solve your problems miss Dlamini. Even a two year old knows that."

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that if you are unable to follow your own teachings then maybe you shouldn't be regarded as one of our best teachers in this school. Look Dlamini, I have no care what you do outside of this school premises as long as it doesn't affect this school in whichever way."

I sigh. I know all of this. What I can and cannot do, but to be crucified for this dumb decision is really breaking my heart.

"Are you firing me?" I ask.

"No Miss Dlamini. Not yet. There's procedures in this thing and I can't let you go without following them."

"Okay..." I say not so sure anymore about what I should think cause I could actually be losing my job.

How can I mess up so bad?

How can I fall victim to such a stupid decision.

"I'm going to have to suspend you for a minimum period of at least a week."

I look down at my lap, tears failing to stay back. This is me losing a job I've worked so damn hard for to get. My years of training and sleepless nights are now in vain. My hard prayers and the two jobs I had to tackle in order to support my siblings and myself was for nothing. Nothing at all.

"I'm sorry Dlamini."

"It's fine." I wipe away a tear before sitting up.

"Listen, if you need to go say something to your grade nines, then I'll allow it."

I nod and get up before I reach the door of the office feeling like shit. When I open the door someone is leaning onto the door, and awkwardly pretends as if they weren't just eavesdropping on what was happening in here.

"I...was just bringing t...these papers to Principal Phakade."

"Really Deborah?" Me. I move past her and head to my classroom. It's quiet. I forgot I had two off periods. *Good*. This is

what I needed. "Can I please have some privacy?" I request from the two mannequins.

"Of course Miss." They both turn to leave and close the door behind them. I look around my classroom. I sniff before sitting down on my chair, arms flat on my desk as I started crying my lungs out at the thought. I wanted to pull my braids out and burn this whole school down.

How could they do this to me?

How could I do this to myself?

I don't know how long I sit there after my crying session. I glance at my phone for the time. 09h40 the bell is bound to ring any second now so I fix myself. I can't allow the kids to see me like this. Especially not my favorite class. Just as I had predicted, the bell rings and it's chaos outside. I can hear the kids changing classes as usual.

The door opens and a mannequin peeps in.

"Miss your class is present outside."

"Let them in." I force a smile on my face. He opens the door and they quietly walk into my class, probably shocked by the two tall men at the door. They go stand behind their chairs. I clear my throat. "Sit grade nines."

They sit. I go stand in front of them as they looked up at me, some of them take out their books but I stop them.

"You don't have to take your books for today, cause I'm leaving."

"Leaving? Again?" Mbali asks.

I nod. "I have to."

"Ma'am you don't have to." Siya says.

"Unfortunately, I have no choice."

"Ma'am you always have a choice." Someone else says.

I shake my head.

"So who'll teach us L.O like you ma'am?"

"We're falling behind ma'am, and you always discourage that."

"I don't want another teacher." Siya says. I heave out a sigh.

"I'm sorry guys...hugs?"

"Ma'am you're making it sound like this is your last day here with us." Thabo says getting up as well.

It might just be. We share a satisfying group hug.

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"You don't sound well to me." He says on the other end of the line.

"How do I sound like Bangi?"

"Like you've been crying...have you been crying? Did I do something wrong?"

"Well I've been suspended from work." I say.

"What! When? Why?" He bombards.

"Yesterday, for everything that's been happening."

"So, this is my fault."

I sigh, removing an irritating eyelash from my eye.

"I didn't say that."

"You're thinking of it though."

"I am obviously, but I can't just blame you for everything that's out there. If I didn't get intoxicated then I wouldn't be in this dire situation. I added fuel to my own fire."

"Zano, I'm so sorry."

"I'll probably still have to go a hearing soon, but I want nothing more than to not think about this thing."

"What if I..."

"If you what?"

"I should've done this ages ago. Can I call you later?"

"What are you going to do?"

"You'll see. I still love you okay."

Oh God!

There goes that giddy feeling again.

My cheeks heat up as a smile manages to sneak up on me, after so many hours of sadness and tears.

"I...you can call me later."

"So you still won't admit you have a little bit of attraction for me?"

I do. In fact I've come to realise it's a lot of attraction and it scares me. I just wanted a clear conscious for when I did eventually tell him how I felt.

"Okay...cool, I'll talk to you later" he states before hanging up. I hate making him feel like this. I hate making him feel like I don't care, when I do.

I scroll down to Zweli's number, battling my own brain for how I'm about to do this. Simple, call the man. End it.

It shouldn't be that hard. I mean, what else am I holding onto?
Broken faith?

A cheating man hoe? A liar?

The words of Phakade ring in my head. Why can't I follow what I preach? How many more times am I going to allow Zwelibanzi to hurt me?

Not notice me?

Why is he not answering my calls?

Probably because he's with Mpilo...or at work.

I try again and it still doesn't get answered. Fine. I go to messages, getting comfortable on my bed as I prepared to type the longest text of my life.

'Hi. Since for some weird reason you wont answer my calls, I hope this message finds you well and healthy. I wish to just

pour out my heart today and tell you how I feel. This relationship has not been the same since you cheated on me. You see I can't even bring myself to forget it cause it hurt me so much. I thought that taking you back and giving us another try would be the same and we would just continue where we left off but I was wrong. I never thought the day would come where you would lay your hands on me, looking like you were ready to get rid of me completely. I was wrong for believing that you would still be that funny and caring guy who wouldn't be afraid to tell the world about us. I don't know what I did wrong or how we ended up growing apart but the truth is, we did. I've noticed that I want to move on. I want more than this. There's no trust here, there's no honesty here and clearly there's no love anymore. This is me setting you free and letting you go be with the person who can satisfy your own needs and desires cause clearly I'm always going to be fat and not ready. Bye.'

I press send.

That was so satisfying.

•••

Evening hit and I was busy cooking something for supper. Buhle and Khaya were still busy with their homework on the lounge table and I was not about to disturb them, even with the news of my suspension.

The front door opens and Zonke walks in here. Our eyes lock, and I knew she had something to say at that instant. I wondered where she had been for all of these days. With a partner or?

"This family is a sham."

"Zonke..." Me.

"No, don't talk to me Ms goody two shoes."

"What do you mean?" I close my pots.

"Exactly that." She says and walks off down the passage, into Buhle's room.

I shake my head. I'll just ignore her then like any other day.

After eating, I quickly washed the dishes and got reminded of the trip happening this Saturday. Buhle told me too that she wanted to go spend her weekend at a sleepover at her friend's house. Which I allowed her to do so as long as she acted like an adult.

I sit on the couch and hop on straight to Google for a something I could do at an affordable price for Bangi. It definitely had to have cars in it...or maybe a much needed dance class for the two of us. Those options are cheap.

But did it cater for the waltz...or the tango? I don't know. The racing sounds fun though. Maybe some food after too. A little picnic, with a beautiful scene...too expensive. I huff. That did

sound good though. Too good. Maybe I can find a great racing place, plan a cheaper picnic.

Nyiso... maybe she can borrow me some cash.

That's a bad idea, especially with the odds.

Have him pay? For his own surprise picnic? Maybe not.

You know what. Let me just do this. I'll regret it later.

My phone starts ringing as I was about to book us up at the racing place.

"Mge?"

"Channel 3, now." She says and hangs up. I grab the remote from Khaya's lap and change the channel.

"I was still watching that." He whines.

"I'll give it back now now." I say as the content shows itself on my screen. I turn up the volume a little.

"...with the public responding better than what we expected them to, all due to an official statement published by the Prince, Bangizwe. This is all fro-..." I switch the channel back to Khaya's soccer match, not allowing the woman to report any further. Nyiso sends me screenshots of what she's just made me watch.

'Read those with caution.' Her caption read.

I head to my room, leaving Khaya.

"A statement by the communications secretary of Prince Bangizwe. Since an early age the Prince of Emashazini has been made aware that his life will always be in the limelight, receiving warmth from people all around."

I shake my head before reading further.

"The Prince is also very aware that there is awfully a lot of curiosity surrounding his private life which he does not appreciate , now more especially since someone he is close with has been harassed by the public and shamed on multiple occasions. Zanokuhle Dlamini had to endure reporters spreading pictures

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invading her privacy and also not being granted the freedom to move as she pleased at her own place."

"The Prince is worried about the safety and wellbeing of Ms Dlamini. He is disheartened that there is only a certain amount of things he can do to aid in this situation. This is not a game. This is his and her life. This is not a plea for more unwanted attention. The Prince is issuing out this statement in the hopes that reporters will stop spreading inaccurate and fake news before this spirals into something worse." I read the last bit and let in some much needed air into my lungs.

'This on the newspapers?' I text her.

'Yep.'

'How old is this?'

'Fairly fresh mge.'

I nod to myself and go dial Bangi's number. He answers almost immediately.

"I was about to call you."

"Well I beat you to it." I chuckle.

"I'm guessing you've seen the statement." Bangi says

"I have a fast friend."

"Now, I'm sure people will start backing off, and understand why you did what you did."

"Are you trying to make them give me my job back or something?"

"I'm trying to give you back a piece of your normality. I've completely ruined that for you."

I clear my throat.

"Uh, are you doing something tomorrow?"

"Like what?"

"Princey stuff, you know."

He chuckles. "Princey stuff...well I will be busy, but not the whole day. Why?"

"Good, how does 12h00 sound?"

"Sounds like you have something up your sleeves."

"Please put on something nice. Not too formal too. I don't want to get you expensive shirts dirty."

"What are you planning?"

"Just be ready. Chery and I will be there at 12." I hang up exactly after saying that.

He calls me back. I hang up giggling.

'Did you just say Chery is picking me up tomorrow? Excuse me.'

'What's wrong with Chery now?'

'You're serious? I told you that car is not roadworthy anymore.'

'And I told you to leave my baby alone.'

'I wish you'd call me baby instead.'

I send him a bunch of laughing emoji's before sending him a goodnight text.



My reflection stared back at me. My face was as blank as an empty book. The bags underneath my eyes were empty, the life sucked out of them. My body stiff and screaming for some rest while my heart just beat away to the tempo of the clock in my

room. I walked closer to my reflection and stood there for a good second...

I looked at the top of my forehead where my wild untamed hairline hair roamed freely. My plum full cheeks and lips that looked just like my mother's. My naked shoulders which glided smoothly, glowing and golden like honey. My full, fallen breasts sitting perfectly on my chest. I looked down at my belly...this mushy beautiful thing right here that connected right to my love handles where my fingertips glided across the marks of my skin stretching to accommodate all this loveliness. These bumpy thighs and hips...gosh...where is all this beauty coming from?

And this smile on my face. It can't be because 12h00 is just around the corner...or was it.

There was an extra spring to my step as I made my way to the kitchen to boil some water to bath in. After bathing I get dressed in one of the dresses Nyiso bought for me. It's a beautiful mustard yellow colour and because I felt extra about myself, I paired it a black clock heel.

I let my braids loose, but then later decide against it. I tie it up. A nude colored lipstick goes onto my lips and a little bit of mascara to my lashes. I spray on some perfume before taking all the things I needed for this day. I find Zonke on the couch, wrapped in a blanket, reminding me of the weather outside. I

go fetch a jean jacket of mine in my wardrobe and throw it over my arm.

My mannequins have been changed again. Two new faces to watch me now.

I make the drive all the way to the palace in under an hour. I roll down the window. They look at me once and let me in.

No ID? Nothing?

I spot him, not so far away. Hands in his pockets. A smile.

"Morning. I mean afternoon." I correct myself.

"Hey. Can I get a hug?" He says taking his hands out of his pockets. I could never resist this man's hugs even if I wanted to.

"You look beautiful." He whispers into my ear, arms tightening around my waist.

"You look handsome too."

"Is that so?"

"Yes." I say rolling my eyes.

Someone clears their throat. I let go of him, but he still keeps me in place. It's Amandla, looking at him and I with a grin on her face.

"Hey Zano."

"Ama." I acknowledge.

"Good to see you." She says before walking off to some cars. I wonder where she is going.

"Anyway, I forgot something in my wing. Come."

"But..."

"Come on." He pulls me by my waist as we made our way up the stairs to the entrance of the palace. We head off to another direction this time around. The day I was here, I was put in the guest wing. A shit massive guest wing at that too cause I'm sure it would be able to accommodate almost 50 people if need be. Probably even more.

We pass a massive indoor pool which was being maintained. He waves at them. I don't know if I should do the same.

We get to a huge glass door, ones you couldn't see through. Those initials again written on each of the doors. 'B' on one, 'S' on the other. I giggle, face palming myself. He eyes me as he was busy unlocking the door.

"What?" He asks.

"It's nothing." I shake my head, stopping myself from laughing any further.

The door is pushed open and he allows me in first. The lights come on and wow, this place was so clean and well kept. Everything was in place. That eagle statue is also present in his wing.

"I'll be right back. Make yourself at home okay."

I nod and he lets go of my waist.

This place is bigger than what I thought it would be when he said wing. It was probably bigger than the guest wing itself. I make my way through the place. White walls, also filled with art and portraits of him. I think I loved his portraits more than I loved the art paintings. He looked so handsome in these.

There's a shirtless one up on these walls too. What the heck?

I move right along before I start thinking about stuff that I shouldn't be thinking about.

There's a massive TV in here, it even looks glued to the wall. The light brown couches, soft and leathery under my touch. The detail on the mere cushions had me in awe. There's a small side table next to this one couch. On it was a picture. The picture is of a cute chubby boy in uniform with the biggest most heart melting smile I've ever seen.

I shiver as he snakes his hands around my waist, resting his chin on my shoulder.

"Did I scare you?"

"A little." I chuckle. "Who's this?"

"You mean you can't recognise your own Prince?" He says.

"Wait, you were...fat?"

"Pretty much my entire childhood."

"You lie!" I gasp as I hear him chuckle.

"I'm serious. I was bullied too back in Private school. Then I got taken out of there and was homeschooled for the rest of my school years."

"How did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Lose all the bad weight."

"I just did it. I've come to realise that if you want something for yourself you'll do it with no worries, but if someone forces you...it won't work out just as you expect."

"Wow." I sigh.

"Anyway, I think a lot of anger contributed to me transforming my look. I didn't want to be known as this boy anymore."

"Then why keep a picture?"

"Because that boy is still somewhere in me in any case. I can't just forget him." He says and takes the picture from my hold and lets me go. He stares at the picture of himself for a while before putting it back where I picked it up.

"I can't believe you were bullied..." I say. It hurt me thinking of his young self having to go through what I went through. I know what it's like to be bullied, but luckily I had my mother to build me up.

I wonder if he had anyone motivating him or something...

"Anyway enough about this topic. Here."

I turn around to find him holding something that was in an envelope.

"What is this?"

"An invitation."

"To?"

"You'll open it after wherever you're taking me to."

I give him a questioning look, but I'll respect his wishes.

Besides, I can wait.

"Let's go then." I give him my hand to take as we left this place.

Once outside I give him the keys to my Chery.

"You're serious?" He chuckles, an eyebrow lifted.

"One hundred percent. I mean what's wrong with Chery?"

"Look at me. Would I fit in that?"

"If I can fit, then there's nothing you should worry about." I chuckle, giving him a little push.

"Lord have mercy." He complains, but still takes a step towards Chery. I'm grinning ear to ear watching him open her door.

"Get in." I encourage getting into my side. He sighs, getting in. I close my mouth with my palm as I fail to contain my laughter when his knees force him to push the seat back.

"It's not funny." He says, humor pretty evident in his voice.

"I'm sorry."

"Why am I even the one driving?"

"Because, I want you to drive."

He shakes his head and closes the door before bringing Chery to life. He proceeds to putting on his safety belt. I do the same. We drive out of here with the motorcade following right behind us.

"This car is ridiculous."

"Chery and I have history. Longer than you and I."

"I just can't believe she's running beyond 60"

"You can take a right here..." I direct him. "...Chery is timeless. Three owners down the line and she's still doing what other people fail to do."

"And what is that?"

"Sticking around."

He breaks down in the most beautiful laugh I've ever heard. I shake my head.

"I can do that and even more."

"Words...Those are just words and not actions."

"Words that I mean truthfully, also have I ever let you down with my actions before?" he says, glancing at me before focussing back on the road again.

"No not yet." I lay back in my seat.

"How can you say that without even giving me a chance then?"

After almost an hour and a half of driving he parks the car at this racing place. I got a little delighted when I saw him look excited by this. At least I didn't waste any money. We spend hours it seems at this place, with him beating me three times in a row.

Was I not embarrassed, especially after claiming I was good at this.

We then drive to the place where I had asked them to prepare two picnic spots for us to use. It was an indoor setup that impressed me beyond anything.

On the floor they laid out a clean white blanket, four red cushions and red roses on the edges of the layout.

What is it valentines day?

"What is going on here? Did you do all of this?"

"I paid people to do it for me." Me.

"Ouuuu...are you spoiling me?" Bangi asks squeezing my hand.

I roll my eyes. The lady in front of us curtsies. "Your highness, miss Dlamini, I welcome you here to Tammy's gardens and indoor services. It is an honour to have you both here."

Poor thing sounds so nervous all because of Bangi here.

"Over here we have a variety of dishes which include meatballs, a variety of cheeses, some nuts, strawberries covered in

chocolate and a specific order of Juice. Enjoy." She says before walking out of here.

"Thank you Tammy." I say.

I swallow the grape in my mouth..

"So, you mean to tell me the same old man gave us these beads?" I ask, sitting next to him.

"That's exactly what I'm telling you. He gave these to me a day before I saw yours."

"Why didn't you have yours on then?"

"I was confused. Bothered and thought the man was insane."

"I tried throwing mine away. They came right back."

He chuckles.

"Strawberry?" He asks putting it near my lips. I swallow before opening my mouth a little. He pops half of the strawberry into my mouth, before I bite into it. I chew and as if things couldn't get any hotter, they do when he finishes the rest of the strawberry. "Sweet, delicious... Just like how I would imagine your lips are."

I look away and stop chewing to swallow. How does one avoid such words?

Now all thanks to him I can't help wondering how *his* taste like.

"Would be better if you found out for yourself." The words slip out of my mouth. Somehow I don't even regret them. I turn to

look at him. His eyes were focussed on me. He lifts his hand, running his thumb on my bottom lip...ever so gently.

"Do I have permission?" He asks. My eyes travel down to his bottom lip, that he bites on.

"Yes." I breathe out

His lips twitch into a smile as he leaned in, placing those majestic lips onto mine. My heart is beating unbelievably fast.

What the heck?

I open my eyes. "A peck really?"

He lets out a chuckle before shaking his head. "I don't go around kissing people who aren't my girlfriends."

"Then I am your girlfriend." I almost whine.

"What?" He grins.

"Bangzi kiss me." I say.

He cups my face with his warm hands. Our foreheads rest on each other.

"Okay...baby..." He whispers before his lips are on mine again.

•••

I got here at about an hour ago and I couldn't believe that I was officially Bangizwe's girlfriend. Like never mind the fact that this would've happened sooner than when it did but I needed some kind of ground to stand on. Some clear foundation. I hope he dealt with Noluntu before I agreed to this just like I did.

My cheeks heat up at the thought of us together. I feel like flying, up with the stars...but it's probably a little too soon for that. Plus I have that dreaded email I have to attend to from work.

There's a knock on the door.

"Get it will you Gimba." Zonke says from the couch.

"But you're closer nje." I say. We're the only two in this area of the house. The other two have gone to bed.

"Zonke come on." I say. I'm talking to myself. I wipe my hands dry and make my way to the door. Its a mannequin.

"Miss you have a guest." He says.

"Oh?" Me. He moves from the door and my heart stops for a second.

What is he doing here?

Chapter Thirteen.

"You've got to learn to leave the table when love is no longer being served." x NINA SIMONE.

••

"Zanokuhle." He says stepping forward. I take a step back.

"Ufunani wena la?" I ask after a while of processing it all, my bottom lip quivering.

"Baba!" Zonke jumps off the couch, shooting right into the arms of this man that had two bags with him. "Baba, you came back."

"I had to." He says as Zonke lets him go. I give a nod to the mannequin, informing him that he could give us some sort of privacy.

"Zanokuhle move, let baba in." She takes his bags from the ground and allows the man to walk in first.

Did she just call me by my name?

"I'm sure Khaya and Buhle will be so excited to see you baba, just like I am." She says offering him a chair. I'm still at the door, which I decide to close after realising that this was really happening. "Should I get you anything to drink? Coffee? Tea? Water?"

"iCoffee ilungile Zonke." He says, his gaze focussed on me.

Zonke nods continuously as she headed to the kitchen to put some water into the kettle.

He looked a little older than what he did all those years ago. White hairs invaded the hair on his head. He still liked keeping a clean face I see. He took out a handkerchiefs to wipe away the sweat on his forehead. I can't believe he still did that...makes me wonder if he still smoked like a chimney.

"I see you guys made some changes to the house." He says, finally removing his gaze from me to look around. "It looks great."

"Zano even managed to extend the house." Zonke adds for no good reason.

"*Nonozi* is still a hard worker I see." He says tapping on the table. I hated that name.

"Ngisayolala. (I'm going to sleep)" I state and make my way to my room, slamming the door behind me as I let out a mother of all breaths. How can I go from being the happiest woman alive to the most livid in a matter of seconds again.

Why is this man here, in this very house he left us in to suffer and fend for ourselves?

My phone rings from between my breasts. It's Bangi and somehow just by seeing his name flashing on my screen brings some joy to my heart.

"Bangi..."

"My baby. I miss you."

I chuckle and make my way to my bed before sitting at the edge. "I miss you too."

"You know I can't even sleep. I'm still thinking about today to every detail. All thanks to you."

I shake my head. "Sleep Bangi, you said you have a busy day ahead of you tomorrow and you need to rest."

"Can't I just come and see you then before I do? It'll make me sleep better."

"That sounds nice, but no. Besides my father is around." I sigh.

"You don't sound excited."

"I don't know if I should be... I really don't." Look at me already shitting on this relationship with heavy stuff. I'm basically ruining his mood, just like mine is. "Look I don't want to be a sour grape right now, so how about we talk tomorrow?"

"Can I come fetch you later then? Tomorrow."

"Bangi..."

"I can make time for you, if that's what you're worried about."

I smile and bite on my bottom lip, my mind drifting off to that kiss. Those majestic lips and how he was just so gently with me. The way he held me...the way he took his time to make me feel what he felt. The emotions... Everything.

"Baby?" He brings me out of my thoughts.

"Mhn?"

"You didn't answer my question."

"What question?"

He chuckles. "Will I be able to see you then?"

"Oh, yes. Of course."

"You don't know how happy that makes me." He says. I could hear the excitement in his statement and that brought warmth to my heart. "Did you open the envelope?"

That reminds me. I get up from the bed and go fetch the envelope from my handbag. "No. What is in it?"

"Hau, open it."

"Fine."

I roll my eyes, putting my phone on loudspeaker and placing it on my bed. I remove the eagle seal from the envelope and open it.

"An invite?"

"Read it."

"Relax." I giggle and open the letter of invitation. My eyes go wide. "Amandla's birthday ball?"

"Yes. I want you to come with me."

"Ha, this thing is going to be filled with people."

"People I want you to meet. Including some of my friends."

"Bangi, this is a lot."

"You have about a month to think about it, no biggie."

No biggie? Is he hearing himself? I am going to be rubbing shoulder with his friends? See his family again? Okay, I need to calm down.

"I...okay, I'll go with you."

"Great. Now I can sleep with a little bit of peace." He says. "Get your beautiful self some rest okay. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Okay, I can't wait."

"I love you."

Iyoh, my heart does a 360 degree turn as I take the phone from my bed and bring it closer to my mouth.

"I love you too."

"Awu suka madoda! My baby finally said it. Baze bajabula oMalinga, oZindela..!" He praises, till I fall back on my bed eyes closed. Why am I acting like I've never been in love before...actually why does it feel like I've never been in love before. These butterflies feel so new, so abnormal.

"Ngiyak'thanda uyezwa."

"Ba-bye Bangi."

"Umuntu uyo phupha kamnandi namuhla."

"Jesu, go Sleep Bangi."

"Okay, can I hear it one more time ke? For my own health."

I roll my eyes. My cheeks hurt. "I love you Bangi."

"Mhn...okay okay. Let me go."



It's so quiet in here, you would swear I would hear a needle if it were to drop on this very concrete floor. It's like I'm alone in here but in actuality I was with Buhle and Khaya. They went mute after I told them of who was here. I don't know if they were confused or couldn't remember him, especially Khaya.

"Kodwa baba..." Zonke's laughs fills the passage as they step out of Khaya's room.

"She was like that, always testing me." He says in that hoarse voice of his.

"Aii, I miss Aunt Miriam." Zonke says as they finally reached the lounge, still laughing to whatever they were talking about.

He looks up to me as he was preparing to take a seat on one of the chairs. "Sanibonani."

"Yebo." Buhle greets solemnly.

I shake my head.

"Nonozi..." He says. I fold my arms in front of my chest.

"...please say something."

"Why are you here?"

"Zano, we don't talk like that with our father." Zonke says.

What is with her?

I chuckle. She's serious. I grab the plates of breakfast and serve them all, including the man who is my father. I sit down at the spot next to Zonke and ask that we say a short prayer before we ate, like I always did.

After the prayer he starts digging in almost immediately. Zonke follows suite. Buhle picks on her food. Khaya eventually puts something in his mouth, but he isn't eating like his usual self.

I don't know if I want to eat or just save this for later, cause I know I'm hungry.

"So, Buhle what grade are you in?" He asks, averting his attention from me looking at her.

"12." She answers almost irritated.

"Wow...you're almost done moes, when I was last here you were..." He trails off causing me to chuckle again, only this time in disbelief.

"You didn't answer my question."

"What question Nonozi?"

"Why are you here?"

"I missed my children."

"That is complete and utter bullshit." I say.

"Zano." Zonke tries to chip in.

"Zonke it took him 10 years to remember he has children? 10 years of no calls? No sending something that could see us

through all these years of suffering?" I say. Khaya pushes his seat back and takes his plate of food heading to the front door.

"Khaya, where are you going?"

"I'm going to eat outside." He says, opens the door and steps out. Buhle pushes her chair back too, getting up.

"I'm think I'm going to join him." She says doing exactly what Khaya did not so long ago.

"Are they always like that?" He asks.

"Like what?" I ask.

"So disrespectful."

"Disrespectful? My siblings are not disrespectful. How do you even expect them to react when a man they haven't seen for so long just shows up out of nowhere? And on top of that acts like he didn't do anything wrong."

"Why aren't you just appreciative like me that he's back?"

Zonke asks, clearly annoyed by the fact that I was questioning her precious father.

"Zonke, so you're not bothered by the fact that he wasn't there to mourn with us when mom died? He was not here to help you finish school at least...he was not here to be a father."

"Stop acting like he wasn't there at all. Most people don't even have that privilege. Most people don't even know their real fathers."

"You call this a privilege?"

"Yes. You and I both know we're glad he's back and alive."

I look at the man. He's stopped eating his food. It is quiet in here again. I should just go put my food away cause I'm clearly not going to eat at this point. I just wanted out of here too.

"So, where's Fihliwe?" I ask. I can't believe I still remember her name...but then again how can you forget the name of the person who took our father and never gave him back? I've seen her twice in my life and I'm okay with that. My leg was shaking under the table as I asked this and he seemed to take forever to come up with his response.

"She's back at our place. You have two brothers too now."

I chuckle. "And you're in their lives? Meanwhile, we are here too...surviving."

"Nonozi..."

"Stop calling me that please! Stop okay, I'm not a kid anymore."

"Nonozi, I mean no harm...you'll always be my kid. I'm sorry I left you guys for so long, I didn't think I'd be doing so much damage..." I roll my eyes. "...but you've done so well for this family Nonozi, even you Zonke...I'm proud of you. Look now my Nonozi is seen with the Prince and..."

"Ohhhh!" I get up. He goes quiet looking at me. "Now I get it. You didn't come here because you missed us, you came back

here because of rumours."

"Nonozi..."

"Haii marn! Stop it...stop lying, stop calling me that

Advertisement

stop it all. With all due respect, I want you to leave."

"Zano." Zonke warns.

I shoot her a look.

"How do you expect me to just leave you guys here? I said I'm sorry."

"I want you to leave the same way you left 10 years ago."

I take my plate of food and head to my room.

•••

I just finished replying and confirming the time I'd show up for the hearing that was set up for me to attend tomorrow afternoon. I was not ready, but being in the dark about what my working status was, was killing me with worry.

For now I was preparing myself for tonight. Bangi texted me about an hour ago informing me to start preparing myself as his trusted people will be here to fetch me when I was done. I put on a simple faded pair of jeans and a floral top...which I later change to a plain black light sweater. Okay this worked better. I put on a watch of mine that stopped working two years ago, just to accessorize.

I use a headband to push my braids back since I decided to wear them loose. I grab my phone and handbag before stepping out of my room.

'I'm done.' I text him. Within seconds, there's a reply.

'I think they're there already.' His reply read. I smile and pull my door close.

'Okay. Should I text you when I get there?' I send him the question.

"Buhle." I peek into her room after knocking.

She doesn't respond. She has earphones in her ear. I walk to her, tap on her shoulder and she looks up, startled by my presence. "I didn't mean to scare. I'm going out okay. Tell Khaya when he comes back."

"Okay." She says. "Are you...never mind."

"No, khuluma."

She clears her throat sitting up. "Are you going to see Zweli?"

"No. Turns out I didn't like or trust him too."

I see her smile. "Okay you can go now."

"You'll behave?"

"Always."

"Good. I'll bring you back some scones from the palace." I back

away.

"Wait you're going to see the Prince?" She gasps.

"Shh...hau...bye." I dash out of her room, giggling. This is unhealthy.

My phone vibrates. **'Yes.'** Bangi replied to my text.

I find my father and Zonke by the front door. This man is not going to leave is he?

"Are those royal men?" He asks.

"As you can see baba." Zonke answers for me.

"So you're going there? To the palace? Greet His Royal Majesty and Her Royal Highness for me Nonozi." He says.

"I have to go." I walk past them. Honestly I still didn't want this man here but he's managed to keep Zonke home for the longest time ever. So maybe him being here is good...for her.

A familiar looking mannequin opens my door and I thank him stepping in. I was avoiding the stares from the obvious surroundings. He closes my door and I get driven away. I wipe my sweaty palms, trying to distract myself from the distance that ticked away the closer we got to the palace.

I thought of texting Nyiso in the hopes of distracting myself, but I thought that wouldn't be fair. I shake my head, before looking out. The sun was almost out of sight. You could see with each minute going by how the view changed. From gravel bumpy

and uneven roads to smooth streets with tall street lights. The houses were getting bigger and better too. It felt like the grass was definitely greener this side.

The car comes to a halt by the huge gates of this enormous palace.

'I'm at the gate.' I text him just as the car drives in.

'I'm literally run.' He sends me that before another one comes through. **'Running*'** he corrects himself.

I snort. Why is he running? This man will tire himself out before he even gets to the main entrance. That mannequin opens my door again, offers me a hand and helps me out of the car...even if I didn't need much help.

"Am I allowed to ask for your name?" I question. He closes my door.

"My name is Deliverance." He says.

"Oh...Deliverance. Thank you."

Who names their child Deliverance?

Anyway, I've probably hear more unique names from back at my job. I had a kid named Passion in my class once. Smart kid.

"Can I usher you in Miss?" Deliverance asks.

"Please." I say and he leads the way, but when we get to the stairs he allows me to walk in front of him. The same guards at

the gate are at this very entrance as well. A few are at the sides of the stairs. I feel so watched at this point. Like missing a step would cause me immediate crucifixion.

"My Prince you cannot run, it is not safe!" Someone yells and there he appears from the top of the stairs. The woman who had been trying to stop him is a few feet behind him. He looks out of breath. A hot out of breath mess. When our eyes meet he throws me a smile, walking down the few stairs I still had to climb on. And as if we didn't have eyes on us, he pulls me to him for a hug.

I hear him taking in a deep breath right after burying his nose on my neck. I have mine on his chest. His heart was still beating fast and hard yet it was so calm and slow. "You could've walked you know. You would've still found me here." I say and chuckle. He lets me go, shaking his head.

"Come." He clasps my hand into his.

We get to his wing and he immediately closes the door, jamming me between it and his tall self. I squeal inwardly as he surprises me with a kiss, his hands cupping the sides of my face. My hands go onto his forearms, holding on for dear life as it felt like I was walking on jelly.

The smack of our lips the moment they separate has me gasping. My eyes shoot open as Bangi utters a whispered "Wow."

"I've been waiting all day to do that." He utters before he gives me a quick last peck letting me go. My arms drop to my sides again, afraid to admit I was thinking the same thing. I'd rather keep myself in place. "Juice?"

I nod as words fail me.

I make myself at home, like I did yesterday. The place was in the same clean condition I had left it in. I sit on the couch that was next to that picture, my handbag going near my feet.

When he walks in here carrying two glasses of juice I notice he's not wearing his shoes anymore. He hands me mine and brings the small table closer to me.

"Thank you."

"You're welcome, baby."

He sits down right next to me. I take a sip of the juice. "This is some good juice."

"It's freshly squeezed." He says with almost no care in the world.

Must be nice having that as a normal thing then.

"How about I play us some music?" He asks. I nod before he gets up to go fetch a remote. He presses a button and some music starts playing softly filling the room. It's a song I've heard before...where konje? He lowers the volume a bit, to just the right amount that is sufficient for me to hear myself thinking.

"You okay with Michael?"

"Michael?" I question.

"Bolton. Michael Bolton."

"Oh." I was about to argue when I thought he was going to say Jackson, cause I knew my MJ.

He comes to sit next to me once again, only this time he sits back throwing his arm to the back rest of the couch. I lay back too, taking another sip of this freshly squeezed juice.

"How was your day?" I ask, glancing at him as he sipped on his juice.

"Busy. Boring. It was a lot of talking too about how we're going to conduct a partnership with the president of South Africa. Hopefully it can create unity with our two lands. And an investment."

"Iyoh." I breathe out. This is serious stuff.

"What about you baby?" He chuckles and looks down at me.

"How was yours...especially since you told me your father was around."

"Well he's still around. I've been avoiding him. Is that a bad

thing?"

"Depends."

"On what?"

"On why you're avoiding him."

I clear my throat. "It's a long story Bangi."

"And I have two listening ears...talk to me."

I shake my head. I might as well tell him then. "Well, okay... My mom died when I was only 15."

"I'm sorry to hear that." Bangi says.

I nod. "She used to work emakhishini while my dad would do small piece jobs on the side every other month. This used to bother my mom a lot cause they would even fight because of his lack of pride in a sense. My dad would literally quit an actual job when he'd get a proper one too and just claim that the boss of that place was mistreating him or being rude and unfair."

"Mh..."

"Well, then after we had managed to bury my mom he stuck around for 2 weeks before running off with some sugar mama he met at the funeral. Some woman who I heard got her money from her late husbands life cover." I chuckle at how I remembered Lilly telling me all of this a few years ago.

"Wow." He breathes out.

"When he left he never looked back. He never sent any money, He never called...he never even sent a simple letter telling us anything and we had to be figure out our way through life. Then we met Mrs Nkosi."

"Who's Mrs Nkosi?"

"A woman of Christ. She would send us groceries, enough for at least a month while we continued going to school. Khaya being only six at that time, was a lot to deal with so she took him and raised up until he was ten. I made sure I'd go see him every single day. My older sister failed her matric..." I pause, not wanting to talk further about Zonke like that. I didn't want him to see her as a failure. Not when I've seen the good she's done for us.

"...by the time Khaya was returned I was already getting my part time first year started while I worked two jobs on the side. One major reason wasfor helping out with my fees and the other for helping out at home...you know what I'm sure you get why I don't want him around us. He's hurt us and I thought I forgave him but not until he showed up to our home." I say, feeling his hand rub my shoulder.

He kisses the side of my forehead.

"I'm sorry to hear that." He says. "You're a strong woman. My strong woman."

I smile before taking another sip of my juice.

"I just ruined our evening didn't I with all this sob story junk."

"No. Not at all. See now I understand why you're avoiding him."

He sips on his juice. "Plus, I value honesty and communication in a relationship not someone who'll just throw dishes around when they're angry."

I snort at the thought. "You've had someone like that before?"

"No not really. I don't even have more than a handful of exes to talk about."

"Are that bad with girls?"

"I'm picky."

I burst out with laughter. "Picky?"

"I'm serious. I've just always been like that."

"Where you picky with me?"

"No..." He says. I look at him a little offended. "...I say this in the best of ways cause it just feels like I'm doing what my heart wants and not what my brain wants. There I was searching...but here, here I think I've found."

I look into his eyes, deeper than that...and it just felt like I've been here before cause it all just felt so familiar. I don't know what he has on his mind but he just shows me his smile again, which I mirror pretty soon enough.

"You wanna dance?" He asks.

With no care in the world I nod. We get up and he takes my empty glass from me, putting it right on that mini table. He takes my hands, puts them around his neck when the song starts singing.

"When a man loves a woman, can't keep his mind on nothing else, he'd trade the world for a good thing he's found." Bangi sings his hands firmly around my waist. I shake my head. He thinks he can out-sing me?

"If she is bad, he can't see it, she can do no wrong, turn his back on his best friend if he puts her down." I sing and slightly tilt my head as he gains his composure back.

"When a man loves a woman, spend his very last dime trying to hold on to what he needs" he sings and lifts his eyebrows after the last word.

"He'd give up all his comforts and sleep out in the rain if she said, that's the way, It ought to be" I sing.

"Okay okay..." He nods. I can't believe we haven't stepped on each other's toes like we did last time we attempted to dance. I chuckle. He brings his forehead closer and allows it rest on mine. With my eyes closed I allow him to guide me through this dance. "...mhn... Loving eyes can never see..."

My hands slides down from his neck those broad shoulders of his. I felt a peck on my cheek, followed by another and another. The other side gets just as much attention. Those acts alone have me smiling.

"I'm starting to think you like my kisses."

"Of course I do. What do you mean." I look at him.

"None of my exes seemed to like them." he shrugs. None of mine too.

"Well I'm not any of your exes now am I?" Me.

"That you are not." Bangi says and pecks my lips. I shake my head before standing on my tip toes just so I could kiss him again. Properly this time.

The song eventually fades away with us still in each other's arms.

"That song was nothing but perfection. Sung by a legend."

"Meh. Michael bolton may have sung this song to perfection. He hit the notes and everything, but it still lacks something..."

"What is that?"

"Percy sledge."

"Sometimes I forget I'm dealing with someone who knows her music." He chuckles. I let go of his shoulders. It takes a while for him to let me go though.

"Can I have a refill?" I ask. He looks down at me and then at my empty glass.

"You can have mine."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. Are you hungry? "

"You have any scones?"

"Scones?"

"I promised someone scones from the palace." I take his half full glass. He takes my empty one.

"Maybe I can have the helpers make you some then."

"In that case, leave it."

"It's not a problem, let me just go ask..." He gets up from the couch with me shaking my head slightly. He gets his cellphone out and heads to the kitchen. Not even a moment later I hear a knock on the door.

"Please get that for me baby." I hear him shout.

I get up from the couch too putting my glass on the side table before heading off to check on who the knocker could be. He immediately frowns when his eyes land on me.

"Girl who dances on tables...what are you doing here? Where's my brother?" He pushes me aside and walks right in.

"Bangizwe! Bangizwe!"

"Yoh, will you stop. I'm right here." He appears returning from the kitchen.

"Here too busy dining with the girl who nearly tarnished your image."

"Her name is Zanokuhle and I want you to respect that. Why are you even bothered by my image?"

"You're forgetting I'll be King one day and having a bad egg is not something I plan on having in my basket."

"You know, I'd expect this talk from dad, not you."

"Dad won't matter when I'm King cause he'll be gone. Stop whatever it is you're doing with Miss drunkard over here for all our sakes."

"Her name is Zanokuhle!"

"I don't care what her name is but do you know how much we're losing because of you."

"What are you talking about? Actually get out of my house."

"I'm telling mom you dumped Noluntu for this commoner."

I hear Bangi chuckle.

"Argh! Whatever makes you sleep at night Alakhe, now leave! Nxa!" He pushes him out of here shutting the door.

"Uh..." I sigh. "...maybe I should go."

"No. Come here..." He opens his arms. I finally manage to walk forward and sink into his arms. He holds me tight. "...I'm sorry about that. Alakhe can be a shithead sometimes."

Chapter Fourteen.

"Pretty words aren't always true and true words aren't always pretty."

••

"Guys...grade nines, please settle down." I walk into my classroom and instead of it being quiet, it gets even more chaotic. They rush to me. All of them. Attacking me with a ground shaking hug. I try to hug them all but to no success. They must've been informed of my return then cause I see some cake and balloons.

"Ma'am, we missed you." Mbali says, followed by the rest of them when they finally let me go. I was overwhelmed. I didn't think these kids would miss me this much.

"I missed you guys too."

"We bought you cake."

"You mean I bought the cake." Siya says.

"It's a class effort."

"Okay guys, relax. Thank you guys for this. Its so sweet of you. How about we eat after I see how far your substitute got with you?"

When I came for the hearing, I highly doubted the fact that I would be allowed to work here again. Not even the slightest. But all I got were two warnings. One written, the other verbally. The only reason I was not fired was because they didn't actually see me drinking in the video but they know I'm intoxicated judging by my actions and instability.

Siba wasn't at work today. Apparently she has been coming down with the flue.

•••

I arrive at home to find Zonke and her father playing cards on the table. I can't believe they both have been around for almost a week now. I was obviously happy about Zonke, but the man... not so much especially since he's adding more to my expenses. The man finished almost half of the tray of eggs in a matter of two days. That's all he does. Eat our food the moment the sun rises, up until the chickens start clucking at midnight. He was pissing me off, but I wanted to tolerate him for Zonke's sake.

She hasn't called me Gimba once, and she's been...nicer.

I liked her like this. Everyone else too.

"Sanibonani." I greet and head to the kitchen for a glass of water.

"Nonozi, how was work?" He asks.

"Okay, I guess." I down my water in almost one go before placing my glass on the sink. Who the hell used so many dishes? The bread is finished too?

I sigh.

"Nonozi, we've run out of cheese...and polony." He says. I turn to face them as he dealt Zonke her fair share of cards.

I don't even eat those. They're for Khaya and Buhle's lunch boxes. "How do you...you know what never mind." I grab my bag and head to my room. I literally bought those the time they went on their outings. When Khaya went to his soccer trip and Buhle went to her friend's sleepover.

I change into one of my rags for comfort before getting my phone out to text Bangi, an essential thing that has become a part of my routine now.

'Stuck in a meeting, can I call you later?' He replies about a minute later. That did hurt, but I understood. He is a busy mam.

'Okay, I love you.' I send him my reply with a heart emoji.

'I love you more.' He replies, before going offline almost immediately.

Must be really serious then.

I get up and grab my car keys from the inside of my handbag. I was planning on going to see Nyiso. It's been a while and I'm pretty sure she missed me too.

Soon, I'm on the road with the mannequins following behind me. The drive to Nyiso's house is not so far. The moment I get to her gate I realise I haven't been here in ages. I think I just avoided coming here because of her husband. It was awkward being around him, also it felt like I'd be invading their privacy if I kept coming here everyday.

I park and step out, and before I even make it further than anything, she comes rushing out of her house. Arms spread and with the loudest, ear bursting yell I've ever heard from this woman.

"Holy balls! Mge!" She jumps onto me, nearly tumbling me over. I hug her back. "Why didn't you tell me you were coming?"

"And ruin the surprise?" We let each other go.

"Haii wena...what's with the hunks behind you?"

I forgot about these people for a second.

"Bangi." I say

"Bangizwe got you some guards? "

"Yeah, hectic right...is Mandla around?"

"Nope, woza. Let's go in vele. Excuse the mess in here, we're repainting." She says. That explains the drops of paint on her tshirt.

"I like the color."

"You do? I picked it out last minute." She says, placing her hands on her waist. I look around, everything was moved and covered with plastic. The peachy color was definitely going to look good when everything was back in place again.

"I do yaz...it's so you"

"Haii, hlala phansi mge...you have so much to tell me." She says and gives me one of her fancy wooden chairs. I sit as she grabs hers too.

"Ah, where do I start...?" I question looking up to nowhere.

"Start at the reason why you're glowing."

I give her a look.

"Glowing? Mina? Ha."

"Yeah mge, like you've been smiling since you walked in here...and that can't just be because of what's been happening around the tabloids right now. Khuluma." She crosses one leg over the other.

"I think it's love mge." I say, watching her dramatically long false eyelashes flap like washing hung outside on a windy day.

"No Zano, don't tell me you and Zweli worked things out again." I keep quiet trying to milk her reaction. She claps once and folds her arms in front of her chest. Ya neh. The level of consistency here is scary. "Why would you do that? I thought since the last time I asked you about him and you were so dismissive it was surely the end..."

"I broke up with him." I interrupt her as she spoke.

She halts and frowns at me. "Broke up...wh..."

"I ended it." I say. "I'm not with him anymore."

"Wait so...love? Is there someone else I should know about or...holy balls...you and...are you and Bangi dating?" She whispers the last leaning in closer.

"I'm not saying anything." I look away slightly.

"Mge! I know that look!" She says. I frown focussed back on her and her pouty mouth.

"What look?"

"That look you make when I'm right. I know it. Oh my God! Why didn't you tell me this? When did this happen you sly woman!" She says causing me to giggle.

"I said I'm not saying anything."

"I'm your best friend, you can't just leave me out in the dark like this." She says.

I roll my eyes. Since she is the only other person I trust with my life I tell her almost everything I can tell her about this new relationship. And what she keeps doing in between my telling is gasp and squeal like the idiot she is.

Who am I kidding...I was squealing too.

"I like him. Keep him." She says. "In fact I can't wait until the day you rub this in that prick of an ex's face. He must know how much he's messed up and let go."

I shake my head. "That's extreme." I say.

"Extreme where? This guy made a fool out of you, I'm sure he needs to feel a little of the pain he's caused you."

"By me flaunting my relationship?"

"No, marn...by flaunting his title."

"Mge!"

"What?"

"That is mean!" I gawk at her unable to stop myself from laughing at her ridiculousness.

"Yoh, then you're way better than I am. Mina nga ngiyam'nyisa (I'd show him flames). Busy flaunting shapeless Mpilo's in your face like you couldn't do better? Haa mge mhn." She chuckles.

I can't with this girl.

...

There's a bit of a cold breeze when I return home. As I quickly enter I nearly fall over with shock when my eyes land on a cooking Zonke. I eye Buhle who's sitting on the lounge table. She shrugs at me before focussing back on her work. When my feet eventually decide to be mobile I can't stop myself from going to check out what she's making.

I don't even say anything when she closes her pot until the words just decide to push out of my mouth.

"You're cooking?"

"As you can see." She answers with a trace of a smile on her face. I nod my head and back away. She must've bumped her head or something...or did that man feed her something.



It still gets awkward seeing my man on the television sometimes. It still gets awkward having these mannequins around me all day long. Even interacting with my neighbors has changed. But one thing that hasn't changed were the amount of nerves I had racing within me. Tomorrow is the faithful ball I agreed to attend to and boy was I regretting it.

I thought the one month thing would really do me justice, but no.

My father went back to his wife eventually. When he left though it was a different atmosphere. We all wanted to tolerate him for the sake of our older sister. Maybe one day there'll be more than just that.

"Relax would you baby." He reaches out for my hand and squeezes it. I avert my attention from the outside to back in here.

"I am relaxed, what are you talking about?" I chuckle. That was too high.

"Your palms are sweaty." He tilts his head forward.

"Palms are meant to be sweaty." I clear my throat.

"It's just a ball baby."

"Just a ball? Are you hearing yourself? You're talking as if I've been to a ball before."

"This handsome face will be right there with you."

"Bangi please."

"Okay okay..." He kisses the back of my hand. "...just think of it as a classroom filled with new learners. That should feel familiar."

"What if I say the wrong things? Or I trip and fall face flat on the floor. I'll embarrass you."

He shakes his head. "Baby, you won't. I promise you."

I heave out a sigh.

We get to the designer's boutique where my dress has been under the make of this woman's trusty hands. My door is opened shortly after and I'm helped out of the car. Bangi is next to me within seconds. I hook my arm onto his before we all made our way to the entrance.

"Miss Monique." Bangi is first to greet.

"His majesty. I welcome you. Miss Dlamini." She says. I slightly nod my head before she turns her attention back to Bangi.

"We're here for the final fitting." He says.

"Of course...come darling." She whisks me away from my man. He has the biggest grin on his face as he takes a seat on the couch, sitting back with one leg over the other. Oh God. My insides.

"I hope you didn't gain any weight cause that would prove disastrous." She says tittering alone, while I just gave her a look. Nothing was funny about that.

"I didn't." I say.

I've been watching what I eat.

The dress fits like a glove as I stood back and looked at myself in the mirror. I turn slightly to look at my behind. The other side too. It was perfect. I didn't want anything too long cause my short self would drown in that dress. I also didn't want a short dress cause that was just bottom line inappropriate. Plus that was not the look I was going for.

Entlek, who was I kidding when I said I didn't like dresses cause this one looked so bomb on me. I looked like a dish.

"I've got to say, this is the dress that will totally have everyone's heads turning."

Away I hope. I was still on edge about the whole thing

"You think?"

"Trust me." Monique says and I nod.

Bangi was right. Emerald green does bring out my eyes. Also the off the shoulder vibe gave this tight dress a new meaning.

"Thank you."

"That's what Monique's hands are for. Do you have a shoe for that?" She asks.

"A nude pair of heels...to match with the clutch bag..."

"Perfect. I was going to faint if you said flats." She says.

I step out of the room with my dress in a garment bag. Bangi gets up the moment he sees me. "I thought I was going to see the dress." He says. He takes the bag from me.

"Nope. And don't open it."

"Baby..why would I?" He takes my hand with his free one.

"Thanks Monique. I appreciate it."

•••

My phone rings from between my breasts. I quickly fish it out hoping it would be Bangi or Nyiso calling, but instead it was an unsaved number. I contemplate whether I should or should not answer it but before it stops ringing I answer.

"Hello?"

"Zano, thank God! I thought you changed this number."

"Z...Zweli?" I frown. "Why are you calling me?"

"Awu kahle Zano hau. Why are you like this?"

"Like how?"

"All uptight sio. Phola."

"Zweli we broke up, which means there's absolutely no reason why you should be calling me. Entlek bye."

"Wait wait wait...Zano please. Hear me out okay I know you are mad at me because of what I did the last time I saw you...but couples fight all the time and when they fight they should forgive each other"

"Forgive each other?"

"Yes. That means me taking the big first step of forgiving you for making the stupid decision of dumping me. Ngiyakuxolela (I forgive you)

cause I know you weren't thinking straight yabona."

"Uthini wena? Zweli, never ever ever call this number again. Forget it exists. Forget how it starts and ends. Forget the sounds it makes when you type it on your dial. Forget that it

can ring and while you're at it forget me. Please. Nxa!" I hang up and immediately block this number too.

What the hell was that?

I sigh. I don't need this or any other thing to stress me out.

.....

"Look up."

"Are you sure this is doesn't look too much?" I utter as the angle I was looking at her from was somewhat awkward.

"You don't look like me if that's what you're trying to say." She says.

"Mge I'm serious."

"Give me a second...you'll see for yourself...okay, I think I'm done." She stands back and looks at me, eyes squinted.

"Nyiso...haibo give me the mirror ke cause you're not saying anything."

She pats on the bed, not removing her eyes from me searching for this mirror. I reach for it myself when she fails dismally to locate it.

I turn the mirror to myself and nearly drop it out of shock.

"Nyiso, I think I'm a lashes girl from now on."

"Neh?"

I kept blinking.

...

I take deep breaths as I steadily made my way up these stairs with the help of a familiar face. The slight cold ass breeze makes the hairs on my skin stand at attention. I probably didn't think this through enough.

"Have most of the guests arrived yet Deliverance?"

"Affirmative Miss." He says.

"Crap" I murmur. "Sorry...I didn't mean to say that."

We reach the top where the huge entrance is and I take this opportunity to scan around the area. People were walking in and some of them had someone directing them. Waiters holding trays with beverages. A kid running around. I could hear another car driving in from behind me.

Where is he?

Where is he?

Where is he?

I want to head off to the nearest corner and hide.

"Should I lead Miss to the ball room?"

"Please." I swallow before making my way in with Deliverance by my side. I knew the few eyes on me were probably wondering what I was doing here...or probably even who I was. We get to this ballroom and it's way bigger than I thought it would be. Again, this should stop shocking me because it should be obvious that this place would be huge. A band was busy playing on the stage filling the room with their amazing sounds. There were about 6 round tables with chairs at the sides, but one huge one in the centre.

"Are those drinks nonalcoholic?" I ask Deliverance.

"I would assume they are, should I go check for miss?" He replies and I nod, feeling bad in a way cause I could've gone to check myself. But the shoes I'm wearing today, definitely didn't want me moving around too much.

"Here you are miss. Nonalcoholic champagne." He says handing me the glass with gold sparkling liquid in it. I take it thanking him before having my first sip of this drink. I've never had this before and it definitely wasn't bad. The bubbles danced on my tongue and washed down my throat.

"Deliverance." I look at him.

"Miss?"

"Am I keeping you from other work?"

"No Miss." He says and looks right ahead again. I sigh.

After what felt like hours and hours of waiting for something to happen, I finally hear some loud voice which becomes audible through the speakers.

"Testing one two, one two...Good evening everyone. My name is Hlompho and I'll be your host for today." Says the girl on stage. I hear some people clear their throats while some shook their heads. I chuckle at the uptight bunch. I wonder why they didnt just invite Amandla's peers only.

"Uh...before we go any further I'd like to welcome the girl of the moment, my friend Amandla... I mean Princess Amandla!" She quickly correct herself before we started clapping. There's fog and a loud song that plays on the speakers right as the birthday girl walks in. Dressed in a bright red dress that had a slit at the front, and a short trail at the back.

She looked amazing.

Hands snake around my waist as I was admiring Amandla's dressing sense. I knew it was him the moment I inhaled and put a hand over his big hands.

"I knew no one could look as beautiful as my baby does, even from the back." He says and I chuckle. "What are you drinking?"

"You are late." I lift my glass so he could have a sip over my shoulder.

"Mhnn...Blame Ama on that." He lets me go and turns me to him. "Standwa sami umuhle kanjani."

I smile, shaking my head. I knew the expression I had on my face had me looking foolish but now I didn't care. "Nawe, you look handsome." I say truthfully. He even paired his suit with an emerald green tie and a pocket square.

"I try for you baby." He pecks my forehead. "I hope no one bothered my baby while I was being held captive."

"Nope. Deliverance kept me company." I say before Bangi dismissed him. "Anyway who are all these people."

"Amandla's friend's and their parents. She has quite a few friends."

I nod. I counted about 20 adults here.

"Let's go..." I take his hand into mine. Honestly I have no idea what was happening right now but I felt better now that Bangi was here. "...I think Monde and Thulani are here."

"Who?"

"My friends." He says.

Right his friends. We head to the other side of this room.

"What type of people are they?"

"Relevantly quiet, especially Thulani."

"Accurate naming huh." I titter. He takes my empty glass and puts it on the tray of the passing waiter. I want another one, but I can wait.

The introduction or whatever went better than what I thought it would. A little awkward too especially since Bangi was the one doing most of the talking. Anyway...

Oh God... We're going to the big table that was in the center. And when did the rest of the royal family show up here? I avert my eyes from looking at them, instead I look at my new full drink...my shoes...his shoes...our hands.

Should I say something? Anything? I look up to Bangi. I think he sometimes forgets I'm not from around here. I'm not always sure of what I can and cannot do.

Oh my God he's taking me to his parents. I know ive met them before, But that was then and this is now. Phela now I'm busy sucking face with their son and I'm enjoying it.

"Mom, Dad... As I said, Zanokuhle."

I curtsey. Hectic times I tell you. "Your Royal highness...My Queen."

"Miss Dlamini, it is a pleasure seeing you again." The King says.

"I've been treating her right." Bangi chips in, with a smirk on his face.

"Ndodana, Is there something we should know here?" The Queen asks, an amused look on her face.

"All in good time mom." He leans in and pecks her mothers cheek.

He pulls out my chair after we get to where we're allocated to sit. He sits right next to me. Ama came to greet me a while after that. "I'm so glad you made it."

"I wouldn't have missed it for the world." I say.

As the night progressed the lady of the day got to receive some heartwarming speeches from her friends and open some gifts including the one we got for her.

"I think my parents like you." Bangi says .

"Why do you say that?"

"I know my parents. They can be brutal to people they don't like."

"What if they're just being nice?"

"Nice? They don't do nice."

I sigh and lay on his shoulder.

"I like your parents too." I say.

"You do? Then maybe I should stop beating around the bush and have your last name changed." He says causing me to chuckle.

Wait what?

"Doesn't she know she shouldn't be laying on your shoulder like that, especially by our table?" I know that blocked nose sounding voice from anywhere. I open my eyes, sitting up.

"The table was doing way better before you came here." Bangi says. "And no one was complaining."

"Mhn...I believe that this table was reserved for our family only. Not just any other nameless being." He says.

"Alakhe, this is not the place for your stupid stunts. It's Amandla's day, so can we please respect that."

"Stupid stunts? Stupid stunts? What stupid stunts are you talking about when I'm following the rules and protocol of this house?"

"Keep it down will you."

"Guards! Guards!" Alakhe yells and two mannequins come rushing out of nowhere.

"Your highness." They bow. By now his loud ranting has gained us a few unwanted eyes and I felt so out of place.

"Can't you see you're ruining Amandla's night?" Bangi gets up from his seat.

"What is the meaning of this?" The Queen asks also getting up.

lyoh.

"Your son over here is running around our land with this commoner. Put an end to it Ma."

"Call her a commoner one more time, I dare you." Bangi.

"Guys!" Amandla.

"Zanokuhle is my family too now. I don't see what your problem is."

"That's enough!" The King bangs on the table. "Alakhe what is the meaning of this?"

"Baba Bangizwe..."

"If it's about Bangizwe then I don't want to hear it. Sit your ass down." He says looking at Alakhe in disapproval.

"Guards remove the guests." He roars and they scatter like headless chickens escorting all the guests out of the ballroom. Even that band. I was about to get up when I was firmly told to sit down by the King and with a tail between my legs, I obeyed.

It's dead quiet in here for the longest while before the door of this room gets shut.

"Never did I think I'd be this disrespected by my own sons."

"Father..."

"Shut up Alakhe!" He roars and the man goes mute immediately. "I welcomed Miss Dlamini into my palace and you dare have the audacity to challenge me and my authority?"

"Father I wasn't challenging your authority, I was doing what had to be done."

"Which is?"

"Removing this commoner from our table."

"Whose table?" The king says suddenly so calmly.

Alakhe keeps quiet shooting a cold look towards me.

"Isn't this my table? Isn't it me who should decide on who should stay or go?"

"That's not the problem here father. Alakhe is angry at the fact that Bangizwe is in a romantic relationship with Zanokuhle and not King Xhanti's daughter. He's mad at the fact that his under carpet deal with him worth 6 million is gone down the drain." Amandla says.

"That is a lie! Amanga nje!" Alakhe is up again.

"So you're saying your wife is a liar?" Amandla folds her arms in front of her chest.

"Is that true makoti?" The Queen asks, sitting forward.

"I..." She looks up to her husband.

"Come on Khethiwe, tell the whole table what you told me." Amandla.

"It's true." She sighs and the next thing I see has my eyes going wide. He slapped her.

"Alakhe!" The Queen gasps.

"Guards take him out of here." The King orders and they waste no time taking a hold , his forearms but he has them remove their hold from him.

"Don't touch me. I can walk out of here myself." He walks ahead without the guards holding him.

The woman Khethiwe, sniffs. "Amandla take Khethiwe to her your wing please."

"Yes baba." She walks from this side of the table to the other side where she helps Khetiwe up from her seat and out of here too.

"Miss Dlamini, I'm sorry you had to witness that." The King says.

I just nod. I didn't know what to say and I hope that was enough.

"Bangizwe." He calls him out.

"Baba?"

"Is what Amandla said here true? About you and Miss Dlamini."

He looks at me before he gives me a small smile. "I guess theres no point in keeping it from you now."

"I see." The King says.



The kotas I ordered about thirty minutes ago are ready. I pay and leave almost immediately since the weather wasn't one for gallivanting around for no reason whatsoever.

It's been two days since that dramatic ball night and damn...I don't know. I thought Bangi's parents knew about us that day Alakhe threatened to snitch. But I guess not. Now that they all knew though it put some more seriousness into our relationship. A new meaning. It felt like it was too much though, because I thought we'd date for a little longer than a month before actually telling anyone of that magnitude.

I get into Chery and check the rearview mirror, spotting that old man. The man who gave me these beads. I look closely, trying to make sure it was him. I look back. It is him. I quickly get out of my car in the hopes of asking him all the questions I had in me but its like he was never ever even there. I look left. I look right. Heck, I even look up. Nothing. No old man. Weird. I shake my head and step back into my car, checking my mirror again and there was nothing there.

Am I having hallucinations?

I drive back home. My mind still filled with thoughts of what happened back there.

I head inside the house with the kotas in my hold only to find Buhle on the couch with Lillian.

"Lil Wayne?"

"Haibo wena. When last did you call me that. Hlehle please excuse your sister and I." She says still laughing. Buhle gets up, and I hand her her Kota along with Zonke and Khaya's.

"And then? What brings you here?"

"Am I not your friend anymore? Anyway umama uthe ngizoboleka ushukela. (Mom sent me to borrow some sugar)" She says showing me the cup she brought with her. I nod even if I could've just given her money to buy it instead.

"Zkhiphan vele ngawe mge, like you've been avoiding me."

"I have?" I ask taking her cup. I put my kota on the counter.

"Don't act like you didn't notice."

I clear my throat giving her the cup filled with sugar.

"Thanks. Khuluma ke."

"Nothing is going on."

"When I left here, it was rumour after rumour. I come back and you're still not talking to me."

"I've been busy."

"With what?"

"Things. Work. This and that."

"So you won't tell me?"

"There is nothing to tell."

"Okay ke, uzwile nge drama eyenzeka ku boyfriend yakho?"

"Huh?"

"uZweli ndoda."

Iyoh.

"Yah Bathi abo babymama bakhe bebalapha kwakhe (his babymamas were at his place), demanding things. They ended up leaving him with all 5 children ke."

"What?" I frown. "Zweli doesn't have kids."

"With you yes. Didn't you know this?"

"Haii..." I don't know what to say as I chuckle in disbelief. Not that it is relevant now but still...why would he never mention something like this. That explains the one photo moes...

"Heeh! Also uzwile they broke in Khabo Grace?"

Chapter Fifteen.

"When a person falls in love with your flowers and not your roots, they don't know what to do when fall and winter comes"
x JADE JACKSON.

••

My eyes shoot open for the second time this evening, only now it was because of my alarm. I had the same dream again. Zweli and his crèche of kids chasing me in a dark and dingy pit. I swear I could even smell the dream. A pungent smell of cigarettes and nappies. I don't even know them, but they all had Zwelibanzi's face and tiny bodies.

All of them kept on yelling "mama" "mama" "come back"

I sit up, running a hand past my face before uttering a "Mh...Yaneh."

What is this guy's aim? To have every woman out there birth his child? How many soul ties does this man have? Is he even healthy? I clap once. This is embarrassing.

Sies. Sies!

I say a quick prayer before climbing out of bed. My neck was sore from my sleeping position it seems, but I'll soldier on. I go boil some water for my bath before going to wake Buhle and Khaya up.

When I'm done bathing, I put on a pair of jeans, a top and a wool knitted jersey. It's probably time I take these braids of mine out, even if they still looked a bit decent.

Zonke comes to sit by the table just as I was about to portion out the oats I had just made.

"Morning." I greet with a smile on my face in the hopes that she would respond positively.

"Hi." She replies, her voice low.

I take in a deep breath. "Sh...should I dish up for you?"

"What did you make?"

"Oats?"

"Sure." She says, and I pretty much scatter to go grab her a bowl and a spoon in the cupboards. I pour her a full scoop before pausing to ask if she wanted more. She nodded and I ended up adding two more scoops to her bowl.

"Sugar? Milk?"

"Just sugar." She says. I nod and bring it for her. I then hear Khaya coming down the passage, bag in his arm as he shoved a book in it.

He joins next to Zonke and puts his bag on the floor. "Can I also have some too?"

I end up serving everyone breakfast including myself. We all ate. It was quiet, with just the clinking of our bowls filling the room.

Buhle clears her throat. "Uh...I have to help my friend after school with life science, so I might come back later than I usually do."

"Oh...do I have to fetch you?"

"No need. Her father will bring me back."

I nod. "Okay."

Saved myself some petrol.



3 months go by and honestly after such extremely cold days I couldn't wait for spring to arrive. I loved spring. I loved how new life was given to nature. How the grass and leaves seemed to grow greener than the previous years.

It has also become harder to contain myself with what I kept feeling inside. I was scared of my own feelings and for the first time ever, my faith was literally getting tested. It's like this man has fed me something, cause it just seemed like I was putty in his hands. Maybe it was the way he treated me. How he reassured me every single time that he loved me and that I'm beautiful. How he was so honest with every word he spoke. I think what scared me the most was how quick I was and is falling for him.

He made me happy. He made me look forward to seeing him every time he was not busy with his tons and tons of work.

Even if I didn't see him every single day, this did feel like the longest and loneliest week ever.

He was in Botswana along with his father, visiting different shelters and donating where possible. I knew all of this cause he told me and because of the news updates I manage to sneak into my life. Because of this trip, we couldn't talk as much as I wanted us to. He'd either be too tired or vice versa. I had to suck it up though and take a chill pill, so that I could focus on my life too.

I drive into my yard, exhausted from the day I just had at work. Things get stressful when exams are just a few days away from starting. Kids panic. Teachers panic. Parents panic. Everyone panics.

I get my phone out to check on some of my socials. I was starting to hate my phone too. I've had to change my number almost six times in the course of these months.

The amount of people who have started following me because of that scandal were mind blowing. Abantu bathanda izindaba, which is why me posting the picture of Bangi and I's hands was not easy. Like any other person, I wanted to post our selfies together but I wouldn't dare.

'I miss you' probably didn't help too as a caption cause now most of the comments were asking me who I missed. I didn't even bother replying to them, but I read them all.

'We know those hands from anywhere.' A comment read.

Pffttt, yeah right. What are the chances.

'Those are the hands of the two bastards who think they're in love. Don't believe this hoe of a woman she may post someone completely different next week. I don't know why I ever trusted and cared about you when you gave no flying fuck about me.'

The comment from another fake account read.

This profile is not even three days old!

I shake my head deleting this comment and reporting the account. That is enough social media for today.

I step into the house to find the lounge empty. "Zonke?" I call out, and get no response.

She surely went out. I sigh. We've made some progress in terms of communication. And I'm not one to speak about her like a project, but it felt like a task trying to get her to fully communicate with us.

After changing I sit on the bed, thinking of all the marking I had to take care off before the end of this week. They were simple

tests that were going to help these grade nines massively in the exams.

My phone vibrates after minutes of me just sitting there, causing me to squirm as I dug it out of my bag. A quick glance at the lit screen allowed me release a deep breath before answering.

"Nyiso?" I say. She doesn't say anything but sniffs on the other end of the line. "Mge? Are you okay?"

I check my screen to see if she maybe didn't hang up on me by accident, but she didn't.

"Nonkanyiso?" I say, a bit more alert now.

"Mge..." She finally says, her low voice is accompanied by two sniffs.

"Hai, mge you're scaring me. What's wrong?"

"I...I stumped my toe on the corner of a table mge..." She laughs silently before sniffing again.

"Seriously!" I shake my head as I rolled my eyes. "You had me worried sick because you bumped your toe in the corner of a table. Haii marn."

She laughs. "That's not the point here mge...it ruined my excitement."

"Excitement yani manje?"

"I took a test a few minutes ago."

"Haibo, test?"

"A pregnancy test bathung and it has two lines mge! Two lines!"

I gasp. "So...so that means..."

"I'm pregnant mge!"

I yell out in excitement, throwing myself back on my bed while kicking my legs in the air like a madwoman. She's yelling too on the other end and it's a loud mess.

"How? I mean eish, nxa don't answer that. I know how..." I face palm myself before sitting up, catching my breath.

"You said I should be patient mge and trust in God's timing. That doctor helped us too."

"The Lord works in mysterious ways mge. Look now I'm going to be an Aunty."

"Aunty where? You're going to be my child's rich Godmother."

"Rich? Ngemali yiphi?"

"Mge don't act stupid."

"Eh. Mina angazi nex ngama riches." I chuckle. "Does Mandla know yet."

"No. You're the first person I called. I'm telling him when he comes back from work. Speaking of work, Mandla told me that uthole iCV ka Zonke in one of the new ones that were sent in."

"What?" I frown. I remember telling her about this since we've started talking again, but I didn't think she would go through with it.

"Yep. Anyway, I was not supposed to tell you that, but ke."

"Wow okay." I breathe out.

"Ya, mge let me go Google some more shit about the new life I'm embarking on."

"Congratulations mge! Yezwa! Take care of that toe too."

"I will. Mwah!" She hangs up.

Wow.

I nearly shed a tear during that call.

I get up and go fetch the mountains and mountains of tests from Chery

so that I could start marking after having something to eat.

●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●

I wake up in a dark room. The papers shrivel under my hands as I sit up.

What the heck?

My red pen is sticking to my chest.

I get up from my bed and sense my way to the light switch. My room is immediately alive again reminding me bit by bit what I

had been doing before this ruthless sleep took me over. My empty plate of food is still on the bed. I check the time on my phone but instead get hit with 10 missed calls from Bangi. Iyoh. It's 00h07. I can't believe I fell that deep into sleep.

The house is quiet. I don't even know if Buhle and Khaya came back, or if they ate and studied...but I trust they did all of that.

The phone rings near my ear as I took a chance at calling my baby.

"Standwa sami..." He says, sounding so sleepy.

"I woke you up didn't I? I'll call you tomorrow."

"No...I'm fine. I'm awake now. What's up I tried calling you earlier and you didn't answer. I even thought of sending my guards there to see if you were still alive."

"I fell asleep and...yeah." I clear my throat.

"Okay. I just wanted to check up on you."

"I'm fine now that I know you're okay too."

"Mhnn...sending tender virtual kisses."

"Sending warm virtual hugs." I say, giggling.

I hang up, giving him the much needed rest he clearly needed.

I head to the kitchen to put my plate away before heading back to my room to sleep properly. I'll finish marking tomorrow.

●●●

"Ma'am how did we do on the tests?" Someone asks just as I said they should start packing up because the bell was about to ring any minute from now.

"Well, I didn't really finish marking, but I'll done with it hopefully by tomorrow."

"Is it looking good so far, or we need to study more?" Thandeka asks.

I press my lips into a thin line and shrug.

"It doesn't look that bad yet but tomorrow...you'll all know." I say in the hopes that I do actually finish with these test before the sun rises for the following day. I was probably setting myself up for failure.

"Okay." She says and as if the bell knew I wanted out of my pressure, it rings and they rush out apart from Siya. I frown as I halted from collecting my stuff from my desk.

"Hau, Siya?"

"Ma'am, I have a question."

"Oh? Buza."

By the time I eventually leave my classroom the school premises are vacated with only a few heads left outside. I meet up with Siba and we have a small chat about the exams that were on the way. She tells me about a meeting we were going to have tomorrow morning. We part ways and I finally manage

to drive out of here so I could make a quick stop at Shoprite for a few essentials we have run out of.

I step out and head into their premises. I take the small indoor trolley. I've learnt to try and ignore some of the stares I still get from some of the people around me, but one thing I couldn't ignore all the time was these two mannequins a few feet away from me.

Every time I looked back they were there looking all too serious and focussed about their job. Sometimes, I felt like people knew they were following me which made my whole shopping experience even weirder than it already is. I buy a pack of canned beans, pads and a 10kg bag of maize meal which I have them carry because of my poor trolley choices.

I also make sure I get some more juice and ibraaipack before going to check out. I was pretty certain that those were the only things we needed back home cause the rest was still there.

I walk out of here carrying my light plastic bag with the big dudes behind me carrying the maize and meat. I could see Cherry where I last parked her when I hear a mannequin call me out. "Miss!" He tackles me out of the way as a car sped past me in tremendous speed.

My eyes go wide as I just stood there behind this tall man trying to calm myself down from what could've just happened. That

car would've hit me. Why didn't that asshole of a driver at least stop to apologize ...or was it me who was walking in the middle of the road?

"Are you okay Miss?" He asks.

I nod.

I was okay, all thanks to them.

As soon as I get back home find my two siblings, watching some TV.

"Haibo guys. iTV ngaleskathi?"

"Sizo funda Zano." Buhle says not taking her eyes off the television.

"Mhhnn...Khaya hamba uyo landa imphuphu ne nyama from the car please."

"But I'm watching."

"Khaya..." I give him a look. He heaves out a sigh before getting up from the couch and heads out. I go put the plastic that was in my hold in the kitchen before heading to my room.

Since I knew I couldn't call to check up on Bangi, I get right into marking those scriptures.

I was hours into marking these things when my phone rings.

I hang up. Blocking the number immediately.

My door shoots open and out of some weird reflex I nearly fall off the bed while holding a pen in my hand, ready to attack whoever was coming in here.

"Woah! Baby its me."

"Bang!" I throw the pen aside and climb off the bed racing to his arms.

"Oh my goodness don't tell me to were going to stab someone with that pen."

"Don't be silly." I let him go. "Why didn't you tell me you were back?"

"I wanted to surprise my baby." He pecks my forehead. "I got you something."

He takes out a small box from the inside of his hoodie's pockets.

"What is that?" I ask.

"Open it ." he encourages.

Fine.

I feel his hands slipping into my gown. I look up again before giving him a look while he had a ridiculous smirk on his face.

"Wenzani?"

"I'm warming up my hands." He says and snakes them even further into gown reaching a place where my top had shifted slightly exposing some skin.

"Yoh!" I shiver away. "Why are your hands so cold."

"Baby marn, buya...you're so warm." He walks forward.

I sigh.

"Okay, but only for like five seconds and that's it." I say. He waggles his eyebrows like an idiot before his cold hands are back at that exposed part of my skin.

"Open your gift."

I sigh again opening the box, coming into contact with a...necklace. Half a heart with a B on it. A smile creeps up on me before I put a hand in front of my mouth.

"You like it?" I nod.

"Where'd you get this?"

"Botswana has pretty amazing things. I got myself one with a Z." He says.

"I love it." I giggle, leaning in my aim focussed on his lips. But before our lips could even meet, I stare at him trying to read his expression. He raises his eyebrows.

"What?"

"Nothing" I pull him further in by the collar of his hoodie, putting the necklace in one of the pockets of my gown. I've missed his kisses and his intoxicating smell. My arms go onto his shoulders as the slow kissing session seemed to intensify with each passing second.

I don't want to let him go.

He pulls me closer to him, allowing his hands to travel up my back. They weren't as cold anymore.

I hear him groan before he clasps both my hands removing them from his shoulders, entwining our fingers. He breaks the kiss trailing down my neck giving me instant shivers and weak knees.

My breathing hitches.

I feel goosebumps peaking on my body as he pushes my gown off. I hold onto his forearms as his hands went back to traveling my body. He cups my breasts and squeezes them causing me part my lips and let out a soft breath. I press my legs together. My nipples harden, irritated by Bangi's tempt.

What the hell is this?

"Bangi..." I whisper. He groans still with his head buried in my neck. "...baby please stop." I remove his hands from my bothered ladies and he stops, still on my neck. I clear my throat before he actually decides to show his face again and looks rather displeased by me halting him. His eyes were still tiny...just like when he'd smile, but this time they had a different emotion to them.

"You even got other things... standing at attention now." He says shaking his head.

What?

For the love me, I don't know why my eyes travelled down to see the unspeakable. Is he...oh God.

"I need some...s..some water." I utter and rush out of here.

What the hell almost happened in there. I mean I know but, it has never gotten that far. I down my glass of water hoping it would aid in cooling down the heat my body was in. I'm embarrassed.

Why did I run out like that?

I mean how mature of me to do that right. I hope I didn't make him feel bad or question anything. I take a deep breath, collecting myself before heading back to my room. "Listen im sorry about that but can we set some bound...ries...what are you doing with my phone?" I ask as he was sitting on my bed.

"It rang and I answered."

"Why would you answer my phone!" I ask.

"Why are you yelling? I can hear you perfectly fine." He says looking at me. His gaze making me squirm. "I'll never ever touch your phone again if that's what you want."

"No...look I'm sorry. I didn't mean to raise my voice at you." I say, my voice low.

These calls were messing with my head.

"Its okay...now you mentioned boundaries." He puts my phone aside.

Good. He's moved on from the phone thing. I clear my throat, closing the door behind me.

"Oh..right...thing is...today we went a little bit..." I trail off clearing my throat again. "I've never...you know...done anything like this."

"Anything Like what?"

"Like..." I clear my throat. "Like have sex marn Bangi...I'm still a virgin." I can't even hear myself at the last words I say.

He chuckles. "I figured the moment you ran out that door. Come here." He pats on his lap. I move to him, avoiding immediate eye contact with our *'visitor'*. "Sit."

He pats on his lap again.

"I'm not sitting on your lap Bangi."

"Why not?"

"Because..." I shrug.

"Baby, dont be ridiculous." He pulls me down and I sit on his lap while he laughed at me.

How can he do this to me and worse of all laugh at what I just told him.

"If I knew you were going to laugh I was not going to tell you."

"Ncese standwa sami... How about I tell you something."

"What?"

"I'm a virgin too."

"What?" I pause looking at him. "Are you okay...how is that even possible?"

"Same way it's possible to you too. Don't be all stereotypical now."

"Okay...sorry. That was a bit stereotypical of me. It's just that I know of no guy who isn't... You know."

I feel like slapping myself, since I teach about this but can't seem to say it now to the man I'm sitting on.

He puts his hand on my thigh.

"Well I promised myself I'd wait for the right one ages ago."

"And here I was thinking I was insane for saving myself for marriage." I mumble.

"You're never insane for believing in what you believe in."

I chuckle, not believing my ears. The hand on my thigh becomes firmer, holding me in place as he groaned with his eyes closed.

"Don't move too much please."

Why did you put me on your lap then?

"What I mean is if you're not ready for this part of us then I can try and control myself like I have been for the past years of my life. If you want us to wait until we get married then..."

I throw my arm over his shoulder and place the other on his cheek. The stubble feeling prickly under my fingertips. I caress.

"So that means no touching where my undergarments go" I say.

"Who still says undergarments? In this day and age? " He asks. I giggle. "Okay. If thats a boundary then I can respect that."

"Also maybe leave enough space between us when we kiss for the holy spirit."

"Yoh, so I can't hold you close anymore? Like right now?"

I nod hesitantly. I don't know if I want him to stop holding me close, but if it meant having some sort of control over our feelings, then so be it.

"Anything else?" He asks.

"Not that I can think of."

We sit in a comfortable silence for a few good seconds.

"Can I get off your lap now?"

"Nope. You still have to endure the consequences of your actions." He tightens his hold around my waist, the visitor still poking me.

Chapter Sixteen.

"Love begins by taking care of the closest ones - the ones at home." x MOTHER TERESA

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"I swear to God if you call me one more time I'm going to call the police and report you for harassment!" I say tight lipped as the phone was near my ear. I couldn't anymore. These were getting too much.

"Calm down. I just want us to talk." He says.

"I don't want to talk to you get that through your thick skull!"

"Oh..." He pauses. "...you'll listen to me by force ke." He says before the line goes dead. I yell out in frustration, wanting to throw my phone against the wall. But instead I slam it on the counter, furious. I have to change my number again in the hopes that he won't be able to get the new one too.

Who am I kidding?

I've failed so many times at that, I doubt it will work this time around. I wondered where the hell he'd get my numbers from cause I'd only send it to the closest people around me and I've never posted it for nobody.

I sigh.

Maybe it's time I told Bangi about this. I know he hates me calling him and telling him 'hey, this is my new number. Save it.' And I don't get why it's so hard for me to tell him about this.

"What's wrong with you?" Someone startles me. I turn to find Zonke standing in the lounge just looking at me.

I clear my throat. "What do you mean?"

"You've been standing there since I went to the toilet. And that was 20 minutes ago." She says and I shake my head.

"You've been counting?"

"No, but you know what I'm talking about."

"It's nothing." I breathe out.

"Look I'm he...nevermind." She walks out of here, a handbag hooked to her arm.

I remembered she was headed for her interview today.

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The last time we were here it was just a huge piece of unworked land. Grass was everywhere and it was just machinery, bricks, dust and workers everywhere.

Not much has changed though, apart from the fact that where the grass was before, there now were new homes being built. About a row of them was complete and I could honestly stand

here and say I was proud of what Bangi was doing. I squeeze his hand earning his gaze once more.

"It's coming along perfectly baby. You should be proud of yourself."

"If it were up to me, they'd be done with everything now." He says.

"Patience. No one should be rushing anything here." I say and look ahead again at these houses. They weren't mansions, but they were big enough for a regular sized home. Plus I could see that there was going to be enough space for these people to roam around, embracing their new community.

"You think people should start signing up for a place here?"

"Is that how you want it to be done?" I ask.

He shakes his head. "Not sure yet, but since you said there's no rush then I'm sure we can figure out how this can go down."

I shrug.

"Let's go." He says, walking with me to one of the houses. It looked even bigger up close.

After spending about 30 minutes at the site we leave heading back to the palace.

The ride is filled with comfortable silence as I played with the beads on my wrist. My mind darted off to that day I thought I

saw him. The day I thought I would ask him all the questions in my head. And...

"The man who gave you your beads...have you seen him since?"

"No. Why?"

"I don't know if I'm going crazy or anything but I saw him ages ago when I came back from the store he gave these to me. I could've sworn I saw him again yesterday."

"Odd. Maybe I wasn't paying attention."

"Maybe..." I say and lay back on his shoulder again.

•••

"10 kids Bangi?" I break down in laughter, covering my mouth with my free hand.

"Don't laugh, this was a serious dream of mine. You know having a house full of kids who won't be uptight and your little people who you can mould." He titters.

"But still 10 kids? I love kids but 10 is a lot." I say, returning to peeling the next potato.

"How many kids do you want then baby?"

"2...or 3 at most."

"Uyadlala wena." He chuckles.

"Says the one who wants ten kids. I love you but ten kids would be a lot Bangi." I shake my head.

"3 kids it is." He says. "Your turn."

"Mhnn..." I ponder the thousands of questions I could probably ask this man. "Where do you see us in five years from now?"

"Married, happy, madly in love, building and growing our home."

I smile. That sounded beautiful, but was it something that would happen?

What if we aren't together in the next five years? What if we're not happy or...

why am I thinking of this especially since I want him with me in five years.

"Sounds like a plan." I say.

"My turn..." He says and places his elbows on the kitchen counter. I throw the potato wedges onto a baking tray. Things of the internet.

"Should I be nervous?"

He shakes his before I turn to get some oil. Why is everything in here still closed or nearly full?

"How would you feel if I asked you to move in with me?" He asks, causing me to nearly drop the two spices I picked out too.

"How far along are we talking about here?" I return to the counter, tearing off the plastic cover over the opening of this

spice container.

"Next week."

My eyes go wide.

"Next week? As in the following couple of days?"

"Yes." He says confidently while I shook my head.

"What would that mean for me? I mean in terms of my job...

You once mentioned something about me having to leave my job because of how things will be around here. This job is how I take care of my siblings back at home. How will I be able to do that if I'm here?"

"Baby, your siblings are grown."

"That's not a good reason." I chuckle.

"Okay. What about your older sister? Can't she take care of them? Money is not a problem if that's what you're really worried about. I can easily give them what they can use to take care of themselves."

"But Bangi...it's not just about money, I want to be there for them too."

He tilts his head to the side giving me a questioning look as I put the spice in my hand down.

"What are you so afraid of baby? The way I see this is you have done enough for your siblings, and they'll thank you for that in the long run. You said it yourself, Nobuhle is going to further

her studies next year provided she passes with immaculate marks, which I believe she can do. Khayalakhe is also nearing that stage of a young adult. Soon he'll be out of that house too, and if he's serious about soccer then we can make it happen for him. I'm not going to stop you from visiting them or them visiting you. They're your family and I'm not that selfish."

"You seem to have it figured out don't you?" I shake my head.

"No. I know this is not going to be an easy decision cause you're leaving a lot, and you're coming into a lot. But I'm sure we can make it work. I'm sure they can figure out how to live without you. And if it doesn't work, you can go back..." He chuckles, seemingly doubting his own words. "...or we find a better solution."

"Shouldn't you talk about this to your father? Wouldn't he have a problem with me just moving in?"

"I'll talk to him." He runs his fingers across his chin.

I heave out a sigh, taking the baking tray and put it in the hot oven. "I can't believe you. You actually want me to pack my stuff and come live here...with you?"

"The sooner the better." He gets up from the highchair he was sitting on and comes all the way around to the side I was on. Not once did I avert my eyes from his. "So? What do you say?"

"Bangi...I walk when I'm asleep."

Why the Hell did I just say that?

"I'll tie you up then."

I giggle shaking my head. "Next week?"

He nods. "You can still go to work for this last term...probably the one after that too"

I breathe out covering my face as tears threatened to escape my eyes. "Hau...standwa sami...ungakhali..." I feel his arms go around me, hugging me while brushing my back. "I understand it's a lot but..."

"...I know...and I'm happy" I interrupt him. "And you smell good."

"Do I smell yummy for my baby?"

I remove my hands from my eyes and nod in agreement before he flashes that smile of his.

I was done making lunch for us. A not so complicated spaghetti dish with those googled potato wedges. This big place has a big ass lounge which I discovered today and it was beautiful. The man has taste, or whoever decorated this place to it's current state.

I watch him chew on his food, anxious to hear his verdict. This is the first time I cook for him, at his place. And I trust in my cooking skills, but this can either go very well...or terribly wrong.

Also if I wasn't busy sucking face with this man right next to me, I probably would've tasted the final product before serving it.

"And...?" I encourage.

He swallows. "I feel like you'll stab me with that pen of yours if I say it's terrible."

I gasp. "Is it terrible?"

"No...just needs salt. The potatoes."

I roll my eyes. What was I even thinking with those.

"This is actually delicious." He takes another mouthful.

"Don't lie."

"I'm serious."

I start digging in too, nodding in appreciation of what I managed to cook up in under an hour. Not much is said until I feel my phone vibrate from between my breasts. I should seriously stop putting it there. I clear my throat before retrieving it. My heart drops to my stomach when I notice its another unsaved number. I hang up immediately, sinking into my chair. I know he's looking at me.

"I have something to tell you."

"Is it about the calls?" He puts his fork down.

"Yes." I sigh. "My ex has been calling me. That day you answered my phone, it was him."

"You still talk to him? Is that why you got mad?"

"No." I try matching his calm tone.

How does he even do that?

"Then why is he still calling you?"

"I've tried to get him to stop but he won't. I kept changing my number because of this."

"Why is he still calling you Zanokuhle?" He repeats.

"He wants us to get back together."

"I still don't get why you didnt tell me though."

"The whole point of breaking up with him was because I didn't want to ever speak about him again. Never mind even think about him. Zweli and I didn't have the best of relationships together. I feel like he hated my guts

Advertisement

but still tolerated me."

The sound of my foot tapping continuously under the table is irritating me to the point where I reposition myself. "The man strangled me once...belittled me..." I pause, not wanting to think further of the hurt I endured because of someone who I loved. I also realised that even before the Mpilo thing happened, he wasnt the same anymore. "...I didn't think I'd still have to deal with him even now."

"Have him arrested." He says.

"Bangi he has kids."

"Was he thinking of his kids when he laid his hands on you, nearly killing you?"

"Zano, you are having this idiot arrested. End of discussion."

•••

Bangizwe is driving me back home again as the sun was setting slowly. I have a lot running around in my head.

A lot that has me thinking and rethinking a lot of things. I couldn't even focus on the song that was playing on the speakers.

When the car halts, I realise we've arrived. My eyes immediately go to the car that was parked near the gate.

"He's here." I sit up.

"Who?"

"Zweli." I breathe out.

"Good. Now I can talk to the bastard." He gets out of the car before it registers in my head what he meant.

"Wait, Bangi!" I rush out of the car.

The mannequins rush into the yard marching to his side and mine as well. "Please move..." I try to move the mannequin in

front of me. "Bangi!" I manage to see a glimpse of him walking through the door.

When I finally manage to walk inside I find them standing almost head to head.

"Sir." A mannequin pushes Zweli back.

"So it is true. You are fucking the Prince." Zweli says.

"Watch your language." Bangi says.

"Oh...sorry I forgot am I supposed to bow to you?" Zweli shakes his head.

"Zweli please leave." I say grabbing ahold of Bangi's hand. He's twitching.

"Let him say what he wants to say first."

"Hawu, iNkosana ifuna ngikhulume."

"Listen boy, continue disrespecting me..."

"Bangi. Just let him go."

"Zano baby asambe."

He reaches out for my hand but Bangi blocks it.

He's punched. There's a tug on my arm.

He's pulled away cursing.

There's chaos and commotion outside.

Khaya and Buhle appear.

"Bangi, you're bleeding." I try touching the side of his cheek but he flinches away. "Khaya...where's that first aid kit of yours?" "Phez' kwe fridge." He says and I rush to go get it.

Konje.

"Come on." I take his hand and take him to my room. There was no privacy here. Luckily the mannequins will take care of the people outside. I close the door and turn with the kit in my hold. It's dusty due to the lack of usage. He walks to the mirror as I followed to where he was, standing behind him. He glanced back at me, still not saying anything before I realise I need to go fetch some cool water too, which I quickly rush to fetch.

"Bangi let me see."

Somewhere at the back of my mind I can't help thinking that He should've hit him back! He should've shown him who's boss! Do they throw men who've wronged royalty in dungeons like in some books I've read? How dare Zweli punch and bruise my man like that.

"I was this close to hitting him." He finally turns to me. "But I had to stop myself. I had to control my anger."

He sits on the bed still looking at me. I go put the dusty kit on my bed and open it, taking out a gauze pad and dampen it in the water, adding a few drops of saline. I still don't get why

Zweli had to do what he did, unless he was truly insane and I didn't notice all along.

"Well I can't say I'm glad you didn't get hurt...cause look at your lip." I wring out the water from the gauze pad and position it right where the blood was, wiping it off.

"I wish you didn't see that."

"What? You getting hit?"

"That."

I clear my throat.

"What did you mean when you said you had to control your anger?" I ask. He averts his eyes from me as I put the gauze back into the water, rinsing it...wringing it out and gently dabbing where his lip got cut from Zweli's attack. I could clearly see the kit wasn't as necessary, but that was not important right. I asked him a question.

"Anger is something I've always had Zano." He shrugs. "Over the years I've learnt to control it and how to ensure I didn't lash out again."

"Lash out again?"

"I once hit a kid. Back at school. I hurt him. He's the same kid who kept on making fun of me. Being me, you can't go around hitting people cause they will talk and they will twist and turn things so that it becomes the next scoop."

I sit down on his lap. Don't look at me like that.

"There are many other things that made me angry. My parents. My lack of living. I've learnt to control it."

Is that even healthy?

"All I have to do is calm myself down and breathe."

He holds me in place.

"If you weren't there I probably would have beat the peasant-ness out of him and regret it later. This is why sometimes I wonder how it is being normal you know. Being without people following and knowing you and would do anything to say they saw me doing this and that..."

"Probably would've ended with someone dead or seriously injured. I don't even want you to imagine this side of life cause it's not as pretty as you think." I say. "In fact I'm glad we had all those mannequins there and you could control your anger because if he did more than punch you like he did, I wouldn't know what to do with myself."

He chuckles.

"Don't laugh." I gently push on his shoulder.

"It's just so refreshing seeing my baby care about me like this."

"Your baby is also worried about the swelling on your cheek. I don't want to get fined by your parents because you sustained injuries while with me."

"You still think I'm handsome though, right?" He asks. I smile before pecking the side of his forehead.

"Even if you were to shave off the middle section of your fade, I'd still think you're handsome."

"Good answer." He takes my hand kissing the back of it.

The knock on the door manages to burst the bubble we were in. I quickly get up from his lap before allowing whoever was behind the door to come in.

"Your Highness, Miss Dlamini." He bows.

"What is it William?" Bangi asks.

"My Prince we've had the man thrown into jail immediately."

My eyes go wide.

"Excellent William. Thank you, sewu ngasi shiya manje." He says and the mannequin bows before turning to leave.

.....

"10 minutes left. You have 10 minutes left." I say after looking at the time on my phone and the clock on the wall.

A vibration alerts me of a new message which I quickly open.

'Do you recognise is'thandwa sakho in the picture above?' The caption below the picture read.

I giggle before clearing my throat remembering that I had to keep my mouth shut in here.

He had his chin up in the photo as he slightly looked to the side. My heart melted when I noticed the cut on his lip was healing just fine. He told me the swelling went down just a few hours after the whole thing. This is after he said his mother called in a doctor to look at the injury. He called it being too dramatic. I didn't.

'It's almost gone.' I replied.

10 minutes before I could get out of here and get stuck right into a meeting I was not looking forward to.

Another teacher wasn't present today, I had been tasked with looking after her register class since I didn't have one. The exams were well under way, bringing the usual vibes of nervousness to the school. This was not the term to worry about, the next one was but at the same time this one mattered as well in terms of accumulating your marks.

A hand gets raised from the back of the class. I get up from the front desk I had been sitting on and paced to the boy. I lean in as he whispered " Ma'am, can I borrow a ruler?"

"Kanti bewusebenzisa ini sonke lesikhathi?" I ask before heading back to my desk to grab him a ruler of my own.

"Thank you ma'am." The boys says before paging to the beginning of his exam paper.

I walk in between each row, invigilating once more.

"5 minutes."

5 more minutes for me to decide whether I was going to hand in that resignation letter to Phakade or not. To say that this was an easy thing for me to do would be a lie.

When the time is finally up, I collect their scripts before they start making conversation among themselves. "Guys, keep it down the other classes could still be busy." I say, stacking up these papers properly.

The bell rings and they disappear, leaving the class as if they've never been in here. I take the scripts with me and head to the stuff room. After giving the papers to the teacher it belonged to I go sit next to Siba. I greet and she greeted back.

Not much was said after that.

Phakade walks in and the meeting takes place immediately.

About 30 minutes later we leave.

I decided against giving her the letter.

Once back at home, I start with some cleaning. I dusted off the shelves, mama's room divider, the top of the fridge and the table. The countertops get a clean wipe as well. As I swept I wondered what we were going to eat. The miniature sand, grass and chewing gum wrapper get swept onto a dustpan. I throw it all in the trashcan.

Zonke walks into the house, her handbag in her hold as she made her way to one of the chairs.

"I am so tired...and I smell like bleach, or is it this house?"

I chuckle, putting the broom in it's corner.

"I'm guessing your first day was hectic?"

"Busiest Tuesday ever." She says. I take this moment to sit down right across her. The two others weren't back yet.

"It will get better, you'll see."

She shrugs. "Maybe. I just never thought this would be me. I had such big dreams, you know."

"You can still try again Zonke."

She shakes her head. "I'm almost 30. What more can I do with my life?"

"Go back to school."

She bursts out in laughter. "I'm not doing that."

I sigh. "I'm sure mama would've wanted to see you go back to..."

"Don't talk about mama. If mama cared she'd still be here, with us."

"That's unfair."

"What's unfair was me having to sleep with someone in order for us to have money for things in this house. Me having to act like I knew what I was doing when it came to taking care of you guys. How when other people started stepping in I had already lost so much of myself in the process."

What?

She gets up with her bag and storms off to her room before I hear the banging of the door. Followed by silence. Tears failed me as I felt them run down my cheeks...

Chapter Seventeen.

"People will quit on you. You gotta get up everyday and make sure you never quit on yourself."

••

I breathed out before wiping away my tears with the back of my hand.

What the hell did my ears just hear?

How...I mean No.

I gather the last bit of my working mind and body before dragging myself to her room. Once in front of the door, I knock. She doesn't say anything at all even when I knock again. I gently open the unlocked door and search for her inside. She stood by the window as almost inaudible sniffs fill this space.

I clear my throat, but she barely even moves.

"Zonke...can we talk."

"Get out of this room."

"Please...we can't continue like this."

"We can't continue like this? I said get out." She finally turns to look my way, wiping a few more tears that manages to free themselves from her eyes.

I'm not used seeing her cry like this.

"I'm sorry..." Goodness. I'm tearing up again as well. "...I didn't know."

"Of course you didn't know, you don't know anything." She says. "always so naïve."

"Was I supposed to just know that that's what you had to for us without you even telling me? I thought mama left us with some money."

"What money? The money baba buried her with and then what? She left us with nothing!"

I breathe put, swallowing the words I wanted to say.

What ever happened to the all the money I've seen mama saving up?

"You know I wished so many times that I could've been you. I wished so many days and nights that God could reverse the terrible things I went through for this house. They would've taken you guys away, we would've starved to death."

"Zonke..."

She puts a hand up.

" I sometimes wonder if I was the one with your job and car and stuff, then maybe I would've met the Prince. I would be the one he loves and cares for. Do you know how much it hurts to just see your life falling behind while your younger siblings are doing more than you are. And I'm here, stuck."

I don't even want to think of that because it would hurt me so much.

"I'm done." She wipes away her tears.

"You can still start over, you can't just give up. I believe you can do that and I'll help you do that. I don't want you to go through this alone anymore when I can help you now. I know I can't take away the pain you've gone through, but I want to at least make it better."

It's a moment of quietness as I stood there waiting for her to say something...but she doesn't. I nod and with a tail between my legs I turn to leave.

"Wait..." She says before coming to stand in front of me, before taking me into her arms. I hug her back.

•••

We're having a quiet supper. Everyone is just focussing on their food right now...or maybe it's just me who won't start a conversation either.

I look up. Zonke has her eyes on my hands, and something tells me she's looking at the beads on my hand. I clear my throat.

"They're... They were given to me." I explain for no good reason at all.

"By who? The Prince?"

"No." I shake my head. "Some old man, I don't even know."

"And you're wearing something a stranger gave to you?" She says and reaches for my hand before trying to touch them. She flinches instantly out of pain sitting back. Her hand shaking back and forth.

"What the hell Zano! Those things just burnt me!"

"What do you mean? They're not even above my body heat." I feel on them before getting up from my seat to check her hand out.

"Bring me some ice." She says and I hurriedly go grab two and a cloth. I'll get us new ones in a few days anyway.

"Let me see." I say as she took the ice from me.

"That looks painful." Buhle hisses.

"No, but look...they aren't even hot I don't get it." I feel on the beads again, as if my wrist wasn't enough of a telltale.

"Mhlambe bayi loyile lento leyo, wena ubhizi uyayifaka.(they probably bewitched that thing and you're busy putting it on)" She says. I sit back down again.

"Something told me to wear them." I shrug.

"Something...awa Zano, bayiloyile lento leyo hau. Are you even sure it doesn't make you fly in the middle of the night on a toothpick?" She says.

Khaya lets out a mother of all laughs while Buhle snorted.

"Akuhlelisi (its not funny)." Me.

"Just imagine Zano on a toothpick." Khaya says.

"Nawe Zonke awusathi neBroom nje." Buhle adds.

I roll my eyes. "No it doesn't make me do anything..." Or that's at least what I hope and believe in. Besides I pray every single night, so this can't be bad energy or witchcraft as Zonke is making it out to be. "Bangi has one too."

"The Prince?" Zonke asks.

I nod. "The exact same one. It seems the same person gave us these things. We still don't know why though."

"That's strange. Uniloya noyitwo shukuthi. (He's bewitching you both)"

"mxm...Anyway, guys...I have something to tell you ."

"Are you pregnant?" Zonke again is quick to ask.

Hearing her speak this much is scary and feels so foreign.

"No...what, no. I'm not pregnant. Actually it's something I wanted to talk about more than ask."

"Us too?" Khaya asks.

"Ya. All of you guys." I say.

"Okay..." Buhle.

"So...as you guys know, I am dating Bangi..."

"No we didn't know." Khaya chips in.

He sits back, arms folded. Looking all kinds of stupid and serious.

"Okay fine Khayalakhe, I am dating Bangizwe... Now you know, can I continue?"

"Sure."

"Thank you...ya so obviously things are going to happen that may need me to move out soon..."

"How soon?" Buhle asks.

"Maybe next week."

"That is not happening." Zonke chips in just as Buhle started squealing.

"Hau, why can she not move in."

"Zano, you two aren't even married yet and you want to move in with each other?"

I clear my throat.

"I see nothing wrong with that." Buhle says.

"Oh, so your church allows cohibiting?"

"You mean cohabiting?" Khaya.

"Whatever, you got my point. Zano, what are you going to benefit out of this arrangement at the end?"

I shrug. "More time with him...getting to know him better..."

"That's not how men think Zano. I know my own fair share of men and what cohabiting does to them."

But Bangi is not the fair share of men you've been with. He's different.

I sigh. She's right though. I remember by me just visiting Zweli twice he just was forcing the idea of us having sex and sleeping on the same bed, even without my consent. Now, I know Bangi is not the same guy as Zweli was, but they're both men at the end of the day...and I know my feelings towards him. How would I be able to control those when we're living and breathing in the same space.

"If he wants to live with my younger sister, he must marry her first. I don't care if he's the ruler of all rulers." She says, and somehow a smile manages to creep up on me.

I think I like this. This new Zonke.



I have just finished making us breakfast when a knock on the door came through. Who could possibly be here so early in the morning?

I make my way to the door to find a mannequin there, who lightly bows. "Miss you have a visitor." He says before moving slightly, bringing into my view a woman who probably looked in her late 40s. Next to her is a younger version of the older woman.

"Uh...hi..." I greet.

"You are Zanokuhle right?" The older woman asks.

I nod, not so sure where this was going.

"Good...please, have a heart. My son has been in jail now for so many days, and they won't allow him out. Not even on bail."

She add, her hands clasped together.

I frown. "You're Zwelibanzi's mother?"

"Yes. Please Zanokuhle, he needs to be out here with us. With his family and his children."

"He should've thought of that before he did what he did." I say, putting a hand on my hip.

"Haibo wena you can't just say that! That's my brother." The younger lady says.

I heave out a sigh.

"Listen, with all due respect, ma everyone knows that laying a hand on someone of royalty is a serious offense, no one sent Zweli here to do that...his idiotic self did."

"You're calling my son an idiot?" The older woman says, dropping her hands.

"I'm just saying, he could've avoided the 5 year jail sentence he's probably going to get if he left me alone after we broke up."

"You are wicked."

"And you are not welcomed here anymore...please remove these two from our yard. I have things to do." I say and step back, watching how the guard removed these two from here.

What the hell was that? That couldn't have been me.

"Yoh." Khaya chuckles from behind. I turn to find them all seated at the lounge table just staring at me.

"Good. You're speaking up for yourself. I love it." Buhle says.

"You don't think I was too rude?"

"Nope, wena woza uzo hlala phansi and eat. Yeka labantu, I'm sure they know their son is a loose screw." Zonke says.

I go sit down and we have breakfast before we all head out. I'm driving Zonke to her workplace, which is going to take up a few minutes of my early arrival time to my work.

"So...Zonke..."

"Mhmm?" She answers. When I take a quick glance at her, I notice she's still looking out of the window.

"I...I want to know...something..."

"Khuluma Zano."

I clear my throat. "Did you hate Luthando?"

She chuckles. "So you think since I'm talking to you guys now, I'll just answer whatever you throw at me?"

"I just want to know Zonke. I never understood how you could just hate your baby like that...or why you even decided on keeping her until you birthed her."

I can't believe I'm one to even think abortion could solve this when I'm against it. Also, I thought I'd never bring this up ever again.

"It's a long story Zano. I'll... I'll talk when I'm ready."

"Okay." I nod. Let me not push any further for both our sakes. After dropping her off I head to my workplace, arriving there just in the nick of time.

•••

"What the hell..." I mumble to myself right after driving in and getting a closer look at the man who sat on our stoep. It's him. My father. I knew his big head from anywhere. I take in a deep breath as I parked and stepped out. He rises to his feet and removes the pipe that was in his mouth.

"Nonozi."

"Ufunani la?"

"Aren't you even going to allow me in Nono...I thought we were over this."

I shake my head and proceed to unlocking the front door.

"Please, don't smoke inside the house."

"You sound exactly like your mother, you know that. She always

wanted..." he's interrupted by his own coughing. "...always wanted me to do my smoking outside." He finishes off the last bit of his sentence hurriedly.

"Are you okay?" I ask.

"I'm..." More of his painful sounding coughing. "I'm fine."

I quickly go fill up a glass with water before handing it to him. It's probably the cold...or his smoking has already done damage to his lungs. He downs the whole cup of water in one go before handing me back the cup.

"Thank you Nono, I feel better."

"I'll...go change." I say and head to my room to change into something more comfortable.

'Baby. You are missed.' I read the text I just got as I was putting on a pair of socks.

'I miss you too. Your busy schedule is not doing us favors.'

'Have you thought about what I said already?'

'Yeah, and we need to talk. But face to face.'

'Okay. I'll let my baby know when I'm free then. I love you.'

'I love you more.'

I put my phone away, heading back to the lounge where I left my father. He had stopped smoking, sitting on a chair by the table.

"Nonozi. Hlala phansi." He says. I frown for a second, wondering why the hell he'd want me to sit down this time around.

I sit

Advertisement

smelling the harsh and fresh smell of tobacco radiating off of him. The smell is bound to give me a headache I can tell.

"I hear you want to move in with the Prince." He says.

"Who told you that?"

"Zonke did, and she did well by telling me."

"What the hell." I fold my arms in front of my chest sitting back, gawking at his seriousness.

"Nono, you can't go living with that boy without following the right procedures. Tradition is something he has to follow and I believe he knows that especially being a man of his status."

"Tradition?"

"Lobola." He says, and I choke on the spit in my mouth.

"What..."

"Yes, if he is serious about my Nonozi, then he must pay Lobola

for you. And you're a gem phela ngane yami, which means he'll be paying a lot."

"Paying a lot?" I chuckle in disbelief.

The door opens disturbing my train of thought. They're all here.

"Baba, you came." Zonke rushes to his side and they share a hug that isn't returned with the same enthusiasm.

"This was an urgent thing to attend to. Zano was about to put our family to shame by not respecting our ways." He says. Buhle and Khaya make their way to their rooms.

He's quick to talk about how I could put the family to shame when he did the same thing, the only difference with his shame is that he dragged it through more shit. Does he even know what shame is or he's just here to make another quick buck out of Bangi.

"The Dlamini's have to meet with ebakwa Shazi as soon as this boy decides to send a letter."

Iyoh. This man.

"I'm serious njalo. You will not spend a day at that palace without a discussion of Lobola. finish." He says. I eye Zonke who shrugs.

What a great father he is.



"You still don't see it Mge?"

I sit closer this time around, shaking my head for the third time.

"No. I don't see anything."

She looks down at her exposed belly. "You sure you don't see anything?"

"Mge you'll start showing at 3 months, not now." I say. She closes her stomach, rolling her eyes before sitting down next to me on one of her brand new couches. I cant believe they actually brought new furniture since the last time I was here.

"So vele you saw nothing?"

"Nope. You're still flat."

"Mxm."

I laugh at her reaction.

"I can't believe you want to show already."

"Actually what do you want in my house?" She asks giving me a bored look.

I chortle.

"I need relationship advice."

"Trouble in paradise?"

"No."

"Oh, I was just about to say, forgive and forget mge, cause these men know which buttons to press when they make you

angry. I mean one moment my clothes were on the next we're sweating in bed."

"What are yo...sies marn Nyiso." I throw her with a cushion as she dissolved in laughter. "I was going to say he wants us to move in with each other."

I narrate the whole thing to her and what both the other adults in my life said about the whole situation.

"Yeah, you came to ask for relationship advice from someone who got married at 20...mge whatever I'll tell you is probably just the opposite of what Zonke told you."

"Mge marn, I'm serious."

"I'm serious too. Mge, listen I can't tell you what to do with your relationship cause you two are the ones that know whats going on in it. Some people move in as soon as they start dating, people like roommates. Some people will move in right after they tie the knot, like I did with Mandla."

"What did I do?" He appears out of nowhere, giving me a little bit of a fright.

"Yoh babakhe, don't do that!"

"I didn't even know your friend was here, hello bestie."

"Hi." I can't believe he still remembers that.

"Anyway, you two have fun. I'm off to meet up with Langa, we're having a few business discussions over a glass of whiskey."

I'll be back before you even know it." He says and comes to quickly give his wife a kiss. "Bestie...I'll see you around. "

He leaves shortly after I nodded.

•••

"Thank you." I say taking the glass of freshly squeezed orange juice.

"It's a pleasure my baby." He says putting the jug back into the fridge.

He looks particularly handsome today. His fade freshly cut and his facial hair, a bit more grown out than the last time I saw him. The bruise on his lip, almost unnoticeable now. I watch him remove his suit and put it on the countertop before coming to join me on this side of the counter. He removes the cufflinks of his one hand and I offer to remove the one on the other hand. He gives me his other arm and I remove the cufflink, out of each hole. They're gold, with his initials written on them.

I roll up his sleeves, running my fingertips across the skin of his arm. They trace back to his hand and he clasps mine, causing me to smile looking back to him again.

"That is so ticklish." He says.

"Sorry."

"You apologize a lot." He chuckles reaching over with his other hand for his juice.

I don't.

"I cant even remember the last time I was tickled. It was always an uncomfortable thing though"

"So you dont like being tickled?"

"Nope."

I nod taking a sip of my drink.

"You wanted us to talk face to face."

"Yes...I did." I sit closer. "I've been thinking, about what you mentioned the last time I was here..."

"Oh. And...?"

"And I think maybe we're rushing things."

"Rushing things how?"

"We've been together for four months Bangi, don't you see that as rushing things?"

"So what you're saying is that you won't be moving in with me?"

"I'm saying, I just want to help my sister out a little. She needs me and I can't do that if I'm here. Lets just take it bit by bit. Allow me to do this. Allow me to eventually leave my job when I'm ready."

He sighs, nodding his head squeezing my hand a little before bringing it up to his lips pecking the back of it.

"I won't lie though, it does hurt a little. I thought that we'd be able to spend more time together when you're here, but we'll continue making it work like we've been doing." He says.

I chuckle.

"What?" He asks.

"My father heard about this plan of ours and he flat out said ngiyaphi without proper proceedings or lobola negotiations."

"Your father wants Lobola?" He raises an eyebrow

"Don't entertain my father Bangi." I shake my head.

"If it's lobola he wants then I'll gladly give him whatever he wants, in order for me to have you..."

"Baby that man will milk you dry."

"You think so?" He chuckles.

"I know so."

We spend the rest of the afternoon with him trying to teach me a game of pool which, I still did terrible in after hours of his skilled teachings.



"Who are you?" I ask as the woman looked at me. She was beautiful. Full cheeks, a stunning and familiar looking smile, skin golden and flawless as pearls. I wanted to touch her, but she was beyond my reach.

"Just know, we are watching you." She says.

"Mama." I utter as she appeared from the side. She put a hand on her chest.

"Ngisese nawe...don't let him go." She says before they gravitate towards each other. More people show up that I do not know, but my mother seems unbothered.

The moment their hands touch my eyes open.

I'm in my room, eyes glued to the ceiling. I sit up immediately, wondering what I had just dreamt about.

I've never seen that woman before. Ever.

I climb out of bed and say a quick prayer before grabbing my dirty laundry. There was a glimpse of the sun showing on this lovely Saturday morning. There's running water too today coming from the tap. I rinse the two huge washing tubs before filling it with water.

My father comes out and sits on the stoep, setting his pipe alight. "Morning...baba." I greet.

"Morning Nono."

"You...you sleep well?" I find myself asking.

He nods. I make my way inside to get some washing powder and to wake them up so we could do the washing together.

"These guards, are they always around you?"

"Yes."

"So this boy...had them organised for you...even till now?"

"Yes." I sigh.

He's being awkward right now, busy calling Bangi by this boy.

"That's good. It shows he cares." He says.

So he's great at stating the obvious too.

I hear him clearing his throat as I separated my whites from the colors. "You know Nonozzi, there's nothing I regret more than how I left here. I left my babies behind without a care when they needed me most, and I'm sure that broke you guys. I know saying sorry won't bring back the 10 years I've messed up, but I'm hoping we can look past it all and start over."

He puts his pipe back into his mouth.

"And I miss her."

"Who?"

"uNomakwezi." He says. I look down at my white shirt, noticing a orange stain on it. Dammit. "I regret cheating on her...maybe she wouldn't... Wouldn't have..."

"Wouldn't have what?" I look up.

"What are you guys talking about?" Zonke shows up at the door.

"Baba khuluma..." I say.

He gets up from the stoep and heads inside without finishing off what he wanted to say.

"Buhle, Khaya continue la." I say and follow behind this man. Zonke is right behind me.

"What is going on here?"

The man comes to a stop by the lounge. His pipe is still burning. I don't like the look on his face...

I've been in my room for I don't know how long, crying for what I felt inside. When he walks into my room, I rush to him and he takes me into his arms, hugging me without asking any questions. His hand running up and down my back as new tears filled my eyes.

"It's okay...I'm here." He says.

I hug him even tighter.

•••

My eyes are painful and irritated from my crying fest. I think i felt way better now though.

I try moving without waking him up, but it all fails miserably when he awakens. He gives me a small smile, I can't return. How he heard me mumbling through the phone call still had me wondering. "I made you miss your banquet."

"Don't worry. I had Alakhe stand in for me."

I clear my throat. It wasn't even dark outside, but my body just felt heavier and drained.

"Baby...Are you okay?"

I shake my head.

I could see it all again. Her body laying pale and calmly on the bed. Me trying to get her to wake up, but her just not wanting to. Her body was as cold as ice.

"My mother killed herself Bangi."

"What?"

"My father said he found her lifeless body han..."

"Baby please don't... You don't have to explain it to me.

I...come here." He holds me again. I sigh out, before he kisses my forehead.

That man really ruined everything.

Chapter Eighteen.

"And there you are, so colourful in a world of black and white, unable to fully appreciate your light."

••

He has me wrapped around his arms, in quietness. I feel like such a baby in this position. His touch managed to calm me, preventing me from any further crying.

He clears his throat causing me to look up to him. He was looking right ahead before he breathed in. "You know, I know exactly what you're going through. The pain and frustration of losing someone you adored to the core in an agonising way is something that can drive a person crazy."

His eyes become glossy as he took in a deep breath.

"Baby..."

"That's how I lost my grandmother. Through a car accident. For years I didn't understand how men who've been trained to drive exceptionally well since the day they were legal could fail to control a car."

I've read about this before and I remembered how it bought such agony to our Kingdom when our Queen passed on in such a harsh way. It took the nation a full year to finally appoint the new King and Queen which we have till date.

"The day I heard she died...I...felt so weak and paralyzed. I felt betrayed because the only woman who genuinely was there for my brother and I was gone. I had lost my best friend."

I hug him tighter.

"If she was your best friend then I wish I could've met her."

"You would've loved her Sthandwa sam."

I see a glimpse of a smile on his lips as he said this before wiping away the tears that manage to slip away. I've never seen him cry before or any other man for that matter.

"There's a lot I miss about that woman, her infectious smile, her humanity and her amazing cooking. There wouldn't be day where she wouldn't cook for us even given her title and role."

"Oh so that's why you were such a chubby young adult?" I blurt.

He chuckles, shaking his head before looking down at me.

"I was a sexy chubby young adult because of uMaButhelezi."

"You must show me her pictures one day. I'd love to see the woman who bought such joy to my man's life." I say.

"Definitely." He says. "Come here." He motions to me with his hand before I prop myself up on the bed. He sits up as I rest on my knees making me seem taller than him. He cups my face and brings me closer to him, resting his forehead onto mine. "I never want to see you cry again unless if it's you laughing uncontrollably at my stupid nonexistent jokes okay?"

I chortle cupping his face too.

"I love you MaDlamini, and I'm serious. You crying like this affects me emotionally. Makes me wish I could just take all your pain from you."

My eyes shut just cause I might cry again and I don't want to.

"Look at me baby." Him. I sigh. "I'll always be here for you, no matter what...okay?"

"I'll be here for you too." I say truthfully.

He smiles, even though it doesn't reach his eyes.

"Can I kiss you?"

"You're even asking." I nod once and allow him to devour my lips with a slow, gentle kiss.

"Are you sure you'll be fine?" He asked as I closed my bedroom door. I hook my arms around his laying on his shoulder. I think I still had butterflies from that kiss that took place back in there. I appreciated how it made me forget about what was going on around me, even for a second.

"I'm sure." I say as we walked down the passage.

As we got to the lounge I noticed that everyone was sitting around the table, with food in front of them. A quiet, uncomfortable ambience was very prominent here. I lift my head from Bangi's shoulder as they all turn to us. My father's eyes immediately go wide as he stood up.

"Awu! I hope my eyes are not deceiving me! My ancestors have favoured me indeed! oDlamini abahle, Sibalukhulu, Mdlovu, Magaduzela, Magaga kaNsele, Wena owashisa umuntu ngesikhuni esibunjini kwaze kwasa eyobayoba, Mgoqo ovimb'esangweni nansi impi!" He says and bows dramatically in front of Bangi.

I cringe before Bangi and I briefly look at each other then back at the man I still couldn't believe was my father.

"Your Highness, it is an honour having you here. Bayede Shazi, Malinga, uZindela, Bombo, uCebekhulu." He continues off. I let go of Bangi, before cracking my fingers out in frustration.

What happened to him referring to my man as 'boy'.

"You must be Zanokuhle's father?" Bangi finally says.

The man nods profusely standing upright. He keeps his head down though. I find myself frowning. Bangi puts his hand out for my father to shake which he gladly grabs into a tight looking handshake.

"I've heard quite a few things about you." Bangi says.

"Good things only I hope." My father says secretly eyeing me.

I wouldn't lie to Bangi like that. Good things where?

When he finally lets go of Bangi's hand I've cringed too much.

"Khayalakhe, Nobuhle. Good to see you guys again." He says looking at the two now. He has a smile on his face and they can't help but return it too. This act alone warms my heart in so many ways.

"Good to see you again. My soccer offer still stands." Khaya says.

I roll my eyes, sniffing.

"Of course..." He chuckles while nodding his head. "Miss..." He redirects his attention to my older sister.

"It's Zonke." She says for herself before I clear my throat.

"Oh. Great to meet you." Bangi says.

"Your Highness, would you like to join us for lunch?" My father asks.

"Yes, yes...I made this lunch. Please come and sit, there's plenty." Zonke says already getting up from her chair.

I gawk at her.

"No thank you. That won't be necessary." Bangi says once and she halts.

"I insist." She says.

"Like I said. That won't be necessary. I have to be on my way."

"Please My Prince..."

"I said no thank you." He says firmly this time around, making me look up at him again. He looks irritated and pissed. "I don't go around eating food from strangers. I will only eat food Zano has prepared for me."

I guess this excludes takeaway joints. Again...that warm feeling makes itself known once more. I feel like smirking but instead I bite on both my lips, taming myself.

I feel his arm snake around my waist.

"I have to take my leave." He says. "It has been a...pleasure meeting the both of you. Nobuhle, Khayalakhe I'll see you two around."

"Sure." Khaya.

"Cool." Buhle says.

"Want to walk me out Sthandwa sam?"

Wait I'm Sthandwa sam.

"Asambe." I sniff.

The silence I left in there feels colder than this very outside.

"I'm sorry for my father's dramatic ways." I utter.

"The man is a character."

"Now you know what I've got to deal with. I want him gone."

"Then tell him."

"I can't just do that."

"You're too kind then."

I shake my head. Honestly the man is only here because of how Zonke acts when he's around. Now I'm wondering... As awkward as it is if she even cried when dad told us all of this. Quite frankly she looked unshaken, but then again Zonke isn't as emotional as I am. She's also probably tougher and rougher than I was.

"You have to get going. I don't want to keep you here for longer than I have to."

"I like being around you Sthandwa sam...even if you're sniffing snot and crying your eyeballs out." He says.

The corner of my lips twitches.

"You're lucky I like being around you too." I say.

I look behind him. People.

"Ignore them." He says, with two fingers on my chin.

I sniff, before nodding.

He pecks my lips before we say our final goodbyes. Damn. It gets harder to just let him go away like that. But then again we all have lives, and honestly I have one to get back to as well. These mannequins are at the gate and it's hectically dramatic as well.

"He's rude." Zonke says the moment I walk back into the house.

"Who?" I ask.

"Your boyfriend."

"No, wena bewudelela nje." Buhle clears her throat.

"Njani when I offered him food wancaba yena."

"Wena you think people like him go around eating whatever they set their eyes on? Haibo." Buhle says.

I chuckle.

"Mina I understood when he said he'll only eat food Zano cooked. It's trust. He trusts her, not you." Buhle says

"Why can't he trust me?"

"He didn't even know your name bathung." Buhle.

"Zonke leave this topic alone will you. Be happy he was here and Nono still has him eating out of her palm." The old man says.

"Heeh, baba what is that supposed to mean?" I ask, folding my arms in front of my chest.

"Hai, just keep doing what you're doing. This man is what we need in this family." The man says.

"Stop seeing Bangi as your meal ticket. Umdala for all this bullshit you keep saying around here. Talking about this man is what we need in this family, no, what you need is a job." Me.

"Easy for you to say when you have both of that in your life."
Zonke says

"Guys." Buhle.

"You're acting like this all just fell onto lap nje." I say

"Oh so the Prince didn't just fall onto your lap." Zonke.

"What! No, listen stop this okay. I've had enough of this."

"Yes. Zonke it's enough. We shouldn't put strain on our Nonozzi here. We should respect her wishes."

"If you want to respect my wishes then you'll leave this house."

"Nonozzi..."

"uBaba akayi ndawo." Zonke says.

"Look as long as I'm the one buying food here and paying for the electricity then I have the right to say who stays and who goes."

"Sife ke thina ngoba nguwe phela osebenza kahle lana!" Zonke.

"Listen, This man wouldn't have come back here if it wasn't for those stupid rumours."

"Ya, but now we know they aren't rumours." The man says.

Yoh, no. I can't be in here any longer than what I already have cause if I do I might end up pulling out bits of my afro.

I slam my bedroom door shut.



A whole week of me feeling like shit goes by and nothing seemed to feel any different. I hurt, because the same women

in my dreams can't tell me if what I heard really happened to her or not. For so many years, I believed my mother died suddenly and peacefully not by her taking her own life.

I couldn't believe it.

I somehow still couldn't get my head wrapped around the idea of my mother leaving us behind because of my dad's unfaithful ways. My mother was a strong woman, so she would've left. It was not like my dad provided anything for her to make her stay. Or was she afraid of what they'd say about her out there? Was she afraid of what her parents would've said? The same parents who I haven't seen or heard from in almost two decades.

This family is a sham indeed.

I wonder if our extended family even know of our existence, or they just think we're dead.

I place the roses near her tombstone before turning to leave.

Once in Chery, I get her engine started before driving off to church. After church I head home to find the place empty. Good. I wanted a moment to myself to just breathe and take in everything from the uplifting sermon I just sat through.

That and other things like the circulating picture going around again, of Bangi and I on the front yard of this place. I knew PDA, was a bad idea. People are always ready it seems with the talks, but they had a different tone this time around. A sweeter tone, which I appreciated since I knew I wronged no one when I stepped into this relationship.

Maybe Noluntu, but I haven't seen or heard from her since.

Which was fine with me too.

'The Royal Prince of Emashazini spotted once again with the confirmed Miss Zanokuhle Dlamini. Could this be an actual relationship blossoming right under our noses?'

'Is Prince Bangizwe Shazi in a relationship with a teacher?'

'Sparks are flying once again for Prince Bangizwe Shazi.'

'Rumours confirmed! His Royal Highness dating highschool teacher.'

Wait what? Who confirmed?

I read the article and it's a bunch of bull honestly. They have no facts whatsoever in this article. They're trying to reach. I log into Facebook and scroll through my page and timeline. Same story on this side as well.



I park Chery right in front of Romans Pizza. Today was the last day of the third term for all schools and I decided on treating the family to something nice. At least to give everyone a day off from cooking.

I step out and ask the mannequins to lay it on a little thin with the guarding. I slid on my shades and popped on my hoodie before heading in. It's a full place inside. I make my way to the line and glance at the mannequins who just look out of place by the huge nearby windows. I can hear there's talk about them already.

The line finally moves forward and eventually it's my turn to order.

"Can I please get two large chicken and mushroom pizzas." I order, pay and take my slip before going to stand at another corner. Waiting.

"Order number 305!" A voice calls out. I check my slip.

Dammit. 308. Two more orders before I finally get mine. I'm impatient at this point. 306...307...

Finally.

I basically sprint forward to get my order. "Thank you." The slip I used for evidence gets shoved into my pocket. I lift the box.

"Sisi...ubona ngathi kuright mara ukuthi ungaka uthengane nama Pizza mara?" I hear someone say. I turn and meet with this lady, who looks about the age of 40.

"Sorry...are you talking to me?"

"Yebo sisi, phela you should be choosing something healthy. How old are you?"

"25..." I say, tilting my head to the side.

"Yoh

Advertisement

ngine ndodakazi who's 30 and...look."

Oh so she's probably in her late forties. She takes out her phone, scrolls and turns the screen to me. Skinny is all I see. I take in a deep breath wondering why I was still standing here.

"See...healthy, appealing ngane yami. She's a fitness coach and she's helped so many people with your body type to lose weight and avoid getting abo shukela, diabetes and breathing problems. I can give you her numbers so that you can ca..."

"Ma...with all due respect..." I sigh out.

Now you see if she told me this a couple of months back I would've jumped at this offer. Back when I didn't like how flabby my arms were...or how much cellulite I had on my thighs...or even the stretch marks that ran across my back. Back when I would crumble when I'd look at myself in the mirror, crying my eyeballs out, wondering why I didn't look like this 30 year old fitness coach. Or even why it was so hard to find a decent stunning pair of jeans that would accommodate all this lusciousness.

But now, I see beauty when I look in the mirror. A work in progress. I'm not completely where I want to be with my confidence but accepting myself is something I've done

wholeheartedly. Even if it took a man reminding me of my worth and beauty it still was a huge milestone for me.

And now this woman wants to shake all of this beauty!

Never!

"... Are you telling me I am not good enough just because I don't look like your fitness coach of a daughter? Do I look sick to you? Ngihamba ngi hefuzo mina ma to the point where you think it's appropriate for you to tell me how I should live my life? How is it bothering you that I'm not "appealing" as you say? Learn to mind your own business ma, uyeke abantu baphile their lives in peace. I love myself and I'll continue buying whatever I want with my money. Excuse me." I move past her and head to my car.

It dawned on me that I probably should've kept quiet and just left that scene because by now I'm sure that woman thinks I'm green. Ngihlaza nje. I start Chery and drive out of here.



"Hallelujah Bazalwane!"

"Amen!" We respond.

"I can't hear you. The holy spirit can't hear you. Ngithi hallelujah Bazalwane!"

"Amen!" We respond, louder this time, as the gentle cords played at the background. I was fanning myself with the programme's list.

"That's good...that's amazing my fellow family. Isn't God amazing?"

"All the time!" We say. A few claps are heard from the back.

"He is. He has blessed each and everyone here today. You're here because of his undying love and grace." Pastor Nkosi says.

"That's true." Nyiso says from next to me, hand on her full round belly bump.

"Many people wished to wake up today to see the sun rising, to hear the birds tweeting and to be with their loved ones on this new year but unfortunately they couldn't be here today. But you...you...you...you...you...everyone was blessed to wake up and come here and praise his wonderful and Almighty name. Amen!"

"Amen."

"Yes Lord!" I say.

" 1 Chronicles 16:11-12 says Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced."

"Amen!"

"Bazalwane his miracles are why you're here."

"Yes..."

"A lot of people bashone in their sleep...died during their runk nights out...but he has favoured you. Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, thats 1 Chronicles 16:8. This year, don't be afraid of calling upon his name. Don't shy away from having a conversation with your God even if your life seems to be going excellent don't forget where it all comes from." Pastor Nkosi says.

The church is out at 12h23. 23 minutes later than it should be but I'm not one to complain especially since the service was amazing.

"Yoh, mge I feel so blessed, like I should've never stopped going to church yaz."

"I told you."

"When?"

"Ngiyadlala hau, but I did drag you here and I'm glad I did. I feel like I've done my part in helping one of the Lord's lost sheep."

"I wasn't lost. I was just lazy hau. And I'm glad you dragged me here. I'm sure my little bun here is feeling the blessing nje like nobody's business."

I smile. I'm happy I could do this for her. Actually for us cause I've also been slacking in my attendance only because of me having to finish up yet another year at school. The fourth term was just chaotic and something I thought I was prepared for. There were so many deadlines but all of it had to be done before the academic year could end.

Khaya had made it through to the next grade and I was proud with how he had managed to pass. His marks were impressive and thankfully the push we gave him bagged him a distinction in mathematical literacy.

The pride I have within me right now has surpassed all the levels I think it could pass.

On Buhle's side, we were still waiting. Waiting for next week before the matriculants could finally hear their fate. But I believed in Buhle and I knew she would do well. If only she believed in herself too, just like how I did.

"So, what are you doing tomorrow?" Nyiso asks.

"Tomorrow?"

"For your birthday mge."

"Oh...its tomorrow already?" I ask. It completely slipped my mind that I was aging the very next day.

"How do you forget that mge? That means you don't have plans moes."

"I...I do. I might just chill in my room, listening to music while probably thinking of the new bunch of learners I'm going to have to get accustomed to."

"That sounds boring mge."

"Boring? Okay wena what would you do."

"Not would but are. You and I are going to the spa tomorrow, we'll get manicures and pedicures done and our bodies taken to heaven by magical hands."

"Sounds expensive."

"Why would I let you pay for anything on your birthday? Beside Ban...I mean Mandla gave me money last...week to spoil myself and I figured let me spend this money with my sister."

"I think that sounds better than listening to Ringo Madlingozi the whole day."

We share a good laugh.



"Happy birthday Sthandwa sam'...happy birthday to you." He sang on the other end of the line. My cheeks were painful from the smile that failed to get tamed from my face.

"Thank you baby wami. That means so much to me."

"Just a song?"

"Yes. Phela no guy has ever sung me happy birthday before." I chuckle.

"Well it's their mistake. I move differently like that sthandwa sam'" he says.

"Okay okay Mr move differently. I hear you." I laugh. He's doing the same on the other end.

"Anyway...I'm sorry I can't come there and spend the day with you baby, you know when duty calls I have to answer." He sighs.

"It's fine baby. We'll have plenty of other birthdays to celebrate." I say, but truthfully it hurt deep down inside that out of all days to get caught up in his royal duties it had to be today.

"I'll make it up to you. I promise." He says.

"You better." I chortle.

"Well...sthandwa sam' I to get going okay, ngiyakuthanda yezwa."

"Nami ngiyakuthanda." I turn over to lay on my stomach, hoping that would aid with the butterflies I felt fluttering in there.

When he eventually hangs up, I've fallen in love a hundred times more than just a few minutes back. Before he woke me up with this call.

I climb out of bed and quickly make it. I draw my curtains next and open my windows before heading out.

"Surprise!" Khaya and Buhle say as I walked into the lounge area.

"Happy birthday Zano!" She squealed.

"Guys...you shouldn't have." I utter looking at the cake Buhle held in her hands. My favourite. Death by chocolate cake.

"We wanted to."

"And since you're the best sister ever, we got you something else too." Khaya says.

He holds out a black plastic bag for me to take. "What is this?"

"Hau ivule." Buhle encourages putting the cake on the table.

I open the bag and inside was material. I take it out and unfold it. It's a red T-shirt. I turn it to me and big black words written 'Best sister in the world.' make them self known.

"How did you guys buy all of these?"

"You taught us to save remember." Khaya.

"So this is about half of the money we saved." Buhle says.

"Guys..."

"We hope you like it. We couldn't decide on which color to print this on."

"I chose the red, but if you hate it...she picked it out." Khaya says.

I chuckle, shaking my head.

"You guys are being silly...this is...thank you." I hug them both tightly, pecking their foreheads.

"Zano marn...we're too old for that." Khaya complains.

"You're still my younger siblings...no matter what." I say and let them go. "Someone get a knife so we can slice some cake."

"I'll get it." Buhle.

"Vele you'll get it." Khaya.

I forgot about this mister over here who doesn't eat cake.

"Is Zonke still not back?" I ask.

"Yes."

I sigh. I hope she's not going back to her old habits. Not after so much work with brief psychotherapy, school hunting and talks about what she wants to do fulltime.

After we ate some cake for breakfast we spent about an hour just talking further about what we'll be doing this year. Buhle was still waiting for or her applications To be answered and whatnot. Tough and stressful times.

At 12h00 I went ahead and prepared myself some water to bath in.

My phone vibrates, just as I was about to pour my hot water into my cold.

What?

Capitec: Payment +R90000.00 into SAVINGS ACCOUNT; Ref To my Ntombzanaaaa..."

No what? R90k for ntoni?

I quickly pour the water into my dish and take this matter to my bedroom.

'You done yet?' Nyiso texts me.

'Are you outside already or something?' I peek out of the opening between the curtains. I don't see her car.

'No, but I'll be there in probably 30 minutes tops. Think you can manage?'

'Yes.'

'Okay. Bring an extra outfit , something nice please! we're going to have a photoshoot after the fact.'

'I will. Let me bath.' I go offline immediately. I'll interrogate Bangi probably on the way to whichever spa Nyiso was taking me to.

After I manage to fit my bathing time in 15 good minutes, I lotion and grab one of my simple pair of jeans. I wear the top my siblings bought for me and comb my luscious afro out. It has grown beautifully. To almost the length mama had.

I put on some lashes and a red lipstick. I don't know how many wrong coloured shades I had to go through before I found the one that matched perfectly with my skin tone.

I think this should be enough. I pull out the Louis V paper bag I stored at the highest shelve in my closet. I put the paper bag on my bed before retrieving the dress from inside. It's still as velvety as I remember under my fingertips. Still that beautiful black colour I last saw, and it still had that new smell. I've worn it once and that was just to fit it, and was I glad I did. It fit like a glove back then and I'm pretty sure it'll still fit me now.

I grab my pair of black strapped block heels before taking a few other things I thought would be essential even after my massage and stuff.

"These flowers are yours Miss." The mannequins slightly bow as one handed me a bouquet of wild flowers. "They're from the Palace. His Royal Highness the King and Queen send their blessed birthday wishes." He adds on.

I freeze for a second, absorbing these words like a sponge. The King and Queen thought of me? I bring the flowers closer to sniff them and they smell both sweet and wild.

'We hope you thoroughly enjoy this day Miss Dlamini. From: HRH the King and Queen.'

Oh my God.

I'm going to faint!

Nyiso arrives just as I put my flowers in water in my room. I rush out, after saying my goodbyes to my siblings.

"Best sister in the world neh." Nyiso says before we share a hug.

"It's cute isn't it?"

"Very. Ngena mge sihambe." She goes to her side of the car.

Minutes after our drive to town she stops the car in front of Bella Diva Spa. I'm excited. Today has been different altogether. And now my friend is spoiling me for my day of birth. The first thing we get is the manicures and pedicures which took about two hours. The next was a full body massages...an Indian head massage, a facial, a sugar back scrub and we have our feet soaked. I needed all of this. All the tenseness on my shoulders was eased and caressed away. I smelled like essential oils and my skin felt as soft as a baby's behind.

We left after that because she had booked another venue for our photoshoot. This was all too much, even if Nyiso didn't get to experience everything to the tee. "The photoshoot is so unnecessary. You've already spent so much on me mge and you need to be using your money sparingly because you have a baby on the way."

"When was the last time I ever did something for my friend? Remember you spoilt me two years back on my birthday and I never returned the favour." She says.

"You could've just taken me to the movies or something."

"Movies? Awa mge."

"Okay ke, let me pay for the photoshoot. It's the least I can do since Bangi decided to send me money I didn't ask for."

"No...I won't allow that."

"Nyiso..."

"Holy balls mge...let me spoil you hau, who knows when we'll be able to do all of this again."

"Wakhuluma ngathi ngiyashona nje."

"You never know mge." She says as she continued ahead.

This place is far moes.

Two hours?

For pictures?

Don't they know about white backdrops with painted sceneries, backgrounds, walls and regular old trees?

Finally we drive through some huge gate, that has guards by it, who asked us what we were doing here. Nyiso told them we were here for our photoshoot. It was a marvel here, one that made me take back the things I was thinking of prior. Why would I want a white backdrop when I can take photos in front of these beautiful mountains?

"This is where we're taking pictures?" I ask.

"Yep. You like it?"

"Mge how much was this place?"

"Would you stop worrying about the price and come on. I'm sure John has been waiting for us." She says.

The sun was almost ready to set for the day.

Inside the building we walked, passing men and women in white shirts and black pants. Nyiso is on her phone.

"John...yeah, we're here...okay out at the back? Okay." She hangs up, before taking my arm bringing me to an immediate stop. "Let me ask one of these people where the back exit is. She signals and one of them come to us. "John. He said he's out back, please tell us where that is."

"You were on the right path, just straight ahead. There should be an open sliding door on the side." The guy says.

"Thank you." We continue. The passage comes to an end and there's this beautiful peachy sunlight coming in through the huge windows. Tables and chairs were put aside in this empty space. The view to the outside was breathtaking. The grass and trees greener than anything.

"Uh...this way." She pulls me to an exit on the far left.

What the shit.

I squint my eyes for a better look. Hayi marn, I know that chocolate dream of a man from anywhere. "Is that...Bangi..." I'm already rushing to him after she frees me. "What in the hell!" It is him, with that beautiful smile of his.

"Ou!" He breathes out the moment my big self collides with his chest.

"What are you doing here?" I look up to him.

"I'm here for the photoshoot hau...can't a man take pictures now?"

"Well Mge meet John...our photographer." She says the moment I glance back for her.

"Wait so you knew he was here all along? You're sneaky!" I gasp before letting my man go.

"Did she suspect anything?" Bangi asks.

"Not even a single thing."

"You did good." He says while I playfully smack his chest.

"My job here is done then. I'll give you two some privacy." She says and turns to walk back into the building.

"So this was your plan all along?"

"Worked like a charm didn't it."

"I should've known marn." I chuckle as he snakes his hand around my waist.

"This way." We walk along the stone path that was made.

"Where are we going?"

"You'll see." He says. We walk down this path and am I not glad he's here to help me balance on these high shoes. "You look beautiful..."he whispered into my ear. A flush creeps up across

my cheeks. I thank him. He did buy this dress at the end of the day, but I did believe his words.

My eyes meet with a huge dome shaped place, that was lit up with tiny lights. Iyoh! Inside was what looked like a table for two setup and as before there, were these people in black and white which I've concluded are waiters and waitresses. There are these fluffy

looking flowers on this section of this place.

He allows me in first and pulls my chair out for me. "Thank you." I sit.

He makes his way to his seat right across me and immediately calls for a drink. The waiters serve us with apparently their finest nonalcoholic champagne. "This is beautiful Bangi...like I don't even know what to say."

He's quiet.

"Bangi..."

"Ever felt like you actually needed some beve...uh I mean alcoholic courage?"

I frown. "Uh..."

He downs the whole glass of champagne before getting up from his seat. He's looking at me, licks his bottom and clears his throat soon after.

"Baby uright?"

"Yes...I just need...I just need to do something..." He says reaching into his royal blue suit. His hand returns with a box as he made his way next to me. Haibo. The man goes from his staggeringly tall self to a man on his knee.

My heart races, leaping into my throat as I turned on my seat. I close my gaped mouth with the palm of my hand as I sit up. "Bangi..." It comes out as a whisper.

"Sthandwa sam'...Ntombzan...Zanokuhle Dlamini...the only woman I've ever felt like a nervous mess around. Where I felt like I should better myself and listen more to others. I wake up with a smile on my face knowing I've managed to find myself a gem like you...A gem I want to make my wife. Forever. Will you...will you marry me?"

I don't know what to think. He opens the box. My hands are shaking as I take in a deep breath.

"Zano..." He says.

I nod, noticing I haven't answered him.

"Yes" I breathe out.

"Angizwa?" His face lights up, the uncertainty washing away like the dirt stains depicted on an OMO advert.

"Yes! yes yes!"

Thank you for the 4k likes! 🙏

Chapter Nineteen.

"Love recognizes no barriers. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination full of hope." x
MAYA ANGELOU.

••

"I fear I might have competition right now."

"What are you talking about?" I avert my attention from the foreign object on my finger looking at him. He had his fingers caressing his stubbly chin.

"The ring, you haven't had your eyes off of it since I slipped it onto your finger." He chuckles.

I throw him a smile before leaning forward, resting my elbows on the table.

"Do you blame me? It's something I never expected."

He lets go of the hairs on his chin and holds out his hands for me to take. He gently runs his fingers across my knuckles. His thumb finding the stone he put on my finger.

"I'm glad you like it. It was hard coming to my final decision."

"Final decision?"

"On how I wanted it to look like."

"It couldn't have been that difficult." I giggle.

"You have no idea...but, on a serious note this means that things are going to start changing."

I knew what he meant and that was a side I don't think I was ready for. Going all public with us was scary. I've already tasted what those tabloids can do to a person and how unavoidable they are. How was the public going to react to this? I heave out a sigh.

"Can't we continue like this...I like the mystery and the privacy."
I sulk.

He chuckles. "People should know I'm off the market Baby."

"Bangizwe..."

"What..." He shrugs causing me to giggle. "...I'm serious. Plus I think it's time we tell our story, and wipe all those lies away. I'm also sure people want to know who's going to be joining our family soon."

I shake my head.

"Congratulationsssss!" I hear Nyiso say from behind us. I turn and see that she had Mandla with her. Jeez, what else have I not been told and informed on cause wow. I get up and we share a hug.

"Thank you mge." I let her go but she reaches for my hand.

"Holy balls mge! This is beautiful."

"My baby outdid himself hey."

He chuckles next to me before shaking Mandla's hand.

"Your Highness, it's an honor to meet you." Mandla says.

"Please call me Bangizwe." My man says.

Must be tired of the formalities then.

"Call me Mandla."

"Call us an actual photographer, we have to take some photos together." Nyiso says.

"You're right." I say.

Well...since Bangi didn't actually end up hiring any real photographer we had to settle with taking photos with his phone, and Nyiso's as well. The pictures looked amazing nonetheless and I loved how sexy I looked in most of them.

"Bangi...you're not even looking at the camera in any of these."

I say as I was seated next to him. He looks at his phone in my hand as I scrolled to the next picture.

"Are you sure?" He asks.

I delete one that wasn't focussed properly.

"Look." I show him 3 consecutive pictures to back up what I'm talking about. "You look creepy." I giggle.

"You said handsome wrong." He says. I chortle. "We can take a few selfies right now then."

Now that sounds like a plan. I take a few more snaps of the two of us. Him behind me. This time he's focussed on the camera which is all I wanted really.

"I'm sure you two have forgotten about us." Nyiso chuckles.

I clear my throat. I kind of did.

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He has his one hand on my thigh as we were driven back to my place. I was resting on his shoulder, in comfortable silence. On his other hand he busied himself with his phone. Scrolling through the pictures we took. He goes to his WhatsApp and then goes to his status, picking out 3 pictures he seemed to like best before posting them. The last one he types the words '**she said yes.**' And that's when I smiled. He wasn't afraid of hiding me cause if he was I doubt he'd even think of posting these and going public.

"And now for chaos." He says before putting his phone away.

"Our bubble...gone." I mumble.

"I'll have to amp up your security baby as soon as yesterday. Would've been better if you had moved in with me."

"Bangi..."

"I was just saying" he says before I hook my arms around the one that rested on my thigh.

"I know...but now its probably going to happen sooner than I thought."

"When do you want to do this?"

"Do what?"

"Get married...walk down the aisle to me."

I giggle, liking the idea of that happening. "Next month."

"Next month it is. We'll have to get started on the planning

then as soon as possible because it's going to be a huge ass wedding."

I sit up.

"I was joking."

"Joking where?"

"Everywhere! Big wedding? I thought we'd be having something small and intimate, you know."

"Small and intimate is not something we do where I'm from Sthandwa Sam."

"So no compromising..."

"Maybe we can have the small celebration after amalobolo."

I sigh. Konje that.

"I don't think I want to see that man again. He probably doesn't even want to see me too."

"You never did tell me how you got him to leave that day."

"Packed his things and threw them out." I shrug.

"Baby!" He chuckles. "I shouldn't be laughing."

The moment we're driven into my home we've received about 4 calls from the media. All of them were eagerly turned down by my man. "I told you...chaos."

I chuckle right as his phone rings again. "Maybe you should switch it off." I say. He pulls it out of his pocket and looks at the screen. I do too.

'Mfazi ka baba' is written there.

He groans before answering.

"Bangizwe angiyithandi lento ongeza yona."

"Yini mama?" She's on loudspeaker.

"Why am I the last to know about your engagement? Yini? am I not your mother anymore?"

"That was not my intentions ma."

"Then why did your father know and I didn't? I'm the one who carried you for 9 months Bangizwe. 9 yonke! And now you do this to me. Even people on your socials found out about this before I did. Amandla had to tell me."

"Ncese mama." He sighs.

"Kubhlungu marn."

"I'll make it up to you mama. I promise."

"Mhnn...anyway,where's my makoti?" She asks and immediately my eyes go wide.

We're at the makoti stage already?

"She's right next to me mama." He looks down at me, kissing my forehead.

"Let me speak to her."

I shake head, backing away slightly but he brings the phone closer to me whispering a "khuluma"

"Uh...Hi... I mean Her Majes..."

"Whuuu, woah call me Mama please. You're marrying my son

angisho."

"Uh..."

"Ya, and you better not be playing him cause things will happen."

"No. Never my Que...I mean mama." Why am I so nervous when I've dined with this woman twice

"When are you and Bangi coming to see me?"

"Uh..."

"I'll bring her mama. Soon."

"Good. We have to sit down and talk over tea and cookies."

Yoh. Yoh. Am I ready?

She hangs up soon enough before we actually part ways, far into the the evening. I had not realised the time was 23h56. Khaya is sleeping on the damn couch, the TV playing loud and proud. Haibo, No. He can't be wasting electricity like this. I switch it off and shake him awake.

"Hambo'lala " I say as he opens his eyes. He groans irritated before getting up and slowly walks off down the passage to his bedroom. I turned off the lights before heading to bed myself. The pictures I sent to myself with Bangi's phone are all over my gallery. I pick a few I liked and posted them. I'll deal with the consequences later too.



"Ahhhhhhhhh!" A yell wakes me up.

I sit up immediately just as the door decides to shoot open and Buhle comes running in.

"What the hell! Whats wrong?"

She jumps onto my bed "Let me see! let me see!"

"See what?"

She takes my hand and holds it up close to her face. She takes in a deep breath and yells again, falling back on the bed. "Its real! It's real!"

"Yoh yoh yoh! Whats real?" Zonke asks standing by the doorway, arms folded.

"Zano is engaged!" Buhle squeals.

"What!"

"Yep, there's about 3 gossip articles now that I read about this before I went to check out her status and boom. Its true!"

"When did this happen?" She asks.

"Yesterday late afternoon." I say.

"Late aft...are you serious?"

"Hau hello didn't you hear me?" Buhle asks.

"So you're saying to me he asked you...to marry him?"

"Yes." I answer a bit annoyed now cause she was starting to sound like she really didn't think Bangi would ask me to marry him. "you don't sound too happy for me."

Buhle lets my hand go.

"Dont be ridiculous... I...I am happy for you. " she says and immediately turns to leave, not even giving me a chance to say what I wanted to say.

That was just too awkward for my liking.

At lunchtime I've managed to spot the dramatic and ever ready tabloids outside our yard and thankfully Bangi kept to his word and organised more security for us. I was eating my beautifully ripe mango when Zonke walked into the lounge area. My mouth drops to the floor as I looked at her.

A beautiful figure hugging black dress topped with a huge black hat. Her face was beat, highlighting it to the max. She looked stunning. Wait..."are those mine?" I ask looking at the shoes she had on. Zonke doesn't own those type of heels, and I wouldn't have minded if she had asked me nicely to borrow them.

"I figured you wouldn't mind"

"Where are you going to? Its safer in here."

"Uzoy'thola kanjani uhleli kuleli tin lomuzi. I'll be back. I can have one of the men out there drive me right?"

"Uh...sure."

"Good." She walks out of the house. I get up and watch her catwalk to the gate before conversing with one of the Mannequins. They lead her to one of the tinted SUV cars and soon enough they drive off.

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"You may not ask His Royal Highness and Miss Dlamini any political question. You may not ask of how any of the royals passed on. You may not pry for answers they wish to ignore. You may not ask his Royal Highness and Miss Dlamini anything sexual or anything that involves their sexual life..."

I chuckle at that cause what sexual life? Also people ask that?

Hectic.

"...If they wish to share they will. You may not ask of any of their previous relationships or partners...." The man continues. This is the man that deals with public image of this family and right now he was telling the woman seated not so far from us about all the things she cannot ask us. The last minutes interview took me by surprise.

This was going to be broadcasted live and to say I wasn't scared would be a hell of a lie. I didn't think I was ready for but Bangi said this was the only interview we were ever going to sit through until necessary again.

"Relax." He squeezes my hand. I take in a deep breathe and blow it right out again.

"What if I say the wrong thing."

"What if you don't? Baby relax. If you cant answer then I will."

Okay.

Okay.

"I understand all the rules." The woman says before the tall man excuses himself.

The woman fixed herself and sat up.

"We're going live in 10!" A voice alerts.
10 what? hours, minutes, years?

"5, 4, 3..."

"Your Royal Highness, Miss Dlamini...welcome to Entity news. It is such an honour having the two of you here with us." The woman says. Mrs Utchi.

"Thank you for having us." Bangi says putting our entwined hands on his lap.

"Now can we start at the very beginning of all of this. Im certain people are dying to know how the two of you actually met?"

Okay.

"We met on a day I never expected would lead us to this very moment. I was taking a sort of rebellious ride outside of the palace when I saw this woman whose car had broke down on the side of the road. Now I had two options, one I drive away and pretend I never Saw anything or two try to do a good deed for a woman in a place i wasn't really familiar with." He says and I giggle.

"So Miss Dlamini here was a damsel in distress?"

"Not necessarily she barely even wanted my help that day."

"If I could I would've ran away from there." I finally say.

"Why?" Utchi laughs slightly.

"I honestly couldn't pinpoint where I've seen him before. I even thought he was going to traffic me."

"Hau! This is news to me." Bangi says causing me to look at him.

"So you didn't know you were actually meeting the Prince?"

"No. So you can imagine how embarrassed I was when I eventually found out." I say looking back at Utchi.

We share a laugh.

"Was it love at first sight?"

"Uh, not from my side since I was in a relationship prior to this. He was too as you may know."

"But it was definitely love at first for me."

"You always scare me with that you know." I mumble.

"So you knew she was the one from onset?"

"Absolutely. Obviously we didn't pursue anything until I was certain about what I wanted and all of that."

"Congratulations on the engagement."

"Thank you." We both say.

"Could you tell us more about the ring and how he proposed?"

Utchi asks.

"The ring was mainly supposed to be simple yet elegant to match my fiancé's personality at best. I chose a rectangular shape for the main Diamond stone. The smaller emerald green stones were inspired by our first time in front of my parents as a couple. She wore this beautiful emerald green dress."

He explains more on the ring and then I narrate to her how he asked me to marry him.

"So you have met the King and the Queen?"

"A few times already and it has been an absolute honour. Ive sat down with the Queen and drank tea. They are amazing people."

"And the rest of the royal family."

"I'm yet to actually meet the whole family but I've met his Sister and brother and both are incredible." I clear my throat.

Yes people don't need to know what a 'shithead' Alakhe is in actuality.



"What does it say?" Khaya asks.

Zonke has not been back here for a whole week and...sigh.

"Come on Nobuhle." I yawn.

"It's loading."

We stand there surrounding her as she used my phone to check for her results. We've been awake since the wee hours and it's even the following day. 00h12. Gosh. I'm going to fall down right here, right now from all this exhaustion.

Who knew dodging your own 'family' and press would be such a hard thing.

I sigh, thinking of how excited the man was when he told me of the letter he received from the Royalsmen.

"I don't want to look." She says and turns the screen to me. I look at the results, gasping.

"Higher Certificate?" I put my hand on my mouth.

"Yeh?" Khaya.

"What? No that's impos...Zano!" She hits my shoulder before I convulse in laughter.

"Congratulations Miss Bachelors Degree."

"How many distinctions?"Khaya asks.

"3!"

"Dammit! " Khaya says.



"There are a few charities I can get you involved in that will keep you busy for most of the time you'll live here." He says.

"Sounds better than me just sitting here and not doing anything with myself for so many days to come."

"No pressure. This has to be a step by step type of thing because it can get pretty overwhelming."

" I know nothing about working with charity."

"And that's what I'm here for. I wouldn't leave you to suffer."

We were talking about when I eventually leave my job. I think I was now starting to warm up to the idea, even if my mind was with my siblings, especially Khaya.

"Has Buhle gotten any offers yet?"

"Just two

luckily she got a bursary as well So that's one less problem."

"That's amazing. And what about the wedding planner? Have you two talked about when you'll meet?" Bangi asks me.

"Somewhere next week, before the schools open."

"Remember big wedding...there are no limits."

Ya neh.

I get up from the chair. Looking around. "You know you've never really given me a tour of this place."

"You want one?" He downs the rest of his energy drink.

"Yes." If I'm going to move in here then I might as well familiarise myself with this place.

"Lets do it then."

He starts by showing me the downstairs area. There's that pool table in the open space far from the lounge area. A few places

away there was a huge white, clean Piano. "Do you play?"
"Not as well as I used to." He says. "I'll play it for you one day if you want."

I nod. I would love that. There's a ridiculously huge guest bedroom down here which has me wondering how big his room is then. The backdoor actually leads somewhere. A beautiful rose garden and an open space of yard. There was a jacuzzi and a pool not far apart in a set up that wasn't just that of the typical pools I knew.

We then head upstairs and already I was taken aback by the open plan up here. The chandelier you see from downstairs is much more of breathtaking from up here. The first two rooms are unused bedrooms. Their size alone keeps on putting my home in shame.

He opens the door to another huge room.

"This is where I sleep." He says as I took a look around.

"That picture..." I squirm.

A massive picture of himself was right above the headboard and why again was he topless in this one.

"That was taken two years ago"

"And you still manage to look that good?" I bite on my bottom lip walking further into the room.

"I look way better in person though don't I?"

"How can I make an accurate judgement though when I last saw you like that almost 10 months ago?"

"You can always take another peek." He says before I turn back to him.

"I...can?" He encloses the space between the two of us. He reaches for the button of his shirt. He undoes the first two just as I stop him.

"I'll do it." I swallow as my fingers began swimming over the buttons with double the amount of effort because of the nails I decided to get. He's looking at me, focusi hard as if he was trying to look at every mark on my face. I'm met by a white vest.

I push the shirt off his broad shoulders and toss it onto the bed.

"You can take the vest off too." He says.

Is he that comfortable with me and his skin? This gives me some sort of pride now.

I pull the vest up and he grabs a hold of it pulling it off his body.

Okay now what?

Do i continue staring at his body like this, wishing I could kiss each inch of it... Or do I turn and walk out of here before we find ourselves in a conundrum.

He takes my hand as I was still contemplating my options. he puts it on his warm chest...or was it my sweaty palms that were warm. I cringe inwardly. How can these palms be this sweaty at a time like this?

When he lets my hand go i move it across his chest. His tattoo. That tattoo that confused me cause I didn't know what it was. I still don't know what it is. He smelt so intoxicating. For some reason I wished now that he didn't get inked because he has such beautiful smooth dark skin that's Now invaded by these permanent words and things.

I look up to him looking at me still. He bit on his lip, his eyes now travelling down to mine. I nod and pull him to me. The slow and steady kiss turns into a passionate and breathtaking action. He pulls me down with him as he sat on the bed. I rest a knee on the bed, his hands now firmly on my thighs. I felt how my dress rode up as his hands moved higher and higher and higher.

I want him closer to me...and as if was also wanted the same thing he pulls me to him.

The pressure on my clit made it hard for me to keep in the sounds that's escaped from deep within my throat. Harder than what I what I felt between my legs, poking at my clit. He groaned as I rubbed myself on him, trying to aid this foreign itch. He grasped at my waist. The thin fabric of my panties was

not helping my desperate situation. I gasped as he broke the kiss, feasting immediately on my neck.

"Oh Crap!" I cried out. He kissed the right spot it seems that sends tingles to my pussy...

My nipples hardened as he squeezed hard on my breasts.

What are we doing?

I breathe out as the pleasure built up inside of me. If this act alone of me rubbing myself against him feels this good, then I could only imagine how he'd feel like when he's inside of me. I could feel how close I was to this edge... But before I could even seem to jump over it he switches the roles. I want to cry out so badly. He's still in between my legs, laying at the edge of the bed. He looked at me, his sweet breath hitting my face. He bit on his lower lip before I felt his hand glide down my soaked panties.

"Oh my God!" He grunted.

How could one person just make me feel like this? So not in control of my own damn body.

He presses his palm on my already wanting clit and I immediately shut my eyes again. His fingers then took over rhythmically rubbing over my panties as I pushed onto his hand. I wanted to release whatever beast of a thing was brewing up

inside of me. He kissed on my neck again, kissing to the collarbone stopping right at the passage of my breasts.

His hand stops too and my eyes instantly shoot open.

What the hell! Why did he stop?

"Bangi..." I breathe as I held his face in my hands. He has his eyes closed calming down his breathing it seemed. "...baby."

"We can't do this Zanokuhle." He groaned.

Why was it so sexy when he spoke like this?

"Wha...why not?" I asked. I sound like a mess.

He opened his eyes, but they still looked closed. "Your boundaries."

"My..." Gosh, curse me and my boundaries! Why does he have to listen to everything I say though.

Maybe this time if I give him permission he'll budge. "...forget the boundaries Bangi."

"What? No baby." He gets up and I sit up closing my legs in internal unresolved tension.

"I'm allowing you to do this Bangi. I want this."

He shakes his head. "No. We're not thinking straight."

"I am." I half shout.

Why do I want to cry so bad?

"Then you'll know I wouldn't want you waking up tomorrow or whenever blaming me for not respecting your wishes. I've already messed up a handful of times now and I fear the next time you come near me in this way I won't be able to stop myself Zanokuhle."

Haibo, who's this Zanokuhle he keeps talking about?

He walks off to the windows, huffing out. He puts his hands on his waist standing there for the longest 15 seconds of my life.

"So...we're not doing it."

"No baby." He clears his throat.

Mxm. I sigh getting up to fix my dress. This hot and bothered game is becoming a little too much now and me wanting thee unknown has me dying. How does one slap the respect out of a man, cause wow this is really frustrating.

I go to the bathroom to fix my hair and wipe myself.

When I make my way out he heads in. I make my way back to the kitchen to get that ice cream I saw earlier. I open the tub, grab a tablespoon and struggle my way onto the kitchen highchair. I shove the first scoop into my mouth, my mind drifting off to what happened up there. Nxa! This Ice cream is not helping. I could just burn this place down that's how I felt. He shouldn't have touched me. Not like that!

He walks into the kitchen after I have managed to eat about a quarter much's worth of ice cream.

"Oh so this is where you disappeared to." He comes to stand next to me. I won't look at him. Maybe that will help. I should probably not breathe him in as well. He leans in. I can feel him breathing down my neck. Don't look at him Zano. "We were still touring the house baby."

I put another scoop full of ice cream into my mouth. It melts and the vanilla taste on my tongue feels new.

"Are you giving me the silent treatment baby?" He kisses on my neck.

Okay! Now he's just doing it on purpose right? I put my hand on his chest, stopping him from kissing my neck again.

"Haibo...Ntombzanaaaa...Nunuza..." He says in an almost annoying deep baby voice.

Oh God.

He takes my hand that I placed on his chest and shoves himself in front of me, pushing my ice cream away and leaning on the counter. I avert my eyes from him before feeling his fingers on my chin. "Kabuza...kabuza...(kiss me)"

My lips twitch. "Is that a smile I see?"

I breathe and shove him away from me, getting off the chair. I take the ice cream and make my way up the stairs. He jogs on behind me as I hear his loud steps on the stairs. I pass his bedroom. "Haike, angiyazi le yona...baby vele awufuni ukung'khulumisa?" He asks.

I eye him, dipping my spoon into the ice cream and eat the contents of the spoon. He puts his hands on my waist, kissing my neck again. "Is this what you want?"

I breathe out. He pushes a door open leading me into it. He pulls me closer. Does he have to do this. He kisses behind my ear and I shiver almost instantly.

"Stop..." I whisper.

"Will you talk to me?"

"No..."

He turns me and immediately pushes me to a wall. He looks at me. "Baby...you're mad at me because of the boundaries you set? You said you wanted to wait for marriage..."

I know what I said!

"...if it was up to me, I would've had you a long time ago. Do all the things I can only imagine doing to you...explore your body from head to toe...feel you...lose myself in you...do you know what just thinking of you does to me?"

I avert my eyes from him, pressing my thighs together as my insides clenched deliciously. I clear my throat. "I'm sorry."
He takes my spoon from me before taking the ice cream and moves away from me. I breathe out.

Okay, maybe I need to distract myself.

I finally take my time to look around the room we were in. Pictures everywhere.

"What is this?"

"Oh. My Gallery room. I keep my most valued pictures in here."

I move from my place. Walking around, looking at the pictures.

A picture of Ama smiling. A picture of Ama and Bangi together smiling. His pictures were almost everywhere. There's one picture of Alakhe. A few of the pictures here were of his parents. And then there were three with me on them.

"What the hell..." I whisper.

The first one is of...haibo...its of that day at aunt Portia's wedding. I wasn't looking at him or the camera. I looked awkward though. Hot and awkward. You could clearly see how much I was just avoiding looking at this man I can't stop thinking about now.

"She's sexy isn't she?"

"She didn't even know it." I mumble to myself and look at the

other two.

One is of a week ago on my birthday when he asked me to marry him...I still remembered the day like it was yesterday. The other was once a profile picture of mine. Smiling, teeth white and hair combed out.

A whole shambula!

I turn my attention to another wall...

"Wait...that's her."

"Her who?" Bangi asks.

"The woman I saw in my dreams."

"Dreams?"

"Yes." I nod walking closer to it.

"How? She's been resting for years now. I don't even know know her personally."

Wow. It is her. I touch the frame of the picture.

"She said something to me..."

"What?" He asks.

"Uh...something...I think it was she was watching me."

"Watching you? Isn't it supposed to be the other way around?"

"Are you jealous baby?" I look at him.

"No...I just find it weird that my great grandmother who is my ancestor is appearing in your dreams and not mine."

"You are sooo jealous Bangi." I laugh.

"Ohhh sowuright manje neh?"

"Mxm."

We wrapped things up in that photo room of his. See people with money can spend it on such things I'd totally see as unnecessary. Imagine me spending money on a room for photos. Yoh. Next thing I'll be using it to build a room for teacups and spoons.

As we were sitting on the couch finishing off the ice cream, my feet on his lap, a knock on the door disturbs our conversation.

"Come in." Bangi says.

Three mannequins walk in. Deliverance is among the three. I get my feet off Bangi's lap and turn my attention to them. They all bow before standing at attention.

"Your Highness, there's a man here who requested to see you."

One of them says.

"Me? Let him in." Bangi says getting up.

The mannequin who had just announced that nods firmly and walks out, only to return with that old man. I'm up, walking to stand next to Bangi.

"You." He says.

"Bayede! Shazi! Malinga! Bayede!" He chants bowing down on both his knees.

"Please...get the man up." Bangi says. They immediately do so.

He puts his stick down and clasped his hands together, rubbing his bare feet on the tile of the entryway. He had green beads this time around both his feet and wrists. A pure white headpiece that ran past his forehead. His stick had leaves now too that were green and bright just like the cloth draped on his shoulder. The one he wrapped around his torso was pitch black. The red and black one out of sight.

"Sir...may I ask what brings you here to my fathers palace?"

Bangi. I nod, agreeing to the question.

He looks between Bangi and I before he finally allows a smile to dance on his face.

"Bangizwe namanyemadoda, WeZanokuhle... Mina bangi thiyela ngo Mehlo. Amehlo wabaphansi. I have climbed mountains, crossed dangerous paths and rivers to find the ones I was destined to bring together." He says.

Bangi and I look at each before looking back at him again.

"I...I'm not sure we understand." I say.

"Yeah." Bangi.

"I come from a bloodline of healers and Foretellers. Every twenty years there are male heirs born and within those sons only one can fulfil the tasks, they're destined to align souls the ancestors want them to align. It is one of the harder tasks I was given hence I had to travel until I found the two souls."

"Uh..." Me.

"I know there are plenty of questions you want to ask me but not all of them can be answered by me . Know that this is the path that the ancestors have chosen for you two..."

Chapter Twenty.

"Everyone of us needs to show how much we care for each other, and then in the process, care for ourselves." x DIANA, PRINCESS OF WALES.

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I couldn't shut my eyes longer than two minutes before opening them and turning in this huge bed.

Was it because Bangi was in the room upstairs or was it because of the words of that old man? I mean uAmehlo wabaphansi.

It was still scary how all of this just unfolded and turned into what it was. I think a part of me was so pleased and happy that Bangi and I's ancestors accepted us and wanted us to be in this relationship of ours. I wasn't very big on believing in ancestors, but now I think I was singing to a different tune.

My mother was one of them too at the end of the day and I believed she and God were watching over my siblings and I. Every single day.

I remove the covers from my body before getting out of this bed. I think eating something will make me relax. I slowly pull the door open. My feet step onto the cold tile, from the warmish carpet. I pull Bangi's gym T-shirt down since I could feel my butt was exposed a little.

Or was it paranoia?

I mean being in only this shirt felt quite daring enough.

I cautiously made my way through the darkness, able to see bits and pieces of this place that I think I knew my way around.

Where's that switch? I feel on the wall and find it. The moment the lights come on I nearly yell out in shock when I see him seated there too.

"I...uh...couldn't sleep." I explained my sneaky endeavor.

"Me neither." He says and sighs.

"Kinda got hungry too."

"Come finish this off then. I think I made too much." He says. I make my way to where he was.

"What did you make?"

"A bowl of fresh fruit with some plain yoghurt." Him.

Sounds rejuvenating. Not at all what I had in mind for a quick snack. He tells me to stand in between his legs which I didn't protest again. I pulled the bowl closer before eating. This was delicious and as fresh as he promised. I swallow.

"You know I never thought that this is how I'd know I was definitely with the right person. The gut is never wrong then I guess." Bangi says placing his hands on my shoulders.

"I'm just pissed at the fact that I had to waste my time with all of my previous relationships. I mean was it necessary to go through that with them?"

"It seems. I mean how else would we have known that this was genuine?"

I shrug.

"You know what else was creepy...how he knew that these beads have burnt someone."

"You should've seen your face when he said that." He laughs.

I punch his knee. "Hai wena. (Stop it) That was a serious topic wena uyahleka. (and you decide to laugh)" I chortle.

"I'm sorry, but you should've. If I took a picture it would definitely go into my gallery."

"Mxm." I eat further.

"The part I liked the most was when he said we will be blessed with kids...actually it was the way he said it..." He clears his throat. "...Your woman...ooouuu!" He shivers behind me "...will bear your children, carrying out your name in pride. She will grow your home and make it warm just like her heart."

I smile. I think I liked that part too.

"We've never really talked about when we'd... You know when we'd want to start creating this family of ours. I mean do we just want to jump right into it after marriage?"

"Mhnn...probably not. I think I'd like to enjoy the transition of going from girlfriend and boyfriend... to fiance and fiancée to husband and wife." He says. "I want us to enjoy that part of our lives too, enjoy my wife before we're stuck changing diapers and all that."

I laugh.

"Before we're mama and papa...Yeah I like that point. So we're getting you condoms for our first night?"

He sighs. "Not how I imagined our first time really."

I turn around to face him, bowl in my hand. I chuckle as I feed him some of the salad he made. "Okay, there are other options too...like the pill and..." I cringe. "...the injection. There's a lot."

"Maybe I should call our family doctor and then take it from there. I'm sure he'll be able to tell us all we need to know."

I smile before leaning in to peck his lips. "Ak'fani amadlozi angiphe indoda eshisayo (At least the ancestors gave me a hot man.)"

"Uyazi nawe. (You know it.)" He chuckles again and pecks me back. He takes the bowl from my hands and puts it on the counter before taking my hands into his. He kisses the back of them and looks at me.

"I have to go see my dad tomorrow...all the way in eHlamu."

"Sounds exciting."

"Not when you're meeting your so called stepmother and step siblings as well."

"I'm sure they're not that bad Sthandwa sam."

"I know, I just don't know if I can deal with it all at once."

"You're a strong woman baby. I'd go with you if I could."

"I know." I sigh. I really hope that woman is not around tomorrow too because just thinking of her just makes me want to hit a wall with my head.

"I think it's time we go get some rest since there's a lot to do tomorrow." Bangi says.

I nod. He was right. "I'll tell Zakhele to personally drive you to eHlamu too. I don't want you driving yourself." I remove my hands from his.

"Haibo what's wrong with my driving?"

"Nothing. I'm just saying." He shrugs. I shake my head.

"I'll see you tomorrow then." I playfully squeeze his thighs and attempt on walking away when he grabs a hold of my waist before I even get far.

"You're coming with me Missy." He says pulling me to him. I pull down this top.

"What do you mean, my room is this way."

"Our room is up there." He points with his head.

I clear my throat. "I'm not going up there with you Bangi. In case you forgot what almost happened in there."

He chuckles. "I won't do anything to you. No funny business."

"Struu?"

"Struu." He holds out his pinky finger and I hook mine to his.

"Hamba ke, I have to switch off the light."

I roll my eyes before heading up the stairs. I can't believe I'm actually putting myself in this situation all over again. I open the door and find the room light turned on. His bed was slept in. I walk forward just as I hear the door close. I hug myself.

"Which side am I sleeping on?" I ask.

I can't believe I'm not even suggesting the floor for the man, busy asking which side I could sleep on.

"Any side baby."

He hooks his arm around neck kissed my cheek before walking off to the bathroom. I rush to the side I've mentally chosen and immediately jump in covering myself with his covers. I prop myself up before pulling the top down. Oh gosh. I lay back down again and pull it down at the front. Okay. But I can't sleep looking up. I'll have bad dreams and that was not the plan here.

I turn to the side where the empty space was.

Mhnnn...no. I can't face him.

I turn to the other side and sigh out. What if I fart looking this side. With that yoghurt in my system it was probably going to make me gassy. I sit up and fix the pillow underneath me before laying down again, facing up once more.

What if my periods start now and...oh gosh whats the date today? I forgot my phone in the guest room!

Look at me and my irregular cycle checking out the calendar as if that has ever worked for me. I don't have cramps though...do I?

I reach out to return Bangi's phone to his bedside table.

"And then?" I hear him say before I spring back into my original position. "Who are you wrestling?"

"Huh?"

"Who are you fighting with? I could hear you tossing from in there." He chuckles.

Okay now he's just being dramatic. He goes to switch off his lights and makes his way to here. He climbs in before I turn my head to face him. He's facing up. Not saying a word.

"What are you thinking about?" He looks my way.

"Nothing."

"Oh." I turn my whole body to face the same direction I was looking to.

"Would you like to cuddle?" He asks.

I giggle before nodding slowly.

"Jika ke baby." He says and I do so as I felt him coming closer to me. "You okay?" His hand rests on my waist.

I put a hand under my head. "Are you okay?" I ask back.

"Now that I'm holding you, yes."

"You're always so sweet you know that?"

He comes closer to me as he chuckled. "Lala before you say I'm cheesy too."

I laugh.



I open my eyes to find myself in bed alone. I could hear the shower running which meant he was up ages ago. I sit up just as I hear it stopping. He's even done. Something drops and I hear him curse. The door opens and I hear him curse again. Haibo. What's with my man today?

When he finally walks out he's only wrapped in a towel.

"What's with the cursing?"

He shakes his head. "Morning Sthandwa sam...yah...you almost saw things." He comes and pecks my forehead.

"What things?"

"Let me just say things you'll only see you say I do."

My eyes go wide. Oh. Wow. No. He smirks before walking off to the two huge wooden panels that he slides open. He drops his towel and I can't stop staring. My innocent eyes, have never buttocks that beautiful. I mean I've always seen mine, but they're not like his. Something in me wanted to go right in there and spank them.

How indecent of me to harass my fiancé like this. I should be ashamed of myself but I'm not.

"Baby..."

"Yeah?" He pulls on a pair of white boxer briefs before he disappeared further into the closet.

"You have a beautiful butt."

I hear him chortle as I decide to finally get out of bed.

"Thank you baby. Can't wait to see yours."

My cheeks heat up. I have to bath now before I say or do something dumber than what I just did. I make my way to his bathroom. I have a relaxing warm shower using his shower gel. I loved it. Having his scent all over my body. When I'm done I step out and pat dry my face and body and lastly my legs.

I leave with the gym top draped on my shoulder and my hands gripping on the small slit opening on this towel. He's not in here. The bed is made and the curtains are opened, fresh air blowing in.

I make my way downstairs getting hit with a firm whiff of burn. I hear coughing. "Haibo!" I hurried carefully down these stairs only to spot Bangi removing a pan from the gas stove. "Baby!" He coughs again before I get to him and gawk at the mess. Eggshells, breadcrumbs, empty can of beans. "Are you trying to suffocate yourself?" I turn off the stove.

"I was trying to make us breakfast."

"Bangi..."

"Uh...it seems I burnt the toast, the eggs and the bacon. So... Would you like a bowl of beans?" He asks.

I heave out a sigh before chuckling.

"Who eats a bowl of beans?"

"I shouldn't have told Nandi I'd make my own breakfast then."
He says. I shake my head.

"Clean up here...I'll go get dressed and then come and make us breakfast."

"You're not even going to try my burnt eggs?"

"No."

"Shuu, kunzima. Umuntu beka zama ukuba romantic kodwa. (I was just trying to be romantic)" He takes my hand and brings it up to his lips, kissing the back.

After I got dressed, I headed out and got started on making a proper breakfast I was hoping he'd enjoy. And since I was actually craving for porridge I end up making that for myself. He ate some of his food before he started invading my bowl of porridge. He even praised it more than the bacon and eggs. Well, I'd call myself the porridge Queen if I could cause wow.

My mother taught me well. He helps wash the pots and dishes before I go grab my phone from the guest room.

I had a missed call from Michaelr wondering what he wanted. We head out only to find Amandla and the Queen headed here. I hope this dress is appropriate.

"Hawu, Zanokuhle my daughter." She opens her arms wide as she approached. I nervously met her halfway and we shared a warm hug.

"Morning to you too mama." Bangi says.

"Aw'kahle umona Bangizwe (enough with the jealousy), I'm greeting my beautiful future daughter in law first." The Queen says while Ama and I shared a laugh. "I'm happy to see my son is still treating you well."

"What else would I be doing if I wasn't taking care of her mama?" Bangi asks quickly snaking me away from his mother. Haibo.

"Heeh, you are just like your father...anyway I was actually on my way here to tell you to bring Zanokuhle over before the first meeting of Amalobolo. But since she's here, I might as well tell her?"

"Tell her what?"

"Bangizwe...this is a conversation I want to have with her alone. It won't take long."

"But mama..." I give him a look. It's not like I'm going to run away now am I? "...fine, I think I forgot something in my room anyway."

"As you know my daughter you are marrying into our royal family and with it comes a lot of...shall I say new experiences, challenges, changes and traditions which can't be ignored or skipped."

"Oh..."

"Yes. Immediately after the first meeting between our two families you'll have to go for what I'll call an initiation."

"Ma?" I'm shocked.

What are we initiating? Me?

"This is a tradition that this family has kept alive for many years and I'm glad to finally have another daughter to send off and

have learn the ways of this family once again. You'll learn a lot there, and also receive your title."

"My...my title?"

She smiles. "Yes. Your title. It will be how this kingdom will address you after everything. I'll have Khethiwe brief you more about this and tell you all you'll need to take for the three days you'll be at the hills of the Queen."

"Three days?" I slightly gasp.

"You'll be fine my daughter. No one will hurt you there. It's just going to you and Bangizwe's aunts and their daughters."

I bite on both my lips before I nod. If this is something I absolutely had to go through for the reasons given then I might as well do it.

"Also...mntwanami (my child)...no more..." She clears her throat.

"No more what ma?"

"No more you know...until this whole initiation is done."

I frown. Wait... "Oh, you mean...no mama..." I squirm. "...there wont be any of that trust me."

"Hectic." Amandla says.

"Wena ushada nini Miss Hectic? (When are you getting married ?)"

"Yoh mama..." She rolls her eyes before I receive another hug from Bangi's mother.

"I'm guessing you're done here?" I hear Bangi say from behind us.

"We are." She lets me go and holds me at arms length. "Now you take care of each other okay?"

"We will mama." I say and throw her a genuine smile which she returns.

"Bangizwe. Your father wants you home at 20h00. Please make it here on time. It's important."

"I'll try my best."

She nods and walks off.

"And then...Ama?"

"I...I need a favour."

"I knew it. What do you need?" Bangi asks.

"I need to sneak out tod..."

"Yoh yoh yoh

Advertisement

Amandla I can't."

"Please big brother, please. You always help me out what's wrong now?"

"I have more responsibilities now Ama."

"Pleaseeee Bangi, I have to see Sanele today."

He sighs.

"No."

"I'm begging you." She pulls a face and clasps her hands together in front of her chest.

"When are you just going to go up there and tell your parents that you want to go out. You're over 20 to be sneaking around like this."

"You know I have to explain myself to them Bangi and I cant yet. Please tuu, this will be the last time I bother you."

"No. Now can my fiancée and I leave?"

Her face drops before she looks my way.

"Please talk to him for me?" She asks. I open my mouth to speak but settle for just nodding. She walks away. So much for just leaving this place.

"Lets go." He says and I hook my arm to his.

Once in the car I lay my head on his shoulder. "Why won't you help Ama...sounded like she really wanted to see her friend."

"If she really wants to continue her dating things then she should start doing things like an adult."

"Baby...just let her see her boyfriend one more time shem. And then let her be an adult after. You heard her moes."

"You mean girlfriend."

"Wait...your sister likes girls?"

He chuckles. "Something like that."

"Wow, I would've never thought."

•••

The car drives into the yard slowly, trying to fit into the tiny hand made gate. There are children playing on the stoep but they halt looking ahead. I see the old man walking out of the house followed by the woman I haven't seen in years. She put her hands on her hips before the engine of the car went mute and my door was opened.

How fast are these mannequins?

She chases the kids away.

"Haaawwuuuu ingane yami boh! (Oh My child!)" I hear my father proclaims at the top of his lungs before rushing towards me.

"It's fine." I say to the mannequin who stands in front of me.

"As you wish." He bows.

The man hugs me in the most awkward of ways...or was him hugging me just awkward on its own?

"Nonozi, why didn't you tell me you were coming? We could've prepared a feast for you to enjoy. Kubonakale ukuthi indodakazi yami iyashada kungasi kudala. (So that people could see my daughter is getting married soon.)"

"Hi baba." I force a smile on my lips as he let me go. My eyes averted to the woman who was still standing by the doorway. He ushers me to the door and I'm allowed in. Fihliwe just stood next to the door looking at me. The house is no different than the house this man left 10 years ago. I could appreciate the fact that it looked cleaned and not as much of a mess I expected to find.

"Come Nono, sit." He coughs and points at a chair I could sit on. I check it's stability before sitting down. There are pictures of them on the wall as a family. He looked happy as he held the two boys in front of him. Fihliwe stood at the back smiling at them. The other ones I spot is of the two boys. School photos. Green uniforms.

"Fihliwe come, don't be weird. Come and greet my daughter. She's the one marrying the Prince uBangizwe. We have met once and he's perfect for her." He adds on unnecessarily. I think it's I accept that this is how this man is. Always waiting for his next handout. This was what God created him for. Being a leech. I even wonder what umama saw in this man who's wiping his sweat off with his handkerchief.

She allows a smile to play on her lips as she clasped her hands in front of herself.

"Ukhulile yaz. (You're grown now you know) The last time I saw you you were..."

"Mourning my mother. I know." I clear my throat.

"I..."

"You don't have to pretend to like me mam Fihliwe cause I know I don't like you either."

"Aw'kahle Nono...my wife doesn't hate you."

As grown as I was, those words did leave a bitter taste in my mouth.

"Your father is right. Plus I think it's time we forgive and forget what happened in the past. I know how we did things that were not right but you turned out okay." She says. She pulls a chair and sits down on the same side of the table as her husband.

"Nono, it's time to forgive us now. We know we aren't perfect but from now on we'll try. I'll try for the Dlamini's."

I shake my head. That was not needed. After these negotiations I highly doubt I'll ever make contact with this man. I can't speak for my other siblings because they have their own opinions and brains to make their own decisions.

"I didn't come here to play happy family baba."

"Hawu. Nonozu. Peace please. Aren't you tired of the bad blood and cold meetings?"

And who's fault is that?

Mine?

"Have you called Uncle Jomo and Terrence?"

He sighs and pats on his pockets, pulling out his pipe.

"I have."

Good.

"They are all willing to be there." He says.

"Okay. Also, I don't want you to be ridiculous with what you ask for." I utter and hear Fihliwe chuckle.

"Zanokuhle, you don't have a say in what your father wants for your bride price."

"You mean for his own pockets?" I ask. The man coughs again.

"Nono, kanti njalo nje uhlala ungibona ngiwumuntu omubi emehlweni wakho (why do you always see me as a bad person?). Can't I be excited that my daughter has done well for herself and this family?"

"Buhle has done well for herself and this family too, why not praise her too? Khaya got an offer to come to the try outs of Emashazini's biggest junior soccer clubs in the coming month. He's doing perfectly well for himself and this "family" too."

"It's not the same." I hear Fihliwe mumble, but I heard her pretty well.

"Baba. Please. I beg you. If you ever cared or loved me as your daughter then please don't make these whole negotiations your big break."

Fihliwe shakes her head. "Hayi Zanokuhle. Why are you so...konje yini leli gama? (What's the word again?) Why wenza ngathi (are you acting as if) the man you're marrying does not have inet worth ye 50 million?"

Yoh! They didnt! They really went to Google that?

"Also, take off that ring, you two are not married yet." She says.

I frown. She can't be serious.

"Your mother is right." My father clears his throat?

"This woman is not my mother." I say looking at her, pulling my ring off. I have never taken it off since Bangi put it on my finger. I held it in my hand tightly.

I push my seat back and make my way out of here. Clearly this trip proved useless and I probably should've thought twice before I came here.

"Nono, don't go."

"Bye baba." I utter getting into the car.



"What?" I half shout, shocked at what I'm hearing.

"I'm serious. Mandla says she hasn't showed up for work for 3 full days, so he thought she's probably sick and couldn't mention it. But now that you mention that you haven't seen her in ages, has me worried."

I sigh. "Argh, mge don't worry about Zonke. She does this all the time and I'm sure she'll be back here, acting as if nothing happened. I'm just so disappointed by the fact that I thought she has changed and is trying to get her life together. Now this." I put one of mama's fancy glasses on my rinsed tray before turning to rest on the counter.

Buhle comes in to fetch the washing powder from next to the fridge before rushing out back again.

"You'll call me when she comes back?"

"I can."

"Okay. Mge let me leave you to it then. I'll send you my measurements."

"Aii, nawe and your belly. You better not give birth on my wedding mge." I giggle.

"Holy balls mge, imagine!" She laughed.

I shake my head. "Senda lapho wena. We'll make a plan." I say.

At the end of the day I have to have her by my side on my big day. Pregnant or not. She said the same thing herself.

I hear a car halt at the gate before I motioned closer for a better look. A whole Mercedes was stationary there, having a word with one of the mannequins. It's probably the planner. She's allowed to drive in. I quickly rinse my two glasses and take out my ice cold juice from the fridge.

"Miss Dlamini?" She asks lowering her shades, taking out a few items from the boot. A mannequin next to her. I nod. "I'm Anita, from Planned Matrimony, aha." She closes the boot and walks forward with her hand out. I meet her halfway and shake her hand.

"Pleasure to meet you Anita." I say.

"I didn't think this is where we'd be meeting."

"I can't just be out there nowadays. Apologies if I'm inconveniencing you." We walk inside and she takes my offered seat making herself comfortable.

"I prepared some juice, I hope you don't mind."

She shakes her head and I pour her a glass. We get started on talking about how my dresses were going to look like. All four of them. Two were for the lobola and the other two were going to be for our actual 'huge' wedding.

"You don't want a white gown?" She looks at me like I said the world is rectangular shape.

"I don't think I do."

"We'll come back to this one aha, cause our time is very tight." She circles something on her notepad with the color red.

"Have you thought of how you want your reception to be?" She pages through the other huge book she took out of her boot.

"...these are a few example of some of the upper class weddings I've done. This one over here was for a well known

actor and this one was of a legendary singer. My team and I managed to deliver to our customer's satisfaction."

I looked at them all and they looked stunning. "I definitely want those chairs."

"Tiffany chairs...aha..Got it." She writes on her notepad.

No black chair is making it to my wedding. Not like the ones I've seen around this community of mine. Those ones that even have a full body cover that makes you slide in your seat...or even tug at it if you don't sit properly on them.

"I like this one..." I point to one of the examples.

"Okay...and do you have a theme in mind?"

See why Bangi was needed here too and not the next time we meet?

"Hello family!" I hear Zonke say before she even walks in. Oh gosh.

She almost looked like a totally different person.

She bought a weave?

She puts the shopping bags she held in her hands on the couch, moving her hair to one side. "We have a guest Gimba? Why didn't you tell me?"

I squirm.

Tell you how when you were practically missing for days?

Couldn't she come back at another time honestly?

"Well darling, I'm Miss Zonke Dlamini." She says with a foreign twang.

Is that new perfume I smell?

"Anita Grootboom." They shake hands.

"Good to meet someone with the same sense of style as mine. I'll go put my Gucci and Prada bags in my room. Excuse me sweeties." She takes her shopping bags again before her new pair of heels clicked away on the floor.

How does one afford Prada and Gucci on a cleaners salary?

"I need to get her numbers as soon as we're done here. Now where were we? Aha, the theme..."

Chapter Twenty One.

"Kindness is free stop being so stingy with it."

••

"As a school we'd like to congratulate one of our own teachers on her engagement. I'm sure we've all heard. Miss Dlamini, congratulations." Principal Phakade says before the school kids start cheering.

I smile, awkwardly at that before waving. I'm actually as exhausted as can be. My days prior to this one have been hectic. With more worry than sleep. I thought having someone doing most of the planning would be less work for Bangi and I but, that proved to be incorrect.

And then there's the prepping of our house so that it looks as presentable as possible.

"If you see her, or go to her class do congratulate her." Phakade continues before paging her notes. "Another thing we can thoroughly celebrate is how well our school performed last year. That is why we're challenging this year's matrics to deliver a full 100% compared to the 92%..."

I'm busy handing out brand new scripts to my new grade nine class. Honestly I miss my previous class, cause now I have to learn new names and new faces. "Please pass out these books." I clear my throat.

After all of them receive books I go sit on my desk, pulling my diary and place it on my lap. I quickly scan the classroom. Okay. I smell new uniform. I clear my throat again. "Morning everybody. I'm Miss Dlamini and I'll be your Life Orientations teacher...for as long as I'm here and I hope we can get to know

and respect each other until then. Also I will probably mess up your names so bare with me."

They laugh a little before I allow them to tell me their names and a little something about themselves as well.

Break time came and the kids have left my class. I was still collecting a few of my things when a knock on my door causes me to look up.

"Michael?"

"Hey stranger." He leans on the doorframe.

"Hi." I force a smile on my lips as he looked at me. I squirm at the gaze, almost wishing he'd stop looking at me. "You good?"

"Would've been better if I knew where I went wrong."

"Went wrong?" I ask right before he walked in and closed the door behind him. I stood there watching him take steady steps to where I was.

"Between us Zanokuhle."

"Us? I thought we were over this Mr Jones. Why are you acting weird now?" I ask. He stands in front of me almost enclosing the space between the two of us. His hands go onto my forearms before I removed them from me. "You don't have to touch me in order for me to talk to you."

"Zano you never gave us a chance."

"What do you want me to do now then? Leave my man for you for this so called chance?"

He keeps quiet.

"Look, Michael I'm sorry if I gave you some hope for something bigger than this friendship between us but honestly you have to move on." I grab my things from my desk again and move past him heading for the door.

"Is it his money?" He asks.

Yoh yoh yoh! I swear if someone says that one more time I'm going to lose it. Why does everything have to be about money. Can't I love someone purely because of what I feel inside? Because of personality? Security? The peace of mind he gives me when I'm with him? I won't even mention the respect he gives me with no questions asked. Why should it just be because of money?

I chuckle before turning to him.

"It is." I shrug. "So what now?" He just looks at me. I suck my teeth before leaving.

•••

I'm rushing back home after the call I received from the delivery trucks of the furniture I wanted. As soon as I drive into the yard, I rush inside. The house is nice and clean all thanks to Buhle. She helps me remove our old couches from the inside to our rooms. Throwing these away would be a waste of good sofas and that's not what we were all about. We move the small lounge table to my room, along with the chairs.

When the people finally arrive, they unload the new couches and dinner table putting them in the right place.

Beautiful new black couches, wooden table and chairs and a coffee table. I sign off the papers they had for me and off they went. I go and fetch the new carpet I bought a few days ago and with Buhle's help spread it on the floor of the sitting area. It looked so different yet so beautiful honestly.

Khaya walks through the front door and gasps looking around the place. "Mhm mhm mhm, alright." He throws himself on the couch.

"Hayi wena!" I reprimand.

"These are so soft and comfortable. I could definitely get used to this." He says already putting his feet on the new coffee table.

"Khaya marn! Get your feet off of there." I slap his feet off.

"Let me feel the couch." Buhle sits down. "Ngathi nginga hlala ngingasa sukumi yaz. (I could just stay seated forever)"

"Iybunu zami (My buttocks) have never felt anything like this." Khaya chuckles.

"Mina ngiyolala la shem. (Im sleeping here)" Buhle says.

"Uyahlanya. (You're crazy)" I say laughing while shaking my head.

My phone rings from between my breasts. I hurriedly retrieve it from there and feel how my cheeks heat up after I've read the name that flashed on the screen.

"Sthandwa sam." He says. How does that still make my heart skip a beat and my insides feel like putty?

"Baby?" I walk away from these two nosy siblings of mine who looked pretty ready to laugh and comment on how I probably looked like an idiot. A lovesick idiot.

"I was waiting for your call."

"I'm sorry about that. The furniture got delivered today so..." I say.

"And they're all in tip top shape right?"

"They're perfect." I say. Even Buhle and Khaya could clearly vouch on that.

"We have an appointment for tomorrow." He says.

"Appointment?"

"The doctor." He answers and I nod.

"Oh. What time?" I ask now looking out the window at the car that's pulling up to the gate from my room.

"Your ride will be ready to leave there by 10h00." He says.

Zonke steps out of the car and I frown. That is not any of our guards cars so that must be whoever she's seeing. The man who's been buying her all of these ridiculously expensive gifts.

She even has two of them with her right now as she catwalks into the yard.

"Sthandwa sam?" I hear Bangi say on the other end.

"Sorry baby about that. You said I leave here at 10h00 right?"

"Yes. And the sooner we're done there the more time we have to ourselves." He says.

"I can't wait then." I say with a smile on my face.

"Ngiyak'thanda uyezwa. (I love you, you hear me.)" He says.

"More than I do?"

"Not even a chance." I giggle and move from the window.

After the line goes dead I take in a deep breath before going to the lounge area. Khaya is nowhere to be seen, but Buhle sat on the new couch, busying herself with her phone.

"Where's Zonke?"

"Our room." Buhle says and I nod before heading to it.

Two knocks later I open the door to find her pulling out an item of clothing from her shopping bag. She puts the dress on her beautiful silhouette, rubbing her hands past the material before turning to look at the mirror that was behind her.

"Zonke."

"What do you want Gimba dearest?" She asks not even glancing back at me. Not even on the mirror.

I pick up a bag and inspect it. The tag on it had me hauling inside.

"R16,660.00! For a pink purse!" I take it out.

"That's not just any bag, that's the Pink Saffiano Leather shoulder bag from Prada Gimba. Put some respect to it cause quality like that doesn't come cheap."

"Where'd you get the money for all of this?" I ask.

This is the first time she glances up at me. "I have a man now sweetie. A man who can afford me."

"Oh...and what about your job?"

"You mean the same job that's been paying me peanuts while I slave away like some worthless being? No thank you."

"So you're depending on this man of yours now?"

"Yes, you have a problem with that?"

"I obviously do Zonke, what happens if he leaves you..."

"Ah so you want him to leave me?"

"I said 'if' not 'when' Zonke. And I was just questioning this situation you're putting yourself through right now. I thought you were using this time to focus on yourself and getting your life together for your Future. Not jump into some relationship with no gaurantees of lasting."

"Kahle kahle unomona wena neh? (You're jealous aren't you?)"

"Ini? (What?)"

"Ya phela now that I've found myself a man who can bring and buy me all I've ever dreamt about you're questioning my relationship ngathi eyakho (as if its yours)."

"That's not..."

"Indoda yakho ine mali Gimba. (Your man has money fatty, use it and leave me and...) Use it ungiyeke mina and my Prada bags and clothes."

"Stop calling me that name please!" I say pretty much frustrated by this conversation.

"Maybe if you lost some weight and minded your own business then I'd stop calling you that."

I open my mouth to say something but decide against it cause I did know better than to let her get to my head.

I leave the room and go get myself some water just to calm myself down.



I never thought Bangi could be such a fussy man. Even with the tiniest of things that people went through and most probably got over. 4 prevention methods were off the table which I found perfectly okay to deal with. The copper paragard IUD. As

soon as he heard that I could get Anemia, Backaches, Dysmenorrhea, Pain and cramping he shut it off.

The hormonal Mirena and the hormonal contraceptive implant. I give him a look. All of these prevention methods have side effects honestly and him being this hardheaded about all the options is beyond frustrating.

"My Prince, please."

"There have to be other options that have less pain in them."

The doctor sighs, shaking his head slightly. "She can try what we call a Patch."

"And what is that?" He asks.

"Exactly that. It's a small sticky patch that she will put on her skin. Its a combination hormonal birth control method that she has to change every week."

Must be nice being him...or a guy in general.

He pulls out one of these patch things he's talking about and hands it to me. "Where does this go?" He asks.

"Anywhere that's not going to be extremely sweaty or chaffed by clothes or skin." The doctor says.

"And it won't fall off?"

"The patch is relatively sticky which does make it immune to just falling off. Which means you can bath with it, you can swim with it and continue life as normal as possible. In the event that it does fall off..."

"So it can fall off?" Bangi asks sitting forward with a chuckle.

I eye him. This guy.

"Certainly my Prince. But as I was saying if it does fall off she can easily paste it on again. If it doesn't, she should replace it immediately with a new patch and dispose of the old one properly. Ma'am you shouldn't try forcing it back on even with glue or a bandage."

I clear my throat. I would never try and do that.

"And the negative side effects?" I finally ask.

"The usual are on the table again."

I sigh. I don't like the idea of falling sick, but it sounded way better at the moment than having someone shoving their fingers up my vagina. Or needles poking into my skin. Gosh.

"I'll try it out."

If it fails we'll eventually opt for the nuvaring. I don't know. It sounded better than the first options anyway. The gynecologist eventually leaves and I'm pretty sure she had a headache by now because of Bangi. He's was honestly acting like I was the first woman who would go through this.

"You are something else you know that?" I say wrapping my arms around his waist. He looks down at me.

"What happened to your ring?" He asks, and my heart drops as I let him go.

"I...I had to take it off."

"Why?"

"My father...he told me to."

"Oh." He says and pulls me back to him. He wasn't mad? "I thought you were having second thoughts about us."

"I just sat through almost an hour of you blabbing about how you didn't want me to feel pain and whatnot for each prevention method out there. You think I'd put myself through that if I didn't want you anymore?"

He chuckles. "I wasn't that bad." He says holding me tighter.

"You should've heard yourself...anyway, I missed you."

"Me too." He brings my face closer and places his lips on mine, devouring me in a kiss. "Wow." He breathes out.

I chortle shaking my head and give him one of the patches we were given. "I think it would make sense to put it on my back." I mumble. "Can you put it on?"

He nods before I turn around and give him my back. His hand goes onto my shoulder. He pulls down a strap of my dress...so slowly.

I look back to find him looking up at me now. "Today please." I giggle.

"My woman has beautiful skin."

I swallow. What the heck. He opens the pack and eventually pastes it on my back, kissing on my shoulder, pulling back the strap to it's original place. Okay, I still felt normal...but now I feared everyone would see it on my back. Oh God. This was probably not such a good idea.

"So..." He clears his throat and heads to the kitchen. I'm following behind him. "...is your family ready?"

"If by ready you mean my father thinking of himself. Then yes. They're ready."

"Leave your father baby. Let him be."

"I don't want his requests to be a portrayal of what people think of me or our family. Your uncles are probably going to think I'm broke too. You know how people are."

"I know how people are, but I know how you are."

I shake my head and sit on the highchair. Gosh, I don't like these highchairs. "Sthandwa sam. Stop worrying about the amalobola procedures. You worry about looking as beautiful as you usually do now for that day."

My cheeks heat up. "Anita briefed me about everything you want so far, I liked everything you picked." He serves me some juice. I mouth him a thanks. "Also I'm sorry I wasn't there. But next appointment, I promise you I'll be there with you."

"I'm glad you liked my ideas, even though I doubted most of them. Like I'm not even sure how many guests we're having at our wedding."

"It's just about 500, that we'll be inviting. The public part can get hectic, so we should expect about 3000 people from there."

"3500! Yoh, awa awa baby."

"That's how it is around here Sthandwa sam. At my mother's wedding there were 600 invited guests and 4000 people of the press and public in general."

"Do you even know these 500 people you're inviting mara?"

"I know most of them, but not all of them. Most of them are known to my parents and other family members of mine. Some are important figures to the public"

"Yoh." I sip on my juice. "Maybe we should get started on the invites as soon as possible."

"You want me to call Anita?"

"Now?"

"I don't see a problem with that." He shrugs and pulls out his phone.

"What if she's busy?"

"We're also her job." He says putting his phone to his ear. Haibo. This guy. "Anita...yes, it is...are you perhaps busy? Yes...I need you to come over to the palace so my Fiancée and I could discuss more of our ideas with you... Are you saying you won't be able to come? Good. I'll see you in an hour then." He hangs up and looks at me before winking. "Done."

"Poor girl." I mumble and drink more of my juice.

"She was with your sister"

I roll my eyes. "Loyo yena. (That one)"

"Want to talk about it?"

"I suspect she has a blesser that one. She keeps on coming home with these expensive clothes and bags and she basically just went back to her old self."

"That must not be fun at all." He says and leans onto the counter.

"She worries me a lot."



I think I'm going to throw up.

"Zano suka lapho. (Move from there)" Nyiso says seated on the bed, with Buhle next to her. This room is full of other vessels who have been here for 2 days now.

It smelt like traditional beer and snuff in here.

"Ksssh! I want to hear what they're saying." I say frustrated by the fact that they were supposed to keep quiet so that I could hear the men discussing my fate.

I hear the man cough.

R2000? For what? I open the door slightly. What is this man asking for kanti?

"Zanokuhle ngane yami, woza uzohlala phantsi. (Zanokuhle my child, come sit down)" Aunt Mariam says, her arms folded in front of her chest. I sigh and close the door again before heading back to sit on the bed. I'm going to throw up. I look down and the world just shakes.

I feel a hand on my shoulder. "Uright mge? (Are you okay friend?)" Nyiso asked.

Okay, this patch was giving me hell today and this has been the fifth day now. I nod nonetheless even though just as many things were going on in my head as well.

Abakhongi or rather Bangi's uncles arrived here late. And not only that I had to go through listening to my father listing most of the things he was going to demand from those men. I had to calm myself down again before I lost it...or throw up in front of them.

"Umiti lona sana. (This one is pregnant)." Uncle Jomo's wife says. Her voice is naturally loud.

I sigh.

"Usho kanjalo Patricia? (You think so Patricia?)Zanokuhle is there something you're not telling us?" Aunt Phindile asks.

"I'm not pregnant." I breathe out, just as my phone rings.

It's Bangi. I look around the room before picking it up.

"Bab...Bangi." I clear my throat and get up from the bed, walking off to the window. The cars aligned outside reflect from the sun. I pull down my dress a little, not because it was short but because it sat too tightly on my hips.

"Are you feeling any better?" He asks me. This has been our main conversation these days, apart from the wedding and what was happening today.

"I'm still very nauseous. Even now. I think I have a headache too."

"Maybe you should tone it down on the stress Sthandwa sam, it'll probably help."

I chuckle and accidentally turn back to the eyes on me.

"I think it'll tone down after everything. Right now I can't stop imagining what my father is saying in there."

"Relax baby. Look I'll check on you later then. Ngiyak'thanda uyezwa?"

"Same here." I clear my throat.

"Hau, same here?"

"Ya bye bye."

"Heeh

ya neh." I quickly hang up and head back to sit on the bed.

"Nguye loyo ubaba wengane?" Phindile asks.

"Aunt Phindile, I'm not pregnant."

"Leave the child alone. She is not pregnant." Aunt Mariam says.

"Then why are you so moody?" She asks.

"And you vomited twice yesterday." Patricia adds. So I cant just vomit and have it be a stomach bug?

"And you gained some weight mge." Nyiso says.

I look at her, my mouth slightly opened at the shock.

"Yoh, it's this prevention patch I'm on bathung." I snap and sit on the bed. Can't I slap everyone out of my room right now. I could hear the old man coughing again from the lounge. Was I not glad that that stepmother of mine couldn't make it .

Khaya opens my bedroom door slightly, peeking in. "uBaba is calling you guys." He says.

Buhle, Elihle and I get up from the bed before walking out of here. Aunt Mariam had strictly told us that we should walk in there quietly, sit down on the grass mats and look at the umkhongi in the eye. I thought we weren't even supposed to look at anyone for that matter. But yes, that was the task.

We sit and I look at Bangi's uncles. Uncle Archie is who I'm stuck on, mostly because he looks so much like Bangi's father. He has a beard, that was mixed with grey hairs. He had a face that just demanded attention at first glance, and if I didn't know him I probably would've been terrified to even look his way. His hard face made it hard to believe that this man could crack a joke or two.

"Madoda, please specify on which flower has bought you here at my premises." My father says. Uncle Archie, glances around the room before his eyes land on me again. He nods slightly.

"Yes. I see her" He says, his voice almost shaking the entire room.

"Please showing her for us, sikhombe yena." Uncle Jomo says. His voice is almost inaudible. He sounds like he was yelling during a soccer match prior to these negotiations. That's how he sounded like everyday anyway.

Uncle Archie takes out a stack of money and sits forward on the new couches before getting up on his two feet. Once in front of me, he gently taps on my doek covered head with the stack, seemingly making sure not to touch me.

I hear a few sounds of approval from the men behind me.

"Hayi, kuhle kuhle madoda. Seningasishiya manje madodakazi. (it is well, you may leave us now my daughters)" My father says. I signal to Elihle. We get up and leave heading back to my room.

"Ngilambile manje khona. (Im hungry now.)" Buhle says.

We've been sitting in here for almost an hour now after the whole being called forth thing. I was hungry too now that she mentioned it. Hungry for the feast that we slaved away for.

"Same here." Nyiso uttered.

It's past 12h00, when we eventually are allowed to leave the room, eat and sort of celebrate this mini milestone. Even if the real celebrations were in the coming days. I receive a text from Bangi.

'Come by the shop please.' He texted.

I know which shop he's talking about. I go excuse myself from these woman with some lame reason and they don't buy it. Aunt Mariam even gives me the side eye. This woman must be really good at sniffing out lies then.

'You look so handsome.' I text him spotting him in the near distance. The shop wasn't that far from my place. He leaned on the car that he clearly came here in.

I see him glancing down to his phone.

'Bring your sexy self here too. Your man missed you.' He quickly texted back. He looked up and had this huge grin on his face, which is already so contagious. He meets me halfway and attacks me with a tight hug. Lifting me up.

What the hell!

I'm heavy, so how the heck is he even able to lift all this lusciousness up?

"Put me down before you drop me!" I half yell, giggling.

"I wouldn't drop my woman like that." He finally places me back on the ground again, looking into my eyes. These mannequins have almost surrounded us, but aren't gladly suffocating the two of us.

"You look too happy. Did everything go well?"

"According to my uncle."

"What took them so long kanti? We were in there for hours phela..." I shake my head. He shrugs.

I should stop being so nosy. He told me not to worry and that's what I should do.

"...nevermind... I'm not even sure if I'm allowed to be here." I say.

He glances behind me before smiling again. "I think they would've fetched you already if you weren't."

"Pictures?"

He looks down at me and nods, giving his phone to one of the mannequins.

"My Prince, I'm not a great photographer."

"Come on Sipho. Just a few snaps." He says pulling me to him by my waist. He wore a crisp clean shirt with a tie that matched the patterns of my simple dress and a pair of well fitted black pants. I had to commend the designer who made our outfits, especially given the limited timeframe.

After Sipho, the mannequin has managed to take a few perfect pictures of the two of us he resumes to his job. We should really get a professional for next time.

He scrolls through them and I can't help but think of tomorrow. It came too damn quick. My mind was everywhere with how things were going to be like the moment I step into that car with all those powerful women. How they would react to me and how they would treat me. I wondered what was so important I could not even miss out on it one bit in this my journey.

"Bangizwe, awuze lana mfana wam' (come here my boy)." I hear one of his uncles call out for him at another car. He nods, pecks my cheek before promising his soon return. I scroll through his phone some more as I started to really feel the eyes on me. How could simple gazes actually matter to me now? I lean on the car actually coming across some of the traditional wedding attire I sent him that I thought would look amazing on

him. He of course loved them all, but we had to narrow it down to what he could have.

Someone sniffs on the back of my neck and I almost smile, but when I actually realise that was not how my man smelt like, I tensed up. I turned my head slightly as he came forward. Hands buried deep inside his pockets and some smug look his face before it falls flat and I'm dished out his regular sour face.

"Well well well, if it isn't Miss commoner herself." He takes his hands out of his pockets before clapping. "I have to commend you for actually playing your game so damn well. I mean, now that I know you're from this..." He pauses as if to reach and touch the air, but only settles on crossing his arms in front of his chest. "...dump. Makes me wonder how Bangizwe dug you out of these pitiful pits and brought you to my father's palace."

I can't avert my eyes from him. Neither can I find the words to say back to him.

"Another thing I have to commend you on is how you managed to make my family agree on paying your lousy family 200 live cows, meanwhile you don't even..." He scans my body coldly, biting on his bottom lip which he releases again. "...look like much worth. Whoever you got your koro...I mean love potion from really works miracles. Whoever this witch is that your paying is doing you wonders. May you continue fooling every single one of them, cause you can't fool me. I'm not easy to fool." He says in that blocked nose voice of his, chuckling at his last words.

I blink, taking in a deep breath as he scanned my body once more. I could see Bangi walking back here in the corner of my eye and I could tell he was livid.

"What are doing to my woman!" He half roars almost standing in front of me.

"Relax. Your thing and I were just having a conversation about the odds." He says bluntly. "Thing?" Bangi roars stepping forward, fists clenched. I grab him before he walks any further.

"Baby." I finally manage but he doesn't even flinch.

"You want to lose your cool in front of all these people Bangizwe. Go ahead. Do it. It won't change the fact that I called that fat blob you call a woman a thi..." He doesn't even finish his words before he's on the gravel floor. "Bangi...please baby don't." I try pushing him back. I look to these mannequins.

"Please do something about these people."

They nod and scatter. I don't even know what I'm asking from these men but they better do something.

"Bangi..." I look at him. He breathed hard, his jaw clenched and nose flared to the amount of anger flowing through him. His hand shaking. I look at the floored Alakhe as he chucked.

"Go on. Hit me you monster. Hit me in front of everyone so they can see what you really are. All of this for..."

"Bang!" I push him back with all of my might and I finally get him to move. I drag him to the car and open the door. "Get in!" I order. He looks at me, still livid but he steps in. I shut the door.

Oh God, my family is also staring. I'm probably not going to hear the end of this. I just hope it doesn't ruin what happened today.

I sit next to him in silence, running a hand past my face caring little about my minimal make up. I'm so glad that didn't turn worse. That it was just a hard push and not a full blown act of violence.

"You should've let me hit him." He says through gritted teeth.

"And then what Bangi? More drama that we could've avoided? Scandals? You said it yourself that if you were to mess up once the media would twist it to fit their own agendas. People won't know what happened until Alakhe landed on that floor."

"He called you a thing!" He says turning his whole body to face me.

"I don't care." I lie a little. His words did hurt my inner being a bit. "He can call me whatever he wants to call me."

"Usuyasangana manje (are you insane.)" He says looking intensely at me. "And I know you're lying. I swear the next time he says anything bad about you I won't hold back anymore. I will hurt him."

I sigh mainly because he was as serious as a heartbeat.

This is not how I wanted to remember this beautiful day. I move closer to him and throw my hands around his waist, resting my head on his chest. He released a breath of air before putting his hands on my back, brushing it slowly.

"What did that shithead say to you before I got there."

Why is he asking now when he's relaxed?

"Nothing." I clear my throat.

I know he doesn't believe me, but I'm glad he didn't interrogate me further about this. It was better this way.

...

Zonke returned at 21h00, much to my disappointment just due to the fact that I thought as my sister and in a "normal"

circumstance she'd be there to support me on this journey of mine.

She barely even looked bothered when she stepped through those doors walking into commotion. More shopping bags in hand.

I check my suitcase one more time and zip it up before removing it from my bed. I had now checked my bags five times and I'd be damned if I forgot or left something behind now. Aunt Miriam walks into my room that we were going to sharing once more, rubbing her hands together. Her pink nightgown and pink doek matching.

"Kanti you guys aren't sleeping yet?" She says, locking the door.

"I was going through my stuff again."

"Mhnn. Kuhle lokho. (That's good)" She says and sits at the edge of the bed. Elihle signed to us that she was going to sleep now. Her mother and I signed back. She threw us a smile before

pulling the covers over her body on the floor bed she had made. "Woza sikhulume Zanokuhle ngane yam. (Come let us talk, my child)"

I go sit next to her, my hands on my lap.

"I want to start by apologizing..." She takes in a deep breath. "...for all the things I didn't do for you and your siblings. Ngibe (I was) wrong for staying away and not doing anything when your mother passed on."

I shut my eyes.

"It is okay if you hate me for it all. I understand completely. As an adult I should've been able to lead your father in the right path but Instead I chose to run away and hide. Not only that but I believed your mother killing herself was bad luck for the entire family. A curse that we'd have to endure for a lifetime.

Bengingazi. (I didn't know) I feel so ashamed, so useless for letting you young kids suffer while I'm alive and still well."

I open my eyes to find her looking at me, fresh tears running down her cheeks. "Please find it in your heart to forgive me Zanokuhle, for all that I failed to do. I know it won't bring back the years I've missed with you guys but all I ask for is a new slate. A new chapter." She wipes her tears with the back of her hand.

Chapter Twenty Two.

"To go is to see."

••

"Zanokuhle...Zanokuhle...wake up." I'm lightly shaken awake. I raise my head slightly from the window frame I was resting on. It's Khethiwe. "Come on, this is our last stop." She says.

Last stop? Gosh. Okay.

I wipe some of the sleep from my eyes before grabbing my purse. The women were outside already, standing near their transport. Two of them were taking pictures and posing with their legs too even if they were taking face shots. A concept I never quite understood myself, since I did find myself doing it as well a few times.

The sun is piercing as I look far from the garage shade. No cloud in sight. The smell of petrol in the air. I put on my shades before fixing the loose fitted dress I had on.

"Full tank for all of them please." I hear someone say. Khethiwe and I walk to the inside of the garage and I immediately head for the toilet to pee and sort of refresh.

When I step out they're all over the store, picking out snacks and things. I take in a deep breath and go grab myself two energy drinks, a packet of lace chips and a Steak and kidney pie.

I was not going to eat everything at once yes, and I felt it was good keeping these 'extra' snacks around.

I pay up at the till and head back to the car with my plastic. A mannequin is effectively checking the inside of the SUV we came here in. I'm sure by now they had finished filling up all the cars. The women are loud behind me and hey, I spoke to them once. And that was when they came to fetch me in the wee hours of the morning. Or 07h10 to be precise. When we left, I was put in the same vehicle as Khethiwe, reason being we were the newbies of this family. We then talked for a few minutes before she went mute. After she did, I had no other choice but to busy myself with my phone.

I think for the most part, I was still afraid of Bangi's Aunts and whatnot. These people were from the same royal bloodline, so how could I not feel intimidated by their presence.

The journey continues ahead. It's 11h04 right now and my battery is sitting at a heartbreaking 35%. I hope they have electricity where we're going because I might die if they don't. No electricity means no network and without those two, I couldn't imagine what I'd do the whole day. What they'll do to me the whole day too.

"Are they...are they going to cut something of mine off?" I blurt, turning to face her as she sat at the seat right next to me.

"Cut what off?" She asks swallowing a piece of her pie.

I should probably eat my pie as well. I reach for my plastic. "You know...where we're going." I have my pie at hand when she bursts out in laughter. I've never heard her laugh before, and it really takes me by surprise when she does so.

She laughs until she has tears in her eyes.

What was so funny about that?

"Oh wow...thanks Zanokuhle. I haven't laughed like that in ages." She says shaking her head while wiping her tears of joy.

I press my lips into a thin line. "So?"

"You're serious?" She glances at me.

"Yes. Am I losing a finger or something?"

"You'll see." She shrugs and sits back on her seat.

"Haibo, Khethiwe. Tell me please so I can mentally prepare myself before I lose a body part of mine permanently." I say.

She shakes her head again and looks right ahead.

"We do not speak of the ways of the hills of the Queen" she says.

Yoh. Okay. I sit back, now picking at my pie. How could I allow myself to go through such? How will I explain a missing body part of mine to people who won't understand. I'm pretty sure I can't even go around telling people of this.

This motorcade drives into an off the grid road. I peek ahead. The road looks like its been unused for a while. Oh, gosh. We're going to the deepest of deepest places and I don't think I'm ready to see it. What if there are snakes here...or spiders...oh my God. Take me back home now!

When the engine of the car goes dead I notice the two front cars has their doors open. I count 6 whole guards who walk off to the huge front gate carrying weapons. They stand apart at a distance, three on each side of the fence.

I hear a door opening and when I look to my side, It's Khethiwe. "Asambe. (Let's go)" she says and I breathe out, putting my half picked at pie back into my plastic and open my door. The rays landing on my hand, even the moment I set foot out of the car.

The grass pokes underneath my dress, freaking me out instantly. It sings to the blowing of the wind. The crickets chirped and that lovely goat we bought with us bleated. The hot heat from the sun has me ready to change into a lighter fabric dress immediately even before I shut the door of the car. I see Aunt Grace walking towards me...wait, no it's everyone too. She held a thick looking brown blanket in her arms.

Once they all reach me, I have no idea what to say. Instead I look down at my sandaled feet. She's wearing tekkies and a long skirt.

"Jabulile, awuthathe ngapha. (Take this side.)" She says. The blanket is lifted onto my shoulders and wrapped around me. Haibo. In this heat! "Bamba. (Hold)" She says . I take both ends given to me before being told I should keep my body covered. A sunhat is then placed onto my head, protecting me from the sun, but not it's boiling temperatures. "We have the candle and snuif right?" I hear her ask.

"Yes." Someone replies to her.

"Okay. Let's go. Our bride in the middle please." Aunt Grace says and immediately they surround me, placing me in the centre of attention. I felt like a sacrifice at this point, one that didn't even have the slightest clue what is to become of me the moment we step through those gates. We walk at the slowest pace I could ever imagine and when I glance up I could see one of the other mannequins with us dragging the goat by it's horns.

When we finally reach the front of the gate I'm told to come to the front. Two ladies come forward and spread three huge grassmats on the floor before I see Grace drop on her knees on the one in front. "Woza. (Come)" She orders looking me in the eye and steadily I made my way there, kneeling next to her.

The other kneel around us too before I see her setting alight the candle in her hold and put it in it's holder. She opens the snuif container, takes a few pinches and sprinkles them on the

floor. She then proceeds to call upon the clan names of the Shazi ancestors. The ones that walked this earth before we did and the ones they knew that have now descended to the spirit world. She calls on the good spirits before she goes silent when she's finished, allowing us to take in the peaceful moment.

A cool, calm breeze flows past us before she continues right ahead to thanking her ancestors for protecting us on the road and for keeping us alive and well for all these years. She thanks them for the opportunity given to us to be here at these hills. The words just ooze out of her mouth as she proceeded to stating our intentions. Why we travelled all these hours to this place and also the gifts they brought for them. This is all before she thanks them again and we get up from the mats.

Aunt Jabulile is quick to head to the gate and unlocks it, pushing it open with the help of two other ladies. The grass looked maintained on the inside of this gate, making me wonder who actually comes here for this sort of maintenance. Once it was fully opened the mats are collected and I'm surrounded again. Someone starts a song and soon enough everyone joins in on the singing. I don't even know the words to this song.

We start walking ahead, slowly. Gosh. The sweat is running down my forehead and I wished terribly to wipe it off with my hands, but I'm scared to move them from the blanket. I can't even focus on the song as my eyes travel to the huts ahead. I

count about six of them all looking like decent sizes and fairly maintained.

There are huge trees at the back of these huts, blossoming with lovely green leaves. I don't even know when the song changes cause it happened so swiftly and once again I didn't know if I could join in or not. Aunt Jabulile rushes to the centred hut and unlocks the door, pushing it open. I see she's the lady with the keys then. When the walking finally leads us to the inside of this hut they spread around it still in song and now dance. There's ululation. Dust. Heat. Clapping. More sweat.

When it quiets down they are still in a celebratory mood. "I have truly missed this." One of the daughters say.

"Ungasho ukuphinde lokho Thobi. (You can say that again)" the other says to this Thobi girl before they high five each other, in laughter. I think her name was Nokukhanya or something. I have to get their names into my head soon.

"Anindlaleni the mats there." Aunt Grace seems to snap out of this mood everyone was in. The mat ladies do so, spreading the mats near the wall. "uMakoti wethu akahlale khona. (Our bride should sit down.)" She adds.

I was about to remove the blanket when she reprimanded me, telling me I should keep it on until she says otherwise. I'm then told to sit where she pointed. I nod slightly before turning to the area she had pointed to. In a swift move I get onto my

knees once more before resting on my side and finally sitting flat on my behind. Grace comes to close my legs, removing my shoes from my feet.

"Khethiwe, sala naye la. We'll be back." Grace says and Khethiwe wastes no time coming to sit down next to me. The ladies leave and the last one out closes the door leaving the room in complete darkness. Khethiwe gets up again and opens the curtain to the only window in here, but refrains from opening the window itself. Haibo.

"Uright ? (are you okay?)" I hear the woman ask as settles down again.

"I'm burning up. Can't I remove this blanket?" I ask, already knowing my answer. The sweat was making itself home under my armpits.

"Unfortunately not. We all had to go through this. Even I did."

"These women want me to die of heat I see. Heatstrokes are a thing phela Khethiwe." I say, heaving out a sigh.

She chuckles. "Well here you have to take it as it is. It's all part of the lessons they want to instill into your head as you're coming to this new path of womanhood as they call it. Plus no one has died from this according to history, which is why it is still being carried out through all these years. You'd be the first."

Now I want to chuckle, but I can't.

What other lessons are going to be fed to me here?

I try distracting myself with something else that doesn't involve this place. I think back of when Aunt Mariam and I were conversing in my room just yesterday. Her asking for my forgiveness and how I just didn't know whether to believe her or regard her as another parasite who's come to do the same my father has come to do. Secure the bag. I wished that she came before Bangi to ask what she's asking right now, which would've been way better to accept.

Forgiving someone is the easy part

but actually forgetting. No. Not when so much has happened in our lives. Not when my sister is like this because of family and people not caring.

I could hear the women coming back, walking closer and closer to here. Their conversations getting louder and louder by the second till the door opened. Some of them walk in, including Grace. Who was now carrying firewood and a paper. Thobi was next to her holding a steel basin or dish. "Go put that there ubuye uzothatha inkuni lezi (and come back to take this firewood) ." She directs Thobi once more.

Thobi does that, placing the wood into the basin, shoving the paper underneath the wood. Is that matches? Oh my God. She sets alight the wood and soon the room is engulfed in smoke.

Thobi is up coughing. Khethiwe gets up as they leave me in here alone. The door open but none of the smoke leaving with them. My eyes water as my nose takes in another smoke filled breath.

I decide to look down, and close my eyes which proves to aid a little, but not so much with the heat.

Minutes of sitting in this hell Aunt Jabulani come in and removes the basin with the ashes of the wood that was now a thing of the past. I'm absolutely sure I smell like the fire and smoke now.

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The sun was now beginning to set. I couldn't feel my buttocks anymore. How could these women let me sit for such a long time with no explanation whatsoever. Aunt Grace walks in with blood on her hands and a big knife in one hand. She comes to kneel in front of me and takes my right foot sliding on a piece of skin with white fur on it. It looked like is'phandla...but why is it going onto my leg?

And was this our lovely goat?

"Shazi...Cebekhulu...Malinga...there's no turning back now."
She says with a slight smile on her face.

"No turning back?"

"Yes. Come, we are preparing supper. You should help Thando with the meat." She gets up. "Leave the blanket on this mat."

She walks out leaving me in a debacle. The thing on my leg stinks. I pull the blanket off me and get up slowly from the floor. My butt and legs have no feeling or movement whatsoever. I wait it out. When I feel able again I fold the blanket of hell before stepping out. Cool air hitting my body and it's like it sings in appreciation. I don't feel fresh though and now I'm forced to go mingle. Outside it's busy. There was fire burning by a pit, surrounded by rocks.

"Woza Zanokuhle." I hear Grace.

Oh. Right.

I walk to where she was. The sand prickling underneath my feet.

3 Full chickens were on a tray. Not so far from where this table setup was there was a solar powered mobile fridge. Those huge white ones...but this one was medium sized

I wash my hands before one of the daughters ask me to hold the chicken while she portioned it. "You can call me Thando.

Over there is Asanda." She says. "You're awfully quiet."

"You were also quiet njena when you went through this."

Asanda says.

"Hayi wena." Thando says.

"Serious. She's probably shy, uyamazi nawe umamakho

unjani.(you know how your mother is) She's exactly like how ugogo was. Strict!" Asanda says.

They laugh. "Don't worry...Zanokuhle right?" Thando.

"Yeah." I say, my voice low.

"I think that one was the worst one out of them all." Thando.

"Yah, the rest aren't as bad ntombi." Asanda says.

I nod and we continue with small conversations getting to know them better.

Their mother was the firm Grace and in total she has 5 daughters and 2 sons. I could never! She was the third born in her family, which meant Bangi's father was the first born, then Uncle Archie...and then Grace. Jabulile was the last born. These women had a lot of daughters and just as many daughters in law.

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I laugh shaking my head as everyone else joined in. "I'm telling you, he will get on your nerves on certain days uze ufise nokum' sakaza ngempama nje (and make you want to slap them On The face)." Thobile says.

I've learnt a few more of their names now. There was Thando, Thobile, Asanda, a Zinhle, Nokukhaya...I was actually right about this one. A few of the daughter in law's names I could remember was Thandiwe, Landiwe and Samukelo. The others

were still a hustle and I have no idea how many times they've said their names to me.

"Kunzima emshadweni. Kuyashisa emshadweni. (Marriage is not easy)" Jabulile says.

"That was the point of today. Endurance. When the heat of marriage comes you have to be able to stand in as the woman in your household. Wazi ukuthi akubalekwa nje noma uthanda. Umfazi uyabekezela ngaso sonke isikhathi. (Know that you cant just run away as you please. A woman is patient at all times)"

"But not for shit!" Samukelo says.

I eat some more of my pap and some meat, laughing with my mouth closed.

"Iya, and asithi uhlale mayekushaya. (Yes, and we're not saying stay if he beats yu up)" I look at the lady speaking. The only source of light coming from the fire before us. I then eye Khethiwe, who squirms before forcing more food into her mouth.

"Or when he's cheating." Thobile says.

"Or when he's a compulsive liar. These men can turn into some vile creatures and then claim to love you." Thando.

I nod. Eating.

"Masithi bekezela sithi even when he's emotionally on his lowest of lowest of days, hlala naye (stay with him). Someone

once asked me how do you maintain a good relationship? My answer was simple. You have to start off with one." Thobile.

"Marriage is not umjolo (dating)." Samukelo. "Especially in the royal limelight. Yours will even be worse, cause it's where the King and the Queen are."

I know that now. I also know now that backing out of this will be harder to do...not that I would ever leave Bangi for no good reason. I hope and pray that we never encounter something that breaks us. Like that.



"Vukani bafazi! (Wake Up women)" I hear Grace say.

Hau.

Not when I just managed to fall asleep. My eyes feel heavy still as I groaned and sat up on the mat laid out on the floor.

"Sheshani, siyahamba (hurry, we leave) in 5 minutes." She says and heads out, leaving the door wide open. It looked lighter outside, but the sun was still not up. I wonder what time it was. I get up and fold my blanket. The 4 other ladies in here do the same too as we uttered mornings to one another.

"Ulale njani Zano? (How did you sleep?)" Khethiwe asks.

"Kahle. (Okay)" I answer. I wasn't retested though...or was it the withdrawal symptoms from not being able to call or text

Bangi? It was probably that, that kept me tossing and awake almost throughout the whole night.

I wonder what he's doing...and who he's with...and if he's missing me just as much as I missed him. We step outside and Khethiwe tells me take along a pinafore and to change my shoes to sneakers.

And so the journey began through the woods as we walked out through the back. These trees look even more amazing as we pass under them. The sun began peeking through their tall leaves and it was a sight to behold. I didn't even think there were so many.

It smells like nature out here.

We make small conversation as we continued ahead. Now I was starting to feel the steepness of this walk. "Kanti lendawo yayikude kanje? (This place was this far?)" Someone asks.

"Ungabuza ukuphinde lokho. (you can ask that again.)"

"Ayibo, naWeak njena. (What's with the sudden weakness?)"

Jabulile.

"Rest. Siyafika kungasekudala. (We'll be there soon enough.)"

That's definitely Thobi.

I could hear it before it finally came to sight. Am I dreaming?

The waters look beautiful and full.

"Amen." Khethiwe.

"Sbonge. (Let's give thanks)" Asanda says breathing out.

Indeed. This was a marvel. This whole place was just a wonder to look at.

"Zanokuhle, here we'll be bathing. Now I'm sure you already do this every single day but just to serve as a reminder silana. (We are here)" Grace.

"Umfazi uyageza. (A woman baths.) A woman has to smell good all the times. She has to take care of her body and her privates so that she can be confident." Jabulile says.

I smile. "You will emerge from these flowing waters a new woman." Grace.

"Not really." Asanda. We share some laughs.

I have never seen so many women naked in one place and be so comfortable within themselves and their bodies. There were all shapes and sizes here, and not to sound like a pervert but they were all mesmerizing. These two mothers too. They looked amazing considering the amount of children they had to carry and birth.

I wash off the previous day's sweat and smoke smell from my body. The water cool . I splash some water onto my shoulder and rub away my dirt in my own little corner of peace. I could

hear them talking but I just wanted to shut them out and enjoy the beauty of this land.

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Khethiwe, Asanda, Zinhle and I were busy collecting firewood for the late night fire and for the cooking. "So ntombi, tell me how it was when that video of yours started circulating."

"What video?" I ask trying to break off a stick.

"Konje beyithini...the one where you're dancing to Are you coming." She says.

Yoh. I chortle. People actually still remember that?

"Hayi wena. Why are you digging up the past. Uyazi ke nawe ukuthi uBangizwe wathi singakhulumi nakanye ngalento (You know Bangizwe didnt want us entertaining this thing even for a moment)."

"It's fine really..." It really was. I'm even surprised I never went back and searched for it to watch the whole thing again after the dust settled. "...I was how you'd expect me to be. Worried cause of my job. My reputation...my family... A lot yaz." I say.

"Hayi shame, I would've had to probably sit down and apologize to so many people." Zinhle.

"Same. Umama would've skinned me alive for dancing on the tables like that. The last scandal to happen out of our household was when uBhuti made a video of him denying the

baby he made with his side chick."

"What?" I ask shocked.

"Mhmm...yabona uSamukelo, hayi shame unontombi has been through it shame." Asanda.

"And she refuses to leave ke." Zinhle.

"Haibo." I say my voice low.

"I'm telling you. Kutricky kwa love. Things get hectic. I think she cheated back though." Asanda says and then clears her throat.

"She did well." Khethiwe says.

We all turn to look at her as she tied her wood together. "Yah. Men must think we're stupid for not doing the same to them. Umlayile if she cheated back." She says and sits on her bundle, now obviously waiting for us to finish. Lol. Wow. Hectic.

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The fire is cracking as I down some more of this cider down my throat. These women are something else. I can't believe they even bought such to this trip. But then again nothing should be surprising about these women sitting around this fire with me after the lamb meat and pap we just had, now drinking away slowly like I was...or at the speed of a motorbike like the daughters.

Khethiwe was far gone with drunk ness as she kept on laughing like a maniac to what these women were saying. Honestly I was

laughing too. Shocked at how carefree they were to this topic that was taboo back at church.

"Mina if he doesn't eat it, The whole event stops. Somaar I go sleep in the guest bedroom." Asanda slurred and we laugh.

"But wait...eat what?" I blurt and some of them chortle to my question. Haibo.

"The cake darling." She says and takes a sip of her drink right from the bottle.

"Cake...ohh." My eyes go wide with shock. People actually do that? I mean I know they do that but like they really...really do that. I can't wrap my head around it.

This also had me thinking if I'd even want that done to me...nope. Not a chance. He's not putting his tongue or mouth down there. Sorry.

"Mina I've learned that sometimes you have to show your man that you are a boss too. I make sure he knows that when I'm riding him." Thandiwe says.

"Amandla to iWoman on top!" Asanda.

"Viva Coconut!" Landiwe.

Haibo there are coconuts in sex. I cough as they cheered.

"Bafazi kwamele nibancishe bo sometimes. Ingathi nenza kakhulu nje. (Women, you have to be stingy with it sometimes, it seems like youre giving it to them always.)" Jabulile says. Yep,

she sounds just as drunk as everyone here. She's even louder this time around.

"Ncische kuphi la? (be stingy where?) Some men are hard to resist." Landiwe says.

"Hayi woah. I don't think I want to know what my son does to you." Aunt Jabulile covers her ears and there's more laughter.

"Vele bengeke ngikutjele. (I obviously wasn't going to.)"
Landiwe says.

I think I'm ready for my second cider now.



Not these women not failing to shock me once again. This time with how well they clean up and manage to look like dolls again. Prim and proper. Weaved and perfumed out. Everything had been packed up with the help of all those guards I forgot about for a hot second.

I shared hugs with all 20 women who would be in their respective cars. I thank aunt Grace and Jabulile for how they kind they were and for all the teaches. The ladies promise make it to the wedding, no doubt. Which I appreciated since I was getting a bigger family now. I just hope they're all genuine and not putting up a facade for whatever reason.

Apparently two of the daughters were left behind because they're not married. Just like Ama I guess.

I open my eyes to some vibration. It's my phone and when I check it it's a flood of messages and missed calls and notifications. I see we finally have some network coverage even though it's eating a massive portion of my battery.

I probably need to get myself a new one as soon as possible, but after everything. I sigh and promise myself to check these later. When we arrive back home I'm met by an ecstatic Buhle. And since it's Monday I'm sure Khaya went to school.

"You smell like nature." She says.

"So you're saying my perfume doesn't work effectively?" I chuckle.

"I can smell it." She shrugs and helps me with my bags. I'll give her an energy drink once in the house. "Mrs Nkosi came by yesterday to check up on us."

"And how is she?"

"She's fine. She sends her greetings."

I smile genuinely. I missed that woman dearly and I owed her a visit and a few gifts.

As always I'm greeted by a clean house, some questions now about what's on my foot and how it was like. I obviously couldn't tell her everything so I tried my best to tell her it was just a place of learning. The aunts would be returning soon.



"They forbade me from seeing you Sthandwa sam imagine." He says and I laugh at how pissed he sounded about the order. "Patience my love. Patience." I breathe out. "Tomorrow nje, has me on edge."

Even with Anita and her team telling me everything was going to be ready for the small celebration I couldn't begin to think how the day would go. Again with the help of my aunts we were preparing some of the things needed for tomorrow. The beer was brewing, the salads were going to be brought tomorrow by a catering company we had hired.

I don't know man. I don't know.

It's just a lot.

"Me too. But I comfort myself with knowing you'll be my wife at the end of it all."

Shuu. My cheeks!

"And you'll be my husband..." Just saying it makes me feel giddy inside. "...and I can't wait."

I can't wait to ride him too.

Wait what...am I still drunk?

"Zanokuhle!" I hear Aunt Phindile call out. My five minutes were surely up. I sigh.

"Ma! Baby...I have to go. My aunts need me." I state and hear

him chuckle.

"They better not be overworking you there, Sthandwa sam."

"Hayi don't be dramatic." I shake my head. "I love you."

"I love you too."

"Zanokuhle!"

Yoh.

"Bye baby." I hang up and rush inside. She has her hands on her hips. "Ma."

"You took your precious time ngikubize kangaka. (I've called you so many times)"

"I'm sorry."

"Akunankinga. Thatha. (No problem. Take.)" She hands me something. A strainer. "Quickly go strain the beer."

Haibo, how the hell am I even going to do that?

Chapter Twenty Three.

(Short)

"My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor and some style" x MAYA ANGELOU.

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The man I call my father is busy thanking the Dlamini ancestors for giving him all of these blessing he's seemingly worked hard for. The man was after all almost 200 cows richer and he was making it known to almost everyone around here. He was even telling everyone how he's going to multiply all this and make the best out of it. I was however going to ask him for just 50 cows. Not for myself, but for my siblings, he can keep the rest.

And since I knew he was not even going to bother himself with buying the gifts that has to go to Bangi's family, I had to take care of that. This man is just giving me more reasons to just cut him off after all of this. He got what he wanted in any case. I wondered where he was going to keep all of these cows though. He didn't have a big yard. But I'm pretty sure he has his ways.

I feel his hands snake around my waist before he rests his head on my shoulder. He smells amazing and it just bring weakness to my knees. I've missed him terribly.

"Are you happy?" He asks me and I feel a smile creep on my lips.

"Is that a trick question?" I place my hands on his.

"Not if I genuinely want to know." He says turning his head to sniff on my neck.

I stop staring at where my father was sitting with a whole group of men drinking the beer I made. A very good first attempt even though I had been thrown into the deep end when it came to preparing it.

"People are looking baby." I push myself closer to the lips he presses on my neck, eyes now shut as shivers rush down my spine. I hear him let out a deep chuckle, before clearing his throat.

"I thought I was just kissing isithandwa sam on the neck. Its called affection baby." He kisses my neck again.

Yeah no. My morals are hanging on a thread.

He lets me go and comes to stand in front of me. Another maskandi song starts playing loud from uncle Jomo's polo. This guy really loves his maskandi...and his umqombothi. Or anything that has an alcohol percentage in it. Oh and his women. He apparently has a new woman on his side and she's

somewhere around here. She's beautiful and probably two years younger than me.

"I am happy. Very happy too baby." I say wrapping my hands around his neck and he rests his forehead on mine. "In fact everyday seems to give me more reason to just be happy. You are my happiness Bangi."

He holds me again. "You are mine."

You are mine as in...I am his happiness or ...

I'm not quite sure what he meant with the statement but I didn't care cause I was his in any case. My heart was and is far gone by now and nothing could stop it at this point.

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The celebration finally came to an end and I was ecstatic with how everything went. The King and the Queen also managed to make their appearance here and to me that was enough of a blessing. I knew now that I had their full support with this union.

The time was now past 20h00 and there were still men outside drinking. I guess my beer was bomb indeed. I was busy dishing up some of the leftover food that was served today for myself and Mrs Nkosi. I serve her first and sit right across her to eat. She thanks me and says a short prayer, blessing our food. I'm first to dig in and it was scrumptious.

I couldn't believe I hadn't eaten the whole day until now.

"Laze lalihle ilanga lanamhlanje. (It was a beautiful day today.)" Aunt Mariam says sitting down with us. I have no idea why she's not with the other aunts doing what aunts do when they're alone. This was my moment with a woman who I should've shown more gratitude from the beginning.

"You reckon? I should've arrived earlier." Mrs Nkosi says.

"Yes. You would've had a chance to meet His Majesty and Her Majesty and celebrate with us."

"I'm sure I'll meet them next time given the opportunity." Mrs Nkosi says and smiles. "How are you though Zanokuhle? How do you feel about all of this? You haven't even come to me for setting up an appointment for marriage counselling."

"Ha, Ma'Nkosi I don't think we need that."

"Why not?"

"There's a lot of things on my plate right now ma. Like fitting in a counselling session now when dates are already set and are finalised. You even have your invitation Ma." I shake my head.

She nods and starts eating. "I was just looking out for you my child. I know you have been through so much and since you moved out I have been amazed at how well you're doing."

"You think I'm doing well?" I give her a smile.

"I do. Your brother and sisters must be proud. Speaking of which...what's going to happen to them? Especially Khayalakhe." She says and I sigh.

I have been thinking of this for a very long time and honestly I didn't know as well. Do people even take their siblings and move with them to their husband's homes or will I be the first. Or was I still going to continue living here until they both find their way.

"They can come live with me." Aunt Mariam says causing me to look at her.

Uhhh...I'm not so sure about that.

"Funny enough I was about to offer you the same thing." Mrs Nkosi says.

"You were?" I'm quick to ask.

She nods. "I thought this day would eventually come, and well I'm willing to take him and look after him. You'll be a newly wed and you should be enjoying your life and not worry much about children that aren't yours. Plus the house gets pretty lonely with no one around most of the time."

I sigh again.

My siblings are practically my babies by now. They've been there for me and I'd like to believe I was there for them too. I knew I couldn't fill the void of our parents but I wanted to at least make them feel like they didn't lack anything.

"Wena who are you to be offering my brother's daughter your services?" Aunt Mariam asks, giving her a look.

"I should be asking you the same thing." Mrs Nkosi.

"You cant just come here and talk to me like that when you aren't even a family member of ours." Mariam says.

"Aunt Mariam please stop." I say.

"Stop for what?"

"I won't allow you to talk to Ma'Nkosi like that auntie. She is practically my family and has been ever since everyone abandoned my siblings and I."

"Come on...I thought we had forgiven each other on that."

"I may have forgiven you Auntie but that wont erase all the hurt and the pain we've had to endure in our young lives. You don't know how it feels to have a family out there but nothing to show for it."

"Zanokuhle...yehlisa umoya. (Calm down.)" Mrs Nkosi puts her hand on my shoulder. The door opens and Mr Nkosi peeks in. He smiles before stepping in a little.

"Sorry to disturb, My love are you ready to go? We still have to prepare for the all night prayer." He says.

"Ngiyeza (I'm coming) my love." Mrs Nkosi says. Her husband nods and steps out again, closing the door slowly. "I don't want you fighting with your Aunt, Zanokuhle. You know violence is never the answer to any problem...and raising your voice won't make the point come across better."

I run my hand up my arm and avert my eyes from her. This is not how I thought our meet up would be like. I thought we'd be talking like we used to talk back then

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but because of this woman here, I'm busy digging up old stuff.

"Listen, I'll allow you to decide for yourself. This is your decision to make and I know you'll choose well." I look back to her and then to Mariam. I was going to think this through and also have a talk with Buhle and Khaya first to hear what they think. Mrs Nkosi stands up and holds her arms out. I'm in them with no hesitations whatsoever, hugging her. "Congratulations my child. I am proud of you. God is with you." She says.

"Thank you Ma." I say as she holds me at arms length.

"I'm checking on my dress tomorrow. I'm so excited." She says.

I smile. "Is it going to have a matching fancy hat?"

"You know me."

I chuckle, shaking my head and walk her to the door. She then leaves after I manage to get a few words from her husband as well.

Inside it's tense and quiet and I just want to go to bed now. I didn't even have the appetite and energy to finish my food. I

pack away my dish and close the food I wasn't even sure I wanted to finish with another plate. I down some water. "So you really haven't forgiven me for my past actions?"

"I have." I sigh.

"Then why did you allow her to talk to me like that. Why did you talk to me like that? Don't you have respect for me?"

"I do have respect for you Auntie."

"And she has an invite to your wedding and we don't?"

I clear my throat.

"You'll be at umabo Ma." I say.

"Oh so we're not fancy enough or worthy enough for your other wedding?"

I can't answer that. I don't even know if I should even bother justifying my actions or just leave her here to go sleep. My feet are what gives me my answer as I head to my room. I know She'll be here to sleep too, but I would rather ignore her by pretending to be asleep.

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"So what do you say?" I ask.

I'm anxious. They look at each other before shrugging. "Come on guys...say something. Would you like going to live there?"

"What's going to happen to this house then?" Buhle asks.

"Nothing is going to happen to it."

"So you're not selling it?"

"No. Not yet. Not any time soon. This our home, and I can't just act as if it's just a place."

"Then I have no problem with Khaya going. I have to start being independent anyway before I leave in March."

"So you want to stay here?"

"Yes."

Okay.

"What do you say Khaya?" I ask, now looking at him.

"I don't want you to go." He says.

Is he sulking? That is so unlike Khaya. He should be brushing this off and say its no big deal, not what he's saying right now.

"I'm not saying I don't want to go stay with umama Nkosi, but why should we have to lose you so soon?"

"Wakhuluma ngathi uyofa nje uZano (you talk as if Zano is going to die.)"

"Exactly. It's not like you guys will never see me again cause I'll make sure to check up on the two of you every chance I get. Visitations are a thing too. I'm not even going to another state or anything like that too."

"I support you. Zano is grown now Khaya. She has a life to live and so do we."

"You're saying this because you're done with highschool." He sighs. "You think Mama Nkosi will still allow me to play soccer?"

"Why would she stop you?"

"We all know that woman is just filled with church, church and even more church. Will she understand that I have practice every other day and that I have important tryouts to prepare for? Will she let me do what I love?"

"She will."

"Are you even sure or you're just saying all of this just to make me agree with this?"

I swallow as I looked to Buhle who shrugged.

Khaya gets up and rushes out of the house. "Khaya!"

I watch him jog out of the yard and off into a direction I knew all too well. He was surely headed to the soccer field. I breathe out and step back into the house to think.

After much debate I decide that I should follow him. I grab Chery's keys and rush out too, leaving Buhle to do as she pleased. She takes a while to start. I haven't been using her for a while now and I could tell. The dust and stuffiness on the inside. I open a window and drive out of here, taking the long way around.

I spot him from a distance, running and kicking a ball, still dressed in his school uniform. There's no one else on this field. I step out and check the mannequins that stop not so far from where I was parked. I walk closer and closer to the field. He sees me but ignores me.

"Khaya!"

"Go away!"

"Don't be like that Khaya come on! Come here!"

He gives me a not so pleasant look before he puts a foot on the ball and bends to pick it up from the floor. He takes short strides towards me and I can't help but take him into my hold.

"Khaya what's wrong?"

"Nothing..."

"Khaya I mean it when I say I'm not going to just abandon the two of you. You two are my family. You two are my life."

"Then why does it feel like you are doing what you say you aren't doing?"

"Because you're thinking of the worst."

I let him go. "Look, It will work out." I think. "I'll talk to Mrs N. For now just keep doing what you're doing."

He nods as we start walking back to Chery.

"Plus, now someone will be able to teach Bangi some soccer."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah...and it will be by one of the best soccer players I know."

He looks at me and smirks.

Chapter Twenty Four.

"The faker you are the bigger your circle will be."

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I breathe out, wiping the tear that tickled the bridge of my nose along with the one that nearly falls onto my pillow. I shut my eyes but just can't bring myself to immediate sleep. I sit up. I have to stop crying. I can't be doing this to myself again. I thought I was fine.

"Father...God..." I choke, getting out of bed and onto my knees. I clasp my hands together and just let it out. Everything. I couldn't believe this is how things were going and at this pace. Back at the conversations we had earlier today, I thought I was fine with how this was going to end up like.

But...was I?

Was I okay with how Khaya felt with me leaving them for a mere man?

Was I okay with me not being around them 24/7 and not hearing them quarrel?

"Father lead me into the right direction. Show me that what I'm doing and the decisions I'm taking are the right ones. Show me..." I swallow, my hands shaking. "...show me the way forward..." I hear the front door opening and shutting.

Who was that?

"Show me any fraudulent people in my life father. I ask you to let me know if my siblings will be safe on their own. If they'll be able to do this without m-..."

What was that?

I get up from my knees and grab a high heel of mine, ready for some sort of protection. What the hell are those mannequins doing if a thief can easily come here to the house and break in without them noticing?

I'm silent as I tip toe to the lounge where the noise was coming from. Whoever it is better leave before I do my worst. "Yey!" I throw the shoe aiming at the man in a suit that was now on our couch before hearing him yelp.

"Ouch!" He holds the back of his head, propping himself up and looks directly at me.

Who is this man?

"Baby...yini? Are you okay?" That's Zonke.

Hawu!

I switch on the light as the man stood up. Oh my goodness he's bleeding. Did I hit him that hard. "Baby...Daddy?"

"Les'sfebe singishaye ngento enhloko. (This hoe hit me with something on the head.)" He groans in pain.

"What?" She immediately shoots me a look that sends uncomfortable shivers down my spine. "What did you hit my man with wena?"

"I...I-" I can't even answer. There's so much blood.

"Gimba bring the kit slima! (Idiot)" she hissed. "Now!"

I snap out of it and go get it from on top of the fridge, handing it to her as soon as it got into my hands.

"What am I going to tell my wife?" He groaned as Zonke started working on the bleeding area.

"I thought I told you I don't want you talking about you wife when you're with me." Zonke says to the man.

"What do you expect me to think when I have an injury on my head because of that idiot of a woman right there."

"That idiot knows nothing...just ignore her Daddy. You'll just say you bumped your head hard on the doorframe at work or something. She's stupid in any case so she'll believe you."

"You think so?"

"Hawu Daddy, I do. You're Mr Big bucks. My Mr Big Bucks and I know you can convince anyone." Zonke says. "I'll teach this one a lesson."

"I thought it was an intruder." I justify.

"Intruder yamasimba! So your dumb self just attacks without making sure who it is in the house slima! What if you killed my Big Bucks?" She brushes his bold head.

"I wouldn't have done that."

"How would you know that? How?"

Wow. I can't stand this. I throw my hands up in defeat and turn to walk back to my room.

"See daddy why you have to give me more money so that I can finally leave this hell hole of a place? I can't look how I look and live in a place like this." I hear her say before stepping into my room.

So this is the man who's been spoiling my sister rotten. He's married! I'm appalled. How could she do this knowing very well that the man is married and has a wife.

I sit on my bed trying to mind my own and forget what I saw and heard from those two back there. I was about to lie down when my door shoots open and in comes Zonke, fuming. I sit up as she came to my side before her hand cracks across my face, snapping it back with the force of her blow. I even stumble back onto the bed, receiving three more full blows to my face. I try shielding my face but it fails, she takes both my hands into a tight grip pressing it down. Her acrylic nails digging into my skin. "Get off me Zonke!"

How is she so strong?

"How many times do I have to tell your fat self to stay out of my business!" She hissed.

"I thought it was an intruder!" I use my leg to push her off. She luckily does fall and I'm up on my feet again. "What is wrong with you? Ungishayelani! (Why did you hit me!)"

I sniff, rubbing my wrists. "Get the hell out of my room Zonke! Get out!"

She gets up from the floor still looking at me, head on.

"Let this be a warning to you Gimba, I will hurt you. With no hesitation. If you try any of your stupid stunts again that will be affecting my life...I'll do worse. Nxa"

"Phuma! Leave!" I push her out of my room and shut the door, locking it.

No. That didn't happen. Zonke didn't mean any of that. I rubbed on my wrists again, before realising something.

"My...my bracelet." I rush to my bedside table and it's not there. Where is it? I search on the floor and it's not there. Wait...when did I even take it off...oh right. And then someone cleaned my room. Oh gosh.

I search my drawers and luckily find it there, sighing in relief. I immediately put it on and shake my head, vowing to never ever take it off again.

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"So Ma, I need you to promise me to allow him to play soccer and go to each of his training sessions with no complaints."

"Hawu, Zanokuhle. I wouldn't do that to the boy. I know how kids are and I know Khaya. Don't you worry yourself okay."

I smile. I told Khaya before he left for school that we'd talk about this moving thing the moment he came back. I wanted him to promise me to tell me how his first week is there with Mrs N. If she's allowing him to really do what he loves, if she checks if he's doing his work, and if she's giving him food since I'll be giving her some money monthly.

If none of these things are being done for him there, like when we were younger then he'll come live with me.

After more talk of when I can bring him around I hang up and grab my bag and Chery's keys. Once outside I'm met by the mannequins who ask to take me wherever I'm going. I thank them and opt to be driven around instead since I wasn't really in the mood to do so myself. Buhle comes with me.

In town I meet up with Nyiso, Anita and Siba. I know I haven't spoken to Siba in ages, But I'm glad she could be here to support me in this. I was going for all the last of my fittings and got a confirmation from Anita, that Bangi is currently at his. She shows me pictures of his outfit and he looked pretty drool worthy. He had on a white tuxedo...beaded by the shoulders

and some of the beads come to the front and back of the tuxedo.

My man looked amazing, even in his fitted pants. His second outfit was just as spectacular.

I fit my dress and I was still happy with how perfectly it still fit me. It even made my butt look bigger. I grin, when I look at the beautiful and full mermaid tail.

"And here's your cape." Monique says and she walks in holding it with three more people. Okay, I won't lie. This sounded smaller on paper.

"Holy Balls mge...Bangizwe better faint when he sees this." Nyiso says.

"If he doesn't I'll push him." I chortle. "Are their dresses also here for fitting? I want to make sure that Nyiso's dress still fits her."

"Would you like to see them all? I'm sure Monique can get them all dressed for you. Aha." Anita says writing something down.

"Please."

The last time I saw them in their dresses they weren't done. Especially the beadwork. Unlike mine. And I'm quite impressed with how much I loved this white dress, since it wasn't just a

plain white dress. I loved the beadwork that dominated the top half.

"Monique, her isicolo...is it ready?" Anita.

"Both of them are actually." Monique says before she's allowed to go off with Buhle, Siba and Nyiso.

I go with another one of Monique's assistants to fit my second dress, which was a simple royal blue dress that was off the shoulder. The mermaid shape fit perfectly and the bottom wasn't as extreme as my actual wedding dress. It was easy to move around in this one too. I take it off as soon as I'm satisfied.

I spot Ama among the ladies now, she's also dressed in the her braidsmaids dress.

I gasp, looking at their beautiful knee high red dresses. Nyiso's dress was below the knee out of choice and wanting to stand out as my matron of honour. Her baby bump looked in place.

"Monique, I love them all."

"You know me and my team by now darling. We make miracles. Nonkanyiso, your dress has stretch fabric around your belly area, which will accommodate your bundle at any given day."

Monique reassures.

"So are you 100% satisfied?" Anita asks looking up at me.

"Absolutely." I say.

"Aha." She writes something down once again.

When we finally leave without the dresses since she Promised to be the one to deliver them on time a day before my wedding, Siba excuses herself to go back to work. Anita does the same, her path only leading her to the venue. I had to go fetch the ring I had made for Bangi from the jeweler Anita once again recommended. She really knew her stuff this lady.

'Sthandwa sam, can I call?' The text from Bangi read.

'Yes.' I text back, hurriedly. It felt like I hadn't heard from him in ages.

And soon enough my phone vibrates and I answer. Buhle was seated next to me minding her own phone, but Nyiso had her eyes on me.

"Baby." I'm the first to speak.

"Sthandwa sam...ukahle? (Are you okay?)" He asks and I frown.

His tone was somewhat more concerned than how he'd usually ask me this question. I clear my throat. "Uh, yes. Why wouldn't I be? I just went dress fitting so..."

"No, Zanokuhle...are you okay?"

"Bangi I'm fine. What is all this about?"

I hear him sigh on the other end of the line. "My heart is just heavy." He says. "I don't know, It's been like this since yesterday."

"Yesterday..." Now both of these ladies have their eyes on me.

"Yes...anyway it's probably nothing Sthandwa sam." He says.

Well now that he reminded me of Zonke and her doings I just feel irritated. I'm fine though. There's nothing I have to worry about, especially since I can finally count the days before I get out of Zonke's way for good. That's the only part that excited me more than this marriage, was ridding myself from that vile sister of mine and allow her to do her things in peace.

"You're probably having some wedding jitters. It happens."

"I guess..." He sighs. "...anyway where are you headed to now?"

"Uh, Buhle, Nyiso and I are off to do some shopping." I say.

Ama left with her own ride, obviously gone to see Sanele.

"Sounds much more fun than sitting here and checking the RSVP list. Do buy me something there."

My lips press into a thin line. "Buy you something like what?"

"Surprise me Sthandwa sam." He chuckles.

Nyiso smirks.

What's with her?

"Okay...Do you want me come and help you out when I'm done here?"

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We finally get to the mall and head out with four mannequins behind. It still felt weird having people look at me like this. Maybe this is why this was not something people from the palace never actually did their shopping themselves and some of them did it on the web. Online shopping. I was going to miss this though. The normal shopping and outing that didn't involve a gang of hard faced bodyguards.

"Buhle, you can go crazy." I say and she squeals.

"Are you serious?" Her eyes are lit as we stood in this clothing shop.

"Yes, now go." I chuckle and she wastes no time, rushing off into the one side of the shop.

I've never said anything like before. There's a first for everything I guess.

"Haa, mge nami I want ifree shopping." Nyiso says.

"Now because I love you my mge, you can also enjoy yourself." I said. "But you'll help me pick out something for Bangi right. I don't know what to get him."

She smirks, the second time today.

"Come...I'll buy my things later." She starts dragging me across this expensive shop.

"Where are you taking me?"

"He said you should surprise him. That's what we were going to do."

Why are we in front of bras and what are supposed to be undies. Is that a g-string?

"You want me get Bangi a bra."

"Mge come on. This is lingerie, you know things that will help you get your freak on."

"My freak on? Haibo mge."

"Yes." She says simply. I frown as she starts going through the items. I try doing the same, but only freak out more when I see how much skin these things will be showing. Yoh. I swallow and turn to look at her. She had this look on her face. I see three pairs in her hands already. "I like the red ones. Red for danger phela."

"Danger...hayi mge."

"And then this blue one for peace."

I chortle. "What's the black one for mge? Let me guess, depression."

"Depression yani mge, there no such when it comes to sex."

Yoh.

"Black is for your inner demon Zano."

"I don't have demons mina mge."

She laughs. "Not those type of demons mge. Thatha." She gives me the three sets.

"These look small."

"Trust me they aren't."

"Can't I take a size bigger? What if they aren't big enough."

She rolls her eyes. "Okay, but if I'm right you owe me lunch. Go fit the bras."

After fitting them I head out and do more shopping. I have never spent so much money on clothes only and it made me feel ashamed. I'm spending hot money here while others can't do the same.



"Surprise!" I nearly fall over as I take in the group of kids in my class.

"What the...oh my gosh!" I cover my mouth as my eyes go over to the huge banner up against the wall.

'We'll miss you' written in huge golden letters.

"You guys didn't have to do this." I spot all the grade nines I've taught in the past years and one I'll definitely remember for as long as I live. Siya. My boy. He's even decent today. No hat on his head, just a head with neatly combed hair.

"We wanted to ma'am." Mbali says. "All of us just wanted to let you know how much we're going to miss you and how much

greatness you've instilled in us. I still know the difference between and STI and STD."

The class laughs. I join in.

"I believe in myself more ma'am." Siya says.

"Thank you for all the amazing years you spent here in our highschool. You've shown great consistency and that alone was enough. A round of applause for Miss Dlamini!" Phakade says and starts clapping.

In the midsts of my high I remind them to come to my umabo. Hectic.



My long braids laid freely on my back before Mrs Nkosi puts my white isicolo on my head, pressing down gently before she secured it with a needle and thread. I smile, gazing at my reflection in the mirror. That was the final touch to my entire look and I couldn't believe how different I looked.

"No no Zano, don't cry you'll ruin your make up." She says handing me a piece of toilet paper which I take before my tears start pouring down my cheeks.

"I'm sorry...Mapaseka, thank you. I look amazing." I sniff and carefully tap on my cheek.

"It's a pleasure."

"Mge

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you look so beautiful."

"That's my sis!" Buhle says and comes to hug me.

"How about a few pictures before you become Mrs Shazi, New mother of the nation?" Mrs Nkosi suggested.

"Mother of the nation is a step too far." I chuckle getting up. With the help of Siba, Buhle and Mrs N, so that I could move to the open area in this room. We take a few pictures and then distract ourselves even more with some talks and from them a few more advises, but nothing I haven't heard before.

I couldn't help but wish my whole family was here. My mother. My sister and even the man I call my father. I wish we were a happy normal family but instead we're a mess.

"Aha. Come my beautiful bride. It's time." Anita says, dressed the part in a elegant knee high yellow dress and matching shoes.

I breath out as she gives me what I chose out to be my bouquet. A small grass broom with lots of beadwork around the handle of it.

"Is he done?"

"Yep, and he's waiting for you. Everyone is." She says and then presses her fingers on her ear. "Our bride is ready...yes...okay...let's go."

Buhle takes a side of my tail and hands it to a pregnant Nyiso. She goes to the other side. Siba is at the back while Mrs N rushes off to the chapel. These three are forcing an off key song as we went ahead, along the passage. They giggle at how they sounded.

"We should never sing." Nyiso says.

"Njoba ngithi siyokhipha neAlbum nje (I even thought we were going to be releasing an album)." Buhle giggled.

"And call it what? AboNtombo volume one?" I ask.

"That's the one!" Siba.

We laugh, wondering how ridiculous we looked as we were walking past these formal greases. The few hand fulls of men and women whispering to each other.

The journey to the chapel is a long one. Apparently its set out like this to give you enough time to turn back if need be. It also gives you enough time to make sure you're making the right decision .

The amount of guards inside here were unbelievable.

I could also hear noise from outside.

Oh my goodness!

The violins played a sweet melody as I approached the first bunch of invited guests. They rise the moment I stand by the entrance turning slightly to look my way. The few I looked at

throw me a smile. I see some familiar faces. These are the people with big names in the kingdom and over the borders. I see a few artists as well.

The violins quiet down as I come to a halt at the aisle. And then a guitar...

"Uyalibona lothando...ulwe diamond elimyama. Abanamehlo bayakholwa, phela babona silkhanda. Aww bheke manje albhaji ndawo...lisithatha lisbeke ngiyakhumbula kodwa lakhe lama ndawonye. Cishe kwaphel'isneke..."

Tell me this is a joke! Tell me that is not Blaq Diamond. I quickly close my open mouth and continue ahead.

"...ohh ngaze ngathi ohh sthandwa sam, uzungisize unгахambi, ohh Sthandwa sam uzungisize unгахambi. Ohh bambo lwam' ..."

I spot Bangi's aunts and uncles. And those daughters. Their men too. Zinhle waves excitedly. Khethiwe is just pokerfaced...Alakhe is well...Alakhe. I don't know what he's thinking at this point but I brush it off since it wasn't any of my concern.

"...ngob'ikhanda liyazula liyazula liyazula weeSthandwa sam.." Sphelele sang further. setting the mood for the whole chapel.

And then my eyes land on the man who kept blinking profusely. He frees his lips still looking at me with the biggest grin ever

hands together in front of his lap. Thulani, his friend next to him firmly taps on his shoulder squeezing slightly and leans in to whisper something into his ear which make my man nod.

"...Emakhaya...aw ngithi wee Sthandwa sam! Ubongibheka mangbuya mina..." Ndumiso sang. His fulfilling voice bringing even more emotion out of me.

When I stand next to him at the altar, we join hands. My ladies fix my dress before going to sit down at their assigned seats.

"You look so beautiful." He whispers. I feel my cheeks heating up as I looked down. He squeezes my sweaty hands. Gosh.

"Please be seated." Mr Nkosi says...or in this case our Pastor.

"May we close our eyes..." He prays before starting off the ceremony. "...amen."

"Amen." Everyone says.

"Dearly beloved. We are gathered here to witness the holy and blessed matrimony between His Majesty the Prince Bangizwe Shazi and my daughter Miss Zanokuhle Dlamini. Before we go any further I have to ask if there's anyone here who feels that these two shouldn't be joined together in front of the eyes of the Lord?" He asks and I turn to nervously look at our guests hoping no one come forth.

Alakhe snarled at his mother.

"Amen." I breathe out. "Let us move ahead. In the book of 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 it reads that Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. " Mr Nkosi says.

I squeeze Bangi's hands.

"Do you have any vows prepared?" He asks.

"Yes." Bangi is quick to say.

Oh?

"Go ahead son." Mr Nkosi says and someone rushes to the front with a microphone in hand. He gives it to Bangi, who clears his throat.

"Uhhh...okay. I spent the whole week thinking of how I want this to go and well I ended up with a half blank paper and the words 'I love you' at the top."

Ncooh.

"For the past few month of our relationship, I got to see and feel what it means to be loved and respected. You filled a void

within me that I didn't know existed and made me feel complete. I don't know how many times I've thanked that Chery of yours for breaking down on that hot day, because I wouldn't have met such a beautiful and breathtaking soul. I stand here in front of all these people, my family and my parents and vow to put you first." He blinks and takes in a deep breath. "I vow to put a smile on your face every single day of my life. I vow to be open with you forever. I love you."

I'm near tears as he lowers the microphone from his lips. I take it from him, wanting to speak from the heart too.

"Well I don't think I could beat his words, but I'll also say what's in my heart. In you I have found a man who defines everything I've ever wanted. My love. My rock. My...my husband." I giggle sniffing. "My everything. Today I'm lost for what I can call what's in my heart cause it feels like more than just Love. The term Love just isn't enough. I promise to stay, if you promise never to leave. I promise to be comitted and transparent with you. You are the only man that has made me quit my job and trust that this is the path I want to take."

He smiles.

"Malinga wami, thank you for respecting me. Thank you for giving us a chance. Thank you for not caring about where I come from when others looked down on me. Thank you for not never making me a joke or ridiculed me despite our obviously

differences. Thank you for showing me great patience." I look up, trying to stop my tears from escaping.

"I want to wake up next to you everyday. Make memories with you. Laugh, smile and cry with you. Grow our empire and family. I want you to make me your burnt food special when I'm not in the mood for cooking. "

Laughter.

"I love you." I say.

I can't say more than that. If I do I'll be a crying mess and have Mapaseka on my case.

"Well...with that said, Rings please."

Khaya my dapper looking man comes forward with the rings as our ring-bearer.

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"Heal my heart and touch my soul. Ngivele ngishawe luvalo, wangithanda ngingenanto. Ngelosi yami yokuphila, ngicel' uhlale nami. Uthando lwami dali, lubanzi lujulile. Ngif' ukuchith' insuku zokuphila nawe. Ithemba lami dali, luphelela kuwe yinjabulo ye ntsuku zonke my sweet darling. Sthandwa sami, woza my love woza my love..." Ndumiso sang the song as I swayed as best as I could to the beat.

He spins me around and again I land in his hands. He rests his hand on my side, as the other clasped tightly to his. We're going with whatever feels right at this moment, not caring if we looked unprepared cause we were.

"I love you." He mouths.

"I love you too." I peck his lips before I lay my head on his chest.

When our dance was over we went to sit down. Our 50 close family and friends join us for some delicious food.

"Can I get your attention please." Monde clicks on his champagne glass, standing. "Good evening Ladies and gentlemen. The lady who stole our friends heart. Thank you. Now I know my Job is to make fun of you Bangza and its expected of me but you know that's not how I roll. Instead, I'd rather make it clear to everyone just why our new bride Zanokuhle has decided to marry Bangizwe. And the reasons are pretty simple and straightforward." Monde lowers his glass.

"First and foremost, he's a handsome fellow. Although standing up here and looking at him next to Zanokuhle, honestly you could have done a bit better sweetie."

We share some laughter.

Bangi shakes his head.

"Secondly, the man has impeccably taste. He chose me as his best man after all. He even decided to wear the same outfit as me today...just a bit more drama from his side."

Laughter.

"Thirdly, when he loves, he loves hard. There's nothing this man wouldn't do for me. In fact, he's spent 15 years doing nothing for me. See there really isn't a lot to look forward to Zanokuhle."

I chuckle looking at Bangi.

"And lastly, he's a very patient man. I mean if he could spend up to 15 years with me and Thulani then a lifetime with you is nothing." He says. "So, a toast to our lovely couple. Congratulations my friend. Cheers!"

"Cheers!" We clink glasses.



The new day came with me feeling like I could take over the world. I was, according to law now Bangi's wife and that alone made me emotional.

The sun was still out, blazing down as the celebration continued ahead. The palace gates were opened to the public and it was

full, beyond the inside. Some roads had been closed off because of the support that came out to celebrate with us.

The crowd celebrates as Aunt Grace receives her blanket and basket of goodies. She also dances and ululates when I peek up.

Buhle calls out Aunt Jabulile next before I shift slightly for some blood flow to my one leg. Sitting on isidwaba is not it, but I'm glad I chose to wear some tights underneath otherwise the not so smooth cow skin would actually make this whole ordeal even more unbearable.

The list reading carries on for several more minutes before it's finally my turn to get up. Buhle and Ama help me up and hand me tiny grassmats that weren't that heavy. My spear is in my other hand as I cleared my throat ready to start a song I've heard before from a wedding that took place several years ago. It was a pretty simple song too anyway.

"Eyam lendoda eyam eyam! (He's mine this man is mine)" I start singing and my maidens back me up. I remember how I revised this.

First the right foot. Stump. Then the left one. Stump. And then the right one twice. Stump. Stump.

"Eyam..." I scan the crowd of men standing at the far end, spotting the one that made my heart beat faster than Castor Mokgadi Semenya on the tracks. "...lendoda eyam."

Stump!

The women are ululating as I went lower, some of them coming into my circle in jubilation and dance. He looked at me, winking as I turned almost laughing. He wore that umblaselo and not the other way around.

I make my way back again but this time to slightly bow in front of him.

I lay out the mats in front of him, making a path that led all the way to the mattress that had been put near the centre. I'm multitasking still singing out and laying. He walks steadily and lowers his shield and spear.

When he gets to the where the bed was I have Buhle hand my and empty basin that had a small clay pot, a washcloth and lotion. I put the basin down remove the things that were inside before taking the washcloth and taking his hand. He smells like he's been out in the sun the whole day. I stand closer to him, pretending to wash his toned arm.

"Mhnn...sesiya gezwa manje.(we're being bathed now)" He says. Haibo. I chuckle and grab his other arm. "Kumnandi ke ukushada mos, nawuzomane ungigeze nje, awu Sthandwa sam. (It's nice to be married then, if it means you'll just bath me my love)"

Shut up Bangizwe! I chortle, shaking my head.

"Hlala phantsi. (Sit down)" I say and he listens to me. Holding my hand. "I need my hand Bangi."

"Cela. (Ask)" He grinned.

"Haibo." I manage to free my hand as he laughs. I pretend to wash both his feet and then proceed to fake lotion his body.

I grab the empty calabash and shake it in a circular motion. Handing it to him after I drink from it. He does the same before giving it back to me. "Lala. (Sleep)" I raise my eyebrows.

He lies back, shifting and owning the mattress. I attempt on covering him with a light cover when he sits up. "Hau ungishadelani mangizo phinda ngilale ngedwa? (Why did you marry me if I'm still going to be sleeping alone?)" He complains causing me to push him back laughing. Others heard that too as they laugh. This guy.

I tuck him in with my white covers and have my ladies come forth. Playfully hitting on him with thin sticks. His escape is dragged, but he's a gone man with my white covers.

I shake my head.

Chapter Twenty Five.

"I like it when you lose it, I like it when you go there, I like the way you use it, I like that you don't play fair, Recipe for a disaster, When I'm just try'na take my time, Stroke is gettin' deep and faster, You're screamin' like I'm outta line" x TANK.

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"The world is yet to see a wedding that could top that of His Royal Highness Prince Bangizwe Shazi and his beautiful bride Her Royal Highness Princess Zanokuhle Shazi..."

I tumble over on my bed, kicking my legs in the air out of pure joy. That was me. A whole royal title to my name. A whole me, married and not using my father's surname anymore. A whole me looking so beautiful next to the man that I could now call my husband with a full chest. I shake my head still looking at the roof of my room. I bring my phone to my face again.

"...the two tied the knot on the 5th of February, Wednesday and was witnessed saying their 'I do's' in front of millions. Their wedding was attended by the Queen and King themselves showing full support of the two who couldn't seem to keep their hands off each other. The wedding was one of a kind, one showing that no matter where one comes from can't stop the matters of the heart. Our Princess was a former teacher, giving knowledge to the youth of Emashazini. We hope that this will

the beginning of more amazing things that..." I look to my side as the door opened.

My eyes go wide and I'm off the bed in a matter of seconds, running into his arms. I'm in the air as he lifted my legs and held them by his sides. His grip firm and secure. This is the second time he's ever lifted me up and I don't know what to think. He smelt so amazing...so intoxicating as I held him close to me.

"Sdudla sam." Him.

"Haibo wena." I giggle, pecking his lips.

"Kabuza kahle hau." He says. I slightly shake my head and lean in to kiss him again. Bringing him closer to with the arms I had around his neck. I run my fingers through his rough hair, feeling the rich texture. He's walking, still with me in his arms and gravitates. My knees resting on the bed now.

His hands travel up my covered thighs, all the way to my behind which he squeezes. I move back, stopping the kiss before clearing my throat. He looks at me, clearly confused by my actions.

"Uhhh...I need to finish packing." I say and attempt on getting off him, but he held me firmly in place, not granting my escape permission. I think I'm overwhelmed with thoughts and what really lies ahead. How the hell do we go from this to fully naked? Like with none of these barriers and thin tight fabrics.

"Are you scared of me?" He ask and my eyes are quickly on him

again.

"What? no..."

"Then what's wrong?" He asks and it's almost a whisper.

"These clothes won't pack themselves." I say and press my lips into a thin line just as his hands moved to my inner thighs.

"Bangi..."

"I don't bite..."

"Are you even sure about that?" My cheeks heat up.

He doesn't answer me, but instead throws me a smirk and lets me go.

I take the last dress I had been folding from on top of my suitcase before I place it with the other pile of neatly folded clothes. Both old and new. I hear the bed moving and not long after that his hands around my waist. "How about I help you?" He asks.

I nod. "Sure."

He takes a suitcase and goes to put it on the bed. I hear the zip open before I turned to look at him opening it. "Ouuu what are these?" He lifts what was inside and holds it to his face.

Wait no!

I grab it from him and hide it behind my back . Something red. Something blue. Something black.

With my free hand I close the suitcase. "You were not supposed to see that." I whine, not believing I forgot about these things being in there.

"Oh, are they for me?"

I roll my eyes, chuckling. "Something like that, but I don't want you to see them before..." I clear my throat. "...just, close your eyes."

He tilts his head to the side before crossing his arms in front of his chest. He does that shortly after shaking his head and I remove the bra's from the inside of the suitcase. Putting them underneath my pillow.

I continue folding while my husband packs them inside, very decently at that too. After a whole week of ups and downs, doing interviews and him wrapping up a few of his commitments that couldn't be missed, I couldn't wait to finally rest.

"Are you excited about our honeymoon? Traveling? Away from all the drama?"

The corners of my lips twitch.

"Well, I can't wait to get to Maldives." I eye Bangi. "I'm just terrified of flying. This will be the first time ever flying."

I didn't even have a passport till yesterday.

"Don't worry yourself Sthandwa sam. It gets easier after the first time." He says. "I remember my first flight. I was shit scared. Even vomited all over the floor, imagine."

I chortle. "Eww...must've been traumatic."

"It was." He chuckles. "But I'm sure you won't go through the same, cause I'll be right next to you Sthandwa sam."

"I know. But will that stop me from vomiting?" I give him a confused look not looking for an answer. "I can already see myself...feet in the sand, the water."

"Snorkeling..."

"Baby, I can't even swim."

"Nothing I can't teach you." He says.

"Look at you acting like the one who was a teacher."

"Maybe I was in my past life...but I dont think you need to be a pro to go snorkeling." He shrugs.

When we're done packing, he drags my bags to the car outside...and get shocked with the amount of people outside. I honestly thought this doesn't happen on a regular cause there has been people here to just watch the house and take photos. He pecks my cheek before heading back to my room again for the last of my bags leaving me standing by the door.

Buhle should be back from town soon. With her essentials. The buying of a few things she'll be needing soon. I spot Khaya running back from his soccer practice, forcing his way through

the crowd at the gate. "Hey." He says out of breath.

"Hey bro. You okay?"

"I'm fine. Is uncle Bangizwe here?" He asks peeking over my shoulder.

"I'm over here. Hey young man." Bathung, young man, since when. "You are dedicated in this soccer thing."

"So you're taking my sister away?"

I clear my throat.

"Kha..."

"No...listen. Don't say it like you're never going to see her again."

"You know that's what's going to happen. I'm never going to see her again." He says and I pull him into the house, closing the door.

"Khaya come down."

"Have fun." He tries walking past us but I stop him.

"Khaya I thought we talked about this. I thought you understood and accepted that I'm going and I won't be going away forever. I'm not abandoning you. I told you this."

"Yeah. You did. But this family is untrustworthy. I don't even see my own older sister everyday. She doesn't even care about us. That Pipe smoker too. He left us and never looked back. Buhle is going away too...now you. No." His voice cracks.

I take him into my arms. "Khaya please."

"I hate you for this."

"Please Khayalakhe don't do such okay."

Khaya keeps quiet. How the hell am I supposed to do this now?

"Sthandwa Sam, let me talk to him."

"What?" Me.

"Let me talk to him." He says. I nod and let Khaya go, heading to my room.

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"Babe you didn't!" I gasp at the sight in front of me. "Bangi."

He giggles. "I did. And there's more on the inside."

"Bangi what did you do?" I ask. What more could this man pull out of the bag. He's already done so much for me and still he's doing more. Yoh. What could top the change of his door initials?

Z.S

B.S

"How about we go in and you see for yourself?" He says looking all too excited. He bites on his bottom lip before I go and push the door open. My heart stops for a while when I see the completely renovated entrance, lounge and sitting area.

"Bangi..." I place a hand on my mouth.

"Please tell me you like it." He says, closing the door behind him. He even had new black couches bought in. White cushions and white fluffy carpet.

A new lounge glass table with wooden legs, paired with wooden chairs. I walk deeper into the house. Oh my goodness he even changed the kitchen. Grey smoothly finished cabinets, white counter tops and a sink at the kitchen island.

"It's beautiful... I love it. But why...it was okay before." I say and turn to look at him. He's watching me attentively as if calculating my reaction.

"It was. But now it's perfect. I wanted this to be our humble abode. Something new for the two of us. Our lifelong and beautiful home."

"Home." I turn to look at the kitchen again.

A knock comes through at the door and once the knockers are granted permission inside they come in. Oh it's the helpers of this palace, carrying my bags in after announcing them.

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Light kisses on my face cause me to lightly stir as I turned my head away from them. I hear him chuckle before turning me to him again, kissing me all over again until I giggle like the damn idiot that I was. "Sthandwa sam...vuka so we can eat." He says, kissing my lips. I blink, adjusting to the lighting in here. We

were still up in the air, soaring peacefully since my fear proved to be minor.

I mean I even managed to fall asleep. "We're still not there yet?" I ask and he shakes his head returning to his seat on the other side of the family jet.

"Nope. About 6 more hours to go." He says before I hear a sound coming by. A lady in uniform pushing a trolley.

She smiles before curtsying. "Your highness, dinner is served." She says.

"Thanks Cindy." Bangi says. I just nod as she began serving us the food I could've handled myself. A hot plate of meat and veg. Steak, corn and asparagus to be specific. I've never had asparagus before and it looked so green on my plate.

Cindy excuses herself. I pick up my fork and knife, sighing as I cut into the steak. "Is the asparagus nice?"

"I like it." Bangi says. I shrug, chewing and then swallowing the delicious steak. The asparagus is next as I cut into it. It goes into my mouth, but as soon as it does I feel like spitting it out. No. This is not it. I gag, forcing it down before gulping on my juice, washing it away from my taste buds.

"Okay, I don't like it."

He laughs. "Mama has to know about this. Her Sunday lunches always have a serving of asparagus."

"Definitely do that." I move it to the side and continue with the

rest of the things I could actually eat and enjoy in peace. He even offers to take mine, while he gave me his corn.

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I couldn't fathom the fact that I was standing on an island that I've only seen and drooled over on Google.

We were warmly welcomed at the Male airport and escorted to a luxurious lounge before we had our speedboat transfer. The boat's staff was very friendly. They were even very informative making the whole ride worth the while. Bangi and I take a few selfies that we both share on our WhatsApp status. The speedboat ride is only 30 minutes long before once again we're being welcomed by the team on the jetty at Huvafen Fushi island complete with refreshments and cold towels.

The island itself is green and luscious. The trees and plants looked very well maintained and the sand underneath my feet was white and powdery. I say this since I confidently took my sandals off and gave them to Bangi the moment I finished my refreshments. Hussain was the one assigned to be our butler here. They carried our bags while still telling us more about Huvafen.

"What is that?" I point to one of the trees that had something that looked like a tiny creature on it.

"Oh, that over there is one our wildlife here. A fruit bat. We

also have resident harons, Maldivian hens and nurse sharks to name a few."

"Sharks?" I ask shocked.

Bangi laughs and I playfully hit his shoulder. How could he laugh at me when I'm deadly concerned about there being sharks on this island. Maybe Maldives was a bad idea. Imagine getting eaten by a whole shark on your honeymoon.

How romantic.

"They're nurse Sharks Mrs Shazi. And they're almost completely harmless to humans...so no need to worry yourself ma'am."

"See Sthandwa sam. Now stop worrying yourself."

"You knew that or...?"

"I figured there wouldn't be deadly animals at a place like this."

He shrugs, finishing his laughing parade. I roll my eyes and continue scanning my surrounding.

We finally get to our Lagoon Bungalow, and I couldn't stop admiring the beauty of this cosy feeling place. It smelt of the ocean and lemongrass, but it was oddly quiet. The natural lighting, the calm breeze blowing right through the room.

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I step out of the shower and dry my body, feeling anew. I did well by taking that nap since I was exhausted from everything. I quickly dry and put on the given gown and slippers before

stepping out of the bathroom. Oh, he's dressed already. Gosh. How does he still look good in his nude tailored linen trousers and white polo shirt?

I don't get it.

I walk to him

looking him in the eye. He fixes his silver wristwatch, and lifts his eyebrows as if questioning why I'm busy wasting our time even more.

I lift my hands and place them on his waist, and then move them to his collar, which I fix. He seemingly eases his focussed face. He opens his mouth as if to say something but opts for tucking his bottom lip away. His teeth pressing into it. I want those lips all over my body. I want his body on mine...

Is that too much to ask for?

"You look like a steaming slice of freshly baked lasagne." I breathe out.

What the hell?

He smiles and leans in to kiss me on the lips. "If you don't go get dressed up now, no one is going to see this steaming slice of lasagne."

"I..." I trail off, chuckling.

Okay.

I nod and hurry off to the closet to pick out my outfit for tonight. A loose fitted knee high Pink satin dress. The slit on this dress has me nervous. When I bought it I didn't think it would be this obvious. I slip on my sandals, ignoring it. We were at a place where people walked in just bikinis in any case. I let my braids loose, slipping them back before putting on some gloss, my lashes and hoop earrings. Some golden bangles and some perfume. The goat skin on my leg stood out now. But I still thought it was cute. It has become a part of me now, pleasantly so after it eventually dried up and stopped smelling.

I step out and find him sitting on the bed. He looks up and his jaw drops to the floor. That reaction was better than the one I had in mind.

"Is that all mine?" He asks, getting up. My cheeks heat up as I look down.

"Yes." I utter. He takes my hand and lifts it up.

"Spin baby, I wanna see all of you."

I spin, listening to the sounds of approval coming from my husband. "Umuntu ushadile la khona. Sthandwa sam umuhle kanjani. (I married a real woman here. You're beautiful my love.)"

"Ngiyabonga Malinga wami." He pecks my cheek. "Now before we miss our dinner reservation I suggest we get a walk on."

He continues staring at me, a smile on his lips. He leans in, gently putting the braids that came to my face behind my ear. I can feel his warm breath near me, causing the hairs on my neck to stand at attention. He's not even touching me. He doesn't even need to, cause I'm already breaking at the wild thoughts running around in my head.

"I can't wait to see you without it." He says, his voice deeper than usual. I swallow. Do we need to eat? Like honestly? He clasps his hand in mine and we walk out of here without saying anything further. No. What the hell was that!

Our walk is silent, but loud in my head. He wanted to see me without this dress. My nerves are back at it again. What if he doesn't like my...No...No...No he wouldn't have married me if he didn't like my body. He must know how bigger girls look like. Plus...he's seen my jiggle thighs before...and these beautiful stretch marks...

I smile.

He pulls out my chair for me and I sit. I thank him as he made his way to his seat. A waiter comes to us, and takes our drink orders. Just one glass of wine. I didn't even know if I'd like it but still wanted to try it, the aim not being to get drunk.

Our waiter pours in some white wine in our glass, which I bring closer to my nose and sniff. "Mhnnn...." It smelt like

citrus...probably a bit of peach too.

"A toast." Bangi lifts his glass.

"To?"

"To us."

I lift my glass. "To my handsome husband."

"To my beautiful wife."

"To marriage."

"Cheers." We clink our glasses together and I take a sip of the wine. It's sweet on my tongue.

Winum, was a whole experience on it's own. The lighting was dim, the mood light. In front of me I had a plate of beautifully plated food. Food once again, I've never had in my system.

From the menu it stated that it would be Foie Gras au Torchon which was Classic half cooked duck liver, citrus jelly, baguette.

Jude the Sommelier Selected a Champagne that complimented the food.

"So...Babe, out of all the places you've been to neh, which one was your favourite?" I ask.

"For work or for fun?" He asks.

"For fun obviously. I'm sure you've seen plenty of amazing places in your lifetime."

"Well, fun places...or places I've gone to to unwind. Let's see...I think it'll have to be Dubai. Even if it was a little less private than this."

"This is nice." I say. "I can only imagine how you had to deal with relaxing then at that."

It felt like we -or mainly me- were just normal people again, which I appreciated honestly. "It got better after the first two nights though. Quieter too. I got to unwind and well really relax. And then it got lonely and then it got boring."

I chuckle. "That's a thing of the past now right? "

"Of course. I'm never going on trips alone. You should've come into my life ages ago."

"I don't think so. I think we met at the right time."

He knows I'm right.

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Okay.

Girl you've got this.

Just call him and tell him you're ready. Tell him you want this. Tell him you don't want to wait any longer. Okay. Sounds easy enough and like a plan. I take in a deep breath and fix the strap of this red g-string. Okay. We're doing this. I nod and sniff on myself. Okay. Okay. Zanoluhle you've got this. Look at how perfect these ladies look in this matching push bra.

I open the bathroom door and he's not here. Is he still watching the stars?

I huff out and make my way the bed. Those ladies that talked a mouthful back at the hills of the Queen did say always try to look...sexy. What could be sexier than a pose on this very bed.

Okay. I have my knees rested on the bed, in the center.

"Baby!" I call out. He doesn't reply. Mxm. Maybe if I put my hands like this...woah this feels awkward. Maybe if I - the door opening catches my attention.

"Sthandwa... Sam...you...ca...called..?"

The door continued moving until it closed. I sit back, my heels touching my butt. Someone's joints were pretty stiff here. I ignore the feeling, placing my hands on my thighs, relaxing my shocked face.

"Surprise..." I smile. "Uh...I...you like it?"

"Very." He nods, more words clearly failing him. Mouth slightly opened as he shut his eyes taking in a sharp breath of air.

He walks towards me, steadily. I scoot forward wanting to be at the edge to meet him halfway. He's standing near the bed now and cups my face, bring me in for a kiss. It's not long before the kiss grows more passionate...hungrier... More breathtaking. It somehow felt like we were both fighting for something only we knew and understood. My hands travel underneath his shirt, riding it up.

I watched him pull it over his head and drop it to the floor. Gosh. He buries his head on my neck. Sucking and nibbling near my ear. His hand firmly at the nape of my neck keeping me in place. A subtle sound escapes from deep within my throat as his other hand landed on my breast. Squeezing gently.

They're freed seconds later as he kisses his way to them. The warmth of his breath on my skin. Wet warmth closes down on my nipple, hardening it. I gasp, pushing my body to him wanting more. The other gets attention from his fingers. Rubbing...caressing...pinching. His tease sending delicious shocks to my cookie.

His hand slips it's way into this thin fabric, finding my clit. I watched him biting on his bottom lip again as he began rubbing on it. A back and forth motion that caused me to rock my hips. "You're so warm..." He breathed out.

How does one react to that? more especially when they're looking directly into your soul with hungry eyes?

"..Lie back. I want to see it." He says, his voice sounding like it did a few hours earlier. Deeper. I swallow. Yoh.

I lie back a pillow underneath me for support. Knees bent. Legs shut. He reaches for the thin straps, I lift myself up a little as he pulled it down past my thighs...knees and eventually off.

He spreads my legs.

Oh.

Wow.

We're really going there.

I notice the bulge in his trousers and my heart instantly skipped a beat as more nerves came over me. What happened to that pep talk I gave myself in the bathroom?

Kisses trail down my legs, as he held my foot. The closer he got to my girl, the more I wanted to shut my legs. His beard caressed on my inner thigh as he kissed every part of my lower body but not where I kept feeling these tingles. "Please..." I mumbled.

I finally feel two fingers on my cookie, fingers which he brings up to his face. They're glistening in my obvious wetness.

"Hayi Bangi." I exclaimed shocked as he licked his fingers clean.

"What?" He groaned. "I had to...and you're yummy Sthandwa sam." Before I can even stop him his tongue is on my clit.

Bringing my body to an immediate tremble of need. How could I want to fight something that felt this good? How is he even making me enjoy this? His mouth felt like it was making out with my cookie -oh God. Yes!

"Bangi!" I gasp shutting my eyes and reach down in an attempt to push him away but he clasps my hand and pins it on my stomach.

I'm going to pee on him if he doesn't stop.

"Baby!" I can't even recognise my own damn voice as I lose control of my own body. My toes curling and my insides turning at the foreign pleasure I've been denying myself for all these years.

"You okay?" He asks A moment after I've regained some consciousness. I look down at him, forcing some air into my lungs.

"I'm... Amazing. Do that again." I giggle.

"Again?" He squeezes on my thighs and before I could even answer he dives in only this time he licked near my entrance. His tongue massaging between my folds. He would lick and suck everywhere but never on my sensitive clit. He pauses and his fingers press and spread my cookie. Haibo. The moment I look down I find looking at me. His stare is intense.

Ah! My head tilts back as I grab on my breast for comfort.

"Bang!...Oh!" My lips quiver. I tilt my pelvis to him. My legs involuntary wanting to shut but the man doesn't stop. I don't want him to...cause that delicious moment creeps up on me again. No...Yes! What!

What was I thinking not wanting him down there?

When I came back to some of my senses I opened my eyes looking down at him only to find that smug look on his face once more.

"I think this is going to be my new favourite thing. Watching you have an orgasm."

I have no idea why I shy away at those words when there were bigger things to shy away from. His lips make contact with my sensitive clit again, but this time his kisses trailed up my body. From my stomach, past my bellybutton to the valley between my breast and eventually my lips. Oh wow...is this how I taste like. He really was down there...

The few seconds that he leaves me on that bed are enough to let me mellow in my bliss. Am I not glad I didn't pee on him though.

He puts the box not so far from where I laid and I didn't bother asking what was inside cause I knew. He removed the skin anklet... I kiss on his lips, my hands on the back of his head.

I don't even know when he took off his pants but I feel him rubbing himself on my clit all the way where he would gently try and push himself in. He did that ever so rhythmically. Ever so slowly. And every time he tried to push himself in I'd hear him groan.

"Can I...can I touch it?" The words escape my mouth as I looked at him. He gives me a small smile before nodding slightly, sitting up, getting onto his knees and for the first time I get to see his hard self up close. I sit up and marvel at this glistening masterpiece. The veins made it look even...*deadlier*.

My hand raises, finding its rest on the hard shaft pointed at me. It looked so big and felt even bigger. I look up just as he hisses, tilting his head back. My grasp as firm and gentle as possible.

"Like this..." He puts his hand over mine, moving it back and forth on his length. I bite on my lip watching as he squirmed under my touch. He looked so sexy. I run my thumb over the tip, speading the sticky seed that came out. I want to taste it... But instead he leans in and claims my lips once more. He pushes me back until I laid down again. I pull him closer to me by his neck, deepening the kiss...

He grabbed the lube from the box and opened the container, squirting some of the clear liquidy contents onto the palm of his hand. He closed it and tossed it aside then proceeded to apply it on his hard self. He moved his hand like I had done not so long ago but he was a bit more rough with it. Cover every inch of his length with this lube.

I Hear him chuckle causing me look at him.

"You like watching me do this?" I nod. "I do."

"I like you watching me too." He says with a deep moan escaping from within his throat. "I want you now Sthandwa sam."

"I...I want you too." I breathed out as I realised that this was it. I was finally getting all of him and that made me feel sort of nervous deep inside.

He presses down on my thigh before positioning himself at my entrance. I prop myself up with my elbows for somewhat of a better view of whats going on there.

"Do you trust me MaDlamini?" He forced the words out of his throat.

"With everything in me." He pushes himself in a little and I gasp, looking up at him.

"Do you love me Sthandwa sam?"

"Ngayo yonke intliziyo yami (with all of my heart)" my lips quiver. He pushes in further and I cry out trying to close my thighs. I feel how I stretched as he entered more and more of himself...my elbows give in. Tears streamed down the sides of my face in an instant. "Am I hurting you?"

"No." I wipe them away.

It did hurt a little, but I think I was just overwhelmed by everything that's happening.

"Look at me mkami." He said his voice lower now. My heart melted at those words. "I want all of me...inside of you."

My insides clenched right before he tried to plunge in further. "Bang! Ima kancani (wait)!" I shut my eyes as I cried out. He stilled, now hovering over me. Me breathing so loudly as he groaned. If he went further than this I would surely break in half.

I was so full. So stretched. So weak. So overcome by so many things, clinging onto his forearms.

"You...you have no idea how good you feel right now. I've never felt anything like this before." He said, so simply. I finally open my eyes and find him looking at me his eyes giving away his emotions too. "I love you so so much Sthandwa sam."

I pull him to me not wanting to see him like that. I held him in my arms as he started thrusting...slowly. Making me accustomed to his size. He was setting the mood and the pace, so meticulously calculated now. With each thrust I moaned in pleasure and not so much the pain.

"You feel so...so good too." I uttered, that feeling building up again.

With each thrust I climbed higher and higher...closer and closer to my peak. "Bang!...ah!" I shook and lost control of my body

once more. My legs trembling as goodness waved right through my body.

I couldn't anymore. That felt like it took all my power with it.

"I think I...I think...oh Baby!" He growled before he pushed a little further inside me. He grabs on my waist, his grip rough.

His breathing hitched as he surrendered to what I think was his release. I felt his warmth in me as it twitched again. The sounds of his groans dying down.

He sunk onto me with his sweaty body, which I didn't mind.

"Ngathi siqale inkinga la (I think we started something addictive here.) He breathes.

I chuckle, in agreement. We laid like this for a while before I felt him pull out leaving me empty. I shut my legs still feeling how my clit was still pulsating. He lays down right besides me before I turn to face him.

"Ngiyabonga sthandwa sam. (Thank you my love)" He moves me closer to him pulling the sheet over to cover our bodies. He clear his throat. Is he actually hard again?

Lord. His lips kiss on my forehead as I felt my drowsiness consuming me. "Now you're fully mine." He says.

"Yours..." I mumble entwining our fingers on the hand that seemed to wander...

Chapter Twenty Six.

"All I want is loyalty, love and all your damn attention!"

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I bat my eyelids the moment his handsome face comes into sight. Stretching and turning to look up. I take a minute to remember last night before a smile creeps up on me. Is there a better word I could use apart from perfect?

Maybe pristine...or mint.

"I'm dying to know what's making my beautiful wife smile like that." He says, causing me to look at him. His head was rested on his hand propped up, while looking at me.

"What other than thinking of my husband?" I shrug as my smile grows wider.

"Oh?" He mirrors my smile. "I guess it is a good morning then Mrs Me." He leans in to give me a kiss. I place my hand on his cheek, caressing his beard.

"How are you feeling? Are you in pain?" He asks pulling me to his chest.

"I feel great baby..." Am I blushing? Is this a normal feeling after a person has been through the sheets with the love of their life. I couldn't find fault in anything. "...No. I'm not in any pain either." I admit.

In fact for one main reason, I believe yesterday would've been a taboo if I had to report back to someone on how it went.

Solely being that I didn't bleed or anything.

Like how dare I?

How dare I not bleed as a virgin?

I think there are some cultures that request for the famous 'white sheet' and basically I would've been labeled damaged goods for no good reason at all. Also, now that this anklet of mine is gone, the ones who've been through what I've been through before getting married to a royal will know we've had our love making session. That was what it was for in any case apparently when I asked. Maybe he was told something else I don't know.

I mean I don't even know what he did with it after he took it off which has me wanting to ask. Could I?

"Oh so ngenze zona? (I did the right thing)" he chuckles.

"Hayi wena." I shake my head.

"Hawu, Sthandwa sam can't I blow my own horn manje?"

"You can I guess..." I start tracing on his chest. "...cause you did treat me like a Queen. I felt so important and at ease letting you see all of me like that."

Not even once did he shame me or ask me why '*that*' is sitting the way it is.

He pecks my forehead. "Awu suka madoda." He says readjusting himself underneath me. "You are a Queen. My Queen. And I want no one to ever make you feel like any less of a Queen Sthandwa sam. I love every inch of your body and nothing will ever change that."

"Not even after having all ten of your babies?" I chuckle looking up at him.

He laughs, nodding. "Even after all ten of our babies Sthandwa sam." He emphasises.

That still made me nervous. How the hell was I going to give birth to ten entire kids just like that. Even doing the maths was tricky, especially if I wanted all of this before the age of forty. That would be a child every other year or two. Hectic.

"So what are today's plans baby?" I kiss on his chest.

"Let's see...we have the all famous snorkeling on offer...we can also go for a couples massage..."

"Or...we can just stay in for the day."

"Oh well now that you mention it." I can hear the smile in his voice.

"I hope you know I mean stay indoors for cuddling and watching movies right?"

"Uyahlanya." He says and I burst out in laughter. I know I didn't mean what I said, so I understood his reaction. Plus I'm pretty sure he didn't wait 29 years just to cuddle and watch movies.

I'm not saying we can't do that but... "Sthandwa sam ungadlali njalo please. Uzong'phathisa inhliziyo."

"Ncese baby."

"I'll call Hussain then and tell him our plans have changed, okay. But for now I'll go run us a bath."

"Sounds like a plan." I look up and kiss him on the lips before he eventually decides to get out of bed. Stretching and allowing me to marvel at him and his perfection. I did say this man has a beautiful butt. So firm and grab worthy.

Haibo.

Did I just think that? Oh Gosh.

I get up, cover my nakedness with a gown and start making the bed to utter perfection. I go open the curtains here with the press of a button and I'm met by the view of the breathtaking ocean in front of us. The water was so clean and inviting.

Unconsciously it felt like I was in the water, floating in paradise. This place is heaven...or in my head its as equivalent for many reasons.

"The water is almost ready." He snakes his hands around my waist.

"I'll be with you in a minute." I utter, still gazing at the water ahead.

"I'll go call Hussain then." He says before pecking my neck and

walking off to where I last saw the phone they provide us with in here.

This man is so comfortable in his own skin. How is he literally gallivanting in the nude like that with no worry? Do I make him that comfortable?

I focus back on the water outside while hearing him talking in the far background.

I wonder what he told Khaya back at home. The man won't tell me. He blatantly said to me that it was a talk he had to have and it's between him and the little guy. I should trust him. I even ended up sleeping on the plane from all the begging I did.

I close this fancy tap and feel on the water. it's warm to the touch which is perfect.

"Oh, I nearly forgot about the water. Thanks Sthandwa." He walks into the private bathroom and I watch him test it's heat. "Should I go in first?"

"Yes, I'll get in in the front." I say. He nods and steps in. I did well by not filling the tub too much because you'll never know how high the water could get once I get in. When he sits down I undo my robe and go hang it on one of the rails before coming back to the tub.

I clear my throat and step in between the space he's allowing between his legs. Okay...let me turn slightly so that I can sit

down without flashing my behind at him. It felt awkward in a sense.

But come on Zano, he has seen you naked for goodness sakes. The man was even between your legs doing you-know-what to your cookie. What the hell.

"Are you going sit or will I continue enjoying the view?" He asks from all the way down there, arms rested on the rim of this tub. I sigh before sinking to the bottom and resting between his legs he pulls me to him and opens the curtain with the press of a button. The view that comes with it is just as mesmerizing and beautiful. "There we go."

I lay on chest, soaking in the moment. The smell of fresh lavender and lemon filling my nose in an instant. My body warming up, fully relaxing and becoming in sync with his.

"This is nice." I say and shut my eyes.

"What is? Being this close to me?"

I chuckle shaking my head. "Relaxing like this Baby. I guess being close to you too is nice now."

"Mhnnn..." He agrees with my statement before we soak in silence for a few good minutes. I think baths are my new favourite thing. I mean indishi was absolutely not it. Boiling a kettle for hot water and then having to bath in a tiny dish was a mission. A messy one too cause water would just go everywhere. Also getting the water to the top half of your body

is work, and the hot water is over before you know it. But anyway, that was life. Our life, which I now have to change for the better. I have to think of renovating our home for future purposes because I'm sure Zonke will never think of doing that.

"Baby?" I speak.

"Sthandwa sam." He says.

"Can I ask you something?"

"Uh, sure."

"Have you and Alakhe always been like this?"

"Been like what?"

"Been so mean and cold towards each other? I mean like was there always a bond between you two and one day out of the blue you started hating each other?"

I don't even know why I'm asking such.

"Oh. No. Not really. We were cool with each other until we just stopped being that. I think it's because the two of us are always in battle for attention that he just spiraled out of it. I'll use this throne thing for example. He knows he's next in line so he makes sure I know it all the damn time and it gets irritating."

"Maybe that's what brings him joy."

"Irritating me?"

I chuckle. "Yes."

"Well he'll earn himself a beating from one of these days cause I'm honestly almost at my limit with his actions."

"I don't want you hurting yourself Bangi because of this."

"You mean you don't want me hurting him right?"

"Baby."

"I know what I'm capable of baby." He says, his voice now almost inaudible. So...I won't."

That's what I fear the most seeing that side of him. He's never hit anyone in my presence before. And I'd rather not witness that. "I don't want you fighting. Ever."

"With Alakhe around..." He clears his throat and pours some water over my shoulder. "You know what irritates me the most about him is how he'd always run to umama when I'd do something wrong just to snitch on me. He's a crybaby, even now."

I chortle. "Haa."

"I'm serious, there was this one day, we were both playing in the house after being told countless times that we should take this playtime outside, but we're two boys...enjoying a hyper game of soccer, with me losing miserably. I finally got a hold of the ball, kicked it to the wrong side I don't even know how but it hit a stand that had one of my mother's favorite vases and it fell and obviously broke."

I sit up to turn and look at him before bursting out in laughter.

"Eh!"

"I'll never forget that day. The way I cleaned up that mess. The

way I hid the trashcan in my closet trying to hide the evidence from my mother. I even had my gran by my side but then my brother went to snitch. I never knew spanking till that day Sthandwa sam. Ever. I couldn't even sleep properly."

I can't stop laughing. I try closing my mouth but it fails as all I could see was his terrible soccer skills and two little Shazi boys with a broken vase in front of them.

"Oh Ma'Dlamini uhleka indoda yakho manje."

I nod and breathe out. My laughter dying down while leaving me with painful cheeks. "Ngizokuthola Sthandwa sam, sibone ukuthi usazohleka na."

"Ha, ngiyacolisa baby. Hawu awusahlekwa wena manje." I chortle before kissing him with the side of my lips. "Yoh Alakhe is something else nje."

"At least you've seen him in action."

"I guess." I sigh, laying back on his chest again.

Am I even ready to see Mr blocked nose more regularly now because we'll be in the same environment, breathing in the same air and going in and out through the same entrance as him all the time. No, I am not. Cause him being around means more words and his words are nothing but hurtful.

"What about you and Zonke?" He asks. I've never really told him the complexity and the dynamics of our 'relationship' before because it's never been anything exciting to share.

"Zonke and I...well we've always been like this I guess, but it definitely got worse after, Nomakwezi, my mother died. I think I've noticed how I'd rather paint the good in people first before I even paint the bad which is why I've never given up on Zonke so many times until now. Like when she gave away her child for reasons only she knew and how she simply accepted the man who left us to starve just like that like they both know something we don't." I say.

"How was your mother towards her?" He asks.

Odd.

"My mother was a mother to her Bangi. She loved us all equally and I don't ever remember there being any excluding of some sorts. She was like us." I say.

Was she?

Is Bangi trying to say something here that I'm probably missing? My mom treated us the same. Period. Like even when she bought us clothes. She'd buy Zonke more clothes. Same thing with toys.

"I just thought that maybe your mother might have caused her acting like this towards you Sthandwa sam. Maybe there are

some things you never got to see for what they are."

"Okay now you're being ridiculous."

"Then how else would you explain her behavior."

"It's probably something in her baby. Something she has nurtured in her DNA. Not my mother's fault."

"Okay...okay. I'm sorry." He says and pulls me into a tight hug, kissing my shoulder. "I'm sorry. Let us not fight because of Zonke."

Ya vele. Yoh.

We spend some more time in the bath before some more hot water is poured in.

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I'm dried, moisturized and dressed in another one of these g-strings, a matching bra and my gown. These things are beyond comfortable which is something I didn't think was possible when it literally was up your butt. I gaze at myself in the mirror, admiring myself and looking closely to see if I had any changes in me...

Well I didn't look any different, but I did feel different. Good different. I search in my bag to find a new patch to replace this old one. I almost forgot it.

Bangi is in the sitting area of this bungalow. A big variety of foods to pick from were laid out on the table. Our breakfast.

"There she is." He says before I shove my hands into the pockets of this gown along with the patch. I spot some pancakes, cold meats, eggs, cheese, fruits and syrup. It looked amazing. "Come sit on your man."

There was plenty of space next to him on this couch but who was I to deny myself this opportunity to sit on him? Especially since I wanted to. He was in sweats only

seated like he owned the place. I settle on his lap, hooking my arm around his neck. He leans in and we share a not so innocent kiss but it doesn't go further.

"I was waiting for you before I could eat." He says.

"Thank you baby." I peck his lips before reaching down for a piece of Cheddar. "Cheese?" He opens his mouth and I feed him. I get myself one too, enjoying the tangy taste in my mouth. He grabs on my thighs when I reach for something else.

A piece of egg.

Scrambled.

He eats it all up. Shame, he must be hungry and here I am feeding him like a baby. I get up from his lap collect the food and place it on the empty space next to him. I even take this opportunity to have him change the patch for me.

"We're getting you on something else when get back home."
He says.

"Why? I thought this was working fine now." And my body has gotten used to it since I never felt sick or had any headaches since that first week of this thing.

"It's leaving marks on my beautiful wife's skin." He says and kisses my shoulder.

"Ah." I chuckle.

After I tell him to sit back I straddle him, resting my butt on his lap. His hands slide up my exposed thighs and he eventually undoes my robe. Bathung.

"Haibo." I stop him, giggling.

"What?"

"Food first." I say.

"Okay Ma'Dlamini, I am a very patient man after all." He chuckles causing me to shake my head and grab a plate and a fork. I plate some of the cold meats and pancakes in here before I feed him and myself over a conversation.

"20 years? In the army. That's a long time." I say.

"Right? He was even ranked as the squadron leader...when my father took me there, I thought I was going to hate it. And I kinda did though but that's besides the point."

"Why'd he take you there?" I ask, chewing on the cold ham.

"He said and I quote 'Bangizwe we need you to focus all this anger of yours on something positive. Something that will get your blood flowing and your mind out and thinking.' The old

man is hectic when he wants to be." I feed him some of the cold meats too. He massages the insides of my thighs...and I swallow, taking in a slight sharp breath of air.

"And...and weren't you taking those therapy session things by then?" I clear my throat.

"I was. And for almost a decade of just talking and having meditation sessions I did four solid years there and ranked just a lieutenant position."

He squeezed.

"Food baby." I try stopping his touchy and warm hands, but it doesn't work. Instead he opens his mouth ready for me to feed him as I've said. I take two of the peach slices and feed him one. He chews while looking at me, licking the little drop that escaped from his lips before making a slight sound from within his throat. His mouth is open again, ready to be fed. A few big green grapes. "...so they didn't fight you when you...you left?"

He shakes his head. "I had things to do by the time I left. Minor things not the things I'm involving myself in now." He squeezes my thighs again but this time to indicate to me that he wanted some food. A peach again. I've long stopped eating. I just keep watching him chew, lick and swallow.

Chew, lick...swallow. Eyes forever on me and hands where they've been since I took on these sitting arrangements. I swear

to God if he doesn't stop rubbing on my inner thighs like that I'm going to toss this plate to the wall.

"The charities keep me the busiest now Sthandwa sam and I wouldn't have started helping there if it wasn't for you."

I giggle. Lets go back to the pancakes. I take a bite and give him a bite too.

"It needs some of that syrup." He says. Oh, I've completely forgotten about the syrup.

I reach for it from the couch and open it. He takes it from me and I wait for him to tilt his head back and squirt it into his mouth or something but instead he peels my gown off my shoulders.

He tilts the container and gets some of the syrup out onto my chest. What the heck? He holds onto my waist, leans in and starts licking on my cleavage. His warm tongue lapping all the syrup from my ladies. I'm going to be so sticky after all of this here.

"I...I think it's good that I could say something you understood and....and chan...changed how you did things." I utter. His hands glide to my back, under the gown and he unhooks my bra after a slight struggle. He takes the plate from me and puts it on the empty space big enough for the plate. I remove the gown from my hands. "Oh...God..." I breathe out.

Bangi reaches for the straps of my bra and pull them past my shoulders and reveals my breasts. The exposure causes them to harden in almost an instant. I toss the bra aside before he squeezes more syrup onto my ladies. Some of It runs down and lands on his torso but he pays no mind to it. Instead he grabs both my breasts and licks off the syrup off each areola and each nipple. Both of them receiving the same amount of love and attention. I gasp as he gently bites down on one nipple, more especially since I push my body to him.

He looks up me and I run a hand through his rough uncombed hair.

It looked like I was breastfeeding my husband for goodness sakes...and I liked it. More syrup. His hands are on my thighs again rubbing, higher and higher but not where I was desperate for some touching. I grind on him but he stops me.

How dare he stop me if he's just going to be rubbing on my thighs like that.

"Bangi..." I call out. He calls me by my name in his muffled voice since he still has my boob in his mouth. "That...that is not my freaking clitoris." I whine before hearing him chuckle deeply.

I don't even know why I take his hand and move it closer to where I want since he wasn't hearing me. He removes my hand. Bathung!

He kisses up my chest, past the crook on my neck and then claims my lips. I taste the sweet syrup on his lips and tongue. His hand slips into the thin lace and finds my wanting clit. He rubs on it with just enough pressure to make it feel good and not irritated. I can't even focus primarily on the kiss alone.

A finger slips into me and I shiver.

He breaks the kiss as I breathe in.

"My love, you...are...so...so wet." He groans causing me to look at him.

And whose fault is that? His! All his! How can he look at me like that and not expect me to want him? How can he can he bite on his lip like that and not want me to bite it back?

Is that another finger?

I almost yell out when he touches something in there that makes him stop immediately. "Are you okay?" He asks, worry in his face. "Did I hurt you?"

I giggle, shaking my head. "You didn't. Please don't stop." I move my hips.

"Ma'Dlamini please tell me if I'm hurting you."

"I will." I utter as he begins moving his fingers in me again. The pace is a bit upbeat. His other hand plays with my nipple. I'm in a sensational world where I'm surrounded by clouds and

pleasure. Pleasure that creeps up on me...slowly.

"I want to be inside you so bad." He moans.

I grab onto the sides of his neck as my body loses all sorts of control. My toes curl and my eyes shut. Riding a wave of ecstasy. I think I'm near tears too before I slouched forward to take a breather. He removes his fingers from me and gets up from the couch.

With me in his hold. I'm holding onto his neck as he walked steadily to the bedroom. "Where'd you learn to do that?"

He chuckles. "I finally used that Google you kept telling me about."

"Keep Googling." I kiss his neck. "You also have a bit of syrup on your beard."

He chuckles "Also can we...use a condom?"

"What?" Him. He sounds confused. I kiss his neck again.

"Just for today."

"Haibo, why?"

"Because I'm not sure if this patch thing is working yet." He lays me down on the bed. "Please."

He sighs.

"Okay baby." He pecks my lips before reaching for the box and retrieves one. I pull two pillows and stuff them underneath me. I laid there watching him remove his sweats and get in between

my legs. He looks even harder than yesterday and for some reason I wanted to feel it all today. I couldn't keep my eyes off him as he stroked himself. His hissing sounded like music to my ears. I spread my legs even further, and trace my hand to inside my cookie. Damn. I was soaked.

"Take it off. I want to see you rub it." His words sound forced.

What the hell!

I'm quick to take the g-string off and throw it somewhere. He tears on the corner of the condom wrapper and takes it out. I'm rubbing on my clit, that still felt sensitive from not so long ago.

"You don't know how sexy you look right now..."

What sick game is this? Is everyone like this? Cause this can't be normal.

He manages to slip it on with me watching attentively. My patience wearing thin. He kneels on the bed before pressing down on my belly, positioning himself at my entrance.

"Please..." I tilt my pelvis up and he pushes himself in slowly, connecting our bodies again. I thought this slight uncomfortable feeling would be a thing of the past by now. I reach out to stop him when he seems to be going past his limit.

"You okay?" I nod and look up at him. "Relax...let me in...all of me..."

What does he think I am?

I could see he was serious. He wanted this. I remove my hand and allow him in deeper...filling me. I moan out and he start thrusting. Slow...and unbelievably deep. He grunts with each stroke. He's too far for me to touch and hold so I grab on the sheets

My legs are in his hands as he tried changing angles, hitting a different spot all together. I swear if I don't faint now from all of this, I might never get the chance to. My insides turn causing me to throw my head back moaning out his name. He pins my hands above my head and buries his face in my neck, going a bit faster. This is new and I love it.

"Yes..."

"You like that?"

"Yes baby!"

"You don't want me to stop?"

"No please!" I lock him in between my thighs.

"Are you close?" He hisses.

"Yes! Very!" I chant and soon enough touch my climax with both hands... My body trembling all again.

His thrusts become uneven and his sexy groans get louder and more demanding. His grip around my wrists tightens before he goes completely still. I can feel him twitching. His breathing heavy like his body on me

It takes him a while before he sits up and pulls out. I watch him remove the filled condom and tie the end. When I look up I find him smirking.

"One down. A whole packet to go." He says. His voice dark. My jaw drops to the floor before I shut my legs. He must be joking.



"Breathe in..." Our yoga instructor Katheeba says and I do as instructed.

It is said that a woman should take care of themselves and their bodies to the tee because they are temples. And you respect temples, and make sure that they're always up to standard. It is also said that as a woman you should know your body like the back of your hand. You should know where every nook and cranny there is, where each fold lies and what makes it feel bad. Unfortunately that was not the case for me since the beginning but we're working on that. Especially now since I could see that I needed to keep up with this fit hunk of a man next to me who wont keep his mouth shut.

Sex with Bangi is proving to be a task. Yesterday and the day before that showed me flames.

'I want more of you.' The words ring in my head once again and my insides clench.

These past three days have been something else. Something that had me numb with pleasure. Ngilale ngizwile. I think that's another reason why I'm here. This man was starting to know my body way better than I did. And That's scary.

"...and out." Katheeba says and I breathe out, lowering my arms. "Now on all fours please. Like so." Katheeba says and gets onto her knees and hands. Her butt is in the air. The few people around do so and I follow soon after. "This is called the cat or cow pose. This pose helps to improve your posture and balance and is ideal for those with back pain. The benefits of this synchronized breath movement will also help you relax and ease some of the day's stress. Now neutralise your spine." She says.

Okay.

"Ouu..." Bangi says in a low voice, loud enough for me to hear. Oh, gosh. Here he goes again. I eye him. The man bites on his bottom lip.

"Focus!" I whisper back. He chuckles and looks ahead.

"As you inhale and move into cow pose, lift your butt upward, press your chest forward and allow your belly to sink."

What?

I look at her trying mimic her moves.

How the hell is she doing that with her back?

"Lift your head and relax your shoulders away from your ears, as you gaze straight ahead...As you exhale, come into cat pose while rounding your spine outward, tucking your tailbone in, and drawing your pubic bone forward." Katheeba says. Okay. I thought this was going to be easier than this. I mean it's just Yoga right?

"I'd love to have you in that position, all night long..." He whispers into my ear and I nearly tilt over. I was too focused on Katheeba to notice him near my ear.

"My God, Bangi." My eyes go wide.

"I can see it already. Me holding you up like that...doing things to that beautiful body of yours."

I gawk at him and the ridiculous look on his face.

"Stop it."

"What?" He chuckles.

"I should've known it was a bad idea bringing you here with me."

"Is there a problem over there?" Katheeba asks looking up at the two of us.

"Uh...no...sorry about that." I say.

"Right. Now release your head toward the floor but please just don't force your chin to your chest and most importantly, I want you to just relax."

A minute of this pose goes by and I'm glad we get to the final stages of this yoga session. A simple child's pose to really stretch out. I'm most certain I'm doing it wrong but that won't stop me. Plus I'll get better at this sooner or later.

"I'm never doing yoga with you again!" I click my tongue.

"Hawu?" He laughs.

"Yeah, next time, you go to your lifting and running and whatnot, not my yoga! Never."

"But I was helping you."

"Helping me where Bangizwe? Where?" I fold my arms in front of my chest as we stood near our room door.

"Ah. She's even using my full name now."

"Open the door." I complain. I need water and food.

"It's open." He pushes it and I walk past him.

He puts both our mats on the bed and I go change into shorts and a bikini top. We set up outside and bask in the warm sun, feet in the pool.

Chapter Twenty Seven.

"Assuming is the root of all disappointments." x Rogienel Reyes.

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The warm waters are exceptionally great on my body right now. I couldn't believe this was me. Swimming -I suppose- in the shallow waters of the Maldivian oceans. Or in short, having my third attempt at snorkeling. I was in the waters with the very nurse sharks that freaked me out when I heard of their existence the day we got here. The other fish were just as breathtaking and such kind souls. I would occasionally touch one and want to jump for joy cause I was being an idiot.

I come up from the water and wait for Bangi to come up as well since he could swim deeper than I could. I hold onto the edge of the pool and remove my snorkeling tube and goggles before taking in a breath of fresh air.

"Look at you snorkeling like a professional. I am so proud of you Sthandwa sam." He smirks and pecks my cheek.

"I try." I say. "I'm getting out though."

"Okay. I'll join you in a few." He pecks my cheek again before getting swallowed by the water once more. I shake my head and climb onto ground level and reach for my towel to dry my body. This bikini will air dry eventually. I wrap my braids thereafter and pray they dry before bedtime came. I don't

know why I kept doing this to myself knowing very these things will probably betray me.

I fill my glass with some juice and only take a single sip before rushing inside the house to get both our phones. I've been neglecting my social life for so many days now I'm sure plenty of people have assumed I've disappeared in Huvafen. Well those who knew I was here. His phone is fully charged by now.

I switch my phone on and wait for it to finish updating itself.

"Day...day what is it again...day 8 of our honeymoon.

Tomorrow we'll be going back to reality." I say the moment I pressed record on Bangi's phone. His phone had better quality after all. "It's a beautiful day today. Look at that..." I walk to the edge of the deck, shooting the beautiful blue waters. "If you look closely you will see one of the most rarest of creatures. My husband, and if we're lucky enough we'll get a shot of him and probably an interview...so exciting." I squeal to myself.

I head back to the mini table where I left my juice, take it and go sit by the deck itself. "I'm sipping on some passion fruit and mango juice and it is delicious and very refreshing." I take another sip just capturing the wonderful sight ahead. There's a ship a bit far ahead that people enjoying themselves surely. We had ours yesterday.

"Oh here he comes..." I say before he comes up and wipes the water from his face. "Ladies and gentlemen I present to you Aqua lad. My other half is still alive and well. Baby...I thought you abandoned me for a female fish down there."

"What?" He laughs and swims towards me. He puts his wet hands on my dry thighs. "What female fish?"

"So you wouldn't leave me for a female fish?"

"That would be me going insane." He says and wipes more of the water on his face off.

"What about a mermaid?"

"Those don't exist baby." He laughs and moves away from me. He gets onto the deck and searches for something. "Where's the towel?"

"On my head." I giggle and steadily get up. "There's another one on the drying rail" I say.

"Oh." He walks off to it and starts drying himself.

"Doesn't he look handsome? Just look at him. Take your time..." I giggle.

"You're still filming me?"

"I never stopped." I state and zoom in on his buttocks which he squeezes. I burst out in laughter. "Baby! Your timing!"

"What did I do?"

I bite on my top lip, suppressing my laugh as best as I could.

"Nothing."

"Uhleka kangaka nje uhleka inothing?" he gives me a questioning look.

I fail to answer that. "I knew this live was a good idea."

"Wait we're live...Sthandwa sam no!" He sounds like he didn't expect that and in seconds he's in front of me fighting for the phone in my hold.

"Baby you're going to drop your phone." I hide it behind my back. Long arms seem to find a way to it. I quickly turn and hold it out, far. "Bangi!"

"Stop the live baby." He chuckles.

"No!" I giggle.

"What do you mean no?" He lifts me up. I'm kicking and laughing.

"Bangizwe put me down!"

"Give me my phone."

"Hayi!" He tosses me onto the bed. My braids! His body is heavy on me as he crushed me underneath him. "Bangi get off me, I was kidding."

"No." He says.

"Bangi marn we're going to get the sheets wet!"

"That's not the only thing I'm going to get wet."

"Yoh ha.a." I laugh and try pushing him off but the man grinds on me.

"Did you feel that?"

"Bangi."

"Zano."

The hell.

"I don't want you. Get off me." I giggle.

"You don't want me?" He sounds so shocked. I rotate my hips.

"Yes."

"You don't want all this good loving?" He breathes into my ear.

"Yes I don't. My cookie needs a rest." I try to sound as serious as possible.

"Hawu, I thought it was mine nje. All mine."

"It is." I chortle. "But not today. Today it's mine."

"Ya neh. Kunzima kwaLove." He finally gets off me and I turn to face up. Shem he looks so frustrated...is this all because of a no?

"Baby... Ungikwatele?"

He looks away slightly causing me to sit up and fix the towel on my head. Why am I still laughing? "Baby." I get up and cup his face before pulling him closer to me for a bunch of kisses all over the face. "I love you."

"I love you too." He mumbles.

"I can't hear you."

"You can't hear me?"

"Yah."

He chuckles. "I love you Sthandwa sam. I love you." He holds me to him and kisses me on my forehead.

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I've been sitting under the shade, enjoying some alone time. Busying myself on my phone with some of today's happenings and some things I've probably missed out on. I also managed to check on Buhle and Khaya back home with just a quick phone call that had them asking when I'd be back. They didn't know when I was coming back and I hoped I could surprise them before Mrs N comes and takes Khaya away. I sigh. This bliss was really just temporary.

Nyiso has posted a picture of herself and her adorable baby bump with Mandla holding it tenderly. '

7 beautiful months and already I can't wait to hold you in my hands.'

Ncooh!

I immediately react and comment under the picture.

'Godmother sends her love. You look so beautiful Mge!'

She is quick to reply to my comment as well. And then chaos. Oh wow. I shouldn't have commented on here cause now the focus has been shifted from the main post to me and and the wedding and the royal house and the man back in the

Bungalow. Sigh. Some people sleep on these social media streets. How did they even find me?

I shake my head.



I thought we'd land here in the wee hours of the morning but I was wrong. We landed at around 20h00 and I have been thanking people since we left Huvafen and the airport. The people delivered and I was looking forward to more of this. More outings and freedom in a sense.

We were now headed to the Palace and I don't know why but I felt nervous...and maybe I had a tad bit of an uneasy feeling but I brush it off. And oddly enough I wasn't as tired as I expected to be like when we flew to our heaven.

Bangi pecks the back of my hand, reminding me of his presence. I smile and readjust my head on his shoulder. This was it. I was going to spend my first night with him at our home as a married couple and I don't know how that thought alone made me feel. We were literally going to wake up next to each other every single day now. I might even hate a few things he does or question why he does certain things in a certain way. These past nine days have taught me something though...for starters that Bangi might crush me in his sleep one of these days again since it has happened about twice.

I glance out the window and notice that we were minutes away from the Palace. The motorcade followed and lead us too. Closer and closer and finally arriving at the massive gates where a few people were gathered carrying flashlights, waving them back and forth. We were waving back, of course with big smiles on our faces. The lights not able to hide us.

That was a rule here. You smile and wave. And always be kind.

We drive in and the car stops not so far from the entrance before our doors gets opened. Deliverance, helps me out of the car before I pulled my dress down. "Thank you Deliverance. Are you good?" I ask, genuinely concerned.

"I'm splendid my Princess. Thank you for asking." He says now bowing slightly and then closing my door for me.

Yep. It still hasn't sunk in.

It's like I slept and woke up a completely different person. People are bowing down to me now. I mean just a few days ago I was just a normal girl from a place of hopelessness and now I'm here, looking at Bangi's parents in the eye as they smiled back at us.

"My Prince. Welcome back." I hear Deliverance say before Bangi gives him the same polite response. They share a joke before my hand is taken into his. The King and Queen are excitedly making their way down the stairs.

When we meet up with them Bangi hugs his mother tightly.

"Oh my baby boy...I thank the Lord for both your safe returns," she says and lets him go before holding him at arms length.

"Feel that...he is well fed. Ngizokubona kahle ngaphakathi, suka ngifuna umakoti wami," she lets him go and focusses on me.

"Hawu Mama kanjalo nje?" Bangi complains as he moves on to hug his father in a manly hug. The Queen engulfs me in a warm hug.

"Nqo! Unjani makoti?" She asks before letting me go.

"Ngikahle ma," I smile.

"Good. Kufuneka njalo. Bangizwe ngifuna umakoti wami ahlale ajabulule kanje uyezwa?" She says as I moved to the King whom I attempted to curtsy in front of but instead end up in his strong arms.

Okay. I can deal with this. I think.

He acknowledged me and told me from now on forth I shouldn't be afraid of him cause he was now like a father to me. I wonder how that's going to work out.

"Hayi, asingeneni. (Let us go in now shall we.)" Bangi's mother suggests and we turn to make our way to the stairs. I spot Amandla who enthusiastically greets us and hugs us, asking questions about our honeymoon. How it was...when we got there...what we did...what we ate.

She just wouldn't stop talking.

And we haven't even settled down yet, but her list of questions seems to carry on growing and growing.

"Awukahle Amandla. How about you ask all those questions over dinner?" The Queen suggests.

"You guys haven't eaten yet?" Bangi asks. I'm guessing the time to eat has long passed or something.

"Your mother was waiting for the two of you to return so that we could eat together apparently," Amandla says.

"Haibo mama, what if we came back at 01h00 in the morning?"

"Then we would eat at 01h00 in the morning," She answers.

"That is insanity," Bangi's father speaks. "Who eats at 01h00 in the morning? What are you even trying to gain?"

I laugh a little at this commotion cause honestly it was a little ridiculous to wait up for people who didn't even specify on what time they'd be returning or anything.

"You know what? Bangizwe, Makoti, go and freshen up and then join us so we can get dinner over and done with." The Queen orders and doesn't even give us a chance to accept or decline. In any case why would I even decline when she's making it clear that she wants us all there? "Amandlawenkosi go call uKhethiwe and Alakhe to join us." I hear her say at a far distance. And then I hear Ama complain about her being sent to call people she's not in the mood to see.

"Yoh, my mother," Bangi chuckles and takes my hand into his. It's only then that I realise that two mannequins have been standing behind us, carrying our bags in silence. The respect. I surely would've tapped on someone's shoulder by now to tell or ask them where to put their bags.

"She's amazing."

"If by amazing you mean confusing then sure, go ahead," he says as we made our way to our home. Yes...our home.

"What is so confusing about your mother wanting to spend some quality time with her son and family over supper? I think it's sweet." Me.

"The woman hasn't broken her supper time in decades. She would never wait on anyone, even her first son or Ama for that matter," Bangi tells me.

Okay, I believe the time part more especially since I've had a tense breakfast with them before. Also I know it would be rude to not show up after the Queen herself invited you to dine with her. Why did I feel so special though after he mentioned the fact that his mother has never done such before? In so long?

Hectic.

The initials at the door have my heart skipping a beat. I think it's going to take a while to get used to this.

We step in and it takes me a moment to remember the changes he made in here too. "You can leave the bags over here. Thanks," Bangi says to the mannequins who then bow and leave.

Wait are those roses?

"They're for you Sthandwa sam."

"Me? Why?" I ask going to take them.

"We didn't celebrate valentines day."

I give him a look. We did. We surely did, even if the day completely slipped my mind in a sense.

"Thank you ke." I giggle and kiss his cheek. "I'll go put these in water."

"Okay and since its clear we're going to eat with the family, I'm going to have a quick shower then...you joining me?" He asks as I put them in an empty vase before I reach down to remove my shoes.

"Alright

I'm right behind you," I watch him take two suitcases up the stairs with him.

I then take this moment to fill the vase with some water and go search for my phone in my handbag. It's 20h43. Damn. The time is flying. I rush up the stairs and enter the bedroom...

Okay wait OUR bedroom.

I put my phone on a bedside table and charge it before collecting my bathing needs. I can already hear the shower running. When I push open the door I'm greeted by the almighty steam. This man and burning his skin. His showers are always like this. Skin peeling. I chuckle and take off my dress. Followed by my undies and my bra and then put on my showering cap. He's not facing this side and if only he knew how sexy he looked from here.

I open the shower door and he turns slightly before moving from the door. I step in and squirm as the heat takes me by surprise. "Wena uzosha yaz! Amanzi ashisa kangaka!"

He chuckles before turning a knob. "This water is perfectly fine. Unless you want it freezing."

"Yeka," I say and place my showering gel on the stand right next to his after squirting some of it onto my loofah. This has to be a quick shower. In and out. I start by washing my arms and then my chest area. Washing off all the sweat I may have accumulated on the flight and ride back here. I then rinse before getting more soap on my loofah for the lower part of my body.

He hands me one of his beard washes. I loved how this one smelt like. I take it and carefully get some onto the tip of my fingers. I massage it into his beard cautiously cause I still had my nails and allow the foam to form beautifully on this

masterpiece. He holds me tight as if I'd run away while doing this, eyes closed and a few calming sounds escaping his mouth.

I peck his lips and watch his reaction. He smiles and pouts.

"Khabuza futhi phela."

I chuckle and kiss him again feeling his hands swim across my back. This kiss was clearly doing things to him cause his hand on pokes my thigh. Bathong. I back up as he pushed me, my back toughing the confusingly cold wall of the this spacious shower.

He lifts my leg up and I stand firmly so that I don't fall. I stop the kiss and look at him.

"Please..." He whispers and rubs himself on cookie. Back and forth.

"We're going to be late."

"They'll wait."

"No...I don't want your mother waiting on us."

"Baby...."

"I don't want her to see me in a bad light baby."

"She's married. She'll understand." He kisses on my neck.

I chuckle. "Bangi. Let's just go to this dinner thing and get it over with. And then you can have all of me afterwards."

"All of you?"

"All of me." He looks at me, his eyes saying a thousand more words than needed.

•••

We grace the table with our presence. Bangi and I on one side with Amandla next to me. The King and Queen at the head of the table. Khethiwe sat across us, with her eldest son next to her.

"Uphi uSbusiso?" Ama asks.

When I look at her she's looking at Khethiwe. I'm guessing Sbusiso is the other son that's not here. I didn't really get their names the last time I was here.

"He's sleeping. You know boys. He ate something and then fell asleep." She says.

"Oh. Okay."

"Haike, where's Alakhe makoti?"

"Uhhh...ubani?" Khethiwe.

"uAlakhe." Bangi's mother repeats.

She looks like she thinks for a while and then realises something. She clears her throat. "Ah, he...he's at a meeting. A late meeting with...with a friend of his."

"What friend?" Bangi's father asks, his voice taking me by surprise. How is it even possible to hear all his authority in just a mere voice?

"A...a friend that he's doing business with. You know that the business has taken a slight hit so yeah he's having a meeting

with his friend. To strategize." Khethiwe says.

"See Senzo, it's good to know what your partner does every time."

"What do you mean? You always know what I'm doing all the time."

"Do I?"

The King chuckles softly, shaking his head. "Let us proceed ahead with eating. My stomach will start digesting itself if I don't get something into it now."

"Right." The Queen signals for the helpers to start serving the food that had smells making my mouth water. It's only then that I realised I haven't eaten since Huvafen. We say a short prayer before I start dishing up for myself.

"So how was your honeymoon?" Ama asks.

Right. I forgot I didn't answer any of her questions earlier.

"It was amazing." Bangi says. I glance at him and smile.

Potatoes go onto my dish.

"Haibo I want details." She says.

"Details? Hayi, we did some snorkeling...some underwater couples messages and we enjoyed a cruise ship every now and then."

"It...it was beautiful. Peaceful, calm and something I've never experienced before. The waters there were breathtaking."

"I think we agree on going back there one day again," Bangi says.

"Whuu, must've been fun. You guys make me want to go there now."

"Uyohamba nobani? (Who are you going with?)" The Queen asks.

"Ngiyohamba ngiy'one. (I'll go alone.) There's nothing wrong with that." Ama says.

"Why not go with Sanele? It's better to go there with company," I suggest.

"Uh." Ama breathes out shaking her head.

I start eating as slight silence invades the room.

"Who's Sanele?"

Okay. Maybe I should've mentioned this.

"My friend." She answers quickly.

"Friend from where? We know all your friends Amandla."

"Yes. She's my new friend."

"Okay." Bangi's mother says.

I hope she's letting this go. I'll have to apologize after dinner for just jumping into her business like this.

"Anyway..." Bangi says.

"The food is delicious." Khethiwe says.

"Very." I agree and eat more of my chicken.

"Mama, can I please have more peas?" The boy speaks for the first time ever. I look up. He looks so much like Alakhe. He even has these cute big ears on him. He looked like a sweetheart.

"Ask Aunt Zanokuhle to pass them on." Khethiwe says and I'm caught staring.

"Aunt Zanokuhle may I please have some peas?"

Oh my heart!

I get up, passing the bowl of peas to the boy. "Thank you."

"Its my pleasure." I sit back down again. Drinking some of my juice.

"I hope you two are planning on having kids." Bangi's dad says out of the blue. Yoh.

"Haibo Senzo, hope? They better phela and soon futhi. I want this whole palace to be flooded with my grandkids." She says.

"Bangizwe."

"Baba."

"I hope you hear me and your mother." The King says. Bangi's hand goes onto my thigh, squeezing. I clear my throat. His eyes were definitely on me right now.

"All in due time Baba. Maybe in two years we'll...."

"Two!" The Queen exclaims causing the whole table to burst out in laughter. "Haibo. Ngeke."

"What's wrong with two years mama?" Bangi asks.

"Bangizwe I'm getting old. We are getting old. I'm almost 60 years old and your father is already 60. I want to still be able to run around with my grandkids phela." The Queen says.

What good looking parents he has.

"Ma, you're still able to walk up the stairs, two years is surely nothing." Amadla.

"Weeh, you children better not be taking things like these lightly. Kids are blessings. Ntokozo here needs more brothers and sisters around him." The Queen says.

I down some more juice. This is not the conversation I signed up for.

"Makoti." She looks my way.

Yoh!

"Ma?"

"Mama, don't put so much pressure on my wife." Bangi says.

I put my hand over his, rubbing his knuckles.

"I'm not trying to put pressure on either one of you Bangizwe," She says. "I would've had more children if I could. Which is why I want this to be a big happy and loving family soon, that will stand united and lead this Kingdom." Her smile grows bigger.

I think I understand her...she wanted more kids?

We were still conversing when a laugh caught the attention of the whole table. I look at the direction I thought I could hear it from before seeing the two huge doors of this dining room open.

The maids at the door bow at...oh Alakhe and his companion? The tall, curves in the right places woman who whispers something to Alakhe who then laughs. Khethiwe is up on her feet, gawking at her man who has another woman clinging onto his hand. The woman slings her hair to the side and our eyes meet.

Now I'm the one attempting to get on my feet, but Bangi stops me.

"Oh. Family, indeed you are here dining as I've been told." He speaks. I can never get used to his voice.

"Alakhe what is this?" Khethiwe.

"I see the happy couple is back," his smile is filled with mockery.

"Alakhe!" Khethiwe once again tries to find out what exactly is going on here.

"Quiet down will you." He says with a chuckle. Ama gets up and takes Ntokozo with her to somewhere before things get out of hand.

"What foolishness is this Alakhe?" The King finally speaks.

When I look at him his face is hard and disapproving. "Who is

this?"

"I was getting to that father," he puts his hand on her waist.

"This is a first class lady. Independent, beautiful and business minded. She owns 2 successful business right here in this Kingdom my dear parents..."

"What?" I ask shocked. My brows furrowed.

"Look at poverty girl shocked at the words independent, beautiful and successful," he chuckles.

"Fuck off!" Bangi clenches his fists nearly crunching my hand.

"Make me!" Alakhe.

"Enough!" The King roars. "I will not have such shenanigans in my Palace!"

Khethiwe's tears run down her cheeks. "Haven't you embarrassed me enough Alakhe? Haven't you made me feel worthless countless times already over another one of your side biltongs?"

"The name is Eve." She says. The only true thing so far that's left her mouth. I haven't heard that name in forever.

"I don't care if your name is Mary or Lilith! What the hell are you doing with my husband?" I hear the sound of a plate hitting the floor. "Did you not know he's married with kids? Did you not?" Another plate lands on the floor but this time at close range of where these two were standing.

And then chaos.

She's held kicking and screaming. "Does this make you happy Alakhe? Does it!"

"Get them out of here!" The King orders.

Mannequins swarm in. "Yes, protect me and my baby." Madam Eve says as she rubbed her belly.

What!

What?

What.

"I think dinner is over." Bangi's mother says and gets up long after the place went quiet. I could see she was hurt by all of this and well I was just the same. I could believe what just unfolded in front of my eyes. The lies!

The betrayal! From My own flesh and blood.

She can't be serious. Tomorrow I'll wake up to realise this all was a dream and it will all be okay. Right?

"Sthandwa sam, asambe," Bangi says and breathes out. He gets up and I follow suit. "Baba, uh...we'll see you tomorrow."

His father just nods before we make our way out of here.

"That was not Zonke right?" I ask headed for our home. He was just looking straight ahead. Not giving me an answer. No marn...what businesses?

Chapter Twenty Eight.

"People who need help sometimes look a lot like people who don't need help." x Glennon Doyle.

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"How could she do something like this? How can she blatantly hurt another woman like this? How does she even sleep at night?" I say running a hand across my face.

"Sthandwa sam..."

"Like how can she lie like that? Businesses Bangi? Is she for real? Is she okay in the head?"

I peel my eyelashes off.

"Yehlisa umoya Zanokuhle."

"Ngiyehlisa umoya kanjani when things are like this?"

"Okay can you sit down ke, you're making me dizzy."

"You must've not been there with me Bangi. You must've not heard what she said. She is pregnant Bangi again...and...oh my goodness...is it even your Brother's child or is it one of her blessers' child? What if it's that married man's child?"

I glance at him as he sat on the bed. Hands on his knees.

"Are you seriously just going to sit there and not say anything?"

"What do you want me to say?"

"Something!" I snap and soon after regret it. I sigh, hating how

this whole situation was making me feel. How Zonke was just becoming a nightmare to even think about as time just continued passing by. I knew she hated me but this...this was another level. A level I never thought would exist. Ever. "I'm sorry my love...it's just that this whole thing is getting to me."

"Come here," he says and motions for me to come to him. I walk to him still trying to calm myself as best as I could. "You shouldn't allow her to get to your head like this."

He takes both my hands into his and I frown.

"Bangi have you not been listening to me this whole time? How can she not get into my head when she's literally a few feet away from this very place plotting God knows what."

He sighs. I know I'm irritating him with this but he must feel my frustrations and worries. It's his job now.

"Bangi you know the moment everyone in this Palace finds out about that they'll think I had a hand in this. They'll think I'm the one who set them up and tried ruining someone else's marriage. Oh my God Khethiwe is going to hate me. She's going to despise me for not telling her that Eve is my sister...I'm not even going to mention your parents. They're going to think so low of my family when our name has already been tarnished by my father...I do not..."

"Sthandwa sam," he interrupts me.

"What?"

"Do you hear that?" He asks and I keep quiet. Not hearing a single thing apart from my own heated breathing.

"What am I supposed to hear?" I finally ask.

"Exactly that. How calm and sane it is when we're not quarrelling about those two?"

"Oh so this whole time you've not been listening to me neh?"

"I am listening to you." He groans in frustration.

"You are not Bangizwe! You are not!"

"Zanokuhle I am! I just don't want to be fucken thinking about shitheads like Alakhe and your insane sister literally hours upon returning from our honeymoon. I don't want to be talking about them like they bring some sentimental value into my life when they don't!" He gets up after roaring all of that out into the open.

"I'm going to sleep if this is all we're going to clearly talk about." He lets his tight grip loosen from my wrists, turning away from me. I grab his wrist before he halts his journey. He turns his head back, looking down at my hand holding him before back at me.

I didn't want him going to bed angry at me, especially because of something I could've avoided. I can't even speak right now but I clear my throat. "I...I'm sorry my love...I...I just...I just wanted a reaction from you."

"A reaction?"

"Yes. I just feel like I'm the only one worrying about what happened tonight back there and..."

Argh, yes he's not reacting the way I want him to. I want him to tell me he'll sort this out and talk to Alakhe or something. Have them see that this was not going to go any further than this...but he just wanted to ignore it? Act like it's not happening?

"My reaction...You don't want my reaction."

"Don't?" That's the only word I may have seem to hear out of all of those words.

He moves back to come stand in front of me again, cupping my face and makes me look up at him. "What do you mean..." He attacks me with a kiss filled with what I could only describe as hunger and need. His hands firmly holding me in place as I brought him closer to me with the hem of his pants. I moaned into his mouth as he pushes his tongue into my mine, igniting a fight between the two. This is before he stops the whole thing in a nanosecond and gazes at me.

I know this look. I know the lust it carried with it and the promises it held at the end. I wanted those promises.

"Zanokuhle, stop me."

"Huh?" He captures my lips again before I'm lifted off the ground. I wrap my legs around him, feeding on his lips while

holding onto his shoulders. He throws me down on the bed and almost roughly presses on my clothed breast. He doesn't even focus long on it as his hand skims down my body to my exposed thighs. I rock my hips when he touched my undies.

"Stop me Sthandwa Sam," he breathes out, head buried in my neck as he sucked hard at the spot he knew would have me weak.

"But I want you."

Why the heck would I even say no now when I know I'm as ready as can be? I lift my butt up and lower my panties...past my behind and thighs when he stops me. "I won't be gentle Ma'Dlamini."

"I don't care." The words just seem to flow right now.

"Sthandwa Sam..." He groans.

"I want to feel what you feel."

Those words seem to do the trick as he takes over from where he stopped me, removing the panties faster than the words go. He spreads my legs and devours on my cookie. Licking and sucking. He presses on my inner thighs and I flicks his tongue on my clit. Why did I look down at him? Oh my goodness. Oh my goodness. "More." I breathe out.

I wanted more of this. More of his beautiful mouth doing amazing to my still shaven girl.

His tongue swirls...slurping.

What?

God!

He sucks...Yes...and sucks...yes...and...No!

He stops, stands upright and rips his shirt apart, the buttons flying across the room. Oh is this what we're playing at? He has never done this before, deny me an orgasm. How dare he? And how dare he look at me like that.

"I didn't stop you Bangi, what the hell is this?" My voice sounds so shaky.

"You didn't," He says taking off his shirt and I sit up, removing my dress just as fast. My mind yelling *'take me now please'*. I'm watching him unbuckle his belt before his pants drop to the floor, followed by his briefs. "Come here."

"Huh?"

I get up and he grabs me, turning me around bends me over. I gasp as his hand made contact with my butt, giving off a slight sting which I confusingly liked. The next thing he does is kick my legs apart and rubs himself on my wet cookie. I push my body back, my butt sticking out a little. He presses down on my waist and the strain alone was too much, but tolerable. There's also a gentle pull I feel behind my thighs. But If there's something my three day yoga sessions have taught me is that pain is

temporary but a flexible body is forever...or is it the other way around.

He groans and enters me without warning.

"Oh," the soft moan escapes my lips. It's been two days but it felt like I had forgotten all about this good feeling. He kept pushing himself in, bit by bit. Reminding me how it felt to be full.

"Bang!" I half yell as he hit something. Is that my cervix? I breathe out. My hands giving in on me. What the hell. He pulls out and I shut my eyes, not wanting to question why he did that.

I feel him on my entrance again before he pushed himself in, again. Deeper like before, hitting that same spot. I cry out once more, the urge to push him out crossing my mind. After a low groan he pulls out. Haibo again?

What is he doing?

When he pushes into me again he refrains from doing the same thing . This time he starts thrusting. A little gentle at first and then he picked up the pace. It felt like we went from a zero to a hundred in a matter of seconds. I don't know what to do with myself as I grab on the sheet near my grasp. Pulling to the amount of pressure and pleasure I seem to feel.

"Ah!" I yell out. I think I even say a whole of gibberish after that which I can't even remember. I can't even hear what he says anymore.

What is this?

The sounds of his body hitting against mine and my cries fill the room and as if that wasn't enough he spanks my behind with just the right amount of force. I feel something on my clit. It's his fingers. Pressing. Rubbing. Rubbing. Pressing. As if I needed more sensation to my body I convulse in what I could only describe as mind numbing pleasure.

He pokes at something in there making my body it tremble again. Jerking anew. I'm even on the tip of my toes. My knees weaken and give in but he's quick to grab me, thrusting slowly as if he was giving me a moment to catch my breath again. That's it. I can't move anymore. This man has left me immobile, taking my soul with him. There's a throb withing my core...one of satisfaction.

His warm hands glide up my back, unhooking my bra after a little bit of a struggle. His lips caressing my back. His beard brushing on it as well. He plants kisses on my neck before stilling. He's as deep as he was before.

"I was talking to you..."

"I didn't hear you." I breathe out. He flexes his hips and I gasp.

"I said I love you."

"Is that all..." He pulls out and enters as quick he left and a sound escapes from down there. What was that? I know I did not just let one rip. He does the same thing again. Bathong there it is again. He lets out a chuckle. "...Stop it."

"I didn't do anything Sthandwa sam." He defends...

He has me turn around and lay on my side. He lifts my leg and rests it on his shoulder. When he leans in I stop him. "Are you trying to break me or something?"

"Why would I want to do that?" He shakes his head getting off the bed. I lay on my back. He drags me across the bed to the edge of it getting between my legs. His body glistening beautifully under the lights.

The pace is fast again. Arms keeping me firmly in place for all of it. "Ma'Dlamini?"

I respond with a moan I can't hold back. "Look at me Sthandwa sam." He says and I open them to find me looking at him. He leans in and I suck on his bottom lip before letting it go. "Do that again."

The words don't seem to register in my head as fast enough. What does he want me to suck again?

"Baby."

"Huh?" I try looking at him, but it's a mission.

"Suck my lip again." He groans.

Oh. I suck on it, occasions trying to add a little zing by gently biting down on it and that seems to drive him crazy. I feel my body getting closer and closer to the promised land and with a few last strokes I reach it...

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After forcing out some pee and wiping myself clean, I brush my teeth and rinse off my face with some warm water. This was a routine I was getting used to and it seemed to work best for us after a whole lot of sweating.

Now I just want to sleep and not think of how tomorrow is going to be like for the most part. He's already in bed when I switch off the bathroom light, having a protein bar. In bed. Imagine. Anyway.

I peck his lips and lay next to him. He then pulls me to his warm body for a cuddle. "I know you love your cuddles." He chews ahead.

I smile, putting my hand on his chest.

"I think my abdomen hurts."

"How bad?" He sounds worried.

"Just mild, but I can feel it. It's like my periods are going to start soon."

Which makes me wonder if that's even possible. Could he mess up my already messed up schedule like that?



The moment I open my eyes I realise I'm alone in bed. The sun was out though and I could tell it was a beautiful day outside. One I wanted to explore and see more of just so I could forget like I forgot yesterday when my husband was doing things to my body. Where is he vele?

I sit up and hear the bathroom door open before he steps out, towel wrapped around his waist. What time is it if he's already taken a shower.

"Morning Sthandwa sam..." He says giving me a smile that I reciprocate. This man is gorgeous. And the mere fact that his smile still gives me butterflies in my stomach says a lot. I just loved how his eyes seemed closed when he'd give me his genuine smiles.

"Morning. Why didn't you wake me up?"

"You looked so peaceful and I thought you needed the rest," he smirks. The little devil. I've noticed another thing about this man and that is after he's ravished my insides and made love to my body he has the energy of a five year old

whereas I die. I sit at the edge of the bed wondering where the pain I felt last night vanished to.

"Nonsense, you had to wake me up," I say before he makes his way to me, caging my body between his arms.

"Kabuza."

"Yabona."

"Ini?"

"Now you want me kissing you with my morning breath?"

"It's nothing new though." He says and pouts causing me to chuckle.

"How is that fair when you've showered and smell like heaven?"

"Haibo baby, kiss your man," he cups my face and pecks my lips for the longest time.

I giggle and shake my head. "You know...you we're right."

"Right about what?"

"My love, you said the moment my parents find out about this whole...Eve or whatever thing, they'll start painting you in a bad picture. And I don't want that more especially since you're my wife now and everything that happens, happens to us. I'll talk to my father and let him know who Zonke is and we'll take it from there." He says.

"You'd do that?"

"Of course I would Sthandwa sam. You are my priority now way before anyone else in this Kingdom and Palace."

I hook my arms around his neck and bring him closer to me.

"Thank you." I kiss his lips.

He let's out a soft chuckle just as I kiss his lips again.

"If you continue like that you might be staying in that bed a little longer."

"I didn't hear myself refusing to that preposition."

"Haibo..." His bushy eyebrows lifted in amusement, his lips twitching before they earn a lick from his tongue. "...I thought I was the one here who couldn't get enough of you."

"Well..." I reach out, hooking my fingers to the towel unwrap it. "...It seems like I can't get enough of my husband too."

Saying those words alone have my body going into a trance far and beyond. I already wanted his hardening self between my walls and in these sheets. I lift my hand and guide it to where my eyes were stuck. I hold him. Stoke him and feel him grow bigger and bigger. I look up at him the moment he lets out the sexiest groan ever. I must be doing something right then. Something worth his approval and appreciation.

The fingertips of his hand stroke across my thigh and find the band of my panties.

"I think you shouldn't bother with these anymore...especially in bed." He says and groans again. I chuckle.

"Are they causing conflict or restrictions between my husband and I?"

"Major...major conflict."

"But they're comfortable...and I thought you liked them."

"I do...but I'd much rather have you roam around here naked so I can admire you all day long." He smirks and I shake my head.

Me losing my panties in bed is one thing...me gallivanting here completely naked is another thing. How will I even bring myself to even enter the kitchen with no bra on? He takes my lips into his and kisses me. A paced, passionate kiss as he laid me back on the bed. I opened my legs and felt his hand rubbing on the fabric which he pushed to the side and allowed his hard self to enter me slowly..

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I frowned the moment I reached the middle of the stairs spotting a lady in uniform busying herself in here. She turns the moment she notices me and allows herself to curtsy even before I reach the bottom of these stairs.

"Good morning Your Royal Highness, I hope you slept well" she says not exactly looking at me but at the duster she held in her hand. "The breakfast His Royal highness requestion is ready to be served."

How long has she been here?

Oh my goodness what if she...what if she heard all the unspeakable things we did not so long ago. If I could I'd turn crimson and migrate to another country just to avoid thinking that she did.

"I...hi...I didn't even get your name."

"My name is Nandipha Your Royal Highness."

"Please...call me Zanokuhle... Or Zano."

"Or Mrs Shazi...Mgedezi...Bhangubhangu lam elihle." Bangi says as he calmly made his way down the stairs. Once he reaches my side he pecks my cheek. "Morning Nandi."

"Morning My Prince." She curtseys.

"I hope you and my wife here have gotten to know each other a bit better."

"A little My Prince." Nandi says and finally looks up.

She looks too young and beautiful to be working in such hectic environments. I'm saying this because most of the workers around here seem to have a few good years under their buckles and here she is.

"She said she's even prepared breakfast like you asked." I add on.

"Well then, Sthandwa Sam let us go eat. Thank you Nandi." He says and snakes his arm around my waist, leading us to the dining area where I'm met by a feast. She said breakfast...not a buffet. This even looks like too much food for the two of us alone.

"Won't she be joining us?"

"Uh...nope." He says and I nod. He pulls my chair out and I take a seat, thanking him before scanning through the table as

everything just screams at me to eat and marvel at them. Soon enough the two of us are eating after I've said grace.

"Ithi ah." I say and pick some food on my fork. Ready to feed him.

"Uthi ngenzeni? (What did you say I should do?)" he gives me a look. One filled with humor. Bathong what did I say?

"Ithi ah." I place my hand under the fork so that the food that decides to escape would land on it.

He smirks.

"Open your mouth Bangi." Yes I was about to give in and eat the food myself. And even more so now that he laughs.

"I was literally about to moan."

My mouth drops in horror. He's mad. How did he even get to that point?

"Usile wena."

He opens his mouth and I eventually feed him a mouthful to which he complains about already. "That reminded me of our wedding day. I had so much cake in my mouth that day because of you."

I giggle. "I had to shut you up somehow."

"I would've appreciated a kiss way more."

"Hayi, ngak'laya."

He laughs.

We continue eating.

"Would you mind if I continued having my yoga sessions...you know to see where it takes me?" I lightly throw in during our small talk.

"Of course not. In fact I think it's good."

"You just want to watch me right?" I chortle.

"Wouldn't hurt." He shrugs and downs some tea, the same smirk dancing on his lips once more. I noticed he only put honey in it, two teaspoons. No milk. "I'll see who I can find around here. The best female instructor to handle my baby."

"Who said I wanted a female instructor? I've heard that male instructors are the best." I pull his leg.

"Where did you hear that? I need to have a talk with this person."

"Can't remember the name...but they take their time my Love, they even make sure you're doing the poses right. Touch you and fix your mistakes."

"Then we might as well drop this whole thing."

"Haibo why?"

"I'm not having another man touching my wife like that. No."

"But it will be strictly yoga baby."

"No."

"Bangi."

"Sthandwa sam."

"Please."

"No." His face is hard.

"Tjo. uSerious vele?"

"Nje."

I chortle and grab his hairy chin, turning him to me for a kiss.

"Bengidlala my love."

"Udlala nobani?"

"Nawe."

He keeps his serious gaze on me. I press on his cheeks making him pout once more before kissing him again.

There's a knock on the door that disturbs us from our breakfast.

"I'll go check it out." I peck his lips and push my chair back before getting up and heading for the door.

Oh, Nandi is here too. I allow her to continue right ahead and open the door before Deliverance comes into sight along with two others. He doesn't look his usual confident self today, but in fact the quite opposite.

"Good morning Deliverance, how are you?" I ask with somewhat of a frown on my face I could tell.

"I'm...I'm fine Your Royal Highness."

"Awesome, uh...what brings you here? I mean at this very

hour? We were still having breakfast."

"My apologies Your Royal Highness but you have a..."

"Yoh yoh yoh..." A very familiar voice interrupts us, walking right in. The clicking of her heels almost ear deafening for some odd reason. "...kanti how long does it take to just say that the first or second lady...whatever is here huh? You're busy nywee nywee here when you can just get straight to the point. Do you want me to report your lazy ass?" She's quick to spit out, looking at these men in pure disgust. I know this look all too well it seems.

"I'm sorry Miss, it'll never happen again." Deliverance says, now looking down.

"Good, vele it'll never happen again or else I'll have you chased out of here and fired"

"Hayi Zo...Eve you don't have to be so rude." I say but the words seem to fall upon deaf ears.

"Out! Out! All you incompetent species." She shoos them away before turning back to me. Nandi also left with them. "Mhnn," her eyes scan the area we stood on. Lips pulled back and eyes cold and malicious. "This wing is way smaller than Alakhe's. It's even a shack compared to his."

I fold my arms in front of my chest, chuckling at this unwanted drama so early in the morning. I didn't even think I'd deal with her before the clock strikes 10. "You came all this way to talk

about my home?"

"Don't be silly. There are bigger matters here than this thing you call a home." She says in mockery.

I let out a sigh, biting back my words.

"I came here to tell you...no...actually I came here to warn you. You better stay in your lane okay. You will not say a single word about who or what I am to anybody you hear me."

"So you want me to lie and scheme with you in whatever stupidity this is?"

"Oh no Gimba, this is not stupidity at all. In fact it's the total opposite of that cause look at where it's gotten me."

"In another woman's marriage?"

"Slima...don't you learn. Their marriage was failing anyway, I'm just helping in ending it quicker so I can get what's rightfully mine."

"Which is?"

"Recognition, power. Everything I failed to get previously in the life you offered me which was shit by the way. This...this will be everything I've ever seen for myself. Now it's manifesting beautifully."

I chuckle.

"And what do you think he'll do to you when he finds out you've been lying to him all along? Alakhe wouldn't even give you a chance to breathe if he does."

"That's why you should shut your trap and make sure your husband does the same too. I'll tell him at my own time and how I want him to hear it."

"You're playing with danger here you know that?"

"That's a gamble I'm willing to take. I won't settle for second best like you did."

"Excuse me?"

"All of this..." She motions to the whole room. "...is second best. I bagged the right Shazi. You didn't."

"Second best?" I chuckle tasting the bitterness in my mouth.

"Ung'jwayela kabi yazi wena. No. Zonke...or Eve or Adam or whatever you go by now, this is not second best. It's far from being second best and you wouldn't know that cause you're too busy sitting on your crippled high horse thinking that that is the creme de la creme. I didn't bag the wrong Shazi. I didn't lie my way to this home you call a shack and if anything that clearly is too higher grade for you to understand I bagged the love of my life. I bagged trust, honesty, chemistry and a soulmate. I bagged someone who makes me smile and laugh all day long. Someone who worships the ground I walk on and someone who never fails to reassure me that I'm enough to him. Go ahead and bash me, but not my husband because if you dare try you'll see another side to me you'll hate for a goddamn reason." My voice breaks.

"I've had enough of you and your messes. I've had enough of you and your fake facades that keep changing with the weather. If my efforts were not enough for you then fine, but that won't change the fact that Khaya and Nobuhle ate because of my 'shit' offering. I don't even get why you're talking so ill of a life you barely even lived cause you were too busy sucking every dime you could from men who would still regard YOU as second best. I even wonder if the baby you're claiming to be carrying is his or its just another one of your thousand man whores who've been giving you money for this lie. Luthando should've chosen a better mother." My stomach aches again, as I bite on my bottom lip halting myself from this sudden charged anger in me.

I take a deep breath.

That made more sense to me the more I thought about it. The expensive clothes weren't just for show. They were for this.

"Now...I want you to turn around and leave my shack before I say more things that I shouldn't. Leave."

Oh God, why am I tearing up?

She's still gawking at me, her mouth opening slightly as if she wanted to say something but doesn't. She shakes her head.

"You..."

"I said leave Zonke!"

"It's Eve."

"I don't care! Go!"

She's still standing here when I hear Bangi clear his throat.

"You heard my wife. Out." He says and she wastes no time turning back and leaving our house in peace. And that's when I let it all out, breaking down because of the words I just spoke to my sister like that. He takes me into his hold and allows me wail to my hearts content with him brushing my back.

"You heard everything didn't you?" I question.

He doesn't answer.

He did and that makes me even more emotional. He heard all those humiliating and hurtful things I would've rather not have had him hear.

"Its okay...it's okay." He says.

No its not.

Chapter Twenty Nine.

"A cow doesn't give milk. You have to milk it."

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I sniff, and look up as he made his way back to me holding a glass of water. I've been sitting here for the past few minutes feeling like...I don't know exactly. I probably felt as empty as an underperforming just-passing-some-time bunking-every-single-subject highschool learner coming to school with an empty bag. The bag would always have a pack of cigarettes but no book in sight. I wish I could put into terms how my confrontation with Zonke made me feel but I just couldn't. Did I really have to burst out in tears and break down the way I did when I should've not felt a single dent from saying what was on my mind.

Bangi crouches in front of me, handing me the glass of water which I take with shaky hands. "Thank you." I clear the buildup in my throat before downing half of the water in one go feeling a tad better about myself. He looks at me, takes my hand into his hold and rubs my knuckles ever so gently. Searching for something within my eyes that only he knew.

He shakes his head slightly and lets out a sigh that could only portray his feelings. "Angithandi ngomkami." He says, butterflies and lilies coming out to play in my belly once again

even at this very serious moment. There was just a way he said those words that made me feel like everything was going to be okay. "Angithandi ukuk'bona ukanje sthandwa sam."

I forgot he has seen me break down like this. Yes. I'm sure he's regretting marrying such a crybaby like me. He needed someone strong and hardheaded, not me. A space wasting marshmallow.

"I said I never want to see you cry and I meant it." He says taking my free hand and hold it tightly in his warm hands. "More especially because of people you care about but don't give a damn about."

"I know. I'm weak." I sniff and if looks could kill I would've been one with my ancestors at this moment. He frowned, eyes squinted as he bit on the insides of his mouth.

"Weak? I never want to hear those words come out of your mouth ever again you hear me." He says more than just asking me for my permission on this final judgement.

"You know it's true. I mean who breaks down at just saying a few words in the heat of things instead of standing their ground as firmly as possible. I should have had a heart and head of steel, hit her like she hit me without flinching but my weak ass couldn't even do that."

Look at that I'm crying again, proving my point exactly.

"Not being violent Sthandwa sam is not a sign of weakness. Speaking from a place of heartbreak, genuine care about your own blood is not a sign of weakness. I find you caring about others a turn on. It's something I appreciate my love and the fact that you don't stoop as low as she does is everything. It's not bad for you to stand up for yourself but sometimes its not worth the fight." He kisses the back of my hands and reaches up to wipe my tears away. "Please...stop crying sthandwa sam."

I shake my head. The more he talks like this the more I'll seriously keep flooding the river Jordan.

"You know all of this is really making me wish I could choose family. I wish I could chose my own path and not have to deal with igazi lami like this. Is that a bad thing to want?" I question and sniff before he wipes my tears away again.

"Not at all my love."

"Like I wish I could make them disappear. Especially Zonke. wouldn't you do that for me?" I ask.

Look at me wanting my man to play God Almighty and never create my sister.

I hear him chuckle. "Legally I can especially after hearing what she said to you but this won't be what you need my love.

Making her go away is not going to just fix everything."

"Legally you can?" I think my eyes are too wide.

"Yes." He says without even flinching a muscle.

"That's too much power."

"Power I've never used before...and I doubt I'd ever use."

I nod. No, I'll let God deal with Zonke. I manage to smile and subtly sniff. I don't want to cry any further. Not today. Not after the beautiful morning we had and not when we're supposed to be in a light and enjoyable mood.

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be Sthandwa sam. I am not mad at you." I nod. "Now I want us to head upstairs and get your face washed and refreshed, I'm going to give me a kiss and a hug and then I'm going to take you to see Buhle and Khaya...how does that sound?"

"Better than me sulking here." I say and he gets up, leading the way upstairs and allows me to do all he said I could do.

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It's past 14h00 when the motorcade parks in front of the gate that feels like it homed a place I haven't seen in ages. Buhle and Khaya come running out of the house and I find myself smiling at this. Bangi squeezes my hand before letting me go and my door is opened. I don't wait to be helped out as I almost leap forward to these two who attack me with a mother of all hug. I sigh out in what I'd call a sombre moment because Mrs N was going to come here any minute now.

"Why didn't you tell us you're coming over?" Buhle asks. "We would've made you something to eat."

"No. I'm not here for food, I'm here to see you guys. You guys look perfect...no scratches...you don't even look like hobos." I say as I let them go, scanning them properly.

"We can take care of ourselves." Buhle says. "This one though is work. He fai..."

"Hayi, why are we talking about my things at the gate?" Khaya interrupts Buhle.

"Okay okay, let's not bicker here." I have enough bickering happening back at the palace so I do not need this. "How about we go in?"

"Isn't the Prince coming in?" She waves at car .

"Oh...no maybe next time."

We make our way inside and I'm impressed with how it looked like in here. Everything was still in place. Even if they had a party in here I wouldn't be able to tell. There are plastics on the table. "More clothes?"

"I have to be ready for university phela."

"I hope you're not finishing all the money I gave you on clothes ke...otherwise we'll have to revisit your saving methods."

"Relax. I know how to spend my money well," Buhle says and takes out a dark colored jean from one of the plastics. "See, Essentials. Plus they were on sale so..."

I nod and take a seat. Khaya was about to go away when I called him back. "Please. Sit."

"I have to check my bags."

"I won't take long." I say and he sighs, taking a seat. "Are you still mad or is it something else?"

"I..."

"I think it's something else." Buhle interrupts him, sitting back.

I look between these two and wonder what the heck was going on here. They seem to be having a conversation with their eyes that had me even more curious.

"Is anyone going to tell me or...?"

"He..."

"I have a girlfriend." He says quickly and I gawk at him.

"What?" Me. I don't know if I should be joyous or worried about this revelation. A girlfriend brings along so many things that I don't think he's ready for. Especially with a teens raging hormones.

"Since when?" Buhle asks.

I thought she knew.

"Since...since a few weeks ago."

"That's...that's sweet."

"You have a girlfriend even before I get a boyfriend. How is that sweet?" Buhle.

"So you're jealous."

"What?"

"You're jealous." He laughs.

"I'd be jealous if you passed your maths test not some made up girlfriend you're claiming."

"Really!" Khaya exclaims and I stop them and this feud.

"If? Khaya you failed a maths test."

"Uyabona wena Buhle nomlomo omkhulu." Khaya points at Buhle.

"Ukhomba ubani wena eh?"

"Guys I can't be dealing with uZonke ngapha and then you two marn," I state. "Khayalakhe how is this even possible when you're good at maths? It doesn't make sense."

"He's been neglecting the books. He thought the maths will just come to him."

"Yabona wena."

"Khayalakhe is this true? There is no girlfriend here is there? I'm the fool here who's trying to make things work and it all seems like it's going to be for nothing."

"It's not for nothing." He mumbles.

"Then why does it always seem like you're not happy for me? Now you're failing on purpose for what? You know very well about all that we've been through. And this is exactly how you want to show dad and everyone else who thought we'd amount

to nothing that they were correct? You fail maths you don't do soccer you know that."

"I'm sorry. I was just...I don't know. I'm sorry. I wont do it again."

"Khaya this is your future and if you mess it up..." I shake my head. "...you're turning 17 this year. Don't let things slip from your fingers."

•••

It's silent. No one is saying a thing. I'm occasionally staring back and forth between Alakhe and Zonke as they displayed affection towards each other. I'm wondering when all of this bull-crap started. How they even managed to meet and actually have time to like each other and on top of that, have sex still baffles my mind.

"Ao Z...Eve, sorry. What type of businesses do you own?" I ask and clear my throat. She has her eyes open in shock, glancing at Alakhe who then throws me a pissed look. I shrug.

"I don't see how that is relevant to the talk we're having here." He says.

"No, no. I think my wife asked a very valid question. Everyone knew what job Zanokuhle had before she came to this palace. Everyone knows what Khethiwe did so why can't we ask your mistress over there? Plus I'm just as intrigued." Bangi says and

sits back on his seat.

"Answer the question please." The King says.

She looks at me and then at the King before clearing her throat.

"I...I own a law firm uh and a salon."

"What type of salon?" I ask.

"The fancy kind. I thought you'd know this stuff if you were smart." Zonke says and rolls her eyes while looking at me.

"And if you genuinely had two businesses you love you wouldn't mind filling in my not-so-smart self." I say.

"What is that supposed to mean?" Alakhe asks.

"Nothing my love. Nothing at all. She's...she's right. I'll explain to her more about what I do." Zonke is quick to say.

"Never mind. I'm not interested anymore. Plus your man was right this question is not relevant to the talk we're having here." I say and fold my arms.

She seemingly relaxes after I say that before her fake confident facade is back on again.

"I want to know how you got her pregnant." Khethiwe speaks. The second thing out of her mouth since we sat down here.

"We had sex and boom Alakhe junior was conceived." He says sounding rather stupidly cocky.

"Alakhe you slept with your tramp without protection? Just like that? You completely discarded my feelings out of the window

because you couldn't keep it in your pants?" She asked and asked

the tone of anger quite evident in her voice.

"Please respect the presence of my father." Alakhe says.

"Respect me first!"

"Woah yehla from whatever you are on okay. You have no right to tell me what I can and cannot do with my dick. You haven't given me any in months even so please."

Who's not respecting who here? Clearly the man right across me.

"The day we got married I received the ownership of your body. What was yours became mine and what was mine became yours but now it just seems I married my damn self cause you've been cheating on me since this fake union started."

"So?"

"So? So? Screw you Alakhe uyezwa, voetsek! Ungijwayela kabi yaz! All those Hanna's, Judy's, Londeka's and Noluntu's that you put me through nje weren't enough for you to stop all of this? I can't believe I've stayed with you for so many years when all you do is hurt me again and again. We have kids Alakhe."

"And now we have another one on the way."

Yoh!

"Koti." The Queen finally says. This is all too heavy to digest, just like brown bread with peanut butter. I even want to shed a few on behalf of Khethiwe but instead I keep strong. "I think it's enough for today."

"I agree." The King says.

She shakes her head and looks at Alakhe once more. "I heard you saying you're thinking of marrying your tramp when we got to our home..."

"Yes."

"Soze."

"I never asked for your permission though did I?"

"You need my permission. You can't marry anyone or anything without my consent."

"Sis Khethiwe, I'm the Prince of this Kingdom...soon to be the King meaning I have tremendous power. Power that allows me to decide whether I want to go east or west. Left or right. Up or down. The power to turn water into wine and have peasants pay me for every breath I take. I am all the permission I need."

He says and gets up. "Don't worry though, all of you will be invited to witness me making Eve my second wife. You can come too if you want." He points at Khethiwe before getting a hold of Zonke's hand helping her up. She's blushing like a madwoman and if she had been about 3 shades lighter she'd be the color of a ruby.

Wait did Khethiwe say Noluntu? Is there another Noluntu that I should know of or like a thousand other humans they just happen to share a name.

I look Bangi's way and say a tiny prayer. May he please never wake up and treat me like this.

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"Why are you taking me back home mama?"

"Just follow me Zanokuhle, I'll answer your Questions later but for now I need you to follow me." She says standing in front of me. I look ahead, seeing darkness surrounding the house I used to like in. I've never seen it like this before. So alone. So hair raising.

There were no other things that were in view apart from the house. And then a man...with the body type I think ive sen before. Smoke covering his face from view. Inside the house it's dense and cloggy. I couldn't see clearly. She takes my hand into hers and leads me ahead. I'm not sure in which part of the house we were now but I definitely couldn't get air into my lungs anymore. I gasp for air but it's not aiding whatsoever.

"Mama!" I feel pressure on my face. "Mama!"

"Zano!" She yells back. She lets my hand go.

"Mama!"

"Zano! Baby! Vuka!" Something shakes me and my eyes shoot

open. I'm taking in deep breaths as if my lungs would run out of that. Glancing everywhere but to the man in front of me and then eventually realise it was all just a dream. A bad, horrible dream I've never had before.

My eyes are finally on the man next to me, scanning his face and only seeing worry in them. He must probably think I'm possessed or something more especially since I've been told I speak in my dreams by Buhle.

"Are you okay?" He asks taking me into a tight hold.

"I'm... I'm fine, it was just a terrible dream." I say truthfully. "A dream I'm sure will never visit me again."

"Are you sure?"

I nod continuously. Not this again. I hate it when my mother comes to my dreams in such violent manners. I don't get it. Is she not resting? Is she not happy on the other side?

"I want to pray."

"Now?"

"Yes."

"Okay." He says and let's me go before I get off the bed and then onto my knees. He comes to join me. Kneeling next to me, taking my hand into his and I eagerly start praying my heart out.

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Morning hit and I pulled myself up sitting upright. I'm alone in here, given yet another chance to really reflect on everything that's been going on for the past three weeks since that intense meeting with Bangi's parents who didn't really do much for the situation. It even felt like it was just yesterday when it happened.

"Sthandwa sam." He reels me back in walking into our bedroom. Tray in hand with a fresh single rose. How many flowers does one girl need? I throw him a genuine smile watching him mirror it. Warming my heart in an instant. "Good thing I found you still in bed. I made you breakfast."

He lays the tray on my lap and I gawk at it. No sign of burn anywhere. I raise an eyebrow at him, giving him a questioning look.

"You did not make this." I shake my head.

"What gave it away?"

"The fact that it's not canned beans." I laugh a little.

"Okay okay...guilty as charged Sthandwa sam." He leans in for a peck on the lips. "Nandi and her magical hands did all of that. I may have been her commentator." He smiles again.

"Oh well lets see...we have bacon..."

"Crispy bacon." He says and sits at the edge of the bed.

"...eggs..."

"Scrambled with a touch of salt and pepper for added flavour."

"...toast..."

"Toasted to perfection. Not too hard and not too soft, served with locally churned butter."

My mouth waters at that. There was a glass of my favourite juice on the side too.

"Thank you my love, let me go brush my teeth and then come back and enjoy."

I've or rather we've been trying to carry on living life as normal as possible. Zonke was still around, flaunting her lies even more now. Her praising her pregnancy and claiming it be her first was what made me sicker. I knew now that I couldn't and wouldn't stand her even with the shared blood we supposedly have.

This thing was surely eating me up but the best I could do was watch her destroy herself until she decides to do what's best for her. There was also this thing that would have me cracking up everytime though.

Alakhe.

The man who considered me an idiot and a person who was just from a poor background. I even stopped taking his jabs seriously when I came to the conclusion that he was just as much of an idiot who couldn't have better judgement since he fails to see that his baby mama is just as 'poor'.

Bangi did end up telling his mother about it and she was livid. She almost bit my head off but ended up seeing that I had nothing to do with Eve. And for some odd reason she also decided to keep her mouth shut about this whole. The things we do.

Tomorrow we are going for the last inspection of those houses. The project according to my lovely husband was complete and now we just had to deal with the final proceedings, safety checks and then announcing it to the public once more and then alas have people move in. I think that excited me more. The fact that people were going to have proper shelters and new beginnings. Something positive. Something great. Something that is Eve.

I shared and finished my lovely breakfast before I went to take a shower. Bits and pieces of last night's dream come back to me as I tried to put things together. Nope. Actually I don't want to be thinking of that senseless dream.

After getting dressed I join my busband downstairs, cosing up close to him. Whatever he was watching, he took the time to restart the whole movie over. Just so I wouldn't ask him questions.

I bite on my bottom lip as Bangi finally brought me my juice with plenty of ice in it. He looks at me for a while as I soften my eyes and allow the corners of my lips to curl up.

"What?" He asks. I let my lip go, still smiling.

"Nothing. Can't a woman just smile?"

"You've been smiling at me like that a couple of times now. Since this day began. Should I worried?"

I giggle and shift for him to join me once again on the couch.

"Dont be silly." I take my drink. Cold. Refreshing. He settles behind me before I lay back between his legs. "You comfortable?"

"Yeah." He answers and I rub on his knee. He reaches out for the remote to continue the movie we are so sucked into.

Hot fuzz. An old but relatively new movie to us. I liked the fact that it was hilarious here and there and serious when it needed to be especially with Nicholas's partner PC Danny Butterman. He unpauses and the film continues. Right before it was paused two lead actors of a local production of Romeo and Juliet, whom Nicholas had pulled over earlier for speeding, were killed by some cloaked figure wielding an axe, and then later has it look like a car accident.

It's horrific in a sense.

My phone vibrates in the midst of all this and I quickly pull it out. Its a text from...Nyiso. Oh my goodness! I have been sucked in so much from all of the drama here that she slipped my mind a little.

I'm a terrible friend. Two texts. One is ancient the other is a few seconds old.

'Mge, when are you free? I miss my friend. We should go on a kota date. You're paying obviously haha.' The first text read.

I face palm myself.

'Holy balls, News now!'

Huh?

"Baby can you please check the news"

"Why whats up?" He asks already changing the channel to the news.

I shrug sitting up.

Prince Alakhe Shazi proposes to second wife on the rooftop of a luxurious hotel. Romantic! The words keep flashing on the newsflash. This man bought cameras for all of this?

Isnt that Zonke mge?' A follow up text reads.

'It seems I have a lot to tell you.'

Chapter Thirty.

"Happiness is the secret to all beauty. There is no beauty without happiness."

••

"Hold it." Lindiwe instructs me. "Breathe...relax and allow your body to become one with your mind."

One with my mind. Got it. Crap. Is there suppose to be so much pressure on my fingertips?

Both my legs and butt are up in the air, held up by the all ten of my fingers. It's hectic. I thought I was heavy, but now I definitely know that I am heavy. I peek in the direction where Lindiwe laid, holding her position like the pro Bangi hired. I envied her control and impeccable core strength. My forehead is even damp from the poses I've been put in since 06h00 in the morning.

Is yoga even supposed to make you sweat like this or...?

I wonder how my husband is doing too since it is his first day back in that gym of his after what he'd say is years of hardwork off his body. I wonder if he's surviving. He has a goal. A goal to have his old body back. The body he had once worked hard for in order to feel way better about himself.

"You can ease your legs Zano." I hear her say and immediately drop them, sighing out. Why is my first day going like hell?

The vibration of her laugh still manages to catch me off guard as she sat there, legs crossed and arms resting on her knees. "Excuse me for laughing Your Royal Highness, it is a terrible habit I've accumulated over the years."

I chuckle. "If you're laughing at me, just know that I'm laughing at myself as well." I sit up, eager to copy her sitting position.

The other leg is harder to cross.

"Does it get easier?"

"Very. But we can only achieve that with consistency and dedication. Nothing beats those two things," She says. "And if today is not the day you do everything perfectly then tomorrow and the day after that will surely be better."

I nod. I hope so. I pray I don't disappoint myself in all of this.

"Lets do a few stretches and call it a day?" She asks me.

"Yes."

Please!

I roll up my mat and rush to the kitchen for a bottle of cool water. I needed it's revitalization and something to lubricate my throat. Since the mannequins helped Lindiwe out, I didn't have much to worry about apart from waking up at 05h30 tomorrow again. I don't think I'm ready for any of that. My two dresses from Monique have arrived and I was so excited to wear them for today and whenever.

Today was going to be very busy, and I'm not quite sure how I'm going to tackle it all at once. There's the ducking of the press and media, the viewing of the new village, my meeting with Nyiso and then my check in on Buhle's moving arrangements.

A lot I tell you.

I hear the tapping of shoes coming towards the kitchen area causing me to turn in the direction it was coming from. Oh. My. Damn. Jesus.

Why?

I repeat why! Why does he do this to me? He throws me a smile, one that reaches his eyes. He was so sweaty...so confident...so mine. I've seen this torso before but today it looked anew. He heads for the fridge and also grabs a bottle of water for himself. He opens it and downs it, I'm watching his Adams apple move...up...down..the sweat dripping past his belly button before he catches it with the dark towel he held.

Yoh.

He pats more on his beautiful skin. Drying up.

"Eyes up here Sthandwa sam." He says and puts his practically empty bottle of water on the counter. I have long forgotten about the one in my hand. He makes his way forward, sandwiching me between the counter, himself...and something

hard. I swallow, pressing my thighs together. "How was yoga?" "G-Good," I clear my throat. He reaches for the bottle in my hand, puts it on the counter before hooking his towel around my neck. Pulling me in.

"And Lindiwe..was she as good as they commended her to be?"

"She was," I look at the lip he licks on.

"Does your body feel okay?"

I just nod profusely looking back at him in the eye. They had a calm tone to them, glistening perfectly underneath the morning light that came through.

"I want to kiss you so bad."

"Oh...and what's stopping you?"

"I might not stop there." He says and leans in slightly more, our lips almost brushing against each other. His breath is warm on my skin, sending tingles throughout my whole body. "Plus it's been so long since we made love Sthandwa sam. Ngizizwa ngilambile nje. Hungry for your body."

My heart almost leaps out of my mouth as his words make me want him even more. Things have been that hectic for the past few weeks that I just didn't really give attention to both our needs that much.

"Don't you miss me?" He asks, his lips now gently brushing on mine. I reach up and hold onto his broad hard shoulders. His body was still radiating in heat and dampness from his workout

and oddly enough he still smelt good enough to ravage.

"I do...but we have so much to do today."

He lets go of the towel allowing his hands to travel down the body he was turning into putty in a matter of minutes. "Am I not one of the things you have to do?"

Oh my.

"Plus I saw the looks you were giving me yesterday...I don't know what you were thinking though, but I hope it involves you and your sexy husband getting naked and giving each other what they need. A good, satisfying and filling release." He says. I bite on his lower lip earning a groan from him.

"Your wife thinks you were reading the wrong signs."

"I'm never wrong baby." He chuckles.

He lifts me up and places me on the counter. Well I have never! This man really wants to make me a meal. His whole plate of flesh. But the sound he made when lifting me up has me worried. He has never made it before while lifting me up.

"What's wrong? Am I heavier?"

"What?" He laughs while searching my eyes for something. Probably my seriousness. Can't he find it? "No baby. You are not heavier or whatever other thing you think you are. It was just arm day, so my rusty joints are going through the trails and

tribulations stage. It'll get better once I get my mojo back." He says and sticks his hands under my gym top.

That was silly of me though. I really have to work on not seeing myself in this negative light when there's so much to love about myself. This man said it himself. He wants me to start loving me because I love me and not because he says so. That way I won't break down at that 'G' word or any other shaming word out there.

He finds the band of this grey sports bra I have on and he pulls it up, resting it above my breasts. "Hawu, Ima...we're doing this here?" I ask, eyes wide open.

"What's wrong with doing it here?"

"What if..." He rolls both my nipple between his thumb and index finger. Bringing them to life. "...what if Nandi walks in to find us here?"

It was almost 07h00 anyway, which is when she'd usually show up here and start doing what I still found awkward. Cleaning our space for me.

"Relax, I told her I'm taking my wife out for breakfast today so she shouldn't bother coming in."

Ouuu...He is?

He leans in, this time claiming my lips and giving them something good and passionate to talk about. He's pulling me

in, proving that there was definitely more to this kiss that he needed and that was me. All of me. There was something about being desired and wanted that drove me crazy. That made my insides sing and dance to the quickening beat of my heart. I trusted him with my all.

I want to touch and feel him too as I move my hand over his chest, down his stomach to the stretchy band of his gym shorts. My hand glides over the bulge, eager to have it breathing and twitching in my hand and then guide it to my entrance. He looks down and then back up to me. "It got hard with me just thinking of you."

I bite on my bottom lip, those words giving me even more oomph.

There he is, ready for me. He takes in a deep breath, as my hand grips on his length, as gentle as I could manage. I didn't want to hurt him. His hand goes over mine and like once before he shows me how he wants me to do it. He grunts, nodding slightly and places his hand on cheek. I kiss the palm. The veins on his arms and the ones ones on his length are enough to drive me to more hunger. He kisses me again...

"Are you wet for me?"

"How about you find out for yourself," I prompt.

Oh God. His hand manages to slip into my tight tights and find my kitty. I knew he could feel all the wetness he's caused, and his knee weakening groan tells the exact same tale.

"I can't hold myself any longer Sthandwa sam, ngivumele." His voice is deeper, lined with lust. I just manage a nod before he hooks his hands on the band of my tights, struggling to get them off in record time. "Urgh...goddammit!" He says under his breath.

I chortle, resting my behind on the cold white marble again. He takes my shoes off and pulls the rest of the tights off leaving my socks on. I scoot to the edge of this island and watch him lower his gym shorts.

I open my legs for him to stand between them. He tries entering, but stops when I hiss. "Easy...I'm not running away." I chuckle before he tries again. Slowly filling me. Stretching me. Making my head spin and my clit to throb in excitement. The slight undertone of pain makes me bite on my upper lip holding him to me.

"So tight...so right...you feel so good around me."

He's still. Not moving an inch while in me. He leans in and plants wet kisses along my neck. "Baby..."

"Mhmm?" He moans near my ear.

"Please..."

"Please what?" His kisses trail up my jaw down to my chin. I

open my eyes and find him looking at me.

"Please make love to me. I need you...just give it to me the way you want!"

"The way I want?" He kisses my lips.

"Yes!" The muffled answer escapes my mouth. I think just having him in me was making me desperate beyond my control.

With a groan he starts thrusting deliciously slow, allowing me to feel him once again. I place my hands flat, laying back. Eyes shut as I moan. He holds onto my waist with so much meaning, stroking just as hard. I try meeting his thrusts but my position is not helping one bit. My head feels heavy as I tilt it back allowing bliss to control my body.

The gym top I'm wearing is lifted off my breasts before he his mouth is on them, sucking and dribbling the sensitive nub with his tongue. "Baby, look at me."

I open my eyes to find him looking at me. Eyes dark and filled with so much want and security. He's looking at me like I'm the only thing he'll ever need in this lifetime. Like he was looking at his most prized possession.

My Goodness. The intensity. The pressure I get when he does something with his hips that allows his to hit that delicious spot again. That spot I knew I wouldn't last long in. The same spot that has my toes curling and my heart leaping out of my mouth,

along with a lot of words I can't even remember.

"Yes...yes...right there."

I grab his neck. My hand redirects down to my vibrating clit, rubbing on it. The sensation I get from that only makes me wetter. He reaches down for my hand, lifting it up to his lips and licks my fingers before putting my hand back where it was.

Why was that so damn hot?

He picks up the pace a little holding both my thighs.

"Give it all to me baby." He says so close to my face, I could taste him. "Let me feel you go through your orgasm." Before I can even answer him I'm swept away by pleasure that takes me by surprise. My whole body takes on a life of its own where I have no control over it. I'm crying out, trembling in front of him and he allows me to take it all in. Every bit of this makes me want it never to come to an end. "So beautiful."

Oh what the heck. I pull him to me and attack him with a kiss as he lifted me off the counter. "Put me down." I say holding onto him.

"I got you."

"I don't want to hurt you." I say and kiss him. He bent down and placed me on the floor. He was leading me somewhere. The sitting room? Oh my goodness.

"I want you to turn around baby." He utters. Oh.

He's close. Kissing, breathing and nibbling down my neck sending nothing but tingles down my spine to my waiting cookie. His kisses trail to my back. His beard tickling me too...ever...so...slightly. I let out a gasp the moment both his hands smack both of my buttocks while he just chuckles behind me. With both of his hands he starts moving and squeezing them, making it jiggle in the process. "All of this is mine."

That manages to bring a smile to my lips. I reach behind me to his hands, moving them to my waist before giving my butt a life of its own. Shaking it slightly. "Forever yours Mgedezi wami." "Jesus! Baby..." I think he struggles to breathe for a moment. I let him go and once again I'm spanked. Moaning out the name of my husband. "Knees on the couch..."

The command is followed out pretty soon enough. My hands get placed on the rest of this couch before I stick my behind out a little. "Ngivulele phela sthandwa sam." A soft kiss onto my shoulder. I separate my legs.

"Like that?"

"Kancane futhi..." Well damn. As if I needed any more odd feeling positions today. Once I'm spread to his satisfaction he comes closer. I feel him rubbing himself on my entrance. One hand on my waist. "Are you comfortable?"

I nod.

"I want to hear you."

"Yes." I breathe out. The torture continues, even when I try pushing myself down he'd move away. "Bangi..."

"Mhmm?"

"Please, Give i...t aw ah! Bangi!" I fail to control myself as he started thrusting. Fast. That smacking sound of our bodies colliding fills the room. I laid my head on the rest and tried grasping at the material underneath my fingertips to no success. He kept grunting while holding onto my waist.

I meet his thrusts, my butt feeling like its moving even more now. "Fuuucckkk..." He slurred and spanked me. Why was that so sexy? "Come on baby."

Five more strokes and I was out. Exploding underneath him with a whimper.

"Lie down..." Huh? "...on your back."

I lie down as he says at the length of the couch before he gets ontop of me. He buries his head in my neck going at it deeply now and oh so slowly...so tenderly...so lovingly. It felt so good I was at the verge of tears. I held him closer to me, wrapping my legs around his waist, begging him not to stop. I knew he was close, I could hear it in his breathing which got heavier and the slight agression that would take over him. His thrusts become uneven. "Awu Sthandwa sam...awu MaDlamini...dammit!" He

finally lets go, his warmth filling me. I could feel him pulsating before he gave in, his heavy body crushing me.

I felt sated.

Once we calmed down and regained our breaths he props himself up, resting on his elbows.

"Yaz, I don't know how you expect me to look at this couch and counter the same again." I say, looking deep into his eyes. He was looking back at me, a low chuckle escaping his throat as he leaned in to peck my lips.

"The strange things you think of my love...you never cease to fascinate me." He says and reaches over to my head full of hair, picking on my afro gently.

"I think of strange things?"

"All the time my wife, and hearing what you actually think sometimes is something else," he says.

"You're talking nonsense now Bangi...entlek suka phez'kwami, I have to go shower. In fact you have to go shower too, we have a long and busy day ahead of us." I say and attempt on pushing him off me but he doesn't budge. "Bangi."

"Sthandwa sam." He flashes his knee weakening smile at me.

"We have to shower and leave."

"Kabuza ke...and then I'll get off you," he says. I roll my eyes while giggling like a little girl before holding his face in my

hands, kissing his lips slowly. Taking my time with his majestic lips. The bottom one last...tugging...nibbling...wait wait wait...

"Haibo...baby..." My breath is leaving me.

"Huh? What?"

"Are you serious? Again? You're turned on again."

"What did you think was going to happen when you kissed me like that?"

"You asked for the kiss!" I laugh.

"Well then now I ask that we deal with my situation in the shower or right here."

Why not the bed?

This man. I shake my head.

"God...what am I going to do with this insatiable man?"

"Ngasho ngathi siqale inkinga la, I shouldn't have touched you."

He gets up and off me before holding out his hands for me to take. I take both of them no questions asked and rush past him. Even if he manages to spank me. Bathong.

•••

After more minutes getting wasted on more bodily workouts and cleaning up after ourselves we finally got down to showering and getting dressed. I'm dressed in that garment Monique made me as I head to the bed to sit and put my shoes on.

"Let me help you my love," Bangi shows up from inside the closet fixing his crisp black collar, which I was surely going to fix for him again. That wine red coloured suit definitely making me proud for choosing it put of the others.

"You know I can manage right?"

"I know, I just want to do it for my wife." He says and gets down on one knee. I smile as he looked down at the straps of my heels, hooking the first one in place.

"Can I ask you something?"

"Anything," he says taking my other leg.

"I've been thinking...not long enough but it did cross my mind at some point. About my dreams. Like my literal dreams. The terrifying ones with my mother in them."

"Your mother?"

Oh right. I never did tell him about the dream I had last night.

"Last night...the nightmare I had, had her in it. We...we were walking and I can't remember what she said to me but she said something and the next thing we were in the house and I couldn't breathe

" I narrate not liking how raspy my throat felt after I said the last words.

"That doesn't sound right." He says, concern written all over his face.

"I know, but this is not the first time I've had such dreams with her in them. I always just wake up and pray and then I'll be fine. I'm sorry I didn't tell you this yesterday."

"It's okay, what matters is that you told me...but on a serious note have you consulted someone about this?"

"Someone like a sangoma?" I ask, a little shocked.

"Not a sangoma exactly per say but someone who can help you dissect and understand your dreams better. Someone who can give you more insight."

"You know...I never really thought about that. I just always felt like my mother's soul wasn't resting in peace you know. Like I probably had to like any other black family household conduct a ritual of some sort. Ngihlabe noma yinkomo nembuzi eyodwa nje to the ancestors to better the situation."

He chuckles. "Who knows, maybe that is one of the things this someone who can help you will say you should do. But whatever it is, I'll support you 1000%." He says.

I smile again. That meant a lot to me. Anything that had his support in it meant a lot to me. "Well...there you go Sthandwa sam." He gets up and like earlier on holds his hand out for me to take. Once on my feet, I fix his collar and give him a peck on the lips.

"Yaz yayinhle indoda yam nkosi," I say.

"Usho njalo?"

I nod and peck his lips.

"Well, haike asambe," He says, wearing his smile again before entwining our fingers and leading the way.

"Wait...my bag," I say in realisation.

"I guess forgetting your bag is something that happens when you have a handsome husband, I'll get it," he dashes off to fetch it from my bedside table. I laugh.

"Good morning Zakhele, is the car ready?"

"Splendid morning My Prince, My Princess..." He bows. "...The car is indeed ready for the journey."

"Excellent we're right behind you." Bangi says before Zakhele bows once more and rushes off to the outside. "I'm guessing there are no changes on my schedule since Lesego hasn't called me or said anything."

I shrug. Lesego being his personal assistant who basically lays down all the things he gets up to on a weekly basis. Even daily when needed. I've met her a couple of times and all I can say is she definitely knows what she's doing. I didn't even know this man had a meeting almost every week... Heck I'm even embarrassed to think that I didn't think someone of his nature would have a personal assistant. Somehow I thought he just knew his stuff and could keep himself in order. Again I wonder why I'd think that when you literally have to help control and watch over a whole Kingdom.

Anyway, she does a pretty good job. I haven't seen her fail thus far.

We carried on behind, gracing these floors with a pace that felt right, before I heard a laugh I chose to ignore. My mood was too high to be tumbled down. As soon as Bangi glanced back I knew he was worried for me and how I'd act around the two who were hurriedly approaching us. I knew he would rather put me in my bag he's holding until the killjoys pass us but I didn't want that. Instead I hold his hand tighter and carry on walking.

They almost pass us when Zonke looks behind and pulls Alakhe to a stop as well, a fake smile playing on her lips. "Oh, goodness...we didn't see you there," Mrs Law firm says clearly lying through gritted teeth.

I chuckle. "Morning Eve...Alakhe...I hope you two are doing well today. Congratulations on your engagement," I say before she practically shoves the stone in my face for a closer look of all her hard work. This time her smile is genuine.

"Thank you, thank you...I mean its not everyday that a man proposes with an 18 carat gold diamond ring," she says.

"You must feel very lucky," I say and look up at Bangi who just has a bored facial expression on his face.

"As she should," he says, clearing his throat.

"Its also not everyday that the wife of a Prince should go out looking like a hobo. What's wrong Bangizwe? Can't afford to

buy your wife a weave? Or better yet, have you no shame brother? You know that this palace has a status to uphold and right now you are not representing its status. You're embarrassing us," Alakhe says and I couldn't stop myself from chortling.

Wait, wait, wait...is his actual problem my Afro? The same afro Zonke is nurturing under that weave of hers is suddenly unacceptable and labeled hobo status? The same Afro my own husband adores this much and actually helped me wash, dry and detangle after I took my braids out? That's the same Afro that's getting bashed. Is he serious?

Bangi takes in a deep breath as I use my other hand to rub on his knuckles. "It's funny how you're already embarrassing yourself big brother without my help. I don't appreciate you talking about my wife the way you do cause she is none of your business. Good day."

"Mxm." Alakhe. They storm away, Zonke failing to keep up and nearly falls over. Shooting to the outside where they skip down the stairs and into the car we had organised. They get in along with their driver before it goes off. Great. These two are definitely the same. Both only look out for themselves and don't see themselves as being the ones who are wrong.

"Well there's something you don't see everyday," I say.

"Indeed...Zakhele, please arrange another car for us as quick as

possible," my husband says and he bows before rushing off. I knew we we're going to be waiting here for a few long minutes because of the safety checks and car checks that ensure that the car is safe for the road.

•••

"I'm posting these," I say and show him the picture I took of us back in the car. I loved how he focused on the camera and not on me on this one. It seemed to be his thing when I would propose we take a few selfies. "And probably this one too..." I say and scroll to the next one.

"You and photos Sthandwa sam," he shakes his head and sips on his juice.

"What are you talking about Mgedezi?" The next one is deleted. Our eyes were closed.

"My phone is just filled with your beautiful videos and pictures nje...even I didn't take as much pictures as you do."

"So...are you saying I should dele..."

"No no no no. Cha Sthandwa sam, that's not what I was saying."

"Your Royal Highness...I'm sorry to interrupt. I have your food...uh...eggs Benedict with a grilled cheese and bacon sandwich." She puts the plate in front of me. Goodness me.

"For you my Prince, fish with Sweet potato fries and an avocado salad."

I cringe.

"Enjoy."

"Thanks," he says as she walks off before we get to tuck into our brunch. "Well this is a bad start to my diet."

I know...

"I want to try your fish. Can I?"

"Only if I can try your eggs Benedict." He portions out a bite size piece of fish for me along with a sweet potato fry and a piece of tomato from his salad.

"No avocado please."

"But the avocado is the best part."

"I don't like avocado that much," I shrug.

"Heeh, okay."

•••

"Wow," I breathe out. These houses were not like this the last time we came here. They had a fresh coat of paint and looked pretty decent if I could say so. They didn't even look like two roomed houses from this angle. "This is the same place?"

"Yes...I'm guessing you like it?"

"It's not even for me to like but I'm blown away. My love..." My voice cracks. I don't know why I'm suddenly all up in my feelings right now but I was. I think just by thinking of all the new

families that are going to be moved here and how much their lives are about to change was all in all what had me excited. I knew some of the families that were being moved to this place mainly because they were my learners once upon a time.

"...this is amazing."

"Ah, Charlie." Bangi says to the man whose hand he shakes firmly. He shakes mine too.

"Your Royal Highness. Welcome."

"Splendid work here Charlie, my wife can't stop praising the outcome she's seeing."

"I'm glad I could impress." He says sounding quite proud of the work he did. "Would you like to see the inside?"

"Yes, please." I answer on both our behalves. Bangi laughs a little before taking my hand and walking in with me, Charlie and half a dozen of these precious mannequins.

The inside was just as impressive. Tiles? Well damn. Flushing toilet...ya neh. "My love..."

He looks down at me. Why am I even whispering? "...how...how much was invested on all of this?"

"Four million, two hundred thousand, rounded off. We added 10 hou..." The rest of his words just go in one ear and out the other.

"Yoh!"

Did he just say 42000000?

Like six whole zeros?

One, two, three, four, five, six?

I think I got dizzy for a second there. I never thought I'd hear anyone say that they've spent that amount of money...not even on themselves. And he said all of this is just the start. Madness is alive people.

"You okay?"

"I'm... I'm fine, just shocked. That's a lot of money."

"It isn't actually."

"Hayi for you maybe but some people have never held that amount in their own bare hands, never mind even seen it." I say.

I glance around some more before we step out again. There was a list. A list that was soon going to be known by the people of this kingdom and that was another thing I couldn't wait to see unfold. "So, when are the people moving in?"

"As soon as all the safety checks are done and we're sure all these houses are safe for the elderly, kids as young as 1 day old, women, men and anything that breathes nje."

"Don't you do that before?"

"We do. But I don't want any mistakes."

"And if there are faults?"

"Then we wait Sthandwa sam for a solution."

Mhnn...hectic.

"You know...I still haven't found a name suitable for this place."

"Oh?"

Pictures are taken. The press is just everywhere. Ready. "How about Shazifontein?"

I chortle.

"Shazifontein?"

"I'm kidding...I mean how about Siqalo or...I don't know?"

"Siqalo you say? He nods slightly. Haibo.

"Ngiyaz'dlalela mina my love."

"I like it..." I give him a look. "...Charlie, we have a name."

•••

"Mge what are you telling me?" She sits forward on her couch, shock the only thing on her face.

"Exactly that mge. It still is hard to swallow but I've made peace with the fact that I cant change Zonke and her ways."

"But...but how is this even possible? Didn't Alakhe see her even once at your place? Somewhere?"

"Nope. She wasn't even there for amalobolo wami remember...not even for my wedding so you see."

"Your sister is something else shame. So you're saying she lied about having businesses and even her entirety."

"She's even using her second name Mge."

Nyiso claps once before placing her hands back on her belly. It was so big now. Beautiful too.

"So what are you going to do...or at least what have you done about this?"

I tell her everything there is to this story and about how only the Queen knows about this. As we were talking, Deliverance comes in with his phone in his hold. I frown. It's so unlike him to just disturb us like this. "My Princess, I'm sorry for interrupting you, but the Prince has been trying to reach you to no avail. He requests to speak with you." He hands me the phone.

Oh.

"Malinga wami...sorry about that my phone is on do not disturb mode. I didn't think you'd need me." I say as soon as the phone is on my ear

"It's okay. I hope you're enjoying yourself there. Your sister is on the news, that's why I'm calling."

"Serious?" I gaze at Nyiso pointing at the remote before mouthing a 'news channel' to her. She switches on the TV, immediately bringing those two to light. "When did it start?"

"About five minutes ago...that's all I wanted to say. I miss you."

"You'll see me in a few hours hawu."

"Still doesn't make me miss you any less."

"Mhmm."

"Switch your don't disturb off."

"Okay my love," I say rolling my eyes with hurting cheeks. This man. I hand Deliverance his phone back and thank him before focussing on the screen. My phone is back on volume.

"My sources were also trying to reach me...they've only spoken about how they got engaged," Nyiso fills me in.

"Okay."

"I didn't think he'd propose this early on in the relationship. He really took me by surprise." Zonke says.

"And how did you and Miss Eve Zungu meet if I may ask?"

"It's a funny story actually. I was coming from my law firm business and I was just in a rush to...to get home and soak in my bathtub..."

She means indishi!

"...when I bumped into one of his guards and all my paperwork just flew right onto the ground. He was furious about my blindness and nearly bit my head off before our eyes locked and he finally shut up, helping me pick all of them up. " she laughs but there was nothing funny in that sentence. In fact this whole cooked up polony is just filled with red flags. He was nodding there next to him, confirming everything.

"...I knew then that he was the one for me. We started dating a few days later and here we are."

"Must've been a beautiful relationship to bring home." Mrs Utchi the same woman who interviewed us said to them.

"Absolutely, my parents, siblings, his wife, my children and Khethiwe...my first wife were very welcoming to the news as soon as they heard." Alakhe says. It looks like it hurts when he smiles honestly.

The lies! Nyiso convulses in laughter.

"So this union is even blessed by the first wife?"

"My wife is a very open minded woman who was raised to know of these customs and norms that have been around way before we were even born. She knows that the bigger the family the better. So yes, she has blessed us and will even be there when we tie the knot."

I'm sure Khethiwe is boiling wherever she is. I know I would be.

"We're actually friends now." Zonke says.

"Ya, your sister definitely has no consciousness." Nyiso says.

I shake my head. Does Zonke even know what that is?

One of the producers we met while there comes forward and quickly whispers something to Utchi, something that would only happen during the break.

"So...it seems that there are a few fans who want to say a few things to you two...is that okay with you Your Royal Highness?"

We saw and got all of that after the show.

"Sure go ahead...we love our fans." Zonke chips in and turns to pecks Alakhe's lips.

"Okay...here we have @NdabukoM who says 'congratulations to the Prince and soon to be Princess of Emashazini, we hope you two lead with just as much love you portray here.'"

"Ncaaaww...thanks NdabukoM." Zonke.

"Another one from @Falcon8899 reads 'can't wait to see their wedding. She looks awfully a lot like Princess Zanokuhle Shazi, the wife of the King's second son.'"

I chuckle.

What?

Zonke laughs too but Alakhe is not having it. If people only knew how much he hated me and how I looked like, this surely was no compliment to him but rather an insult.

"@TwoLeeSeaWear says, she looks awfully a lot like a woman named Zonke Dlamini who I used to work with. She was the rudest woman I've ever come across and wouldn't even wish her personality onto anyone else...' I think I shou...no? Okay uh... '...the woman had so much pride with nothing to show for it. Changing married men like panties. Sies. Anyway congra!!!! #AlakheandEve."

I'm sweating.

"Wow...p...people are some...thing else. Thanks Thulisiwe."
Zonke says and clears her throat. "I think that's enough now."

I feel uncomfortable for Zonke as she squirms, the camera still shining brightly on her.

Nyiso and I look at each other for a second. Mrs Utchi presses on her ear piece and nods. "We have a caller on the line and after this we go to a break..."

Bathong this place takes phonecalls too?

"Anonymous hello."

"Hi...I have a question neh. I know people can look the same mara awa, this one is not it. I'm sure sure. Since when does Zonke own Zunguza law firm business when we both used to clean toilets of that place only? The paperwork? Yey Zonke Bonke, isn't it the paperwork that went missing from Monde's working desk? I knew you stole it."

"What?" Nyiso and I.

"Excuse me but who is this Zonke woman you're talking about?" Utchi asks.

"The same liar on your couch today Utchi. She's Zonke Dlamini. Her sister is the same woman who was on your seat not so long ago. Ya neh these sisters are clever!"

What?

"What nonsense is this? Turn off the fucking cameras! Cancel this fucking show!" Alakhe gets up.

"It's not what it lo..." Their mikes get cut off and Utchi announces a break before we're taken to an ad.

I don't move for the longest of times, my phone vibrating in my hand. It has begun. The truth was finally out.

Chapter Thirty One.

"Roses are red, violets are blue. Sometimes in life you've got to look out for you."

••

I was escorted back to the palace not a moment later after the whole Zonke thing blew the internet over, all in the name of protection. The exaggeration though is what I didn't get but I knew Bangi was happier seeing me here in his space than out there.

I couldn't stop myself from scrolling through my phone taking all of this in as it came. Article after article. I tried though, believe me. But as we all know, curiosity does in fact kill the cat. No questions asked.

The third article. 'THIS JUST IN: HOT SCOOP! PRINCE ALAKHE ENGAGED TO A FRAUD AND A LIAR.' the heading in bold read and I cringed. I already knew what they'd write in it, judging from the picture taken from Mrs Utchi's television program where Alakhe was up on his feet looking ready to pounce on anything that ticked him off even more.

I was also in there. One of the pictures you never know people take of you right there in a huge red circle. I hated this. I hated how my name was also dragged into this mess and how I was also seen as a liar for living my life. Did Zonke even think this through or was she just envisioning this going smoothly with nothing to hinder her whatsoever?

'The Mine-sisters score Gold while bagging Royalty.' Oh God. This one is worse. How do I face the world after such? Do you even face the world after such is said about you? I shake my head and read the next article...and the next...and the next...and the ne...bathong!

"Bangi," I gawk at him as he takes my phone and switches it off before shoving it in his pocket. "I was busy with that."

"Stop. This is not good for you," He sits down next to me.

"So sitting here and wondering what the hell is going on out is good for me?"

"How is reading a bunch of rubbish articles going to help anyway? You want these lies to just be going through your mind and make you feel like they're true?"

"No but..."

"Sthandwa sam, please."

I heave out a heavy sigh and lay back, folding my arms in front of my chest.

"Where's your brother and Zonke?"

"They got here about a few minutes ago, avoiding the media as they should."

"Zonke marn naye!" I click my tongue. "I mean now the articles are even digging up more crap from our past. Crap like my father and how we grew up. All of the things that just makes all of this sound like it was planned you know...and now...Buhle and Khaya..." I sit up in realisation. I didn't even call to check up on them since this whole thing blew right open. "I need to call them."

"I've sent them protection Sthandwa sam, they are safe."

"I still need to check up on them..." I say but as soon as I finish saying those words there's banging on the door. I'm up on my feet, shocked and suddenly nervous by whoever is behind that door.

No one has ever banged on it like that before. Bangi is up too, standing in front of me with a questioning look on his face, obviously wondering the same thing. The door then bursts open and I wish I could've disappeared right there and then when I see the man who once adored me wearing a face of hatred.

"Baba, what is the meaning of this?" Bangi asks.

"Get out of my way." He roars still lunging to us.

"What for?"

"Bangizwe how can you be harboring a snake right under your nose?"

"A sna..."

"You! You!" He point at me but Bangi is quick to remove his pointed finger from my face. "Bangizwe! This woman has proven to be unfaithful to this family! Bringing such shame and embarrassment to my kingship. She knew that that woman is her sister and she chose to keep quiet yet you still defend her!"

"She is my wife baba an..."

"You are my son! This family should come first! Not some low life bimb..." He doesn't even that sentence as Bangi pushes him. His own father.

Oh my God.

I try holding onto his forearm, hopefully preventing a full on fight. Something I never thought I'd see happening between my husband and father. All this because of my family.

"Bangizwe...so you now have the balls to lay your hands on me? Your own father?"

"Disrespect my wife once more without knowing the facts and I won't hesitate to do that again."

"Bangi..." I reprimand. He shouldn't be saying such.

"You seem to forget that this is my palace."

"So what? You want us to move out cause we would gladly do that. I wont live for this."

His father is quiet, still looking at me like he would kill me if given the chance. And I'm afraid that that's what he would've done if Bangi wasn't here. I'm surprised I'm not even crying yet.

"I want both of you at The Table. Now." He says and turns on his heel storming out again, slamming the door shut.

Bangi holds onto my shoulders making me snap out of my thoughts. I shake my head, the only thing running through my mind is running upstairs and pack up everything I have and run away before my life is cut short by the man who just rattled my soul. I have siblings to live for.

"I want to leave Bangi."

"Ini? No. You're not going anywhere Sthandwa sam. Not without me."

Bathong. Not without him? "Did you not see how angry your father was in here? Did you not hear what he said? I've lost his trust."

"And? If he wants the truth then that's he'll get but I want you to forget about running away cause that's not happening."

I avert my eyes from him wondering what the hell is going to happen next. And I just couldn't stop thinking of the worst most especially since that was the only thing that made sense right now. "He won't touch you. Not even a hair on your head as long as I'm still around and have anything to do with it."

Somehow I end up looking back at him before nodding slightly. Again there was absolutely no debate about that. "Let's go." He clasps my hand in his and I hesitantly follow his lead as we made our way out. The guards looked like they were in distress.

Honestly there's nothing I'd appreciate more right now than a peaceful dinner with my husband and no drama. Especially drama that could've been avoided had I said something at all those awkward dinners. "Here." He hands me his phone. "Call your siblings."

Oh. I unlock it and go straight to dial, typing in Buhle's number first and call. It rings for a while before she actually answers.

"Hello?"

"Buhle...it's me, Zano."

"Zano" she sighs. "What the hell is going on? You and Zonke are all over the news, there's royal guards here and I can't just go anywhere now cause people will look at me weirdly."

"I'm just glad you're safe. Look, don't...if they miraculously find your numbers answer any questions okay. I'll try and explain everything to you later," I say and just hang up after that.

Khaya is also as confused as Buhle was but like I've promised to her, I promise to him as well. I'm just glad that they were both in safe hands and were willing to follow out my mini requests.

The atmosphere in here is thick. Dim. Heavy. And bother line devastating. Everyone is just quiet. Ama has her face buried in her hands while Khethiwe just looked off into space. I'm pretty sure she had a lot of things she was thinking of. Bangi gently tugs on my hand. I must've stopped walking unconsciously.

We get to the table, our usual spot was open and cold. Ama looked up and I could definitely tell she had been crying. Khethiwe focuses on me and she gets up. "You!"

"Sit down." Bangi commanded. "I won't repeat myself."

If thoughts were loud I'd have been mashed up right now. Stabbed in the heart by the truth and my clear betrayal to our little friendship and tolerance. She finally plots her behind back on her chair before I swallow and sit down at the chair Bangi pulls out for me. He's sitting on my seat which would typically be next to the King.

Khethiwe chuckles, shaking her head profusely. "You sat there like that for the past month acting like you don't know the bitch

meanwhile you both come from the same rotten womb? How evil can you two be huh? How inconsiderate can you be to not tell me or at least hint me that this is what you came here to do? You know with the others I understood cause there was no one who could warn about the backstabbing that's happening. I had to go out there and find out that shit myself but with this..."

"My wife did nothing wrong."

"That woman failed to keep this family out of whatever mess this is." The King.

"My wife was minding our business as she should."

"Your wife should have this family's success first in her heart. The day she became a part of this family it became her business." The King says.

"I..." I start speaking but the King stops me right in my tracks.

"Not another lie from your mouth..." I look down and my knotted fingers and instead of feeling sad, I feel pissed. "...My first mistake was blessing and allowing this marriage to happen.

My second mistake was thinking that someone of your status could be trusted. My third mistake was allowing my son to foolishly let King Xhanti's daughter slip away from..."

"Senzo!" Bangi's mother interferences. "Stop it. Your shouting will not aid in this situation at all."

But he's right. I haven't even secured a tangible spot in their hearts yet and then this happens.

"Mama why didn't you tell your husband you knew about this the moment I told you?" Bangi.

"Yeh?" His Father. I glance up at the mother who gave birth to my husband hoping she'd answer this as well. Why didn't she tell her precious Senzo about this before he and the woman right across me bashed my resting mother like she knew her. It had to get to this moment?

"Tell him you knew ma. Tell this whole table you knew of Zonke. You know my wife had nothing to do with this but right now you're quiet allowing him to emotionally abuse my wife. How can you just sit there?"

She takes in a deep breath before running a hand past her forehead. "I did know about all of this Senzo. It just wasn't easy for me to say it to you because I knew you'd react the same way you're reacting right now. Bangizwe did tell me that lady's name is actually Zonke and she's Zanokuhle sister who doesn't have all the things she claims to have. He told me Zanokuhle had nothing to do with this and was just as shocked to see her here with Alakhe."

I think I understood now why Bangi chose to tell her first though and not necessarily his father.

"What am I to be if I can't even trust my own wife? It's clear snakes are everywhere in this house." He pushes his chair back

after banging on the table. Without a further glance he walks off and doesn't even look back. Not even for a 'goodnight'.

What a stupid thought though. Why would he even say that when he's livid?

I feel Bangi's hand on mine once again.

"I think we should go Sthandwa sam," he says getting up. I follow suit, holding tightly to his hand.

•••

I step out of the shower and immediately get to drying my body. I had hoped that it would make me feel better but I just felt the same. The same girl who managed to lose yet another family. A family I wanted nothing but the best for. We haven't even been a family for a year and already I'm in their bad books.

My heart aches at the thought of if it were Bangi who didn't know anything about Zonke. I probably wouldn't be here right now. The door opens and he peeks in before walking in.

"Our food is here." He says and comes to stand behind me, hugging me by my shoulders. A kiss on my cheek before our eyes lock on the mirror in front of us.

"I don't think I'm hungry."

"Nonsense." He laughs a little. "Usuthi udleni? (What did you eat then?)"

Somehow him smiling manages to put a small smile on my face.

"Okay maybe I am a little hungry ke...what did you get us?"

"Prime steak pizza with mushrooms."

Okay, there goes my mouth watering like I didn't just suggest I'd go to bed without eating at all. "Let me lotion and join you ke."

"I'll wait for you then." He says and pecks my cheek again before stepping out first. I take my lotion and quickly leather my body. I didn't want the pizza to get cold phela. I wrap one of the dry towels around my bosom. Once I feel like I'm done I head out, finding him settled on the bed busy on his phone.

I then head to the closet for shoes I could put on. The closets thing there, are his slippers. Yoh, they're huge. I find myself just breaking down in laughter.

"Haibo wahleka uwedwa yini manje?"

I feel his presence behind me. When I look up at him he looks somewhat amused, arms crossed in front of his chest. "My love your feet are like shovels."

He laughs. I take a step forward but trip over the huge slipper and land in his hands. Oh my goodness. "Not you falling for me all over again." He titters. "Take those off, they're clearly not safe."

"Hayi." I chuckle and step back. "I just need to be extra cautious while walking ngalama hhalavu wakho."

"Amahalavu wami? (My shovels?)" He shakes his head.

"Asambe. Ipizza izobe ibande. (Lets go before the pizza gets cold.)"

We head downstairs. Dinner was set up by the sitting room. It looked cosy. Drinks and all. He sits down and pats on his lap, prompting me to sit on it. I bring the boxes closer and put them on the empty space next to him before straddling him. Probably should've gotten dressed for this

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but anyway he opens the box and the smells immediately invade my nose. I'm the first one to even take a slice before taking a big bite. Wow. Heaven I tell you. The flavours were just

so balanced and made perfect sense. I open my eyes to find him with the biggest grin ever on his face.

I clear my throat and swallow and right after that get a serviette to wipe the corners of my lips. "Sorry. I didn't even wait for you. We didn't even say grace."

"Idla sthandwa sam..."

I slightly shake my head and shove more of this pizza in my mouth. "So...what happens now?"

"Now?"

"I mean with everything that's going on...what happens next?"

"Well, I was thinking of releasing a public statement releasing you from any more false accusations and see what that does."

"Like you did when you needed to clear the air about us?"

"Yeah."

"But how will that stop people from writing more stuff for following? We all know how people are."

"We do, I also know that gossip or conspiracy theories sell the best out there for media companies looking for a lift up but if they don't want the truth then we'll sue them."

I chuckle. "Kanjalo nje?"

"Ya... but you'll see, all of this will blow over..."

"And your father will still doubt me."

"Sthandwa sam, he was angry. We all were angry."

"So he's one of those huh."

"Actually Let me not justify his actions. He's his own man, very prideful too. If he doesn't apologise to you though..." He chuckles bitterly, the conversation turning darker and darker by the second. I didn't need that. We both didn't.

"How about we talk about something else?"

"You're right, lets. How was your day with your friend?"

"Great until the thing happened. We caught up...talked mostly about our honeymoon and how it's been like staying at home not waking up to go to work. We also talked about how I've

settled in here...with you..." He swallows. He has some sauce on the corner of his mouth which I wipe away while talking. "...We also talked about her pregnancy which is going beautifully by the way. She's having a baby boy and I'm so excited to be his awesome godmommy."

"Awesome?"

"Ya awesome hawu..." I give him a look. "...anyway I was thinking of throwing her a baby shower, something small that I can afford. You know surprise her...I can call her mom and a few of our friends, a photographer too. I'll just have to find out first though when this can happen cause we both have to be free on that day ...okay but now that I say it out loud I have to get a move on because she's due in like a month...and yoh no maybe I shouldn't do this. I mean I don't even know the first thing when it comes to planning things." I bite my pizza realising I've just said a lot. Why didn't he stop me and my unnesseccary rambling. I look at him and shrug.

"Basically we talked a lot."

"I can tell." He chuckles, placing the tiny portion of pizza that's left in the box and takes a new serviette to wipe his fingers clean. "Well..." Hands go onto my thighs. "...first of all I love the idea. It sounds like it'll be fun. Secondly I can get you help Sthandwa sam...and thirdly whats mine is yours, You know this by now and if you want to go all out for your friend then do it. Money is not a problem."

I shake my head and finish off the small piece I still had in my hand. Okay. Okay. Get used to it Zano. You're here now. Not back in your village with broke problems. Okay no, that sounded a bit too arrogant for my liking.

He moves one hand from my thigh and puts it on my stomach while I reached for another slice of goodness. When I look at him he's focussed on my belly, he has a smile on his face and a calm aura to him, one that I want to soak in for eternity.

Until it hits me. "Hayi...hayi tell me you aren't thinking what I think you're thinking."

"And what is it that I'm thinking?"

"My love akuna ngane lapho." I playfully hit his hand.

He looks up at me. "MaDlamini, you sound so sure."

I am sure. I've been using those patches properly and according to me and my body there shouldn't be anything in there yet. Apart from my healthy intestines and fat. I hope. Hayi I'm not.

"All this pregnancy talk has me wanting a bun in this over already."

"Hectic. Ses'khuluma ngama buns manje."

Okay that was meant to stay in my mind.

"I can't wait to have a little family with you. Our Shazi home. Our baby running around here...making noise and having us to depend on. A beautiful baby girl that looks exactly like her mother. Our angel."

The way he put that was just everything. I should definitely thank the Lord for a man like him everyday.

"And what if we get a boy first?"

"Then we send him back." He says and I burst out in laughter.

What the heck! He's being ridiculous.

"Ungadlali kanjalo my love."

"He'll get love. Plenty of it too. Whatever we do get first will be ours and that's all that matters in the end." He leans in and kisses me innocently.

"I'd like him to look exactly like his father...and have his heart too. His kind, loving and generous heart that is my everything." I say and run my thumb across his bottom lip. His eyes shine under the light of this room. "I love you Bangizwe. Malinga wam omuhle."

I feel like I say this all the damn but my goodness, I mean it every single time. It comes from deep within my being and I knew that it felt like it if the words were to be a power source the whole galaxy would benefit from it. Shining bright.

"I love you too Sthandwa sam."



An annoying ringing sound is what wakes me up from my precious sleep. I tap on the arm around my waist holding me tightly. "Bang!...Bang!..." I call him out, still sleepy as hell. He must really be tired too then. I shift, forcing myself up but it fails since he holds me tighter.

"Uh-uh."

"Your phone is ringing."

"Ignore it." He groans.

"Ignore it? I can't just ignore it, please switch it off."

"Okay..." He lets me go and finally ends the loud torture. Good. I get comfortable once again, shutting my eyes and channel my sleep back. "...Ama it's 02h00 in the morning. Why are y...huh...I can't hear you...What?" He raises his voice at the last word.

Now he has my attention. I turn in the bed and face him blinking a few times to stop the irritation my eyes were going through.

"I'm coming." He hangs up and immediately gets out of bed.

"And then? Where are you going?" I sit up.

"I'll be back."

"What? No. What's wrong?" He heads to the closet before I'm out of bed too, right behind him. "Bangi Tell me."

"It's... It's your sister. She's been rushed off to the emergency room."

"Who Buhle?" The moment I say that I realise that that would be highly impossible because Ama is the one that called Bangi.

Oh wow. I'm getting dressed too. Fast.

What happened? Why would she be rushed to the emergency room? I'm flooded by hectic questions exhausted by the drama

that Zonke is bringing again. Did she hurt herself and then what? Mxm. This woman never gives up does she? I mean is all this even necessary?

We rush down the stairs, with me swiftly behind him. He's not saying anything to at least tell me what Zonke did to herself mercilessly.

"Did she shoot herself?"

"Who?"

"Hawu...uZonke my love. We both know she can't just be taken to an emergency room without something major to write home about."

He doesn't respond. Seriously? I walk out first at the door that he holds open for me. So many guards running up and down at damn two in the morning. This must be damn serious then. I spot Bangi's mother. The closer we get to her the more I realise

that she had been crying. She looks away, privately wiping away her tears.

"Ma...where is he?" Bangi.

"So much blood."

"Ma?"

Ama comes running to us. Her top covered in blood. Oh my God. Oh my God. I take in a deep breath. "Who's blood is that?" She looks my way and let's out a heavy sigh and shakes her head.

"Eve's... I mean Zonke's."

"What? What happened?"

"I don't know, but she was still breathing when I got to them."

"Them? What? Where is she now?"

I know they said she was rushed to an emergency room but no one said which one. She tells Bangi instead and I want to be taken there immediately. Bangi's mother protests against all of this stating that we should stay put. Is she serious? Is she forgetting that the woman that's in hospital right now is my sister? My blood.

"I'll go with her it's fine." Bangi says and takes my hand before we rush to royal fleet, where this palace kept their cars. Mannequins are right there with us being told by my man that they could follow right behind us. I knew his mother sent them here and because of the situation, I understood.

"Shit...keys. Zondo, keys now." He says and turns to one of the men here.

"My Prince we..."

"Now!" He half yells.

I hated this. All of it. Now my man was losing sleep because of my sister. He's already grumpy and I could see. Zondo fishes a key out of his pocket and hands it to Bangi who unlocks a jeep. The passenger door is opened and I step in, sitting and buckling up right before he closes the door.

The drive is quiet. Filled with my worries of what could've happened a few minutes before that call. I'm wondering how bad she's hurt and what has caused all the blood that I saw back in there. Ama said she was still breathing when she got to them so that means she was near death or what exactly? Why didn't Ama speak up?

A hand on my thigh catches my attention right before it squeezes gently on it causing me to look his way. He quickly glances at me and then back on the road. "She'll be fine Sthandwa sam."

"You don't know that Bangi. You don't. You don't even know what happened do you?" I wipe away the lone tear that escapes my eye.

"I don't but that doesn't mean we should behave as if she isn't in capable hands..."

"In what state though? Did you not see the blood? Did you not see the panic in Ama's eyes? The shiver in your mother's voice? Wherever Zonke is right now she could be dying and I should just believe she's fine? No." I look back out of the window again.

The drive just suddenly so tense and bitter because of the words I spoke right now. I hate this. I hated the tone I used towards my husband. I hated feeling like I was prioritising the woman who bought all of this onto herself and not the man who was just trying to make me feel better.

The hospital isn't as packed as I expected but it's busy. The mannequins are immediately by our sides, ready for anything it seemed. A woman came to us, introducing herself and asking us questions before escorting us to a private ward where we could sit and wait for a further information since we had nothing still. The ward is as quiet as I'd expect it to be. Two mannequins are at the entrance. At attention. Silent too.

"My love..." He doesn't look at me. I sigh. I probably deserved that. "...I'm sorry. I'm sorry for how I spoke to you earlier in the car and for making you feel as if your efforts meant nothing to me when they do." He finally looks at me not saying a thing though. I look down my knotted fingers before He shifts, his arm resting on my shoulder holding me to him. He says nothing though.

Minutes of sitting go by and the only difference we've had is a change of room. Mr Mphela's office to be specific and I've honestly had enough of the waiting and not knowing. I yawn again, my eyes feeling heavy from the lack of sleep I was going through.

"Sthandwa sam I think you should get some rest on the bed there."

"I'm not tired Bangi." Another yawn betrays me.

He gets up. "Come on."

I sigh and get up, following him to the bed we were told we could use to rest in. I get on first before he gets on behind me. It's not a big bed but we manage. He kisses my shoulder before I allow the sleep to consume me bit by bit.

My eyes open to the sound of the door opening. A man in turquoise scrubs makes his way in. I quickly sit up realising that Bangi wasn't beside me anymore but rather on the chair not so far from me. I couldn't read his face but it was blank. The minimal grey morning light shone through the blinds giving light to this room.

The man removes his mask and closes the door behind him before coming to shake our hands. "Morning Your Royal Highness's, I'm Doctor Mphela one of the doctors who were operating on Miss Dlamini."

"O...operating?"

I don't even know why I ask that stupid question especially after seeing that that was the obvious reason for our waiting. I mean they couldn't have been partying out there while taking body shots while we slept so uncomfortably.

"Yes My Princess." I get off the bed, Bangi next to me in seconds. "Miss Dlamini came in here in a very critical state that required our immediate medical attention which we by some miracle managed to handle and bring her out of danger's way, stabilizing her. Unfortunately she did suffer a few fractured bones, two in her arm, one on her knee and a very serious one on her neck."

I gasp. Neck? The neck is connect to the spine. Oh my God.

"She also suffered a blow to the head with..." I gasp. He stops looking between me and Bangi.

"Please...continue." I force.

He shakes his head. "I'm very sorry to be the one to bear all of this. I wish there was also a way we could've prevented her miscarriage but..."

"She lost the baby too?" Okay now I'm letting them out.

"I'm sorry...."

Chapter Thirty Two.

"You don't enter something to come second."

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The pain I was feeling inside was foreign feeling, only because I didn't think seeing someone who has been hurting me so much despite all my efforts would hurt as much as it did. I wanted to be angry at her, for not listening to me and not doing things by the book and lying and scheming and making people think that my family is just a bunch of rotten broke scums. But I just didn't feel like this was the time. Not when she's laying there, bandages all over her limbs and is barely conscious. Not when the beeping sounds of the monitor is loud and proud in this room.

I almost lost her. The one and only older sister in my life all because of her ways. I almost buried someone I wouldn't even think I'd have to bury so early and all of that for what exactly? For money? Status? What?

I haven't cried though since I came in here. I couldn't. I just wanted to stare at her with all my unanswered questions. Slap her too. But I instead just continued sitting there wondering how She'll take the news of losing her baby. How it would even feel to go through such pain.

A hand goes onto my shoulder. It's Bangi. An exhausted looking Bangi who just gives me a small side smile and then allows his face to drop again.

"Dr Mphela said we should head home and get some rest. I think that would be the best option right now."

He's right. We've been here since past 02h00 in the morning and now it's around 06h00 . I get up and we head out, with the promise to be informed when she is to wake up from her coma. That heart pleasing assurance had me feeling a tad better.

"I called Thandiwe to cancel your yoga session for today, figured the time isn't right to have her around."

"Thank you my love," I say, my voice low but hopefully still audible.

Its grey and gloomy outside with clear indication of the upcoming rain that we may experience. I don't even know what the weather will be like as the day continued ahead but right now I was certain we might see a few drops. When we get to the palace I feel my mood drop even more as I hope I don't bump into anyone. I wonder if they even got some sleep after everything or...

"What the?" I ask getting to the entrance of our home, bags and plastics in front of our door. Blocking the big entrance.

"What is this?" I let Bangi's hand go and head to the things. He

excuses himself to go get a guard who would better explain this situation to us.

"I hope you know what to do with all that shit cause I surely would've burned it all to ashes." I hear Khethiwe say and walk up where Bangi once stood.

"What is this?"

"That, is that tramp of a sisters bags and stuff that I had to discard from my house for my own sanity."

"Sanity? Are you the one who hurt my sister in that way?"

She shrugs, not a trace of care in her body.

"Do you know she's laying in that bed now with broken bones. She nearly died and all you have to do is shrug?"

"Ufuna ngihleka yini Zanokuhle? Don't forget that I was the fool here for believe you were family to me after this month went by only for you to sit here and not even warn me about that bitch. You brought this onto yourself. In fact I would've wished she died because that woman has nothing to live for."

What?

I blink away my tears biting back my tongue. She turns and walks off.

Honestly, I'm over this and the drama.

Bangi returns with a mannequin who then explains what happened here to me once again, but I'm not really paying

attention. The mannequins assist each other, bringing the stuff into our home, placing them in the guestroom downstairs. All the weaves she's managed to accumulate over the past few weeks of her 'hustle' are right there too, damaged beyond anything. One of the plastics had papers in it. Are these the papers she stole? Written in huge red letters the words 'Whore', 'Liar' and plenty of other names that I've never even uttered right under the sun.

How much more things have been damaged? I pull out a dress. A red number. Damaged. Burned at the bottom. Wow. I put it back, the fiery smell daunting on me.

I leave the room and close the door behind me, searching for my man. When I finally find him in the kitchen I walk up to him, finding my seat on a highchair. "Pizza?"

"I'll have a slice." I say and watch him take the box of the leftover pizza before turning on the oven. He takes the pizza and puts it in a baking tray before shoving it into the oven.

"I'm sorry about Zonke my love." He breathes out. I shake my head.

"You don't have to apologize about anything you didn't have a hand in. I'm just frustrated at how I can't just ignore her and not feel what I'm feeling inside. She hates my guts and I'm here crying my eyeballs out for her."

He makes his way around the island and stands in front of me, pulling me to him for a tight hug. I hug his torso, taking in his scent shutting my eyes. I was still tired and I knew for sure I was going to take a nap after eating.

"We're not all the same. You're not heartless."

"Hayi."

"Some hearts are naturally beautiful Sthandwa sam. They pump blood and love, not amaJeans or jealousy or even unsuccessful schemes that only drag you down," he says and pecks my temple. "Let me check on the pizza."

He only takes it out after another three minutes and it was perfect to nibble on. We ate over a light conversation and I then retreated to bed where I managed to fall asleep in a matter of minutes.

•••

'Ungavumi.' She repeats looking at the far distance not really bothered to turn even with all my requests.

'Ngingavumi? Ngingavumi ini ma?' I ask, suddenly shifting off into an opposite direction. It's dark. Quiet ...until a tap-tap sound echoes from somewhere. 'Mama?'

'Ungavumi.'

I search for her everywhere but fail to find her anywhere in this pitch black room. I search the highs and the lows, my body

manoeuvring quite easily in here until I'm stopped by a red fiery ball of light which quickly turns into the shape of my beads. The ones on my arm. Heat. That's what I feel next before once again my body moves away from these hot beads back to where my mother stood gazing at the peaceful ocean waves.

'Ungavumi Wezanokuhle...'

I'm pulled back, my eyes opening to a somewhat bright room. The air calm and the rain hitting softly on the windows not so far from me.

"Ngingavumi?" I mumble to myself and reach for my phone from my bedside table, marveling at how late it actually was. 13h03 to be exact. The time I'd usually spend watching TV or a movie with Bangi if he was around. A time I should really start thinking clearly about how I want to spend it cause just sitting here and ass-farting was not it. I miss being busy with something I could call 'my own'.

I climb off the bed and go take a quick shower before getting dressed in something comfortable and baggy. I wanted nothing but comfort for the rest of this day. After combing out my afro I head downstairs to find my man. He's not in the kitchen. He's definitely not by the lounge...or where the pool table was...or even by the huge piano space. There's only one place I could possibly find him if he didn't leave me alone in this huge house and that's where I discover him.

Lifting and breathing in a controlled manner as he laid flat on the bench and pressed ahead. Those looked heavy and pretty much impossible for me to even try them out. He clearly can't hear me as I made my way in past all these training equipment. I'll probably try out the treadmill one of these lovely days and that was a promise I was planning on keeping and fulfilling.

He lifts the weights and places them on the rack before sitting up and grunting like a madman. A sexy madman. My sexy madman. I'm pretty sure the adrenaline flowing through his system right now was beyond my imagination.

When he notices me he removes an airpod from his ear and smiles at me. I'm quick to return it. "She's finally awake...did you sleep well my love?" He breathes out and I find my seat on the space on the bench right in front of him. He's a sweaty mess, even the grey top looked soaked in the front. I pass him his towel and he eagerly wipes away the sweat on his face before throwing the towel over his shoulder.

"I had a dream again...a confusing one at that cause she kept on saying the same thing over and over again."

"With your mom in it?"

"Yeah...she kept on saying ngingavumi and wouldn't say what I shouldn't agree to. I mean if she's trying to tell me something then she should just downright do it cause it's honestly not helping." I huff.

I still haven't even thought of how the heck I was going to tackle this dream thing of mine and where exactly I would get the help I clearly needed.

"Ungavumi? Well I hope she didn't mean that you mustn't agree to me kissing you," He says placing two fingers at the bottom chin and motions me closer to him, claiming my lips.

"Well I hope not too," I say, after stopping the kiss. My lips still close enough to his to taste the mint on his tongue. I find myself smiling before backing away and scan this whole place for no tangible reason.

"I got a call from the hospital two hours back. Zonke is awake." He says and gets up and off the bench. Bathong.

"Hawu, and why didn't you tell me about this?"

"You were asleep Sthandwa sam. I didn't see the need to wake you up because of news that will rob the wellbeing of my wife."

I frown and get up following behind him as we made our way out of his personal gym. Okay, he's right. Plus I was tired. And besides that meant that she was healing and could finally answer some damn questions.

"I can take organise Zakhele to take you to see her if you want." He says getting a cold bottle of water from the fridge.

"You're not going with me?"

"I can't Sthandwa sam. I have to meet Sivulele and finalise the

statement before it's release, and I have no idea how long that would take. I also need to ask her to start preparing my speech for the grand opening of Siqalo that may happen roundabout next week." He says and downs some of the water while I can't seem to stop myself from opening my eyes wide, surprised by his words.

"You mean next week next week?" I ask excited.

"Mh-hm. Next week next week." He nods with a chuckle and I squeal.

"That's amazing news my love...when did the inspection finish? I mean we were there just yesterday and...wow."

"I got a lot of calls today and emails. Charlie sent me a confirmation email that by tomorrow we'll have the papers we need for the go ahead. See if you start with a good structure and quality products the final thing will be just as good."

"I'm even sure this will have the people talking about this family in a positive way again. I think it needs it all."

"Absolutely

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" he says and downs the rest of the water in the bottle in one go before I tell him to go shower while I make us lunch.

He indeed is off before I get started on a tasty pan seared fish and potato hash dish. When he comes down dressed in a light

blue polo T-shirt and dark blue chinos, I've already taken my precious time to dish up for my man. To his plate I added more hash, two eggs and a sliced avocado which he seems thrilled about.

At 15h00 I'm headed to the hospital feeling quite lonely as my drive is truly without my other half. The rain has seized and the clouds don't look as if they're ready to shed any more rain for the rest of the afternoon ,but I stand to be corrected.

These trustworthy and loyal mannequins ensure that I'm taken in safely into the hospital, even if they couldn't shield me from the couple of phones which were taken out and used to capture my guarded self. At this point it was all just a norm.

Dr Mphela greets me and briefs me on her current state informing me that they'll have to keep her here for a day or two to really monitor her progress before she can be sent home.

That too was another thing I had to think about as I walked into her private room, seeing her with a cast on her arm and leg. Where will she go to after getting discharged from here? Back to Alakhe's place was definitely a no-no, but so was her moving in with us. Her leg and arm has been elevated as she lay there. The neck brace looked so damn uncomfortable making me wonder how she had to be feeling while carrying the pain from the embarrassing revelation, to the pain of being beaten to a

pulp to the pain of surgery and now the pain of not having a child anymore. I'm pretty sure they told her all of this.

"Hi," I clear my throat closing the door behind me and step in further into the quiet room. She keeps her eyes on me, not saying a thing. Okay. "How are you...how are you feeling?" I ask sitting down, my purse resting by my feet. "That was a stupid question of course you don't feel...great."

Okay...maybe she can't speak is that it?

I look around, my eyes landing on the heart monitor not so far from where I was sitting. I didn't want to continue seeing her in this foreign manner. The discoloration on her face made me uncomfortable.

"What happened to you? Who did this to you Zonke?" I ask and hear her chuckle deeply.

"You kill my baby and then ask me such?"

"Me? Kill your baby? I'm sorry but if you're looking for someone to blame then you're looking at the wrong person. You brought this all onto yourself without my help at all. I told you you were playing with danger angisho and you said that's the gamble you're willing to take." I shrug. "Well here's the gamble. I hope it was worth it."

She breaks her gaze from me and I think I see a tear escape her eye. I didn't mean to be rude or anything but this was the bed

she made and now she had to lay in it without dragging us in it with her.

"When do I get out of here?" She asks.

"Dr Mphela said probably after two days, they still have to monitor you and your vitals," I say and watch her use her good hand to wipe her tear away.

"What about Alakhe...where is he?"

"I don't know. I don't keep tabs on a man who's not mine...and neither should you."

"He's still mine," she says her voice low.

I shake my head and let out a chuckle. "Who did this to you?"

"Does it matter?"

"Of co...for goodness sakes Zonke you were this close to dying."

I pinch my fingers together holding it up to my face. "If Ama hadn't called for help we would be talking a whole different story right now. I'd be planning a funeral for your reckless ass."

"Look at you...calling me a reckless ass, that's very fresh of you little sis. You have it all now and I'm sure you're so damn proud of yourself. I'm sure you're so happy now that I'm back to having nothing again."

"If you have nothing now then maybe you never had anything to begin with." I mumble to myself but I'm pretty sure she heard me. "And why would I be happy that you're in this

situation right now. I tried helping you before and you spat it all back onto my face."

She's quiet.

I think I know now where to send her to. Home. I don't even know why I didn't think of that since it sure was pretty obvious. I'll even get her a helper to assist her with moving around and other things she'll find difficult to do.

"He speaks about you," she says in the awkwardness of the moment.

"Who?" I ask and have her eyes land on me.

Just then the door bursts open and Alakhe stands by the door, holding a bouquet of flowers in his hand. I frown. What is he doing here?

"Oh, I heard there was someone here...somehow I knew it was you." He smirks coming in.

"Baby." Zonke says.

"Shhhh..." He strode ahead. I get up taking my purse from the floor.

"I...I better get going."

"No, I mean what's the rush?" He stands in front of me.

I clear my throat.

"I have things to do." I try walking past him but he blocks my way. "Alakhe, move."

"Izinto zika Bangizwe zilana unsupervised... Mhmm..." He scans my body from head to toe making me squirm. I wanted out of here now. "You're much prettier up close."

"What?" I probably didn't hear him correctly. I attempt on pushing him out of my way but he grasps my hand tightly. "Stop it!"

He chuckles and winks before letting me go. The look on his face is enough to send me running towards the door and leave here without looking back.

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I've been sitting here on the couch for the past hour. Thinking. Replaying things in my mind. It didn't feel healthy. I luckily did manage to get my mind off what happened during that hospital visit when I went back home to check on it's condition. It definitely felt different walking into that house in it's empty state.

I finally manage to get up from the couch and switch on the lights in this dark house before getting started on supper. I hope Nandi was enjoying her time off. This man and his new diet. Actually our diet. Whatever it is but this no steak life is going to be something I have to get used to. I can't imagine life with no red meat.

After putting the baking tray with chunky veg in it into the oven I go back to sit down on the couch.

No marn...he said I'm pettier neh...not prettier. He couldn't have said that.

The door bursts open and with a minimal fright I quickly glance at who walks in. "Ndoda yami!" Oh thank the heavens above. I shoot up and practically jog into his hold.

"Okay okay someone missed me," he kisses my forehead. "I like this. Sorry that I took longer to finish up with my stuff."

"I'm just happy you're here now," I say still holding onto him.

"Uright?"

"Yeah...why wouldn't I be?"

"Hayi, mawusho njalo Sthandwa sam besengibuza nje. How's your sister?"

•••

"Thank you for taking your time out of your schedules and coming here at such short notice." The King says right after we're seated on our chairs.

I just stare ahead, right at Ama.

"I understand why you all are choosing to keep quiet at this very moment and I believe it's root cause is from how I behaved yesterday. It was out of line and indecent. I sincerely apologize especially to you Zanokuhle. My out lash was

unnecessary and like my father used to say always hear both side of the story before making a decision that will be fair on every party involved. As the eldest here I should have sat here and listened but instead I chose violence." He says and my eyes dart onto him before down at my knotted fingers.

I couldn't say anything.

"Zanokuhle say something," I hear Bangi's mother say.

This man called me a snake. Me. A whole slithering beast that can snatch the breath out of you with one bite. He called me a betrayer. The same thing that led women and humankind to the life of sin as we know it. I was a whole hisser to him a few hours ago.

"Bangizwe, awukhulume nomkakho," she says again.

"Cha, I heard what you said my King..."

"And? Do you accept my apologies?"

"It will take a while before I truly forget all the things you said about me."

"Does that mean I'm forgiven though?"

"Please don't rush my wife baba...you said a lot of things that aren't easy to forget and I don't want you to think that my wife will just take your word for it."

"I think what Bangizwe is trying to say here is that Zanokuhle needs time Senzo." Bangi's mother says again.



"Slowly." Zonke reprimands me.

Bathong.

"How slow do you want me to go kanti?" I ask and stop the wheelchair in the middle of the lounge.

"I'm hurt here and you keep pushing me like we're in a race. Be delicate," She says and I sigh.

"Delicate? Yoh am I not glad I won't be dealing with you while you're in this wheelchair ke."

"Haibo what do you mean?" She asks. I hear the rattling of plastics that cause me to turn my head. Ah...Nandi shows up with the rest of Zonke's things.

"Is that the last of it?" I ask.

"Last of what?" Zonke.

"Yes my Princess."

"Thank you so much please get Deliverance and Lindelani so they can take these bags to the car."

She just curtseys and moves past us.

"Zanokuhle what is going on here? Why are my bags here?"

"Hawu you're going home, I thought that was obvious."

"Obvious? I thought I was going to stay here with you until I heal."

I chuckle.

"Here? In my tiny shack? We; my husband and I don't have space for you here," I say.

"But...fine then call Alakhe."

"Alakhe? I'm not calling Alakhe, not in my house. If you want to call him you'll call him when we get you settled back at home, on your account. Plus I'm sure his wife won't appreciate that, most especially since she clearly doesn't want you there."

Deliverance and Lindelani show up just as I requested. They bow and greet before I tell them what I want them to do for me. I know Zonke didn't like this but I could care less, more especially since she still wants to go back to the same man who is just not it. I've gone back to trash once before and that didn't end well but anyway, she's not me. I head upstairs to quickly use the bathroom.

Chapter Thirty Three.

"It's hard to feel real gangster when you're always getting kissed."

••

"I don't get why you don't want me living with you for a while. Why do I have to be looked after by a whole stranger that I've never met before when you can do so?" I wheel her out of the wheelchair friendly van onto the ground level. "I mean you wouldn't even notice that I'm there with you in the house."

"It's still not happening," I pause my walking when I see mama Lilly outside. I have a smile on my face as I lift my hand up to wave at her. "Sanibonani Mama Lilly."

"Zanokuhle mntwanam, ukahle?"

"Yebo ma." I say. She walks forward and I'm tempted to ask how Lillian is doing but she beats me to it already asking about Madam Eve who's seated on the wheelchair.

"What happened to you Zonke...phela just the other day I saw you on our TV screen..."

Scream?

I suppress my laugh and attempt on listening further but I've already missed the rest of her speech. "Ave uthanda izindaba salukazi ndini, I don't see how any of this is your business,"

Zonke says. "Get me away from this woman." She snaps and I pretty much shrug and bid my goodbyes to Lilly's mother.

I get to the door and dig my keys from the back pocket of my jeans and use them to unlock the front door. I walk in and go open the back door and the window for immediate fresh air and life inside the house.

"See...now people think they can just talk about me how they please because I'm back here. I shouldn't be here. I should be back in the palace where I belong."

"Belong? Zonke I beg you in whatever you do just remember to wake up and smell the damn coffee. You don't belong there. I though this would've sunk in by now."

"Sunk in? No Gimba there's no sinking in here cause I know I'll get Alakhe back whether it kills me."

Breathe Zano...breathe...

"Oh so you're saying you'd rather die then move on?"

She doesn't answer me. I sigh and signal for Deliverance to come and help me wheel in this woman carefully. I didn't want her biting my head off for no reason at all. He helps me get her onto the stoep and eventually into the house without shaking or dropping her.

The fact that Ma Yolanda -the helper- was still not here did tick me off a little cause I have a hair and nail appointment in about

an hour and I wanted to pass by a shop before that happens. I send her a text asking her where she is and surprisingly she replies to my quick satisfaction.

'5 more mins. ma'am.'

I sigh and take a seat. The room is engulfed by silence and pure awkwardness which I wish I could just avoid by leaving. I fiddle with my ring, wiggling my big toe. It feels like years before a Yaris comes to a halt all the way at the front gate. It takes a second before she drives in and parks where I'd usually park Chery. How I miss my baby.

"Sanibonani, ngiyacolisa ngokufika late Nkosazana yami."

"All is well Ma Yolanda. Here she is. Her name is Zonke...and I hope you two will get along just fine."

"Get along just fine? Haibo Gimba you're talking about me as if I'm not here and I cant talk for myself. I'm not living with a stranger mina."

I roll my eyes.

"Unfortunately you don't have a choice right now unless if you can afford to get your own helper then it's fine. I'll pay ma Yolanda whats due to her and you can do you."

"Mara...Gim...I mean Zano. Please."

"I can't do this with you right now. I have places to be, Ma you'll call me if you need anything okay...oh and there's food in the

fridge and cupboards."

"Zano!" Zonke calls me out.

"Bye." I take my leave quite quickly not wanting to further involve myself in her stupid fits that should have nothing to do with me anymore. I've been all about her for the past two days and frankly I've had enough.

It's time that I focus on me again, hence the appointment it seemed I now have to rush to. The safe drive to the mall doesn't take very much of my time most especially since I get quick service. After purchasing all my lovely oils, which I hope will be highly appreciated, I head off to a salon I also managed to find on the internet.

The company there was just so lovely and peaceful that I definitely promised myself I'd come back here to do my hair and nails. I felt alive again. One step closer to feeling as if the whole Zonke thing never happened. Look at me even thinking of it again when I shouldn't.

But let me at least say that the hype had died down a little by now and people seemed to be doing a lot less digging on my personal stuff. Especially after the formal statement was released.

Twist braids have a way of feeling way better on the head than dabrets braids do. My door is opened and I step out of the car before thanking Deliverance and heading into the Palace.

"Zanokuhle!" A familiar voice calls me out. It's Ama, who picks up the pace as she made her way to me.

"Hey." I smile.

She tries -believe me- to smile back but fails dismally. Okay. Still sour.

"Sorry for the ambush, but I was on my way to Bangi to tell him about mom wanting to host a dinner tonight."

"Dinner during the week?"

"Yeah, will you two be able to come?"

"I...well sure. I'll let Bangi know then, don't worry." I say. She nods and there's an awkward of silence before I excuse myself and walk further to my place.

I think her behaviour just comes from a place of hurt...plus she's known Khethiwe longer than she has known me and has automatically been around her more than she has been with me. She's even used to spending her time with her children so that means they're close. Super close.

"Ooouuu Is that my beautiful wife?" He gets up from the couch after putting his ipad aside. My cheeks hurt from the uncontrollable smile dancing on my lips. This is all before he wraps me in his arms into a tight hug. "You look so beautiful Sthandwa sam."

"Ngiyabonga my love...even though I always do braids njena. You should be used to me looking like this."

He tilts his head to the side, taking my hands into his. "Used to you looking like my Queen?"

I giggle and peck his lips before I hear someone clear their throat. I look past him. Lerato?

"I'm sorry...but I think we have gone through everything now. I'll be on my way My Prince."

"Thank you for coming Lerato, you have yourself a lovely evening then." Bangi says letting one of my hands go and faces her.

"My Princess." She curtseys.

"Lerato." I nod.

She leaves before Bangi leads me to the lounge. "These nails feel longer."

"Is that a good thing or a bad thing?"

"It's a confusing thing actually. I marvel even at how you still manage to get things done with these nails of yours."

"It gets easier I think." I shrug. "Skill baby, skill." I click them in front of his face.

"What's in the Dis-cem plastic?"

"A few things for a little something something for my man." I grin already excited at the thought of getting my hands on his aching shoulders and neck to work my magic. Magic that will make him feel at least 5 times better than he did yesterday. His violent workouts were proving difficult on him. Shame man.

"Me?"

"Yep. I hope you like me touching you here and there," I run my hands up his bare arms, stopping at the sleeves of his T-shirt.

"You can touch me everywhere Sthandwa sam. This is your temple now and forever."

I smile. Good. "That means you'll love this then," I step out of his hold and make my way to the kitchen and place my tiny plastic on the island before searching for the measuring cups and a decent sized glass bowl.

"Oh?"

He's watching me attentively, finding his rest on one of the highchairs on the other side of this island. He keeps trying to peek into the plastic. I giggle and take the bottles with the essential oils in them. He takes the biggest one, holding it up not so far from his face reading the label.

"Sweet almond oil...can I open it?"

I frown and tap on the counter before giving him the go ahead.

"Just don't drop it."

"Never," he says and not a moment later it almost lands on the floor.

"Bang!" I retract my hands and sigh out in relief, while he just laughed the whole thing off.

"I was playing baby, I'm sorry. I said I wouldn't drop it," He suppresses his laugh. I feel like giving him a blank look but that

doesn't happen. With no struggle he opens the bottle, bring it to his nose and takes a big whiff. "Damn...this smell reminds me of something...a dessert..."

"Let me smell." I reach out and he places the bottle in my hand. My goodness. Why did I feel like licking it? It smelt so damn yummy. It has an intense nutty aroma to it too. I think I loved this already. When I return from my smell-gasm I realise my husband has already gotten to opening the second bottle.

I chuckle and bring my bowl and measuring cup closer to me to measure out 60ml's worth of sweet almond oil. That's what the list said right and then what...dammit... Where's my phone. Oh.

Yep 60ml's.

Next the Grapeseed oil. I'll add just 10ml's of that.

"Dark...patchouli essential oil...smells woody." He hands it me and I add 2 drops of it into my the almond oil. It does smell nice and woody. "Benzoin essential oil."

The opened bottle is put to perfect use in my mixture. 5 blobs. Blobs are bigger than drops right? The same ritual is carried out with the Clary sage essential oil and rose absolute. 3 drops of that. I then transport the whole blend to my glass bottle with a cork before carefully shaking the whole thing. Bangi climbs off his chair and makes his way to stand behind me. Breathing down my neck.

"I think it's done." I say in glee and open it again to take another sniff at this oil. I'm weak in the knees with how good this smells right now.

The base notes are so sweet, with a deep, complex dark patchouli and a vanilla-y like benzoin. The patchouli isn't overwhelming though or dominant at all but it was there. Subtle...like a thief in the night. I think I'm going to enjoy using this more than he is. And it apparently gents better once it's actually on another human's flesh.

"Sthandwa sam I also want to smell it."

"Err...no, you'll only smell it tomorrow." I close the bottle. He lets out a deep chuckle. "Ouch...and why not now?"

Is he sulking? I put my finished product on the counter and turn only to be caged into his arms. I reach up, cupping his face and allow my fingertips to caress on his bushy face. "Tomorrow." He shuts his eyes, relaxing while taking gentle breaths. My fingers probably still reeked of the oils I messed up on the counter but that didn't matter. I hear a low groan resonating from within his throat before he opens his eyes again. Those beautiful -now lazy- eyes. "I love it when you run your fingers on my beard."

I can't believe that makes me blush. How though!

"One more thing to add to the list of things my husband likes," I giggle. He smiles. His eyes expressing his genuineness.

"There's a list?"

I nod, moving my hands from his beard to his neck.

"And what's at the top of this list Sthandwa sam?"

"uZanokuhle Sthandwa sakhe Shazi... ingane yakwa Dlamini, uSibalukhulu...uMdllovu."

He shivers at my words.

"Awu suka madoda...inhliziyo yam igijima njengamanzi olwandlwe mawusho njalo Sthandwa sam... Thambo lami...juba lami, ntash yami... (My heart beats faster than the rapid oceans when you say that my love...my rib...my dove...my drug)"

I burst out in laughter. What? "Ntash manje Bangi?"

"Yes my love. Uyintash yam..." He brings me closer to him. I just couldn't stop smiling. "...your husband loves you uyezwa."

We share a kiss right there and then. A slow -let me taste and enjoy all of you- kiss that just leave me breathless and flooded with sweaty and high moan sound thoughts.

"We have dinner with your parents tonight," I mention after he helped me put the oils away. "Ama mentioned it to me when I bumped into her when she was making her way here."

Did I bump into her? Anyway.

"You want to go? I'm pretty sure Alakhe and Khethiwe were invited as well," he closes the tap after rinsing the dishwashing cloth. I cringe at the mention of his name. It lingered in my mind once again after I've managed to shove it in the forget file for the past two days. I knew I had to tell Bangi but...

"Sthandwa sam."

"Huh?"

"Hawu, I asked if you wanted to go to this dinner and you went mute."

"Sorry...just was thinking of something."

"Something? You think this is what your mother meant with that cryptic dream?"

I shrug. I doubt though, unless if something major and sinister were to happen there which I highly doubt would even transpire.

"We should go. There are a few things I still need to iron out with your father and this should be the best opportunity to do so."

He nods. "You letting him off the hook?"

"Everyone deserves forgiveness Bangi...plus I don't want this to keep us stationary when we could be moving forward and try

again. There's nothing wrong with that right?"

"Only forgive those who deserve your forgiveness my love."

•••

These silent and awkward environments are definitely not what I signed up for. I couldn't even chew or swallow without hearing myself. I won't even mention the screeching of our cutlery on these expensive plates.

I gulp down the juice. Even that is loud.

"The food is delicious Ma," Bangi says and the table shares a few '*mhmm's*' of agreement, including myself.

Yoh!

We should've just passed on this offer then if I definitely knew it was going to be like in here.

Bangi's mother clears her throat and gains my attention. And the seven other's around this table.

"I...Thank you all so much for being able to show your faces here at such short notice. I appreciate it a lot. Also the fact that you respect the ethics of my dinner table even with everything that has happened a few days ago. I wanted all of us here as a family to talk things out and come to some sort of common ground. Somewhere where we can at least feel like there's healing and a way forward."

I nod slightly.

She's giving me the push I seemingly needed as well. I put my cutlery down and look down trying to find the right words.

"Can I start off by saying I accept your apology my King...and also plead that you do the same for me especially for how this situation became what it became when I could've said something. My sister has brought my family and myself nothing but shame and I'm deeply sorry for all her doings...especially to you Khethiwe." I face her. "I did you wrong. I did what at that moment felt right to do which was to let the truth speak and reveal itself. I didn't mean for it to be seen as betrayal or dishonesty."

Bangi snakes his hand onto lap, holding my hand in his. I look at him and squeeze his hand back before looking back at the table.

Another throat is cleared and next thing I hear is the shifting of a chair. The King is up on his feet. "Come."

I swallow, and get up too. His arms are open and soon enough I'm in a hug. The same hug I got that day when we returned from our honeymoon. The same hug that made feel at home. That made me feel like he was once again my father. I swear I was near tears with this gesture.

"All is forgiven," he says letting me go and I sit on my seat again. "And I hope everyone around this table heard what Zanokuhle said and we all forgive and forget. My wife is right we should move on to positive things. Things like Siqalo an-..."
"You mean those stupid houses that are a waste of money and hard work. Oh please."

My smile dies down.

"Just keep your mouth shut if you can't say anything good Alakhe." Bangi's mother says.

"Please," Amandla adds.

"One pathetic apology from this liar and you're all just back to licking her fat feet."

"What?" Bangi.

"I didn't send you out there to cheat mina," the words fly out of my mouth.

"Uyazizwa ne? 3 minutes nyana of being in this family and you think you have the right to talk to me like that?"

"Argh marn Alakhe get off your high tree. You know Zanokuhle is right. If you didn't go around chasing skirts than we all wouldn't be in this scandal."

"Amandla shut the fuck up, don't make me exp...."

"Alakhe!" Queen.

He shuts up.

"There are kids around this table. Watch your language!" The Queen says.

He chuckles.

"I'll take them to bed..." Ama gets up. Siyabonga and Ntokozo get up too and walk past her without saying a word. Has this table always been this chaotic or it's just something that started because of my presence? "...I would detest the day you take on that chair and get crowned the King who's supposed to lead Emashazini cause you're nothing but an arrogant piece of shit you know that."

Off she goes. I need water...juice...a certain percentage to help digest that hard and evident truth.

"This table knows no peace these days," Bangi's father says.

"We're always bickering."

"I think we should just all call it a night." The Queen says and gets up to leave too.

"You done?" He whispers into my ear. I nod. I didn't have the will to finish it all anymore. "I think it's best if we call it a night too."

"As you two wish. Goodnight," The King.

"Goodnight baba..."

"Uh...Goodnight." I stand next to Bangi, finally removing my gaze from Khethiwe.

"We'll talk," Khethiwe says. Her voice is raw.

Me?

"Talk nobani?" Alakhe.

"I'm not talking to you loose zip."

"Ini?"

"Ngisayolala." She storms out of here first before us.

Her and I will talk! That's good right?



A vibration is what wakes me up from my much needed and comfortable sleep. Irritated I pat-pat on my beside table eager to skillfully find it without opening my eyes. Mxm. I open them anyway, reaching for the damn phone as the name Satan flashes on the screen.

I'm kidding

I chuckle at that stupid thought. It's Zonke. Calling me for the 23rd time now. They've been accumulating since yesterday. I don't want to answer but I do, maybe she might say something sensible.

"Zonke ufu-..."

She cuts me off. "Gimba how dare y-..."

Mxm! I hang up and check the time. 05h45 in the morning and she already has the energy to call me that dumb name. The nerve. My cuddle hubby moves closer just as I was about to

close my eyes and I think I feel something. I stick my butt out a little. Yep. Definitely morning wood. Oh wow. Now I can't sleep. Is he still drunk in his or...okay he still is. My goodness.

I rotate my hips. The heat between my thighs rising with each grind. I should stop. Let him get his rest just like he should. Okay...one more grind won't hurt right?

Crap!

He turns over and I freeze, shutting my eyes and pretending to be asleep. If he were to feel on my heart rate right now he wouldn't buy my story.

Is he unlocking his phone? Oh no never mind he's locking it again. Movement... Aha! A hand on my buttock! He caresses it gently before I hear the words "I know you're not asleep Sthandwa sam."

Dammit.

"What gave it away?"

"Maybe it was just me doing a better job at pretending to be asleep after that phone vibrated, who knows." He kisses on my shoulder. I giggle, slightly embarrassed but in a good way, if there is such. "But nonetheless we live to see another day my love."

Kiss.

His fingertips glide down the side of my body. Patiently. Past every handle or my mountains of beauty. It was so calming and somewhat just as arousing. Waking up in someone's arms has never felt better. "My soft woman."

Kiss.

"You know there's this song I can't get out of my head lately...it goes like...when I see your face...there's not a thing that I would change...'cause you're amazing just the way you are..."

Kiss. Kiss. Kiss.

"...and when you smile, the whole world stops and stares for a while, 'cause girl, you're amazing, just the way you are mhmhm..." He chuckles tracing his hand to my breast. I gladly give him access to both. He's not even trying to sound like the best singer out there but his voice was just perfect.

"...Her lips, her lips, I could kiss them all day if she'd let me. Her laugh, her laugh she hates, but I think it's so sexy she's so beautiful and I tell her everyday...Sthandwa sam, you know, you know, you know I'd never ask you to change. If perfect's what you're searching for, then just stay the same...so don't even bother asking if you look okay uyazi ukuthi ngiyothini..."

Kiss.

I giggle. He rubs on my nipples.

"Bathathe Bluno Shazi. (show them Bruno)"

He laughs.

"I loved it. You should sing to me more often..."

"Musa ukudlala ngami Ma'Dlamini."

"Angidlali."

His fingers eventually moves from my hardened nipple and allows the warm tips to travel down the side of my body. Breathing into my ear. He halts at the straps of my g-string, groaning and pulls on it. I push my butt out onto him. He's so hard...I want him. I want him now.

"Ma'Dlamini..." He calls me out. His voice deep enough to rattle my insides but just sounds as sweet as honey.

"Malinga wami." I utter.

He now pecks on my neck causing me to carefully reach up to caress the hair on his head. "I thought I said no panties in bed."

"No panties...These ones are cute though. They make me feel like I'm packaging her for you, like a little gift for my man...a gift only he can unwrap."

I hear him chuckle deeply. Oh my God. "And enjoy...Such words...do wonders to my body."

I smile, moving my hand from his hair and shove it under the cover, finding his arm. "Can I have my husband's body now?"

"Which part of your husband's body do you want?"

"This part..." I grind on him again hearing him take in a deep breath. "...please."

"Good choice...leg up." He grabs my waist scooting closer.

I lift my leg to give him all the access he could possibly need. His hand cascades down to the thin fabric, which he shifts to the side. This is before I feel him position himself better and rubs himself on my entrance. "Fuck," he whispers penetrating me even so slowly. Yes. "So damn amazing...it's taking so much for me not to just come right now."

I take it he's feeling just as much goodness as I am.

"I just want to give it to you slowly..." He thrusts match his promise.

"Uh-huh..." I moan shutting my thighs. His fingers find my clit and they don't shy away making me pull on these sheets for support. I knew then and there that I was in the same boat that he was in. I knew I'd be done before I could even spell out my entire name. What level of arousal is this?

He changes the rotation of his hips, simultaneously making me shiver...followed by a violent wave of bliss...wait! Wait!

Bathong. "Bangi..." I cry out. My toes curl and my insides clench while he just continued thrusting slowly. I feel him pull out

mumbling a "not yet..." But his fingers never stopped. I took me a while to recover.

"I want to see you." Him.

The covers are pulled off and I turn to lay on my back. He's on his knees on the bed, looking at me with pure lust. He pulls my g-string off and spreads my legs wide open, kissing my knee...my inner thigh all the way to my cookie, which he gives a peck. I shiver reaching down to close her. She felt so sensitive. "Yekela Sthandwa sam."

I remove my hand and he pecks her again. "Ah..."

On the other leg he kisses up my inner thigh to my cookie again. Mirroring his previous actions perfectly. He kisses up my stomach, his beard tickling my skin. Up past the valley between my breasts until he finds my lips, claiming them. I hold him closer by the head and soon enough feel him rub himself on my clit. I try shutting my legs but he's in way of it. The sensitivity made me want to push him away but my arousal was yelling bring him closer.

Yelling, 'Let him weaken you further than this!'

Yelling, 'Let him worship you!'

He moves from me, still kneeling between my legs. I can't stop myself from looking at his hardness rubbing on my clit. It was so hot to see him coated in my wetness. Back and forth he rubbed,

occasional inserting himself a little at my slippery entrance.
"You feel that?" He asks the words while looking straight into my eyes.

I nod. He hits my clit twice with it. Lord!

"How about that?"

"Yeah." I breathe out, falling back and face the ceiling. I twist my own nipples, gushing out a sound that was too foreign to me.

"So wet..."

Its all because I love you dammit!

He's back to rocking my cookie back and forth. That slow consistency allows me to climb the ladder to where I knew I'd come jumping off with no safety net at the bottom to catch me.

I hear him groan violently before he curses. When I look up he's trembling.

Oh. My. Shit.

"Awu...Ma'Dlamini awu."

A deliciously warm load shoots right at my stomach and on my mound. That's it. That's my undoing...

In a quick motion he falls right beside me, tells me to lift my leg up again before effortlessly entering. I mumble something before the steady strokes bring me back to some sort of reality

again. He support the suspended leg and I turn to look at him just as he decides he wants some more loving from me. Kissing me with passion and me biting on his bottom lip with careful attention every now and then.

I feel his hand leave my leg and claim my clit. One moment I'm focused on the kissing the next I'm being led to the land of pleasure. His fingers worked a familiar magic. "Faster...please," I beg.

Yes!

I touch on his chest, my other hand grabbing on the sheets. The pleasure becomes too much and I find myself letting it all go. My whole body going into shock. I try shutting my legs but they're opened again. I'm whining. He doesn't stop. My body doesn't stop. I think I'm crying. I'm panting. I'm hearing a grunt and I know he's just made us both a mess in a matter of minutes.

How am I sweating when he did most of the work?

We lay there catching our breaths while he kissed on my neck and cheek.

With a smile on my face I turn to look at him. "That...was amazing."

"Golden morning to you too Mrs Shazi."

"Mxm," I giggle and lean in to kiss him.

•••

I giggle as he brings forth a chair into the bathroom, still holding onto my belly even if it wasn't touching my cookie.

"Uhlekani Ma'Dlamini?" He asks amused.

I shake my head sitting back. "I can't believe we're doing this."

"Ngithembe sthandwa sam. (Trust me my love)" He puts the chair in front of me, sits down and reaches for the razor.

He looks at me giving me an assuring look. Okay it looks like he knows what he's doing. I probably should've just booked another bikini wax session if I was going to have to go through such with the doubts that I have right now but...nerves are good right?

Right. There's nothing to fear here. Just a man with a shaving razor.

"Two minutes are over let me get to it." He grins.

"Please don't cut off my clit."

"Hawu..." He laughs. "...angeke sthandwa sam."

He bring his hand closer and with steady stokes gets to it. I let out a breath, calming myself in the process. Is it quite obvious that I've ever shaved twice in my life? Yes? No?

Bangi takes his bottom lip into captive and rinses the razor in the water in the basin.

"You're making me feel like you've done this to someone before,"

"Never. That doesn't even sound fun."

"What doesn't?"

"Shaving a thousand women's vaginas. Sounds like work I was never cut out for. Ngiright kabi la kumfazi wam."

I shake my head.

"I'm almost done, and I'll have you as smooth as ever...ready for me to feast on peacefully for supper tonight."

I gasp. Okay what?

He's serious. Playfully serious.

"How long will you be...at the gym of course?" I ask trying to take my mind off of me potentially shoving his face down there and have him do it right now.

"2 hours max."

"Oh."

"Sounds like someone is going to miss me."

"Awa." I chuckle. "I'll find something to do, but just don't take forever ke nawe."

"I won't baby, I promise...done."

"Really?"

"Yep...and my meal is still intact," he gives her a kiss while I just

giggle.

"Mirror, I want to see."

"Sure." He passes the tiny mirror to me. My inspection leaves me pleased and happy.

"That was immaculate service my love."

•••

I take my feet out of the pool and check my phone. Honestly she doesn't give up hey. Now she's sending me messages with random numbers? I'm definitely not answering any of these now cause I've made it pretty clear that she's not coming to live here. It's 12h00. The sun is shining bright and my man finally emerges from the waters.

I still can't believe he spent almost another extra hour in that gym, doing what he was doing...also reminding me to call Lindiwe to ask her to come in tomorrow so I could get my workouts in order as well. I think I've slacked off enough.

"The water is great," he says. I nod. I know. I nearly drowned when I went in there without any supervision near. Ngiza cina ukuphapha yaz. He would be able to tell cause my braids were still damp. Hectic stuff I tell you.

He pulls himself out of the pool and immediately starts drying off his body. He said a swim after working out is very beneficial

and I well I believe him. "You should go change those shorts now please."

"Is it finally time for the oil massage thingy?" Oh wow look at him looking so damn excited. All I do is nod and off he is into the house. After chuckling to myself I head inside as well. No sign of him here, the only evidence that he was once here though was the tiny drops of water on the floor.

I take the oil container from the counter and rush out. I still had to set up towels on the grass.

Bathong, those are not shorts.

I'm not even going to ask.

I request that he first sit down on the towel, legs crossed and that's what he does. I'm kneeling behind him, anxious with how this is going to go since I'm no professional masseuse. But I have faith in myself.

The sun on my skin feels amazing. There's a calm breeze navigating around here and now the air is filled with this beautiful scent. I rub my palms together to get the oil warm before getting it onto his now dry skin. I notice the warmth and sweetness of the benzoin first, followed by the deep hints of the subtle patchouli.

He lets out a moan, a beautiful sound to my ears.

Okay...I think he likes it. Just don't ruin it Zano. Be cautious of your nails... Be cautious of your nails... Be cautious of your nails...more oil. I rub my hands together and get back to it. The magic is truly when it's massaged into his warm skin.

"Why didn't you tell me those tiny hands can work such miracles on me?"

"You never asked." I giggle. "Also I don't have tiny hands."

"Keep telling yourself that." He laughs.

"Speaking of things that were never asked before...your tattoos, can you tell me more about them?"

"Oh...well I got the first one at 16."

"16! Isn't that young...like too young?"

Hands up and down his neck...pressure... Then minimal pressure.

"It is...and trust me I felt it. I thought the needle was nothing serious until I sat on that chair and had to endure almost 3 hours of pain."

"And you still went back." I chuckle.

"I still went back Sthandwa sam. Guts."

"Balls. I would never."

"Never vele."

"But who knows I might just tattoo your name on my chest."

"Hayi, hayi, hayi..." He shakes his head.

"What's wrong with that? I think it's sweet."

"Hayi. Please don't."

I laugh. Angeke vele.

"Ya so your parents didn't say anything? I would kick Khaya if he went to get tatted at his age."

"They've never really seen them...I don't know if they know about them now though cause they've never said anything regarding them. So yeah I got them when I went to visit Aunt Grace, made her promise to never say a word to them and on the same night I got the hiding of my life..." I chortle. "...those were the days my love."

"Aunt Grace doesn't pass me as someone who just let's things slide."

"She doesn't. Always so strict and following traditions to the tee."

I think that's one thing I took from those days at the hills of the Queen. She's like a leader.

Mhmm...what if I invite them all over for his birthday...maybe.

He giggles. "Wenzani?"

I plant another two soft kisses on his neck.

"No...Continue talking please." I sniff on the neck and move my hands to his shoulders before getting some more oil and ask

him to lay down, flat on his stomach. I scoot closer and get back to it.

He turns his head to the side I was on, eyes closed. "I got a heart, surrounded by fire." Oh so that's what it is. "Regretted it the moment I turned 18 though cause what I thought was cool back then wasn't as cool now. That's also when I kind of felt I had to redeem it and actually get it a friend...there where the eagle came in...that's the spot..."

Right at the joint of his arm and shoulder.

"You tattooed the Royal mark on your body?"

"Why not?"

I chuckle. I guess that's enough reason.

Chapter Thirty Four.

'Je veux le monde pour toi, J'rais au bout du monde pour toi mes anges mes démons. Je veux de bisous, je veux de bisous.' X
DBN GOGO French Kiss.

••

I reposition myself on the bed again and check my phone for the second time. The barber should be here any minute now and that would mean the last step or in this case the prep for tomorrow was going to be complete. I smile at myself, proud at what I've managed to do here. It's not much, but I do hope it's appreciated.

"Ready Sthandwa sam?" He asks all the way from inside the closet.

"Yes," I reply and put my phone away before turning my focus back at the door that opens for the third time now.

I'm crossing my fingers, thumbs and toes that this is the one. This has to be the one. He comes into view and my jaw drops to the floor. Yep, this one. This is definitely the one. I clap my hands in glee and stand up to go have a closer look at this chosen suit.

"I love this one."

"Yeah? I think I do too," he nods a little and turns to check himself out on the mirror. This fit made him look both ready to

conquer the world and show immense leadership. The leadership he deserved. It screamed respect and *'my wife knows how to dress me'*. Not that I'm blowing my own horn but this Royal blue colour is sitting wonderfully on his skin. It even brought out his beautiful eyes and smile. Yes he's smiling while looking back at me through the mirror.

"Monique will surely love the feedback," I say and take my phone again before searching for her number to send her a quick text.

'Blue moon is perfect for tomorrow.'

She sends me back a dancing emoji and an excited face emoji before I toss it back on the bed to focus on my man again.

We had to leave here by 09h00 so we could get to Ejezini Palace on time for the reception. This beautiful event was going to be hosted by one of the big investors who've helped Siqualo 'be' what it is now. Even Mr Charlie and his amazing workers will be there and I could only pray for everything to just go smoothly.

"Let me go change then before I mess up the perfect suit," Bangi says and gives me a kiss on the cheek before heading off to the closet not really bothering with shutting the door again since we done with our little fashion show. "You know Sthandwa sam, I'm still nervous about my speech tomorrow."

He's mentioned that to me once and I got to see a little bit of those nerves shine through. Public speaking was definitely not something he did. The eyes of the public don't know him for speeches either, apart from the short speech he said at his grandmothers funeral but that was about it.

"There's nothing to fear here," I say simply. "I think with the few years I spent as a teacher I got to learn a thing or two about addressing a Kingdom...or in my case a classroom. It gets easier with time and practice and it helps a ton knowing that people are there to listen and learn from you. You are the bowl that people will be eating out of for 30 to 40 minutes straight. If they choose not to eat from that bowl then that's their own fault and choice. I know you think you'll make a mistake but who doesn't? Who doesn't mess up their words every once in a while? My love you have absolutely nothing to fear here."

"Ngathi ngiyabona iEnglish imane ihlangahlangane out of nowhere. Bo 'Good afternoon Humans and Gentlemen, I come to khulum'."

I chortle. No ways. No. "Haybo."

"We are built izindlu for an about 200 and zero peoples who work at unemployment."

"Yoh awa Stop...that won't happen."

"Sthandwa sam you never know." He sighs.

"Well let's say in this case I do know cause we've prepared you

inside out. You know the flow of that speech now like the back of your hand. I see nothing going wrong here."

"So optimistic."

"What's negativity if we have positivity flowing in our hearts?" I smile.

I see him nod and think that maybe that was enough motivation.

"Thank you Sthandwa sam."

"Don't thank me my love, I'm here for you too. Now I think the barber should be here any moment now..." With his hand in mine I tried leading us downstairs but instead I'm pulled back. His soft expression eases me, and I find myself matching his breathing.

"Can I have a kiss before we leave?"

There was just something different about when he'd ask for a kiss. Something that I couldn't explain to my own full and able mind. I just nod before he leans in and kisses me on my forehead, much to my confusion. His fingers go onto my chin as he turns my head slightly to kiss my one cheek and then the other. Why am I blushing and giggling at this gesture? I hug his waist before the final kiss goes onto my full lips, kissing me with what I could only call pure intimacy. I loved his kisses...and being in his presence nje was enough for me.

Hogging much?

Probably. But I wanted nothing more and nothing less.

•••

Morning came too soon and with the minimal amount of sleep we managed to get throughout last night, I'm glad to see that we were punctual. Our personal space was invaded by thee Lerato, the lady here to do my hair and make up, Monique to make sure both of our outfits had no sudden mishaps and mutual support from Ama and the one and only Khethiwe Shazi.

It was still shaky being around her, but we at least talked like adults and managed to kinda get back to where we were before Mrs Law firm happened.

"I hope this goes by quickly," Khethiwe says as we walked out headed to the ready motorcade.

I glance back. Bangi is walking with his father having what looks like a serious conversation with him. He definitely looked dapper. Different too especially with the new haircut and beard trim.

"You know this family and quick don't go together. We just may be there for the whole afternoon," Ama says and I don't really know what to say as input. I've only ever been on the other side of the screen when all these things that didn't seem that important to me aired on TV. Look at life now, so different and

definitely not how I'd ever imagine it to be in just a space of a year.

"Are you ready?" I hear Khethiwe ask. Is she asking me?

"Me?"

"Yes, you. I know you've never been to such an event before and it must be nerve wrecking for you to even think of how it's going to go down."

I clear my throat, not really sure if I've had a chance to think of my own fears. How the hell was I indeed even going to act around all those important people and big names? How was I going to fit in? I sigh.

"I don't know. We'll see," I shrug.

Outside indeed we're met by the motorcade that looked ever so ready for this journey.

"Ladies...can I have my wife back?" Bangi asks snaking his hand around my waist before I glance up at him. My goodness...he was utter perfection...my utter perfection.

"Of course. But I still don't get how you want her back when you spend every single day with her."

"It's called Love Amandla. You'll know that once you find the one that makes you feel like being away from them even for an hour is a crime," the Queen says getting to us.

"Guys time," Khethiwe reminds us and that's when we all remember that we had to get a move on.

"Let's get this show on the road then," Bangi says and we head to our car. The one that's nearly centred. The King and Queen were in the last car as part of the 'tradition' here. Them as the older ones should leave here last...or something along that context. Our ride is not as quiet but I was more focussed now on the hype this was all getting from social media. The good hype that is and that just made my heart swell up in pure joy nje. Good and great things were said about my husband so what more could I even ask for.

The venue is jam packed with people of the public and all the famous media personal here for a scoop most certainly. My door is opened along with Bangi's before we both step out of the car. Flash. Flash. I fix my dress before being joined by my husband who clasps his hand in mine. I have on my smile as I should. We should always smile. Smiling is part of the package here and even if I were to wave, I'd have to do it properly. I couldn't wave like a child as it all had to be prim and proper.

"My Prince, may I have a word please?" A lady asks.

"Your Royal highness can we hear your thoughts on all of this?"

A guy. More questions fly by before we eventually stop at the gang. I hear them thanking us and then it's question after question after question.

"My people, most of the things will be said in the inside but for now all I'll say is I'm grateful for the day that the Lord has made. Today wouldn't have been possible, especially not without my wife."

Aw, me? My cheeks heat up, squirming under the eyes I suddenly feel around me.

"As a new addition to the Royal house and family would you say your wife has been more hands on in this project more than the others?"

"Miss, my wife is the backbone of this whole project. She was involved from the very start till where it is now. And nothing makes me more proud than that, the Kingdom should be proud too," Bangi says.

"I'm pretty sure the news that was trending not so long ago of your wife's sister and how she lied about everything to your brother ha..."

"I think we're done here," he simply says and gently thugs on my hand before I follow him into the huge Palace. It takes me a while to pick up my jaw from the floor as I marvel at the beautiful formal outlook of this whole interior. Chairs were neatly set up in one area while in one area was just an open space for people to mingle on. Waiters and waitresses were scouting the whole area with their trays neatly situated on their palms, carrying drinks and hors d'oeuvres.

"My Prince may I take a photo of you and the Princess?" A photographer comes our way and we agree. Bangi holds me close and after two hot awkward photos later he thanks us and moves along swiftly.

Ama, Khethiwe, the King and Queen have also joined the party. They networked beautifully...or at least the King and Queen was. Khethiwe was just downing Champagne after champagne like she was in a drinking contest.

"Ah, Bayede Shazi, Mgedezi, Malinga omuhle," a charming man with a potbelly and a suit greets us. Next to him is a woman I believe is my age...but I could be wrong.

"Khumalo." They shake hands. "Thank you for coming."

"Wouldn't have missed it for the world." He says and they stop shaking hands. "Aren't you going to introduce your beautiful wife?"

"This is my one and only indeed. Zanokuhle Sthandwa sam

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this is Mr Khumalo owner and founder of Aqua-line, amanzi wabantu." Bangi says.

Mr Khumalo extends his hand towards me before he kisses the back of it. I've heard of him if I remember well and he's the one who was making sure that the water and anything to do with the water at Siqalo was up to par.

"A pleasure to meet you my Princess."

"Errr...likewise."

Likewise?

Really?

If I could face palm myself right there and then I would.

"Well I also thought I should come out with my wife to such a prestigious event. Baby wam, I don't think his Royal highness needs an introduction."

The formalities!

I feel so awkward amongst these people and it hasn't even been 40 minutes yet. They talk. Believe me, for the longest 5 minutes of my life. Talking about still working with each other on other projects that were to happen in the near future.

We move along swiftly. More shoulders are rubbed and it's intense. But finally after all of that we're asked to settle down so that we could get started with the event. We're placed in the front not far from where my mother and father in law were seated.

A man stands on stage. He clears his throat before fixing the mike in front of him. "Right...I greet you all and thank everyone for taking their time out of their busy schedules in order to join us here. Ladies and gentlemen, we are indeed blessed to be

among the great Shazi, the great Ukhozi lalelizwe lethu elihle.
Bayede!"

"Bayede!" Some say behind us.

Hectic.

"I trust we shall behave accordingly and welcome them with warm arms," the man says and I slightly shake my head before turning to glance at my man. So focussed and hard right now...not even a smile. "I'm Mr Maphosa, founder of ZALO fund and we're honoured to be the ones to host such a big event."

He continues ahead talking about how this business started and how it managed to get where it is now. It was beautiful and indeed insightful. A hand goes onto mine and squeezes it gently.

A smile creeps up on my lips and like earlier I glance at him. This time though he looks present. I could just kiss him but I don't. PDA has a time and a place right?

Where's that paper again...oh...I reach into my purse after subtly freeing my hand from his caption. I think I heard him sulk. The tiny paper doesn't stay in my hold for long as I place it inside the pocket of his suit.

I watch him reach into the same pocket.

"Now ladies and gentlemen without further ado, I wish to open the stage now to our Prince, Bangizwe Shazi...a round of applause please."

Hawu, it's time already?

The applause is loud and proud as the attention just shifts to the man next to me. The kiss I get on my cheeks somehow gets a reaction too. Goodness me. The ground should do it's thing and swallow me up.

He peeks at his palm and then puts his hand in his pocket. Did he read that? They shake hands before he gets behind the podium and adjusts the mike in front of his.

His personal assistant brought his ipad forward.

"When my great grandfather was still alive, he made sure to listen to people and their needs. He was a man who believed in change. A man who believed no man or woman out there should be subjected to suffering. So as part of that thought one of the first Rights that was initiated and set up as part of the change my great grandfather wanted to see for this Kingdom of ours was the right to every human here to have access to their basic needs. Basic needs such as education, proper sanitation and a warm safe home. It was his vision to see his Kingdom thrive and evolve, becoming a developed place amongst other places surrounding it. That's where the initiative and the dream

started forming, picking up numerous problems along the way. It did fall off and became less of a priority for us as leaders... but as a unit I believe we've taken a huge step towards the right direction..." His eyes land on mine and a warm smile plays on his lips. "...the direction of change and making Emashazini a sustainable Kingdom for the people of her land..."

He continues speaking, covering matters of the utmost importance. Telling us of the high numbers of people who are without all these basic needs. Needs he's heavily promising change on. He's dishing out percentages and it sounds too pretty.

And Heavy.

But he does make it sound possible. We all take it in as he swam across his beautifully prepared speech. I'm impressed.

The applause come in and he walks off the stage. The Flashing lights continue almost until he takes his seat next to me again.

"That was beautiful," I say.

"Yeah?" He takes my hand.

"Yeah, see and I told you my love there's nothing to worry about."

"And you were right," my cheek is smothered with another kiss.

●●●

The scorching sun was not giving us a break. It indeed was still proving the fact that even if your skin has all this lovely melanin, you still needed sunscreen protection and shade cause it was hectic. Deliverance comes to stand next to me, shielding the two of us under the umbrella he managed to find. "Thank you," I whispered to him and he acknowledged it with a nod. Bangi was having what looks like a deep conversation with Charlie, and this place was just getting more and more packed with each passing minute.

You could sense and see the excitement on everyone's faces and their actions if I could say that.

"Excuse me...My...My Princess, so glad to finally meet you. Deliverance," a lady comes into view. She sticks her glove covered hand out for me to shake. Gloves in summer? Interesting.

"Hi?" I'm unsure of this but I shake her hand. She's with a friend.

"I'm Vuki, and this is Nelli."

"Oh? I'm..."

"There's absolutely no reason for you to introduce yourself to us My Princess. We know you...and I'm still pretty gutted we couldn't make it to your lovely wedding celebrations, cause the pictures looked amazing."

Were they supposed to be there or? Am I missing something...?

They even know about Deliverance here phela.

"I..."

"I'm sure she's confused and is just wondering who these two loud women are..." Nelli finally speaks and it's sense. I figured me talking was not working so maybe sign language will work.

I nod.

The Vuki lady turns her head searching for someone or something. "Aha, there he is."

"Those are our husbands," Nelli.

"That sounds so wrong," Vuki laughs.

Wait...that's Monde and Thulani though... You mean to tell me that those two are married and these two are the their wives? They look like housewives...if housewives even have a look, but since my only reference is the real housewives of Atlanta I'll keep moving.

"Seeing as to the fact that your husband and our men are friends maybe we should also hang out and go on expensive dinners and trips and you know just be acquainted with each other. Who knows we might become just as good of friends as they are," Vuki says.

Oh?

New friends? They make it sound easy. Too easy and honestly I don't know, but since they are married to people I kinda know, it wouldn't hurt right?

"You know what Vukiswa, she should probably take our numbers and give us a call when she's free," Nelli.

"We should also take hers just in case she doesn't call us soon enough so that we can call her instead," Vuki digs her phone out of her purse.

Dammit. I should really get myself a new phone.

"Good idea friend. I'll even start searching for places we can go to grab drinks at." Nelli.

"Woo! Our first outing as friends has to be spectacular." Vuki.

"Expensive." Nelli.

"I don't think it has to be expensive," I clear my throat.

"Did she just say that?" Vuki.

"I'm also shocked." Nelli.

"What's shocking?" I hear Bangi ask. They're all here too and I think these two just had me sucked into whatever this was for a while that I forgot we were still in public. Oh my goodness.

"Now I'm also wondering cause I know my wife can talk herself into tomorrow. Vuki?" Thulani says and just hearing him speak is awkward.

Not as much for Monde cause he spoke on our wedding.

"Hayi, we were talking about woman stuff." Vuki.

"Oh? Is that so?" Monde.

"Would we lie?" Nelli.

Monde shrugs.

"It was woman's stuff Thu...plus we were just wondering if we couldn't go out with the Princess and have a drink with her, you know. Maybe in the end we'll be friends." Vuki says.

"Best friends." Nelli.

"I'm sure she gets bored with Bangizwe. He seems boring."

Vuki.

"Hey!" He holds his chest, sounding a bit hurt.

Yoh. I burst out in laughter. His friends join me. I honestly did not expect that even though I probably should've.

"I am not boring." He chuckles.

"If you say so." Vuki.

"But what does your wife say? Can we hang?" Nelli.

"Surely she'll give you an answer but for now we need to get this day done with. We'll talk." He says snaking his arm around my waist and takes me with him to where him and Charlie were once having a conversation.

"FYI, I don't think you're boring my love."

"Mhmmm..."

"Ukwatile?"

"Maybe."

"Maybe? How do we fix that then?" I ask.

"I'll let you know at home," I get another kiss. My cheeks hurt once more.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, please quiet down so that we can do the revealing of the name," this man speaks again. He last spoke after we arrived here. I thought we'd have one of those huge red ribbons to cut but nope. It wasn't necessary. Instead there was going to be the big awaited reveal of the name and that would be an official mark of this place. It was on the map now.

The crowd consisted of our family. The one who didn't want to be here still wasn't here and that made me happy. Vuki waves at me and I smile back. Maybe these two won't be as bad. I don't know. There's a huge camera on one side.

Live news?

"Uh..." His voice vibrates through the speakers. "...I thank everyone for once again being with us here. The success of this...all of this can't be called that without the support of the people. What is achieved today through hard work shall shine through for many years to come. I want to once again thank everyone who was involved in this project...one of many...people like Mr Charlie and his team, Mrs Ngwenya and

Mr Dube just to mention a few people. Not forgetting my lovely wife, I love you."

This is not even a prepared speech.

I mouth an "I love you too" back.

"Under this white sheet is the chosen name for this place that will be home for many. I hope it's spelt correctly..."

Bathong!

The crowd laughs before he hands the microphone back to the man who handed it to him in the first place. I shift to stand on the other side. He takes a hold of the sheet and pulls but the name board lands on the ground. I chortle while the crowd laughed again. Who the hell closed this board like this? Oh my gosh.

"That was not part of the rehearsals," Bangi chuckles as one of the mannequins were quick to come and pick up the board. It looked fine. The crowd claps and starts cheering. I'm clapping too excited for Siqalo cause now it was her time to shine.

•••

"You are trending my love," I say scrolling down my news feed. I reach down and start undoing my shoes before kicking them off my aching feet. "People are happy...you should see this."

I head to the bathroom where I find him washing his hands. The day wasn't over yet for us though cause the King and Queen wanted us all to celebrate this.

Nyiso being the one who always tells me what to watch told me of the news airing his speech from earlier today a few minutes ago.

"There's even an article here...they interviewed uGogo Andiswa..." I dont know her. "...she says 'I never thought I'd ever have a place to call my own after losing mine back in 2015 to a fire. What the Prince has done here is give us hope and a new meaning to life. I'll forever be grateful for what he has done for us.' That's you baby."

I squeal and throw my arms around him as he chuckles and holds me back by my waist.

"I'm so proud of you. I hope you know that."

"There's still a lot to tackle out there and it might not always be such a smooth sailing ship."

"And I'll still be proud of you."

I peck his lips.

Chapter Thirty Five.

*"When the time is right, I, the Lord, will make it happen." X
ISAIAH 60:22.*

••

Weird.

Nothing again. I mean the patch is back on, but still, dololo Mrs red robot of the season. I don't know man but this surely is one for Google... right.

I dump the used toilet paper piece into the loo and get up before flushing and pulling my pajama shorts up. My hands get a quick wash and when that is complete, I allow them to air dry while staring at myself in the mirror.

The doek on my head was hiding a disaster I haven't had happen to me since high school. I trusted a change of hairstyles would do me good but here I am today filled with regrets. The hairstyle literally ate an unbelievable amount of my hairline. I cried my eyeballs out on the day before yesterday when I had Bangi helping me out with unbraiding the mess.

I even wanted to shave everything off after he called me...his own wife a turkey. A whole turkey.

Look I'm almost in tears just thinking of it now.

I drag myself back into our bedroom and find him there seated and wide awake.

"Morning Sthandwa sam...what's wrong?" He asks. I shake my head. It's nothing. Just a bit of abdominal cramps and a headache today. "Don't shake your head, I know you're not okay. I can see it. Come here."

I breathe out and head to him either way.

After straddling him he looks at me in the eye for the longest time. To the point where I frown and shrug. "Kanti yini?"

"There's something different about you Sthandwa sam," he says his arms now folded in front of his chest.

"Different?" I ask and then remember he did say I look like a turkey. "Mxm." I attempt on getting off his lap and head downstairs to try and distract myself from all this turkey thoughts but he anchors me to his lap. So effortlessly.

These past five months I've really seen him evolve and tone his body in a way I've never thought possible. I thought I was the only one with thunder thighs here but his were killer. I could never compare, even though he says I've also toned a few areas of my sexy body.

What is a gymnast against me? Okay that was a bad example but you get the point.

"Are you still angry at me for what I said the other day?" He asks. I try removing his hands from my waist but nothing. He didn't even flinch when I slapped his hand.

"Bangi!"

"Khuluma nami Ma'Dlamini. Why are you so moody these days?"

"Moody? Mina? Bangi let me go please." I try again but still nothing.

Okay...breathe Zano. He'll eventually get tired of this and let me go. It's only a matter of time. My stomach growls and I definitely knew I was hungry now for something light. Heavy food was surely going to make me feel worse.

We sit.

"You still don't want to talk?"

"I have a headache."

"There are headache pills downstairs, you know this."

"Okay let me go ke."

"Is that all that's bothering you Sthandwa sam? Like just a headache?"

"Yeah...and just minor period pains."

"Oh? You're on your period?" He asks, eyebrow raised and his grip on my waist loosening a little.

"Well not yet. But it's definitely coming." I say and watch his disappointed look turn into a smirk filled fest.

I know that face all too well now.

"Uh-uh, not with my siblings around," I shake my head as he reaches over to my still crossed arms.

"I didn't say anything Ma'Dlamini." He says, the humor in his voice doing back flips and splits.

No...no...is that my body betraying me. I have to get off this lap fast before...crap. He twitches underneath me and I wish I could brush him off like a normal human with a headache but it's not what it wants. It's like I didn't understand my own body right now.

Bangi leans in and halts right in front of my face. His lips barely touching mine but I could feel him.

"I meant you have this glow to you today. That's what's different Sthandwa sam."

I blush at those words before resting my arms around his bare neck and shoulders. He was still warm from being in bed this long. He's always warm. My person heater. It's my turn to just stare at him in utter adoration. The man I can't stop applauding for everything he does for me and others.

Within these five months a lot has happened. And beside the amazing fact that my man was now at the big 30 he had started another foundation. A feed-the-nation foundation that focuses on giving families that are unemployed and in need of basic

good quality food every single month. That also reminds me of the other houses being built not so far from where Siqalo is still.

There just was a lot going on.

I lean in and we share a kiss. A slow steady kiss that soon escalates, nearly taking my breath away. His hands sneak under my top and finds my breasts. The moment he squeezes them I flinch, stopping the kiss altogether.

"What the hell?" I ask removing his hands from me. My mood just ran out of the door.

"What?"

"Hayi marn," I get off of his lap and put my slippers on.

"Uyaphi manje? Did I do something wrong?"

"You'll find me downstairs," I hug myself.

I hear him chuckle before he shakes his head. "You're just going to leave me like this? Sthandwa sam."

I leave, closing the door behind me. As I made my way downstairs I noticed Nandi was already here, cleaning. There were closed containers on the island and I knew she had already made something 'simple' for breakfast.

"Morning Nandi."

"Morning Sis Zanokuhle. How are you this morning?" She asks stopping with her sweeping. I shrug.

"Better. What did you make I'm starving," I walk to the island and scan the food.

Scones, awa.

Maybe this bacon...yeah...wait I can't start eating when everyone isn't down here yet. But says who? I remove the plastic wrap from the bowl of bacon and take one. Make that two, before closing it and biting off some. Goodness me. This is just what I needed.

"Are Buhle and Khaya still in bed?" I ask, grabbing a clean bowl and a box of cornflakes from the cupboard.

"I'm not certain about Khaya, but Buhle did come by here a few minutes ago before heading to the bathroom."

I nod. Which should mean she'll come down here any minute now. Khaya has been an oversleeping machine ever since he came here three days ago. But even if it felt like I was complaining I wasn't cause I missed them both dearly. This also being their first ever visit here is a good thing cause there was so much we caught up on face to face. The months may have hindered something in our usual bond but we made it work.

The only person who wasn't here was Zonke. Not that I would want her here, especially since the woman is pregnant again. With the same man's child who beat the shit out of her. I don't even understand how she and Alakhe are back together again. I

don't even understand how she could be willingly making a baby for him again after everything. How they even worked things out still baffles Bangi and I.

Khethiwe...Sigh...she's still around fighting it all as it came but one thing I've learned about about Alakhe is that you won't tell him what he can and cannot do.

Anyway Zonke is still healing well the last I heard from her. She's still in intensive physiotherapy trying to get back on her feet again.

"Morning sis...are you feeling better today?" Buhle says after having jogged down the stairs like a maniac. She sits on a highchair before giving me a smile.

Gosh I know I've been trash these past few days but I can't be that bad.

"Yeah...I mean I'm here right. Plus I'm sure it's just my delayed period that's making me feel like this," I say and pour some of the cornflakes in a bowl.

"Mhmmm...are you sure it's just a delayed period as you say?"

"Hawu duh, what else would it be?"

"Hayi I'm just asking nje, phela you've been awfully moody nje these past few days."

"Kanti don't you become moody when you're PMSing? Yoh hayi

niyangibhora nonke yaz," I cluck and take the bowl of cornflakes with me to the outside where I'm hoping to feel a little better about myself.

What did she mean when she said I'm moody. Me? First I'm a turkey now I'm moody? Whats next?

Okay going outside was a bad idea because one, it's cold and two the air is making my head spin. I slide the door closed and awkwardly walk past these two women I stormed out of, making my way to the lounge. After throwing myself on the couch and placing the bowl on my lap I start digging into it. A handful of crunchy cereal later I'm pissed at the fact that Buhle made me forget to add milk in here. Mxm.

"Good morning." That's Bangi.

"Morning my Prince," Nandi.

"Haybo where's my wife?"

"She's in the lounge," Buhle says.

"Oh Thanks."

When I look up indeed he was making his way towards this area. "Is that all you're having?"

"Is there a problem with what I'm having?"

"Let's not fight baby, that's not why I'm here."

"Then why are you here?"

"Eh?" Him.

Okay that came out very wrong cause this is still his house and he has the right to be here.

"I meant like you came all the way down here to ask me why I'm having cereal?"

"Nope. You left your phone upstairs with me and someone called you," He says and settles next to me on the couch handing me my phone.

"Who?"

"Your father."

"My fa...mxm." I toss the phone aside irritated by the fact that he'd bring me it just to tell me that idiot was calling me. I wouldn't have answered anyway cause I don't have anything to say to him. "You shouldn't have bothered."

"It was probably important."

"Important? Nothing this man says or does in my life now is important. In fact why is he calling me now when we haven't spoken since after my wedding? What does he want from me?"

"See why you should answer his calls?"

"Hayi. Gamare ngibe clueless. Plus I'm sure he wants money."

"Or your step siblings need help...or want to bond with you."

"His kids are not my siblings. I don't even remember their names."

"Okay. Forget I said anything ke Sthandwa sam," He raises his hands in defeat.

Good. I take another handful of cornflakes and eat.

I hear the phone ringing in the corner of the couch where I threw it. I reach for it and turn the screen to him. "You shouldn't have bought this phone here." I let it ring. When it stops it doesn't even take long before it rings again. I sigh, and answer.

"Hello

Advertisement

" He says too excited.

"Baba." I chew on the cornflakes in my mouth.

"Nonozi...unjani nono?"

I heave out a sigh. "Ngikahle baba."

"Nathi sikahle Nonozi."

"Manje Ufunani?"

"Nono, don't be like that. I'm just calling to hear from my daughter that's all."

"Next time text me ke."

I was about to hang up when I heard him yell on the other end of the line. "Wait wait wait."

"Ba?"

"Nono, please don't be like this. You're still my daughter and I'm still your father."

"Okay." I eye Bangi. "Can I hang up now?"

"Fine...please Nonozi, I need money." He says his voice lower now than before.

"Hawu?" I chuckle and put the phone on loudspeaker for my husband to hear the point I so eagerly proved a few minutes ago. "Money? You need money?"

"Yes."

"Oh? What happened to the cows you demanded not so long ago?"

"You took 50 of those cows Nono."

"And you were still left with 150. That's still a big number."

"I...look please just 10k and I'll be out of your hair."

"10k? What are you going to do with 10k?"

"I'm going to...Nono since when do I have to explain myself like this like you don't trust me."

"I don't trust you vele. For all I know you could be lying or even be busy supporting a gambling addiction of yours that we don't know of."

"Gambling? I don't gamble." He says and I hear someone laugh. I could tell it was that woman.

"Awume Zanokuhle with this pointless interrogation! This man is still your father and you have absolutely no right to be talking to him the way you are talking to him," my supposed stepmother reprimands me. "Your father is coming to you as his daughter asking for help and you just keep on treating him

like garbage. Yayaphi irespect? Unyoko akakufundisanga ukuhlonipha abantu aba-..."

I hang up. No. No one is going to talk about my mother like that when she doesn't even know her like that. Where does she even get off with saying such stupid things to my ear? Nxa.

"I'm sorry about that."

"Please never answer his calls." I beg him. If I have to talk to this man it will have to be on my own term and not his. If it's money that he so desperately needs then I'll send it to him.

We both head back to the kitchen where we find Buhle eating breakfast and Nandi still cleaning. "Nandi, you can come and have breakfast if you want."

"No, I'm fine my Princess...I mean sis Zano."

I nod and start dishing up some for Bangi before he sits down next to Buhle. Khaya finally shows up, singing loud and proud to the most annoying song ever.

"Eh Labantwana bawrongo!" He sings.

"Ahh, eh labantwana maUber!" Buhle joins him getting off her highchair and they both start dancing when Khaya pulls the earphones out of his phone. The song now playing loud for us to hear.

"Eh labantwana madumane, ebaythatha bay'faka emakhaleni bay'user!" They sing.

core and it's all because of Lindiwe. That woman has been making me work more these days and I don't get why.

"You heard me right?" I ask chewing on my heaven sandwich.

"Yeah you asked me to not allow you to eat after 18h00," he closes his laptop, checking on the time on his wristwatch. "It's 17h30 now."

"You were listening," I smile and lean in to peck his cheek and have a seat.

"Why are you making it sound like I never listen to you?"

I shrug. I don't know vele, but right now I didn't want to talk. I just wanted to eat in peace.

"I was actually checking on things like how to start our own NPO and the steps that would be taken to get there. I sent an email to Lerato to compile the information and any more she can give us and hopefully we'll have all of that tomorrow."

I nod. Sounds like a plan.

"Have you thought of what you'd want this NPO to be about?"

I shake my head.

"Awusakhulumi manje Sthandwa sam?" He asks.

I shake my head again. I'll talk only after I finish this sandwich. It shouldn't be hard to get this, I swear. Entlek he should keep

quiet too, cause then I'll be able to finish faster and then we can have this conversation that clearly can't wait.

"Mhmmm...let me go order myself some pizza then," he takes his phone and gets up before ordering an extra cheesy and an extra beefy pizza. Delivery to arrive...I'm not sure when.

I should call Nyiso then to confirm our meeting for tomorrow. Yeah. I pat for my phone and fail to find it in the pocket of my track jacket. I do however find it in my track pants. I finish the last bit of my sandwich and smirk at my accomplishment. I don't think I wanted another one though just for the sake of not wanting one. I find her number fairly quickly and dial away.

It rings for a while and then the while just becomes ridiculously long that I hang up irritated. Why is she not answering? What could be way better than answering a call from her best friend...unless if she doesn't value our friendship anymore.

Oh my goodness...she doesn't want to be my friend anymore. Is this because I told her about Vuki and Nelli and how much fun we had the other day? Like is that why she thinks that I don't want to be friends with her anymore? She must think I tried replacing her...but she should know I would never do that. I would never ever replace her.

Yeah she definitely replaced me. Twice and no answer? No this is serious. I wipe my tears away. I did not think this is how our

friendship would've ended. Like she could've at least given me a hint about this. Did she show any of these signs at her baby shower? Yes? No? Mxm.

'Have a nice life.' I text her. If this is the game she wants to play then we both should get hurt hawu.

Oh so now I'm the one getting called huh?

I'm not answering...I'm not answering...why did I answer!

"Yeah? Can I help you?" I sniff.

"Uhhh...what's up with the text? Have a nice life?"

"What do you think is up with that text? Have a nice life vele angisho you don't want to be friends with me anymore so ngiyakukhulula."

"Uyangikhulula? Haybo mge are you okay?"

"I'm perfectly fine. Is it just because I saw right through you now that you ask me such silly questions?"

"Mge I swear I don't know what you're talking about cause mina I was busy putting uNcebo to sleep when I heard my phone ring. In fact he's still in my hold as we speak, wearing that beautiful white fluffy romper his godmother brought him. Mge you should see him he's so adorable. Useza ksasa angisho?"

Oh? She still sounds like she's my friend.

"I...I am."

"Great, vele I wanted us to celebrate my baby turning 4 months. Honestly he's growing up so fast ." she laughs.

"I get what you mean phela just yesterday your water broke while we were still having the time of our lives at your baby shower and now he's turning four months. I mean tomorrow he'll be running nje." I say. That thought alone made me emotional. I still couldn't believe my friend is a mother to a whole living and breathing and healthy boy. It's amazing how God can just change things up and give you the things that you need.

"Holy balls...I mean mge you're right. That means I have to spend every second I can with him cause angifuni nex. I don't want to miss a single thing."

I chuckle. "Let the child breathe too mge." I hear what sounds like kisses on the other end.

"He's breathing just fine under my wing. Anyway I hope this means awusangikhululi. What was up with that anyways?"

"Oh...I might have overreacted lapho. Ignore that text please."

"Oho, mge. Okay. I'll see you tomorrow then. I definitely have to go put my young man in bed."

"Okay bye. Give him a big fat kiss for me okay?"

"No problem," she says and I soon hang up.

Right.

"Who's getting a big fat kiss?" Bangi asks walking back in here holding two cups of hot chocolate from what I could smell.

"Ncebo."

"Your friends son?" He asks handing me a cup. I take it and thank him before he joins me on the couch once more.

"Yep."

"Some kids are lucky," he reaches for the remote and switches on the TV.

"What do you mean?" I sip the sweet but delicious hot beverage.

"I mean he's busy getting kisses while we are getting none."

"None?" I chuckle.

"Were you crying?"

"I don't give you kisses now Malinga?"

"Why were you crying Sthandwa sam?"

"It was just a little misunderstanding I had with Nyiso," I clear my throat. "But I still don't get how I don't apparently give you enough kisses my love when I gave them to you this very morning...or is it more that you actually want?"

I ask this on purpose cause I know what he wants. It didn't even take a lot to read him.

"It's not happening."

"See why I don't even bother anymore?" He chuckles.

I gasp as I hear my heart shutter into a million pieces.

What is that supposed to mean?

I don't excite him anymore now?

Okay, I will not shed a tear for this nonsense, not when I can just go back to sleep again.

"Sthandwa sam don't tell me you're crying again, this is becoming ridiculous now."

"Oh so now I'm ridiculous huh?"

"That's not what I said."

"But it's what you meant."

"No it's not what I meant." He takes my cup from me and puts it on the coffee table before taking me into his hold. "Please stop crying my love....I'm sorry but I promise you that's not what I meant at all. It's just been a tough couple of days and I miss you. I also get that you haven't been feeling well and I won't under any circumstance force you into sleeping with me. I love you and that means I'll wait." He kisses my temple.

I feel silly now for just crying like that. It was uncalled for.

"I'm sorry for crying like this too." I sniff.

"Nothing a movie can't hopefully fix. What do you want to watch?"

"Anything that won't make me cry."

"Action movie...coming up." He says and goes to box office to rent a movie. Bad boys. Mhnn...okay.

It's not long after the movie starts that a knock interrupts us.

"I'm sure that's my Pizza." He excuses himself and gets up to go attend the door. Indeed it was the Pizza that came accompanied by Deliverance himself and a few other men.

"My Prince, you have a guest," I hear him say.

"Let the guest through," Bangi says and walks to go put away the box on the counter. The smell immediately made my mouth water and I wanted to have some of it now.

Hold yourself Zanokuhle.

Zibambe!

Amehlo wabaphansi comes into view and with a frown on my face, I'm up on both feet. He immediately kneels in front of Bangi. "Bayede. Shazi."

"Please, get up." Bangi says and steps forward to help the man we haven't seen in ages.

"Thank you my Prince." He says without looking up.

"I...please come in and have a seat. I can prepare you anything to drink if you'd like." I offer but he lightly shakes his head.

"That will not be necessary Wezanokuhle, I won't be staying long. I've just been sent here to announce the arrival of the family's coming blessing. A seed has indeed been planted." Bangi glances over at me and then back to Amehlo.

"Rejoice and nurture this gift for there is none other like it. Let what is conceived in love be raised in love." He finally looks up and his eyes find me in a matter of seconds.

He turns to walk away but halts just as I was about to ask him about something.

"You need to listen to what she says. See what she's showing you. Don't undermine your dreams Wenzanokuhle. They are more than just dreams and the fact that your mother has chosen you to see what she sees means a lot. Amadlozi awadlali."

"But..." I stop realising that he was already walking away from the conversation I was willing to have.

Soon he's out of here. Bathong? Just like that? Like he didn't even ask how we're doing before just confusing us with random and complicated words and sayings.

Anyway. I'm hungry. I head to the kitchen and grab a plate, putting it on the counter next to the pizza box which I open. Oh my Goodness. Yes. I scan the box for the biggest slice.

"Did you hear what Amehlo said?"

"Mhnnn."

Yes. I have found my slices.

"He said that a seed has been planted...Sthandwa sam that could only mean one thing." "Someone is a gardener?"

Okay that was stupid. "Be serious babe."

"Okay sorry." I attempt on taking a bite of the pizza, but halt when he asks me a question that has me bursting out in laughter. "Are you pregnant Sthandwa sam?"

"Ucalile." "Are you?"

I stop laughing. He's seriously asking me that? Haybo. No marn.

"Bangi I'm not pregnant. I'm sure he meant Khethiwe or something."

"Why would he tell us then?"

"I don't know my love, but you could've asked him." I shrug.

"Now can I eat it peace?"

"Eat? It's after 18h00 by the way so, no."

"Huh?"

"You said No eating after 18h00 remember?"

"Heeh! I'm sorry but you cannot tell me when I can and cannot eat, you are not my stomach nor will you ever be! Hawu nangu muntu azongitjela ukuthi I said no eating after 18h00 when did I even say that? Mhlolo wam." I grab my slices and plate before leaving him there. That movie is not going to watch itself.

Chapter Thirty Six.

"Adopt the pace of nature, her secret is patience." X Ralph Waldo Emerson.

••

I have been staring at the ceiling for the past few minutes since waking up and I've been feeling like shit. Not just physically... But emotionally. I felt...I don't know man but that eight letter word definitely made my head spin. I mean I don't understand how I couldn't see this myself. How I couldn't put two and two together, or in this case how every single symptoms -is that what you call it?- couldn't have been more obvious?

I mean did that word have to appear on my forehead for me to notice the difference it has brought onto my life? And what's even more embarrassing is the fact that this was one of the things I had to teach when I was still a teacher. Which wasn't even that long ago. I know the symptoms and all that like the back of my hand. But... Gosh.

I sit up a little too quick and feel how my head just spins. Oh my God. What if I really am pregnant. Oh my God!

That one mishap is why I'm feeling like this right now? Like what the hell. I drag myself to the bathroom and pee before opening the shower tap to get the water running. From cold to hot. Where's Bangi? Obviously somewhere in this house

Zanokuhle. I take my showering gel and loofah before squirting some of it on there.

One whiff and I find myself closing my mouth and nose. What in the nausea is this? I was definitely going to hurl if I took another smell of this.

Why did I smell it again. I'm gagging, my hand closing my nose and mouth again. I can't use my showering gel now? How great. Amazing. Now I have to change my showering gel because of this.

I gag again. This is probably the worst shower I've ever taken and I never thought I'd be one to say that. I mean who ever thinks that you'd ever live to see the day when showers are in the category of being shitty? Not me.

After showering using Bangi's showering gel, I step out and dry my body. In the midst of it all I find myself glancing at myself in the mirror, wondering if I could see any changes. Okay, I don't know...but my areolas definitely looked different. Darker maybe? Oh my goodness I think I'm going to be sick.

I wear the warmest and most comfortable clothes I can find before combing my afro out and cover it with a doek. I was not used to myself looking like this but then again I'm not walking around this mother earth with hair I wasn't confident in. I

should probably invest in a weave or two. Who knows, I might actually look bomb in one.

With my hands in the pockets of my jacket I make my way downstairs. The house is warm yes, but it just felt lonely. That alone was making it feel a tad bit cold. I haven't even checked the time yet.

I find my husband seated on the couch in the living room, busy on his laptop. I don't think he noticed me standing there for a while and I didn't blame him. I mean who else would want to talk with the same woman who basically spoke down on you. Making you feel like less of a man when he was just helping me help myself. I didn't even finish that movie we were supposed to watch together last night.

I sigh and that's when he eventually looks up, shortly after his face is overtaken by his beautiful smile. He stretches and rids himself of his laptop placing it on the coffee table not so far from him. "Good morning Sthandwa sam," he gets up.

I don't deserve him. I really don't. "Hawu my love, yini inkinga?" He asks. I look down as I felt the puddles well up in my eyes, blinding me. I honestly didn't mean to shed tears but I genuinely felt like shit for yesterday, and the days before that. "Sthandwa sam, what's wrong?"

Why pretend as if I didn't offend you last night man? Or is he just being nice about this whole situation? If he could've chased me away, I'm pretty sure that's what he would've done. But now he's stuck with me.

"Khuluma nami (talk to me my love)my love, you can't just be crying for no reason ekseni kangaka. You'll give yourself more headaches and I don't want that."

He's right. I take my hands out of my pockets and wipe my tears away before he grasps my hands by their wrists. "Zano."

"Mhmm?" I sniff.

"Please tell me what's bothering you. Did I do something?"

"No."

"Then what is it?"

"It's about yesterday. I'm sorry for how I spoke to you. It was unnecessary."

"Yesterday? My love that's no reason to be this emotional. It's all okay."

"No it's not. I shouldn't have spoken to you like that." I look up at him. "I don't know what got into me. Maybe..."

"Maybe what?"

"Maybe...the seeds thing got to me a little."

He chuckles shaking his head slightly. "Forget about what I said aft..."

"No no, we can't ignore what Mehlo said Bangi. And maybe you

were right. Maybe...maybe I am pregnant." I frown a little after saying that.

He on the other hand becomes the face of Colgate. Grinning ear to ear before moving his hold from my hands to my waist.

"There's nothing wrong with that moes Sthandwa sam. In fact that would be amazing news."

"Maybe. I don't know." I sigh.

"Why do I get the feeling you aren't as excited as I am about this possibility Zano?" He asks, his face now serious.

I knew I was being a killjoy right now. I should be just as excited about this even though it wasn't part of the plan. But when has anything and everything ever gone accordingly in life?

"It's one thing to talk about it but now actually having to go through it...I'm scared."

"Scared? Scared of what?"

"Everything Bangi. I've never been pregnant before, obviously and..." I pause not wanting to say more. What if I mess up? What if we get excited for nothing only to -God forbid- lose this baby. If there even is a baby. These are possibilities. I know what Mehlo said but he also is not the one above.

"Feeling scared is normal Sthandwa sam. I've also never been a father before and that's okay. But what you should not feel is loneliness because I'm here with you. I'm not a cardboard

cutout who's not willing to take this beautiful journey with you. I love you for telling me this because I don't want you to shut me out."

For the first time ever since I came out of that bed, I smile. I needed to hear that. Or something like it. I nod.

"I won't. I'll ask Nandi to go to the pharmacy for me...for pregnancy tests and then..."

"We take it from there?"

I nod again. "That's a start right?"

"Yep," he leans in pecks my lips.

"Also can I have Nyiso come here instead? I don't feel like traveling today for some reason."

"That can be arranged My love. I'll let Zakhele know as soon as you inform your friend yeah?"

"Thank you." Now I'm the one who stretches out to give him a kiss.

It's not long before he heads upstairs to go take his morning shower. He was at it again this morning, gym being his holy church. Luckily today was also my day off. I think this whole week should just be my week off don't you think baby? I think so to. I can't be suffering all this dizziness when I can just rest and actually focus on growing my baby. Our baby. If there even is a baby cause now I'm apparently pregnant. I'm going to be a...a mother. What the heck?

Me? Now? Scary man. Also scary how this patch is useless now that I think of it. I reach into my jeans to the sides of my thighs to remove it. After a minor struggle I have the sticky patch in between my index finger and thumb. It was good while it lasted.

It felt wrong tossing it away like that when it still had a few more good days to go.

I'm scouting the cupboards and the fridge for anything I could eat but nothing was speaking to me. Not even the pork. I sigh and grab my phone, and begin surfing the world of online food ordering. But what do I even want?

Definitely not that.

Raw fish? Nope. I don't think I can have that.

I even exit the app and end up on Google, searching through some things I already knew and then finally what I came here to actually figure out. No processed cheese? Seriously? Okay why am I ever bothered when I didn't even eat that much processed cheese. I didn't even like cheese like that.

Oh my Goodness...the pizza I had yesterday had cheese. Was that cheese okay or? Oh my God I think I'm going to be sick. Zano you should be ashamed of yourself. How could I even put our child in that kind of danger?

Why am I crying again! Argh! This is not okay... I put my phone down and take a breather. I shouldn't even stress cause that's not good for the baby. Nothing is good for the baby. I miss the days I didn't even know about this cause now I was a mess.

I hate Bangi for doing this to me. How could he have sex with me? How could I have sex with him? What was I even thinking? He should've kept his privates to himself marn, busy hlokolozing (poking) me with stuff I didn't even know a few months back. Look at where I now because of all the times I begged him not to stop.

You know what Nyiso will just have to get herself the food she wants to eat cause I don't even think I'm hungry anymore. I send her a text, asking if it would be possible for her to come over instead since I didn't feel like going anywhere. She replies with a voice note.

"Ahhhhh!!" She yells and a shocked me moves the phone away from my ear. What the hell is this. "Mge! Ask no further. Of course I don't mind coming over, I mean who in their right mind would say no to an invite to the Palace? There will be a motorcade coming to fetch me right? Entlek, why didn't you call me?" I listen as the recording comes to an end right there and then with me managing to chuckle at what my friend had just said.

Wow.

I dial her number and not even a ring later it's answered.

"Mge, what should I even wear when coming to the palace as a visitor? I have to know cause the last time I was there it was your wedding and there I had to wear what you wanted."

"Anything you want to wear mge. I don't have a problem mina. You'll be in our wing anyway," I say.

"And if I bumped into the King and Queen? I don't want to feel out of place."

"Don't worry about them bathong. They'll be in a meeting with Bangi and a few other men discussing something about the project that's in motion right now."

"And aren't you going?"

"Nope, I don't feel well so."

"Oh okay then. Let me go bath Ncebo and prepare the two of us before we find ourselves in a late fiasco. You'll text me when these people come to fetch me right?"

"Of course. I'll see you then," I say and not long after that I hang up.

Now that that was sorted I could ask Nandi to go buy those tests that I needed. She promised to have them delivered to me before the end of the day since she is held up in the prepping of the table where today's meeting would be taking place. I made

her promise not to tell a single soul about this cause it just wasn't their business yet.

The climb all the way up the stairs didn't feel as great anymore. I don't know if it was me just being too damn fussy or the stairs were going to be a problem to me too. I enter our bedroom to find him comparing two suits in front of the mirror.

"The maroon one baby." I sit on the bed as he places the other suit on the couch in here. He puts the suit on and nods. He did look like a fine ass specimen in that black polo neck too.

"Are you just going to keep looking at me like that and not say anything?"

I giggle, getting up. I have to pee.

"You know you always look handsome." I say and flush.

"Thank you my love."

I dry my rinsed hands.

He joins me in the bathroom, tackling the task of brushing his hair and beard to perfection. "Nyiso will be able to come over today. She didn't even hesitate taking the offer." I tell him.

"Then Zakhele will be informed my love. He'll call you for the location and times."

I nod.

Soon enough I'm left alone in this big house. The clock had just hit the 10 o'clock mark and I didn't know what to do with

myself for the hours before I'd be joined by Nyiso. I make sure though to text all the important things to Zakhele before deciding on watching that bad boys movie I failed to complete last night.

I'm woken up by my phone ringing. Bathong not again. I missed the whole movie practically. Again. It's Nyiso.

"Mge."

"Mge we're almost there, please come and fetch me," she says and I quickly sit up. A little too quick it seems. I did forget.

"Oh...okay."

She hangs up and I wipe the sleep from my eyes before switching the TV off. I only leave with my phone at hand cause I'd be back here anyway within minutes. It's colder out here than I expected. I fold my arms in front of my chest and walk ahead.

How I managed to sleep for almost two hours is beyond me. I greet the two helpers I pass by. They curtsey back before continuing ahead. Not so far I could hear a voice that could only belong to one man. The only man with a blocked nose sounding voice. I couldn't make out what he was saying though but he sounded angry?

Was he angry though? I wanted to turn back but I was a little too late. I have already been spotted. Oh Zonke is here too. I

don't know what to make of this but I'll just mind my own business before any commotion starts here. And I'm not in any mood for violence. Not today. Not ever. She looks better though, that made me happy. The scars on her face had vanished. And the wheelchair was still a thing. Her arm sling and neck collar was off.

That helper I got her

Advertisement

uMa Yolanda did well. I applaud her till today for not giving in to my sister's stubborn attitude cause even if she didn't like it she needed her help.

"If it isn't my younger brother's wife," he scans me from head to toe. I'm focussed on Mrs Law firm down here who is smirking like she wasn't looking like she was ready to shed tears not so long ago. I snap out of it when Alakhe asks a guard to push my sister to his wing. What is she even doing here? Is she looking for a fight with Khethiwe again?

"But Khe, I don't want to be pushed by anyone other than you."

"Do I look like I'm pushing-your-wheelchair material. Get her out of here. Don't piss me off."

"Alakhe." She calls but he gives her a look. The same look he gives me.

I take a step back as she's indeed wheeled away.

"Why do I get the feeling you're running from me Zanokuhle?"

What?

His face softens and I think I see a shadow of a smile on his face.

"You look beautiful today."

"Excuse me?" The words escape my mouth faster than I can register what he has just said to me. What is even going on here. I take another step back which he undoes by taking one forward. "Please stop it. I have to go."

He stops me by grabbing my forearm.

My heart starts pounding. I'm stuck between acting cool around these guards and not panicking over nothing. But I can't call this awkward act nothing.

"I'm no monster Zanokuhle."

"What?" I frown. "Please let my arm go Alakhe."

He does. Huh? What is this? Am I still sleeping?

"Never touch me again."

"Oh? Or what?" He lowers his eyes and in a second I feel like this was the Alakhe I knew. I squirm, shaking my head. My phone ringing is what makes me rush off before he can even touch me again. What the shit!

Nxa!

Outside the three cars pull up and not a moment later her door is opened. She steps out with Ncebo in her hold causing me to shove whatever happened back there to the back of my mind. I hear her squeal. Her baby's pram is taken out of the boot and brought up the flight of stairs. When she finally gets to me we share a hug. I manage to ignite the excitement of seeing her again. We walk back to our wing with Ncebo in my hold.

•••

"You're making labor sound...drastic."

"It is mge. Don't do it. I had a first degree tear and healing all that is no joke," she says and takes another chicken wing. These things were too spicy, so I ended up only feasting on my chicken and avocado wrap. Heaven.

"Too late," I laugh.

"What do you mean too late? You're pregnant already?"

I swallow and jump at denying all that before she thinks otherwise.

"No, I'm just saying Bangi and I are already planning on having a huge family so I can't go back on that." I say.

"Yoh, after what I went through I'm thinking that just one is probably enough." She says.

I glance over at Ncebo who's still napping peacefully in his pram. He fell asleep in my arms.

"Maybe after having one more mge than unga valelisa (then you can say goodbye). Phela uNcebo needs a sibling. You surely don't want him to grow up alone nje. No sister or brother...awa mge." I chuckle. It was still up to her though.

"You sound exactly like Mandla's mother. That woman wants so many grand children it scares me. At my age she says I should've already had 3 little Shongololos running around. Mge si late." She says and we both laugh at her words.

"Hectic."

"Imagine mge. I know I've been praying for at least one child for uMandla, but when his mom said I should be at three I felt the passion leaving me and the room. Athi I'm almost 30, and by the time my kids reach teenage hood I'll be old."

"Yoh."

"Heeh that woman. I swear."

I laugh. I guess all mother in laws are like that. They want what seems like the best for their children and family. I get their mindsets though. Back then it was all about growing the family surname, and making sure that it doesn't die out. Survival. Which is why there would be 11 kids in one homestead. They were 6 in my mother's family alone. Bigger was clearly better. Nowadays, not as much. We women are busy building ourselves and have choices now. More rights too. Not to even

mention the methods of prevention out there...even though sometimes...Ahem.

"But you know what, with everything I went through, I don't regret having Ncebo naturally. I somehow feel like I would do it all over again...maybe," we laugh.

The talk moves from the birth and stress to a photo I posted not so long ago. Okay I'm lying. Buhle posted it because I felt like shit that day and she really just loved the photo and wanted it out there. I liked it too. Somehow I didn't look as bad in it.

"You should keep posting pictures of your natural self. People love to see it."

"People should calm down." I chuckle going through the comments. I probably couldn't get over the fact that I've gone from a maximum of 100 likes to almost a 50k. All that because of a smile and chubby cheeks?

"Do you know how many woman out there don't think being natural is beautiful."

"They have the right to feel like that though. Everyone is going through something."

"Everyone should start loving themselves."

"It takes time mge. Lots of time."

"I get that. I mean Ncebo gave me tons of stretch marks on my belly and I'm trying to live with them."

"See, nawe you need time. I also needed time to start appreciating all these curves, and even with all of that I still have my days where I don't feel fabulous. Those days make me appreciate having Bangi by my side."

"Ncooh...mge marn nawe."

"I'm just saying. He does make me feel like a supermodel at times. Like people leaving such stupid comments don't matter."

"What comments?"

"Bathi, 'she's fat neh but I'd still marry her too.'"

"That's a good comment though Mge. I don't hear anything wrong with that statement."

I chuckle. "Obviously. This guy is making it sound as if being fat should be a reason why someone is undesirable mge. He should've left the size of my body out of the context. It's like saying I don't date dark skinned ladies but I'd definitely give Lupita Nyong'o a chance."

"Isn't that preference?"

"Sounds more like colorism to me." I shrug.

How did we get to this conversation again?

"Deep." She says and we break out in laughter after a moment of silence.

"Indeed. Let's talk about something else."

"Oh how about we talk about taking a trip to Bali, you're paying."

"A trip to Bali."

"Yes. Phela your man gave you 2 mil and we should spend it."

I laugh shaking my head.

"Bali is not one of those ways."

"Haybo mge...Dubai then?"

"You're serious?"

"Dead serious mge. It's not everyday that you hear your friend got 2 million in the bank now and she's not using it."

"But I am using it." I say taking another bite of my wrap. I've been eating fairly slow it seems because of all the talking.

"Give this a thought too." She reaches down for another chicken wing before a cry disturbs us. "Imagine it mge."

"I'm imagining."

I try. I really do. She sits down and checks the time. 12h03.

"I hope you don't mind. It's his feeding time."

I nod.

I take this time to take another bite of my wrap.

"Yaz mge I wanted to ask about the Avo thing, I thought you didn't like those?"

I thought so too.

"Bangi got me to like them." I lie. He could never.

•••

"That dragged," he says as we washed the few dishes that we used for supper. I was drying them while he washed them. I dried the glass in my hold, looking at him. I couldn't stop smiling at him not just because of how sexy he looked with his sleeves rolled up like that but just with how much love I had for this man.

His mouth kept moving and I nodded.

Even if I still felt like the most exhausted woman on this earth with tamed nausea and could now clearly not stand the smell of bleach, I was excited about taking those tests Nandi brought back. The thought of giving my husband his first son or daughter, our baby made my heart melt in nothing but pure joy. I couldn't help but feel like he would make an amazing father. I knew he would make an amazing father. Better than the one I have...and hopefully better than the one who wasn't exactly as present in his life.

"Sthandwa sam am I boring you?" He asks bringing me back to the present. "And that glass was dry 20 wipes ago."

"Uh...right. No, I just was in my thoughts right now. I'm sorry. You were saying?"

"Are you sure you're listening?"

I nod. "I'm sure."

"Mhm...okay as I was saying Mr Donalds has put forth a very appealing offer which..." I smile nodding away.

Can it be tomorrow already?



One, two, three, four, five, six and seven. Seven tests neatly packaged and now out on the counter. Okay. My cup is here too. I go sit on the toilet seat and with my poor aim manage to do what had to be done. God. The things you put us through.

Morning pee was apparently the best for these tests. Right.

I get to the first box, opening it and taking out the testing stick. I did spend 5 minutes rereading the instructions given and watched an almost 2 minute long YouTube video so I'm pretty sure I'll absolutely know what I'm doing. I remove the cap and dip it in the pee cup for 5 seconds and close it with it's cap again.

It's not a sexy process and even at the seventh test I feel awkward. And just as nervous. And just as excited. I'm not sure which feeling dominated but they were all there. I empty the cup and throw it away before checking the time. It wasn't even past the minutes of waiting recommended when the name flashed on the tiny screen.

Jesu wam!

What!

Pregnant! It says pregnant right? Holy shit. My knees knock and twitch when I read the same thing on the second and forth one. The last one confirming what the other half a dozen said. Just as fast.

I chuckle in disbelief not wanting to yell out how I felt. I, Zanokuhle Sthandwa sakhe Shazi is pregnant. Haikhona. For real?

Wait...these things are still supposed to tell me how far I am which should be like 2 weeks or something right?

3+ weeks! What? Are these things insane?

I've been baking for more than 3 weeks? I clap once. Oh my God I'm going to faint. The floor is definitely where I'm landing...or is it nausea? I don't know anymore.

After putting the tests in the drawer of my bedside table -don't ask me why- I head out to find ubaba wengane (the father of our child).

uMr Gardner of the year.

Oh now he's a pianist? What is he even playing? It sounds beautiful, calm and like a huge task. He presses the wrong key and curses before glancing up. "Hey."

"Keep playing. That was beautiful."

"Don't lie." He chuckles and glances down.

"I thought I'd find you in sweatville, working out."

"Not today. I'm not even sure how I found myself here."

"Well you did say you'll learn to play again...something like that."

"Funny how I have so many things to do today too but here I am. Struggling past Moonlight Sonata."

I giggle.

"Try again...no need to rush. I can even add vocals."

"Wena? Vocals."

"You make it sound like I'm that bad."

He chuckle and puts his fingers on different keys. He plays away, my soul getting touched by this majestic sound filling my ears. I take a seat on the space right next to him, before laying my head on his shoulder. Humming the wrong hums. I didn't know this piece at all. I actually don't know a lot of pieces anyway. When he makes another error he heaves out a sigh.

"Sorry about that."

He starts again...

Why do I feel like crying and having a chicken and mayo sandwich?

That's not what I came here for.

I clear my throat. "Baby..." I force my impossible singing voice. "...I didn't believe it when you said it...yesterdayyyy...I didn't even think this would happen now...even if I knew there was a possibility especially when we do it with only a sticker to protect us...but now I'm here to tell you that...that I am with child...I am with child...child...I am P...R...E...G...N...A...N...T...and in a few months down the line, I'm not sure but we won't be sleeping peacefully anymore. We'll be housing a whole stranger in here...oh a child..."

He presses the wrong key again before chuckling. "Kanti uthini Ma'Dlamini? (What are you saying Ma'Dlamini?)"

"Ah, didn't you hear a thing I just said?"

"Not really." He says and I sit up defeated. Bathong my singing couldn't have been that bad. Come on. I sigh shaking my head.

"Ngithe...all this time...ngikhulelwe."

"Huh?" He turns quickly on this bench. "Ukhulelwe as in you're pregnant?"

"No, as in ndimithi." I roll my eyes. I thought I was clearer now.

"Bo'Malinga abahle..." Is he tearing up? My heart is a melting mess. "...Sthandwa sam are you...are you sure?"

"Seven positive pregnancy tests sure."

Chapter Thirty Seven.

"I'm running but can't run away I-" X Drake 4422.

••

My heart was still in shambles after seeing the genuine happiness radiating from his face. I can't believe I was responsible for making someone's son this happy right now and that made me at peace. He wouldn't stop kissing my entire face, the hairs of his beard tickling me in the process.

"I can't believe this. You were right it's different when you're actually going through it," he eventually stops his beautiful assault and moves his hands from my face to my belly. I place mine over his giggling. "Nje there's a little Shazi, a little Malinga growing in your womb Sthandwa sam."

"I'm still shocked."

"This calls for a celebration."

"Oh? What do you have in mind Daddy?" I bite on my bottom lip, giving him the look.

He bursts out in laughter and I'm pretty sure it's because of the name I just dubbed him with. That laugh is music to my ears.

"Daddy?"

"Yes Daddy Bangi."

How am I the one blushing when he's the one I'm trying to...charm. I don't know.

"Well...Sthandwa sam, your husband is thinking a little sweat activity."

"The same sweat activity that got us into this situation?"

He chuckles. "Bingo." A kiss lands on my lips, claiming them in an instant and I don't deny him a response. It gets intense. My breath being taken away a couple of times because of how much I wanted him. When I pull back, I feel bad for being the party pooper. But I wanted that sandwich and I wanted it now.

"You okay?" He asks just as breathless.

I nod. "I'm just hungry."

"Hungry? Are you craving something?"

I giggle. We're at that stage already? It feels weird, honestly.

"Chicken and Mayo... Sandwich."

He smiles and nods before getting up from the bench. I frown. Where is he going? Oh the kitchen. I get up and rush to the kitchen too. "Luckily you made chicken yesterday." He takes the container that indeed contained the chicken I cooked yesterday evening. It was interesting how I knew what I just wanted to eat. I thought I was gonna be confused but I clearly wasn't.

He washes his hands before getting to the chicken. Taking it out of the container and placing it on a clean chopping board. "You know I could've done that myself."

"I want to do this for the two of you. I may not be a cook but I

can surely whip up a simple sandwich for my wife," he says.
"Sit."

I sigh and make my way to a highchair. Who am I to refuse someone else doing something I didn't force them to do? And it's not like he made me feel incapable of doing it myself cause then we would've had a problem.

"Toasted or just plain fresh bread?"

"Toasted my love." I say to him and he wastes no time getting the bread out of the bread tin and into the toaster. "So...when can we see a doctor?"

"As soon as you want to Sthandwa sam."

"Okay tomorrow it is then, but we have dinner tomorrow. Remember?"

"Dinner at night. I'll cancel all my meetings and then we do it. I'll just have our Doctor know before we actually go to him."

Right. I nod. "Can we not tell anyone yet...just for the sake of safety?"

"Okay...will be hard not to tell my mother though."

"I feel like I should tell Nonkanyiso because she told me as soon as she found out she was pregnant."

"And she just had her baby, she might be able to guide you through most things in our pregnancy."

"So I can tell her?"

"I don't see why not. If you trust her not to tell the whole world before we do then yeah let her know."

I nod again. "You know she told me about her birth and I didn't like the sound of it. She made it sound worse than I already imagined. And I don't even think I want a planned c-section cause those too have their own long term after affects. I know this because my mother had two of them and I think the epidural things and whatnot made her sensitive to a lot of things...even the cold..."

"Relax...I know that that's worrying you, but lets take it easy. I'm sure the doctor can even clarify a lot of these questions that bother you. How about we even write all your concerns down so that we don't forget anything," he suggested and I liked the idea.

"You're right. I'll go get my notepad."

"I'm sure your sandwich will be ready by the time you come down."

And sure enough I was headed upstairs to find the tiny notepad where all of these things would be dotted down. I find it and even take my phone with. Downstairs he's putting a plate on the island with what I knew was my sandwich. I sit back down and thank him for the food. He made himself one too. We spend most of our breakfast really talking about my fears and his fears and writing down most of the concerns I indeed had

and could remember at that current time. Six things may not sound like a lot, but to me they were everything.

They were me thinking of my baby and making sure that everything I did and thought of doing was safe for my baby. That every decision I take doesn't affect our baby in the long term. I know I may sound paranoid right now but I couldn't just think of myself alone anymore. And now I definitely felt like Bangi was going to come second. I don't know, cause I also don't want to sound selfish and feel like I was neglecting my man.

He got off the call he had just had with Lerato, basically asking her to cancel anything he had to attend to for the following 3 days. His reason was that he wanted to spend time with us and really be there for my needs.

On the other hand I was planning on going to a weave shop. Is that what it is? UniWeave. Where I saw these amazing looking weaves. Nyiso recommended the place to me and said I should definitely check them out. It looked like quality and according to her would never disappoint me.

"I'm leaving..." I peek into the bathroom to find him brushing his teeth. He turns to me, frowning a little before he seems to remember the arrangements I made. I walk in and go stand behind him, our eyes locking in the mirror in front of him. He spits out the toothpaste. "...I'll be back before 15h00, so that I

can get started on supper early."

"I'll be here. Drowning in paperwork."

"Don't finish all that energy then..." I place my hands on his waist. "...save some for later...actually a lot." I kiss his shoulder.

My hands glide up his nakedness. Feeling his warm skin under my fingertips and palms.

He turns around, now allowing me to properly feel on this masterpiece of a chest. Up his neck, and down to his broad shoulders again. I was drooling.

"Have I ever been too tired for you mara Sthandwa sam?" He groans and my eyes run up to meet his. They're filled with wonder, excitement and promises. He grabs me by my waist, pulling me to him. Am I not glad he's not making me nauseas.

"I'm just saying...better have a long conversation with the big man down there."

He lets out a laugh, his head tilting back slightly as he his body shook under my hands. I was serious, even if the smile on my face probably told a different story altogether.

"Him and I will have a long...long conversation. Ready to give my wife all that she needs and wants," he says, pressing into my waist. I had a feeling that if I didn't leave now, I'd probably never do so.

"I...I have to take my leave."

He leans in and goes for my neck. "You sure you want to go? I mean we could always practice for later..." He nuzzles on my neck, breathing down it. My eyes shut as I shudder, my body responding to just having him breathing me in. I'm in danger here. He's provoking the fragile control I have over my whole body right at this instant.

"Allow me to leave Malinga wami..." I almost couldn't recognise my own voice.

"Don't go."

"Baby." I giggle and slightly back away.

"I don't get how you expect me to focus with all this tension."

"I'll be back before you know it." I finally see him emerge from the land on my neck and look at me. If the need he had written all over his face could manifest into reality we'd be looking at a whole other being in here.

I eventually left with nothing but regrets and a soaked panty.

Deliverance opened my door and allowed me to step in.

Zakhele would be the one driving me today too. I didn't even want them to waste any time here because indeed it felt like I had a lot to tackle today. First I got my hair washed and braided at Mimi's. She was mad for the obvious reason. I went to another salon and now my hair was not the same anymore. She

said the lady who braided my hair last, didn't show my afro the respect it deserved. She basically added salt to an open wound.

But on a positive note she made me look and feel better after the lecture. The cornrows didn't make my obvious hair loss a vocal point.

I left there and went to UniWeave. There, I didn't even stay longer than two hours because madam was prepared and knew what she was doing too. My first two weaves. I was mesmerized with how they made me look. I looked like a whole different woman. I couldn't wait to show Bangi this.

They packaged them neatly in a paper bag and I paid with a satisfied heart.

My next stop was clicks for my search in a new showering gel. I found one, and a few eyes as usually. I know I didn't have to do my own shopping but sometimes nothing cleansed my heart than doing it myself.

I awkwardly sat at Spur, watched by my mannequins while destroying a double serving of ribs. These ribs even had me wondering if I really needed to cook back at home or just buy more of these and take them with. I decide against it. I wanted to cook for my man.

After settling the bill, I leave to my last stop.

I needed new lingerie. A bigger bra size and something that yelled sexy. The boutique is filled with so many options. So many choices. So many colors.

'Husband.' I send Bangi a text on WhatsApp.

He's online. Typing...

'Wife.'

'Help! Your wife is in a bit of a conundrum.' I reply.

'Conundrum?'

'Choose; Red, Pink, Purple...or white.' I send a bikini emoji with the text.

Typing...

Purple demon face. Fire emoji.

'Your husband is confused. Why should he have to choose?'

I chortle, looking around to see if anyone was watching.

'Your husband wants all of them!'

I bite on my bottom lip before someone clears their throat standing at a not-so-far distance from me. The mannequins already at work by my side.

"Please. My Princess, I'm the owner of this boutique." She says.
"It's okay guards." I put my phone away. They back off a little and I got to see the lady relax.

"I saw you standing here and I was wondering if you needed assistance maybe."

"Actually...Yes, my bra size is changing and I don't know what size I'm at right now. Do you allow fittings?"

"Well I can actually measure you right now if you don't mind."
She says.

Great.

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When I returned I found Bangi in his study, working on a few designs with Mr Charlie. I didn't even know he would come over here. But I didn't bother them further than that. I showered and then got started on supper. Lasagne.

Supper went by swiftly. We had just finished washing and drying the dishes when I excused myself.

I wanted to head to the bedroom so I could finally try on one of the goodies I brought.

"Uyaphi? (Where are you going?)" He asked.

I reach down for his hand and lead him to the lounge where I make him sit on the couch in the middle.

"Stay here. Give me about ten minutes and I'll be back," my voice is almost a whisper and for no reason at all. Wait I think I was trying to be sexy...praying that it works on him just as I'd imagine it to.

"But I want to follow you Sthandwa sam."

"And ruin the surprise?" I giggle before he pulls me closer to him with the hand that was still in his. "Just ten minutes." My lips brush against his as he squeezes my hand.

"I'll be right here then." He says and attempts on pressing his lips on mine but I pull back. It took so much of me to do that cause I knew my body wanted nothing more than to be one with his right now.

"Ten minutes..." He let's me go and I back away

not wanting to break eye contact with him for as long as I could. When I eventually turned around and rushed upstairs I was already imagining everything.

I wanted my hands all over him and his all over me. I mean it's been a while and I'm pretty sure if it were up to him we'd be having sex at least twice a day, but who has the stamina for that?

I strip off my gown, jeans and top before rushing to the bathroom to freshen up. I was being speedy up in here, rushing up and down, changing into the perfectly fitted bra. I pull out my weave from its paper bag and put it on. The first try has me

chuckling - Not the closure showing me flames. I try again, this time managing to put it on perfectly.

Yass!

I turn around, loving what I was seeing behind. Heels? Nah. I wanted to put on some socks though, cause I'm pretty sure the tiles downstairs were freezing. Why can't I just put on my black slippers? They match anyway. My diamond anklet is just adding a beautiful touch I didn't expect.

A quick glance is the last thing I do before turning to leave. I was beyond excited... I'm lying. I'm dead horny and I left my meal downstairs. The same stairs I was rushing down. He has his head rested on the rest but it wasn't long till he looked up. I think I caught him off guard cause his eyebrows lift almost off of his forehead. Eyes wide open. He opens his mouth as if to say something but words fail him. He gets up.

"I am not used to seeing you like this." He says walking towards me.

"Do you like it?"

"I love it Sthandwa sam...although it will take a lot of getting used to," I flip the hair to one side.

"See anything else you like?" I smile. He towers over me. I reach over to the buttons of his shirt, undoing each one with agility.

"You." He groans.

I giggle, pulling the shirt off his shoulders and tossing it aside. I pull his vest up and off too, also disposing it onto the floor.

"Me?"

"You baby."

My hands trail down his arms and find his hands which I use to lead him upstairs.

I make him sit on the bed, pushing him back before getting to work on unbuckling his belt. He sits up. Bathong. I have him fully naked before pushing him back down once again.

"Don't make me fight you." I say and climb on top of him as he chuckled.

"You don't want me fighting you baby. Not for what's mine."

"Let me take the lead for once, in peace." I say not wanting to show him how intimidated I felt about being on top.

I've tried being the boss in here once before and failed miserably. Honourable husband here wouldn't let me, just like I knew he wanted to do the same right now.

"Let me..." I remove his hands from my thighs and pin them on the sides of his head. Smiling cause that's what he liked doing to me sometimes. "...try."

"But..."

"You talk too much." I shut him up by shoving my full chest onto his face. "I hope you noticed that your meals got super sized." I let him breathe. A moment later I feel his hips rise.

"I would have a closer look and feel if you let my hands free."
He suggests.

I shake my head. "I don't want them moving from there." I free them, trailing my fingernails past the skin of his arms. Those strong arms. He twitches before clenching his fists, taking in a sharp breath. I carefully sit back just above the clear evidence of his arousal. With a slight grind of my hips he tries moving his arms but is quick to put them back when I stop.

"I want to touch you Sthandwa sam."

"Not yet."

Again, I flip the hair on my head to one side and lean in. Kissing on his chest, gliding and caressing this part of his body. I take him in...His delicious scent...the quickening of his chest.

I find myself lightly nibbling on his earlobe. A trick he seems to like. My kisses drag down his neck before I find myself face to face with him again. I eye his lips and that's exactly where I go to. Biting on his bottom lip and proceed to sucking it...

Is that a hand on my thigh?

I quickly reach for it and pin it back on the side of his head before sitting up and giving him a scolding look.

"Come on Ma'Dlamini I'm dying here."

"You better keep these hands still or I'll tie them up with this thong."

His mouth opens slightly... But no words leave his mouth. Good. I let his hands go again, now wanting to take things up a notch. His eyes are on me, waiting and watching so attentively. I place my hands on my delectable thighs and watch as his eyes follow them traveling up my body. Slowly...past my inner thighs...my ticking kitty...up my stomach and past my new set of ladies. With both hands I undo the hooks on the front and free my girls.

His breath hitches.

I toss the bra aside and allow my hands to move from just above my chest with gentle touches. I shut my eyes as I take in a deep breath of my own. The good goosebumps on my skin...the hardened nipples under my fingertips...the low groan from him...it's all enough to drive me crazy. I feel on the rest of my breasts, cupping both and rotate them. Twice. Not too much pressure, cause they just felt too sensitive.

When I open my eyes again, he's still looking. Lip tucked under his teeth.

I lift myself off him a little and tug on the material running across my belly. The feel of the tiny hairs on my pussy are what I feel first before I reach in further and find my clit...but first.

"You should feel how wet I am right now baby. It's like an ocean down here." I retrieve my hand and gawk at the wetness on fingers. I lick one...I don't know what it tastes like.

"Ma'Dlamini..."

"Shh..." I bring the other one to his lips and he does the same. Oh my God. His warm slick tongue circles it.

I giggle. Honestly he has more control than I would ever have. I swear I would've reached down and ignored him.

"Touch me." I order him. And a second later...chaos.

I nearly fall off when he abruptly sits up, catching me by my waist. I grab onto his shoulders. His face was so close to mine that I could see another shade to his eyes. His aura seemed to be one with unmet desires. In a moment I struggled to control my breathing. We're kissing. Its a battle for power. His hands were all over me. It felt like I've deprived him of my body for years.

Is that him ripping the thongs I just bought!

What!

"Bang! Did you just-"

"You talk to much." He grunted grabbing my ass, lifting me up.

Did he just use my line on me!

Oh my God! I can feel him poking at my entrance trying to make his way in. He lets my body go balancing with his hands on the bed. I'm not about to lose wh- he pushes into me and I squeal out in shock. How did we get here again?

"You really are wet..."

"You're not playing fair."

"Mhmm... What's playing fair then Sthandwa sam?"

He rocks his hips slowly and I meet him in the middle. Grinding on him, until we somehow find our rhythm. I hold him to me. His tongue making contact with my nipple. I throw my head back and picked up the pace of my grinding. That's when he stopped. A moan escapes my mouth. I felt so full and so damn good that I almost didn't hear him speak.

"You didn't answer me."

"Huh?"

"What's playing fair Zano?"

"I don't know," I cry out. I rotate my hips in another motion before taking him deeper.

The pleasure builds up even more now. He groans, reaching down to my clit. Pressing on it.

"Yes..."

A delicious current runs through me before my body is taken over by a wave of bliss. A wave of heaven and earth and...chocolates? It's violent and takes my soul right out of my body for a good moment. I trembled, my insides clenching around him. Oh, my.

I still, taking everything in. Trying to collect all of my thoughts, breath and feelings...

I wanted more.

"What do you want me to do?" I breathe out, my forehead now resting on his. I peck his lips, my hands massaging his beard.

"What happened to you taking the lead?"

Mxm. I know what I said. He chuckles and brings me to him and we share a kiss...

I rest my upper body on the bed and stuck my ass out. Knees rested on the bed. He's behind me. "Spread your legs for me a little."

I do so before he asks me if I'm fine. I give him the answer he needs to proceed.

Soon enough he sinks into me.

All of him.

And it's too much.

I'm still stuck between how sexy this looks and the terrifying possibility that I could've found him here after he had burned our kitchen down.

"You are still supposed to be in bed Wife."

"Why?"

"I wanted to surprise the two of you with breakfast in bed." He says before I come to stand next to him. "

"Oh...well now we can change it up and make it breakfast in kitchen."

"Sit down then and allow your self proclaimed, YouTube chef graduate serve you."

I chortle. "That's not a thing."

5 minutes on YouTube has him feeling like this? I leave him to go sit on a highchair. I pull my gown over to close my legs.

"It is now." He chuckles. "Tea or hot chocolate?"

"Hot chocolate. I've been craving chocolate since last night."

"Was it before or after you removed your weave?"

Bathong.

I laugh.

"Haybo..."

"I didn't want to say anything just in case I upset the transformer."

"Bang!" I gasp. He laughs too.

"I'm kidding my love..." He says and removes the bacon from the heat. "...but you really shocked me yaz."

"You're being hectic, lento leya beying'bangela ukshisa."

I take a piece of bacon. So delicious...

"What time is our appointment again?" I ask, chewing.

"10h00."

"Okay."

I sniff on my bacon. No not it. "What's that smell?"

"what smell?"

"You honestly can't smell that?" I close my mouth and nose, gagging.

"All I smell are these eggs."

He brings the pan over to me and I take a whiff I soon regret. I try not to throw up.

"So it's the eggs?"

I nod.

"Okay no eggs then." He says and walks to the trash bin before emptying the pan in there.

"You didn't have to...do that." I feel bad now because he was doing something nice for us and now this.

"If they're making you sick then we should avoid them." The pan goes into the sink.

"Can we go upstairs instead...until the air clears out."

"You go ahead. I'll join you after making your hot chocolate."

I nod again and get off the highchair feeling like shit. I wanted to cry so bad for being a spoilsport. The tears building up in my eyes are disappointing me too before it all comes gushing down.

I'm hit by the thing I haven't told my husband yet and the fact that keeping this from him felt like I cheated.

How could I not tell him how uncomfortable Alakhe made me feel not so long ago?

How could I not be honest with him the same way he is with me?

How my emotions got me crying like this had me confused. And after managing to calm down minutes later with a hint of a headache, I went to wash my face.

"Sthandwa sam?"

I keep quiet. I still look like I've been crying or smoking weed because of my bloodshot red eyes.

"Baby? Are you vomiting?" He found me quite easily.

"No." I sniff.

"What's wrong then? Are you crying?"

"I have...I have something to tell you."

Chapter Thirty Eight.

"There's no challenge more challenging than the challenge to improve yourself" X Kushandwizdom.

••

He was angry. Understandably so too. I would be angry too especially after finding out that these unsettling events happened twice and both made my skin crawl. When I tried to downplay the whole situation, he had none of it. He didn't like me defending 'his shithead of a brother' and said I should never do that again.

Ever in my life.

I shouldn't be defending people who make me uncomfortable and say things that they shouldn't be saying to me. Even the touching part. He hated that the most. His exact words were, "How dare he? And how dare you say his touches weren't inappropriate! Him even thinking of touching you as my wife is inappropriate and downright disrespectful! He should know his place cause ngathi akang'boni. (It looks like he doesn't see me)"

He then left the room and I didn't follow him. I told him what I wanted to tell him and I wanted to give him the time and space to process it all.

I only drank the hot chocolate with the toast after the fact. Even with everything going on I still wanted to eat for the sake of my baby.

In the car, there wasn't much said. I would steal glances of him every now and then, hoping to see some changes to his mood but there wasn't any. I scoot closer to him before laying my head on his shoulder. He heaves out a sigh before finding my hand and puts it on his lap, rubbing on my knuckles with his thumb...but still said nothing. I won't lie, it hurt not having him talk to me.

The dramatic motorcade finally gets us to the hospital and we find good parking. The car is soon surrounded by the mannequins. I hated this. Now everyone will definitely be looking and questioning our visit. I also hated how this Doctor couldn't come to us instead, but now was not the time to be complaining about futile things. We're here now.

Dr Magwaza. My appointed OB-GYN who was the one responsible for putting me on the Patch a few months ago. She was so welcoming and that kind of decreased my nerves a little before we were allowed to sit down. She greeted and welcomed us along with a nurse who was in here, before getting to find out our reason for coming.

"Wow, okay well those tests are usually 99.9% correct and usually don't require us to conduct one right here. I will

however do a dating ultrasound where we can confirm things like your baby or babies gestational age or LMP. That way we can determine around when you'll give birth and all those goodies." She smiles.

"L...LMP?"

"Oh sorry LMP is your Last Menstrual period. Nurse Gigi over here will explain that and more to you," she says before excusing herself and leaving us with the nurse who immediately gets down to business.

She learns more about my medical history including any past surgeries, prior pregnancies, miscarriages and my own mental health. She informed me that it is vital that these questions are answered honestly and as accurate as possible to avoid unexpected things that may come up during my pregnancy. She asked if I was taking any current medication or have taken medication prior to me finding out I was pregnant.

Then the family history comes into talk. Both Bangi and I's history was discussed as best as we could. I wasn't really sure if my parents had any genetic defects or any of these things and I wondered if that would really be a problem in the long run. These things were becoming hectic and I haven't even gotten to the point of voicing out my own worries as such.

The nurse asks about the symptoms I've had and symptoms I was currently having. I had to ask if spotting would be a

problem and she as professionally as she could she told me it's most likely not something I should worry about. Spotting is common in pregnancy.

My height and weight is measured next and would you believe how hurt I was finding out I fell under the category of being obese according to these absurd medical standards. And that also automatically made everything about my pregnancy higher risk. I swear I would've cried right there and then but held it all back. I hated the word obese to the core. It opened up wounds. Scars. It was just pure disrespect though.

"Have you gained any weight since finding out?"

Bathong. A completely normal question that felt like an attack to me. I simply cleared my throat, reminding myself that this is not an attack.

"No." I shake my head slightly. I haven't...right? Just a bra size and that's about it cause all my clothes still fit me. She was writing all of this down in my file.

After about thirty minutes of this torture she tells us she has all that she needs for now.

"I'll go call Dr Magwaza for you."

"Thanks," Bangi says on both our behalves before leaving the two of us in here alone. I don't know what was going on anymore with my feelings but I knew I definitely wanted to go

home now. This appointment was dragging and the smell of the hospital was making me nauseas.

"Are you okay?" Bangi asks me.

Oh he talks?

"I'm fine," I stare at the clock on the wall. The big hand was on it's way to eleven and the small one was on ten.

Just then the door shoots open and Dr Magwaza walks in, hands in the pockets of her white coat. "Sorry for keeping you waiting Your Royal Highnesses. I hope the nurse treated you well."

"She did, thank you," I say forcing a smile on my face before we continued ahead with this part of the doctors appointment.

"Now as I'm sure you're already aware that your BMI is higher than the average person which will only mean that you'll be on a slightly different pathway than most pregnant women out there. This also means you'll have more routine check ups to ensure that you and your baby are doing great and that your baby is developing well."

Well that doesn't sound so bad...I mean I'll be seeing my baby more often. Who doesn't want that?

"I'll also recommend that you have a consultant."

I nod. I didn't mind any of that anyway.

"I would also like to highlight that there are some risks involved with being plus size and pregnant. Some of these risks include gestational hypertension; which is high blood pressure, preeclampsia, blood clot problems, macrosomia, gestational diabetes which we have to test you for today. There's also a chance for you to deliver via c-section, go into pre term labour, develop something we call shoulder dystocia and also experience longer labours." She says this whole mouthful and my head just spins before I squirm in my seat.

Geez. I was already a bad mom moes. All these thing just because of my weight?

If all of this happens to me it would be because I'm fat?

"Macro what?" Bangi asks.

"Macrosomia, or in simple terms a big baby."

"Oh," him.

"Yes." Dr Magwaza.

The nurse walks back in again with my file and puts it on Dr Magwaza's desk before going to prepare the bed that was in here.

"I heard you mentioning gestational diabetes... Does that mean I can get it even if I don't have diabetes?" I ask after clearing my throat.

"Unfortunately yes."

"Is it preventable?" Bangi asks.

"Nothing beats a healthy diet and exercise. But even with that there isn't a 100% guarantee that she might not get it."

Okay now she's making it sound like I will absolutely get it whether I like it or not. And once again it will be all my fault.

More is spoken on this matter before it gets to talks about my mental health again. She wanted to find out where I was mentally because they had already concluded how I was 'physically'.

I'm then asked to head on over to the bed so she can start examining me.

Dr Magwaza proceeded to listening to my heart and lungs, asking me if I had any difficulty breathing or experienced my heart quickening without me making extreme movements. All of these questions received an honest no from me.

Step thirty thousand was my first ever breast exam.

Then next it was my pelvic exam which includes checking the vulva, vagina, cervix and the size of my uterus. I laid there awkwardly with my legs raised in stirrups and my lower body covered with a white sheet. Bangi was sitting next to me. The nurse stood next to Dr Magwaza who kept telling her what to write in my file.

I also thought that this was probably the best time to mention I had sex last night so that things such as my Pap smear test results don't get hindered.

We made our way the lab, where my blood and urine sample would be taken and then tested for my glucose levels, blood type, bacteria, Rh factor, STI's, STD's and something called Varicella. I was already tired of everything by the time we headed back to her office for my scan.

But...I was also happy I was finally going to see the reason why I was here. The miracle happening in my stomach. I wondered how I would react if all of this was for nothing and I've just suffered a full blown hour of hell and a day of false pregnancy tests. I would be devastated...and Mehlo could've meant something completely different when he spoke about those seeds.

"Your Royal Highness, could you please step out. We'll call you back in once we're done." The nurse said as I was made to lie down on the bed again.

"Oh can't I have him here with me?" I ask, glancing back and forth between this nurse and my husband.

"Standard procedure My Princess," she simply says and I nod.

"It's okay Sthandwa sam

I'll be right outside if you need me," he says and comes closer to me, planting a firm peck on my forehead.

I think for the first time since this whole prenatal visit started I feel like smiling.

Maybe things are not as dire as I would imagine.

I nod before he gives me one final look, a small smile on his lips and leaves the room.

"He's a different man up close." The nurse says.

I don't know what to say. Do I even have to answer her?

I lift my top for the second time today. "This will be a little cold. Don't panic." Dr Magwaza says.

I nod again and feel the cold gel make contact with my warm skin. Yoh. What makes it so cold?

"Okay lets see..." She puts the sonogram machine on my belly and the screen is the only area I could truly focus on. Somehow I wasn't seeing what I wanted to see fast enough and that made me more anxious. More on edge. "...I can't see anything...baby is hiding." She says to herself.

I think five minutes go by and nothing.

I felt like dying. I wasn't pregnant? But what about the signs? Was this a phantom pregnancy?

"Uhhh...Nurse Gigi, I think we'll need to do a transvaginal scan...please prepare the wand for me...aw wait...there we go."

I glance up again. There we go where?

"Congratulations My Princess. You're pregnant. Gigi please call his Royal Highness in."

"Where is my baby?" I ask, now not holding back my tears.

"Over here." She points towards the screen and that's when it really becomes absolutely obvious. Oh my God. It even looks like a teeny tiny human if you were to turn the screen upsidedown.

"Sthandwa sam?" I hear him and break my fascinated glance from the screen to look at my confused husband.

"Baby there's a baby in me." I choke on the lump in my throat. He's by my side, seated before planting yet another kiss on my forehead.

"Congratulations My Prince." Dr Magwaza says.

"Thank you. But...Where?" He asks. Is his voice breaking?

Magwaza and I simultaneously point to the baby.

"uShazi...uMalinga...ingane yethu Sthandwa sam... The baby looks big. (Our baby my love...)"

"I zoomed in." Dr Magwaza says.

"Oh." Bangi chuckles in realisation. I do too. She presses something and it Zooms out again.

"Everything is looking very good, and it looks like you're 8 weeks pregnant."

"What? 8? That's like almost two months moes?" I'm shocked.

"Yes. We measure the fetus from crown to rump so it's very accurate. In about 32 weeks you should be parents."

Oh the tears again!

The nurse hands me another tissue. Bangi kisses my forehead once more.

"Your baby is about the size of a raspberry...1.7cm. Would you like to hear the heartbeat?"

"You can do that at 8 weeks?" Me.

"Of course...let me just..." She works her hands on the buttons and then, like magic a sound fills the room.

Da-dum da-dum da-dum...it was all the more confirmation I needed to know that I was truly carrying a life in me. A life I knew I would already do a lot for. Bangi takes his phone out. We both already know we're not allowed to take videos or photos in here but there's nothing really that she can do now.

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We left with 3 scans, a pamphlet and an emergency number we could use for -well you guessed it- emergencies. I think I took something extra with me though from this visit. A lot of

negativity. I mean holding these scans and realising that this tiny human would probably get affected by my size, hurt.

I now realised how different my pregnancy was going to be from Nyiso's...well mostly from what she told me anyway.

"Sthandwa sam, yini inkinga? (What's the matter)" He breaks me from my thoughts and I wipe my tears.

"It's nothing. I'm just a little emotional, that's all."

"I know you Zanokuhle. I saw you back at the hospital and I could see something is bothering you. Talk to me."

The concern on his face is evident.

"I'm the problem and it seems like I'm going to continue being the problem throughout this whole pregnancy Bangi."

"Sthandwa sam..."

"I sat in that room for more than an hour and I just couldn't help but feel like a failure. You know that nurse looked so shocked when I passed my glucose test it's like she wanted me to fail it just so can add to more reasons why I shouldn't be pregnant. Like I'm ridiculous for falling pregnant as a high risk 'obese' woman. Did you hear the list of things the gyne mentioned that I could just get because my clothing tag says 16?" I shake my head and look out.

I don't even know how much further we were before we could get home cause all I wanted to do now was sleep. Sleep all these thoughts away.

"Those were just possibilities, not guarantees my love. Precautions. There's nothing wrong with your body. You're healthy now and we can keep it that way."

"And if we can't? What then? Will you hate me just as much as you hate me for not telling you about Alakhe?"

"What? I don't hate you my love. I could never hate you." He pulls me to him.

"You have a funny way of showing it then." I sniff.

"I'm sorry I made you feel like that." There's silence after he says that. A short silence he breaks. "If you want, we can change doctors and find someone else. Someone more understanding."

"No, it's fine."

That would be too much work anyway.

"I don't want you getting triggered because of someone who's supposed to make your life easier. If she's disrupting your mental wellbeing then I'm not asking for your permission."

"If I feel the same on our next appointment then it's fine." I say and sigh. It felt better letting all of that out. Better to have someone else actually listening to me. A whole 10kg more was

lifted off my shoulders again, like when I told him about his brother.

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I woke up a few minutes ago from an amazing 4 hour nap. I was just so tired from everything.

"...26...oh my...27...28..." I struggled through my squats.

'Also do as many squats as your body can handle. This will help tone and strengthens your thighs, and help baby descend during labour...' Magwaza's words ring in my head as I looked at myself in the mirror.

"30!" I blew out and collapsed onto the floor. I was pissed that I couldn't force myself to do more than that. I placed both my hands on my belly and wished I could be skinny for just these coming weeks. Just for my baby. Funny how yesterday I felt on top of the world but now I was just at the bottom of the wagon. Usually I'd convince myself that I'm overreacting but not today.

My phone ringing disturbs me. I quickly get up and go to find it. Khayalakhe? I smile.

"Baby bro? Hey."

"You sound like you've forgotten about me," He says and I chuckle.

"Never. So what's up? You missing me already?"

"Nope."

"Ouch." I rest on the bed.

"I have a game coming up. Please come."

"When is it?"

"Next week Friday. Will you be there?"

"I..."

"Please. I'm begging you." He says and I sigh.

"I'll come since you asked me so nicely." I chuckle just as Bangi comes to the bedroom.

"Awesome. Bring the Prince with you bye." He says and hangs up.

Bathong.

"That was Khaya and you and I are going to watch a soccer match next week Friday."

"This coming Friday or the one after."

"The one after."

I should've asked properly. Also I'm glad my lil man was still enjoying playing and is still focused on his school work too.

"I was here to check up on you." He says and sits next to him. "I wanted to find out if you still want to go to dinner."

"I should be asking you that."

"Why would I not want to go?"

I shrug. Alakhe, obviously.

I could ignore him but I wasn't really sure if he would be able to that.

"I'm not scared of that shithead if that's what you meant." He says.

"I know. I just don't want a scene. Not in front of your parents."

"Who said anything about a scene?" He chortles.

"Hayke, I'm going then."

•••

The table is decked, graced with food and the presence of His and Her Majesty, Amandla, us and last but not least Alakhe and Zonke. The boys and Khethiwe weren't coming and it was obvious why. I wouldn't dine with the same woman who won't stop ruining your marriage with not only her existence but with a whole forming human.

Wait...we're almost the same months pregnant. She's ahead with 3 weeks I think. Scary.

We pray and we serve ourselves. Nothing was screaming out at me. The fish smelt too fishy. Maybe the mash and veg. I signal one of the ladies in here who served this glorious dinner and request a bowl of bacon.

It's quiet. Plates clinking, forks screeching, Bangi's chewing. The roaming glances and awkward stares. The tense atmosphere. My bacon arrives and I thank her before getting to eating.

Zonke clears her throat. "The food tastes amazing my Queen."

Du! (Silence!)

Ouch.

"I didn't know we could request bacon on the side," Alakhe says causing me to look up. Is he making fun of me?

"That was stupid of you." Bangi.

"Boys..." The Queen. "...please. Not today. It has been a while since we've last had dinner together as a family because there's just been a lot going on. But it's important to know that family time is vital."

"Even when some members of this family aren't here." Ama says.

The mash is nice. Very nice.

"Yes that. Surely she'll join us next time." Queen.

"I just want to know where this girl who isn't even recognised by the Shazi ancestors who is sitting at my table, under the roof of the palace that I rule under gets the nerve to sit amongst us. Didn't she receive the memorandum that I only allow family here." The King says.

"Buza baba. (Ask dad.)" Ama adds.

I devour another piece of bacon.

"I invited her. As my fiancée she deserves to be here. Like Zano over there was."

Haybo. Why is he dragging me into this?

She looks at me and then quickly back to her food. I can't believe that was my sister.

"I'm saying that from now on everyone should accept this relationship and move on. We are getting married soon and she's going to be my second wife and give me more children after this one." Alakhe.

Woah.

I hear the Queen heave out a sigh.

"How can you marry a woman who embarrassed this family with no shame! A woman who lied for her own benefit and didn't even care about affecting the ones around her?" The King banged on the table.

"Calm down father. If I could take her back then it should be a breeze for everyone here." He shrugs.

"Yey, wena ntombazanyana, who are you even? (Yey, you little girly)" The energy shifts in an instant to her.

"Z...Zonke Eve Dlamini my King." She says.

"So you are Zanoluhle's sister?"

"Yes."

Unfortunately.

"I see the resemblance." The Queen says.

"And what do you do? What qualifications do you have? Did you even have uMatric or your lack of common sense is why we're here now?" Bangi's father asks.

I nearly choke on my forth piece of bacon.

"Of course I completed my matric My King." She replies. I frown, not looking up. Okay more pits are being dug I see.

"But...I didn't go further than that."

"Why not?"

"Finances My King."

"How could your sister complete hers then and you couldn't? Where did she get the finances?"

"I would rather not talk about this topic I beg." She says.

I down some of my juice and scan the room. Ama is trying to mind her own business like I am.

"Very well...what about children? Is there a whole nation that we should know about?"

"I...I have no child."

"See she's a clean woman." Alakhe.

"And how exactly did you miraculously plan on meeting my son and conveniently convince him into I..."

"Senzo! please let's not turn this dinner into an interrogation zone."

"I agree with ma." Alakhe says and reaches over for the fish.

My man has been quiet. I don't like the occasional dead glances he's giving his brother.

The quiet eating continues ahead before the Queen asked if I was okay because she heard about our early hospital visit. I froze cause I didn't think she'd find out about that.

"I took her for her annual check up ma, you know I want to make sure my wife is happy and healthy," Bangi says.

"That's sweet," Ama.

"It's pretty normal." Alakhe.

"Nobody asked for your opinion." Bangi says.

Okay.

I hear Alakhe chuckle. "I don't get why you feel like your commoner is so special when she's not even all that."

"Excuse me?" Bangi. He puts his cutlery down before resting his elbows on the table bringing his hands together. Fingers entwined.

"Here we go again." Ama.

"You heard me."

"I did. I was just hoping you rephrased the shit you just said.

This commoner you keep talking about is next to your confused

self. My wife is special, I mean that would only explain why you can't keep your filthy hands and useless words to yourself."

"Oh so big gal over there couldn't wait to tell you that she was touched by a real man?"

By now I've stopped eating. My appetite flew with the wind just at the thought of him even touching me in that manner.

"Aw Alakhe." Bangi's mother proclaims.

"You call yourself a real man? You know nothing about being a real man."

"Shame, Bangizwe. You must be tired of me always doing your ladies a favour. I mean they would always tell me how you couldn't get it up."

Oh my God. What?

He's up on his feet.

We all are.

Its the cold stares they're giving each other that has me scared. The rapid breathing...

"Boys." The King says but it's as if no one was listening to him right now.

Bangi let's out a bitter chuckle, shaking his head. "You piece of wet shit." And then chaos.

"Oh Nkulunkulu! Guards! Bangizwe uzombulala! (Oh Lord! Guards! Bangizwe you'll kill him)" The Queen cried out, hands on her head.

I don't know when they actually found each other but what I knew was I was mortified. I couldn't move nor think straight. The others around me were talking but weren't making sense at all. Bangi kept punching Alakhe as if he was nothing.

"Bangi Stop it!" He was nothing.

"Baba stop him!" Every punch voicing out his emotions.

A scream...a groan...

It takes the King and another guard to remove Bangi from his brother who was not moving. He was still breathing though. The blood on his face made me feel queasy.

"You monster!" Zonke yells and rushes to her precious 'Khe'.

"Uphinde uthinte umfazi wami wena shlama ngizoku nqamula amasende. (Touch my wife again you ass wipe and I'll chop your dick off.) " He said before grabbing my hand and pulling me out of here.

I...I...what the hell just happened in there?

Chapter Thirty Nine.

"I drink the honey in your hive...you are the reason I stay alive."

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'Get your sister away from my man before we have problems. I wont hesitate beating her to a pulp again.'

That's the text I woke up to from Khethiwe. I didn't know what to think apart from the fact that all my thoughts all along were wrong and Zonke is really stupid for going back to that wing. How she chose to risk her life like that just proves to me that I should never ever interfere and intervene in anything she does because there's nothing I can say or do that will change her ways. Even Khethiwe seems to have failed in any case.

The past day has really been...I don't know. Chaotic maybe? For some parts yes.

After Bangi did a number on his brother we indeed went back to our place. Or rather I was dragged back here, willingly too if that made sense. In the moment I felt nothing for Alakhe. Not even for a second because it was all his fault.

"I should've killed him! Why did they stop me!"

Thank Goodness he wasn't touched or anything but that was only on the surface. I knew what Alakhe said back there was still ringing in his head. I for one didn't like how it made me

think of Bangi's ex's. I know I was being irrational because I also have ex's, but damn.

Anyway, he eventually calmed down and regretted his 'setback'. He hated -as he said- "...falling back to what I never thought I'd do again"

"It wasn't your fault. Alakhe got what he wanted. He provoked you."

"That doesn't excuse my reaction. I had the choice to walk out."

That he did. But where was the satisfaction in that? Where was the clear message that needed to be portrayed to him. Like I said, I felt nothing for what happened to Alakhe.

That same night Bangi and I talked. He told me of how insecure this used to make him feel about himself the first time it happened. The times his exes broke his heart. He used to doubt his abilities as a man before he realised the problem would perish the moment he was alone.

"I used to think something was wrong with me..."

Whoever told Alakhe whatever idiotic thing he said today must've been hurt by my man deciding to wait.

For me...

I'm blushing at the thought.

Yes, I listened to him talking about his exes and how he'd try to bang them and just wouldn't be 'in the mood'. Yes I hated every moment of thinking of my man trying to sleep with another woman. Eww.

"I can't believe that shithead slept with the women I was in a relationship with. And now he's after you."

"He's not getting me. Never."

So yes...the following morning was a day filled with back and forths between him, his father and beaten brother who looked swollen. Probably just as bad as Zonke was a few months ago. They wanted Bangi to apologize which I found absurd.

Apologize for what?

Even now the matter was being talked about which made me wonder how it was really going down in there since I was dismissed.

I sigh, dumping the sticky dough in the hot oil, waiting for it to turn a beautiful golden colour before turning it onto another side. I woke up craving amagwinya today. Nice, hot and fresh fat cakes with atchar. The time passed 14h00 before I actually got to eating and cleaning up.

Just as I was wiping off the counter the front door opened. Bangi and Uncle Archie both walk in, not really saying much to

each other. I clear my throat and hang the dishcloth by the sink before fixing my jersey.

"Kunjalo Bangizwe...hawu Makoti." He says as I come into view. "Sanibonani." I put a smile on my face before he opens up his arms for a hug?

I didn't expect that but I gladly take the hug before he holds me at arms length, a smile now radiating from his lips. He still looked like the handsome old man he is. More grey hairs too. What is it with men and their grey hairs sitting well on them vele?

"Bangizwe I see you've been treating your wife right, she's even glowing," he says. I hear the two of them laugh and he lets go of my arms.

I don't know where to look.

The floor maybe? Yeah.

Now those are some shiny clean shoes.

"Kwamele babo'mncane. Sthandwa sam I hope you don't mind our guest."

"Oh of course not, Uncle Archie can I get you anything to eat? Drink? We have water, juice...no alcohol though," I glance up again.

"Bangizwe namanje awuphuzi nane whiskey nje?"

"Cha babomncane." He chuckles.

"Ayi, kuhle. Makoti, I'm fine thank you don't worry yourself. I just came here to have a word with the two of you. Can we sit down?"

"Of course." Bangi says before taking my hand in his. Uncle Archie leads the way to the dining table while we follow. I receive a kiss on my cheek and look up to him.

"I missed you," He mouthed.

"We missed you too," I whisper back.

After sitting down next to my man and Uncle Archie right across him he gets started with what he came here to talk about. I had a feeling we would be talking about what happened a day ago and I was correct.

"...this situation seems to be defeating my brother as well. I just can't see how the two of you have no peace after so many years. You two are blood brothers. Created in the same womb. But I don't blame you, your father is just as stubborn," Uncle Archie says.

"None of this is my fault," Bangi says. I nod in agreement.

"Did you not hit him Bangizwe?"

"With reasons babomncane, he disrespected my wife and I in front of the whole family. I thought I explained all of this to you back at the table."

How he's not yelling has me amazed.

"As the bigger person you shouldn't have laid your hands on him, there are plenty of other ways this could've been resolved."

"I'm tired of being the bigger person. Every time I try minding my own business he pokes at me looking for war. Am I just supposed to take all of this laying down as if I can't handle him myself too? That won't work for me."

"I hear you my son..." He clears his throat just as I pull myself together. "...I'm not asking you to look weak, but I'm asking that you act in ways a leader should. A future King is not a King by being violent, nor by proving his power by being violent. You Bangizwe have to try and forgive your loose canon head of a brother. That won't be a sign of weakness. Forgiveness will set you mind and soul free. It will make you at peace."

"I was at peace Uncle Archie until he...fine, I hear you," he says after heaving out a sigh.

At this point I have no idea where I stand because I thought forgiving and asking for forgiveness here was never going to happen. Not when Alakhe is not willing to do the same. I even knew he would continue doing all of these nonsense shows he keeps doing for whatever reason and we'll be left to act calm, cool and collected?

Even God tests you like this it seems.

"I'm glad you understand my viewpoint. My brother and I used to always bicker about useless things until we realised how stupid it is and how much we were embarrassing ourselves to the public. Makoti, I apologize for the fact that you are now caught up in all of this especially at a time you should be enjoying your marriage and experiencing joyful days with a united and warm family."

"I...I understand Uncle Archie...every family has their own problems," I say not entirely sure if I myself believed that I was okay with all of the things going on here.

Turn the other cheek they say...

It's not that easy.

Uncle Archie leaves after talking some more with us sharing what he knew best and also making us laugh here and there with the tales of him and Senzo growing up. Along with a house with girls who were far too serious too at times.

"That was not what I thought we were going to be talking about...but anyway what did you get up to while I was gone?" He asks as we made our way to the lounge. He sits first on the couch and I follow next, cuddling up to him.

"Well your baby wanted amagwinya, so I had to get busy with dough making and all those nice things."

He chuckles before he puts his hand on my belly. "I hope my baby is treating you okay in there."

"Very. I've been feeling fine today... Like no major symptoms at all. Kinda has me feeling and wondering if I really am pregnant you know."

•••

I laugh and bite on my bottom lip trying to suppress the aftermath of this now ridiculous phone call. She won't stop saying she knew it. She knew something was off the moment I ate that Avocado like it was nothing. "Hayi mge mina sengiyalala, I can't deal with you right now."

"I'll call you tomorrow ke," she says and I hang up soon enough, happy with how well she took that.

It felt different letting someone else know about this other than the four of us. I glance up when Bangi walks out of the bathroom rubbing his hands together.

"I thought I'd find you asleep," he says switching off the bathroom lights.

"I was just on a phone call with Nyiso, and she took it well."

"Did you expect her not to?"

"Not exactly... I just wasn't sure how she'd see this whole thing," I shrug as he made his way to his side and shortly after climbs in. I switch off my side lamp and he does the same.

"Cuddle?"

"Would I ever say no to that?" I smile and snuggle close to him. He kisses my forehead before I heave out a sigh. It's only then that I felt how tired I really was. I didn't even do much today but the exhaustion was just so prominent... Well I am growing a baby after all.

I put a hand on my belly and yawn.

"I'm going to talk to Alakhe tomorrow. Ask for that forgiveness...see if that will bring me this peace Uncle Archie mentioned. I don't know."

"I'll support you

in whatever you decide on doing." I mumble.

"Even if it means I look like a weakling to him."

"Even if my love. You know why cause I love you...like I really really really love you Bangi. I know you for you and no matter what all these other people think about you it doesn't matter to me cause I know the real you. I know what's beneath the surface. Just like how you know me better than any of my friends ever would. Not everyone knows the things that I've dealt with or what I'm dealing with right now. Just like how not everyone will see how loving and how caring you are. How you always put me first in everything you do and how much of an amazing man you are that it sometimes feels like I'm dreaming cause of this beating thing protected by your ribs. I thank God

everyday for giving me you..." My eyes were really starting to fail me right now.

I wasn't even sure if I was making any sense but I hope I was. I hope he understood how none of the decisions he takes would make him less of a man to me because to me he is the only man I see. The only man I want forever.

"Ngiyakuthanda uyezwa Ma'Dlamini," he pulls the blankets over my shoulders and kisses my forehead again rubbing his toes on mine.

"Nathi we love you, to the moon and back."



'Ma...'

She glances down at my not so pregnant looking belly before she reaches out to touch it.

'I don't want you stressing'

'What would make stress ma?' I look up again at her. She looks happy.

'There's a lot my child. Especially when it comes to the first fruit of my womb.'

Okay now she sounded sad.

'But don't worry. I'll try my best to protect you from...from...'

She sighs and looks down at my belly again. I do the same,

nearly getting knocked back my shock. My stomach! Big and beautiful.

'Ma...'

'I have blessed your precious gift. Visit my grave with my two other children please.'

'I-...'

My eyes shoot open as sleep leaves me. There's natural light coming in from outside. I turn in the bed to find Bangi still next to me. It's these rare moments I love the most. The times when I actually wake up and find him next to me. I snuggle close to him and gently run my fingers through his rough short hair.

When he shifts I stop and slowly get out of bed. I pee and wipe myself clean before going back to our bedroom to open up some curtains. It was beautiful out. No sun in sight but it was still nice and bright.

That dream made me miss my mother again.

Made me miss hearing her voice again and having her around me all the time. She made me miss our family home as it was before she ended her life. I even found myself missing the Zonke before this. Yes she wasn't the best but this version of her remained inhumane to me.

I wondered how Luthando was doing. How well she was growing without Zonke by her side...or how her father was

even coping through the troubles he had before. I should try getting his numbers and check up on them, see if they need anything I could possibly give him just to erase the guilt I had in me for not being a present aunt.

That's also if they even need any of my help.

"Sexy..." I hear, half shaken by his unannounced awakening.

"...come back to bed sexy woman."

I blush, my cheeks hurting as I basically skip and hop back into bed and under the sheets. I rest my head on his chest before he locks my legs with his.

"Morning."

"Morning Sthandwa sam. You had a good nights rest?"

"Yes, and a dream about my mom again. But it was a different light. She wants Khaya, Buhle and I to go visit her grave soon."

"Oh. That can be arranged, you just tell me when and where..."

"And Zakhele will take me there right?" I finish off his sentence with a slight chuckle.

"That..wow am I really that predictable now?"

"A little." I chortle, showing him my thumb and index finger nearly touching each other.

He chuckles and shakes his head and takes my hand into his placing it back on his chest.

"You busy with something today?"

"Negative, it looks like we have the day to ourselves. I'll see Alakhe later."

"Mhmm..." I nod and rub on his smooth, warm and toned abs. All that gym time really paid off.

"Sthandwa sam."

"Daddy?"

There's that chuckle again.

"Where are my morning kisses?"

"Morning kisses?" I giggle and look up to him. He's serious yet there's a playfulness undertone to the look he was giving me. He licks on his lips before I shake my head and sit up to give him his morning kisses. One on each cheek and two on the lips

"That's more like it," he laughs and pulls me in for one more, his hands lingering for a while longer on my body. "It just seems like I can't keep my hands off of you. Off these beautiful curves and softness...it's like they keep on calling me out to touch them, to feel them. You're so beautiful my wife."

"Don't play like that," I giggle, burying my head on his chest.

"I'm serious Sthandwa sam, look at me."

"I'm... I'm looking," I indeed am face to face with him again and that beautiful glare.

"Umuhle mawengane yami...and I'm serious, I can't keep my

hands off of you...nor can I keep my fingers from touching and pleasuring you...my lips from kissing you...I'm addicted to all of this."

"I'm just as addicted," I say and he can't seem to stop himself from chuckling.

"Uthi you're what?"

"Uhlekani?"

"The way you said it my love...you're just as a-dick-ted." He laughs further while I gasp in shock and join him in his laughing fest.

"I did not say that!" I playfully hit his chest before he takes my hand into hostage.

"My love you did, don't even try denying it cause I know I have you hooked on this loving," He says with his hand on my chest.

"Usile wena."

"Siyafana nje," he plants another kiss on my lips. Those soft plump and full lips on mine. He lets my hand go and I allow it to roam his body freely...under the covers...Down to his raging length. I rub on it through the silky material, which I soon after dig into finding him. His breath hitches.

"Do you feel how much he wants you?"

"Mhmm," I giggle and work my fingers from the tip to the base. Stroking him up and down before planting soft kisses on his

chest. My hand explores further, past his hairy thighs and then back up his body.

I put a leg over him before sitting up but he pushes me down again, now on top of me. My hands pinned above my head.

Bathing this man.

His sucks on my bottom lip, letting go of my hands and starts tracing down my body.

"Let your man see how ready you are..." He groans against my lips and I lift my lower body rubbing against his. He rids me of my pajama bottoms and settles between my thighs before feeling on my wet warmth.

He dips two of his fingers in, letting out a slight breath.

"Hormones," I quickly defend the slippery situation that's taking place down there right now.

"Oh?" He chuckles. "Can hormones do this?" He kisses my lips. "Or this..." He kisses my the side of my jaw and then kisses my neck, down to the pajama top I had on. I could still feel this lips, traveling lower and lower. "...Or this..." He pulls the covers over himself, leaving me head out with confusion.

"Baby..?" I giggle. I see nothing but the white highlight of him bent. My top is lifted and my breasts are massaged to life, kisses and caressed. He tugs and pulls on my sensitive buds,

sending more tingles to my entire body. It's the fact that I couldn't see him that had me more excited.

His lips brush on my nipples. Not for long though...but just enough to have me curious. More kisses...down the valley between my ladies... to my stomach...to the tiny hairs of my kitty. He teases. Nibbling and licking on my inner thighs.

Close but not close enough.

I rotate my hips, whimpering.

"Open up Sthandwa sam," he orders. "Let me love and kiss on you."

Oh my goodness...

•••

"Baby, your phone is ringing!" I rush to the bed one boot in my hold, the other not entirely zipped. He's not responding. I grab the phone and head to the bathroom and the man is still showering.

I knock on the glass door causing him to turn quickly. I show him the phone before it stops ringing. He opens the door slightly and peeks out.

"Who was it?"

"Lerato."

"Why is she calling me so early?" He asks and I shrug. "Leave

her I'll get back to her later."

"Okay," I leave and head back to get dressed.

The phone pings before I can put it down again. A message.

Lerato PA.

Oh?

"Sorry to be a nuisance but call me back as soon as you can?

Haybo?" I frown.

I shouldn't have read that. I lock the phone tossing it on the bed and continue getting dressed.

Chapter Forty.

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." x MAYA ANGELOU.

••

"Thank you Nandi," I smile at the delicious food in front of me. My mouth already watering at the sight of the chicken and mayo sandwich with a fresh fruit salad side. I felt so catered to, never mind the joy and satisfied feeling I had radiating all over my body.

You know its one thing being told that you're glowing but then to actually feel it yourself was a totally different experience.

Nothing could stop me today.

Not even that weird jealous feeling I had earlier upstairs. It was irrational. She is his PA and that's it. If he was hiding anything from me he wouldn't let me see it.

"Looks scrumptious." Bangi says.

"Do enjoy Your Royal Highnesses," she bows and leaves us alone to eat.

"Can we pray already, I'm ravenous. Your baby already wants me to devour everything."

I hear him chuckle before he reaches out for my hand. A quick kiss on the back of it before his eyes get shut. I shut mine too, blessing the breakfast in front of us and even thanking Him for this marvelous morning.

"Amen."

"Amen," he followed after and we both dug in.

I'm attacking the sandwich, eating it like I've never eaten a chicken and mayo sandwich before. It even tasted scrumptious, better than anything I've ever had in my 26 years of life.

"You're eating that like it tastes way better than mine."

I frown and open my eyes.

Yes, I can't believe I even had them closed. "Maybe it is." I shrug.

He says nothing but reaches towards to the corner of my lips.

"Mayo..." The finger goes into his mouth, and comes out clean.

Uh...okay. I clear my throat after pressing my thighs together.

"...you okay?"

I nod. I'm not though. I don't get how I could still crave him when I literally had him not so long ago. It was true indeed that my body was not mine anymore and that these hypersensitive and heightened hormones were going to be challenging.

We eat further and I'm luckily distracted by the conversation. I mention the fact that we should probably get a dog. I'm

serious. I think I've always wanted one just wasn't sure when that would be. Just then my phone rings. I put my spoon back into my fruit salad bowl before reaching for it.

What's with all these calls today?

Did I mention that two more people called Bangi's phone after Lerato did? He again said he'll call them back cause he thinks it might have something to do with his parents who've gone out. All things he could deal with later.

"Nyiso?" Me.

Oh right she did say she'd call me, I just didn't think it would be this soon. I answer and put the phone next to my ear only to hear she was already talking.

"Woah, wait...hey I didn't catch a word you just said," I say and chortle.

"So you haven't seen it?"

"Seen what?" I frown, putting a full tablespoon of my fruit salad into my mouth.

"Your man! He's all over the news and internet."

I chuckle and roll my eyes and look at the very man who's being talked about.

"That's nothing new moes."

"Mge, it's not good publicity though." She says.

"What do you mean?"

"There's a video here trending of him hitting Alakhe..."

My heart sinks, a sharp pain hitting my lower back as I freeze for a second. Bangi notices.

"Wh-what?" The word comes out as a mere whisper.

"That's not all, there was an interview he did where he narrates everything to the public and about how much of an evil person Bangizwe is while keeping up a fake facade to fool the public."

The sharp pain hits me again and I hiss in pain, slouching forward.

"Sthandwa sam?" his hand is on my shoulder.

"Mge uright?"

"What's wrong? Are you in pain?"

"I'm...I'm fine." I'm not sure about who I'm actually answering right now.

"Oh my goodness, it's on the news now too."

"Mge I'll call you back neh," I say practically defeated.

There's a knock on the door.

I hang up and sigh before looking up at him. I get up from the chair and rush to go switch on the TV. He's behind me.

"What's going on?" He asks.

I swim across the channels and finally get to a news channel.

A knock again.

"Nandi please get that," Bangi says.

"...As reported by anonymous who claims that Prince Bangizwe Shazi assaulted and battered his older brother Prince Alakhe Shazi in a fit of rage that he was completely remorseful about. The source also claims that 'Prince Bangizwe has always been a violent man and just pretends to be the good man that we all know today. My worry goes out to his newly wedded wife Princess Zanokuhle Shazi. I can't help but wonder how she manages to stay with such a monster.' This is indeed a shocking revelation since so many people know and love His Royal Highness Bangizwe. Please be advised the following clip is extremely graphic and may cause triggers to some viewers."

That's all the reporter says before the clip play. It was all there in HQ. I felt tears run down my cheeks. I didn't know what to say.

"My Prince...we're sorr-"

"When did this start?" He interrupts one of the mannequins. He grabs the remote from me and switches the TV off. "Answer me!"

"Maybe an hour ago My Prince."

"Nonsense! And why wasn't I informed?" He asked angry.

"We couldn't reach you My Prince," Fanele says now looking down.

Oh my God, that's what the calls were for?

They should've just sent a text warning us, I would've read it. What an awkward time to fail us indeed.

"Dammit!" He furiously throws the remote against the wall before storming out. I'm following him now.

"Bangi wait."

"These two think they can just tarnish my image like this! No!"

"Two? Are you saying Zonke would do this to you?"

"Who else could it be?"

"Maybe the staff here."

He stops and I nearly bump into him. The moment he turns to look at me I knew he was about to speak more sense. I don't know why I didn't want to believe my sister would do such when she's literally told me once that I bagged the wrong Shazi.

"The staff here has seen far more than anyone ever would around here and they have never spoken about these things. You do the math," he turns on his heel again and walks further again, the only difference now with my following is that I was now going to project my anger at the woman who is supposed to be my older sister.

How could she stoop this low? This is by far the worst she's ever done to me especially when she knows that Alakhe provoked my man. He's the one who started all of this but now my man is the one with a bad name. Alakhe wasn't even fighting back when...when my ma...oh my God...could they have planned all of this?

Did they purposefully set up Bangi to snap and fight him and then have it all captured and then...oh my God...breathe...I should not be stressing the way I am even though I can't stop brewing the different scenarios in my head now.

The momentum this gained was pretty fast too. I couldn't help but wonder how much damage was out there. What other people thought about this whole 'story'...how much they've twisted and turned this story for a big bowl of the latest news.

Breathe...

Ouch...

Bangi doesn't even bother knocking as he pushed open the door to Alakhe's wing. I've never been in here before, not to even mention being this close to this place and I didn't even feel like I lacked anything because of that.

"What the-...Bangizwe, were you raised in a cave or a hole? You knock at people's houses," that's Zonke. I feel like beating the shit out of her. I spot the boys sitting on the couch

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watching the all famous news.

"Where's that shithead?"

"You mean my fiancé?" She takes out her phone. "Resting and healing from the wounds you inflicted on him with no mercy....here he is people the monster. He's probably here to finish my poor fiancé for no reason at all." She smirks but pretends to be crying.

I knew then that the camera was on us.

"Zonke stop lying!" I stand in front of Bangi. "Stop this madness!"

"Look at that my poor sister is defending her Batista. Studies do show that abused women do tend to protect their abuser with everything that they have and I'm heartbroken that this is what my sister is going through ri-..."

Jesu hold me back!

I leap towards her, my hands twitching and itching to beat her back to sense. "Woah woah, did his bad habits rub off on you too Gim- sis? Cause I can help you. I can save you from him. You're stronger than this. I'm your older sister and I'm supposed to protect you from any harm. That's what mom would've wanted for us, not all this pain and suffering you're enduring right now."

"Are you insane? Switch that thing off!" She blocks me with her elbow as I try reaching for her phone."

"Sthandwa sam please you'll hurt yourself." He tries pulling me away but I cling onto Zonke's top.

"I thought I heard some comm- " Alakhe.

The moment she glances at him I snatch that phone from her hold and smash it on the floor with all my might. The immediate contact it has with the tile floor, it's in pieces. The glass of the screen was all over the floor and that alone brought silence to the whole room.

How I wished I could smash the rumours and stories out there right now like this and have it all disappear this easily. I hate this. I hate Zonke for doing all of this. How does even sleep at night?

Alakhe too. Is this really what you do to your brother?

"My phone!" Zonke exclaims. "You ruined my phone! Wena Gimba ndini!" Her hand raises to hit me but I'm pulled away before getting shielded by his big self.

"You lay a finger on her you'll know who I am." He says coldly.

"So you hit women now too?" Zonke.

No but I will!

"This is really a masterpiece. If anyone would've told me that this would've happened I would've prepared some popcorn."

"I didn't hit you enough it seems."

"Rest Bangi rest. You and I know we're the same."

"I'm nothing like you, and I'll never be anything like you," Bangi almost roars. I could sense his anger from just standing behind him.

I can't believe we were fighting like the grown adults that we were in front of these poor kids. Where's Khethiwe again?

"Unfortunately for you the public knows you're far worse than this." Alakhe chuckles, and folds his arms in front of his chest like the drama Queen that he is.

"Is this the games you want to play?" Bangi asks.

"Games? What games Bangizwe?"

Bangi doesn't answer. I wish I knew what he was thinking at this very moment.

Was he thinking and feeling the same as I was?

Probably not.

"Cowards," He says and takes my hand. We left. Back to more brain cracking worry. I was wondering how bad it really was out there. How far and wide this story has gotten.

It was bad. There were even a few hash tags.

#Bangizwemustfall.

#notoabuse.

#batteringAlakhe.

#violentlyroyal.

Haybo this was bad. Real bad. I heaved out a sigh after reading the fourth scoop about my husband rearranging his brother's face. I didn't know what to do. It felt like I was just reading a whole bunch of rubbish after more rubbish.

"No comment!" He groans out in frustration. I look up from my phone and just lock it before going to sit next to him.

"Switch it off," I say.

"I..." he says, unable to finish his sentence as he shakes his head. I take it from him and switch it off on his behalf. He sits back, resting his head on the rest of the couch before shutting his eyes. Frustration written all over his aura.

"What are we going to do?" I ask.

"I don't know."

I'm sure he's never dealt with such before. Your own brother doing such to you with no remorse all because of what? The throne? What's his deal? Is this his weird kink? Getting off on seeing people around you utterly miserable no matter what cost?

"We'll get through this together," I say.

"How Sthandwa sam? The whole kingdom hates me right now."

"Tell them your side of the story?"

"Which is exactly what they told them in any case what difference will it make?"

"You're not a monster Bangi."

"And who'll believe that huh?"

"Me...your baby...and a lot of other people out there Malinga wam. Not everyone believes that you're this person that's trending. We're talking about the same man here who was embarrassed not so long ago by the very woman he's back with. I don't know how but we'll find a way to set things right again," I say.

"You're right," he opens his eyes and cups my face before planting a soft peck on my forehead.

I don't even know why the heck I'm promising such but I knew I definitely had to think of something. The palace's spokesperson might help too. I don't even want to think of what the King and Queen are thinking right now if they've heard about this.

"Are you okay?" He lays his head on my belly and places a hand on it.

"Yeah."

"You had me scared back there. I don't want you stressing," I brush on his hair.

"You sound like my mother right now," I chuckle trying to ignore the awkward feeling of just randomly bringing her up like that as I remembered her words. "I'll try not stressing."

"Good cause I don't want any of you getting hurt. Both of my babies have to be healthy by the end of these coming months."

"We won't get hurt."

"I like to hear it. Makes me wish our baby boy or girl could kick in response but that's still very far. When is the next scan?"

"Four weeks. Someone is in a hurry."

"Aren't you?" he kisses my belly.

I giggle.

"I've been thinking of baby names already..."

"You're even at the naming stage ukude kabi wena," he chuckles and sits up just as a knock comes through on the door.

"I'll get it my Prince," Nandi rushes off to the door and our focus shifts from the burst bubble we just had to the men who fill the house. Men in uniform to be specific. I don't like the feeling brewing at the pit of my stomach. I don't even like the thought that flashes now in my head.

"Good day Your Royal Highness. My Princess, Miss," the men bow after ridding themselves of their caps.

"Officer?," Bangi asks the one who's been doing the talking.

"Officer Gumbi."

"Officer Gumbi what brings you here to my fathers palace and my home?"

"Apologies for disturbing your peace my Prince but we've been summoned here by Prince Alakhe to take you into our custody."

"Excuse me what?" I frown.

"Into your custody? Are you men arresting me?"

"Your Royal Highness, it is per order of Prince Alakhe," he offers Bangi a piece of paper which I take first.

"Warrant of arrest? Assault and ba-...Is this a joke? My husband is not going anywhere. This is madness."

"Sthandwa sam..."

"No Bangi all these men here to arrest one man? No please baby don't allow this they can't cuff you in the Palace! Nor can they want to arrest you here. You are going nowhere until your father returns!"

"We will not cuff his highness as you wish my Princess but-..."

"But nothing okay. You will not take my husband from here and that is final."

"Sthandwa sam, don't."

"What? Don't ini manje Bangi do you want to go to jail because of all these false accusations?" My voice is breaking as I say all of this looking at him in disbelief. He just looked at me until I remembered that this was indeed not a false accusation and I knew it.

I was shaking.

"Bangi No, please."

Is he insane? Clearly he was!

"Gentlemen, shall we."

"Bangizwe Shazi you are not going anywhere, you hear me!"

"Nandi." He says and She nods before Bangi makes his way to the open door with the men following behind. I am losing my mind. How can he do this to me? Does he not care? I think I'm going to collapse due to my heart breaking once again.

I'm disgusted. I'm angry. I'm provoked.

I spot Khethiwe, and she passes the men in confusion. These mannequins are just as useless. They should do something other than watching this happen.

"My Princess lets go inside."

"He should not be going there...he should not," I breathe out. Pain striking my back again.

"Please breathe...calm down." She walks with me next to her, her arm around my shoulder.

"Sit. Your Royal Highness you should not be stressing like this. It is not good for you and your baby."

So she knows?

"The Prince told me so that I can avoid using things that can make you nauseas." I nod.

I take in deep breaths, trying to think of something calming and soothing. Anything other than this chaos. I wipe my tears, all this

crying is not good for anyone. And not to forget that my hormones are making it worse.

"Better?"

"I think so."

"I'll go make you hot chocolate."

"Thank you." I say staring at the clock on the wall. It's not even 12h00 in the afternoon yet.

Did I say nothing could stop me today? I clearly wasn't thinking this far.

Chapter Forty One.

"But if you're gonna dine with them cannibals sooner or later, darling, you're gonna get eaten..." x NICK CAVE.

••

"Mama...mama..." I lightly tapped on her shoulder and that's when it seemed like she was drawn back to this earth.

"Zano," she breathed out and forced a smile on her face. I don't know why she was even faking it when I loved the wrinkles it forms on the outer corners of her eyes. "Senibuyile eskolweni? (You're back from school?)"

"Yes mama, and guess what?" I'm excited again before I dropped my schoolbag on the table and unzipped my backpack.

"Yini? Kune trip futhi eskolweni senu? (What? Is there another trip at your school?)" She shook her head before folding her arms in front of her chest, surely calculating how much money she had to deduct from her savings for this month already.

I pulled out the piece of paper and put it in front of her, bringing her out of her worry almost immediately.

"Ngipassile! (I passed)" I beamed and squealed before she finally joined me in jubilation. A happy moment I'll never forget. She took me in a bone crushing hug before letting me go. She even had tears in her eyes.

"You even passed with great marks!"

"My teacher said if I continue like this I'll even be eligible to apply for bursaries, so you don't have to worry about a cent mama," I said.

Her face dropped immediately after I said that.

"I never wanted any of my children to go through the burden of poverty Zano. You're only 15, you should be worrying about teenage stuff. Things like the bold and the beautiful, boyfriends and sneaking out. Not money."

She and I both knew that was not my cup of tea but I knew what she meant. A child shouldn't be exposed to those types of hardships cause they'll end up feeling like it's their fault. They'll feel like their a burden and the reason why they can't afford the nice things in life...

Maybe even make you feel like you were a mistake. A failed pull out. A condom dodger. Yes Nyiso and I talked a lot about these things especially during break time.

"Tell you what, umamakho will buy you a new school skirt cause this one has run it's course. Plus...it's too short now," her eyes popped out as she attempted to measure it's length.

"Haybo mama!" I laughed and backed away. "This is very long compared to other girls I'm in school with. Others, you even see iybunu kahle nje mebagoba. (...the butt when they bow.)"

She shook her head and folded the report card in half before the front door got occupied by a shadow. He took out his handkerchief and wiped the sweat off his forehead then proceeded to greeting afterwards.

Only I greeted.

Mama, looked like she had just had a bag of lemons. Really bitter ones.

"Noma?" Him.

My mother clicked her tongue before she turned to walk away off to their bedroom. I heard the door shut. It became silent.

"Umawakho usathukuthele? (Your mother is still angry?)"

"Why would she be angry?"

"Oh hayi, lutho Nonozzi, (oh, no it's nothing Nonozzi)" he walked in. "Bakephi oNobuhle nalomfana...u...uKhaya? (Where is Nobuhle and that boy...uh...Khaya?) "

"Nextdoor."

"Oho."

"Baba...ngiphasile," I beamed.

"Oh, okay."

Oh okay?

Just that?

I felt small. I zipped my bag as a distraction. I'll be in the room I share with Zonke.

"Kanti akunakudla kulomuzi? Umawakho akathengangi isishebo? (There's not food in this house? Didn't your mom buy meat?)"

*I shrugged. "Ngizapheka uphuthu. (I'll cook phutu pap)"
"Futhi? (Again?)"*

I shrugged again. I didn't want to talk too much...

I changed into yesterday's clothes and removed the tight hairband on my head before going to the kitchen to get started on the cooking. Indeed it was uphuthu again with amasi. I craved some meat but there wasn't any anywhere. All the deep freezer had was ice and more ice.

Zonke walked in, laughing as she sat on a chair. She was on her phone. A Sony Ericsson K800 , held together with a rubber band.

"Haybo chommy, uthi wenzeni? (Friend, what did you say you did?)" More laughing. "Idla indoda mfazi. Ngeke phela ujwayelwe wuBetty. Not when we're prettier than her. (Eat him up friend. We won't be disrespected by people like Betty. Not when we're prettier than her.)"

I tried not to listen but she was just so loud that that's all I could really focus on.

"Yhuuu chommy, we all failed mos. Like half of us. My parents will understand. Vele even my dad...yena he'll definitely chommy, phela...(because...)" She laughs. "Hayi hayi hayi uworse. (No no no, you're worse.)"

I lowered the heat of the stove and closed the pot, wiping all the maize meal particles I wastes on the stove before going to our bedroom to get started on those extra curriculum papers we were given. I was that bored and I was too lazy to be roaming the streets.

I heard the horn of a car outside before looking out the open curtain. A white Toyota. Thokozani. Zonke jogged out and they jumped into each other's arms, kissing. Eww, right there in front of the gate. I shook my head, looked back at the math paper and cringed. I wanted to eat something. Anything. I remembered I bought amakip kip at school. Yay!

"Yey wena Zonke!" That's dad.

Oouuu drama. She's reprimanded and Thembinkosi is banished from setting foot here ever again.

"Usuyajola wena Zonke! (You're dating now Zonke!)"

"Haybo ngiyeke. (Leave me alone)"

"Zonke..." Okay now I couldn't hear anything.

For someone who just got shouted at she looked pretty...happy to me. Not that she didn't deserve any of that. "Yoh nawe

umsebenzi noma kuvaliwe at school. (You're even doing work while school is closed.)"

"I don't want to fail like you did," I mumbled to myself.

"Whatever," she jumped onto the bed and started being busy on her phone. "Lemme mxit uchommy."

At night I'm woken up by the bed creaking. "Ubuyaphi?" I asked sleepily.

"Huh?"

"Ubuyapho?"

"Oh...etoilet, diarrhea from amasi."

"Mhmmm..." I drifted back to sleep.

When morning came I was the first to wake up. Music blasting on the radio. They were playing all my favourites today on Shaz FM. I mixed my porridge pot so that when Khaya and Buhle were to wake up they'd just jump straight into eating.

"There's only so many songs that I can sing to pass the time, and I'm running out of things to do to get you out of my mind. All I have is this picture in a frame, that I hold close to see your face everyday. With you is where I'd rather be, but every step that we are It's so hard, its so harddd. This long distance is killing me..." I sang my lungs out with Brandy.

I'm sure bengibimba!

Was that a scream?

I lowered the volume a little.

"Mama...vu...mama! Baba mvuse! (Dad wake her up!)" Zonke?

I put my spoon down and rushed to their bedroom. The door was wide open so I just walked in. Zonke was sitting at the edge of the bed, slouched over umama, crying her eyeballs out. I looked to my left and ubaba, was busy on a call, eyes bloodshot red.

"Vuka mama!" Zonke wailed.

I don't know how but I just knew what was going on.

I knew she meant my mother was dead cause she'd occasionally shake her. Mama was a very active woman. Very healthy too...but now she was just lying there, lifeless, with a white cord around her neck. I took two steps forward before I heard my father stopping me.

"Ima, Nono you can't be in here," he rushed to redirect me out.

"But..." I choked.

"No no, please I need you to stay out here and keep your siblings distracted. Don't even tell them about this."

"Tell them what? What's wrong with umama? Why isn't she waking up?" I cried.

"Nonozi..."

"Is she okay? Why can't I see her?"

*His hands went onto my shoulders and he shook me violently.
"Zanokuhle! Please!" He sighed before a lone tear escaped his
eye. He looked like he was having a difficult time breathing.
"Ushonile uNomakwezi...she's dead..."*

Dead...

Dead...

I look around and come across Bangi's childhood photo, then to the footstep coming my way.

I stare at Nyiso as she brings me a glass of water. I frown. I don't remember asking her for water as such really.

"Phuza, you'll be fine." She says and I take the glass and surprise myself when I practically empty the entire thing.

"Better?"

"Lubricated, yes," I lightly chuckle with her and put the glass on the floor before heaving out a sigh.

It's been 4 hours since the arrest of my husband and it felt like forever since I last saw him. I was missing a huge part of me and I could help but wonder if he was okay where he was. Was he warm? Fed? Okay? I've tried calling his phone since he left with it but I couldn't reach him. They probably took his phone as part of this unexpected arrest we've just gone through.

I've been occupying my mind with a lot of reading about this scoop and yes you've guessed it, the whole arresting saga was

making rounds all over the news and blogs now. There were even a few jokes tossed here and there about this. But it wasn't funny. At all.

The only good thing about this are the people who were actually on our side. People who actually believe that there's more to this video than they're being led on.

The #PrinceBangizweSquad.

The #FreePrinceBangizwe.

Even the #PrinceBisInnocent movement gave me hope but I now knew that anything could happen. I mean the police had video evidence and an honest man at their hand so why would they let him go?

There's a knock on the door and I tense up. All the knocks today were terrible. From the guards telling us what we discovered ourselves... to those policemen.

"I'll go get it," Nyiso offers after I've clearly been too unresponsive to the knocker. She's up, walking to the same door she open seconds later to reveal Bangi's parents. They look worried. The Queen looks like she's been shedding a few tears of her own, dressed in the attire I assume she left here wearing for her date. Nyiso curtsies at the door and closes it after they acknowledge her with a nod.

"Makoti...it's true? My son is in jail?" She asks glancing back at the King in between. I had no strength to answer the obvious. I get up from the couch. "Senzo...my Bangizwe is in jail. You have to get him out."

"Makoti why didn't you stop this?" The King asks.

"Mina futhi?" I stop myself from rolling my eyes at him but I want to say something. Something that they should've done and I should've said ages ago. "My King, my Queen

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you both know how much I adore and respect you. You both know that I have your son's best interests at heart. You know I care for him too much to even allow him to hurt himself, so I don't understand how I'm yet again being questioned on what I should and what I shouldn't have done about all of this. Don't you think I tried that? Don't you think that we both have tried to be ourselves even when circumstances failed us? I've sat through every single dinner at the table wondering what bashful words or actions it is that we're going to receive now from Alakhe and all you two would do is sit there and tell my man to calm down when he's always provoked. I've been made meat in front of my husband, called names, shamed for my upbringing and blamed for my older sister's behaviours. I've had nights where I'd literally calm Bangi down from doing something he didn't want to do hoping that you as his parents

would do something but all you've ever done is sweep it under the carpet..."

"...I don't know if you're even thinking of making excuses for Alakhe just to hide something or it's because even you two fear the monster you created. Alakhe is a disrespectful shithead of a pervert and you two are doing nothing about it. It had to get to this. It had to get to Bangi's setback...to the lies out there about a good man all because you've failed as parents. Is the throne too high for you to notice us down here? Is Bangi not important to you because he married me? A commoner? Maybe that's why I crave to see the day you reprimand your child and he actually listens cause that's how I was raised. I'm sorry...actually no cause I'm exhausted. You still believe that boy deserves an apology from us. You still believe putting a bandage on a bleeding wound will help. You still see me as a traitor. You're not fixing the problem."

"Makoti..." The Queen says, but I stop her. She's not about to say another word until I'm okay with it. I don't want to talk about this. I just want to be away from them and all of this.

"Please leave."

They gasp shocked at my request but I was serious. I wanted them gone.

"Okay," Bangi's mother blinks and turns to leave. The King does the same and I'm left to breathe I'm my own space again, falling back on the couch while feeling like dirt for how I just spoke to my in laws.

"Holy balls Mge...that was...wow," she claps once joining me on the couch. "Things are that bad here?"

I chuckle and look at her. "Only when I'm with them."

"I thought this was the place to be moes."

"Some books only have interesting covers but once you open that book it's full of bull nje."

"Yoh...so this Alakhe guy..."

"Can we not talk about him please."

"Come on mge. I'm your friend here and I feel so lost now. Naye nje shukuthi he's not all the things he's selling himself as."

I heave out a sigh and sit back.

"Not even the slightest. Let me just say he makes me uncomfortable. I don't get how Zonke is still with him when she can do 10 times better than that."

"Like that baby daddy of his neh? Konje what's his name again?"

"Thokozani."

"Yaaa him! What happened vele between him and her?"

I shrug.

Speaking of which...

"Do you maybe have his number? I want to call him and talk about Luthando a little."

"Nah...I don't think I have them but I think I know who might. You'll have them by tomorrow," she says and I thank her before I go back to telling her more about Alakhe.

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"He hasn't called yet?" Nyiso asks bringing me a bowl of food. Flavoured Rice. Roasted Chicken. And a huge dollop of mayonnaise.

"No. I think he's forgotten all about me."

"Nonsense mge. How can he forget a beaut like you mara?"

I smile and remove my feet from the couch for her to sit by me again. Ncebo is in his pram, sleeping after having his evening feed.

"This looks amazing."

"As the first member in our tiny almost nonexistent friendship ring to join the abomakoti association we say thank you."

I laugh. "We should say a prayer too."

"Yeah yeah," she puts her filled spoon down. The one she was about to put in her mouth. We pray and get to eating.

Almost halfway through the meal she clears her throat.

"Mge...I've been thinking."

"About?"

"Everything. From Alakhe to Zonke to Princess Khethiwe and I think that maybe you two should just move out of here."

"Haybo."

"Hear me out. I think it's a good idea. I know you've just moved in here but you guys can always come back, at least once the dust has settled."

I'm contemplating it.

"Plus mge, you're pregnant which means you have to be in good shape physically and mentally and judging from all you've told me about those two witches this is a toxic environment. Look now, you're involved in physical fights when you and your Prince can just move to a place where there'll be peace and no drama. Imagine not seeing their faces for 7months mge, holy balls...peace. Maybe then will there even be some change in Alakhe."

Well damn. That sounds like a plan I definitely had to sell to Bangi...also if he comes back soon by some miracle.

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Nyiso left almost two hours after supper and I was alone again. I went to lock the front doors before heading upstairs to bed.

I couldn't bring myself to sleep. It wasn't even 21h00 yet. I tossed to the other side? The space that would've usually been

filled with his big self. It smells like him...but it was cold. I brush on the pillow...

"Father...God..."

I nearly yell when my phone rings. I even gawk at the name on the screen answering fast just in case it hung up.

"Bang! Bang!"

He laughs! The idiot laughs and I feel like crying.

"I'm here Sthandwa sam."

"Here where?" I'm crying.

"Prison."

"I was hoping you'd say you were at the door. How are you calling me from your phone?"

"I may be in here, but I'm still the Prince."

I sigh relieved he was okay. He sounded okay.

"Are you warm? Have you eaten something decent? Why are you not video calling me I want to see you myself."

"I'm okay Sthandwa sam. I'm in the most comfortable cell ever. Alone. Warm blanket and a decent supper is in my belly now, but I wish it was your cooking instead."

"Bang!" I sniff, more tears leaving my eyes. "When are you coming back? Is there a chance for bail? Did your lawyer say something? Anything? I feel so lost."

"Herbert is sorting everything out, I should be back there

tomorrow afternoon if my bail is approved."

"Oh my God."

"I'm sorry for the way I left there...I figured Alakhe would unnecessarily bite their heads off if they didn't follow his wishes."

"That pig. He was here, gloating and rubbing salt to this whole shebang. If I could just..." I shake my head, the anger in me raging.

"I want you nowhere near that thing. I've asked Deliverance to make sure our wing is intensely guarded for the night and until I come back."

"I hear you." My voice is low.

"Sthandwa sam, don't worry much about me right now. I'll be back with both fighting hand and sort this out. I should be asking you all those questions you asked me cause you're carrying our baby."

My lips twitch into a smile. "I've done all of that."

"Good. That makes me so happy right now you have no idea. Now sleep, I'm sure you've drained all of your energy for today...or better yet, I want you to pretend I'm right there with you, put me on loudspeaker."

"Okay..." I breathe out.

"Now put me on my pillow. I hope there's no one in my spot."

I wake up alone. A different alone.

My phone's battery is low, but I see a message from Nyiso. It's the numbers I asked for. I text her back, thanking her immensely for them. I'll call him later. There's another one from Zakhele, informing me about the car being ready to take me to my mother's grave. Bangi told them last night. I smile and rub on my belly before texting him on WhatsApp.

'Morning.'

It's sent, but has only one tick. Maybe they took his phone again.

Sigh.

After bathing and getting dressed I leave with my bag and dying phone.

"Greetings my Princess," the men at my door startle me.

With a smile on my face I nod. "Deliverance, Fanele."

"Shall we?"

"Sure," we walk out and I thank the Lord for not putting anyone from here in my pathway.

A quick stop for purchasing some beautiful flowers and prenatals is made. Then we go fetch Buhle first, and then Khaya last. It was a tense situation in the car but nonetheless they avoided asking me a lot of hectic questions.

The cemetery looks bigger, recently refreshed too. Signs of spring approaching were evident on the trees. A cold breeze hits me. "It feels like we haven't been here in forever. And even now Zonke is not with us." Buhle says.

"You know how Zonke is never present for this anyway" Khaya adds.

We get to her gravesite, Buhle as always is eager and ready to remove any of the things that made mama's resting place untidy. I'm reading the tombstone. The words have obviously not changed.

'Here lies Nomakwezi Deborah Dlamini. Wife and mother. 1965-2009. Forever in our minds, forever in our souls.'

This still broke me. This still brought back that whole day. I know now that she killed herself. I never thought much about that cord but now I knew that that's what she used to hang herself. I don't even want to imagine her like that but my mind displays it for me anyway.

"I..." I crouch and put the fresh flowers near her tombstone.

"...I'm a mess. I'm sorry. Things just feel like they're going wrong so fast and I don't know if the hope I have is enough to be beneficial in the end."

Buhle crouches next to me. Khaya too, hands on my shoulders.

"Was she happy Buhle?" I ask.

"Happy?"

"You were with her the night before...was she happy?"

"Yes. Very...I remember her feeding me and us laughing and she braided my hair. Why?"

"I just wanted to know, you know. She wasn't happy when I last saw her and I think it was because of dad."

"Maybe she found out about Fihliwe."

I frown.

"Maybe..."

Is that why I relieved that day? Because of the pain I felt when I lost umama felt just as equivalent to when Bangi walked through that door. It felt like I was losing him forever...just like how I lost my mother. Someone I love dearly, taken away from me just like that.

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I drag my feet to their front door. Deliverance and Fanele guarding me like hawks. I knew what I had to do. It was not something I would usually do but now was not a time for thinking too much about this. It was already the afternoon and still I knew nothing more than I did yesterday.

I felt like I was being shut out. I don't know. The King and Queen were not here too according to Nandi.

I knock. Twice before the door is opened by Khethiwe's helper. She curtseys. "My Princess."

"Hi, is Zonke here?" I ask.

"Yes she is in," she opens the door further before I walk in. I spot Khethiwe and her two boys, playing a board game on the carpet.

"Khethiwe."

"Zanokuhle."

"You good?"

"As much as I should be."

I nod. Okay.

"Can I see Zonke?"

"Sure. Whatever. Becca, show her the way."

Cold much...

The journey to another part of this wing isn't that long. I'm led to a room.

"She's in here my Princess."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Thank you."

She curtseys and leaves me all alone before I knock and listen.

"It's open."

Good. She's sitting on a bed. Her wheelchair in front of her.

"You?"

"Surprised?"

"A little. I thought you would've been with your precious man. Watching him through prison bars while crying your lungs out. You have always been a crybaby vele. Acting like tears will wash away the things that happen in your life." She shrugs.

"You know, had you come to this palace with a better attitude, I would've supported you fully. No questions asked. But since you woke up and chose your violent and psychopathic ways I can't help but feel scared for you." I walk in further.

"Scared for me how? We've reduced your man to junk status. Chances of him coming back from this are slim, and you know what that means? No one will fight Alakhe for the throne. No one will look down on his leadership skills or whatever other people say he lacks."

"Bangi wasn't even fighting for the throne. He knows his place and knows that it rightfully belongs to the first born son here so what would be the point of him fighting! Now all these useless things were orchestrated just to destroy him for...for...you know what? This is not what I came here for." I raise my chin, focused on her. Eye to eye. "You tell that thing of yours to drop or get those charges dismissed."

"Mxm, or what?"

"Or I'll tell him every little secret about you that there is.
Starting with Luthando."

She lifts her eyebrows, her shoulders sinking and I think I see a glimpse of panic in her. "You wouldn't dare." She breathes out.
"Don't try me."

"How...how will I convince him to do that?"

I shrug and turn to leave. I need to find out if I can see Bangi or something.

Chapter Forty Two.

"You see us how you want to see us..."

••

"Hello?" A loud cry fills my one ear.

"Thokozani?" I clear my throat.

"Speaking. Who is this?" I hear him speaking on the other end of the line, the cry dimming down before something shuts. A door I presume. "Sorry about that."

"It's... It's fine. Thokozani, it's me , Zano...Zanokuhle."

"Zanokuhle? You mean Zonke's sister?"

I sigh, just having that title to my name feeling heavy on my shoulders.

"Yes."

"With all due respect, why are yo- hold on...Lu...baby please settle down... Baba uyeza okay...ayi...sorry about that again but like I was saying why are you calling me? What do you want from me? Or is it that Zonke finally decided to answer my calls by sending you to talk to me instead because of how much of a coward she's been?" He says and I can't help but feel like I probably called at the wrong time.

"Why has she been ignoring you?"

"You ask her, angisho you both in the same boat now."

"Thokozani I'm not here to fight please. You know that's not how I roll, and if anything I'm not my older sister. I got your number from someone because I just wanted to know if I could see Luthando for a while. You know just spend a day with her.

I'm embarrassed to even think that after this whole year I've never bought her more than the hospital bag she had or most likely still has."

"I...I hear you. Thing is she's not really a friendly baby, I mean you could tell from the beginning of the phone call she couldn't stop crying. She's been like this for almost a month now and I don't know why but it just feels like the first few months she spent in this house all over again."

"Maybe change of environment will do her good. Maybe you need a break too."

"Maybe," he mumbles on the other end of the line.

I really started wondering now how Luthando had changed over the past few months. Was she a chubby baby? How adorable was her smile? Could she walk yet? Was she still well taken care of by Thokozani.

"You know what, maybe you can have her over for a few days. I do need a break."

"Great! Save this number, it's mine. I'll let you know when this can happen yeah?"

"Sure."



I turn over to the other side and sigh because I had depleted all the sleep I had in me. All the tossing and turning was not helping too. How could I even sleep properly when my man didn't call me at all yesterday?

Not to even check up on me or allow me to check up on him...I mean how cruel can men be?

Very it seems, cause even Herbert won't tell me a single thing about what's going on in that prison. I thought maybe these journalists would have something I could hold onto but they had nothing as well.

After my shower I step out and dry my body. Choosing a comfortable and warm outfit before putting my weave on. I don't think you'd be able to tell how I truly felt inside when you just glanced at me.

I hear the door opening and frown looking its way. Why would Nandi just walk in here without kno...wait! My eyes go wide with shock as I look at who was here. Bathong.

"What are you doing here?"

"I...we need to talk."

"No Zonke, you need to leave." I say walking out of the closet and slide it's door shut behind me. "How did they even let you through those doors?"

"We need to talk about this ridiculous thing you're asking me. How can I convince Alakhe to do that? He won't drop the charges."

"I thought you were smarter than this Zonke, wasn't it nice when you two were busy plotting this during your pillow talk? This should be easy come on..."

"I can't...he won't listen to me," I could hear her frustration and it was pretty obvious that she was finding it hard to even convince this man of hers.

But I could care less. I didn't believe she tried hard enough which is why I'm not backing down. Even if it meant he'll still have this crime written to his name I still wanted him out of there.

"Make him listen to you then."

"How!"

"I don't know, but what I do know is that you've been ignoring Thokozani and Luthando which is sad because clearly something is going on there and imagine what would happen the moment I tell Alakhe and his parents about this."

"Zano..."

"You better go talk to him, if I were you I wouldn't even still be here," I say.

"Please don't ruin this for me..."

Ruin what? That sham of a relationship of hers? Her fiancée-ship that's sailing on lies and thin ice?

"Leave Zonke, I don't have the energy for this."

"Then le-..."

"Go!" I'm really getting irritated now, but I tell myself to relax a little when she turns to crutch walk out of here.

I heave out a heavy sigh before seeing her back up a little with a tall man towering over her.

I'm stuck on the same spot, swallowing the tons of saliva forming in my mouth. My knees feel weak and I palm my mouth the moment I blink a few times just to confirm if I was truly not dreaming.

"You have some nerve showing your face here. Did she touch you Sthandwa sam?" His voice filled the quiet cold room. It sounded like a melody my ears have been deprived from for so many years.

I shake my head, and mumble a "no" just for more clarity.

"I...I didn't touch her I-..."

"Leave my sight!" He interrupts her and I see her jump in shock. I think she even shook in fear there but she wastes no time in doing that.

"How? How are you here?" I ask and finally lunge forward, hitting hard on his chest, my arms encircling his and my nose sniffing him in. His hugs me back by my waist. "It really is you. Chapped lips and all."

He chuckles.

"I have chapped lips now?"

"That and a stubborn ass lawyer." And that's when I'm overcome by a different emotion. I pull back from the hug and punch his shoulder.

"Ow...and then?" He asks an eyebrow raised.

"How dare you not allow me to come and see you! You prevented me from getting any relevant information about you and just continued keeping me in the dark...do you know how crazy that was driving me? I couldn't even sleep properly last night because I didn't even know how you were," I fume.

"Is that why you're angry? Sthandwa sam you think I wanted you to see me in there like that?"

"I'm your wife Bangi. You think I'd care about that?" I don't get how he thought this through.

"I wanted you to come see me, trust me it just wasn't easy for me to allow it. You were never going to forget that about me and it felt okay at that moment. Ncese Sthandwa sam. I didn't

want to hurt you...I don't even want you angry at me right now because I'm back and I'm not planning on going anywhere." He reaches in to hold me in his arms.

Silence.

"Am I forgiven?"

I take in a deep breath and glance up at him. Okay now I want to cry again. I close my eyes nodding. I chuckle and look at him once more. "You still have chapped lips though."

"Hawu Ma'Dlamini..." He tries kissing me but I back away, giggling. "...yini manje do I smell too?"

"Cha, I just..." I run my fingers past his beautiful beard.

"I missed you too." He says.

I pull him in for a hug and thank the Almighty for this, but now I couldn't help but worry about what was next.

"You go shower while I go make you breakfast okay?" I say.

"I'd love that."

I peck his lips.



Two more days go by and it has been a mess really. How many more scandals are going to keep popping up now because of Bangi's arrest? I don't know. But we're taking it and the drama day by day with a grain of salt.

Bangi comes down the stairs, dressed in chinos and a polo neck. We were almost dressed the same today and sheesh, I still couldn't believe he shaved his whole beard off. I couldn't believe it. I think I even hated him the whole day after that and refused to talk to him. He looked like a completely different man altogether.

I wondered if I would've reacted differently if I didn't have all these hormones driving me crazy.

"I think we're ready to go right?"

"Mhnnn," I quickly shove my second last chocolate covered piece of bacon into my mouth, and get off the highchair. I close the jar of Nutella and go put it in the cupboard.

"What is this? Chocolate? Haybo Ma'Dlamini what is my baby making you eat?"

"Are you judging us right now? I've been avoiding my cravings for two days now let me have this. You saw me eating all that fruit and veg and bland chicken but now that I'm having this tiny bit of luxury I'm the bad guy?" I pull a face.

"I didn't even stop you," he raises his hands in surrender.

"Well to me it sounded like you were, okay."

"Ya neh, let me see what the whole fuss is all about." He takes my last piece and takes a decent bite. The face he makes immediately brings me to laughter. "No, no no...How do you eat this?"

"You better swallow," I chortle.

"Sthandwa sam these two things don't even go together

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they don't." He swallows.

"Well it's amazing to me so..." I take the remaining piece and eat it, my body soaking in the satisfactory joy I get from giving my body what it wanted. Honestly it tasted like something I've never tasted before.

He comes to put his hands on my belly, crouching in front of me. "Shazi Junior...what are you making your mommy eat manje? What's next chocolate and pickles?"

"Why does that sound so mouthwatering?"

"Because you have pregnancy saliva." He chuckles.

"Mxm, suka kimi," I remove his hands from my belly and take the empty plate, rinse it and dry it before we take our leave.

I'm nervous. Worried about how this was going to go down. I haven't seen his parents since that day and I'm sure they hated me.

The room is laced with a strong smell of...bleach? Oh my goodness. "Can you smell that?" I whisper.

"Smell what?"

"The bleach."

"Uh...no..."

"How can you not smell that?"

I shake my head and the two people we've come to see come to sight. The Queen and King sat on their throne. Beautiful and golden, and I bet those were real diamonds.

"Bangizwe!" His mother exclaims getting up and coming up to hug her son. He has no problem hugging her back and afterwards she holds him at arms length. "Oh my son."

"I'm fine ma, we need to talk," Bangi says.

She slightly frowns before letting him go to head back to her seat. His father has said nothing so far, and the look he was giving us was confusing on its own.

"Sit." The Queen utters and with Bangi holding my hand we go settle on the couch situated not so far from the thrones.

"I know I have been distant from you two and it was with reason. I wanted a clear head and some time away from toxic things."

"Are you insinuating that we - your parents - are toxic now Bangizwe?" He finally speaks.

"Yes baba." Bangi answers flatly.

Well I-...

"As tough as it is I'll have to accept the fact that my parents will always choose to mother their nation instead of mothering their own children. Do you know how painful it is to wish your grandmother was still around to help while you still have both living and breathing adults that are supposed to do so. I'm a grown man, I know I'm not supposed to even be looking for such from you now but I thought at the end of the day, regardless of how many years I've been on this earth I surely have the right to look back at you two for help when needed."

"Bangizwe..."

"Let me finish mama, I don't want this dragged. My wife and I are moving out."

"What! Bangizwe what do you mean you are moving out? This is your home, this is where you've been for all your life and there's more than enough space for both of you in this palace."

"But I also don't feel safe in this Palace. Isn't that what a home is supposed to be? Before I wouldn't care as much but now I have a family to look out for. My wife and chil-...future children need security and a loving environment, not this. Not these fights. Not all these back and forths that only drive us into insecurity. The decision is final and should be effective by next week," he says and rises, taking my hand helping me up.

I could see the shock on the Queen's face but I just didn't know what the King was thinking and wanted to say. I didn't say anything because I agreed with it all. I wanted distance between Zonke and I. Space. Clean oxygen with no trances of Alakhe in it. That was all I could really want and need.

We leave it at that without them fighting us any further about this. That also begged the question of what they thought about me. Surely I was seen as the manipulator here, convincing their son to rebel against their wishes.

Back at our wing I was busy on Bangi's laptop searching for places to move to. Somewhere comfortable, safe and obviously beautiful. I never thought I'd look at such houses in my entirety. Yes, there were dreams and visions about where I'd move to once I had enough money but that was just it. It never got to that point of me having enough and I couldn't see it happening until I got both of my siblings out of school and working.

And then we'd start building. I'd probably be able to save the amount needed till I probably turned 40. Imagine. But then again, there is no age to success and definitely no timeline for achievements.

Bangi, Lerato and his spokesman were discussing a way forward. A solution to everything that has been happening out there and it was pretty straightforward, he was going to have to give a speech and address the people of his Kingdom. Apologize for his clear mistakes and then we hope and pray that people will give us another chance.

Oh damn...that is a gorgeous house!

6 bedrooms? We don't even need that many but who knows. Fully furnished...I like... mostly because the style is kind of my vibe. Definitely up there with the other one I bookmarked.

The sound of my man's phone ringing catches my attention.

"Excuse me...Herbert...yes...what?" He frowns. I frown too now, curiosity overcoming me in an instant. "Okay Thank you." He hangs up.

I don't want to ask.

Gosh.

"That was Herbert. He just told me the court dismissed my case."

I squeal and nearly drop the laptop on my lap, but I'm quick to compose myself. "That's great." I clear my throat.

"I know but..."

"You don't sound like you just got the best news ever." Lerato.

He shakes his head and puts his phone away. "I...yeah."

Well I'm still happy. Zonke delivered on this but I'm not about to give her a round of applause for this. It was their fault anyway.



Tomorrow had me nervous. The great big speech was going down and I had the right to feel the way I felt. I think I could sense the nervousness from Bangi too. It being a live speech airing throughout the whole Kingdom was not helping either.

An alert makes me glance at the screen of my phone. It was from Thokozani. I went to my WhatsApp and noticed he's sent me a bunch of pictures. I open them and gasp with the amount of adorable and breathtaking pictures lined up there.

"Baby, look at these," I quickly jog up to him, careful not to slip from the socks on my feet. He puts his ipad aside and looks at me, then to the phone in my hand which I give to him. "She's so beautiful."

"Is this Zonke's child?"

"Yeah, uLuthando."

"It still baffles me how your sister can just abandon her child like that."

"Maybe they were going through something... Anger got in the mix and we ended up here."

"Look at how adorable she is in this one even."

"Apparently Thokozani, the baby daddy has been trying to reach her for a while now."

"Mhnn...and when is the visiting happening?"

"As soon as we settle into our new home." I shrug watching him swipe to the next picture. She's dressed in a warm looking pink jacket, buttoned up and a pair of jeans. Cute baby hair combed out, adorned with a pink hairband that had a white flower on it.

Oh my ovaries!

She even has baby teeth.

"I hope she's not trouble," Bangi sighs and I laugh.

"Hope? We need to deal with her even if she is trouble. Practice for little Shazi in here."

"Yoh...phela baby our baby is going to be peaceful."

"And how sure are you about that?"

"I just am."

I laugh even more at that. We don't even the gender yet and my husband is already predicting little Shazi's personality. I lean

in to peck his cheek before laying my head on his shoulders.

"Whatever the gender as long as they're healthy."

"I do want a boy though." He teases followed by a chortle.

"Ucalile."

"Sengiyasho nje."

My phone pings again. "Who is it?" I ask eyes closed. Is this exhaustion? Those squats are killing me.

"This Thokozani lad."

"Thokozani lad manje?" I chuckle.

"Some man is busy texting my woman, makes me feel weird."

"That weird feeling is what we humans call jealousy. It kinda makes the heart beat faster and your thoughts run wild with fake scenarios. A little like how I'd feel when you're busy talking with your Lee."

"Lerato? Really?" He laughs. "I don't even think of her like that."

"And it better stay that way. Don't make me snatch weaves."

"That would be the day." His hand grabs on my thigh

Hayi. I lay back, resting my body on the bed.

"What does it say?" I ask remembering I got a notification not so long ago.

"It says...Can I bring Luthando over tomorrow, something came up. Important."

"Yeh? Tomorrow?" I sit up, shocked.

"There's another one, 'the lady who usually takes care of her is away. I need the hands please.'"

So what was he going to do if I never called him? Eh.

Chapter Forty Three.

"They're out to get you, better leave while you can, don't wanna be a boy, you wanna be a man. You wanna stay alive, better do what you can..." x Michael Jackson.

••

I clap my hands, along with the two people who made all of this possible. Nothing making me prouder than the delivery of that speech, the way it touched me and made me feel like we were headed for a good start and something better than all this madness.

He gives me a nervous smile, taking the hug I give to him as a much needed reliever.

"How did I do?"

"Fantastic of course," I say and let him go.

"Your wife is correct, that ship sailed smoothly." Lerato says. "I think that is it for today. The movers will come in tomorrow morning. 08h00 sharp."

"I hope you're aware we're just taking our clothing and essentials right?" Bangi asks.

"Yes, My Prince what do you take me for?" Lerato says after chuckling. I feel Bangi snake his arm around my waist before pulling me a little closer to him. His hand glides to my butt and

he squeezes it causing me to clear my throat and reach to put his hand back on my waist.

My goodness...

Not while we have eyes around us like this. My cheeks hurt from the blushing I'm doing.

"Make sure Nandi and a few other helpers get to our wing to start packing."

"At what time shall I send them in?" Lerato asks.

"10h00, the sooner they're done, the better," he pecks my cheek.

Someone is in a good mood today...or rather a better mood than yesterday. We eventually leave Lerato and head for our wing after she gave us a quick review again of how well the speech was doing for the little situation we had.

I immediately rush to the loo to pee and rid myself of one of my jerseys. It wasn't that cold anymore and maybe I had gone a bit overboard with the clothing I put on.

Bangi is seated on the couch, phone at hand, watching a video of his speech by the sound of things.

"...*Let us unite and build our community...*" He stops the video and sighs heavily. I don't know what he's thinking about this whole event but I do want to find out. Or do I?

"Do you think this was a good idea?" He pats on his lap which I gladly go invade with a fullfigured-thick-tighed straddle.

"Are you doubting yourself now?" I ask, looking him right in the eye.

"A little. Look I know My Lee..." He gives me a look and I roll my eyes. "...she said it's going well but I mean-..."

"But you mean nothing because I'm sure this will work. You just need to relax and let everything fall back into place again. Hopefully you know what greatness you've bought to this kingdom and that's all that should matter."

I reach down and grab his phone, scrolling through it. Searching for his Google, find it prior to searching for the speech he delivered today. I check if there were any good articles out there about this and indeed there were already a lot of articles. Good articles.

"See..." I show him what I was looking at thoroughly. "...good things are happening already. Positive things."

"You know what, you're right."

"Vele I'm right hawu," I chuckle and lock his phone before tossing it onto the empty space next to us, cupping his face and peck his lips. "Today we're headed forward with all the housing projects and charity events, your businesses and us."

"I love how you're putting us up there along with those priorities." He leans in and pecks my lips again. "Ngiyabonga Sthandwa sam."

"You know I'm here for you. Well my job here is done then. Let me go make us something to eat, you hungry?" I ask already envisioning what storm I'll be cooking in that kitchen. I know I ate a little something before we left but it surely wouldn't hurt to have something right now. Did I even take my prenats today?

"Yes," his reply is accompanied by a smile. His beautiful smile. "Good." My attempt to get off his lap is put on hold before I could even make it back on the ground.

"Ima (wait), what if what I'm hungry for is not on the menu Sthandwa sam?"

"Not on the menu njani when we have all we could ever need in the kitchen?"

He chuckles at me question...or rather the confused look on my face and then like earlier on puts his hands on my backside. He bites on his bottom lip. The same bottom lip that I want to suddenly bite and suck on.

What is this?

The ambience in the room has shifted dramatically from uncertainty to *so-you-wanna* action on this very couch.

"You're not hungry for food are you?" I giggle and somehow manage to bring myself even more closer to him my hand on his chest feeling on his gently beating heart.

"I'll make it worth your while...phela my mind has been spinning with all the different sorts of things I could possibly do to you right at this moment..."

"Things like what?"

"Would you like me to tell you?"

"You know I love hearing you talk Malinga wami," I peck his lips while he rubbed on my thighs.

Well what a day to wear stockings hey Zano.

"I'd use these lips that you abuse so much to tempt and caress the smooth, soft and beautiful skin of your cheeks, slowly trailing them down to your warm neck before taking in your sweet intoxicating scent..." His hand moves from my cheek and then to my neck...touching where he said he would kiss. I close my eyes, leaning onto his big hand.

"Then I'd drag my lips up again to your ear before whispering into it...a request. Rid yourself of these stockings of yours."

Why did that sound more like a demand? A demand I desperately want to follow. And how did my body just love the sound of that and the sound of his voice?

I giggle softly. I love my life.

"After you remove them, I'd admire that sexy thong I saw you put on this morning. Those red ones. I'd tug on it, already wanting to get to your honeypot, which I hope I'm making wetter and wetter right now."

"That you are," my voice is different. Laced with lust.

"Good, cause I'm getting harder and harder just at that thought."

I open my eyes, meeting his and allow myself to study his look for a second.

"Can I do those things to you Ma'Dlamini?"

I nod, palm his cheeks and devour his lips. They dance hungrily. His grip now firmly on my waist. My lower body starts grinding on him slowly, listening to him groan. I know I never mentioned to him what I would do but I get to it anyway, gliding my hands to his suit, sliding it off his shoulders with his help. My fingers get working on the buttons of his shirt.

And then I hear a knock on the door. He heard it too which would explain his annoyed grunt.

"Is it 10h00 already?" I breathe out, breathless and heart racing.

"I doubt." He reaches for his phone and checks the time. "If it's them then they're too early. Lets ignore them."

"Ha, Bangi." I slightly shake my head.

"Sibusy Ma'Dlamini, they have to understand that. I said 10h00 not 9h34 so they'll wait," He says and pulls me in, kissing on my neck.

"Baby..." I moan and shy away from his tempt. I'm stuck between letting things be and opening, but the second knock is what truly pulls me away from him. "I'll go answer since you're in a bit of a situation." My eyes capture the bulge in his pants.

He shakes his head and lets me free. I hurriedly get up before the sound of another knock fills my ears.

"I'm coming." I huff, a little annoyed and a little horny.

It could be Thokozani now that I think about it. I think that alone makes me a tad bit excited and even gives me an extra bounce to my step. I come into contact with Deliverance as soon as I open the door. He smiles and bows before uttering a flood of apologies.

"It's fine Deliverance I accept your apologies but, how can I help?"

"My Princess, there's a gentleman here by the name Thokozani Xulu, he claims you permitted him to be in your presence along with a child. They've been made to wait at the gate until further orders," he announces.

"Oh, let them in please, I'll be right there." I say and rush back to Bangi to brief him about this before heading out with him

promising to follow me. I make my way out. I don't know if its the nerves or the excitement that's making all these knots and ties in my stomach

An uber drives in, now guarded heavily by mannequins. Some were even armed. Heavily armed.

"Hectic," I mumble to myself.

I watch Thokozani come out of his uber ride with a crying Luthando. I can't hold back the gasp I have within as I finally get a good look at her. She was literally a younger baby version of Zonke there was no hiding that. He climbs up the flight of stairs before I decide to meet him at the top. Her bags are carried up by the mannequins and I'm a bit taken aback with how many bags and things he was seemingly bringing.

Is that a pram?

I want to ask but I'd rather keep my mouth shut for now.

"I'm so sorry, she's been crying the whole way here," he says trying to hush her but it only seems to make her cry louder and more painfully.

"Can I?" I ask reaching out to him for Luthando. He without a shadow of hesitation in him hands her over and like magic she quiets down. Silence hits us and it was if she never even cried to start with. I frown, taken aback by this. I didn't even get to hush her like you would a crying baby and now we were waiting

for her to probably start again in a few seconds but she doesn't. There weren't even any hiccups coming from her, just the tears and snot which get wiped away with a cloth.

"I...hi," I try smiling but my lips stay solid, eyes on him and then back on Luthando.

"Zanokuhle... Or should I rather call you Princess Zanokuhle. I'm wondering how you did that."

"Me...me too. How are you?" I gaze up again.

He shrugs. "Alive as you can see. Thank you again for agreeing to this at such short notice, I'll fetch her after a few days."

"Few days?" I ask shocked.

"I thought I mentioned it in one of the texts I sent you yesterday," he says.

"I think I would've remembered that," I say and smile at the beautiful human in my hold.

"Oh," he mumbles.

He's lying isn't he? "It's fine, she can stay with us for as long you need to sort yourself out or whatever. But you won't find us here anymore. I'll text you all of this."

He eagerly nods, before he tells me about what we can do when we get home. He'll also text me things like when she eats, what she eats and nap times.

I walk back into the Palace, the tons of things being brought in still shocking me.

A whole pack of nappies?

I try making conversation with a one year old and all I receive is a soft touch on my face. It was better than nothing though. "I'm Zano...ncane Zano can you say that? Zano...Za-no."

"Zano!"

What the hell!

I turn to towards the direction where I was called from.

"Ama, hey!" I wave at her and Luthando copies my hand movement.

This baby is so adorable.

Kodwa I still had so many weeks to go before I could hold our own in my arms.

"And then? When did you and Bangizwe have a baby?" She giggles.

"Hayi, you weren't gone that long."

"I know I know

but then that doesn't explain where this adorable face comes from. I don't know of any of your siblings that have children."

I open my mouth to say something but think that that's not really how I should involve myself in my sisters lies. I'd rather let the truth find her like I know it will.

"She's a close relative of mine's child."

"Ohh?" She sounds unsure but I'm glad she leaves it at that.

"I...better get going, we'll talk later yeah?"

My eyes spot Alakhe and Zonke walking out of the King and Queens palace home and when Zonke spots us I knew she knew that this was Luthando.

"Yeah sure." Amandla says and just before she can walk away I stop her for a question I should've asked her because I felt like I was probably being too rude.

"Did you enjoy your time away with Sanele?"

"Am I not glowing?" She motions to her face and I love it. She looks happy and that's all that counts. Good for her.

"Look who I have with me," I say walking through the doors of our home. Luthando's things were left in the lounge area.

"Woah, Sthandwa sam. Okay she looks bigger than she does in her photos," he comments.

"I know right."

He reaches out to take her and Luthando gladly goes to him.

"She's smiling."

"You should've heard her crying there by the entrance, it was

like she fell and scraped her knee. The moment I took her she stopped. Entlek let me check her temperature, Thokozani did mention that all I could possibly need is in her diaper bag, mhlambe ikhona," I say and go try my luck.

"Oh and Zonke saw me-us," I correct myself.

Soap...baby cream...wipes...cough syrup...

"Did she say anything?"

"Nope."

I find her thermometer and check her temperature.

"I'm sure she was thinking a lot though. This is the same woman phela who lied to your parents just to stay with their son. I'm pretty sure I would've been a pile of bashed human remains when she was done with me had she come to some to me."

"Don't allow that woman anywhere near you please when I'm not there."

I nod.

Her temp is normal. "Baby can you feel her forehead." I return all the things I took out to it's bag.

"Feels normal."

"Well I have never in my life seen this. Baby with the way she was crying she should at least have something to show for it."

"Maybe headaches and fevers aren't her thing," Bangi jokes, making me give him a 'really now' look.

"I was going to make food, hopefully she'll eat with me."

"Don't make the child eat your weird combinations if you come up with any." He laughs.

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"Is she fine? Is she causing any trouble there? Is she eating...what about the crying? Has she done any of that?" A concerned Thokozani asks me on the other end of the line not even a moment after I answered his call, exhausted from everything.

"She's fine Thokozani. Luthando is an angel. She didn't cry even once since you gave her to me."

"Are you serious? I've had her visit my mom, aunts and gran and they all complain about her. I thought this would be the same thing."

"Well I'm not joking when I say she ate all the fruits I had for my lunch snack, we then played a game, she had her nap while I was helping with organising a few things around here and then when she woke up we got to it again, playing, laughing, dancing, snacking and just now we had supper." I say.

We both are pretty beat by now. Exhausted even. I think I was worse. I know the only thing I did was direct Nandi and the

other housekeepers on what they could pack and what to leave behind but my goodness...it felt like I moved mountains.

"That does not sound like my daughter," Thokozani says with a chuckle.

I let out a yawn, patting on Luthando's back.

"You better believe it is. You raised her well."

"I...thanks I guess. Let me leave you to it then. Please call me if you need anything."

"Cool, will do." I say and he hangs up finally allowing me to yawn loudly, before checking if Luthando was sleeping. She was. I sigh out, relieved and lay back with my eyes closed and mind occupied.

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"Sthandwa sam."

"Mhmm?"

"Vuka Sthandwa and come to bed." He says.

Mhmm...

"Wait, where's Luthando?" I sit up, managing to open my eyes.

"Upstairs sleeping. Come."

Damn.

I get up. He holds my hand and I lay on his shoulder as we made our way upstairs. "Baby."

"Sthandwa sam."

"We're parents for a few days."

"That we are." He opens the bedroom door and allows me in first.

"Excited?" I ask, rubbing my irritated eye.

"Maybe."

"Just maybe?" He unzips my skirt and I step out of it, followed by my stockings which he pulls down too.

"Yeah...I mean tomorrow might go extremely south and I don't know how that will make me react."

"Mhmm..." I agree. I take my jersey off "...baby."

"Sthandwa sam."

"I love you." I say.

"I love you too Ma'Dlamini."

"Do you still want the cookie?" I sit on the bed. He had already peeled back the covers.

I hear him chuckle.

"Not like this. You need your undivided rest, you're growing a baby in there remember?"

"Yes," I nod.

"Now sleep. We'll make love another day," I smile and climb in.

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••ZONKE••

She hated it. All of her plans falling apart, her being second best and now having to scheme in order to get what she wants when everything was working out for her younger sister.

Zanokuhle even got married first before she could and that only drove her more insane. Crazy even, after thinking deeply about the fact that she had married into royalty.

She paced up and down in her mind, thinking of how she was going to try and fix this. How could Gimba bring that thing here? She had better not be lying to her cause she knew that if this were to come out she would lose Alakhe again and this time she doubts she'll get him back.

"Dammit!" Zonke cursed and searched for her phone in her purse accidentally dropping one of her crutches when she turned. If you had told her she would once be beaten up this bad by a woman she would have laughed at you in the face and called you insane. But now she knew better. She knew that if she kept stepping on Khethiwe's toes Khethiwe would kill her. End her existence in one go. Who hits another woman with a baseball bat and then has no remorse? An evil one that I can tell you.

Her phone rings twice after she checks that she was dialing the correct number. Why is he taking his precious time to answer his phone? Could he be doing this on purpose? And how could he be acting as if he wasn't blowing up her phone not so long ago?

Just as she was about to give up he answers. It's quiet for a few seconds after making her wonder how she should be tackling this situation. "Maka Thando."

"Don't call me that," she cringed looking towards the door, her anxiety spiking through the roof.

"Right..." He lets out a cold chuckle "...I forgot she's not your daughter anymore."

"Good, then why is she here?"

"Your sister wanted to see her and I agreed. It's not that hard to understand."

Zonke huffs in annoyance. She wanted to scream and shout but chose to act decent about this.

"Listen, you have to fetch her an-..."

"Why?" Thokozani quickly interrupts her. "Yini uyasha na? Can't handle reality and the truth staring you right in the face? I've seen your crazy stunts trending all over the web...you and law, haha not a very smart move for a woman I found in bed with my best friend."

"Why are you even bringing that up?"

"Why not, why do we keep on acting like you didn't cheat on me?"

"We're not together anymore, why should we even be talking about this? I called you to talk about that child you bought here."

"That child's name is Luthando." He says sounding as if he was speaking through gritted teeth.

"I don't care." Zonke snaps, irritated by the fact that she was having to deal with this situation again just because a man keeps failing to find someone like her.

"Kanti wena waba njani yeh?" He asks and she knew he was making that frowning face of his. The one he'd make when he was clearly disgusted by something and now that something was her. He would always pull that face with her when they would fight.

"Ngaba nje Thokozani. I don't understand how you're not over this. We ended months ago and you're still nagging me. I know I'm the best you've ever had, but come on."

Thokozani chuckles on the other end of the line.

"You call sleeping with everything that had a dick 'the best I've ever had'? Insane should be your middle name you hear me."

"Then move on. I have long moved on. I'm someone's fiancée

now and I'm going to be a mother...for the first time ever...also I'm madly in love. Stop calling me and nagging me about something I don't give a shit about okay. I gave you it so you can do whatever the fuck you want with it and now you're throwing it back to me?"

"Whose nasty ass handkerchief was in m-..."

"Yoh! Move on Thokozani. Find that brat a mom or something. Gosh," she breathes out and glances at the door again just to make sure no one was peeking in before hanging up with even more frustration than she had before. Hopefully this call was enough to make Thokozani shut his trap and move forward.

The door swings open and Alakhe, the love of her life walks in. Tall, dapper and jaw dropping-ly handsome. Him and Bangizwe looked unreal to the point that every time she'd look at them she'd be surprised at the fact that she's marrying all of that.

"Hi," he says and locks the door.

She knew what he wanted and already had to brace herself for the worst. Not that he was bad or anything, it's just that there were certain things Alakhe would do that make her hate having sex with him at times. Maybe his lack of patience was one of them. Sex was sometimes painful. Too painful. A 'get-it-over-and-done-with type of painful. He rids himself of his shirt, shoes

and trousers before she pulls herself back on the bed, wanting to protest cause she just wasn't in the mood.

Didn't she give him enough sex anyway as a manipulative strategy to get him dropping Bangizwe's charges faster than she dropped her sugar daddies when she finally became official with Alakhe.

"Hi," her reply was just as dry as her coochie was.

"Come on, I have about ten minutes and then I'm off to a boring online meeting," he says to her kissing her neck a few times and shifts the panties she has on to the side. Spit, that's what he uses.

"An online meeting? What online meeting?"

"Can't explain now...and it none of your business," he enters her and soon enough pounds her. "Squeeze, grip it!"

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He did it again.

He called her by Gimba's name and she didn't know what to think this time around.

What was it about Zanokuhle that made him not stop talking about her even during their pillow talk? I mean she's a fat blob with a bland suck-up personality and I'm sure as hell she's stiff in bed. What's there to want? What's there to make a God of a

man like Bangizwe fall and literally rearrange another mans face like that?

Did she get muthi? Maybe. Actually I believe so. Zonke remembers the beads burning her and confirmed it to herself that she was definitely using witchcraft on Bangizwe. She gets up -crutches and all- before heading downstairs, thankful for not finding Khethiwe and her two pathetic sons down here. What are their names again?

Failed abortion and first mistake?

She chuckles making herself some food.

Becca was just as useless. Nxa. How can you make a pregnant, temporarily disabled soon to be a Princess work and make her own food? The Royal Ancestors must be turning in their grave by this appalling event.

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Her phone ringing is what pulls her out of her slumber. With heavy eyes she searches for her phone until she finds it.

The name 'Baba' with a red heart next to it flashes on the screen of her new phone and she willingly answers. They haven't talked in ages.

"Baba."

"Zonke," he says and she rolls her eyes. Gimba always got

called Nono or Nonozzi, Nobuhle was Buhle or Hlehle and Khayalakhe was Khaya, but she was just Zonke. Finish. That alone pissed her off cause now she wondered why he stopped calling her by her special name? Yini? Did she run out of flavour?

"Ekseni kangaka baba ufunani? (So early in the morning dad, what do you want?)"

"Imali. (Money)"

"Yoh," she rolls her eyes again. "Yini you want to take that fat wife of yours out again ngoba you managed to blow through another wad of cash?" She asks. She already knew this was the case.

They did the same thing with Fihliwe's husband's insurance money and Gimba's 150 Lobola cows.

"Don't do this. I need the money for my children's school fees Zonke."

"How much?"

"20 000."

She chuckles. Is he insane? Maybe yes. "I don't have that amount anywhere near me right now," she lies. She just knew he was lying and this money was indeed going to her 'replacement.'

"Kanjani Zonke? Can't you take some of it from the Prince and

send it to me. I've already asked Nono not so long ago...you see I'm also starting a business...a farming business...I still have a few cows and all I need is the 20k please...please sweetie..."

"Mxm, just 20k?"

"Yes."

"Fine I'll send it before noon."

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"Alakhe why is she sitting on my couch, eating my food while watching my TV!" Khethiwe blows a fuse again. It hasn't even been a minute since she walked in with failed abortion and first mistake but she was already making the room feel stuffy. The two brats rush upstairs. "Alakhe I told you if you want to continue fucking this thing of yours get her her own wing! Not her being here in my space."

"I don't know who told you in the first place that this is your place," he mumbles.

"Excuse me Alakhe?"

"You heard him." Zonke adds herself to the conversation, feeling brave because her fiancé was there.

"If you don't want to end up in hospital again, you better watch what the fuck you say to me," Khethiwe hissed.

Chapter Forty Four. "I've got options, you've got them too." ••

"Yes...should we wake this beautiful woman up?" I hear Bangi say from somewhere in this room. That's when I try opening my heavy eyes and adjust myself to the lighting in this room. There they are, my man and my sister's cute baby girl in his hold. A smile creeps up on my lips, as I sit up. "There she is. Isn't she beautiful Lu?" "Haybo good morning," I say and clear my throat. "Good morning Sthandwa sam." "Why didn't you wake me up Baby? What time is it even?" I stretch my neck and it snaps. I probably didn't sleep properly at some point of the night. "9h00," he says easily. "What? Bangi you were supposed to wake me up so I could feed and change Luthando's nappy." "And I did all of that, so there was no need for me to wake you up." "You mean to tell me you fed her with no hassle?" "The house is still standing isn't it, and Lu still has all her tiny fingers too so yeah it definitely was no hassle whatsoever. Also I'm not completely clueless when it comes to babies." I chuckle. "I didn't mean it like that. I just didn't want this baby to be your problem when I'm the one who insisted she come visit me here." "Sthandwa sam, don't worry yourself about this. I'm here to help you and like I said, I didn't struggle, naye she didn't give me any problems." "No crying?" "Did you hear any crying? She was literally slapping my face and drooling on her top after she woke up," Bangi tells me and I find myself frowning. How could Thokozani have been complaining about her uncontrollable

crying when she hasn't even shed a single tear since I took her into my hold? Was I making her that comfortable to the point where she saw no need to cry? "I hear you...well then let me go get showered before your people get here," I say and glance around the room, not believing that this will be the last time I scan it like this until we decide it's safe to come back. Also that's if we do decide to come back. In the past few months of our marriage I could definitely say I have a lot of solid good memories and my own fair share of terrible ones in this house of ours. Even if it's the bad ones that are making us leave. My shower isn't a long one. Neither is my choosing of clothing decision because I had already picked out clothes yesterday while they were packing, making sure that I don't ruin the packed stuff. After that Bangi and I headed downstairs for breakfast, just before the movers came and got busy doing what they were getting paid to do. That's where my emotions got the better of me. I couldn't hold back my tears and Bangi comforting me was making it worse. "And then? Yini inkinga manje Ma'Dlamini?" "Ay, lutho," the tears flow even more as I'm just unable to control them like I would on any other given day. I feel weird though about this because I knew a long time ago that we were leaving so why cry now? Maybe because it was really happening now. The wheels being in motion now were probably the cause. "Khuluma nomyeni wakho..." I look up and paste myself in his arms. "...is it the baby? Is something

wrong?" "No, no." I shake my head. "I'm just emotional. Us leaving right now is making me cry." "Please don't cry Sthandwa sam, we'll be fine," he says brushing my back while holding me tightly. "I know." "Ngicela ungakhali..." I do cry even more, but when I finally settle down I thank him for handling my crybaby self like a pro. The last of our bags are taken away. Luthando has luckily managed to fall asleep for her after lunch nap and I feel that would be better for her travelling experience. I've been distracting myself with reading up on the trending news and you guessed it, Bangi's speech was still a hot topic. I'm glad we're putting food on people's tables because of this. But I'm much more glad that this is making people see my man in a positive light again. Good vibes only even if the news of his arrest was still lingering at the back of everyone's heads, including mine. I look up when movement happens at the entrance, thinking I'd see one of the movers but instead I see Zonke. I frown locking my phone and get up. Bangi also comes into view after he was upstairs for a while. It's like he could sense the devil was in my presence. "What are you doing here?" He asks already standing in front of me. "Can't I talk to my sister now?" She asks, I could swear there was a shake in her voice as she spoke. "No. Now leave." "Bangi, baby it's fine," I place a hand on his forearm before standing next to him and look into his eyes. I could tell he was unsure of this but I could handle myself. I could deal with Zonke. "Umemeze mayiku

hlupha lento," he says. I nod and watch him walk off to the kitchen. "Talk." I fold my arms in front of my chest. "I see you're leaving." "Surprise surprise..." "It's a good thing that you're leaving, there'll be peace in this Palace and no one will be here to hinder our plans any further." "What plans?" I frown. "Alakhe will have the throne to himself. No Bangizwe will fight him and force him to compete with anyone. Now with Bangi gone we'll prove to the King and Queen that this seat does truly belong to my Alakhe," she smirks. "Does Bangi scare you that much huh? He literally has you two scheming and plotting against him just to look good to the King and Queen? Your lives must really be pathetic and boring to the extent of you two making someone else look bad." "Say whatever you want to say but the fact still remains. We own this throne." "Okay, ucedile?" Her talking was starting to leave a bitter taste in my mouth. Even her presence makes me want to run and never return. "You can brush me off all you like but better get used to the fact that Alakhe and I will run this Kingdom one day and you'll all be there to witness it with tears and broken hearts." "Your minute is up. Leave my wife alone," Bangi reappears from the kitchen area carrying my handbag and a sleeping Luthando. "Why is she here vele? I thought we had a deal," she says, focussed on her child. "Ukhuluma ngobani manje?" I ask. "This child..." "What child?" "Don't act stupid Gimba I'm talking about this child Bangizwe's holding." "Oh this one?" I brush her tiny

knuckles. "Why is it bothering you so much that Luthando is here when she's not your child? Awunamtwana wena angisho, so kahle kahle what's your deal?" She opens her mouth to say something but by the Grace of the Lord she shuts her eating hole and it's music to my ears. Even when she leaves I feel relieved and like a dark heavy cloud has left my presence. "We should get going," Bangi says and leans in to peck my cheek before taking my hand in his and leaning with me. Sigh. Z.S... B.S... ●●● Almost 3 hours and 15 minutes go by as the journey to our new home became a reality. We were in the middle of nowhere. Well not exactly in the middle of nowhere but it felt like we were. It was further than where the city and where my siblings were but I could handle the privacy. Not to mention the view. That view there was unmatched and I probably couldn't wait to wake up to it. The motorcade drove on the kilometers long drive to the actual gate and entrance to the ridiculous mansions. Did I mention that none of my options ended up being chosen. Instead a ridiculously expensive house was picked. I shake my head as the light brown coated buildings come into sight. Where will I even start this house? Thank goodness it was already furnished to my taste...well almost, but we'll fix most of the things once we settle in and get used to our new surroundings. The car comes to a stop next to an unnecessary expensive looking fountain before my door gets opened and I'm helped out. I'm glad we could take our familiar

faces with because I don't think I'd be okay with learning and trusting new ones all over again. "Welcome," Deliverance bows and I nod, turning my head to take in my surroundings. The cold winter months and shaky weather did not stop this place from maintaining a stunning garden. Even the grass looked somewhat alive, signs of spring approaching making themselves known. Neatly trimmed trees lined along the tall secured walls and then like all the new things, I acknowledge the white pebbled that were our path. "Come," Bangi takes my hand and both of us make our way in. Luthando is with Nandi who is gladly following behind us. "My Prince, welcome." The unfamiliar looking mannequin says at the huge entrance. "Thank you." "A safety and security check was conducted Your Royal Highness and all of our trusted searches have deemed positive results. It is safe for entry," the man with a raspy voice tells us and I nod. Inside, I'm blown away. Nothing could've ever prepared me for how gorgeous this house truly was on the inside. It looks like a hallway up to heaven. High ceilings, a big chandelier right at the centre...that we walk past. The floors white and crisp, echoing as we walked in further to even more of my amusement. I can climb the stairs up two ways, holy cow. Wait...those look like even more stairs than back at the palace, which means I'll be doing a whole lot of unnecessary climbing. "Couldn't we have rather gotten an elevator? Or even better yet an escalator." "Tired of them already?" He laughs. "I can tell

they're not going to be my favourite thing to do at any time of the day," I sigh. "Do you at least like the Rosa Aurora Marble flooring? Apparently it's visually appealing and comes recommended." "Rosa Aur..huh? Yes," I say quickly avoiding getting a sleep inducing talk about the floors I knew costed an arm and a leg. ••• Hunger is what wakes me up. Luthando was just sitting there staring at me, my phone in her mouth. Eww. I take it and sit up, taking her into my hold and shower her chubby full cheeks with kisses that cause her to giggle. "I love you Luthando," I say and kiss her a couple of times before getting up and take her with me to the massive open view window that gave way to this stunning view. The sun was still doing its rounds and I could tell in about 3 hours it's shift will be complete. It was still amazing though. It even felt like I could come and unwind here, sit legs crossed on a clean mat or blanket with a glass of tea, a book and no clothing on. The ultimate freedom and self love and embracement. "Sthandwa sam?" He peeks into the room we'll soon be sharing

smiles and walks up to where I was standing. "Did you just get up?" I nod and as if he wanted more proof of my awakening that took place not so long ago, I yawn. "You are sure an adorable human," he says cupping my face and gives my lips a long peck. "Do you like your mansion?" "A little," I shrug and watch his reaction which is priceless. "Haybo, a little? Pack your bags then we're leaving!" I laugh. "Baby, no. I'm just kidding.

Why would it even make sense to move out when we just moved in?" I put Luthando down and she helps herself up with my leg. She falls flat on her behind, her nappy providing a good landing not making me stress that much. Another thing that didn't make me stress as much was because this wasn't happening for the first time. "I missed you." He says. "How long have I been knocked out kanti?" "Long enough for us to get some guests out here." I think my eyes went wide for a second there. "G....guests? What guests?" "You go freshen up and don't fuss much about what you can wear, I'll be waiting for you here." "Haybo, Bangi tell me who's here." "You'll see for yourself." He tries pecking my lips but I duck him skillfully. "Bangi, tell me." I whine. "Go freshen up Ma'Dlamini, Lu and I will be waiting right here." Oh my goodness. I eventually rush to the bathroom and as if I needed more things to shock me I'm hit by the unfamiliar looking bathroom. It's the different showering settings that have me by my clit. This knob turns and activates this shower head and and and... I stepped out in under 10 minutes I assume and dry as fast as lightening, managing to get a quick glance of myself on the huge wall length mirror. Umuntu ugorgeous yaz. I smile and rub on my belly, saying a quick random prayer for the little family here. "I'm done, do I look okay?" I ask after changing into my third outfit. He heaves out a heavy sigh, clearly wanting to give me the same response he has given me for the past three outfits.

"Sthandwa umuhle, even in this outfit." "No maybe I should-..."

"No no no..." He laughs and removes the options from the bed and rushes to throw them in the recently sorted walk in closet.

"...no more. You look fine." He scoops the hairs that escaped from this weave behind my ears and pecks my lips, reassuring me completely. "So vele vele, you're not going to tell me who our guests are?" I ask as we made our way to the flight of stairs. I could hear plates and voices but none of them connected to a face. "Nope." "Bangizwe..." I say firmly. "Bangizwe? Haybo since when?" "Mxm," I fold my arms in front of my chest and look the other way. "Surprise!" The crowd of Shazi's say and I freeze for a moment at the top of the stairs, mouth wide open out of shock. I never expected to see these humans here, especially today. I spot Aunt Grace, Aunt Jabulile, Thobi, Thando, Asanda, Zinhle, Nokukhanya, Thandiwe, Landiwe, Samukelo and just as many sons. I couldn't even remember half of their names but I doubt that mattered for now. "Oh my God, what is going on here?" I ask when we finally get to the bottom, hugs coming in from the left and the right. Real warm and secure feeling hugs that warm my heart. "Family had to see the new house," Asanda says and the full house laughs. "True true, we had to come and throw a little house warming for you guys." Nokukhanya says. "Don't forget to add the 'just to see the house' bit," Bangi laughs. I shake my head as the whole house laughs. "Haybo we also wanted to check on our makoti

and make sure she's still treated okay by uMalinga. We haven't seen each other in a while now, and this was the perfect excuse." Aunt Grace says. She looked like she went all out nje with her outfit. An expensive looking light green dress. The night finally gets on a roll and food and drinks are served. The kids were moved to a room where they kept each other entertained with a movie. The younger ones with games and toys. The men went the lounge and we retreated to a space I'm yet to design and turn into my own space. Everyone sat on the couch, eating and drinking. I was having juice obviously which raised the main topic. "We know you drink, so why are you acting fresh now? Juice?" Thobile asks. "I'm not in the mood to drink hawu," I shrug and take another sip of my juice, the words wanting to roll right down my tongue like ice sliding on warm skin. It was hard keeping this from women I trusted dearly. "Ukhulelwe makoti?" Grace. "Hayi mama," Asanda. "No phela she's glowing and I know how abo makoti balana kwaShazi get pregnant as soon as they enter marriage." Grace. "Mama are you that bored?" Thobile says and we laugh. "Am I lying though? How soon did you and your husband fall pregnant after getting married?" Aunt Grace interrogates and now I'm intrigued. "3 months," Nokukhanya says. "A month," Landiwe adds. "Ngafika sengikhulelwe," Samukelo says and she brings the room to laughter. Shuu. "See," Grace. "Okay maybe you have a point mama." Asanda. "So, are you?" Thobile. "Am I

what?" I try buying myself time, just so I'm prepared for when I deny this like a professional. "Pregnant!" Some of them says leaning forward on their seats just to hear this scoop. "No, I'm not." I clear my throat. "Mhnnn," Jabulile. "I doubt that. Plus I had a dream vele of a new member joining the Shazi's and there was a huge celebration and joy from the whole Kingdom." Aunt Grace says. "Oh yeah, I remember you telling me about that yesterday." Asanda adds. I swallow and stuff my mouth with delicious bite size pies. I could feel the heartburn approaching from a mile away. We finally managed to move on from the sacred topic to the one that was on the Kingdom's lips not so long ago. Bangi's arrest and the whole saga which I justify by retelling them what went down with facts. I don't know how that conversation moved from that to sex to babies again and then to Khethiwe's and Alakhe's marriage. I didn't want to say much but I did answer what was asked of me. The elders were going to have to sit this one down and solve it properly before major steps were taken. My phone vibrated and I quickly check it. A new message from Thokozani, which I gladly open. 'Hey, is my daughter still treating you fine? Any problems?' His text read and my heart melted at the amount of love he was showing his daughter. "What if she wants to leave mama? We always promote healthy marriages. If they're not that she can leave right?" Zinhle. "She can, I see no reason why she can't. In fact I don't get why she's still even hanging around.

The moment that woman...what's her name again?" Asanda asks. "Zakhe or something." Lahliwe. "Zonke," I correct her causing the room to go silent for a few seconds before they clear their throats and talk further. 'She's doing amazing, loving every moment with her, don't worry yourself too much. Enjoy your break.' I text back. Sent. "I'm sorry if talking about this makes you feel uncomfortable." Zinhle. "That woman has shocked me enough," I mumble to myself. "Let's talk about something else shall we..?" "Nah, it's fine." I say.

Chapter Forty Five.

"Focus on the journey, not the destination."

••

The night I spent with Bangi's family turned out to be a night I'll never forget. The talks we had here made me feel right at home and made me love this new place even more. The tons of gifts waiting for us to be opened and hopefully used were all over the downstairs area.

The past week has been somewhat of a very occupied one. One of the things that had me the most worried was actually making it to Khaya's soccer match because we couldn't afford to not make it. We both promised to be there and that promise was something we had to keep and I was over the moon when we did get there to watch the boy play like a star. Khaya even made me more of a proud sister when he scored one of the winning goals for his team, playing beautifully.

He was too appreciative that I could be there to support him and that made me happy.

Nyiso had to come and see the place that was all over the internet once again. I just had to accept that most things that we do was probably going to get to the ears of these reporters and we'd once again be the talk of the town. Baby Shazi was also entering a new week and was treating me very well. My

check up was getting closer and closer and I couldn't wait for that.

After that check up I'll get an app. A pregnancy app that will help me in keeping track of my own baby and also learn more. You can never know enough on this planet Earth.

Tonight was going to be our first night out. We could call it our date night if you may and I was excited beyond anything. I even pulled out one of my new dresses I bought when I was shopping online for Luthando's things. I felt like spoiling her and that's what I did.

"You have amazing skin," the lady doing my make up says. She's been blending and making me look pashash and I have to give it to her, I didn't look too overdone.

"Thank you," I say and allow her to lift my head.

When she's done she stands back to look at my face and I smile nervously. The nod she gives me before spraying my face with setting spray has me relaxing a bit. I haven't seen my eye-shadow colour.

"I'm done. Are you ready to see yourself?"

I nod, taking the hand mirror from her. I'm in awe with what she's managed to do to my face. I was beaten to utter perfection. I don't even waste time in paying her all her money with an addition of a tip.

After she leaves I quickly slip into my red figure hugging number that reached the length just below my knees. The best part of this dress the slit that rose right past my thigh. My golden strap block heels are on next. I inspect myself on the mirror making sure what I was wearing made sense. Okay. I like this. Even the dress was sitting right on all my curves and it didn't feel uncomfortable.

"Mhmm-mhmm, stufuza sam," I hear him say, causing me to look up and find him leaning on the frame of door. Arms folded in front of his chest. "Waze wamuhle ngane yomuntu."

"Haybo," I blush and glance down at my toes.

"Let me get a closer look at the woman I call my wife."

He steadily walks forward as I looked at him and he looked back at me. There was so much love in those eyes that it was so hard to look away. He looks delectable too, a feast for the eyes in so many ways. And yes I was drooling over him.

"Sthandwa sam, uyazibona kodwa ukuthi umuhle kanjani?" He stands behind me allowing me to take him in through the mirror.

"You're exaggerating though," I giggle.

"Cha, nakancane. Have you seen how beautiful your smile is...there it is...it just lights up my world and makes me feel like everything is going to be okay, and those eyes that light up when they see me, I notice it all my love and all of it makes my

heart skip a beat," he says and reaches down to hug my waist resting his head on my shoulder. "You even smell good. Makes me wonder why I haven't ripped you out of this sexy dress."

I blush even more, goosebumps forming on my skin and my body getting warmer and warmer by the second. "You still have to feed us first," I bite on my bottom lip.

"That I indeed have to do. In fact I think we should get a move on," he says and pecks my cheek. I just nod and he sets me free, allowing me a chance to go get my white fur coat, which I let rest on my shoulders.

With my hand in his hold we leave. Nandi was going to be watching over Luthando and promised she'd call if any problems came to light. They were busy entertaining each other on the carpet of our lounge.

"Nandi we'll be back probably after 22h00, just don't wait up," Bangi says.

"Yes my Prince," Nandi responds and we indeed leave.

Today he was driving us, with of course the addition of the motorcade, because safety was a must. It's not that cold out here like the previous days. Bangi opens my door and helps me in before closing it. I buckle up and wait for him to join us - Little Shazi and I. As soon as he's in we share a peck on the lips and off we go.

"I missed driving," he says while I looked out of the window.

"Now that you mention it...I haven't driven in months, I might be losing my driving skills."

"You can just drive around our yard then, down the driveway and back, through the backyard up to the front again and even throw in a hoot when you see me," he says and I chuckle.

"That sounds like something a truly bored person would do, but I'm tempted," I say and reach for my phone that beeps with a notification.

It's a message from Nyiso.

'Did you see your sister's latest post?' Her text read.

'Which sister?' I text her back.

The car is filled with music. Is that Letta Mbulu? Oh my goodness. My head starts swaying to the song and just then my phone vibrates.

'Who else other than the mighty Zonke?' She sends me a screenshot with the message and I read it.

"A house is a house, no matter it's size. I for one know this because I've lived in the smallest house and felt no love before moving to a bigger house and getting all the love I've ever needed. For all those who keep messaging me about that monster's woman needs to remember something very obvious,

SHE IS NOT HAPPY. IN FACT I KNOW SHE MOVED BECAUSE OF HIM. He just wants to continue beating her up somewhere in peace and where we won't necessarily see her scars. We've all seen what that man can do so let it not shock you when she's one day reported dead. I'm scared for my younger sister. Actually I'm terrified and without words that I could use for this situation because I love and adore my sister immensely hence why some of my motives changed when I entered the Palace. I came here for love but ended up being my sisters hero. Men are clearly trash and we all know this..." I read in my head and paused cause it was just getting too damn much.

What? What? What?

What the fuck did I just set my eyes on?

What retarded-ness is this?

Who wrote this for her to even begin with because it definitely can't be her who sat down just to write this.

I know Zonke.

She wouldn't even sit for longer than 10 minutes focussing on her English homework and now she can sit and type this to what it was? Maybe it's the passion within her and the will she has to just destroy everything I've built with this man for her own selfish and jealous needs.

"Are you okay? You're so quiet all of a sudden." Bangi asks lowering the volume of the radio. I had even forgotten about this masterpiece because of Zonke's blatant evilness.

"I'm fine, sorry about that," I lock my phone and place it back into my handbag. I'm honestly not about to spoil both our moods and evenings because of this. Not now. I even try to push the thought all the way to the back of my head. I don't owe her that much attention.

"You miss my annoying voice?" I chuckle and move to lay my head on his shoulder. He moves his left hand to my exposed thigh, resting it there after a gentle squeeze.

"Very. Letta Mbulu is not you," he says.

"Then you know love..." I sing along and we both laugh at my impression of this Queen's voice.

"There's a joy in everything, when made for Love, if ever someday you'll come to know your song, I'll show you a way, your heart can come along I can feel it when I sing, Then I know love. There's a joy in everything, when made for Love..." He joins me in singing. I'm all smiles as these beautiful lyrics cleanse my heart. A true legend singing a legendary song that just remains timeless.

"Look for Love, in the Music." He sings.

"Lost in the melody, you'll find Love," I boldly imitate Letta again and earn a chuckle from Bangi. "Uhlekani?" I lift my head

and look his way.

"Uyafosta."

"Awungiyeye tuu," I laugh and lay back on his shoulder. "I have talent."

"Don't make me lie to you," he laughs too, squeezing my thigh.

"There's Music in the Air," he sings and hums the next line.

"You know you still haven't told me where you're taking me."

"It's a surprise. Just know there will be exquisite food all around so I hope you and little Shazi in there are ravenous."

"Have we ever been too full mara..." I stop, immediately hating have said that cause it just sounded like I wanted to stuff my face-hole with food that wasn't going to do me any good. Do me good health wise that is.

"That sounds like something I'd like to hear all the time."

"Mhnnn..." I kinda nod and like earlier, try blocking such thoughts from occupying my mind but it wasn't as easy this time cause at the end of the night it would all be my fault if anything were to happen to our baby.

The parking lot is neatly outlined and marked out for us to come and park there. The motorcade parks next to us and the moment we step out we're questioned about how our drive was. That is all before they conduct a full car search, I'm sure that they would take their time, but we were not going to wait for them.

I hook my arm around Bangi's before we make our way in with of course the mannequins surrounding us. We receive a warm welcome and get ushered to our reserved seats. The whole restaurant is empty and I don't even find it that awkward anymore. In fact it was peaceful. Music gently playing in the background and the warm atmosphere drawing us in.

There was a dark feel to the place. A good kind of dark if that even makes sense. My seat is pulled out before I sit on it. Bangi sits right across me.

We get our menu's and I just stared at it. Scanning for anything healthy or something that won't make me too self conscious. Something with lots of veg and not so many carbs or fat. Yoh. I think that OB-GYN really did play a huge number on my relationship with food. I suddenly wasn't looking forward to seeing her or that nurse of hers.

"What are you thinking of having?"

"Nothing," I mumble and sigh. When I look up, he's frowning as I'd expect him to be especially if he heard me. "The ratatouille...sounds great."

"Great where on paper?"

"And on the plate too hawu," I put the menu down and clear my throat.

I see him shake his head and signal for the waiter to come so he could place our orders which he jazzes up. I don't know how that made me feel.

"Sthandwa sam are you okay?" He takes both my hands into his and rubs on my knuckles.

"I'm fine."

"I don't like that answer."

I chuckle in this serious moment hoping that would change the vibes in here but it doesn't. I lick my teeth and sigh.

"Okay, I'm thinking of that doctor and the appointment we had with her."

"Dr Magwaza?"

"Yah

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her. I don't think I'm as excited anymore to see her."

"I knew it. We're not going back to her." He sits back letting my hands go. Face stern and his words final. The only difference between now and that day we went for our first scan is that I absolutely agree now.

After that, dinner got better. We were laughing again and enjoying ourselves on the night out not thinking of royalty or anything that came with it. We weren't thinking of the sagas or the fact that the minutes were ticking by. The food and great

tasting juice options came and also managed to leave me happy. I think what made this a better experience was the fact that Bangi was having these 'healthy' options with me.

So all in all it was a beautiful night. I almost didn't want to leave especially when we danced to some of my favourite songs with my man, reminding me of our first date. Was it even our first date? No it wasn't. I was still with Zweli back then. Idiotically even. Sheesh, I haven't even thought of him in so long and that alone makes me smile.

But why would I even want to think of someone who didn't even deserve my love or attention?

I wonder how jail is treating him though and how his five kids are holding up with their father being away for such a long time.

We make it home safe and sound, still surrounded by the good mood we left that restaurant in. Nandi and Luthando were nowhere to be found at this hour making me feel like they've gone to sleep already. That's exactly what we also do after a quick shower.



"Hey," I greet Lindiwe before placing my mat on the floor and shake her hand, formality at it's best from her.

"We haven't seen each other in ages," she stated the obvious

and stood on her toes, putting her hands on her waist.

"Things have been hectic."

"Well then let us get into it," she says and we find our positions and start with a few warm up stretches.

The only thing I could truly say I did were those daily squats, other than that I was slothful to the core. Nothing made me feel lazier than work these days and I'd much rather just sleep than be active.

My muscles stretch a little and I get to feel the doings of my setback. I felt stiff. Not stiff stiff...but still stiff.

"This is a spectacular house you have here," she makes conversation to aid in diminishing the silence.

"Yes," I answer quite unprofessionally. I just wasn't expecting her to say what she said and the kind of reply you give to someone who compliments your house.

"Okay now I want us to stretch the other side..." She changed direction swiftly while I somewhat wobble on my feet. My stomach growls in the process and the only thing I could think of now was food. Something livery with lots of garlic and onion...oh and pickles too. My mouth was watering at the thought alone and it was not until Lindiwe called me out that I repositioned my stretch.

"Am I boring you My Princess?"

"What? No..." I laugh now standing upright. "...just a little hungry that's all."

"Focus now, food later."

"No, food now, focus later." The words left my mouth faster than they entered my mind. I clear my throat. "I'm sorry."

"I...Let's just continue." She says and raises one leg balancing the sole of her foot on the side of her knee. I copy her, trying hard not to lose balance.

How long have we been doing this cause I'm getting hungrier by the second?

I glance at the old clock just above her head, the one surrounded by pictures of Bangi and I together.

15 minutes?

That's all its been?

I've been stretching like this for fifteen minutes? No we'll never finish at this rate and I'll probably collapse here because of hunger...or wait...I'll starve to death. Did I even take my prenatals?

Shit. I'm a terrible mother already. I can't do this. I can't hold back my tears anymore.

"Remember to breathe as you hold this position, palms together."

I pull my top over my face to wipe my falling tears. All I wanted was my onion-y and garlicky liver, was that too much to ask for?

"Your Royal Highness... Is everything okay?" Lindiwe asks.

"Do I look okay to you?" I snap putting my foot down.

"Excuse me..."

"You know what? I want you gone from here and now."

"But we just started our session."

"And I just ended it."

"I don't understand," she says.

"I don't care, leave."

Maybe my tone could've been a little different but right now I don't give a flying butt cheek.

"Haybo leave? What's going on here? Lindiwe? Sthandwa sam?"

"Hayi, yena she should just leave nje." I roll my mat up.

"Did you perhaps say something to her?"

"We just talked about the house and then the stretches we were doing."

"Are you sure you said nothing else?"

"She mentioned she was hungry and I-..."

"Ohhh, Bingo," he laughs and I fold my arms in front of my chest giving him a look.

What is that supposed to mean?

"Well I'm sorry about all of this Miss, my wife is just overreacting."

"Overreacting? I'm overreacting now Bangi?" I throw the mat at him and he ducks it... but I do knock my beautiful vase off and it breaks in an instant. My heart pangs in pain. I really liked that vase and now it was gone because of me. More tears leave my eyes blinding me.

"Miss, can you give us a moment?" He says. "Calm down please Sthandwa sam."

"Is this me overreacting too now?"

"Well a little," he chuckles.

"Mxm, leave me alone Bangizwe."

"Okay I'm sorry. But baby you crying and chasing Lindiwe away like this when she knows nothing is not fair. Poor lady is confused because you just told her to leave with no explanation whatsoever. She doesn't know you're pregnant and hormonal. She doesn't understand your needs. Maybe it will help if she knew."

I have calmed down a little now anyway and his words have not failed in making me feel like I was being stupid about all of this.

"Also, you're right for feeling the way you feel. Your feelings are valid Sthandwa sam, it's just your reaction

that's...heightened...you know. And it's okay. But on a serious

note though, what craving is making you hunt for blood now."

"Garlicky and onion-y livers."

"Sorted, I think we have livers in the fridge not chicken livers. I'll go ask Nandi to prepare that for you. You go talk and apologise kuLindiwe, she'll understand," he assures me.

Honestly I don't get how this man right in front of me just always seems to handle me well. How does he even know what to say and how to say it?

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When Bangi left about 30 minutes ago, I knew I'd have to deal with letting go of Luthando all on my own. She has really grown on me, even her daily change of routines she still put a smile on my face.

She pulls herself up with the couch and hits on my lap, drool all over her mouth and clean stripped top. I lift her up and put her on my lap, cleaning her face with a napkin and bless her with kisses.

"You're going to miss her aren't you?" Nandi startles me.

"Terribly," I sigh.

"Why not ask her father to not fetch her right now. Maybe after another week or so..."

I laugh. "I don't think that will work this time only because I have already made plans for this coming week, and I'm sure

Thokozani misses his daughter."

"Point taken my Princess. It was fun looking after her when I did. Makes me excited about your baby that's coming soon," she says in glee.

I smile and kiss on Luthando's cheeks again, bringing her closer to my chest since it kinda seemed like she was sleepy.

"A baby is work. 24/7 365 or 366 days with a little human is not the same as a week with a one year old. Have you taken care of babies before?"

"Only my little brother," she shrugs.

"Mhmm..."

We talk more about babies and stuff that mainly concerns babies. Oh and I managed to let Bangi know about the post circulating and he seemed to brush the whole thing off. He said and I quote "I'm tired of entertaining your sister. If she wants to write a book about me being this bad husband and a monster then she can go right ahead."

I'm fully with that.

I'm woken up by my phone ringing from the coffee table not so far from the couch. I slept like I didn't get a proper nights rest.

"Thokozani," I answer wondering how little miss over here was still asleep.

"Zanokuhle, I'm outside."

"Oh...okay give me a minute," I sigh and hang up. I hug the sleeping Luthando and stand, heading to the entrance, open the front door meeting with the white Toyota driving in.

Nandi comes to stand right by me, curtsying.

"Shall I bring her belongings Your Royal Highness?"

"Please," I say watching it park and the engine dying shortly after before he's surrounded by mannequins. They conduct a throughout search of his body and proceed to give him the green card.

"Za...My Princess, I hope I'm welcome."

I nod and see him reach his hands out to take his daughter. Little Lu is back in her father's arms and it's a beautiful sight. He is careful not to wake her.

"How was she? Genuinely?"

"She was an Angel. Playful and exhausting," I chuckle remembering the amount of toys that would be scattered all over the carpet, her 'talking' and playing and just bonding like we've been around each other for years and not just a few days.

"Your Royal Highness is correct, Luthando was perfect."

"That does not sound like my daughter at all," Thokozani chuckles shaking his head slightly.

"You better believe it...uhmm, Deliverance can you assist each other transporting Luthando's belongings to Thokozani's car. I bought her a few more things if that is okay?"

"On thank you," Thokozani says as we step aside to allow the men to work.

As we were talking I see Luthando move her head slightly before waking up with the loudest, ear piercing cry ever. I think I shook with utter shock. I haven't heard her cry in so long honestly and now this.

And all too soon she starts shaking.

Shaking tremendously making me worry and shiver in fear.

"What's going on?" I ask in panic.

"I don't know," he says the worry in his voice thick.

"I...I think she's having a seizure, put her down!"

"Here?"

"Yes!" I almost yell before he puts her down on the flat ground.

"On her side Thokozani."

He turns her around and she lays on her side shaking vigorously. "Space, give her space!" I find myself saying before we step back and watch her shaking and vomiting. I haven't seen this happen in so many years that it just feels like I'm watching a horror movie and all of it just feels like my fault.

I get a glimpse of Thokozani and I think I see a tear leave his eye which he quickly catches.

"Is she breathing?" I ask still at a distance after she seemed to return back to normal. Her father checks her pulse before Nandi hands me a wipe. We have Lu cleaned up and lifted. "Has she ever had a...a seizure before?"

"No never."

So she comes to visit me for the days she did and this happens? How can I not feel guilty? How can I even act normal now when I'm this shaken?

"Please let's get her to a hospital, I'll pay for everything."

Chapter Forty Six.

"When life gives you curves flaunt them." x Pretty Pear Brides.

••

"Here. Chocolate milk," Bangi says handing me a glass.

"Thank you."

I take a small sip before snuggling up close to him. "How'd you know I needed this?"

"I know my wife," he says and puts his arm around my shoulder, rubbing on my forearm soothing me as the smile on my face disappears. "You want to talk about what happened today?"

"Not really...only because I'm ashamed of what I'm thinking."

"What are you thinking?"

"Bangi..."

"Ngitjele Sthandwa sam, talk to your man," he says and kisses my forehead.

I wiggle out of his hold and place my glass on the coffee table in front of me before heaving out a heavy sigh. My head shakes and I look away from him.

"Zanokuhle."

"Yoh," I turn to look at him. He's serious, arms crossed in front of his chest and awaiting me to voice out my thoughts.

"Fine...Luthando had a seizure today. She's never had one

before until today and so when we took her to see a doctor they told us she looked fine and nothing was out of place."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning none of her tests came back showing any abnormalities. It's like we imagined the whole seizure thing," I say. "So...that's why I've been feeling bad for thinking what I'm thinking."

"You still haven't told me what your thinking."

I clear my throat and glance down at my knotted fingers. "What if...what if Luthando is not happy where she is. You and I both know Thokozani claimed that she cries when with him or with any of his family members, and I've seen it personally. And now with the seizure thing...my mind and heart is telling me that something is definitely not right here. I know how much Thokozani loves Luthando, I mean he was there for her from the beginning of her time here on earth but what if all of that is a facade? A lie and Luthando as young as she is, is just trying to show us by what she keeps doing. Having a seizure due to trauma caused by sexual assault is a thi-..."

"Woah woah woah...Sthandwa sam, how did we even get to that?" He sounds pretty confused and that alone had me feeling worse for even coming to that conclusion.

"Research, I went from searching on how doctors can be able to tell if you've had a seizure; An MRI scan, the brain waves

thing...electro-something...EEG to reasons why you'd even have a seizure in the first place. I searched the types of seizures and ended up reading about psychogenic seizures." I shake my head.

"Psychogenic seizures?"

"Bangi, I'm a terrible person. How can I even think of such about such a great father. Forget I even said anything."

"Sthandwa sam, don't do that to yourself. In fact let us not even pretend that that doesn't happen in real life. Such assaults exist."

"But I'm not making sense Bangi, this research of mine is not even based on facts. It probably isn't even possible for a child her age to have that kind of seizure, yet here I am thinking the worst of this innocent man. She could just be sensitive to light and I..." I take my milk and down half of it painfully.

Zanokuhle, you haven't even been with this baby for that long but you're already summing up her life like this.

My phone starts ringing just as I was reaching out to put my glass of milk down again.

As if I needed any more thoughts running through my mind.

"Thokozani. Hi," I say immediately after answering the phone.

"Sorry for calling you so late, I wanted to tell you that I've finally

gotten Luthando to sleep."

"Oh...is she fine?"

"I think she might be coming down with a fever, but nothing you should worry about. Anyway I also wanted to tell you that I've sat down and spoken to my family and maybe by next week we'll have a ceremony where I introduce my baby girl to my ancestors," he says on the other end of the line.

"You think that will help the situation?"

"Well if that doesn't help or work out then maybe you should come take her from me cause it clearly means something is wrong with me," he says.

"Don't say that."

"I'm not about to make my daughter suffer when she's happier with you."

"Happier with me? Thokozani please lets not get carried away like that. Luthando is your daughter and no one knows her better than you do. I'm sure whatever is going on right now will pass too. You said you were having a ceremony to introduce her to your ancestors right?"

"Yes."

"Then do that, if that fails consult or something but don't just give up on this situation. But I'm sure it's nothing..." I glance at Bangi who's just focussed on me and my call.

Nandi walks into the lounge area, hands clenched together in front of her lap.

Thokozani sighs and I'm tempted to do the same thing right now just because of my own frustrations.

"Please don't give up on Luthando just like that. You are her life. You are her rock and I'm sure she loves and adores you to bits. Just let the minor things be sorted so that things can go back to normal again," I say.

"I guess you're right. Let me go get some rest. Thank you."

"Sure thing. We'll talk," I say and waste no time in hanging up the phone just after that.

"Uh, I'm sorry for eavesdropping and not announcing why I'm interrupting your Royal Highness." Nandi reminds me of her presence and looks down. "I came to ask what His Royal Highnesses would like to have for supper tonight."

"Oh, nothing you should worry about. I'll order some pizza instead so you can go rest," Bangi says.



The days go by pretty fast. And I could finally say my mind has completely gotten rid of that accusation that was impossible. I still felt ashamed for thinking of what I was thinking, but we move and luckily only Bangi knew about my thoughts and never brought it up again.

This day in particular welcomes us with a bright and shining sun. It looked like it was going to be a beautiful and splendid day more especially since Bangi was taking me along on his trip. I think I was more excited about going with him instead of going to wherever we were going.

I had braids on my hair again since my hairline was coming in easily. I felt good and looked good and maybe now did I start to see my belly looking a bit pregnant. Okay maybe not as much.

Patience Zano...you're not even that far yet. And you've always had this belly thing going on so why act all fresh now. I grin and wrap my dry body in a towel before actually leaving the bathroom in a decent state.

"Bathong!" I exclaim shocked but lower my voice when I notice my man is on the phone. This man left the shower before I did and preached the importance of arriving on time at the building site yet here he is, gracing the couch with his handsomeness. Well clearly we have time to play...

"You did now didn't you," he says rolling his eyes with a chuckle. My arms get folded in front of my chest just as he winks at me. Oh so he sees me...good... I turn to my side a little and expose my thigh only for a tiny tease. But that probably isn't enough so why not sway my hips to the left and then to the right, rhythmically moving to the imaginary song playing in my head. I see him nodding.

"But Amanda you told me you left her," he sits forward, showing some interest. I look for my phone on the bed, check the time before making my way to him, not removing my eyes from his. I bite on my bottom lip, placing my hands on his thighs. One is welcomed by the warmth of his skin the other by the softness of his towel. "Oh so now you're saying it's her fault that you dumped her?"

I bring my face close enough to his face to feel his breathing caressing my face, but pull away at his attempt on kissing me. Instead I turn and give him the full view of my behind hidden by this towel and try shaking my ass...slowly since speed kills. A giggle escapes my mouth and I quickly stop myself and remove his invading hand from my beginner friendly attempt at twerking...that's if I can even call it that at this point.

"Of course I'm still listening," he clears his throat which has me glancing back at him. I back up and undo my towel showing off my body to no one but the wall before abruptly getting pulled back by a strong hand. I land safely on his lap, quickly covering myself while trying to suppress another laugh. He looks amused but is trying so hard not to make Ama feel weird when they're probably talking about something deep.

I throw my hand around his neck and pull myself closer to him before burying my face on his neck, sniffing it like the holy

ground it was. The soft wet kisses I plant there make him shiver and let out a deep sexy chuckle.

I could hear Ama on the other end of the line but not exactly what she was saying. This woman clearly had a lot to address today to her brother it seems and I was stealing him like I wouldn't have him by my hip every night.

"She..." He shudders as I nibble on his earlobe. "...what did you just say?...no of course I'm listening to every word you're saying right now."

I use my other hand to trace on his chest, manoeuvring down to where the towel rested. My silent kisses invade his face...his stubbly jawline all the way to the side of his lips. Those soft, plump lips. He twitches causing me to chuckle silently.

"No! Mom almost found out?" He attempts on brushing on my thigh again but I stop him and remove his hand from me. With the hand still in mine I get up again, a shot of courage dominating my system right now. That shot of courage lands me on knees and between his thighs. The smile on my face is just there to mask the fact that I've read about oral sex a couple of times but never had the clit to do it. I'm not even going to talk about the amount of YouTube videos I've watched because of this. My search history is shaking its head at me right now while backing away slowly into the darkness.

Relax...relax...look at him, he's just as confused ma'am.

My hand cascades all over the area where his thigh is exposed moving up to the joint I undo meeting his hardening self and that alone makes me smile even more now. Maybe it's just knowing I, Mrs Shazi has been pushing the right buttons.

"How hard can it be?" He says, sounding different and for a second I chuckle at the wordplay.

I take him into my hold and look him directly in the eye.

"Can I?" I whisper to him.

"Can you what?" He asks after pulling the phone away slightly.

"Can I?" I repeat on purpose, an eyebrow raised.

When he nods focusing back on the call I bring myself forward and push him back slightly. There was no going back now and even if this made me look like a fool then so be it.

Remember...no teeth.

I lick the tip tasting his salty precum on my tongue. I think I hear him take in a deep breath before I take him into my mouth...well as deep as I thought I could before I felt myself gag...

...retreat! Retreat!

I look up at him his mouth wide open just like his eyes in shock? Did he like that? Did I even do that right or?

I try again. Putting his hard dick back into my mouth as deep as I could before gliding up, focussing on the head.

"What...of course I'm still...fuuuccckkk...I'm still listening to you...yesss..."

My tongue swirls around it and lastly kiss the tip. I stroke and suck him at the same time before looking up at him. He's shaking his head, hand in front of his mouth. His chest is thumping up and down wildly. He lets out a low grunt, as I attempted to take him deep into my mouth again but just like before I gag and flake.

I giggle this time around and wipe the corners of my mouth with my fingers.

"No that was not Zano what are you talking about? No I'm not doing anything...look can I call you later?"

Minutes of me doing this, getting him wet with my mouth I could feel my clit begging for some attention, quivering in excitement and demanding to be touched.

And so I reach for her with my other hand while I stroked him with my other

feeling my own wetness with my fingertips. He watches me as I held his gaze, gripping the base of his shaft, opening my mouth so he could watch my tongue slipping and sliding on his silky head. With a smile I closed my eyes and shift my outward focus

inward, enjoying the pleasure I was giving myself which was now combined with the piquant feeling of being witnessed by him.

My heart swelled up with love and adoration for this man I was kneeling in front of. His dick hardened even more before he pushed his hips up forcing me to take more of him. I keep sucking and stroking while my own orgasm was creeping it's way through.

He groans. "I'm gonna...I need to..." And with that I could taste his salty come on my tongue. His body tense from his release as I consume him. Swallow after an effortless short debate. I press harder on my clit encouraging my orgasm as it shook and overtook me with it's glorious, exhausting and delightful power.

I came back to my body again, opening my eyes to marvel at my work, smiling at myself a little and get up. I plant a kiss on his cheek and turn to take my thrilled self to the bathroom to freshen up. I don't even make it there when I'm pulled back by his strong arms, my back hitting his chest. The way he grabs my waist makes my insides dance.

"How can you suck my soul like that and leave?" He talks into my neck, biting and sniffing it. I open my mouth to answer but shudder at the knee weakening neck kisses he's giving me.

"Bangi..." I breathe out. He peels the towel off my body and allows it to pool at our feet and spans me leaving his hand to

grab at the ass-cheek. The sound alone made me jump and giggle only because it wasn't too hard.

I lift my eyes and watch how his hands rub on my body. He takes my hand lifting it up to his mouth and sucks on the fingers I rubbed my pussy with, humming as his tongue swirls around them. It's a sensation I never expected to enjoy. He's already stiff with arousal, nestling at my backside.

"I want you on your knees," he demands and our eyes lock in the mirror for that second. My body obliges, sinking to floor. Ass in the air, my chest nearly on the floor and my hands supporting by the sides of my head

He rubs himself on my clit and entrance, back and forth till I pushed back already wanting him inside of me. Wanting him to ravage me with all he has. I push back but he does the same, frustrating my thirsty self even more.

"Please...I'm going to leave if you keep torturing me like this." I whine

He chuckles, both of his hands on either sides of my butt and enters me slowly. My body trembles, my mouth releasing a breath I've been holding. He's in deep, not moving an inch as if he's also feeling what I was feeling.

"Baby," my hips rotate.

"Ma'Dlamini?"

"I want you. Plea...ah! AH!" He's thrusting quickly in me. Deep. Fast. Urgent. Spank. Grunt.

The smacking sounds of our bodies...his breathing...my moans.

I hear his palm hit the floor, his body pushing me forward slowing down. He rotates his hips and with his other hand reaches around to cup my boob. His fingers tweaking my nipple bringing me closer and closer and I clench and shudder around him. He rides me in the peak of my wave, not giving me a moment to breath...as he should.

"Come." He holds me close to his body, grabbing my waist. I rest the palms of my hands on my thighs and meet his slow tender strokes. He kisses on my shoulder, reaching over to my clit. "Look at how beautiful you are Sthandwa sam."

A flush creeps up on my cheeks. I look like I'm out of it, deep in a daze and my husband deep in me. I scoop my breasts. "So beautiful..."

I reach back, pulling his head closer to my neck. Rocking and grinding harder on him my pussy clenching around his hardness again. I come with my mouth open but no sound leaving it.

"Don't hold back baby...let me feel all of you." That's when I murmur, taking the explosion as it came.

I catch my breath. He does the same near my ear, nibbling on my earlobe.

"Did you come?"

He inhales. "No. Cause I'm not done with you."

My exhausted body puckers up and I'm filled with new energy.

"How do you want me?" I giggle.

I get off him and gently lie back on the towel, spread for him with my legs bent instinctively on my sides. Welcoming all of him in me once again. He's giving it to me at his own savouring pace truly connecting with my soul. I cup his face watching him. He looked like a man with no worries in his existence. "I love you."

He licks his lips before bringing them forward for me to devour. We share a tender kiss, tasting the mintiness on his tongue.

With each of his thrusts I watch the muscles on his abdomen flex. My nails scratch across his back and my legs wrap around him. "Awu, Sthandwa sam...hmmm..."

"Ungayeki Malinga wami," he pulls out almost all the way before slamming right back in. Hard. Each one feeling like a carrier to the pleasure building from deep within. This one was going to be the end of me and I could feel it.

"Whuu!" I gasp melting into his warm skin. My whole body is transported to ecstasy and beyond before coming back.

Everything is velvety, everything is spinning, everything is numb with goodness. He is still in me, strokes now uneven and a clear sign that he was about to fill me up. He quickly sits up, roughly grabs onto my thighs.

He thrusts again...and again...and again...and again...and again...and groans sated.

•••

"Oh so it's my fault now that we're late?" He asks. I giggle turning on my seat. He's already looking my way, a smirk dancing on his lips. He plays with the braid strand that rested on my forehead.

"You knew what time Charlie wanted you there yet you preferred being somewhere else," I shrug.

"You know I prefer that over building sites with dust and winds," he bites on his lip. I shake my head and lean in to peck those delectable lips, blushing myself into a corner. Love was evident in the backseat of this car and there was no way of hiding it.

"You were talking with Ama...sounded serious." I pick on his beard.

"Until you decided to suck my soul right?"

"Is that what you're going to call it?" I laugh.

"It felt like you were though, there's this thing you did with

your tongue nearing the end you almost had me in tears." He says holding his chest.

"Sounds to me like I have permission to keep practicing on you."

"Yes," he grins, his eyes looking like they were closed. I peck him on the lips, blushing like a madwoman. "Well Ama and Sanele broke up."

"What?"

"Ama left Sanele because mom Almost found out."

"That's sad moes. How is she handling things?"

"Well the same way Amandla deals with heartbreak, she blabs on and on about it until she feels better. Thats what you found me doing. I was listening to her until I was not...you know I liked them together."

"I've never seen them together but I can definitely tell she was happy with her," I say and watch him nod.

The cars drive by us as we near our destiny with each passing kilometer. "The media's going to be there right?"

"As always Sthandwa sam, but there will be security protecting you and our precious cargo."

"Speaking of Baby Shazi, have you spoken to Dr Magwaza?"

"Briefly, but she agreed to refer us to a different gynecologist after apologising profusely."

"Why would sh...you told her about my emotions?"

"I had to Sthandwa sam. She had to know that that was no way to make a human being feel. I made it clear to her that not all full figured woman are sick and dying and that most of them don't need her making them feel uncomfortable when their partners love them just the way they are. I'm sure next time she will handle her patients better car and with more respect cause honestly she doesn't where all her patients are coming from," He says and my heart swells up in adoration.

"I'm so blessed to have you in my life."

"I'm blessed to have you in mine, every single day. I hope you know that."

"Wouldn't hurt to remind a girl sixty more times now would it?"

"I'll reassure and show you every single day of my life then of how much I love you."

The site is busy and like the hardworking personals these media representatives come in numbers to the motorcade. They get held of by the mannequins, swiftly even before we step out. I'm held like property as we make our way to the hungry crowd of workers who weren't working, smiling and waving as out mandatory protocol.

"My People, I greet you all," Bangi says.

"My Prince, thank you for the permission to be in you Royal presence. My Princess,"the brave young lady curtseys. "I'm sure

everyone has been questioning this project that you've started once again. How much of this is from the heart?"

Bathong.

"All of it?" An idiot asks...I mean another one of these story twisting liars.

"Affirmative. Why wouldn't it be in the heart of your Prince to not care and take care of his people?"

"Your royal highness, surely some of this has to be stemmed from the fights and jail time you served not so long ago. Are you sure you're not just doing this to make people forget?"

My smile drops and I'm forced into a scold. My eyebrows furrowed as I stare at this guy who just asked what he asked.

"People remember what they want to remember young man and many of you believe what they want to. There's a reason why things happened the way they did and I'm not going to repeat myself. This project started way before this chaos."

"My Pri-..."

"No more questions." Bangi says and that was the end of that.

Chapter Forty Seven.

"I don't trust anyone who doesn't laugh." x Maya Angelou.

••

'Please take her! Take her!' The woman holding a baby says. Her cries are piercing right into my ears.

They're painful and filled with sadness. 'Please!' She drops to her knees clutching her baby close to her. I walk forward and attempt on touching her shoulder to get her to stand and leave cause I could sense the tenseness rising here. It goes dark. Pitch dark. No one around me but the cries of a child and the mother.

'This child does not belong here! Take her with you!'

'What no! She belongs with you.'

'Leave!'

"Zanokuhle!" The urgent voice calls me out. I open my eyes and take in a deep breath. I'm hit with nothing but confusion but the moment I see my Bangi I realise that all of that was just a dream.

"What? Was I screaming?" I ask and sit up. He puts his hand on my lap with a frown on his face.

"You were crying."

"Crying?" I furrow my brows and gaze into space, the dream playing vividly in my head all over again. "I wasn't the one crying though...in this dream there was someone else carrying a

baby. A crying baby and-..." I shut up placing both my hands on my belly. "You don't think..."

"No, no no Sthandwa sam, don't think like that. I'm... I'm sure this whole situation has a reasonable explanation."

"Bangi, but you remember what Mehlo said to me. He said I should never underestimate my dreams. This is probably one of the things he was talking about," I say.

He heaves out a heavy sigh and sits on the space available by my legs. He places his fingers under my chin and makes me look up at him. I'm worried now. My head thinking of nothing but who that baby could have belonged to.

Her?

Please take her? Who?

"Please don't put yourself under a whole lot of stress because of a dream you don't even understand fully. I need you to think of our baby," he says trying to give me a smile, but it doesn't reach his eyes.

I nod closing my eyes as he kisses my forehead.

I had breakfast after praying like my life depended on it. This was all before receiving a call from Thokozani telling me that the ceremony was going to take place today and he was excited. Too excited. He even wondered why he hadn't done

this for his baby girl ages ago but nonetheless he was doing it now and with love even.

"I don't get the point of this meeting if all we're going to do is fight about senseless things," he says as we made our way downstairs, my arm hooked to his.

"Maybe your goal shouldn't be to go there to fight."

"I'm not going there to fight Sthandwa sam, you know that. You also know who does like starting these fights and since he will be there I wouldn't expect any less from him," we reach the bottom of the stairs and spot a guest on our lounge couches.

"Mehlo?" My eyebrows lift.

"Baba?" Bangi says also not expecting to see this man here. He puts down his cup of tea before getting up.

"Bayede Shazi, Malinga, Mathetha, Sotoyi. Apologies for not announcing my arrival."

When has he ever announced his arrival though?

"It's okay, but what brings you here?" Bangi asks uMehlo the same question I had in my mind too.

"The truth."

"The truth?" I ask. I honestly didn't need any more confusion in my life than the confusion I was facing these days. If it wasn't the dreams then it was this man in front of us and if it wasn't him it was my own sister.

"I was shown that you have seen the truth. The truth that will eventually reveal itself to you when the time is right. This truth will be the undoing of more and I have to prepare you mentally for this, cause it will be heavy on you and it will cause a massive rift between aboDlamini." Mehlo says before lifting his hands to the sky. "The one above will protect you, your husband and your seed."

"From what?" I enquire.

"Wezanokuhle, I cannot say."

"Then why put all this fear in my head if you won't tell me what I should fear?" My voice cracks.

He ignores me, angering me even more. Honestly at this point I'd rather not have him appear and disappear the way he does in my life if he won't be straightforward with me. With us. I don't think he sees the fact that him and his riddles aren't hitting home the way they're supposed to.

I shake my head and look away.

"I will let you two leave. Thank you for the tea ntombi," he says and turns to leave. It would be the sound of his stick first and then his shoes. His sandals to be specific. When I could tell that he was no longer in our presence I look at the utensils he was using and then look at Nandipha.

How long was this man here for if he had enough time for tea and scones?

He actually eats?

"Can we go?" I ask and walk to the door all on my own. The doors front weren't closed and as usual the motorcade was ready for the long journey we were about to take to the Palace. My eyes search for the **reminance** of Bab'Mehlo but there are none. "Deliverance, did an old man come here with a car or something?"

"Negative my Princess," he says.

I shiver, my mouth going dry. "Are you sure?"

"Yes my Princess."

"What's wrong?" Bangi comes up from behind me.

"He vanished, the man vanished like he didn't just drop a bomb on us. Hayi asambe please," I head to the car and get in.

I don't know if I'm too pissed at this situation or what but as soon as the cars get a move on I manage to push that thought to the back of my head.

Yesterday turned out to be a very productive day at the site. The houses being built there were on another level. Siqalo probably couldn't reach that level just because you could now clearly see the experience was prominent at this new site. Even

if most of the houses were still getting started the one we got to see in it's glory looked very promising.

I was excited for Bangi and the people who were now also going to have shelter...but mostly for Bangi. This was going to be big for him and all he now stood for which was greatness.

He is a great man, a great leader, a bomb husband and now he was going to be an amazing father and the world will see that when the time is right of course.

The journey is one that is long and calm. I even fell asleep on my man's lap like I didn't have a good nights rest. To be honest I sleep like it is a job these days and I get it. My body is working extra hard every single day now to grow our baby Shazi even though I couldn't exactly be pointed out at the streets to be pregnant. Maybe that on it's own was a blessing.

"I hope I didn't drool on you," I yawn and stretch my body.

"You know you're the drool Queen now

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" he chuckles and wipes something from the side of my face.

"Mxm."

"Ungabi nolaka mama bengidlala," he checks on his phone. I find mine and use it as a mirror just to see if I still looked presentable to meet these in laws of mine.

"Where's my water? I'm so thirsty." I murmur.

The familiar road welcomes us and somehow I feel nervous for seeing the people I haven't in the past few days.

How was Khethiwe doing if she was still around here?

How were her two boys?

How was Bangi's mother or rather his parents doing and what were they going to say to us today that had them calling us back to where we vowed to return to once I had my baby in my arms.

The motorcade drives through the gate and it's not long before it comes to a halt and we have to step out. Ama is the first to greet us, I don't know how she doing but she was smiling. Not giving away much about her break up. "It feels like I haven't seen my brother in ages, Zanokuhle how are you?"

"I'm fine hawu. Wena unjani vele?"

"I'm fine too, why wouldn't I be?" She replies quickly and I hear Bangi clearing his throat.

"Everyone is inside right?" He changes the topic.

"Yep and I don't think I want to be in there so...I'll stay out here with these strong buffy men," she shrugs.

"We'll call if we need backup then," Bangi laughs.

"Kanti uyocal'impini?"

"Hawu Angishongo njalo mkami."

"Mhmm...hayi asambe. I'll see you then Ama."

"Chao," Amandla says.

Bangi and I leave her there at the entrance where she said she would stay. My man pulls me close to him and brings his head closer to ear before whispering "She's going to call Sanele."

Bathong.

It's dead quiet in here. These people are just basking in this tenseness that I just couldn't be comfortable. Them looking at us like this was not helping either. The helpers bow and curtsey before Bangi's mother gets up. "My boy-boy." She tears up. "Hayi hayi," he chuckles.

Their embrace is genuine. "You are my youngest son Bangizwe, let me have my moment...look at you handsome young man, you look fine and healthy."

"Why wouldn't I be any of those things ma?"

"I-..."

I roll my eyes and move past these two, greeting the table and take my seat.

Oh no... they didn't just bring out these tiny mouth watering canapés for the same woman who'd start a world war for Avocados.

What is this one looking at? He should be looking at my sister like that, not me.

"Zanokuhle makoti, ngiyacolisa if I made you feel uncomfortable back there. I didn't mean any harm by what I

said," The Queen says.

"Why is she being so sensitive?" The Almighty Alakhe speaks.

"I don't remember anyone speaking to you." Bangi defends me.

"Lomndeni," Khethiwe.

Silence.

Can't I have at least two of the canapés. Just two. I look to Bangi for permission but he gives me nothing but a frown. I signal to him that I wanted what was on the table and with a smile and nod from him I proceeded to help myself to four. I don't care who's judging me right now cause these were good. Too good.

"You should try the one with bacon on it," he passes me one with bacon on it.

"Maybe you should try it too."

"I should." He bites into it and moans in delight making me chortle. "Nice."

"I think the avocado one slaps more. They didn't fry the bacon right." I say and remove the crumb that stayed on the side of his lip.

Someone clears their throat and the bubble we had made around us bursts quicker than it formed.

"Kumnandi neh? We're called here for a meeting and all your fat wife can think of doing is eating like a pig."

"Uyayifuna enye itoast efancy Sthandwa sam esihle?" He bites on one of ones I took and I nod eating it with ease. "Ungalaleli udoti."

"Ngilalela wena phela babakhe," my cheeks hurt from the smile I just can't hide.

"Mxm, can we get this started already? Some of us have places to be," Alakhe.

"Right," The King speaks as if this whole time he had just hidden in his shell. I don't get how his brain works at times. "I called the family here...obviously not the entire Shazi family because I feel like this should be something we try and resolve ourselves first before even thinking of involving other people. My second born son leaving this Palace was my wake up call if I could call it that even and I feel now is the time to set things right."

Alakhe chuckles. "Oh please."

"I will ask for your comments when I'm done speaking am I clear?" The King snaps giving him a look that had me clothed in chills? "As I was saying this family needs to iron things out and not just sweep all of it under the carpets. We should remain the united front we are to people and show the Kingdom that family at the end of the day is very important. We as the adults and parents here agree that we should have been more hands on with the situation and then maybe it wouldn't have turned out the way it did. My sons, I know in the past we have not

seen eye to eye and many of the things umakoti and you Bangizwe said to me hurt but now I ask that we start afresh."

"You call that addressing the issue?" Alakhe.

"You are the issue here Alakhe!" The King bangs on the table.

Silence.

"Me? I'm just standing up for myself baba. You've changed so many rules for your second best but when I cry I'm the issue." He whines.

Yoh, you see this one was given the wrong name. His name should've been Nkinga. Bhidliza Nkinga Shazi.

"Bangizwe rebels it's fine. Bangizwe marries a commoner it's fine. He challenges my right to the throne it's fine. He beats me to a pulp and humiliates me it's fine and now he's roaming the streets I'll rule under freely and still it's fine." Alakhe.

"Where does my marriage come into all of this?" Bangi asks, that playful him now gone.

"How dare they allow you to break tradition that has been kept alive for so many years just like that?"

"Wena kahle kahle unenkinga nami, not all of these irrelevant things your imagination has been planting in your head since your teenage hood. What's wrong with you? I leave this Palace and your space yet you're still plotting my demise. You and

your roll on have no peace!"

"Tsek! You infertile shit!" Alakhe.

I couldn't hold it back anymore. Bangi and I just burst into a laughing fit. I laugh until I couldn't feel my cheeks and my stomach hurt. He even had tears in his eyes from laughing. I clap once and high five my man before settling down. I breathe out and sit back looking at Zonke who really chose well for herself here.

"So sorry for that. It's just so obvious some people deserved to be Trevor Noah instead of future Kings. Anyway, asikho lapho." Bangi.

"Alakhe what do you think is going to happen if your father doesn't die before you do?" The Queen asks.

"That will never happen," he says and I feel cold.

Okay...

"How can you even say that?" The Queen.

"This one has no brains. It's becoming more and more clear that the more chances I give you nothing good comes out of it," The King says and I'm not really sure what anyone says next because nothing but a loud cry fills my ears.

'She belongs with you...'

Wait.

I look up at her. Zonke. Zonke was the woman?

And I can't breathe.

Air!

Something is definitely not right here and even with me.

"Sthandwa sam...Zanokuhle!" Bangi cups my face forcing me to look at him. "What's wrong? Are you okay? Is something wrong with our baby?"

"What?" Alakhe. "You got her Pregnant?"

"Not now Alakhe man please...baby please say something. Zano."

"Zonke...Luthando...my dream..." I breathe out and the room's doors burst open.

Thokozani. Amandla. That cry. Luthando. Mannequins upon Mannequins. "Don't touch him!" Amandla.

"But my Princess the King-..."

She just looks at them and they hush.

"What nonsense is this? Who are you and what kind of disrespect is this?" The King asks. By now I've reassured Bangi that I was fine again.

"I'm-..." Thokozani is cut off by Zonke.

"Nobody!" She exclaims. "Since when is anyone just going to barge in here and speak out of turn." I think I could hear the panic in her voice even if I were to close my ears.

"You should know better than to speak about people barging in here uninvited," Amandla articulates.

"Let the gentleman speak." Bangi says.

"Thank you my Prince. My King I mean no disrespect to you and your Kingship. May you live long. I just come here with a heavy heart that is just confused. I came here for answers Zonke."

"Me?" Zonke.

"Yey, this is my fiancé you're talking about." Alakhe.

"The same fiancé that's my baby mama — or so I thought cause she lied to me. That evil woman had me raising a child for so many months that...that...entlek who is Luthando's father wena?"

My heart breaks. He's crying.

"Who are you?" Zonke asks. Oh is this voluntary amnesia now? An angry Thokozani charges at her but is held back kicking and shouting by the mannequins. He was livid.

Chapter Forty Eight.

"Givers need to set limits because takers rarely do." x Rachel Wolchin.

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Zonke has done it again. She has managed to destroy someone else's life once more and this time around...I don't know man. But I was just as angry because Zonke's choices have once again caused heartbreak. I'm thinking of how many things Thokozani had to sacrifice in order to be the best father he could be to Luthando.

I remember him even having to ask me to take care of Luthando while he worked during the evening and this woman refused. Did she even know all of this or is she just as shocked as we all are cause I could bet all I have right now that this would've never crossed my mind even once.

I'm even thinking if this was something Thokozani deserved — not that anyone deserved to be lied to but I'm just thinking. I don't know the dynamics of their relationship and I still didn't but I knew that they loved each other like crazy once upon a time. There was no Zonke without Thokozani just like there was no Thokozani without a Zonke...until there literally wasn't.

It's like something just set off in Zonke's mind and now we're here with a grown 30 something year old man getting dragged

out of here like he committed the biggest crime in history. I turned my focus to my sister who's acting like she didn't understand why any of this was happening. I think we all turned our attention to her waiting for how she was to handle this bizarre turn of events.

Remember, she said has no child so this thing that just happened here is 'freaking' her out too...I chuckle and sit down trying to feel if I really was fine and confirm that I truly felt normal. Very normal. I thank the Lord.

"Would someone explain what is going on here!" The King demands.

I take a dekko at Bangi who has his arms folded in front of her chest, waiting like everyone else in here. "Zonke. Talk. Who was that man?" The Queen asks, her tone softer than what I would've ever expected.

"Isn't it obvious, this thing has once again fooled us all. That was her man and child," Khethiwe chuckles. She must be eating all of this up.

"That is not true." Zonke.

"I believe him. This child looks exactly like her," Amandla says walking forward. Funny enough, it's only now that I realise Luthando kept quiet the moment Thokozani left the room. "So someone better start telling the truth here."

The King turns to me and I swear I wanted to disappear cause I knew deep down inside that I was going to be dragged into this mess once again.

"Don't you even start with my wife Baba. You should be questioning that woman over there, she's the one lying," Bangi says.

"Oh so you did know about this and just had us continue living with a liar. We are family but there is no unity here. No honesty. Eve or Zonke or whatever you are I suggest you start speaking the truth or I'll have you personally thrown out of here!" The King roars.

Alakhe? Zithini?

Oh he's looking at me again. Geez.

"I...I..." Zonke stutters.

"Khuluma!" Bangi's impatient father snaps.

"I know nothing about this child mina My King. I know nothing about that man you just had removed from your presence and Palace. He's just a crazy sick man who obviously just wants my attention. He's lying my King." She cries.

Well there it goes running out of the palace gates, the last glimmer of hope I had in this woman to truly be honest with herself and others. She just dug deeper into her pit of lies and there was clearly no stopping her.

"Is this true Makoti? Zankuhle!" I snap out of my shock and look at my husband's father, my tongue tied with manila rope or rather natural hemp rope.

"Wait...is this the same child you said belongs to a close relative of yours?" Ama asks and before I could even answer Zonke jumps into the wagon.

"See! That is not my child! I would never lie like that!"

But...you know what never mind. Never mind it all. If they seriously buy all of this then I have no words for what is happening here.

"So you mean- argh!" A frustrated Khethiwe storms out of here. The King and Queen excuse themselves promising to resume this failure of a meeting later today, which meant we had to stick around. Alakhe and Ama follow out too leaving just the three of us in here, Zonke crying without getting the comfort she needed from her fiancé.

The glee on my face is so evident you can't even see it.

"Can I have a word with her?" I ask Bangi.

"I'll go take Lu you'll find me at home," Bangi says and true to his word he goes to get her.

"What game are you playing at?" I get up and go stand in front of her, at a distance of course. Her stellar performance halts just after I ask her that.

"Game? Awungiyeke wena Gimba." Her eyes gawk at me from head to toe.

"You are playing with your life here Zonke. Do you know what these people can do to you if..." I cautiously lower my voice.

"...if they find out you're still lying! If they could throw Zweli in jail for 5 years for a mere punch zibuze ukuthi wena uyophelelaphi."

"I'm not some dumb Zweli mina. I know what I'm doing, now leave me alone," she clicks her tongue before looking at the corner of her eye, her demeanour sinking to the floor.

I could smell him and I suddenly wished I left when Bangi left.

"Zonke, give us a moment will you?" he says and I quickly turn, my heart beating out of its cage.

"But Khe-..."

"Don't make me repeat myself! All of you scramble!" She practically runs out of here and I try running out with her. No! He grips me with the strongest hold ever. "Finally I have a moment with you."

"Uyangilimaza. (You're hurting me)"

"Relax. How are you? I mean I can see you look so sublime especially in that dress. A true gem. You even smell yummy...how about that smile, come on don't look so terrified. I'm not that bad looking now am I? I don't bite too, unless if

you're into that..." His grip loosens and I quickly free my hand taking steps back but he would close them off.

"Stop following me!" I beg and he stops. Just like that. I have never been more confused and terrified at the same time. "I want to leave, Bangi wi-..."

"Hayi man! Hayi man! No! What the fuck is wrong with you and this idiot of yours huh?" He shouts and heaves out a heavy sigh looking me dead in the eye. "Are you really pregnant?"

I frown. What? Wait...my mind plays back the words Bangi said when I having that pain episode. Gosh.

"How could you even think to get impregnated by that man? He is not worthy of you and he never will be so I'll understand if you lied just to make him feel better. With me you can have it all, you'll be Queen and together we would divide and conquer. Nothing will stand in our way," Alakhe says.

"Kade ngak'bona wena ukuthi uzifunela umfazi wami futhi kuyang'nyanyisa lokho (I've long seen that you have an eye on my wife and that nauseates me)," I hear his voice and breath out in pure relief, running past this blood chilling man to my safe heaven. Standing behind him I could hear his heartbeat thumping fast...actually that's my own. "Look at me and listen to me clearly, leave uZanokuhle wami alone uyangizwa or ufuna ngik'phinde!"

"Bangi woah...please don't do that, he is not worth it!" I pull

him back.

"Listen to her. Run. Leave."

"Wena, azithathi kahle la ekhanda (there is something wrong with you). But let this be your final warning, touch my wife ever again I'll make sure both our parents never recognise your face emotuary," he says.

Uthini?

I...I'm clasped and pulled away by the hands of an angry man and I could feel it. The emotions for today so far have been too much for me to handle and process and I just wanted to call it a day already. I wanted some sleep and a cuddle after all of that too.

"Bangi you're hurting me," I complain before he frees me coming to a halt. He looks at me, eyes glossy and mouth slightly open as if he wants to say something but doesn't. Instead he properly holds my hand and I follow him out of here. If Thokozani came with a car then he was clearly long gone cause there was absolutely no trace of him anywhere. "Where are we going?"

"Home," his reply is brief.

"Home? But-..." I swallow my words and just go with the flow. I didn't want to be here either way so there was no use in

fighting him about a decision he has already made.

"Zakhele

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to Dalweni please."

"Yes my Prince," he bows and Bangi allows me in first. He goes to his side and the moment we drive off I feel bad for not saying my goodbyes.

The glances of him that I steal push me deeper into a pit of wonder. What's going through his mind? Is he still thinking of Alakhe and his words? How much did he hear? Did he really mean it when he said he'd ruin Alakhe if he touched me again?

I breathe out and feel the tears trickling down my cheeks. In an instant I knew my hormones were now out to play and nothing was going to hold them back.

"I shouldn't have left you alone back there. I should've known that creep would try something like that and I wish I came there sooner than I did."

"Are you angry at me for that? Is that why you won't talk to me?" I wipe my tears away.

"I'm not angry at you I'm angry at myself. Once again I feel like shit for failing to protect you."

"You can't protect me from everything Bangi," I glance out of the window. Just yesterday we were laughing and loving each other up but today it's this.

"I can and I will Zanokuhle don't tell me that shit. And next time don't tell me that boy is not worth it cause he became worth it the moment he looked at you the way he did. How dare he say I can't get my own wife pregnant? How dare he say you and him should go and conquer whatever moronic plan he has brewing in his head? I meant what I said Zanokuhle, I'll kill him with both my hands if he ever even thinks of breathing the air you're breathing."

Okay, I'm done crying.



We turned back, got some chocolate cake from MacDonald's and a McChicken to make myself feel better before arriving back at the Palace an hour later with even more takeaways. This was all before we were informed that the meeting that the King postponed to later yesterday was rescheduled for today around lunch time. So yes, the night was spent here in an empty fridge house with no proper clothes for changing.

I wake up to some weight on my thighs and a hand entwined with mine. The moment I move his head jolts to my direction. I yawn and wipe the sleep off my eyes cause I definitely don't

look like the Mona Lisa when I wake up. "Morning Sthandwa sam."

Our evening was dithery and I could attest that I've never had such with Bangi.

"Hi," I clear my groggy throat as he shifts up to lay on my stomach bringing his hand closer to his lips to kiss the back of my hand.

"Just Hi?"

When I nod I see his face drop a little he pulls himself up, sighing while staring right back at me. "I hate how people around us are the ones making us fight. This whole thing got to me my Love and I ended up speaking to you in a way I never thought I'd ever speak to you because I love and respect you. I don't even recall myself apologising so I get why you're still angry at me."

"It's fine."

"It's not. That's not the love I promised you. In my head I was just letting you know that I'd go crazy if I would ever lose you to...to..."

"To Alakhe?" I chuckle.

"It's not funny Sthandwa sam."

"I know, but I'm laughing cause I know I'd never do that to you...to us. I'd never lower my standards that much and be

happy with the rest of my life. Which is why I told you about the comments he made...I don't love him, I don't even think of him like that. He's not you. He's not my Bangi and he's definitely not the man I was created for. He'd never motivate me like you, kiss and hold me like you do and I'm a hundred percent certain he wouldn't make love to me the way you do."

The corners of his lips twitch before the warmth of his grin brings happiness to mine. I get another kiss on the back of my hand and return the kiss on his. How his own brother set the competition when my man was clearly the bar had me laughing. I am not Bangi's exes.

"I'm going to tell you this again, I'll never find another you in any man out there."

"So that means I'm forgiven?"

I nod bringing myself closer to him, kissing those succulent lips mercilessly before pulling away from him. The smack of our lips calling me back. "Breakfast or Zankuhle?"

"I want you," he smirks.

"Excellent choice." I utter before I pin him down on the bed, our mouths wrestling for dominance.

•••

A mess. That's what the room's state is in and I have to thread carefully around here because slipping and falling is a major possibility.

Clothes, cushions and what looks like two portraits were scattered everywhere, damaged. I think I even spot some broken glass and a broken mirror. The curtains were still drawn and it just smells like sadness, nicotine and depression in here. The dull atmosphere was weighing heavy on my shoulders and I could only imagine how Thokozani felt.

"You can sit over there," his hoarse voice says as he puts his phone away. He sits right across us on the other couch before lighting up a cigarette. I knew that smell from anywhere and the Courtleigh cigarettes pack on the table should've been enough of a warning. He puffs out some smoke rubbing his palm on his forehead. The smell was just as offensive and nauseating as I'd have expected it to be.

"Can I ask that you not smoke in my presence," I request and he seems irritated, but does as I wished. "Thank you...I...I came to check up on you...especially after everything that happened yesterday. Where's...where's Luthando?"

"With my mother," he shrugs.

"Oh. Look I-..."

"Do you know I forgave her for cheating on me? Not only once, heck not even twice and clearly I was a fool for even doing that

cause she left me. She left me for better men who would bless her ngoba I couldn't keep up with her. Do you know how happy I was when I found out she was pregnant. I was excited that maybe we were finally heading somewhere good, somewhere stable. I even started gathering and saving up to pay lobola for her." He chuckles bitterly cracking his fingers.

"You were going to marry her?" The words leave my mouth in a whisper.

"Nxa!" He jumps up burying his face in his hands, the pain exposing itself all over again. "And you know every time I'd try moving on she'd come back. Every time it would be the same thing again and again. Her disappearing and reappearing was sickening but my stupid heart couldn't man up and leave. Now I've humiliated myself in front of the King and Queen...all because of your sister!"

I freeze when he punches the wall.

Bathong!

Blood.

Why would he do that?

The mannequin I came in here with is already standing, shielding me from the potential danger he sensed. "My Princess

"I'll ask that we go." He says and without my answer, escorts me out and into the car.

My stay at Thokozani's place was cut short because of him punching that wall and as we travelled back to the palace I couldn't help but ponder on how the meeting was faring without me there. Not that the meeting wouldn't continue with me not being there but it just clouded my thoughts. I hope Bangi is okay

I step out and make my tedious way back into the Palace, climbing up those stairs and pretending like it was my workout for the day.

...what the hell?

"Out! She has to go! Alakhe tell her she should leave, now!" Khethiwe throws another plastic bag out of their wing.

"Will you stop doing that!" The Queen.

"Ma, she has to go!" Khethiwe drags another bag and it suffers the same fate.

"That is not me, I swear!" Zonke cries holding onto Alakhe's forearm who currently seemed unbothered by all of this. Bangi comes to stand by me, pulling me a little further from the scene.

"What's going on?" I ask him. He just hands me his phone and all I see are pictures of Zonke pregnant and in the arms of

Thokozani. There's about ten of them here all showing her face and his in an obvious manner. There was no denying it.

"Those were emailed to the Royal house, everyone saw them."
He tells me.

"Get her out of here! Get her of my space and away from my husband. Go to your baby father and child." Khethiwe says separating the two.

"Baby, Khe...that is not me you know I don't have a child. Those photos are clearly photoshopped very well! This is the work of Satan and people who don't want to see us together. This child that I'm carrying in my womb is the only child I'll ever be bringing into this world. Please believe me."

"Nonsense! Nonsense! Nonsense!"

"Stop embarrassing yourself Khethiwe." Amandla tries pulling her away from hitting Zonke.

Alakhe turns to Zonke. I can't make out what he says at first but manage to pick up a few words. "...want her to do a DNA test, so that we can prove them all wrong Zan-...."

"I think we should go," Bangi says.

I nod and we leave this scene. God forbid this leaks out and becomes another terrible scandal for this Royal family to deal with cause it sure as hell didn't need one.

Chapter Forty Nine.

"Same shit, different toilets. Flush."

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"Here you are. Your scan and something to wipe that gel off," My new Gynecologist says and I take it, wiping off before sitting up. Grinning like a 5 year old who's just been handed candy.

"And like I said, you are as healthy as can be so all I ask is that you keep doing what you're doing cause it's working."

"Thank you so much for this," I say and that thank you was accompanying a whole list of other things. She made me feel good and really advised me well about handling my pregnancy, not shaming me even once or even making me uncomfortable.

"I'll see you at our next appointment then. Please have yourselves a good day," she says and we get to leave there, the nerves and anxiety we had prior to getting here were now a thing of the past.

"You okay?" Bangi asks me, holding me by waist as we get escorted out of here.

"I am. How can I not be when we just saw our beautiful baby," I rub on my belly briefly before remembering that we were in a very public area and people could potentially put two and two together and our bubble would be no more. "Hide these."

He takes the scans putting them safely in the pocket that was on the inside of his blazer. "I think you're overreacting Sthandwa sam."

"If I am then why did you hide the pictures too? Make it make sense."

"Ha, I'm keeping them safe."

"Amanga babakhe," I laugh and quickly compose myself but end up laughing silently.

Him and I both know that if this got out again, there was no tricking that hothead the second round since we denied it like our lives depended on it the first time. We were lying for our peace and sanity cause he was honestly an unnecessary pryer when the plan was to enjoy this moment and tell them later. Them being his parents and Ama.

Once we get to the car my excited self immediately goes to that app I downloaded yesterday. The pregnancy app; and I think I'm too damn happy for this. It asks for my name and how far I was, it even goes to the extent of wanting my weight, length and height just to calculate accurately. When it finally starts up I gush at the page I'm on.

"Oh my goodness." I beam up. This is so adorable. "Ow, This app has a few articles. Looks like it's very informative too...bathilana babakhe our little Shazi is the size of a peach."

"Our baby is being compared to fruits, again."

I give him a look.

"That's not the point," I say scrolling even further through the app to see what it had to offer me. As if I needed more information than the information I already got from Doctor Zulu. "This is pretty nice. I can make notes on here, write down any questions I could possibly have for my doctor, I can calculate his steps and..." A cold shiver runs down my spine as I see the contractions counter and it's like a smack in the face that that would be my fate soon enough.

Nami angazi ukuthi lengane iyophuma kanjani la, kodwa kwamele iphume. Heyi Asazi.

"You bought more stuff?" He asks and I raise my eyes to meet the delivery truck and the guy standing by the gate security. "I did," I chuckle and lower my window to tell me the guards to allow this gentleman in cause I'm sure he had been waiting here. But it turns out he's been waiting for just five minutes, which makes him very patient.

My boxes upon boxes of goodies get moved inside the house and I'm surprised to see Bangi looking at all of this in amusement.

"Thanks. Travel safely," I sign the paper and the young man leaves.

"Ma'Dlamini what in heaven's name did you buy this time around?"

"Baby stuff," I attack the first box with much needed enthusiasm and a pair of keys to rip the seal off.

"Baby stuff?"

"Yes, I was busy doing some online shopping when I accidentally ended up in this cute newborns division and babakhe would you resist this?" The box opens and in another eco friendly packaging I pull out a baby vest. Holding it up I feel mushy inside.

"I still think its early," he shrugs taking the tiny vest that I offer him simultaneously pulling my face in surprise. I laugh.

"Oh? Wuwe lo othi kusese early? Excuse me but who went out for business and came back with a baby crib unprovoked?"

He chuckles. "The crib practically begged me to buy it the moment I laid eyes on it."

"See, we are the same nje, plus I made sure I bought gender neutral clothes so whether it's a girl or a boy he's going to be sorted."

I pull out another onesie and melt to the butterflies roaming in my heart and belly. I could already picture a mini us in this soft and fluffy onesie sleeping peacefully in that awkwardly blue crib Bangi brought. But then again a crib is a crib.

"I was thinking of also getting started on baby Shazi's nursery. The sooner we handle it the better. I mean we're already at 14 weeks."

"And 2 days." I add.

"And 2 days...in a blink of an eye we'll be 3 in this house and I want us to be prepared."

I don't know man, the fact that my baby and I will sleep in different rooms just seemed scary to me, most especially since where I come from you sleep in the middle of your mother and father until they decide to give you another sibling and force you to vacate. Which is also not easy because it just doesn't make sense how you've literally spent two years of your life under their armpits but now you should sleep alone and be fine with it. I'm not even going to talk about the spanking you'd get for reacting naturally to sudden change. Growing up was a mission man and one that is too confusing to understand.

The second last box I open greets me with a flustered look and a tiny voice at the back of my head saying 'you're 4 days late on the delivery guarantee you have ma'am'. Since it's hot again outside I've been sweating more than usually which is why I'd visit the pool a bit more often now on my free time. And when my husband wasn't busy he'd join me.

Also swimming is not that bad. I mean I know I almost drowned twice but it's no big deal.

"My bikinis are finally here," I pull the first set out and already I couldn't keep my mouth shut about how amazing the material felt under my fingertips.

"Bikini's uh?" He smirks.

"You want a little show by the poolside?" I smirk back, teasing his eyes with another set that had leopard prints all over it.

"You know I can't say no to that," he closes up the box he was inspecting before standing back.

Well great then. I get the box up off the floor and before I could even take a step forward I'm politely ambushed and offered a hand. "I don't want my wife tripping and falling over a bunch of stairs when I could just help out."

I'm not complaining but I don't think I want to go up and down these stairs again. Once in the bedroom I push him out of here and go onto emptying the box on the bed. Six beautiful sets and eight beautiful choices looked at me right in the face and I knew making a decision was going to be harder than I thought. Stripping down to my purest form I quickly head to the bathroom to refresh and to tie my braids up.

"Let's try out some bikinis shall we baby Shazi?"

My naked feet clap on the floors as I dashed back to the bed...or was that my thighs? I giggle and open the other packages but still reach for the leopard print one first. It sits well. Too well and the shopping experience was the cherry on

top for me cause they assured me and plenty other normal bodied women out there that we would definitely rock these tiny temptations. "Okay mama, yes!" I hype myself out. "We looking scrumptious today."

I snap a few photos and chose the one that I liked the most, sending it to Bangi with a caption that read *'don't I look purrrrrrfect in this? Choice one'*

His reply is almost instantaneous and the fire emojis accompanied by the purple demon emoticon he send me make me squeal. 'I think I should be up there instead of down here.'

'You stay down there husband. I don't want you here!' I text him back with a line of laughing emoticons.

'Mhmm...' He texts me back and I read it only before changing into a yellow bikini with bling highlighting the outer parts of the top. This one was also nice and worthy of a picture. I decide to send him the pictures after trying on at least three just to save time and true to my decision I send him 4 racy pictures. 4 because I couldn't choose that one good picture of me in the orange bikini I wore.

'Okay, now you're really making me want to come up there!'

I chuckle.

'Baby, I just want your honest opinion about these pieces. How about you decide on which one I wear in the end?'

'Is you coming down here in your birthday suit an option?' He sends this text with a smirking emoticon and I choke with laughter.

'Bang! No.'

He sends me a picture of his succulent, hairy legs dipped in the pool already, captioning it *'Fine. I'll keep my third leg on a leash.'*

Third leg! Oh my gosh! Oh my gosh!

A highschool kid has nothing on me today as I quickly transform with each bikini piece, appreciating my shopping skills even more now that I liked them all...okay maybe not all of them since two just didn't look as good as the picture made them out to be. They looked dull compared to the others but I'll probably find a day to actually wear them and appreciate the dullness.

Remind me to go and rate this shop 3 and a half stars after this because they truly made a girl look sexy and scrumptious and my man was eating it all up, leaving no crumbs.

'Final choice honorable husband?' I send him a text and wait as he types and stops and types and stops. My screen shifts from the WhatsApp I was looking at, to a call alert of numbers I haven't saved.

Who the heck could be calling me right now when I'm seriously this busy with my own life? I answer hoping it had nothing to

do with insurance or a weird person just gunning for my attention when I couldn't even begin to give it to them.

"Mrs Shazi hello?" Well hello confidence.

The other end of the line is overtaken with silence and an airy sound and I hurriedly check if I was still on call which I was.

"Hello? Anyone there? I don't have time for this."

"I...Zano it's me please don't hang up," the shaky voice says and I pull my brows, frowning instantly.

"Am I supposed to just guess who you are?" I question, irritated.

"It's me. Zonke."

"Jehovah!" I painfully slap my thigh in shock. "Zonke Eve Dlamini? You're still alive?"

This woman has been missing since the day she was chased out of the palace — which was nothing new to me but everyone else who weren't used to her disappearing acts surely were concerned. Surprisingly Alakhe too, but asikho lapho.

"I need cash," she says and I can't stop myself from chuckling.

"Straight to business I see with absolutely no care and question on how messy you left things here for us and most especially for Thokozani. Those DNA tests came back and Khethiwe wasted no time in burning every last thing you left behind in her house. You can't even try asking me how Luthando is doing, you just jump straight into wanting money from me."

"I didn't call for that. I need money so that I can pay for...pay for this hotel. Please."

"I'm not giving you money Zonke Kohlwa."

"I'm going to be out on the streets and you don't care?"

"If you so desperately need a place to stay you know where to go."

"I can't go back there, I'll get spotted!" She says.

"Who's to say they haven't spotted you already?" I sneer, already wanting to end this call and join my man down at the pool.

"Zano, don't do this."

"I already said what I wanted to say. I'm not giving you my money. Usho mawufuna the keys ezasendlini," I hang up and heave out a sigh. Uyangisanganela lo.

Anyway...Leopard print piece won! I knew this piece was just going to be dangerous. I change quickly, trying to close that gap of time I obviously wasted on talking with Zonke. I wrap my braids up in bun. A tight one too so it would stay in place because drying up braids was not fun at all. After grabbing 3 towels, my sunhat and some sunscreen cause I was certain the one downstairs in the pool house was almost finished I leave, rushing to catch the sun at it's peak.

"Mamesha! Hawu yeheni bo!" He says not even a second later after I step out. I put the things I bought on the nearby bench

watching him come out of the pool, a grin on my face.

"You happy about your choice?"

He takes my hand and brings it up motioning that I should turn around which I do and the sounds coming from him make me blush. "Yonke into ihleli Sthandwa sam."

"Hayi kusho khona ukuthi lekolobela iyasebenza,"

"Angidingi ikolobela ukuze ngikthande mina," he pecks my lips.

"Anyway, what took you so long to get down here?"

"I got held up by a call."

"A call from?"

"Zonke." I say tight lipped and hear him chuckle.

"She's back huh?"

"Back and broke," I practically drag the two of us to the side where I saw he had laid out a platter of finger foods for us to nibble on. The simple things he put together was enough to make my heart melt even if I knew here he had only torn open a few packets. "You know I'm still wondering who Luthando belongs to if not Thokozani cause I just can't see it being one of the married men she had been seeing. Emphasis on married. Yaz when she was doing all of this did she not think she could conceive?"

"Or maybe that was the plan," Bangi adds on. Oh yes the water is definitely nice and cool. For a short moment I'm surrounded by it's calmness and welcoming and then remember my

husbands words.

"You know I wouldn't even put it past her because after everything that has happened I'm certain she's capable of anything. Maybe the plan failed after they probably told her off," I chew vigorously on the Cheddar in my mouth, standing on my tippy toes of this nice and shallow end.

"So you gave her the money?"

"Never," I roll my eyes, reaching for a cracker this time since the cheddar didn't seem as enticing now. Plus the texture felt weird in my mouth. "She would've had her own money had she worked for it. I'm deciding to be selfish right now and the only thing I'll buy her is food. That's it."

I don't care how bad this made me feel deeply inside because now I was just going to continue nursing someone I was sure was just going to disappoint me soon enough.

"Anyway, enough talk about my sister, are you ready for the full house we're going to have soon?" I ask and see him smile nervously. I could tell he wasn't sure about having not one or two extra people here but three whole humans. Three people means more work but I'm pretty sure Buhle and Khaya can handle themselves better than Luthando would.

"It's going to be busy that I can say, but nothing too extra. You treated my family well when they came here last time so why should I act all funny now when your family is coming around."

"Cause my family is a mess."

"Sthandwa sam, mine too. But you know this. I mean that's why we're even here right," he says taking about four grapes and eats them all.

I haven't seen my siblings in so long I was nervous to see if they have probably changed since we went our separate ways. I have called maybe once or twice before after their last visit and that was just me being too busy to remember that one call every once in a blue moon was not what I promised. I think I let this whole Zonke thing get deeply embedded in my head that I neglected some parts of my life.

My eyes are on Bangi as he disappears into the water, swimming away from me while I chill by the corner. I have tried going to the deep end but never again. I'm perfectly fine on this side doing what I absolutely refer to as swimming. When he returns he's a gorgeous wet marvel, taking my wild thoughts into captive. He looked like he was made for the water or the water was made for him. That would be the total opposite situation for me cause I battled the water. I fought it and it made damn sure that it fought back.

"I like it when you stare," Bangi says drifting to me and stopping when he's close enough for me to melt into him.

"I should tell you more often than how much I like looking at you. I feel like I don't tell you enough of how handsome you

are. You're drool worthy."

"Oh stop it you're making me blush, futhi awuthi ngishaye umfazi wami ngokiss ovutha bhe," he smiles bringing himself forward uniting my lips with his. It's a slow, sensual dance to a song that hits my inner core. This song hits familiar notes that clearly only he can hit. I pull him to me

lifting my legs wrapping them around his waist. He pushes me back jamming me between the wall and him. His hands swim across my thighs to my back and start working on the straps that held this wild bikini top in place.

"Mhmm...wait wait," I breathe out holding onto his forearms to stop him in his tracks.

"What's wrong? Did I do something?" He asks. I titter nervously shaking my head. "Then what's wrong?"

"I..." I swallow my words in another titter before composing myself and take a dekko at him. "...well something happened last night."

"Something like what?" He furrows his dark brows.

"My titties." I pout. He laughs a little obviously after taking in the light look I wore on my face.

"What about your titties Sthandwa sam?"

"Your baby is making my titties leak."

"Leak?" He giggles.

I nod, noting in my mind that this only bothered me because he could probably see it and get turned off by it. "It's colostrum. Yesterday it was sticky and yellow."

"Sounds interesting, you should've called me to see it."

"Haybo," I laugh receiving a dozen of kisses on my face.

I let him go on with undoing this bikini top, removing it and leaving me bare. He lifts me higher, legs now wrapping onto his torso and full chest suffocating his face. "Don't suck, please," the words slip out of my mouth but the message is delivered when he flicks my hard nipple with his tongue. His warm mouth and tongue on my skin felt phenomenal and pleasing. He was somehow making me comfortable all over again even when the thought crossed my mind again. I slip down once more, like a puzzle piece I fall into place, my mouth with his going at it slowly. My fingers trace the back of his head before feeling his hand rub on my plump outer lips, working their way to my clit and I moan into his mouth.

Minutes of him stimulating me like this and me wanting him... vanish the second I hear a high pitched scream from a woman behind us. I think my second death comes when I see no other than the woman who birthed this man who has his fingers on my clit.

"Ma what the hell!" Bangi turns us away, blocking me from her view.

"I'm so sorry my boy I thought..."

"Hamba hamba hamba," he repeated until her voice became a distant echo of apologies. I'm hiding my face at the crook of his neck, feeling the flushness mask my face and my mind purely just going blank for a short while before returning to remind me my mother in law just saw me like that. Nyiso has told me she had gotten caught twice during sex and it kinda trilled her but to me it was nothing short of terrifying.

"Oh my Jesus, why."

"Ukahle?"

"Cha Malinga, oh my gosh your mother must think I'm disgusting. What was I even thinking? Bangi she saw us...kahle kahle how much did she see?"

"You're not disgusting Ma'Dlamini. She should've called if she was coming here, we both would've known," Bangi says while brushing my back, stifling a laugh. I still won't lift my face from his neck. "Do you want to go inside?"

"No," I giggle.

"We can't stay in the water forever Sthandwa sam."

"But we can try," I say holding him even more. The wind blows gently, making the water rattle slightly around us giving me a calming effect and toning down my nerves until I felt better.

"Let's go," I finally utter.

Where is my bikini top? I check and notice it had drifted further than our corner of shame. "I'll get that for you," he kisses my

lips again and helps me put it on. The moment we step out of the pool ngishawa luvalo.

I wrap myself in a towel after drying my body and make our way in, I'm hiding again behind Bangi but he pulls me to his side. I notice the woman wasn't here and I was so delighted, rushing up the stairs. I change into a pair of jeans and a white T-shirt, which I later change out of because I felt it was a bit inappropriate even if this was my own house.

Once downstairs again we find her seated by the lounge with one of her helpers who excuses herself the moment she sees us. When we were upstairs Bangi rang Nandi to come by to whip us up something nice to eat for lunch.

"Ma, hi," Bangi greets his mother with a hug and I awkwardly follow his lead, mumbling a greeting.

"I'm so sorry for my bad timing my son. I...should've called."

"Mama that was nowhere near bad timing, that was horrendous timing. You walked in on me marinating my wife ma, vele you should've called," he says and I slap his thigh.

"Bangi!" I reprimand.

"Yini?" He asks.

"Don't speak like that to your mother," I say.

"No, it's fine. He's right. I should've called and I apologize for just walking in here like I owned the place. That won't happen

again."

"Good. Where's dad? Actually why are you here?" Bangi asks.

I was asking myself the same thing cause we haven't seen each other in so long that it didn't make any sense for her to actually be here since both those meetings failed to make changes in our lives. Good changes that is.

"He doesn't even know I'm here...well maybe now he does. But I came here to do something we've been meaning to do for so long and that is to apologize to you my boy noMakoti wami. Actually let me not speak for people who aren't here and speak for myself and say I'm sorry, for letting you down and neglecting you as my children when things started getting intense between you and your brother. I know your father and I have been passing off Alakhe's behavior as something that will fade away, but it's clearly not happening, instead it's ripping my family apart." She says near tears.

"Ma," Bangi tries saying something but she is quick to stop him in his tracks too.

"Let me say it Bangizwe, I haven't been the best mother to the three of you and I'm sure you've seen how your father just fails to handle and deal with his family situation properly because he wasn't there to know you guys better. He wasn't there to be the parent 24/7 just like I havent and you don't know how

much it hurts me now. I look at you and see someone I don't know like the back of my hand like I should."

There's a moment of silence where I look to Bangi and he looks to me. Telepathically blown away and not believing her honesty.

This made some sense and could be the reason why most of these things happen. This is why they can't reprimand a first born, because they didn't know him like they should. How do you put someone in line when you don't know and understand their line. I say this from a person who taught kids for a living. You had a year to learn a bunch of kids individually; what they're good at and what they struggle with. Some school relationships got deeper to the point where you'd know what they were dealing with at home. Whether it be an abusive or drunk parent, neglectful caregivers, poverty or even the simplest thing such as helping the child with homework you'd learn it from kid to kid. This meant the more I knew a child, I'd know which approach to use when calling them to order. This is the only way I could make sense of how these two grown adults have been handling their boys, or in actuality why they couldn't handle their boys.

"I want to try again. I want my family back."

"Even if it means losing your hotheaded son?"

"I don't want to lose any of you Bangizwe. I did not go through

all that labour just to give up on any of my children and this means if I have to try talking and reasoning with Alakhe I will do so but please don't give up on us," she says and I hear Bangi heaving out a sigh.

"If this means we won't be taking steps back and my wife won't be getting blamed for things she's not involved in then I'm okay with starting over again," he says and I see the Queen sneaking in a smile right at that moment. The air suddenly felt better and just as inviting as it should be.

"That makes me so happy. Very happy," she says. Bangi clears his throat and takes my hand.

"I think we have news that will hopefully make you even more happier," Bangi.

I nod nervously, my palms feeling sweatier than before.

"What is it?"

"Well we're pregnant Mama," he says with joy in his voice.

"What! Bangizwe ungadlali ngami kanjalo," she says. I don't know man but my heart stops beating for a moment. "But you said...now it all makes sense. I — come here."

She stands, arms wide open and my legs somehow can't register this task. When she's in front of me I get up meeting her hug. My stiffness eventually melts away and I hug her back. "Oh nkosiyami, Smakade nabaphansi bakwa Shazi, ngiyabonga. Ngiyabonga ngalesi isibusiso esingaphezu kwazo zonke iyibusiso.

Father you are holy and you are mighty!" She's in tears as I breathe out an Amen. "Why wasn't I told about this earlier?" She holds me at arms length.

"It was still too early ma." Bangi collects his hug too.

"I don't know what to say but I'm just so happy that my son is finally going to have his first child soon, whether it be a boy or a girl I'll be over the moon," she says. "This calls for a huge celebration, I'll call your father and Dora to-..."

"No, no ma, please. Let this just stay between us for now until we're ready to tell everyone else." Bangi.



There was just something different about having someone else know about our secret — not the mountains of greens I've been advised to eat or the resting that's being enforced into my head. Maybe it was the comforting feeling of knowing that someone else is there to advise me. A mother figure per say. And now that things were changing too I knew there was more to look out for in terms of this family; this is if we can fix what has already started to crumble.

Our last goodbyes have been dragging and my feet were already starting to kill me. We've been here since 13h00 in the afternoon, meeting societies and associations, Local Government, Government Departments and Church members. The Queen invited us last minute to this garden party where

the other brother specifically wasn't going to be there and we showed our support with the other members of the Shazi family joining us.

It was honestly a little too boring for my liking, everything was just too civilised and poise, but then again I held on to the knowledge that it would over soon enough and the food was bomb. Whoever made these melt-in-your-mouth chocolate croissants should get my number.

Speaking of number, my phone vibrates in my tiny purse alerting me of a message. A 'please call me' to be specific from a number I hadn't saved. Just as I was about to ignore it again, another one comes through. Must be serious then. "Love, I need the toilet. I'll be quick." I tell Bangi and he nods before continuing off with business talk with Uncle Archie which was supposed to be a farewell.

I wasn't lying though. I was pressed. It's clean, clear and smells like lavender in these palace toilets. After sitting on the one and emptying my bladder I dial the number and it rings.

"It's been two days and you haven't sent me anything."

"Excuse me?"

"I asked you for some money and I still haven't gotten anything," the caller says and it clicks immediately.

"Zonke, I'm not doing this with you again."

"I'm asking for help and you give me that lame excuse?"

"Zonke's who's Luthando's father? Is it one of your ex blessers? Do you know him so we can give him a call? Is it the guy I found you smooching on our couch? The one I got slapped for? Is he the one that would buy you all those gifts? Does he know about her?"

"You're making me angry here because I don't want to talk about this."

I lick my teeth. "Fine."

"Now are you helping me or not?"

"I gave you an option and you ignored it. How is that my fault?"

"I asked for money."

"Beggars are not choosers Zonke."

"I see now that you don't care about me at all wena."

I chuckle. "Had I not cared you and I wouldn't even be butting heads the way we are cause I would've ignored you ages ago. What's the point of being unemployed, broke and pregnant while forcing yourself onto an expensive hotel's system? Look I can still give you the keys to back home and food for a month and see if we can't secure a job for you,"

"Would it kill you to just give me 200k instead."

"Yes, cause it's my money."

"You're such a bitch!"

A rich bitch.

"It's still my money." I shrug.

"Hambofa nemali yakho yoknuka," she clicks her tongue.

"Oksalayo ngifa nayo," I hang up and run a hand past my face, not recognising the woman I was not so long ago.

Maybe I should ju-

"Zanokuhle? Sthandwa sam?"

"I...I'm coming." I wipe myself and get up to leave.

Chapter Fifty.

"Don't get so worked up over things you can't change or people you can't change. It's not worth the anger buildup or the heartache. Control only what you can."

••

'Your baby is growing actively, and the organs are continuing to develop. Your baby can hold their neck straight and turn their head from side to side. Your baby has developed the grasp reflex and is continuously training their-...'

"But no one asked you that." Buhle says to Khaya as their voices get louder and louder. They reach the kitchen and I still had no clue what the heck they were debating about but that has seriously distracted me from reading up on the 16th week development on my baby.

"Give me a break," Khaya throws his grown self on a highchair. I've been stirring this green tea for too long, that it now just looked unappealing to me. Smelt pretty unappealing too at this current moment putting me off it completely.

"Good morning sis," Buhle greets me first and is followed by Khayalakhe. Is that a beard I see on his chin?

"What are you two arguing about so early in the morning?" I ask taking my cup to empty it in the sink.

"He's telling me about Christiano Rollins or something."

"Ronaldo Buhle Cristiano Ronaldo," Khaya corrects her and she just shrugs it off. "You guys have been living under rocks, how can you guys not be concerned when the biggest and greatest soccer player is retiring?"

I pull up my search engine and search for this player.

'Did you mean Cristiano Ronaldo?'

Okay obviously!

Sweet Jesus!

"If he's old then let him be."

"He most certainly does not look old in this photo," I turn the screen to Buhle and watch her jaw drop.

"Where in the name of 'you're-so-fine-gimme-your-time' is he from?"

"That is besides the point here."

"Khaya now I'm interested. Tell me more about him." Buhle gushes over the phone, scrolling down while I chuckle.

"He's married." Khaya says.

"Ah, I'm back to not caring then." She hands me my phone back and I lock it placing it on the counter.

"This was never about his looks though, kanti how are you people."

I chortle moving slightly to allow Nandi to grab cutlery.

"Anyway where Luthando, she slept so early yesterday when

we came, she made me so mad." Buhle mentions.

"She's outside with Bangi. We'll go join them in a few."

There's a prolonged awkward silence that's interfered with the sizzling sounds of bacon on the pan. My mouth watered and my stomach rumbled as I could already taste it.

"So...people have been talking..." She breaks the yolk of silence with a topic I have been avoiding for far too long now with them. "...talking about Luthando not being Thokozani's child. How true is this?"

"News travels hey."

"Some people are even saying Thokozani drinks like a fish now." Khaya adds. "The ladies at church are even saying that the demon has him trapped right where he wants them cause he's even sleeping with random women."

"Khaya why are you even listening to grown people's conversations like that?" I ask.

"How are you going to ignore a group of 6 women laughing and gossiping over a cup of hot tea and Mrs Nkosi's fresh scones? They are always loud." He quickly justified.

Thokozani changes women now and he drinks?

Why haven't I seen any of that during the past times I've gone to fetch Lu from him. He just always looked fine and sober to me. I heave out a sigh rubbing the back of my neck.

I say it takes a Kingdom to build success stories. My wife and I have thus decided to donate three million-..."

The crowd goes wild with applause, gasps and screams. Some even get to their feet in celebration.

He titters "...to help the home keep their lights on and their hearts warm. I encourage everyone to do the same. Give the little that you can for th-..."

'Has the family asked about me?' Her again.

"...Thank you." My man closes off his speech and the response is just as welcoming. The camera flashed plenty pictures of him and his gorgeous smile before he made his way to me. Now I'm also getting flashed but I could care less since he did such an amazing job with delivering that speech. The kids who were seated at the foot of the stage get up to go hug him. A heartwarming sight to my eyes. He really tries giving them all hugs but doesn't manage it. His subtle escape doesn't go unnoticed by me.

"That was magnificent babakhe. You moved the crowd so effortlessly it was beautiful to watch." I wrap my arms around his neck and smother him in a hug.

"Thank you Sthandwa sam, for the note too. They always give me an extra boost of confidence."

"Not that you need any," I fix his tie.

"You'd be surprised," he says and takes a seat before the founder of this home comes onto stage to say her piece and it's just as moving. Filled with nothing but gratitude for the help she was getting from the millions in this Kingdom.

Again, I'm exhausted and need another foot rub from my man. Maybe even a hot bath and strawberries dipped in chocolate. But come to think of it, a hot bath in this weather didn't sound right anymore. It was hotter than an over out here and felt like the Lord just turned this mother earth into the devil's playground. An exhausting car trip wasn't helping either.

"Welcome back!" Buhle exclaimed rushing to come give Bangi and I a hug. "I cooked."

"Yoh." I laugh and walk further tossing my handbag on the coffee table, throw myself on the couch and elevate both my legs.

"Don't be so shocked, you know I can cook."

"I know, but how did you get Nandi out of that Kitchen?"

"I asked her nicely." Buhle says and comes to sit by my feet. By now sleep was starting to betray me, pulling me deeper into a realm of comfortable sleep. The kind of sleep that you'd surely wake up confused on what day it was today. The kind of sleep that would make you answer every question but have no memory of it ever being asked. That was how tired I was.

"Where's Lu?"

"Sleeping. She was playing the whole afternoon, she has energy for days shem," she says.

"Mhnn." That she does.

"Are you seriously falling asleep without trying my food first?"

Buhle whined and I shake my head, my eyelids failing me entirely.

"I'm not falling asleep." I mumble turning to my side.

"You are."

"Buhle please," Bangi chuckles. "Leave my wife alone. Let her rest."

"Mhnn...mtjele wena baby..."

A freezing cold hand rests itself on my head before a presence joins me in this darkness. I knew it was her cause she hummed a song I haven't heard in forever and it was so beautiful. 'You have neglected me,' she says

Advertisement

her face coming to view.

'Mama.' I call but she seemingly just ignores me. It's just a place...a place of truth and honesty here.

'When will you adhere to the words I speak to you? The paths I show you and the feelings I make you feel? I am not resting where I am because I left so many things on that earth unsaid. So much was taken from me Wezanokuhle and you're not

listening to me. YOU'RE NOT LISTENING TO ME!

'Mama PLEASE...'

'DO YOU NOT WANT ME TO REST IN PEACE? Do you not want me to be at peace and one with my ancestors? DO YOU NOT?'

'Ma!'

'LEAVE ME!'

'No never!' I grab onto her arm, tightly but she presses on my head, my whole head spinning and my lungs running low on oxygen. I can feel my spirit slipping away into a pit...

Deeper...

'Is she dead?'

'I think so.'

"Zanokuhle! Zanokuhle wake up!" I open my eyes and gaze frantically around at all the worried looking faces surrounding me. I can breathe again. I can see too now but I'm terrified. I notice my claws were dug into Bangi's arm which I quickly let go of, shocked and the marks it left there. "Good God what was that? Are you okay?" He pulls me to him.

My heart is racing wild alongside my mind because of that dream I just had. No scratch that — that was a nightmare. I have never had my mom so furious at me. She sounded furious cause that's the only word I could use for the fire she was spitting at me.

"I don't know," I answer staring blankly at these two.

"Khaya, Buhle, could you excuse us for a minute?" Bangi asks them and with nods only as their answer they leave, heading upstairs to their bedrooms. "You don't know?" He croaks.

"I'm not listening."

"Huh?" He squeezes my hands.

"Remember that dream I had where I couldn't breathe?"

"Yeah? Did you have it again?"

I shift my focus back to him and utter a very breathy "Yes. She was strangling me Bangi."

"Who?"

"I want to go sleep...I...I'm tired."

"Zanokuhle who strangled you?" He half shouts at me and I cringe. "I don't want to ask you again."

"Manje yini inkinga yakho?" I forcefully remove my hands from his hold, getting up and head upstairs to change and get some sleep. I couldn't stop seeing that dream in my head again, the words piercing into my ear as the fresh memory grabs me once more. I change into my nightgown and get into bed, struggling to even fall asleep...

Luthando's cries wake me up. I check the bed and I'm alone, in the mere darkness of this room. I sit up, slipping on Bangi's slippers and rush to her room only for me to get there while she's quietly getting hushed by Bangi's magic hands.

Nothing leaves my mouth as I back away slowly, and make my way back to bed.

'...do you not want me to rest?' I replay those words in my head, sighing heavily. How can my own mother's even ask me that when I have wanted the best for her. I loved her and I could vouch that she was still a big piece in my life. I felt like she was questioning my loyalty and giving me too much to process this time around. What pissed me off more now was her hurting me. Was that even her or a devil disguised to look like my mother. I've heard of these things... These demons that just come to you in another form just to trick you and deceive you.

Why would she fight me like that?

'You're not listening to me!'

I throw my head back, trying to block my busy thoughts out. I feel sick. No. No. Don't do that. Don't you dare even think of that Zanokuhle. He would never. My bottom lip quivers as I'm blinded by fresh hot tears.

'Ubuyaphi?' I remember peeking out of the blankets.

'Huh?' Zonke's voice plays in my head in a distant memory.

'Ubuyaphi?'

'Oh...etoilet, diarrhea from amasi.'

'Mhmmm...' I growl tossing in the bed, burying my head in the covers.

And just like that the sick feeling goes away like it never came pouring down on me. When I lift my head I see him standing by the door, frozen and blank. I wonder how long he's been standing there but frankly, I did not care. I just wanted him to hold me and make me feel better. "Sthandwa sam?" He breathes out and I lose it right there and then.

"Please hold me," I cry. I have no words. I have no words. "She was strangling me. My mother was taking my life Bangi!" I cry into his shirt.

"That can't be right."

"I heard her Bangi, I heard her. I felt it all!"

"Breathe..."



I barely slept last night. I could barely move around the house freely. My thoughts. My thoughts were leading me to a place I dreaded. A place I hated. A place of confusion. For the hundredth time ever I doubted my mother killing herself because of my father and how he treated her, or merely his stupid actions. I always say my mother was a strong and healthy woman who loved her children from heaven and back to earth. She wouldn't have let anything get her down — or

maybe this was all in my head. Maybe I failed to see all the signs I needed to see.

I park the car by the entrance of the cemetery, resting my head on the steering wheel before sniffing. I've caused my own congested nose it seems and one look in the mirror I could confirm I looked like crap.

Warm air blows my way the moment I step out with the bouquet of flowers. Walking to her gravesite felt like a drag. Maybe it was a drag because the closer I got to it, the further I felt from it. But it's not till I get there that I just fall to my knees overwhelmed by emotions. I was heating up inside, cracking my neck to relieve some tension. The clear sky above me and the blazing sun not seeming to care. Not even the bird that flew right past me seemed to fathom what I was dealing with right.

Nomakwezi is blaming me for not resting in peace. She's fighting me now. Retaliating at the person who didn't send her to hang herself in her own home. I feel like digging her out and telling her right in the face that I don't want to do this anymore. I don't want to see her in my dreams anymore, cause she's messing me up. She's toxic. I don't want her anymore. I can live happily without seeing her for the next ten years of my life without any care cause this was too much.

I dump the flowers right there and get up. I can't tolerate being here anymore. My phone rings and I hang up without checking

who was calling.

The mannequins follow behind as I start driving off. I don't know where to but I'm driving. I'm navigating my way through these bumpy roads until I find myself stopping at home.

I let out a deep breath before stepping out. I know I didn't bring Zonke's groceries but I think I'll just end up giving her the money. I just wanted to ask Zonke something about that night. Maybe she heard something. An argument between my mother and her husband. Maybe she saw something and decided not to say anything to us just because we were young.

My brows furrow the moment I open the door and hear music. Not just any music; music from Brandy. The music was coming from what was once my bedroom. There's clothes on the floor. Female clothes. Male clothes. Cheap looking male clothes. And I hear a giggle. She's definitely here with someone. Alakhe is here? The vibration between my breasts catches me in my snooping and I reach for it. "Hey. I'm at home -..."

"I know. I just wanted to hear your voice, because I don't like how you left our home this morning. I even cancelled my zoom meeting because I wanted to spend time with you until you felt better," he says and I'm all to blame for that.

Right now he probably thought I didn't care enough to explain my thoughts and feelings to him. I promise myself that I'll do all of that once I get back to Dalweni.

"And I didn't even give you a chance..." I mumble.

"...ngiyaxolisa my love I-..." The music gets louder and unconsciously I look towards my old room where the door stood wide open. The man comes out, towel wrapped around his waist, torso bare with beady chest hairs covering it.

I feel like one that has been slapped on the face when our eyes meet, the pipe in his mouth dropping to the floor; it's contents spilling like the line of clothes on the floor.

"I-..." I try continuing my words to Bangi but end up swallowing them when I hear Zonke say something, her arm taking his.

"Kanti what's taking you so long?"

I lower my phone quickly. Heart beating slowly.

Hayi marn. Naye ubhince ithawula.

Matching towels even...I don't need things to be spelt out for me for me to put two and sixteen together. I can see right through them and I can smell it.

"Nonozi I...what are you doing here?" His voice makes the hairs at the back of my neck stand.

"Are you tw- baba ulala no- oh God," my head does a spin, the vision in front of me gets blurrier. I can't feel my body...velvety red masks me... *Deeper...*

'Is she dead?'

'I think so.'

Chapter Fifty One.

"You will come across many people in your life. They will all have a purpose to fulfill. Some will teach you a lesson and some will leave your soul wounded. Some will love you for their selfish motives and some will love you unconditionally. Some will cheat you, lie to you and stab you in your back. Learn from the lessons life teaches you and don't waste your time on people who are there in your life for their convenience and who never take you seriously. Don't allow people to use you for their happiness. Just be Strong and don't let anything break you or leave you shattered. Choose the people whom you want in your life." x
Aarti Khurana

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"She's waking up...bring me the water," a voice echoes into my hearing as I force my eyes open. Ouch. My head bangs and my arm feels painfully tender. "Woza, sit up." He touches my painful arm and I wince, sitting up on my own. "Are you okay Nono?" I reach for my temple, trying to massage the dizziness out of my system. "You...you just fell hard on the floor. Here have some water."

I open my eyes to face this annoying voice kneeling in front of me, holding a glass of water with shaking hands. My eyebrows pull down while my upper lip pulls up, in pure — what's the word?

"You even smell like her," the words leave my mouth bitterly.

"Drink. The wa-..." He moves the glass closer.

"Angiwafuni amanzi wakho woknuka! (I dont want your shitty water!)" I slap the glass of water far from me and it breaks instantaneously.

"Calm down Nono, let me help you up."

"Don't you dare touch me! You disgust me!" I say looking him right in the eye. The same eyes he averts from me in shame.

"I think there's a bit of a misun-..."

"Shut up wena! Thula! A bit of a misunderstanding? Am I 5? I'm not stupid. I'm not blind!" He tries touching me again but the anger in me makes me slap him. A slap I could vouch I have never given anyone in my years of living. "Ngithe ungangibambi! Uyangyanyisa. (I said dont touch me, you disgust me)"

When he backs away I fight my way to my feet, feeling the impact of my fall. Zonke has said nothing since I gained consciousness, she's not even looking at me which is good cause all I see right now is a woman who has far suppressed any respect I have for her. She sat there on the couches I bought, arms folded, her body slouched forward while her foot annoyingly tapped on the cement floors.

Two mannequins come barging into the house but I stop them. It's a full house kwaDlamini and I'm getting crazier by the

second. "How does one sleep with her own daughter like that? How the fuck did you two even get to that level huh? You're slipping off your own daughter's panties while there's a whole sea of women your age to pick from?" I chuckle in disbelief taking a step back. It's getting hotter in here. "You're even...you're even having sex to mama's favourite songs? How sick can you two be?"

"Haybo so now we can't listen to Brandy because of ispoko?" Zonke finds her voice.

"Zonke." Her man warns her.

"That ghost was your mother Zonke. That woman carried you for nine months and raised you before she died...and then we all later find out from this pig that umama killed herself; That she hung herself in this very house because of something this bastard did...was this it? Is this why my mother killed herself wena!" I grab a vase and throw it at him but for his luck he manages to dodge it. "How long has this abomination been going on? Was this a horrible mistake?"

"Kade sayicala lento (we started this ages ago)," Zonke again.

"Ini? (What?)" Me.

"You heard me. Angithi there's no use hiding it anymore so why lie?"

"Zonke!" Her man takes a step towards her but stops, jumping straight into a jungle of painful sounding coughs. "Thula." Cough. Cough.

"Why? It's not like I don't enjoy the relationship I have with my father."

"Shut up marn Zonke!" He says and coughs again, holding his chest. At this point he could die for all I care. He could drop dead right here and I wouldn't shed a single tear for this monster. "Nono, she's lying. This was a horrible mistake. A horrible, terrible once off mistake Nonozi you have to believe me."

Zonke chuckles. "Believe you? Believe you how when she has the evidence of us...of this back at her fancy handout of a house?"

"Huh?" Me.

Silence.

"Please Nonozi see she's crazy cause what made up evidence is she talking about?" He tries to deny it but once again I could feel my sanity slip away. "This was a mis-..."

"Lu-...Luthando? Are you saying Lutha-...Yoh," I can't even finish my sentences.

"What are you talking about? Who's Luthando?"

"You know very well I fell pregnant."

"Hayi hayi, Zonke **musukqamba** manga, angazi lutho ngengane mina. (No, Zonke don't lie. I know nothing about a child.)"

"Well now you know. Congratulations you have a daughter," she says and claps her hands...

Mother brought me here for this? For me to see my own father and his own flesh sleeping together? She let me drive all those hours for amanyala anje? I See her in my head again, smiling bright and standing confidently in a forest of white roses. All of which changes. She's not smiling anymore, and her brightness turns dim and then dark.

I remember that dream where I first couldn't breathe anymore. She brought me here. She showed me the silhouette of a man who I can now definitely say is this pig. Wait...I couldn't breathe the moment I entered this house. Is it because of him?

Those intrusive thoughts cross my mind again and this time I'm not blocking them out. At this point I believe that these two are capable of anything including... — I think this time my empty stomach was going to bring up something.

"Animeni marn! (Would you two stop it!)" I shout and they go mute. Zonke even rolls her eyes at me but she's not who I want.

"Wena what did you do to my mother?"

"What do you mean?" He asks with a frown dominating his face.

"Ubhincene namathawula ukuthi ungibuze lowodoti? (You're wrapped in towels just to ask me that rubbish?)"

"Cha now you're disrespecting me Nonozi, I'm still your father."

"Father yoknuka!" I shake my head vigorously and spit on the floor. These two are going to drive me crazy. Especially this one with a big head. "My father would've been around my life

longer. My father would've ensured that his family is happy and healthy. My father would've never slept with his own daughter. You are not my father. My father died the moment he started sleeping-... You know what that was not what I asked, I want to know what you did to my mother!"

None of them can answer me.

"Did you kill her?"

None of them can even look at me right now.

"Why would you do that? Why would you deprive us of a mother like that when you could've just left her alone?" I roar. He's pissing me off when I want him to talk now. I grab the DVD player and toss it at him. "Khuluma!" I've destroyed the player. "Stop it Nono."

Yoh that name! I take the tiny sound system speaker, pulling it from its cable connections and already aim it at this devil. "Not the sound system wena Gimba!" The rough and cold hand holds me back before I hear a loud yell from the Devil's accomplice. "Yini manje? (What is it now?)" Her broke sugar daddy-father-baby daddy-whatever daddy asks in panic, rushing to a yelling Zonke who's shaking her hand in clear pain.

"This witch burned me again!"

Oh! I laugh in amusement. This is really happening again, right in front of my eyes.

"How could she burn you? She ha-..."

"Those beads baby, those bea-..." She says and I throw the speaker at them and manage to hit lo 'baby wakhe' right on the arm. Anger. "Are you crazy!" How I wished the impact was far worse but I'm satisfied-ish. Nxa. I have to leave.

I take my phone from the floor and get out of there cause I could feel heaviness on my shoulders, burdening me with each passing moment of being in there. Even the fresh air outside wasn't fresh. Nothing seemed beautiful. Nothing looked perfect or even felt familiar. Everything was shit. Everyone I looked at was shit too. I felt like everyone knew except for me that this was going on in here and that made me even more disgusted and pissed. I couldn't even be happy for the people who were out here to see me, or rather they were here to see the Princess who had everything in order.

The Princess who'd smile and wave at anyone passing her by was not here today.

Today there was only a Zanokuhle with a heavy heart who believes fully that her father killed her mother. She believed that he took the destiny of her life and squeezed it out of her. He played God with her life. She couldn't breathe because of him.

Ow my heart!

"Please take me to the Palace. And please don't tell Bangi what happened in there," I say to the two mannequins and get in one of the cars they came in. I couldn't even possibly begin driving with my emotions like this. I just wanted to be alone even if I were to get questioned for coming to that palace alone. I'm let in and get accompanied by Zakhele into the building. When none of the family actually spots me I'm thankful. I fish for my keys out of my handbag, unlock and make my way in after thanking Zakhele for walking me to here. Locking the door and sinking to the floor is what my body does next before I heave out a sigh. I can't even bring myself to cry.

The screen protector of my phone is cracked.

I go about calling my doctor, to tell her about my fainting incident. The questions that follow are nothing but hectic, but I reassure her, telling her that I was fine, I just injured my hand real bad. Funny how I felt none of that when I was throwing furniture at that thing mom considered her soulmate.

"Are you bleeding?" Dr Zulu asks.

I check, sighing in relief when I see none. "I'm not bleeding."

"Then you should be fine my Princess. But I want to make extra sure that there's still a baby in there with a strong heartbeat, can you make it down here in the next say...hour?"

I shake my head. "No, I'm not around Daliwe. I'm at the palace so it would take forever to get there."

"Okay. Well then I can arrange for a friend of mine who works around there to come and check you out. Is that fine with her highness?"

"Yes. Thank you."

"Please be safe."

"I will," I say and hang up. I don't know how much longer I sit on the floor for before I actually get up and dump myself on the couch, sitting back with my eyes close. Maybe sleep will help me feel better, even if I didn't want to dream. Dreaming is terrible. Dreaming is not fun anymore, its just a portal of my mothers terrible revelations.

I touch my beads remembering them burning Zonke. They didn't feel hot to me, making me wonder if they were just ordinary beads to begin with.

'Ungavumi...'

Ngingavumi ini? Ukuthi I should not agree to being around Zonke? Alone? I mean now it made sense why I would never go around her but is that what mama meant? Arghhh! I hate this. I loathed it all.

How could I even bring myself to look at her the same again after this. I wouldn't even know how I could begin to look at that pig and now with what Zonke said about Luthando I knew I could never bring myself to holding her the same way again. What is she even now to me? My sister?

My phone vibrates and I take it.

"Yes?" I even sound as dull and as empty as I feel.

"My Princess there's a doctor here who claims to have been requested by you, shall we allow him through?" A guard asks me.

"Yes," I hang up before getting up to go open for this doctor who arrived pretty quickly as well. I mean an hour and a half went by so quickly right now. He greets and tells me all that he's about to do to me before asking me most of the things Dr Zulu asked me. I still have little Shazi's heartbeat in me and that makes me feel somehow.

"Such conditions are not good for you or your baby My Princess. Fainting alone means you're not doing something right. You didn't get enough blood to your brain and-..."

"I know," I cut him off.

Silence.

"I'm sorry if I offended you," he says clearing his throat.

I reach down to my belly, biting hard on the insides of my bottom lip. I don't deserve any of this when I'm this toxic to my own child. I shouldn't be carrying the life that I'm carrying right now. Dr Magwaza was right. Fat people should not be pregnant. People with fathers partaking in incense should not be mothers

and definitely ones with heartless families if I could even call people around me family.

"I'll take my leave," he says getting up and starts packing his stuff away. Bit by bit he packs his things and that made me feel a bit bad for being this rude to him when he was only trying to help.

"I had a horrendous day," I blurt. "Sorry."

He halts his packing and looks at me a small smile on his face.

"Want to talk about it? I have great listening ears."

"So do I," Bangi says and I just knew it was him without having to turn around.

"Oh, My Prince. Bayede Shazi...my apologies," the doctor bows.

"I think your services here have reached their limit. I'll take it from here, with my wife," he emphasises.

"Of course," the doctor packs his things away faster than lightning now before leaving the house as if he was never here before.

I sigh, hugging myself. I wasn't ready for him. I wasn't ready for the questions either which I'm most certain he had for me. He puts a bag on the couch before coming to crouch in front of me. Now I'm wondering who looked more like crap, me or him. Probably me. "I came as soon as I could. After you left me on that call I knew something was up. I could just feel it, but now I

can see it. You're even sitting in the dark Sthandwa sam what...what happened?"

"I don't want to talk about it." I breathe out and look away.

"For better, for worse. I meant it. Talk to me Sthandwa sam. I want to know what's making you faint when you were perfectly fine when we went for a check up."

Bathong these guards. So loyal.

"Today I saw pigs fly. I heard talking camels," I put my hand on his, sighing. Not talking wont make the situation better. "I could probably have another sibling in my life right now."

"That doesn't sound like a bad thing moes."

"It does when the sibling is from my own sister."

"I'm not following manje Sthandwa sam." He says. I chuckle as I think of all of this again. "Are you saying...no wait what are you saying vele."

"Luthando could be my sister."

"Luthando Luthando? The Luthando we both know? How is that even possible cause Zonke is your sister?"

"That bitch is not my sister."

"Haa," he clears his throat.

"I'm serious. I'm done with her. I'm done helping her or trying to build a relationship with her that she will clearly always destroy no matter what. I want nothing that will connect me

with her including that child of hers. She must take her back and play this happy family I saw when I walked into my mothers house. You know I've always been disappointed with how she'd just throw any opportunity there is out there right back in the face of the giver. I thought I'd never find myself giving up on any person because I know myself. I know I'm too trusting, too naive even, too stupid-..."

"You're not stupid Zanokuhle."

"If I wasn't I would've noticed that my sister and father have been sleeping with each other since God knows when."

"You're serious?" He asks, eyes wide.

"Mama didn't kill herself Bangi. My mother would never and..."

I say and take a deep breath, shaking my head. I've gone from believing Nomakwezi died in her sleep for the longest time to she killed herself and now actually realising that's all bullshit.

I'm going to kill that man.

"Bangi, I even heard them asking themselves if she's dead after-...They lied Bangi! They lied to me and my siblings and kept lying for 15 whole years!"

"Calm down Sthandwa sam," he pulls me up and hugs me. I think this is the first time I truly cry since all of this.

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I wake up to Bangi shaking me awake lightly. I frown, a bit irritated that he woke me up during my sleep. But I didn't dream of anything in any case so there was nothing major to be frustrated over.

"I brought you something to eat."

"I'm not hungry."

"I don't believe that. And you have to eat if not for you then for our baby."

"Konje I don't matter right now." I mumble sitting up.

"That is not fair, even to yourself cause you know this is for you too. Sthandwa sam I know you're going through a lot right now and I understand. But what you're doing now is putting me in an awkward situation."

"I'll eat," I reach for the plate that had almost all my current cravings. He got me pie too and I felt bad for my attitude.

"Aren't you joining me?"

"I ate."

I nod and start digging in. "I organised for Buhle, Khaya and Luthando to come this side tomorrow." He says.

Luthando? Gosh. She's still a child Zano, she has done you no wrong nor would she even think of doing you wrong.

There's a knock on the door.

"You expecting someone?" Bangi asks. I shake my head before watching him go to open the door. The Queen walks in. "Ma, what are you doing here?"

"Am I not your mother?" She laughs with Bangi who I could clearly hear was trying hard to sound normal. "I'm kidding I heard that you two were back here and so I wanted to check up on you. See how you two are doing."

"We're fine ma, just watching my wife eat."

"Makoti." She greets and I get up placing my plate on the table.

"Hi," I force a smile.

"I hope everything is fine then." She says.

"Absolutely." I clear my throat.

"Weeh, Bangizwe I'm sure you haven't heard Alakhe went to the hospital this morning. He was complaining about muscle aches, diarrhea and a fever."

"Mhmm." Bangi.

"I know you don't care but I thought I should just let you know."

"Thanks ma. How about I come visit you tonight. Just you and I?"

"I'd appreciate that my boy, hayke, I'll see you then. Makoti, I'll see you too." She says and hugs the living daylights out of me.

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"I'll be back before you even know it," Bangi says and pecks my cheek. I nod And sigh the moment he leaves. I had no idea how

long his visit with his mom was going to be but this was it. Im in a baggy pair of tracksuits and some shades. I look like I'm about to dodge the police.

"My Princess, where are you headed?"

"Out."

"Then I shall accompany you"

"No, no no Zakhele I'm fine, I can drive myself."

"That I'm most certain of but allow me to do my job." I roll my eyes under these shades and end up agreeing. Without the Motorcade we drive off, I didnt want a loud trip.

I look around the tuck shop....

"How much will that be?" I ask reaching for a hundred from my purse.

"Just a 50 my Princess," the woman on the other side of the counter says. She saw me? I hand her the money taking my plastic of goodies.

"Keep it all," I say.

"Thank you, but my Princess you're not poor anymore. Why buy something like this?"

"I'm still human sesi," I answer flatly.

"Sor-..."

"I have to go, thank you for these."

The car drives in silence.

Standing here I remember back to when I younger, playing in this very yard with my toys and three year old Barbie doll. She looked like her age; hair that was golden blonde now cut into a mess with no clothing. I adored that doll until I searched for it and never found it ever again.

I remember asking Zonke to play with me and she would refuse, saying she was too old for that. She was 8.

I remember how she would prefer sitting with her dad on the couch under a blanket. He would kiss her on the lips too if mom wasn't watching. He wanted me to sit with him but I refused.

I wanted to play. I wanted a sister that would play with me. Kids around here were mean. They would laugh at me, but mama made sure I knew that they were foolish.

I remember her fighting with her husband because he quit another job again. His boss was rude he said. They fought the whole night.

I remember my mom in pain. Labour pains. 'I'm going to the hospital to buy your baby sister'. She spoke the truth.

I remember being trilled and excited.

I remember waiting impatiently for her to grow. Another sibling. A boy. Khayalakhe. Chubby cheeks and an ugly cry but the biggest heart. Zonke is getting more clothes when there's shopping done. She always got more.

I remember tears streaming down my face when I found her dead. I remember feeling empty. I remember her husband

telling my that she killed herself. I remember walking in on them about to do rounds. To Brandy's ; the boy is mine.

Nxa.

I walk further, heading to the backdoor and unlock.

Dark. Its the music that plays in my room that just irritates me more cause it's making me wonder who else she has locked in there. Is it someone I know? Do I care? I switch the light on before opening the bottle walking to the passage.

I pour it down the hallway and get to the lounge. I pour it all over the couch, the floor, the kitchen counters and cupboards. I run out of paraffin. I think it's fine anyway. As soon as my match is alight I throw it at the cupboard and it's immediate flames. Strong flames, burning down all the memories of this place.

I leave, shutting the door and locking it. I walk back to the car where that stubborn driver Zakhele was waiting for me. I watch a curtain catching the flames. I smile. "Lets go," I say to him and indeed we drive off.

Chapter Fifty Three.

"Trust is like an eraser, it gets smaller and smaller after every mistake."

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Since that day at the hospital, I have felt myself slip away into a place of utter sadness. An episode that would later be labeled as depression. I couldn't concentrate, my attention span was second to none and what made it worse was my inability to remember to take care of myself properly. Instead of my clothes growing tighter I could feel them get loose instead, but that didn't stop the heaviness of my soul. It would crush me every single time I'd try to go to sleep. I knew it would just stare at me with the — You should've known — eyes. It would laugh at me each night with it's tongue out and whisper things into my ear like, 'You are Stupid and useless!'

I believe that. I was stupid and useless. I should've known those two were liars and cheats. I should've known better than to trust a man that barely made my mother happy when she was

still alive and well. I should've known that my sister was groomed by this evil man. He violated her and I should've known and stopped her. The stupidity in me probably missed all the hints and signs she was throwing my way because I was too busy stuffing my fat self with food or just being my normal self-centered self. If I knew any better then I would definitely agree with the fact that they should've strangled me too, just to save this world from my meaningless existence.

'Okay Nonozi, I may have had a hand in her death but please can we talk about this. I can't loose you.'

Yes, he wrote 'loose'.

Grey, silently peaceful drizzles land on the window...dragging down and fall onto another droplet. It's been gloomy outside for the past two days and out of a whole month that has passed, I still felt the gaping hole in my heart. A hole of agony and pain. I hate it here. My sombre mood did feel a bit better today though after the talk I had with Dr Zondo, my psychologist.

She was forced onto me by Bangi of course after all his failed attempts to fix me himself. I'm telling you, it came to a point

where he hid everything that even looked like a weapon of destruction to me.

He hid the pills, the knives and anything he thought I'd use as a way of harming myself. He even forbade me to take baths, only showers. It was a lot and it still is but right now I probably was thankful for his efforts than I was before, especially since I know now that what I have is serious.

Dr Zondo called it situational depression and yes, I didn't know what to do with that information because I never thought I'd be faced with that. Depression was something I taught about, warning kids about the signs and symptoms and helplines they could use to reach out for assistance, never thinking I'd be sitting in that chair myself.

A sleepy sigh snaps me out of my window thoughts causing me to turn back to the man in our bed. His hand was stretched out to my side even if he didn't awaken immediately. I think he just got too used to me not having enough peaceful sleep these days. I make my way back to bed and remove my gown before climbing in and snuggling closer to his warm skin. He stirs again, putting the hand I was resting on behind my back, opening his eyes slightly only to close them again.

"Baby?" I call out.

"Mmmm?"

I clear my throat, snuggling closer to him.

"Are you awake?"

"HmMMM."

"Is that a no?" I question and he shakes his head. I take my hand and put it on his chest, picking on the tiny hairs that grew on there. "It's raining again outside, it looks beautiful."

"That's even more reason to snuggle up to me so that you don't get cold." He says in his sleepy voice.

"I thought that maybe I should use this moment of closeness to say I'm sorry," I say and watch his eyes shoot open before he gazes at me.

"What are you sorry for mama?"

"For my drama. I haven't been myself for the past couple of weeks and I know that wasn't the best time to be around me," I say and stop the moment he shakes his head, obviously disapproving what I've just said.

"Don't call your mental health 'drama' Sthandwa sam. You weren't yourself because of trauma and the fact that you had

to unlearn every single thing you've learned so far. I didn't expect it to be easy for you which is why I understood. I understand even now because I love you. For better or worse remember?"

"I remember," I smile a little before seeing his and smile even more.

"Good of you to remember cause I want that instilled into your mind so that every single time you do something, even if its just driving around this yard that you're stuck with me and I'm stuck with you," he says making me lean in and peck his lips. I haven't done that in ages and it shows with my own reaction. Somehow I just see myself as this terrible neglectful human being...

"Don't."

"Don't what?" I lay my head back on his chest again.

"Over think."

"I'm not."

"You are Sthandwa sam."

I sigh and keep my mouth shut cause he was right about what he's saying right now and he knows it. The flutters in my stomach were getting serious now and at five months, I could finally say I was showing. I place my hand on my stomach and

think of how much time I've wasted on other things instead of on my baby. I haven't even had enough time to bond with my baby the proper way that I should've because of the drama. I should've been reading books, gathering more information about babies and plan a gender reveal party cause that's what I truly wanted. I've always preferred it over a baby shower because it's exciting. My yoga instructor must've also truly never had a student like me before because I was definitely not great.

I have truly given other people too much power over my life. Sies.

"What time is it?" Bangi asks bringing me out of my thoughts.

"Uhhh...past eight the last time I checked, why?"

"What! Why didn't you tell me. You, me, shower now!" He says jumping off the bed in a split second, leaving me lying there confused. "Come!"

"Why? What's going on?" I question with a shrug.

"I'll explain later. Come on."

I sigh and drag my lazy ass all the way to the bathroom with him. He already has the hot water running and his boxer shorts were already off hence I stopped with the questions before I joined him in a quick shower. I couldn't help but giggle with wonder as I washed away the pains of yesterday. My mood was definitely anew today which I appreciated cause I really didn't like my dull attitude.

He steps out first leaving me in there for a couple of minutes before I follow him.

"So....you still won't tell me what's going on?"

"It's a surprise," he says turning to me with a smirk.

"A surprise for who exactly?"

"You."

"Me?" I ask, and embrace the new excitement gushing through my body.

"Yes," he flashes me a smile. Now I'm the one rushing to dry and lotion my body. Once dressed in a pair of jeans and a long sleeve peplum top I try doing my make up.

I may have left that shower last but I was done first, seated and waiting for my husband to finish too. A suit? Well damn...this must be a serious surprise then.

"I seriously couldn't have taken that long for you to even finish," he chuckles and I get up from the bed, searching for my handbag. I haven't been out for that long it seems.

Nandi is downstairs with Luthando feeding her breakfast. A sight I appreciated and wouldn't mind attending to today if I was the one to look after her. "Morning," I greet.

"Morning Your Royal highness, I see you're looking mighty fine today. Headed somewhere?"

"Indeed Ms Gatya, remember what we discussed a few days back?"

"Ah, oh yes," her face lights up and I frown, wondering what these two have planned. "Well in that case then I wish you a safe journey. Luthando and I will be fine."

"Thank you. My love let us not waste any more time," he allows me to hook my arm around his before we walk out. Where could he possibly take me in such weather? Not that it was bad or anything because it did look like it was clearing up by now.

"So...you still won't tell me?" I ask walking with him under the umbrella he held. Curiosity was playing with my head cause I

couldn't begin thinking of where he could possibly be taking me. "Are you taking me to a restaurant?"

"Nope."

"Hawu, okay are you taking me to the movies?" I ask as he opens the door for me.

"Get in," he says with a conniving smile on his face. I shake my head and step in carefully, watching him walk all the way around to his seat. "You still look curious... Stop I'm not telling you."

"What if I guess it right?"

"I still won't tell you."

"Are you taking me to the mall?"

"Why would I take you to the mall?"

"For shopping hawu, I haven't shopped outside in forever."

"You mean you haven't been out of that house in forever?"

"Mxm," I fold my arms, I guess this was not going to get me anywhere cause he was set on not telling me anyway. I sulk and look out of the window.

I wondered how Nyiso was doing right now since things were still dim between the two of us. I hope me calling her and

telling her that I'm sorry will be enough...actually when has 'sorry' ever been enough.

"Don't pull away..." Bangi invades my space. I look at him, the glee he had earlier now gone and only worry filled his face.

"I'm not."

"What are you thinking of then?" He asks, taking my hand into his.

"Nyiso."

"Your friend is fine."

"Fine how when I practically pushed her away?"

"See where the power of explaining lies? Sthandwa sam, Nonkanyiso is a very understanding friend from all that I've seen from her. You two understand each other probably even better than I do, so I'm pretty certain she'll understand your words well. Okay?"

"Mhnn," I rest my head on his shoulder as we calmly drove through the rain.

Minutes later we arrive at a place I had no clue was for what. By now it kinda stopped raining. A helicopter? My frown to him

has him giggling slightly before my door is opened by Zakhele and he helps me out of the car.

"You like?" Bangi inquires.

"What is going on here?" I reply with a question myself, stung with more wonder in my head.

"I thought I'd take you somewhere in style."

"What's wrong with driving?"

Okay, now I know the nerves have taken over because I haven't been on anything that defies gravity in a minute. Could you even fly while pregnant or...? Isn't the weather too bad for this too? Again I ask what was wrong with just driving to this somewhere?

"Where the fun in that? Come." He holds his hand out for me to take.

"You're crazy," I put it there and we get a move on to meet the guy who I could confidently call the pilot.

"Tim, is she ready?" Bangi asks.

"She is." Tim answers.

"Woah wait, you're not the one flying us right?"

"And what if I am?"

"Bangi don't you dare think of putting our lives at risk when-..."

"Okay...I'm kidding. Tim will be the pilot and I think we shouldn't waste any more time...after you."

The inside is far better than what I wouldn't even imagined I'd see in a mere helicopter, not to even mention the one I'm stepping into. The helicopters on TV lied! They never have white leather seats with golden embezzlements that almost look as comfortable as massaging chairs. The seats surrounded the medium size table and on the floor was premium clean looking carpet which I didn't want to step on. No way. I'm going to pee myself with all of this excitement in me, even my flutters could vouch for all these emotions.

I take a seat in one of the seats that I had my eyes on before Bangi comes to help me buckle up. I watch him skilfully do that while thinking to myself that I surely could've managed on my own. "There we go. You okay Sthandwa sam?"

My head moves in a nod before I could even think of the words to assure him. Soon enough the pilot said something and the plane lifted off up and into the air. Oh my goodness. The goosebumps on my skin increase when I glances out of the

nearest window. The view was amazing. The Grass on the fields was nice and green, the trees are blossoming bright emerald green with hints of red and purples. The building we were in got tinier and tinier too. I was hypnotized by the greatness of this Kingdom to the point where I didn't feel like keeping this memory in my head only would work.

"This is beautiful baby," I say.

"There's still more to see

Advertisement

" he says with such ease that it shocks me.

"More?"

"More for you my love..."

What could be more breathtaking than this already because I wouldn't mind seeing all of this the whole day. We fly over a few grasslands and beautiful landmarks I couldn't believe I haven't visited yet. The wildlife...the rivers that I wish I could explore closer than I was and the people who were doing what they would do on their regular day had my mind busy.

The flight manages to keep me busy until I spot an unusual scene of red on a hill. I squint my eyes to take a closer look at what looked like words written in white. Haybo. "You're valued Mrs... Shazi?" And I'm not reading it wrong cause the helicopter gets closer to the words and I'm just in awe. What the hell! "Bangi..."

"Yes baby?"

"How?" I look at him confused.

"It's amazing what a great budget and wild ideas with millions of roses can do for you. You are worth it Sthandwa sam."

"Bangi," I'm near tears as I end the video of my over emotional self in a hot minute, while shedding more embarrassing tears. I didn't even think of my worth, never mind even remember that in this tough moment. He's by side hugging me tightly and I manage to calm myself down.

"There's still more."

"No," I shake my head because of the thought of there being something much better than almost more than a million roses writing out my name on a hill.

"And we're almost there," he says causing me to look up at him while wiping my tears away. He smirks while shaking his head.

"Still a beautiful crybaby I see."

"Mxm, suka la," I playfully hit his shoulder and he retreats to his new seat which is next to me now instead of across me.

I'm still in disbelief even when we get to a place I've obviously never been to before. Another nature filled resort with the most breathtaking scenery I've ever witnessed. Where does this man find these places? Lunch set out for two in the middle of nowhere? Yes please. There are people there ready to greet us and suddenly feel nervous and self conscious. I felt like everyone could see my baby bump and were just commenting on it. The paranoia in me just wouldn't let me get over the fact that this could spread throughout the whole kingdom and possibly the whole world like a wildfire. I feel Bangi reach for my hand and whisper into my ear. "You like it?"

"It's okay," I shrug.

"Just okay?" He asks, the whisper gone now and makes me chuckle.

"Yes. I've seen better,"

"Better where?"

"I'm kidding hawu, were you genuinely going to keep asking me questions if I didn't like this place?"

"Yes I was," he squeezes my hand and brings it up to his lips, kissing the back lightly. I do the same, bringing it to my lips to peck.

"Thank you for this. I didn't think I needed it until now," I say and glance around once more before focussing back on him.

We get served a hot and delicious lunch, one courtesy of a queen and the human in my belly made me enjoy a hefty load of garlic bread. No kisses until we get home I guess. We headed out and made our way back to the helicopter where I was just full with the great food we both just had. Truly I had no words for this beautiful day we took on here and I knew now that I had to up my gifting game because this was spectacular.

"Did I thank you for this?"

"About a thousand times already," he says as we flew back to where this helicopter had been prior.

"Add this one to your list of thank you's too. I'd kiss you if my mouth wasn't a garlic bomb," I smile and rub on my belly.

"Also...those waiters can we trust them not to say anything about our bundle of joy in here?"

"Is that why you were so self conscious the whole time about your top?"

"Was I that obvious?"

"Very. I saw you relax just after we sat down cause you even started taking photos of the two of us. But don't worry about any of that because that's where the power of NDA's come in. All of them had to sign that...even Tim so that whatever was said and done back there stays there until we decide otherwise."

Indeed I feel myself releasing a sigh of relief and take out my phone to see how those pictures looked like. Gorgeous... Even though you could see that I was probably going through something. The helicopter lands and we step out again with me grateful that we had a safe flight to and back. Now I'm wondering why we just didn't fly to every place...which is utterly ridiculous Zano.

Somehow I manage to fall asleep on our drive back and once in the yard Bangi wakes me up by shaking me slightly.

"We're home," he says and kisses my cheek before I pull myself up and off his lap, stretching because I haven't slept that peacefully in a while it seemed. "Come."

My half awake-half asleep self follows him while draped around his arm like his charm.

"Sthandwa sam..."

"Baby?"

"Can I confess?"

"About?" I ask. I don't know why I was already cooking up different scenarios in my head when I haven't even been hinted about what this confession is about.

"I have one more surprise for you and I hope you'll love it," he says. I stop dead in my tracks when I notice we weren't headed for the front door but rather the left side of this place. He hands me a box. One big enough to fit my palm.

Z.S...

Oh my goodness. I open it, also wondering where in heavens name he got it from.

A booklet?

"Open it," he smiles widely.

Okay. I open the tiny booklet after reading its Front cover name. "Things do happen..."

Things do happen?

What things?

A screenshot with the name Mkami greets me and the contents have me frowning. Wait a minute...

'Why isn't the lovely Lady asleep yet?' his text read.

'Who's this lovely Lady you keep talking about?' I replied back to him.

'The same woman who's texting me back right now.'

'Oh? So you go around calling everyone 'lovely' and 'Lady'?'

Bathong I remember this day. We weren't even a thing yet, just acquaintances with awkward vibes who just didn't see all this innocent talking getting us to this very moment — In love and pregnant.

'Nope. Just the particularly pretty ones who drive cars that breakdown.' That was his reply.

Oh my goodness Chery!

Why am I crying?

These untimely hormones!

'That literally happened once.'

Actually...

'One time too many.' He replied to his damsel. I chuckle and wipe my tears away.

'You talk like you'd buy me a new car.' I texted him back with an embarrassing smirking emoji. What the heck was I thinking back here?

'Let's say I probably would. What car would you want?'

'Hypothetically speaking it would be a BMW'

'What make?'

'A 2019 8 series'

'The M850i? Good car. Great engine too.'

"You actually kept all of these texts?" I ask looking at him and he nods.

"And there's one more page I want you to read aloud," he says.

"O...okay, uhmm...now that I've reminded you of how cheesy we were I just want you to calm down and breathe because I'm sure you're crying..." I glance up and give him a look. Really?

"...things do happen and today I'm turning my 'probably would' into a 'definitely did'. She's yours my love." I read and the moment I look up I feel my water breaking.

I'm kidding.

But I could absolutely feel my heart stop for a second as I looked back at the brand new M850i starring back at me in a bold blue-ish color and big red ribbon. No he didn't. He didn't. "Bang! you didn't..."

"She's all yours Sthandwa sam," he says and I shiver in shock as he says that to me. Me? Me? No ways.

The box even has the keys solidifying all the words he just spoke and my mind goes ballistic. I scream and suffocate him in a mother of all hug not caring what anyone around me thought. This man is insane indeed. I rush over to have a closer look at it and I couldn't believe what I was seeing in front of me. The seats had my initials like his did but I somehow felt like mine were absolutely better.



Who am I to forget the day my husband made me a proud owner of an 8 series? Not forgetting the fact that he even made me forget every other thing that's been going on in my life prior to last week. Somehow we even trended for some weird reason. But yes, I've been working on myself since and have since attended another session of intense therapy. I was given the task of going out there to evaluate the one thing that makes me the most angry. Is it how I lost my mother...or how my father and sister have been conducting their private abominable acts...or how our family dynamic was always before my current life.

Is there any good my past carried for me?

Well obviously...not everything was bad when I was growing but maybe I wasn't ready to dig all of that up again. For what cause I was still not going to want those two back in my life.

Oh my Jesus!

I was looking at this place I once called home in nothing but shock as it remained there in it's burned glory. I did all of that? Sheesh. I step out of the car and scanned the whole area, realising that both our neighbours houses look the same. They

stood proud and clear while ours was down and out. I heave out a sigh overcome with emotions with guilt not being in any of them.

The roof had burned off completely giving any vultures access to this place, which would fully explain the condition it was in. The half burned couches, tables, the cupboard frames and stove that refused to burn properly. I don't see the TV though...or let me rather say some of the stuff weren't here anymore including the safeness I'd feel when I was here.

My old room seemed better, but kept angering me when I remembered that they were in here doing — I seriously need to stop. I shouldn't have come here. I need to call people and have them demolish and remove these remains so that I could quite possibly sell this property if it was sellable. Then go see if I could find that property my mom would talk about when she was still among the living and then take it from there with recreating her idea of being alive. Her home...where that monster and that witch that lives with her daddy lover would never set foot in ever again.

Getting back at our home I'm welcomed by noise between Nandi and Luthando chasing each other around like mad people. Mad people who were having fun it seems and I honestly would've joined if I didn't drain most of my energy

back at the place of ashes. Never mind...the cautious runner runs towards me and hides behind my leg laughing. "I'm going to get you!" Nandi says and an adorable laugh leaves the back of my foot. This walking warrior came to me for protection and it was up to me to do so. I kick my heels off and grab her, up and into my arms before trying to dodge an athletic Nandipha.

How am I tired already? Sheesh I'm running for three so what did I expect? Luthando on the other hand is not even aware of my unfit chronicles because she's just laughing and pulling on my top with her sticky hands. I think after a minute or two rather of doing this we stop chasing each other and rest. I go put her on the kitchen counter giving her some juice. I opt for my water, drinking it like I was on survival mode.

"I'm so tired. It feels like I went to jog around the blog but no, I ran in my lounge and kitchen," I say and hear Nandi chuckle.

"I didn't expect you to run like a champ after a month of not doing anything physical with yourself. Give yourself a chance to ease back into things," she says making me feel a tad but better.

"Thank you for that, even though I wish gym or any physical exercises would show results immediately after you give them a shot, manje."

"I second that my Princess," she says and we laugh, while I wipe Luthando's sticky hands clean with a cloth.

"How about you take the rest of the day off and I'll take care of things for the rest of the day?"

"No need my Princess," she says.

"I insist Nandi, go have fun. Don't even come in tomorrow."

"My Princess, are you sure?"

"One hundred percent sure. Go," I say and she comes to engulf me with a hug. Taking her bag before rushing out in excitement, it's only once she's out that I realise what I've truly done. I chuckle and look down at this chubby baby in front of me who's drinking her juice passionately.

I can't believe she's been here for so long really since we took her from the man I'd still consider her father, who by the way texted me asking me to allow her to visit him. He must still feel the gap she left after the truth came out in bulks to him, not allowing him a chance to breathe. I'm not really sure why I'm delaying their visitation when I could've jumped on the opportunity.

She hands me the empty bottle with a smile before I take it and wipe her mouth off cause she somehow managed to spill some

on herself even with the help of a straw. Nonetheless her and I head upstairs so I could change into comfortable clothing just so I could call and check up on my husband and both my siblings. I text Nyiso after Lu falls finally falls asleep, suggesting we meet up for coffee or in my case juice tomorrow and talk.

She replies with a confidence boosting yes and I mark one more challenge off my list. Making dinner was next. Lamb chops...samp, the quick and easy one, chakalaka and a spiced up serving of broccoli.

When Bangi comes back home I've already set the table and put Luthando in her seat eating her food bit by bit. I rush over to him, attacking him with a hug and kiss which leaves him smirking. "I definitely missed this," he says holding me by my waist.

"I know right? Now give me that bag and tie and go sit on down. I'll serve you in a minute," I say.

"I thought I'd go upstairs and freshen up first."

"And come back after 30 years? You know those stairs. Go sit," I order him and he raises his hands up in defeat, making his way back to his seat. Soon enough we're seated and eating. I was eating up both the chops and the complements he gave me.

"How was the visit?" I question, cause it was another visit to the charity he pretty much ran more now.

"Busy, we were busy throwing some ideas around that would obviously benefit the place. So we got to the conclusion that a fundraiser evening would be perfect."

"Ooouuu, a night with the rich and famous. I see and like... So when is it happening?"

"Next week," he says with so much ease the words don't stick the moment they leave his lips. How does he even do that?

"Next week? Haybo, kanjani,"

"Kahle nje. I already have Lerato organising the event."

"Uyasangana wena baby. A week? Like just seven days and then a celebration? Hectic. Poor girl," I down some of my juice already seeing the struggle of getting the perfect garment for this event...in a week.

"Will your family be there? I'm thinking we tell them the news before we have the big reveal to the world."

"Maybe they'll make it. I'll ask," he says and I nod.

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My phone vibrates twice awakening me from my sleep. My light sleeping tendencies shining through at... 03h00 in the morning. What the hell. I unlock it and notice it was an SMS from an unsaved number with just a 'hi' message with it. With a frown I leave the text like that and attempt on going to sleep but a pang of hunger hits me. Dammit. Now I have to get up too just to feed a craving. Just as that thought flashes my mind my phone vibrates again. Same number. Different text.

'I miss you baby.'

Ini? I look over to Bangi's side and he's dead asleep, making me frown. I seriously have no energy for this, just the mission of going to see what the downstairs fridge has to offer me. I block the number and put my phone back on my bedside table, quietly slipping out of my husband's hold.

Chapter Fifty Four.

"some of the best moments in life are those you can't tell anyone about."

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The dark hallway and flight of stairs journey welcomes me with familiar arms and a silent moment. This allows me to think again about the good, the bad and the weird that's been going on in my life. I'm not even sure anymore about when my next doctor's appointment is but surely I could check when the sun rises.

My hunger confuses me as I stand in front of a fridge of multiple choices and not really knowing what I want and need. Plain Yogurt?

Argh, what the heck.

That will surely have to do then, along with a handful of assorted berries. Gently I mix in my fruit and devour on a spoonful and thankfully it hits the spot.

The same spot that reminds me of that 3am text. It couldn't have been from Nyiso surely because for starters she would use the name we use to call each other and second of all she would've stated that it was her. None of my other acquaintances would engage in such confusing acts, most especially business people.

Where did this person even get my number when I could literally count the number of people I communicate with.

You know what... It probably isn't even that serious because if it was, the person would've called or clarified. People make mistakes too, maybe that message was sent to me by mistake and I totally understood

"Ma'Dlamini," his words startle the shit out of me.

"Hhayi marn Bangi!" I say my heart still racing like crazy. "You want my water to break or something?"

"Cha, I'm sorry Sthandwa sam," he wraps his arms around my waist and buries his head in my neck.

"It's fine anyway. I thought I managed to sneak out undetected, but obviously I failed at that." another spoonful fills my mouth before I realize he's still not letting me go. "Is there something you want to say Mr Shazi?"

"Yes. Come to bed."

"But I'm still snacking here because of your baby," I say and hear him chuckle.

"So my baby is getting blamed for everything now?"

"Maybe... But you can go and I'll join you in a few minutes."

He doesn't answer me but continues basking in my presence for a while longer. After eating at least a few more scoops of my delicious yogurt I sigh and reach out for his head, feeling his rough hair on the palm and fingers of my hand. He lets out a low sleepy groan and wraps his arms tighter around my waist, bringing me closer to his body.

"You...you want a snack too?" I ask sticking my butt out and like earlier he stirs and lets out an almost inaudible sound deep within his throat. He doesn't need me to spell out what I meant as he grabs on my breasts, kissing on my neck. I put my yogurt on one of the fridge shelves and reach down at the black thongs I was in, pulling them down past my hips and thick thighs before they pool by my feet.

He spans me, causing me to giggle and lift my leg for him to easily access what was his for this moment.

I can already feel the wetness in my pussy and this is all caused just by thinking of him doing things to my body.

He rubs himself on my entrance, groaning again in what I'd assume is appreciation for this heavenly body. "I love you Ma'Dlamini," he says.

"I lo-..." the words don't even leave my mouth fully when he fills me up without any warning and takes in a deep breath, while I was adjusting to him. When he starts moving its not slow. He's fast, taking all of me in need and greed. I grab tighter on the fridge, holding on because I knew I'd fall if I didn't.

"Crap. "

How does he feel bigger and harder? How does he feel better and way within my intestines?

"You feel that sthandwa sam?"

"Yes baby..." I breathe out now meeting his deep thrusts. That seems to fuel him even more cause he picks up the pace. "ah!" it's only the sound of our bodies slapping on each other and our heavy breathing that fills this kitchen.

I took his hard dick putting it right by my entrance and he pushes only half of himself back in now, thrusting. Feeling it covered in my arousal made me even more turned on. At that moment I felt like I was in heaven and him putting his fingers on my clit was not making the situation better. Now the wheels were definitely in motion. "Bangi."

"mhnn?" he groans.

"Please, I need all of you. All of you deep inside of me," I beg.

And to my plead he fills me up, hitting deeper again hitting that spot that makes me feel like peeing.

He thrusts once... Twice... Thrice... And then rests balls deep again.

Yoh!

I cry out loud, chanting his name, yearning to touch him. I know that I'm about to reach my climax so I contract around him and he stops completely, pulling my head back to kiss me on the lips. I don't know if I'm mad or something when he murmurs an

"I love you Ma'Dlamini," before fucking me again. Faster. Harder. Both of us are breathing loud and proud and I get swept away by a painfully delectable orgasm that has my whole body shaking. Not long after that he grabs onto my waist, almost stilling and I feel him come deep inside of me.

Moments of us catching out breaths, he plants soft kisses on my shoulders before leaving me empty. And in a matter of seconds I feel the wetness dripping out of me. I need to go get cleaned.

"Ngiyabonga Sthandwa sam," he kisses my neck. "God bless you." he adds.

"Haybo."

Well I have never.

What the heck?

I burst out in laughter, pushing him away from me. "I think its time we go back to sleep, yoh." I say.

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I open my eyes to find Bangi looking at me with a smile growing on his lips. "Haybo, yini?" I frown.

"Can't I stare at your gorgeous pregnant self sthandwa sam?"

"I feel so exhausted though... And you think I'm gorgeous?"

"Every single day," he says brings himself closer to my lips, kissing them for a good moment.

"are you trying to turn me on again Mr Shazi?"

"If it's working then yes," he says and I giggle, sitting up to stretch my whole body. I need to pee and that's when I excuse myself, going to empty my bladder. When I come out he's busy making the bed.

"You know I would've done that," I say and go open the curtains.

"I don't want you bothering yourself you should be resting you're pregnant remember?"

"Pregnant not disabled plus I have some energy now that I want to put to good use." I say inspecting the weather outside which was peaceful and calm.

"And how are you really feeling today I did not ask that when you woke up... how are you?"

"Better. If you're asking about Eve and her father, then I really wasn't thinking about them until now," I say shrugging and go to sit on the double couch in this room.

"Sorry. I don't want you thinking of those good for nothing beings when there's so many other things we could be focusing on...like the fundraiser."

"That." I sit back sighing and wondering what am I going to wear to this fundraiser evening. Was it going to be something tight or something hiding our little gift in here?

"Sound a little more excited now will you?" he comes to sit next to me placing a hand on my thigh.

"I'm sorry, I'm just thinking of the worst right now."

"Like what?"

"What if the public doesn't take the news well about our pregnancy?"

"aw'kahle Sthandwa sam, did the public get you pregnant?"

I sigh again and give him a look. "What about the rest of your family then? I'm not even going to think of all the bashful and demeaning things Alakhe will bestow upon my head. I know his ways by now but I just feel so fragile. I don't think I would take him shaming my body or saying things like you Shouldn't have gotten me pregnant," I say and feel him tightening his hold on my thigh.

"Then we won't tell him, simple. "

"How long will that be for then Bangi? Cause eventually he'll know. We all know he'll know."

"Please don't even start stressing yourself over people like Alakhe. I'll deal with him if he proves difficult to handle. Alakhe needs to know his place cause at the end of the day you're my wife. I love you. I chose you over him and a lot of other things so he has no right to break you like this. Look at me... " I lift my eyes up to look at him. "... I'll be here. If he tries anything on you, he will know me."

"You're amazing you know that... I even have flutters in my stomach," I put his hand on my stomach not expecting much because it was still a couple of weeks before he could feel our little boy or girl kick for the first time.

"I feel something..."

"Ha! You're lying!" I laugh but still feel on my belly too just to be sure to which he bursts out in laughter.

"Why did you feel too then if I'm lying?"

"Mxm, suka," I shake my head removing him from my stomach and get off the couch before hearing my phone vibrate from my bedside table.

"Let me go shower then," he kisses my cheek. "Want to join me?"

"I'm right behind you," I say and he kisses me again, leaving me to go to the bathroom. I open the texts and frown. It's another unsaved number just like earlier today.

'u look btfl 2day'

What?

It vibrates again and it's another message from whoever this was.

'Pregnancy looks gud on u 2. Should hve been my bby thou.'

Is this Alakhe? Oh my goodness it is! This creep is busy making me feel like he's watching me right now... But what if he was?

"Sthandwa sam," Bangi startles me and I freak out, releasing a breath I shouldn't have been holding. "Calm down, it's me."

"I... Don't do that Bangizwe. Bathong can't you just stop being so sneaky? Hayi marn you'll make our hearts stop beating because of stupid things like these," I say and walk off to the bathroom, strip down to my birthday suit and step into the steamy shower. I shower alone and step out to dry my entire body before going to check on the man who didn't join me.

He's seated on the bed with my phone in his hand scrolling through it and I feel myself get irritated.

"What are you doing with my phone?"

"Who's busy texting you?"

"Wena wenzani ngephone yami?" I fold my arms in front of my chest and hear him chuckle.

"You know you did the same thing last time when I touched your phone and you were busy getting calls from that dumb ex

of yours. You became defensive and just different and I don't get why you do that."

"Who's to say those messages are from Zweli?"

"I didn't say it was from him."

"Then what are you saying?"

"Why not tell me about this other than other than fighting me when I'm by your side?"

I look away, half and half ashamed because that was the first thing I had to do, and it wasn't even a hard task. Now he's mad at me, and it was all because of me and my choices. I don't even know what to call this but it surely is something.

"I'm sorry," I say and watch him shake his head getting up and heading to the bathroom after leaving my phone on the bed.

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The car is dead quiet, with no one looking at each other. I have no idea what's on his mind but mine is still on those texts and why Alakhe decided it was okay for him to text me with

messages he should be directing towards his wife. I'm pretty sure Khethiwe would enjoy the love and attention from her man especially since Zonke has been out of the picture for a while now... That's also if she hasn't seen her absolute worth and left that scum. Maybe she did leave him and that is why he thought it was fine for him to text me abo 'I mic u my luv'

So desperate. Even in times where he can be focusing on his life and moving his own forward. He could find someone better, someone who'll tolerate his personality and love him for who he is. That someone is not me, and it never has been.

My phone vibrates from my handbag and I'm nervous to retrieve it from in there. What if it was Alakhe being creepy again?

"Oh," I breathe out and open the message from Nyiso reading it in my head. Wait a minute.

'Where are you?'

'I'm in a car with hubby, why?'

'I've been waiting for you here for 30 minutes now.'

'We're meeting today?'

'You forgot didn't you?'

'Yoh, I'm sorry'

'Pregnancy brain leyo ke, it's fine we'll reschedule. But you owe me,' she texts me and I don't even refuse responsibility because it did completely slip my mind.

I sigh and sit back a little before my phone vibrates again. Probably Nyiso telling me of what I owe her in detail that was going to be expensive. Oh never mind, it's not.

As soon as I open the mms I freeze.

What. The. Hell.

I drop my phone, the image still fresh in my head.

"Sthandwa sam

" Bangi holds my arm as I remained frozen on my seat. I can't believe what I just saw. "are you okay?"

Where is this guy 's sense of respect? Pride yona where is it? Bangi reaches down picking up my phone and looks at it. "What the fuck! Is this the same person who's been texting you?"

"Alakhe, is disgusting," I say under my breath.

"Alakhe? This is from that piece of sh-..." he doesn't finish his sentence but I could hear the anger he had in him now. He was breathing fire. A wild fire and there was nothing I was going to say or do because I was also angry. I was tired of Alakhe harassing me like this.

I don't know what he says to Zakhele but the car drives faster in a direction that was all too familiar. My mind was thinking of every possible outcome but none of the outcomes got to us actually being at the palace with him marching towards the entrance leaving me trailing behind, calling out for Alakhe.

"Bangi!" That's Ama, who catches up with me. "what's going on?" she questions and I don't even know what to say.

"Where is he!" Bangi invades their parents house.

"Who?" the Queen.

"That pathetic son of yours, where is he!"

"What is the meaning of this?" his father asks.

This commotion has brought out almost every worker in this palace to come and witness for themselves what was going on.

"Makoti, what's going on?" my mother in law ask.

"Leave my wife out of this, all I want is that scum," he shouts.

"Bangizwe please calm down my son, this is not the way you should deal with things. I'm sure with whatever is going on we can solve it without all this commotion," she says trying to calm him down. Does he listen? No.

Instead he storms out of here.

"Bangi please!" I finally say, chasing after him again.

"All of you get back to work! Do you want me to fire you!" the King commands. It's not long till I spot Alakhe at a far distance. He was probably on his way to see what was going on here.

"Bangi!"

"You clearly don't get that what's mine is mine alone do you?" he asks Alakhe.

"What the fuck are you talking about?" Alakhe asks.

"Don't test me Alakhe! You know exactly what I'm talking about."

"I see now... You got bored at that place of yours and now you've come to bother my peace. So unless you say what ever the fuck you want to say I suggest you move right along," he says taking a step closer to Bangi who also does the same, looking down at him.

"My love," me. I don't want them to fight. I don't want Bangi to be sent to prison again for doing something to Alakhe.

"Is she getting fatter?"

Bangi chuckles. "No big brother. My wife, is pregnant. With my child."

What happened to us not telling him?

Alakhe throws me a chilling look, one that made me see a deadlier side to him. A side that didn't look human. A side that makes me never want to cross paths with him ever again. I was

about to move away from then when Bangi is pushed onto me. Something trips me, knocking me off my feet.

I land on my side shocked at how hard that fall was. With that still registering in my head I feel pain in my lower back – an all too familiar pain.

"Oh my God!" the Queen is by my side, helping me up.

"Guards!" Bangi's father calls out and they come to aid in stopping the two who are at each other's throats. I didn't even see how this fight broke out but I could care less. I fell. I shouldn't be falling.

The guards manage to stop the two but even in their separation, they were trouble.

"Wena I'll kill you!"

"Kill me! Stop being all talk and actually fucken do it!"

"Stop texting my wife! She does not want you. She never has even."

"To hell with you and her!"

"Send her your tiny dick picture again and you'll see it all over the internet."

"Fuck you!"

"Makoti, Are you okay?" My mother in law asks and I halt from nodding when I feel liquid running down my inner thighs.

"Mama, Zano is bleeding! Bangizwe!" Ama.

What?

Oh my goodness... Oh my...

"Bangi!"

...

We sat in silence with this irritating beeping sound that felt like it was ticking away the seconds of this horrible day. I couldn't even look at him but I knew he was also anxious. Anxious about

what our doctor would say the moment she comes back with my blood and urine results.

What if our baby doesn't make it? I wouldn't be able to live with myself. How can I go from being the most cautious person from the moment I found out that I was pregnant, even after finding out that my pregnancy was a high risk to a women who fell and bled. And I know I shouldn't be thinking like this when it was clearly a mistake but Bangi pushed me. He's the reason why we're here now. He's the reason why we could possibly lose our baby, all because he didn't stop fighting. I could not even bring myself to cry with all the worry I was going through still being of the unknown.

I've definitely prepared myself for the worst.

The door opens and my doctor walks in, not looking as pleasing as I'd hope. "Your Royal highness, Mr and Mrs Shazi. Afternoon."

I only manage a nod, waiting impatiently.

"I'll get straight into it because there's no easier way to say it. Your blood, urine and ultrasound tests have so come back

confirming my suspicions of a partial placental abruption," he says.

"Pla... Placental abruption? What is that?" Bangi ask and sniffs. I think my mind was shutting down again because now I had confirmation that I had done my worst to this precious baby of mine.

"Yes, a placental abruption. Both of you should know what a placenta is by now because it's the most important thing to the baby in there. The placenta which will usually sit around here on the uterine wall is what is responsible for providing your baby with oxygen even during delivery until the baby can breathe on its own. It then detaches itself and comes out. However if your placenta separates from your uterus before your baby is birthed, you'll have what we call a placental abruption and it puts both you and your baby at risk,"he says.

"What risks Doctor?"

"Risks of suffering hemorrhaging, organ failure and quite possibly she may die, if this is left untreated."

Oh my God.

"Then treat it doctor, reattach it if possible but I can't lose my wife and my baby," Bangi says and I hear the emotion in his voice.

"Unfortunately we cannot reattach the placenta, what we can do for Mrs Shazi is monitor her for a couple of days because she is not full term yet. We'll keep her here to monitor her vitals and blood pressure, also the heart rate of your baby until my satisfaction. We don't want to risk anything at 22 weeks." Dr Zulu says.

I sink into my bed wanting to curl up in a ball and yell my lungs out.

"Everything will be fine. You're in capable hands and I promise you both nothing will happen to both of you," he says rubbing on my shoulder. When he leaves we remain in silence.

"I'm sorry sthandwa sam," he says but I remain in one place. A few minutes I hear the door open and close. He's gone. I feel the tears forming in my eyes before they slide off the sides of my face.

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I wake up in the middle of the night surrounded by darkness and a cold and loney hospital bed. I look around and notice something in the corner of this room. A figure. "Bangi... Bangi," I call out.

The person moves and switches the light on.

"What are you doing here?" I watch him come to the side of my bed.

"The hospital knows I'm here, I waited for you to wake up."

"What for?"

"Nonozi, I care." he says.

"How did you even know I was here?"

"Your hospitalization was published. The whole kingdom knows by now."

Gosh, there really isn't much privacy in this Royalty thing. Now I was the scoop, making some news outlets a lot of money by being here. I heave out a sigh looking up at the ceiling waiting

for him to say what he came here to say and leave me with my baby alone.

"Will you ever forgive me for what I did Nono? I know I'm a horrible person especially with all that has happened but please forgive me."

"I'm in hospital, trying to keep myself calm, rested and neutral for my baby and you think that this is the perfect time to bring this up?"

"I knew you'd never want to see me even if I came by, so this was a blessing in disguise," he says taking his handkerchief and wipes the sweat off his forehead, all the while I'm shocked by his words.

"So you mean it's a good thing that I almost died? That I almost lost my baby just so you can come and tell me the nonsense you're telling me right now? You're unbelievable you know that. The only time I'll ever forgive you is when you go and confess to the police about what you did... And while you're at it tell them about the fact that you raped and groomed your own daughter from God knows what age. Maybe then will I ever consider forgiving you," I say.

"Jail? For sleeping with someone who was asking for it?"

"uthini?"

"Haybo, Nonozzi I did not initiate what's going on between Zonke and I. She wanted me just as much as I wanted her. I didn't rape her."

"How does a child initiate sex? How! Yoh, sies! You're not fine in the head wena and I don't know what I was thinking considering ever forgiving a man like you. Leave! Leave!"

He stands there not respecting the fact that yet again I don't want him near me. I don't want to hear him, I don't want to see him, I don't want to smell him and I sure as he'll don't want to think of him. If he isn't behind bars by tomorrow I'm using my power to have him off these streets for good.



I've been here for five days now and I'd be lying if I said I didn't miss home. I missed its comfort and it's freedom but majorly I missed being around my husband. There was no day he wouldn't come here to spend time with me, filling me in about what was happening in the real world in the times that he wasn't apologizing profusely.

He still felt guilty even if I mentioned the fact that I've forgiven him. It was an accident.

This one time he asked me if I would've forgiven him if things were worse than this. I didn't answer him.

But other than that, I was finally going home today and that made me nervous and excited at the same time. I know now that I'd have to be cautious with everything I do and just be on bedrest until I'm due. This will give me time to put my birthing plan things in order.

He's here, looking fresh in a pair of black sweats and a cap on as I signed my release forms. He helps me up and off the bed, kissing my cheek before bringing me in for a hug. It's not as warm and tight as I'd want it, so I pull him closer to me. Taking in his beautiful scent. "I'm sorry."

There he goes again...

"Bangi, I'm fine. I told you I forgave you," I breathe out and let him go.

"Let's go," he takes my backpack in his hand making his way to the door. I reach out and hold his hand before we both leave this ward with a bunch of mannequins on all our directions.

"So... People know about the pregnancy," I spark up a conversation the moment we settle in the car. He's putting my medication in my backpack, nodding.

"Pretty much."

"mhnn... Cool."

His silence usually means he's thinking of something heavy or something is pissing him off. "You want to talk about it?"

He shakes his head.

I sigh, okay. Space. I'll give him space. I move closer to him and lay my head on his shoulder, playing with my ring.

After driving for ages we finally get home. Nyiso is here? I walk faster to the door and find her seated on the couch. As soon as

she spots me she gets up and rushes my way, attacking me with the most cautious embrace ever.

"Mge... Ukahle?"

"I'm better." she holds me at arms length, reminding a part of my brain that I haven't seen this soul in forever now.

"I'll leave you two to catch up, " Bangi says. "The envelope on the table is for you."

"Okay. I love you."

He doesn't say it back but I brush it off.

"You fine? Do you have the energy to sit and talk? Actually sit down and then answer me. You must be exhausted," she removes a cushion on one of sitting areas of this couch. "I'm trying really hard to understand what happened here. I didn't want to focus on what the news was saying because they can lie for the universe."

"I don't even know what the news was saying about this moes mge."

"They made it look like Bangi is... Is a wife beater. There's this source too who apparently has proof of these accusations." she

says and I roll my eyes. Not this again. "but on another side people are excited to be getting a new member of the royal family. They are all for this baby."

"Great..." I sit back but remember the envelope on the table.

"You okay? Look I know I should've come to visit you at the hospital but..."

"but?" I ask since her pause was far too long.

"Mandla prohibited me from coming."

"Why would he do that?"

"He says... He doesn't want me picking up the bad juju that got you in there in the first place. We still have more kids we plan on having. " she says and I'm taken aback by this. Shocked even that people think like that.

"Yoh wow mge so I have bad juju now?"

"That's what he said, you know I don't believe in that... It's just he insisted that I stay and..."

"And don't go collect my negative spirits? Don't worry I get it, even on my deathbed he better say that exact same thing. I'm sure you wouldn't want to go around collect umoya wokufa." I shrug and open the envelope.

"That's not what I was saying though..."

I roll my eyes in my head. "It's fine mge. I'm not your husband. I'm just a person you met a few years ago who just keeps you entertained when the time is right."

Oh these are the DNA tests Zonke's lover insisted on taking to prove that Luthando wasn't his. These came fast. Wait a second...

25%

Wait a hot minute. Does this mean he's not the father? Hehake. I clap once and put the results back in there. Bathong, Zonke.

Chapter Fifty Five.

"True life is lived when tiny changes occur." x Leo Tolstoy.

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"Thank you to the whole of Emashazini Kingdom for being able to show yourself... for supporting this initiative and for emptying your wallets for a great cause." He says and I chuckle rubbing on my belly. I honestly can't believe this fundraising event is finally happening after all the procrastinating it had been going through. Almost 3 months where we tried getting our shit together and clearing out a few rumors once again. In the near future I just think we'll let people keep assuming that all they read is true because it's exhausting having to justify yourself.

I can't believe that we are this close to me giving birth and I was nervous.

Birth seemed beautiful when the due date was far and nowhere near my brain, but now it's what occupied my mind most of the time.

I couldn't wait for our baby to get here though, just like how I couldn't wait for our gender reveal tomorrow.

I was excited that the family was going to be here and my friends obviously and that we were all just going to try and enjoy my last days of pregnancy.

I remember the day this tiny miracle first kicked. We were seated out back enjoying a grilled cheese sandwich while watching the new years fireworks. It was beautiful.

Bangi joked about the fireworks scaring our baby to life that night.

We knew then that we had passed another hurdle since my partial placental abruption, because I took everyday with my bundle in me as a blessing that many people take for granted. I fall in love again with this strong kicking-insane driving-bladder pushing thing in me more and more everyday even if he wore me out day by day while tempting me to order some pizza online.

God's timing was something else in my life, because I think back to when I was actually on the patch, slipped up and found out we were going to multiply here that he knew exactly what he was doing.

I'm not exactly sure about the Zonke part of my life and how he thought that was what I needed. But I'll take it all. The pain and the trauma of hearing that Zonke's man killed my mother for his own freedom and pleasure. That he killed her thinking he'll have enough money to share with whatever mistress he had out there, but that never happened. I don't really know what happened to that money but I'm glad he's rotting in prison and hell or whichever he preferred.

Zonke... Well from what I've heard, she successfully gave birth to a healthy and handsome baby boy she named...wait for it...

Zwelakhe.

I cringe everytime that name pops up cause it just sounded like she was putting my ex's name and her 'probable baby father's' names together. I know not everything evolves around me but it just gave me weird vibes. Anyway, she's also apparently living with one of her friends – I didn't even know she had friends – in some flats around the city. I have no idea though if my own sister and Alakhe were still talking cause with these two you never know.

"And finally I'd love to thank my wife who unfortunately couldn't make it here because she's on bed rest. I do all things with her support and guidance now and without her, a lot of things wouldn't be happening. I know she's watching this and PDA is something our family would rather have us not partake in but I love you," He kisses two of his fingers and directs them to me... Or the live camera... but nonetheless the sides of my cheeks heat up in appreciation.

The speech ends and I sigh, locking the tablet and put it away before struggling to my feet. I seriously can't believe that I couldn't see my feet anymore but I'd feel them when they're swollen.

Oh my goodness I have to pee again.

The baby yellow paint in our baby's room is practically done now, all that was left was for Bangi to come paint the higher areas where I was definitely not reaching. I make my way to kitchen to attend the intercom that rang much to my annoyance.

"Donald, who is it?" I ask.

"Individuals by the names of Nobuhle and Khayalakhe Dlamini," he says.

The drama. "Send them back," I joke.

"hhaybo," That was definitely Khaya. And sir where did you get that deep voice? This boy was growing and pretty soon he'll be eighteen... Playing soccer... With a girlfriend or boyfriend hanging on his arm or living his life the way he sees fit and I'm not ready for it.

They walk through the doors squealing and rushing to me when all I can do is hold open my arms for them.

"heeh, sisi you look pregnant. Like I knew back then but right now you look pregnant," Buhle says making me retract my arms and put them on my sides.

"Ngathi unomkhaba nje kphela," Khaya says giving me a weird look.

"Can I touch it? I know how fussy pregnant women get when people want to touch their stomachs so..." Buhle.

"I don't like it vele, but go ahead," I lift my maternity top and watch her cautiously place her hand on my belly. Khaya follows hesitantly putting his on another side.

"Hayi, your stomach feels weird," Buhle mentions.

"Trust me I know." me.

"I don't feel anything," Khaya.

"You guys need to talk to your future niece or nephew, maybe they'll move."

Khaya looks away for a brief second and looks back when I move his hand up. "Do we have a name yet?"

"Nope, apparently Bangi 's father has to name our child first before we can."

"hectic... Okay... Let me communicate with whoever is in here... hey whats up, it's me your awesome aunty Buhle, who's going to be spoiling you rotten with gifts when you get here." she moves her hand a little.

"I hate Mrs Nkosi's porridges. They always have lumps," Khaya says and we break out in laughter. What?

"Let her not hear you say that," I say returning to my original spot when I feel my baby kick. They see it and feel it and Khaya's reaction is just what I would expect.

"ewww, no." that's all he said while Buhle was being an emotional mess.

"that's beautiful," she says cupping her mouth. "This is

wonderful. Actually women are wonderful, I mean you're carrying a whole human being in here that will be running here and making noise in just a few weeks. Unbelievable."

"I just think this whole thing is terrifying. That baby is literally feeding off of you. I read once that if you don't get enough calcium in they take it from your bones," Khaya says.

"That's why we have doctors and gynecologists who can tell you what to do and what not to do. I still say it's a strength that women carry with them because this is not easy, right sis?"

Buhle asks.

I nod. Well I did almost die.

"See, I don't get how pregnancy is being seen as this glamorous thing when it can literally give you depression."

Sheesh. No.

"Khaya... I get it. But please don't. Let's talk about something else... Preferably something positive." I make my way to the kitchen again to prepare us some snacks and a light lunch Bangi can have too if he comes back hungry.

"So the reveal is tomorrow, what are you hoping it is?" Buhle helps me by chopping some chives.

"I'm hoping it's healthy with two beautiful eyes, ten toes, ten fingers, a beating heart and functioning organs. Also he or she must poop and pee fine."

"you could've just said a boy sis, no one was going to judge you." Khaya says.

I chuckle shaking my head. Maybe that was Bangi's feelings as well. Maybe he too wanted a boy.

"My biggest worry is that everything goes well tomorrow. Nothing should flop."

Maya should be arriving soon too to drop off some of her decorations.

"It will. I can feel it." Buhle says.

"I like that sort of thinking." I say genuinely because I knew how much this family couldn't have just one perfect normal night. We mix the chives into some sour cream and that was basically it served with a box of crackers because I was just too lazy and out of breath for all of this.

I manage to whip up a quick stir-fry though as we conversated further, catching up with my siblings about what they've gotten up to. I felt like I missed out on a lot that they've been going through and what they've been doing but I was seeing some form of growth in them that impressed me because at one point in our lives we had to face our father during his trial and I thought they would not be able to handle it. But I was proved to be incorrect.

I'm not saying that their father going to jail was supposed to

That, I could take.

"I think we should get a move on

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we don't want to get delayed by anything," I say and turn around to peck his majestic lips prior to leaving the bedroom we moved to that was downstairs for convenience sake.

Tammy sounds like she liked what she designed for us and honestly I did too. Our photographer gets us to stand on the white backdrop before he directs some of the photos we were taking. I would stand in front of Bangi, behind him, next to him, he'd kneel in front of me until we finished.

Our clothing change is fast and easy with this fitted lace garment that was showing my belly. I could tell these were going to be just as stunning. We wrap up the shoot and go change now preparing for the actual main event that I could hear already had people here outside. Bangi helps me zip up my dress at the back before I turned to my side for assessment. This baby definitely gave me a bigger behind. I put on a comfortable pair of sneakers because I was not about to take my chances with heels. No one will see that anyway.

"That color brings out your eyes," Buhle says standing in front of me, fixing my braids.

"Team girl? I see you. Thanks," I say last after seeing her in pink.

"is Khaya dressed?"

"A long time ago he's out in the back with some of his friends. I think I'm just going to go ahead and put your gift with the others," she says, hugs me and rushes off.

Bangi and I are seated on the seats at the far back. We watching and greeting the family and friends that came in after being forced to take a picture and stating which team they're guessing for.

Scary.

I look at Bangi finding him smiling at nothing really.

"what are you thinking of?"

"Our second baby."

"Yoh, I shouldn't have asked," I spot Thokozani waking in with Luthando holding his finger as they walked and paused by the photo section. How she managed to spot me out of all the people baffles me.

"Mama, mama, mama," she jumps causing me to get up and quickly walk to her. I greet Thokozani and pick up the energetic ball of life, smothering her with kisses she returns.

"Hello beautiful girl."

It's then that I realize that she's been what I've been missing in my life while she was gone. The house was so quiet without her around. She has grown on me so much that it makes me scared of losing her. "She missed you a lot." he says.

"how was she though?"

"Better... I think since everything happened and the truths were revealed, she doesn't cry anymore like that."

I press my lips into a thin line, this was still awkward for me to talk about. But nonetheless we make our way in and he goes to sit down by his reserved spot. I walk back to Bangi with Lu and he seems excited to see her too.

Bangi's family arrives as a whole gang like I knew them to. It feels good seeing the likes of Aunt Jabulile, aunt Grace and uncle Archie again. I was glad and grateful they could all make it here including abo Thando, Asanda noSamukelo. We hug, we laugh and manage to squeeze in a minute of light gossiping before I welcome my actual in laws. Thank goodness they heard me when I said I didn't want Alakhe here.

At 13h00 exactly when all of my expected guests are seated we get on with the formal proceedings. Nyiso, my MC for the day couldn't have been more excited about being the one to blab in front of these people like she was born for it. She called up a few people to come say a few words and to bless our baby if they wanted.

My mother in law came up, standing right next to me while looking at the crowd.

"Since I obviously know the gender of my grandbaby, I'll refrain from saying much about that side. I will however say that this

has been my most excited awaiting for my grandchild to be born because this is my son, Bangizwe's first child and I know he's excited. I remember this one night he called me at like 3h00 in the morning and he says mama, she's going insane. I've never seen her so angry at me mama."

I frown.

"I'm in bed at that moment, wondering what Bangizwe is talking about because I know what my makoti is like. She's not one to just be rude to you or one to make you feel uncomfortable and she says what she means. So I'm there wondering what my son did to make his wife angry to the point where he's calling me. Believe me when I say I understood everything the second he said 'she was tossing and turning. I couldn't get some sleep' , " My mother in law says and they laugh.

I did not know about this, but I certainly remember my frustration.

"I said to him 'boy, do you know what your wife is going through? Do you know how uncomfortable it is to sleep with a growing belly and not finding the right spot? Do you how irritating it is not being able to control your bladder because you can't... She's not waking up in the wee hours of the morning just to test your patience or because it's entertaining, its because of that seed you went along and planted. Her body

is sacrificing for your baby and you should understand. You deserve that couch you're sleeping on.' And I ended that call with 'do better'." she glances at me for a second putting her hand on my shoulder. I place mine over hers and held back the tears.

"I know he did better because he texted me that same morning saying he bought her this big beautiful pink pregnancy pillow, a memory foam sponge for her side of the bed and a toilet seat that lights up the moment she steps into the bathroom at night. I knew then that he'll do fine as a father and she'll do amazing as a mother. My daughter, our crazy family is build up of generation to generation, we have great grandparents here. We have grandparents and mothers who are with you in this. This is going to be our child. One who has Shazi blood running through h-...their veins, almost slipped there... "

I chortle.

"You're carrying a future Prince or Princess Makoti but let that not deter from the fact that you'll still be human after this. You'll cry, laugh, be exhausted, be energetic, feel alone, feel crowded but I never want you to feel like you can't ask for help. Motherhood is how you make it out to be. Fatherhood too. It's not easy but it's possible. I love both of you," She closes off and sheesh I'm overly emotional right now. What am I talking about cause I'm always emotional.

"That was beautiful... Thank you mama I'm sure my mge heard everything you said. Now I'm sure we want to hear a few words from our very own mommy-to-be before we have the reveal. Zano."

I'd have rather sat here and looked pretty but because the peer pressure was intense I find myself on my feet. Gosh, I should've prepared something.

"uh... Way to ambush me ..."

They laugh.

"... I think we all know why we're here. It all started on one hot and steamy night in Huvafen Fushi isl-..."

"Haybo!"

We laugh. I can't believe I said that but it made me comfortable.

"Viva!" Landiwe says making us girls laugh even more as I remember that incident that happened at thr hills of the Queen. I was so drunk that night. Good times.

"Okay let's be serious, I apologize. Uh... you know if you had told me 2 years back that this would've been where I would be ending up, I'd have looked at you and said you're insane. But here I am, happy and heavy. I don't know if it's wise to say that I'm grateful for everything, from the love to the support that I've been getting from each and everyone of you. And yes Aunt

Grace you were right all along and so was that dream of yours."
she smiles.

"Bangi, my love, phakade lam. I'm excited and I couldn't have done this without you... Literally."

They laugh. He does too.

"A toast to new life," the King says getting up with a glass in his hand.

"Here here!" we toast and drink our nonalcoholic drinks.

We gathered outside the tent, holding these reveal confetti and powder cannon in our hands waiting as Nyiso and everyone else counted down. Bangi looks at me, grinning from ear to ear. My palms are sweating for some reason.... Maybe because everyone was looking at me.

"three... Two... One!" they all now counted together.

I pulled mine first and then he pulled his but by then everyone was screaming like mad people.

Husband hugs me as I still gaze at the pink color.

"It's a girl!"

Chapter Fifty Six.

"Not everyone wishes you well."

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A Jackfruit !

Mafungwashe was the size of a jackfruit.

That's big, which would also explain why her kicks were so hard and precise in here but I loved it all. Today I have my midwife appointment and this one would be the last one until it's time to push. My home birth plans were also set in motion and I hope nothing goes wrong that would cause me to end up going to a hospital. I wanted to give birth to our baby in the safety of our home.

I wanted her to absorb the good energy of this house and it's warmth. Also I felt like I'd be more comfortable giving birth in a familiar environment and not some cold hospital.

"Looks like my dad wants us at the palace tomorrow," Bangi says as I put my phone away.

"Yoh more traveling. I'd rather stay at home though... Enjoy some TV and my own space. Did he say why he wants to see us?"

"Nope."

"I guess a few sacrifices won't hurt. You going to be fine going back there cause I know for sure your brother will be there?" I ask and put my legs on his lap for a bit of elevation.

The guy –Alakhe– was making moves too it seems, trying out the moves we made over the last two years. Yep, he was building houses too somewhere on the northern side of this Kingdom. I don't know what was funnier, watching him go to disadvantaged people with cameras or watching him bragging about how he was going to make the nation better than Bangi has. I love to see the fact that he was helping though but not how he was going about it.

Whatever he's planning... surely meant he was the only person that understood its magnitude, which was nothing for us to fuss and worry about.

"I know my place. I'm never fighting that idiot again cause it always ends up 10 times worse than when we started."

I nod with a smile creeping its way to my lips. Good. No more fighting will do us both a massive favor. "If it gets hectic we leave."

"Definitely. I'll confirm our absolute appearance to this formal invitation," he says and I chuckle. He just had to be dramatic right when all he could've said was we'll be there.

Just as I was about to close my eyes the intercom rings and I had a feeling it was my midwife, Hellen.

"I'll get it," Bangi says gently removing my feet from his lap.

It is Hellen walking in with her labour assistant, carrying a bag of things. I'm excited. I get up to greet them with a hug and welcome them into our place.

"How are you feeling today mommy?" she asks me as she set up in our lounge. Bangi is sitting next to me, holding my hand which he occasionally blesses with his comforting kisses.

"I feel normal actually," I shrug.

"She has a waddle now. That's very abnormal to us baby."
Bangi says.

"You want to laugh at me again don't you?"

"You're making me sound like a terrible person now."

"Maybe you are," I chuckle and look back at my midwife. We're that comfortable with the both of them around since they've been the ones who were here every other week to conduct their check ups. A tedious process if you ask me, but all in the name of being on the safe side. "Hellen, I guess I should mention that I feel more pressure on my pelvis than I did before."

"That's a good sign." she removes the sphygmomanometer from my arm nodding to herself and tells her assistant, Celia to write down the results. "Your blood pressure looks good mama... I'm proud. Okay uh, the reason why I said it's a good sign is because your body is showing signs of being ready for labour."

"Wait, what?"

"I'm not saying she's in labour now my Prince. In fact at this pace it could probably be in the next 2 to 4 weeks."

I breathe out. She checks our baby's heartbeat and movements before I get up and have her measure the size of my belly to check for any growth.

When that is done we have an ultrasound, followed by her checking how my health is and if I have any problems. There's another urine test and vaginal swab for hectic stuff. By God's grace, I'm cleared and basically get given another booklet that is just as informing as the previous one she gave me.

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I waddle to the outside and find him laying out our picnic blanket, pulling the basket closer to it. He spots me before I even say anything and makes his way to me, copying my very obvious waddle.

"Angidlali nawe Bangi neh," I try keeping a serious face. He on the other hand just laughs, grabbing my hand and pulls himself towards me before trying to kiss me. A kiss I duck and hide from. "Bangi I'm going to slap you and it won't be nice."

"I'm going to kiss you and it will be nice," he says with a grin on his lips.

"I'm going to tell your mom you're making fun of me." I chuckle and fold my arms in front of my chest.

"Even if you tell her I'm still going to kiss you and it's go-"

"... Going to be nice. I get it. Now lets not bore each other and go eat," I finish off and attempt on moving past him but he blocks my way and holds me by my waist. I can't help the smile that invades my face that very moment I see him giving me the look he was giving me.

"Sthandwa sam you cannot get bored of me already when we're still going to spend an eternity together. Same goes for my kisses. Food is temporary, we are forever."

Mhlolo wami.

"Fine, kiss me ke."

"Ang'funi," he lets me go and walks to the set up he worked so hard on a few seconds ago. Bathong!

"Bangizwe Shazi, you'll drive me mad shem." I follow him, sulking a little. This was all my fault. Ngizilayile.

I sit next to him and heave out an exasperated sigh watching him unpack the goodies 'we' made together.

I sigh again when he doesn't look at me even once.

I sigh once more when he pours us the freshly squeezed orange juice in individual glasses.

I sigh one more time and he finally lifts his eyes to look at his attention seeking wife.

"Yin ndaba? Kubhlungu kuphi?"

"Bangi you left me hanging."

"Hanging where, when you said you want to go eat?"

"bathong what happened to food is temporary, we are forever."

"I changed my mind." he chuckles .

"unchange it ke," I lean in and place my hand his thigh, moving it higher and higher... Closer to his hip joint.

"Ma'Dlamini stop playing with me..."

"Who said anything about playing?" I lick on my lips before he finally leans in too, close enough to my face that I could breath him in. His scent made my whole body relax.

"I know you. Don't tease a man when he can't touch you like that."

Well, he's not wrong there. But I still owe him a kiss, even if it is a five minute long one it's fine. I also might mention to him that I'm willing to experiment with other ways he could 'blow off some steam' . I pull him closer and kiss him. We're not in a rush...

I sink my teeth into this delicious peach cobbler and melt away into its heavenly form. For a beginner made cobbler, it tasted just right – whatever right was.

My phone rings while we were still feeding each other. I thought I switched this phone off when I was done prepping because I didn't want any hindrance while it was husband and wife time. I retrieve it from between my ladies and frown when the name Anita G flashes on my screen.

Why would Anita be calling me if we weren't planning anything through her currently?

"It's Anita," I say and glance at Bangi for a second.

"You can answer, it's fine."

I lift my eyebrows looking him right in the eye to make sure he meant what he was saying right now, and after my confirmation I answer. "Anita

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hi."

"Aha, here she is," she speaks on the other end before I hear a loud cry.

She has a child?

"Don't hang up, it's me."

"Zonke?" I frown putting my phone on loudspeaker. That definitely was her voice, I didn't even have to ask any questions.

"I've tried calling you with my own number but it just goes straight to voicemail."

"That's because I blocked your number. It shouldn't be shocking that I don't want to talk to you."

"Why are you being so tense relax. Phola and breathe. I'll be quick," she says.

I roll my eyes, refraining from giving her an answer.

"I need money for Zwelakhe," she says and I cringe, my skin crawls and there's just a bitter taste in my mouth.

"So why are you calling me?"

"You're going to give me that money and I'll never bother you again." Zonke says. "Oh and you can send it to this number neh."

"Kahle kahle Zonke, do I look like your child's father?"

"No."

"Pho yini inkinga yakho? Make me understand why you didn't call the father of your child for what your child needs instead bothering me with your nonsense."

"Are you helping me or not?"

"No I'm not. You can sell your things and use that money to sort yourself out."

She chuckles. "I lost everything I owned in that fire Gimba, and you and I both know you were the one who started it. No questions asked."

My eyes go wide and my mouth twists as I hear her say this. Bangi clears his throat.

"Wha... What are you talking about?"

"Do you think I'm that stupid to not know that you are the one who came there to hurt me? I know you're behind that fire. Don't make me tell the whole wide world about your selfish nature Gimba."

"Are you blackmailing me?" I frown.

"Wena thumelela leyo mali nje, and I'll be a good girl and act like nothing happened." she says and hangs up, leaving me speechless.

I'm shocked with how that call was not what I expected. I clap once, and stuff my face with some cobbler. The mood has just taken a 360 degree turn and my mind went back to that night I haven't thought about until now.

Nxa, who does this woman think she is?

I take my phone and send her those numbers Alakhe used to text me with. If she wants money she knows where to get it.



"Why are you so happy, isnt it obvious that this relationship is a joke? Everybody knows that in this Kingdom and bloodline, sons are supposed to be born first as a sign of true kingship. Is Bangizwe even a part of this family now that his first seed is a female?" Alakhe says sitting next to an absent minded looking Khethiwe.

Well... I'll be damned. Now that I think about it, everyone in this family has boys first. Even Zonke. Even Khethiwe. Even the Aunts and even my own in laws.

"I don't know who told you all that garbage but you are wrong. This is the daughter of my son. My first granddaughter." The King says.

I smile.

"Please...maidens bring forth the dinner. Now we celebrate like true royals. As soon as my granddaughter is born we'll have a massive feast and celebration with the whole Kingdom for her naming ceremony."

"That is madness. Your precious son has one baby on the way and you shut down the whole kingdom? That will not happen!" Alakhe bangs on the table in a fit of rage.

"Who are you again? I am your father, your King and my word is final. I will not have you dispute what I'm saying boy."

"But I have to correct you when you're wrong. Bangizwe doesn't deserve any of the things you're doing for him. I'm your eldest son, you should be praising and celebrating me as the

future King of this Kingdom of Emashazini. Not some unborn
curse who's a nobody yet."

Yoh, back to sender in Jesus name!

"You will never ever see the light of this throne! I'd rather die a
painful death than to let an imbecile like you reign in the
Kingdom of abo Shazi oMkhonto kawukhmuki Nonyamela
wemikhonto! Never!" Bangi's father roars.

Alakhe is on his feet.

They both are.

Well this is just all too familiar now isn't it. Dinner with this
family never ceases to amaze me.

"What!" Alakhe.

"Guards! Take this idiot of a son of mine and throw him out here. You are no longer welcome here at the table."

"You can't do that to me," he hisses before they grab him.

"Unhand me!"

"Out!" the King commands.

I watch him get dragged out. This is real. I sigh looking to Bangi who's watching the drama before my chair is pushed back and he stands in front of me. What I hear next is a loud bang that leaves my ears ringing.

Screams...

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Everything felt like it was happening in slow motion the moment I saw the King stumble to the ground. Alakhe shot him. He shot his own father like he meant nothing to him. He was dragged out of there and I remember remaining frozen on my seat, just like Amandla was when we watched in panic back at the palace. Bangi, the Queen and a few guards were the only

people who rushed to his side and the grim reality that he was losing blood hit us all like a slap from hell.

Our phones were switched off because this was already buzzing. Just a few days ago we were celebrating and now...

I couldn't believe my father-in-law has been in that operating theater for almost three hours now and we haven't heard a single thing from these doctors. I want to comfort my husband and tell him everything will be fine but I can't guarantee any of that to him. He looks like he's in a terrible space. The Queen has been sobbing in a corner. A cry that pierced in my soul and opened up wounds from within.

"Where are these damn doctors kanti! We've been sitting here for ages and still have heard nothing. What in the fuck is that?" Bangi sits up and runs a hands across his face.

"Patience my love. They'll tell us as soon as they have something."

"What if he's dead in there and they don't tell us?" he looks at me.

"Don't you ever say that in your life Bangizwe!" the Queen reprimands him. "Your father is a fighter."

"I'm sorry ma, I just-..." he halts and heaves out a heavy sigh, burying his face in the palms of his hands, leaning forward. I hug him, rubbing his back hoping to at least make him feel better. Not that a measly rub would take away the circumstances.

"Maybe we can pray," I whisper the suggestion.

Nobody answers me.

Bathong Okay. I bow my head and we sit in silence before Bangi moves a little. "I'll pray with you sthandwa sam," he says and I move from his back. He clasps my hand and we get up and get onto our knees. I close my eyes and pray that the almighty gives us all the strength and guidance we needed in this dark moment. I pray that the King survives all of this and comes out stronger than before.

Sheesh.

I felt lighter after that.

We sat there some more, watching the time tick by. I was even getting sleepy, so I laid my head on Bangi's shoulder. How can I fall asleep though... Especially since there's just a lot on my mind right now. I'm thirsty, I get up and make my way to the tiny fridge this doctor has in his office. He did say we could help ourselves to some water if we needed any.

Just as I take a well refreshing sip of water the office door opens and the family surgeon walks in looking pretty exhausted. He pulls down his mask closing the door behind him. Everyone is already up and waiting to hear what he has to say, and my stomach is in knots.

"Aren't you going to speak?" The Queen asks stepping forward.

"I apologize Her majesty the Queen. There's no easier way to say this. We... We managed to remove the bullet he was shot with, but we soon ran into some major complications. The King suffered a shot to his liver..."

"No! My Senzo." the Queen puts her hands on her head.

"We have determined that the blood vessels near the liver were not affected. However I cannot guarantee anything since the liver is something he won't be able to survive without... Neither do we have a machine that can do what the liver does for us. I'm sorry."

"What about a transplant? Can't that save him? I want the truth." Bangi asks. Amandla was back to crying again.

"There is no certainty." he sighs. "A compromised liver is-..."

"A death sentence?" The Queen.

"My Queen, some patients do survive it ... Some don't. Some wait for an eternity for a liver and end up dying. I've had patients wait for their livers to heal but end up losing their lives. But it's possible to survive. We'll keep him here at the hospital for supervision and treatment until we can find a suitable donor." this doctor says.

I breathe out.

"You better find one, I don't care how but you better find one. Fast," Bangi's mother says.

These things probably have lists too and that list was also for people who desperately needed one too... But it seems like here money and power is what will talk. I don't even want to know.

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Ngizilayile by unlocking this nuisances' number. Now she won't stop calling and texting me as if I didn't give her the numbers she could easily use to reconnect with her shooter of a Prince.

I put my phone on silent since I didn't want it off.

My husband and I were back eDaliwe and just a few minutes ago he had the security amped up around here because we didn't know where that lose screw was. He wanted safety for us and the staff here too so that even if the press decided to show up here they'll be well taken care of. I was thankful for that because at least I had peace of mind knowing that Luthando was safe too and the chances of Alakhe showing up here and being trigger happy were slim.

Seeing Bangi's father in the state he was in was traumatic. I wasn't used to seeing him laying so still in one place and not being his normal self. It felt like at one point he would open his eyes and say something but he didn't. He just lay there, with that awful beeping sound reminding me of how much I've grown to hate hospitals. His hands were swollen too but we were told that it was because of the blood transfusion he had to have since he lost a lot of blood.

"I... I made you something to eat."

"I don't want food Zanokuhle," he says still staring off into space.

"Well I don't want you fainting or not having enough energy when you eventually need it Bangi, so please eat. Even if it's just one half."

He looks at me and then the plate im holding before picking half like I asked. I settle down next to him and watch him press the corners of the bread eventually taking a big generous bite.

"How are you feeling baby... What's going on in your mind?"

"I feel, lost. Terrible. Fearful. I might lose my father and I'm not ready for that. Where would I even start to pick up the pieces when he's gone?"

"Don't say that. He's going to be fine Bangi. We just have to have faith."

I watch him shake his head slightly probably doubting my statement since we were told that this was a seriously tricky situation and the wait didn't guarantee us anything at all. Honestly I wasn't even sure of my words.

The sooner they find a donor. The better.

"I should check up on my mother," he gets up from the couch and goes to our bedroom. I'll give him his space then. I sigh and sit back shutting my eyes. There are so many things I could've thought of possibly happening in the last weeks of my pregnancy but this was not it.

Chapter Fifty Seven.

"No one else will ever know the strength of my love for you. After all, you're the only one who knows the sound of my heart from the inside."

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Days came and went by so slowly with no changes or even any improvements on Bangi's father. This took a massive toll on my husband's emotions and it was pretty obvious because he sometimes just wasn't present. I'd sit next to him and wonder if he's thinking good thoughts or if he's beating himself up even more about this. I now knew the frustrations he was going through when I was in my dark phase and I understood why he didn't want to give up on me until I felt better.

And just in the heat of all of this we managed to get my siblings protection until Alakhe resurfaced.

He - Alakhe- found shelter at some hotel.

Khethiwe told us this.

I didn't get why he wasn't arrested though but the royals who knew about this were keeping an eye on him. As soon as the Kingdom found out about the King being shot, it became chaos. There were even people who were prepared to give their lives up so the King could get a liver. I thought I had seen it all until that day. The nation was in tears, sending prayers and tons of letters to the palace wishing the King a speedy recovery.

That was also what we wished for him and prayed hard for day in and day out.

I wake up to find myself all alone in this bed. Bangi is nowhere in here. I don't even hear the shower water running from the bathroom. The second I sit up I stretch my stiff body, taking a few seconds to rub my belly and bond with baby girl in here who like all the other nights was keeping me awake half of the night to pee.

I think in my heart I was ready to hold her in my arms and kiss her hopefully chubby and full cheeks. I couldn't wait to see who she looked like the most and what personality she would take on.

I smile as she kicks where my hand was on. I felt her move again. That tiny moment I got to speak and pray with her made me forget for a moment what the situation really was. There was no doubt in my mind that this will once more cloud my mind all over again for the whole day.

I make the bed and go check on Luthando who was with Nandi in her room, getting her clean.

"Morning Nandi," I walk in and remember that Thokozani was fetching her in a few minutes today. "Is she all set? Do you need help with any packing?"

I usually distanced myself from Luthando when the day came for her to leave cause I knew I'd be extra emotional on that day, but today... Not today.

"I packed her things yesterday my Princess."

"Oh," see even Nandi knew what to do already. Luthando is fighting to get out of Nandi's hold to get to me. "How about I do that?"

She asks no questions and allows me do the rest... Or rather struggle with the 2 year old energy ball. She had energy for the whole Kingdom this one.

"My Princess, may I ask?" Nandi.

"Ask about what?"

"About... About... Nevermind my Princess. I apologize for wasting your time," she says causing me to eye her.

"No, ask."

She sighs and looks down at her knotted fingers.

"Prince Alakhe, will he get arrested?"

"Why are you asking me this?"

"I overheard His Royal Highness mention it but I didn't think it would happen."

"Maybe you should ask him. You overheard it from him and not me." I shrug. I wasn't trying to be nasty or anything.

I go take a shower, feeling a light contraction. This must be one of those not so fun Braxton hicks. Sheesh. I wear a light dress since it was insanely hot outside and when I'm hot like this I don't like it.

Nandi and Luthando were gone, which could only mean that Lu's father came earlier than usual.

This is weird, he's not even in the lounge. I find my phone and try to call him but his phone sends me straight to voicemail. I don't like this, mostly because its unusual for me to not find him and also not know where he is.

I search everywhere and conclude that he truthfully wasn't in the house so I take my investigation outside.

"Deliverance," Me.

He turns to look at me with caution before uttering a very stern and firm, "His Royal Highness gave me strict instructions not to allow you out of here."

"Why? Where is he?"

"I cannot say my Princess," he says and frustrates me with this unusual behavior. Somewhere deep inside I felt like he was out there doing what I wouldn't like or approve of.

He probably went to see Alakhe. He better not have cause I can't risk losing him like this.

Alakhe has proven to be capable of hurting even his own blood

when he doesn't get his way which makes Bangi a target. And since he hates both of us and his father has declared that the throne will not be going to him he automatically has bonus reasons to end us. I think I'm going to be sick...and these hicks are not helping me whatsoever.

"Deliverance, just please promise me that wherever he is, he's safe."

"My Princess, I promise you, for my word is golden and my life lays in your hands."

Well damn, even if he was lying to me I'd still wholeheartedly believe him.

I turn and head back into the house, sighing my frustrations out. Maybe some food will do me and Mafungwashe good and distract me a little...

It doesn't. Instead I end up cutting my pinky finger with the bread knife in my hand. Argh. To hell with this bread and hicks that take me by surprise. I go and grab some of yesterday's dinner and devour on that after cleaning my minor cut.

Honestly I'm getting angrier at him ngoba he didn't have the decency to tell me where he was going to...or am I being too dramatic.

Too depended?

Too in his skin and not really out and about being me myself and I?

Maybe his mother knows where he is. I should call her and-...
No don't do that Zano. Infact put your phone away and breathe for a moment. This is a fully grown man who doesn't need a babysitter, or a nagging wife.

But I'm not nagging, I'm concerned right?

I text Nyiso just to check on her and to see how Ncebo was doing since he's teething the last I heard.

Okay she was busy. I text my siblings to check on them and luckily they're the only ones who answer me, informing me that they're doing just fine.

Khaya asks for money for a new soccer gear and I send it to him, no questions asked.

He's playing for the big boys now. He's that good. I'll get back to watching him play when I'm without this belly. When those two conversations end I realize just how lonely I am. I don't talk to Lilly anymore because we just grew apart. Plus she was at a different place all together. I miss Siba too. The teacher I used to work with. Today I even thought of calling Nellisiwe and Vukiswa. The wives of Bangi's friends. The ones I met twice and never went back to... Maybe not Zano, maybe not.

I huff out and sit back shutting my eyes hoping that time will go past faster.

"For every new life, an old one has to leave," a voice makes me yelp in shock and I nearly throw something towards it until I realise that it was Mehlo.

How did he get in here? Why is he here? Entlek where does this man come from. "For every new life, an old one has to leave," he repeated.

"What do you mean?"

"For every new life, an old one has to leave."

"What old one has to leave?"

"Kusazoshuba. Phepha!" he vibrates and gets a paper out of this tiny bag he had in front, placing it on the table. I look at the paper, reach for it and the second I look up Mehlo is nowhere to be seen. I'm frozen at that spot, before I lean in and take the paper. There's a number on the paper. Nothing else.

My phone rings and frantically I search for it on this couch thinking it's Bangi. It's Zonke. Gosh.

"Yini! Yini Zonke!" I snap.

"Where is the money?"

"There is no money here Zonke. I gave you Alakhe's numbers so stop calling me."

"Mhlambe awusaboni kahle emehlweni Gimba cause those were not Alakhe's numbers, befuthi I don't get why you'd give

me Zweli's numbers when I haven't spoken to him since..." she says trailing off.

"Since when?"

"Look forget I ever called you." she says and hangs up on me.

Bathong. Zweli? I try calling her back but I'm stopped by a sharp, dull pain that pulls on my lower back and lower abdomen. Yoh, okay. I get up, trying to walk the pain off. I end up at the bathroom, peeing. I reach for some toilet paper and wipe. What is that? Oh my God. Is that my mucus plug?

My phone rings near my ear. Hellen doesn't keep me waiting for long.

"My Princess."

"Hellen Hi. I'm seated on the toilet and I think I just lost my mucus plus."

"Oh, that's good. Are you experiencing any cramps or discomfort?"

"Yeah."

"Those could be your contractions, I'd like you to time them so that we can be sure you're in active labour before we rush down there. I also need you to be calm during all of this, it's normal."

"Okay, I'll call if anything changes," I say and hang up.

Great, there's blood too.

I wipe again and get up heading to the bedroom.

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Okay, these were not Braxton hicks anymore. They were serious contraction that also were as serious according to my contractions counter. They were not close enough to have me considered as a woman in labour. But I sat them out on the bed butt naked because of these hot flashes I was getting.

I've called Hellen twice already, keeping her up to date about what was going on in my body. How I felt and how far ahead my contraction were. After talking to her I tried calling Bangi.

Voicemail.

Yoh!

I sit up and him dial again only for it do the same thing it has done for the past 8 times.

"No, honestly you're testing me today. Where are you Bangi huh? Why are you not picking up my calls and why won't you let me know where you are? Or was this your plan all along? Sweep me off my feet, marry me, get me attached to you and then get me pregnant? And right now-..." I shut up as a contraction hits me again. I ride it out and hang up pissed.

My mind is buzzing with so many things.

'For every new life, an old one has to leave...'

What if he was talking about...about Bangi.

No!

Don't even do that to yourself Zano. Do not even bring yourself to that train of thought.

•••

I open my eyes to find him sitting on the bed. "Oh my goodness, Thank God you are okay," I get up and throw myself onto his lap already shedding tears of relief since I slept myself and my worries away. I hug him tight for as long as I could and for as long as he didn't ruin the moment with his talking cause I knew I'd be pissed the moment he did speak.

"I listened to your voicemail...I'm sorry," he says.

"Mxm," I try getting off his lap but he keeps me in place.

"Wait, please. I know I was wrong and I should've mentioned where I was going but..." he keeps quiet. I look at him and he looks like a sin. A bad sin. He looked broken too, making my heart ache as well.

"You know I'd never leave you Zanokuhle. I just wanted to breathe, I wanted a moment to think."

"So I'm suffocating you now?"

"No," he says hurriedly.

"And you can't think when you're around me neh?"

"Zanokuhle..."

"Bangizwe I can hear you. I hear everything you're saying and it's fine but just know that I would've probably had our baby here and you wouldn't have been here while you were out getting some air. It's fine," I remove his hands from me and get up to go pee.

"I feel really bad for that my love and I'm sorry... How are you now?" he comes to kneel in front of me searching for my eyes and when he finds them I'm overwhelmed.

"They stopped. The contractions. I'm fine. I'm just mad at you for leaving me here alone. With no idea where you were."

"I here now."

I sigh, stopping myself from rolling my eyes. He puts his hands on my belly and kisses it, putting his ear on it. I put my hand on his head and run my fingers through his hair.

"For every new life, an old one has to leave," the words leave my mouth and I watch him rise.

"For what?"

"That's what Mehlo said."

"Mehlo was here?"

I nod.

"He gave me a number too."

"Whose number?"

"I don't know, and I'm scared, Bangi you scared me. I thought

he was talking about you."

"Has to leave?" He whispers. "Ngixolele sthandwa sam, I'll never do that to you again. I promise."

I nod again before he gets up and hugs me.

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I waddle back to bed, slowly. I felt like throwing up right now. It's 21h22 and I have no sleep left in me. As I sit on the bed I get attacked with a mother of all contraction.

"Sthandwa sam

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"

"Shhh..." I'm counting in my head until it dies down.

"Are you...okay?" he's in front of me. I look up at him and shake my head. That was the second one in under five minutes. They weren't this close earlier today. "Should I call Hellen?"

"Please," me. He leaves my sight briefly and returns holding his phone to his ear.

"Yes Hellen, I think my wife needs you. Yes... No... Yes... Yes... Okay... Thank you," he hangs up and tosses his phone onto the bed shifting his focus back on me.

"She's on her way Sthandwa sam."

"Okay," I say and lift my hands. He helps me up. His hands rest

on my belly.

"Your stomach is so tight."

Another contraction. This one is even worse as I cling onto Bangi's body while I whimper in nothing but pure pain. Rocking my hips to and fro does not help, even one bit.

"Uh oh..."

"Are you leaking?" he asks.

"I don't- I don't know... Maybe I peed myself or my water broke."

"Sthandwa sam, you were just at the toilet, you did not pee yourself," he says.

"Oh, wait though I might be peeing myself..." I look down and I could just feel it gushing down my legs.

Well this is fun.

"Okay nope, definitely my water breaking. I can't... I can't control it... Oh my God I'm leaking everywhere, I'm so sorry."

"Don't be, let me get you a towel."

"Wait don't move." I grab on his arm and whimper again.

No but this is not what I signed up for hey. This is by far not the pain I ordered. What happened to babies being brought to you by storks or them coming out of pumpkin patches? "Okay." I let him go fetch the towel and remove my wet shorts, walking to the closet to put them in with the dirty clothes. I slouch

forward, tightening my fists as I have another contraction that feels just as shitty as the one before grabs me by my coochie.

"Do you need anything?" he asks.

"Pressure, on my back." I breathe out still standing at one of the shelves.

He presses and massage my lower back, right where it was needed. "How long has it been since you called Hellen?"

"About 40 minutes."

"Feels like an eternity." I rock my hips again.

When Hellen and Celia get here I've already been inside the shower, allowing the warm water to make this whole experience feel somewhat better.

They set up their birth kits on a dresser in here and she's not even too lazy to explain the different type of things she has with her. From the plastic-backed pads to the cord clamps. I'm sure if I was even listening attentively and not just being driven by the pain I would remembered it all.

She then went on to check me again from A up to Z to make sure our baby and I were fine and ready to give birth at home safely. She tells me I'm a hundred percent effaced and only 7 centimeters dilated.

I then get a chance to hear Mafungwashe's heartbeat again and it's so beautiful, so motivating and it fully reminds me what this all is truly for. I need strength. I need my man and God with me.

I'm laying on Bangi's body as he brushes my back. The warm water in this tub, soft music and burning vanilla scented candles set a calm mood in here. Just what I thought I needed to help ease the pain. "Are you okay?" he asks near my ear. "I'm fine, I feel like my vagina is tearing in half but I'm fine."

I hear him sigh.

"Hellen when do I start pushing?" I ask.

"As soon as you feel the urge to do so, but don't rush it. Let me che-..."

I don't hear half of what she says as the contraction and urge to push demands for my attention, I sit up keeping in my insane screaming.

"Breathe sthandwa sam."

Yoh. "Something's happening..." Me. I get up and have Hellen check me.

"We're getting close, I suggest we try working with gravity."

"Okay," I get down to a squatting position, hopping slightly in this tub. *Sheesh.*

After another eternity I get out of the water, dry up with Bangi's help before he walks with me to the bed that's covered in plastic covers and disposable sheets.

I'm resting my upper back on a mountain of pillows with Bangi seated next to me. He's holding my hand, kissing my knuckles and occasionally kisses my forehead.

"Yeah, come on let's do this." I motion to Celia and Hellen who help me prop up my legs, allowing me to press down on their hips.

"You can press your feet against us," Celia says. "And we'll support you."

I nod feeling that same urge to push again, and I do so, pushing and tearing up almost immediately.

Bangi is told to hold my leg while Hellen supports me down there. He wipes my tears away.

"Why is she not coming?" I breathe out.

"Don't worry she's coming. She's coming. Just focus on breathing and pushing when you feel a contraction."

"You're doing amazing Sthandwa sam."

"Your husband is right. It may feel crazy right now but it's going great." Celia says.

"Yeah?" me.

"Absolutely."

Okay. I push again, with all my might and capability. Pushing and hoping that the words I hear next are you're done. But that's not the case. "Can't we do this any faster?"

"It can't go any faster. It's anatomically impossible and you'll tear," Hellen.

Crap! Oh God, remind me again why this has to be so painful? I breathe, feeling the kisses Bangi gives me all over my face bring some sort of strength with them. I look at him. "Are her ears out yet?" I ask him.

"Are they?" he asks the ladies.

"No yet, but you just breathe steadily and her ears will be out, okay?" Celia.

"And for extra support you can hold here," she presses on the sides of my labia.

"I'm pushing!"

"Gently gently, breathe, just push a little bit and then take deep breaths."

"It feels like I'm on fire,"

No scratch that, it feels like it's on fire and my vagina is being torn from all angles. They should just push her back in and let us try another day.

Oh ntombi yakwa Dlamini how will your husband ever look at you vagina the same ever again after this? Actually how is he so calm and collected right now?

"You're almost there. Baby girl is crowning. This pace is perfect okay?" Hellen says. "you're doing a great job, just breathe. I believe at your next contraction her head will be born"

Good. I take in a couple of deep breaths. "You are doing such a phenomenal job sthandwa sam, you've got this."

I can't contain my yell as I push once more, grasping at Bangi's hand tightly. I lift my leg higher. "Oh God!" The pressure I felt not so long ago decreased and I hear the magical words. The head is out!.

"Wow," Bangi says. He's smiling, squeezing my hand too. "Baby, I can see her."

"She has chubby cheeks." Celia

"Can I get something to drink?"

"Is pineapple juice fine?" Hellen asks.

"Yes."

They get me some but I only get a sip of it prior to being told that I'll be holding my baby soon.

It takes a while for my next contraction which I hope is the last one.

I give one big push and it's just a slithery feeling before instant relief.

They pass me this slippery tiny thing that is covered in vernix and has a head full of pitch black curly hair with big brown eyes. I smack my palm against my forehead, shocked.

"You did it sthandwa sam." he kisses my lips.

"You did it. Congratulations mommy," Hellen says.

I did it.

I did it!

I fucking did it!

"Oh wow, she looks so weird...this feels so weird guys. I did it." I say putting my hand on her tiny back. "Why is she not crying? Is that normal?"

"She's breathing so that's fine." Celia says while they continued to wipe my baby clean.

They lift her from my chest to show her to us and all I manage to do is tear up. She's beautiful. Tiny and breathing.

"Who do you look like?" I asks and watch her pull her bottom lip before she lets out a beautiful cry. "There we go."

"Bring her..." I say and they laugh putting her back on my chest.

"She's perfect sthandwa sam." he touches her head and kisses it. "You're done and you did so good. I love you."

"Thank you baby." I shut my eyes. That was something else.

●●●

"Bhayeka, Zindela, Bombo, Bhangubhangu, Nodlunge, owawel'ihlimbithi abanye bengesheya, waling'okaMalinga kwathiwa abakhulu labo, mkhonto kawukhumuki, nonyamela wemikhonto, wen'osengisithole singenankonyane, kawunukwanga muntu wanukwa ngabahambi bendlela," Bangi says holding his baby girl in his arms. I've been watching them talk and admire each other for a good 10 minutes since Hellen and Celia left.

I sit up, unable to contain the smile that dances on my lips. "Sotoyi, Malinga, Mathetha, Mgedezi, Ncabakhulu, Mkhosana." I say the clan names with pride. "I still can't believe we made a whole human."

"Same here. How can she be so perfect at a shitty time like this," Bangi says coming to the bed and sits next to me.

"I know. I wish the circumstances were different."

"Ma is happy though."

"I guess." I say as he hands me our baby. It's 02h00 in the morning and we haven't gotten any sleep because of this miracle.

I'm feeding her. I'm so in love. My heart is overflowing and I'm content.

"Let us not take away from this moment while it's still here. It's the three of us now."

I nod and motion for him to come closer. When he does I give him a kiss on the cheek. He deserves the world and more this man.

His phone rings in the midst of us enjoying our bubble and he rushes to answer it.

"It's my mom. "

"Hawu answer it." me.

He answers it, putting it on loudspeaker.

"Mama," Bangi answers.

She sniffs on the other end. "Mama?"

"Bangizwe boy-boy..."

"Yini mama?"

"Your father... Your father is..."

Chapter Fifty Eight.

"Here today. Gone tomorrow."

••

That felt like the longest sleep of my life after a hectic few hours of labour and delivery. I was better the moment I woke up even if it was in a pool of my own sweat and mild pain yes, but nothing would ever replace this moment.

She looks perfect right next to me sleeping peacefully like nothing was going on in this world right now. She made me feel like there truly was nothing bad happening out there and that the world was a good place.

She laid here like this family wasn't going through the worst time of their lives. Like that call Bangi got not a few hours ago didn't make our hearts stop for a few seconds.

I wonder what kept him gone for so long apart from the fact that we live all the way on another planet.

I took a quick shower ignoring the minor pain I was in as best as I could before rushing back to the main bedroom. Paranoia was hitting me hard, especially with my baby girl being separated from me now.

The fact that Zweli was the one texting me and he knew this much about me and my life scared the heck out of me. I know there's extra security here but I still had room for worry. I hate

to add to Bangi's worries, but I'll have to tell him before I end up regretting it.

I check on my baby one more time before heading out to get myself some food to eat since I was starving. I wanted everything I could get my hands but mostly things I deprived myself during the last few months of pregnancy. That abruption really made me walk on eggshells with what was on my menu and now I had nothing stopping me.

The front door opens and anxiously I glance at the door thinking I'd see my husband walk in with more good news but instead I see Nandi skip in. Her mood is higher than I expected it to be and I don't seem to mind it. She's even wearing a smile on her face. I give her a frown, wondering where this joy is coming from.

"Good morning my Princess, congratulations my Princess," she rambles and my frown disappears. She must've been very alert then about what was happening earlier today.

"I was wondering why you're such a happy chappy today, now I know."

"Where is she my Princess? Can I see her? Actually my Princess sit down and allow me to make you something to eat. I'm so sorry for making you make it yourself," she says leading me to a highchair.

"I was fine making it myself though," I say truthfully but take the seat.

My eyes follow her as she makes me a quick and greasy omelet.

"I hope you'll like it." she puts it in front of me.

"It smells so good, thank you," I take a big bite and sigh at the goodness of this very omelet. She managed to make this in under 10 minutes and it tastes this bomb.

"I hate being such a nosy person but can I ask how His Majesty the King is doing. We haven't heard about him and his wellbeing for a while now and it's worrying," she says.

I swallow heavily cause even I wasn't exactly sure of how he was now. All I heard is that he's awake and requesting to see his son, Bangizwe. Other than that I was a piece of furniture and I had to play the waiting game like everyone else.

"Uhhh, I..."

"The King is doing fine, Nandi. Trust me he is," I hear Bangi say as he walks in further into the house. He's not alone. He's with my siblings and my mother-in-law and I couldn't exactly read where her mind was.

Well... Of course it's all the way at the hospital where her man is Zanokuhle don't be dumb.

I get up from the highchair and get met by Bangi first who hugs the living daylights out of me and pecks my lips.

"Are you okay? I should've called to update you on things but I figured you'd be too tired and needed the rest."

"I'm fine. I'm glad your father is okay too," I say and earn another kiss from this tired looking man of mine.

"And our daughter?" he asks, his face lighting up instantly causing me to smile back too.

"She's sleeping. I didn't think I'd get this much done with her still sleeping."

"I hope you two haven't forgotten about us," Buhle says and invades our bubble. I chuckle and turn to her as she hugs me too. "I'm just here to see my niece."

"Just that only?" I laugh, hug Khaya and greet my mother-in-law lastly. I honestly didn't expect her here at a time like this. She should be with her husband and child, supporting each other.

We talk more about my baby and Bangi's mom tells me more about her husband and how happy she is that he pulled through. Now what confuses me is why he wanted to be taken back to the palace instead of staying at the hospital. People with money never cease to amaze me yaz, but I'm glad he's fine and awake. I'm glad too that he will get to meet his granddaughter, which is special to me and my husband more especially since I've been told that he wants to see us.

I finish off my breakfast and go change into some baggy and loose fitted clothes cause I still looked pregnant and I wasn't

too comfortable about that. We prepare a bag to take with to the palace and it's only when they put everything in the car that I notice that we may have over packed.

Anyway, when we get on the road I get a call from my midwife Hellen, asking me a couple of questions about me and my baby and how we were. It was mandatory for her to do so and I appreciated it all. When she hangs up, I get to feed her awake and hungry self. She's sucking like I've starved her for far too long. Again I'm at it, admiring her perfection and inspecting every angle of her face and tiny hands. She's the image of perfection in my eyes and hopefully her father saw that in her too.

When I look up I find him staring at her as well, with a grin on his face.

"Have you thought of a name yet daddy?" I ask.

"I have," he says and looks up at me. "But you my beautiful wife will only hear it later."

Sigh.

Okay. I haven't really thought of one that would fit this angel in my hands best. Which name best fit her and these big beautiful beady eyes?

"She has your nose."

"Really? I thought she was all you," I chuckle.

"I'm not that beautiful trust me."

"You don't know yourself then my love. You're a gorgeous man," I say.

"Thank you Ma'Dlamz"

"Ma'dlamz?" I laugh, throwing my head back.

"It fit the moment sthandwa sam, yinhle ingane yethu and it encourages me to plant more seeds in your garden, " he says and brings his face to our baby's kissing her cheeks.

"Haa, uyahlola, maybe after two or three years. Not anytime soon."

"Sizobona," he says and I feel it in my soul that it probably will be sooner than that.

Konje what prevention method stays the longest?

"I'm just messing with you sthandwa sam, I would never do you like that. You and I are a team and without your permission there's nothing I'll do

"You can take her when I finish feeding."

"Okay," he says.

We sit in our silence for a long while with me thinking of how I was going to tell Bangi about all the drama involving Zweli. The nerve of that man.

"Baby..."

"Sthandwa sam," he shifts his focus back to me. I take in deep breath and cover our baby with her receiving blanket, trying to

distract myself.

"I have something to tell you."

"I'm listening," he says looking more serious now awaiting my answer.

"I... I think I know now who sent me those inappropriate texts and pictures."

"I think we already know who those things were from. Alakhe already got confronted about this," he says brushing me off.

"No, it's not him. It was Zwelibanzi," I blurt and the car goes quiet. Even our baby stops sucking for a good while as if she understood everything that was going on here.

"You mean your ex is the one texting you?"

"Unwillingly. I don't even know how he got my numbers," I say.

"How did you know it was him? You called him?"

"No, Zonke did. She wanted Alakhe's numbers and I forwarded those to her only for her to tell me that the numbers I sent her were Zweli's. I swear I didn't know," I add that last bit because of my own insecurities and how I thought I would've personally thought about this if I was in his shoes, and a person I once shared my feelings with got into contact with him.

"I see..." He says and runs a hand past his face. "...So this is the idiot's men we found snooping near our palace."

"What?"

"We never got a confession from them. Those loyal bastards

were from him? Your ex surely has balls and the brain of an ant. He dare undermines the power I have over him..." he shakes his head chuckling at the thought.

I wish he wasn't even getting the title of being called my ex because he didn't even deserve my time and energy. I could've done so much better without him being a part of my history. Remind me again what I saw in that loser?

"I think something was going on between the two of them."

"Between who and who?" Bangi asks.

"Zonke and Zweli."

He chuckles. "I wouldn't be surprised anymore. Your sister has done enough things to last me a lifetime. But why do you think of such?"

"The way she spoke about them not speaking in ages sounded weird. I mean why would you as my sister be talking to my ex like that. To the point of even having his number. What nonsense is that?" I say and notice my baby has stopped feeding. She's even sleeping and I feel bad for not even burping her as I continued to let other things bother me.

"He probably is Luthando's father at this point who knows..." he says with a chuckle but I find nothing amusing with that, instead I'm terrified of that possibility. She wouldn't do that to me... I mean she would but bathong! This girl is not human shem, I refuse. "I'm just kidding sthandwa sam, relax. I'm sure

there's a logical explanation as to how they know each other and it's not what we think it is."

"What other reason is that Bangi? They couldn't have been bestie-bombas like that right under my nose? Hayi," I say this and once again there's doubt in my statement since I knew Zonke all too well now. She probably was friends with Zweli and I just didn't know.

More thoughts fill my head as we drive even further to the palace and those thoughts keep me occupied until we stop in front of the huge palace gates. At this moment I could see the dozens of mannequins and helpers standing in formation by our drop off. A whole lot of drama if I may add.

"Dad was not kidding when he said we'll have the entrance of a lifetime."

"Your father lowkey likes drama," I say and shake my head. My door is opened by one of the mannequins here and I'm helped out. Our baby is in the hands of her father and I'm having to deal with some of my insecurities again. I still looked pregnant phela.

"Bayede, Shazi, Malinga," they say in unison. Practice must've been a drag then. Not long after they share the beautiful praises they sing the kingdom's anthem and soon usher us in. Apparently that's what they do here and it is a tradition that has to be respected at all costs, hence I didn't just walk away.

"They sing beautifully," Buhle says.

"That was an experience," I say as we walk in, my arm is hooked around Bangi's.

"Worry not, we'll still go through it only 9 more times."

"Bangi!" I gasp.

"Zano." He laughs.

This is becoming all too serious now and I don't like it at all. This one baby nearly tore me in half.

"Zanokuhle," Ama says and rushes to me for a hug. She smells good and looks better than the last time I saw her which wasn't a pleasant moment for anyone. "Congratulations, I would've called but I didn't know if it would've been appropriate... Plus I was keeping an eye on my father. Doctor Vilakazi says dad is on the right track."

"Speaking of my man

Advertisement

"I'll go check on him," the Queen says and doesn't even wait for us to say anything, already disappearing through the doors.

"How is he?" Bangi beats me to it.

"Better. I told him that he's a fighter and we just continued with nothing much but small talk."

"That's good I guess," Bangi says.

"Oh, guys make yourself comfortable," I tell my siblings who rush off to somewhere without any further questions.

"let me see my little niece, ma couldn't stop talking about her on the phone on the ride here," she says peeking over the throw while holding onto Bangi's forearm. "Am I not glad she doesn't look like you."

I chuckle watching these two fuss over the little miss whom I was certain looked like her daddy too.

"Uthini wena? Can't you see my nose? My ears? My forehead?" Bangi says.

"Awa awa, don't even start. This baby looks like Zano," she says.

"You're forgetting my wife is me and I'm her. We are one. Today and always," Bangi says and I swear he probably dubbed that as the best thing he's said today. I scan the room and see how busy the staff here was and that only reminded me of one thing that the King said about a massive feast and celebration. At this very moment I'd have preferred something small and intimate. Something that didn't give me even more anxiousness and something that wouldn't make it seem like we were having fun while the King is suffering. I should convince Bangi to talk to him and ask him to put a stop to this before it got any further.

"Sthandwa sam," Bangi startles the sense out of me but I quickly compose myself. "You okay?"

"Yes... I mean No...I mean is this all still necessary even when your father almost..."

"I know. But these are his wishes."

"And you want to respect that. I know," I sigh.

"Makoti," I hear the Queen's voice coming from the doorway of one of the rooms down here.

"Ma?"

"Come. My husband wants to see you."

Me? Alone? Crap, why? I glance at Bangi and he nods slightly before pecking my forehead.

"There's breast milk in the ba-..."

"Go," he laughs.

Okay. I clear my throat and make the long journey to that room where I could already hear that annoying beeping sound. Or was that in my head.

The Queen rubs my shoulder as I walk in, closing the door behind me. It feels cold in here. Too cold. I hug myself as I make my way to his bed and gasp when I see him in the state he was in. This was not the King I knew. I looked down, holding back those tears but they were failing me. My blurred vision was enough of a telltale in all of this and I needed to take a breather.

"Are you just going to stand there makoti?" he breathes out.

The authority that his voice once demanded now diminished

and replaced by this horror. "Come. It doesn't spread." he chuckles.

What the hell. Not now. This was even the worst time to make a joke like that. I sit on the chair provided in here, my eyes not affording him even the slightest of glances because I knew it would be game over.

My heart is pounding and my hands are shaking tremendously as the beeping continued right ahead.

"How are you today?" he asks.

"F... Fine. I'm fine."

"I know this is a lot and more especially since you gave birth to my grandchild a few hours ago. How is she? Bangizwe wouldn't stop bragging about her while we were headed here."

I smile a little, nodding. "She's perfect, tiny and an angel. You should see her."

"I will." he takes in a deep breath.

"How... How are you feeling?"

"Like I got shot in the liver. I wouldn't have told you this but because I trust you as my daughter-in-law, I'll tell you my whole body is in pain."

My heart clenches and I nod again. I shouldn't have asked.

"I'm sorry for that question Your Majesty."

"I'm sorry too. For a lot."

"You don't need to apologize my King."

"But I should. I'm here today and it's all my fault. I see that now more than ever and even if it may be too late for me I want to apologize. I raised a monster. I failed to protect my family from him and he came for my blood. I thought I was raising a future King but I was feeding a destroyer while the real heir to this very throne is your husband," he says and I look up.

Oh my God... I don't recognize this man in front of me. No. He looks tired and his eyes and skin had changed to a light tint of yellow. His temples have hollowed down and it looked like his eyes have sunken in. My King looked starved.

"Please don't," him.

"I... I'm sorry," I wipe them hurriedly.

"Nzwanoyezizwe. That's her name. " he smiles. "That name has been on my mind. I hope... I hope you like it."

"Nzwano."

"...Yezizwe...Usuqalile ukufushanisa igama lomzukululu wami ngisakhona," he says laughing a little.

"Futhi uzohlala ukhona baba."

"Ngiyafisa kodwa... Ngicinisile njalo mangicela uxolo. I wish I saw Alakhe for what he was before this. I wish I treated you better, and for most part I wish he never interfered with you and my son's lives the way he did. I was a weak man and Ki-..."

"Cha, my King don't say that."

"Makoti it's true don't conceal the truth that you and this whole palace knows." him.

It goes quiet again. I'm taking in the words he spoke and the fact that the King apologized to me. I thought we've moved past what happened. I reach out for his hand and hold it.

"I've long forgiven you, and I'm sure Bangi has too, My King."

"Thank you," him. "I've always seen how good you are for my son but now I know that I'll be leaving him in warm hands. In you he has found a Queen."

I look down. This man must be losing his mind to now. Me? Is he sure he's talking to the correct person?

"Bring Nzwanoyezizwe. I want to see her," he says and I let go, getting up before curtsying. Leaving that room felt harder cause I feared the worst. I want to research this liver thing just to put my mind at ease maybe him being here instead of at the hospital means something good.

"Sthandwa sam... You okay?"

"I... Uh..." I'm traumatized. "... He wants to see Nzwanoyezizwe."

I see him wearing a smile on his lips almost immediately.

"That's what he named her?" The Queen steps forward.

"Dad has always liked these weird deep names," Amandla says.

"hhaybo leave my Senzo alone, let me go take our little Nzwano."

"Let him not hear you say that," I chuckle as she rushes off to fetch our baby. I need to sit down... Or is it space that I need? I don't know what I need.

"I'll... I'll be at the... You know what I'll go look for Buhle and Khaya," Ama rushes off too. I get engulfed in a hug that's nothing but comforting right now. He says nothing and I'm fine with that.

•••

I'm watching the kingdom of people that have gathered here, eating and dining all in the name of celebrating my daughter. The music was on point too and maybe it would've sounded different if I was happier.

Well I traumatized myself even more after doing that research on the liver thing. I'm shocked that this is the road we're taking already painfully so. Swelling of the stomach? My goodness. I glance over at Nzwano as she moved her tiny arms. I make my way to the bed and sit next to her and later on decide to lie down next to her...

"Don't scream." a voice says the moment I open my eyes.

What the!

I sit up and immediately check on my baby. "Don't worry I didn't touch her."

"What the hell do you want here. How did you even get in here?" I ask and search for my phone. I'm calling security.

"Don't call anyone. I'm not here to hurt you," he says.

"You shot your own father Alakhe! How the hell am I supposed to believe that!"

"I was angry okay!"

"Then please leave me alone before you get angry at me. I beg you," I say and try moving Nzwano from his view.

"I said I'm not here to hurt you,"

"Then why are you here?"

Why am I even talking to this monster.

"I came to see him."

"Him who?"

"My father."

Oh he looks like a mess too, with the wild stubble on his face and eyes that looked like he hasn't slept in ages.

"They let you in?"

"I let myself in," he says.

"You are insane," I whisper and unlock my phone to call for anyone to come and get this maniac out of here.

"Would you have loved me if I was Bangizwe?" he says and the moment I look up I could swear that the look on my face was one of horror. He did not just ask me that.

"No. Never."

"But I'd be him. I'd look like him and do everything he does."

"No Alakhe. No."

"What's wrong with me then? I have money too and just as much power if not more than him. I would've given you a male heir and all the love you need. I would treat you right."

"And still you wouldn't be him," I put emphasis on that, seeing the look on his face change.

I press dial immediately.

"Please leave."

"You're pathetic you know that. I was just thinking I'd upgrade you...Make you someone and something but your high fong-kong cellulite filled fat nosed self doesn't see that. You're nothing to Bangizwe. I know him and as soon as he gets tired of you, you'll come running for me. You think he doesn't see that you've gained a shit ton of weight right now looking like two Zanokuhle's in one. He does and you'll see that I'm right. He doesn't love you."

I- wow. I blink a couple of times before I see him walking towards the door of the closet and vanish leaving me in a pit of confusion and hurt. The door opens and a flock of mannequins

with Bangi walk in searching the room frantically.

"What's wrong sthandwa sam?" Bangi asks sounding worried.

"They need to be fired."

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As soon as I told Bangi that Alakhe was here it didn't take too long for this celebration thingy to end. Everyone was sent home atleast with full stomachs but now the worry was with how that guy got in here. To say that the whole room of Royals was pissed at the guards and the head of these mannequins would be an understatement. They failed to keep one man –not two or twenty- just one man out of these palace walls. These men are supposed to be the best out there, and they're supposed to even be able to keep danger far away from here even during such events.

"Yini? Were you all stuffing your faces ngama gwinya when he sneaked in?" Bangi asks.

"It makes no sense," the Queen says.

"He could've hurt my wife and child while you lot kept pretending to be doing your jobs!" Bangi.

I look at them as they all stood in lines of attention.

"Alakhe is smart. He knows this palace and it's staff like the back of his hand. Bangi, Maybe someone helped him and we're just being ignorant to that fact. Maybe someone is not always

loyal as they say they are here. This is not the first time things seem to be in control only for them to spiral into nothing but chaos," I say before turning to walk back with my baby.

I sit and wait for them to finish doing what they're doing out there while bonding with Nzwano. I wonder what the King was thinking with this name. My poor baby is also going to be one of those ones with long ass names that take forever to write.

"Sorry to disturb you Your Royal Highness, would you like anything to eat?"

I look up and look at this young lady, my face turning sour.

"Eat? So I look hungry to you?"

"I...no My Princess I-"

"Then please leave me alone I'm not hungry," I say and look back at my sleeping baby.

"Get her something please Thando," Bangi says.

He sits next to me on this couch and I knew he wanted to say something cause it was obvious he heard all of the things I just said.

"You know you have to eat something. You're feeding someone now and for your own strength this is what you need. You didn't even eat during the ceremony."

"Because I'm not hungry."

"This is not the same Zano who was eating an omelet this very morning like it was a piece of heaven."

"Doesn't change the fact that I'm still not hungry." I shrug. "And I want to go home."

"I thought we'd be staying the night," he says.

"I don't feel safe here. Nzwano has been restless for hours now. It's the energy here."

"But it's late out...maybe we can go back to our old wing and rest there. We'll leave first thing in the morning," he says and even if it was making sense I didn't want to hear it. "Ma'Dlamz, I know this is a lot to take in but please don't shut me out."

"Your food Your Royal Highness." the lady puts the buffet in front of us and my mouth betrays me, watering in seconds.

"Thank you Thando," Bangi.

"I'm not eating all of that," me.

"You don't have to. I'm eating with you though."

I sigh and watch him plating up before taking my phone out to text Khaya and Buhle since I haven't seen them the whole day. They're apparently still having fun with Ama. Something like that.

Nyiso also gets the latest Intel about the ceremony and our baby's name and she seems to love it more than I did the few seconds I first heard it. My birth was also making rounds in the gossip world with people speculating how she looked like and if the whole Royal family was accepting the child who was birthed by a commoner. Sigh.

"Eat."

"Fine." me.

We ate and I ended up enjoying it more than I thought I would. The food was good, okay.

I had to wait for Bangi and my daughter down here to go say his goodnights to his mother. I've already texted my siblings that if they wanted to sleep at our wing they should let me know but I got told that they were enjoying themselves to the tee without me. Fine. It's whatever.

'...for every new life...'

I turn and no one said anything in fact it was just me in this huge space. Mehlo? He's not here but I swear that those were the words he left me with the last I saw him. I don't like this feeling.

Why was it this quiet right now?

The room is quiet and there's a weird stinch in the air. He's sleeping? The further I walk into here the more I felt like something was wrong.

No man, what's that smell?

Where's the doctor?

Why are the machines off?

What? He's freezingly cold to the touch. I take step back and stare at the pale King in shock.

No. No. No.

It can't be.

Where's the doctor!

I can't move. I can't even say anything apart from thinking that the worst has happened. The King is...

"... Zano! There you are I've been calling you and... What are you doing here? We should get going."

"Bangi he's cold. He's not breathing," I whisper my voice shivering. "I think he's no more."

"What?"

I thought I was defeated but when I almost see him falling while holding our baby, I knew this would be far worse to him.

Chapter Fifty nine.

"If you see the fangs of the lion, don't think the lion is smiling."

Congolese proverb

••

Ya neh...

You know when life just deals you the worst cards imaginable that leave you defeated to the core you just don't think it would be real. You don't think that this is what you'll go through. You don't think this is how much it will hurt you when in reality it's a dozen stab wounds bathed in salt, petrol and lemon juice and then lit up.

Seeing the Queen cry and breakdown like that was just as traumatic and reminded me nothing short of my mother. How I saw my King laying there, lifeless was just as painful and as sore as seeing my mother with no soul in her.

"Not my Senzo... Not my Senzo... He said he'd fight and he'd get better not die... Kings don't die! He was not supposed to die!" the Queen said rocking herself back and forth while in my hold. "He's not dead. My Senzo is still alive. That man in there is not him. No not my Senzo."

"We found the doctor," we look up as Bangi and two mannequins walk in. I frown and shoot up the moment I see blood on his shirt.

*'Senzo! Buya Senzo! Myekeni you can't take him from me!
Please No! Senzo please wake up!'*

He's seated by the couch, slouched forward and face buried in his hands. It's not even 02h00 in the morning. I get out of bed and make my way to him, sitting at the open space and put my hand behind his back. He heaves out a heavy sigh and manoeuvres his upper half onto my lap. I don't mind, in fact it brings me something that warms my heart.

"Can I cry?" he asks a while after we sit in the silence of the night.

"You're human Bangi."

"I don't even know how to feel."

"That's okay. Don't even put pressure on yourself. I'm here for you." I say.

I hear him sniff. "You know nothing pisses me of more than the fact that they can't find that shithead. It makes me even more pissed."

"Don't worry they'll find him." I say.

They better.

"I have to tell the Kingdom tomorrow... I don't think I can. I don't want to. I can't even sleep, how the hell will I even tell people about this?"

"Maybe ask someone else to do it."

"I wish I could. I..."

"It's okay my love. It's okay."

I'm trying here. I really am. He abruptly sits up and looks at me with bloodshot red eyes. "You have to sleep. Please sthandwa sam."

"I can't."

"Try. I have calls to make."

I nod. "Your mother... Is she okay? I think it's best you go to her and Ama for tonight. I'm sure they need you."

"With the incompetence that's been going on here, you want me to leave you here with my child and your siblings."

"Don't worry we'll be fine. You did organize new protection and I trust them."

He sighs again running a hand across his face.

"Promise you'll call if you need me?"

I nod and cup his face bringing it closer so I could peck his lips.

"You call me if you need me too. Okay?"

He chuckles and holds me by my wrists before nodding. He gets up and leaves soon enough and not even a moment later I hear Nzwano crying.

Okay konje I still have mommy duties...

The sun rises and somehow I managed to get some sleep into my system. I still felt like shit though the moment I woke up but I'm sure others around me were going through far worse. He really slept that side and my phone had no missed calls from him. There were plenty from the press though and I knew they knew. I go take a quick shower before changing my baby's nappy. Once again as new as the day was, Hellen called to conduct her mandatory check in and check up. I once again told her the honest truth about our current health and that there should be nothing worrying her right now.

Khaya and Buhle are already having breakfast when I find them at the kitchen. The atmosphere is tense and heavy and I didn't need to ask why. I sit down, begging myself not to become emotional, not now. Not at this very moment, since I did enough of that yesterday.

The forks played on their plates but no one was eating. I knew I had to eat because I needed the strength. I needed it for Nzwanoyezizwe.

"I know you guys know what's happening. I need you to understand that there's a lot going on and we need to be there for each other. It's going to be tense and guarded. And no one should post anything unless if it's permitted and it's not out of mockery or seeking attention. There's a lot that you can't do without permission here and if you fail at doing that then I have

no power to stop the Queen's reactions." I say watching them nod.

I hope they haven't done any of those things yet, because I was serious. This is a very sensitive matter and it should be handle as such.

The front door opens and in walks my husband, shoulders slouched while wearing a tired look on his face. I rush to him and the first thing I do is hug him as I tried finding the right things to say.

"Hey," that's what comes out of my mouth first.

"Sthandwa sam."

I hold him at arms length, inspecting him closely and I could definitely tell he didn't get a wink of sleep in him.

"You okay?" me. I feel like slapping myself after asking that dumb question. "Don't answer that... Come my siblings made breakfast."

"I... I'm not really hungry. I just need a shower before heading back to my mom."

"Oh. Okay." I say obviously hurt a little by his dismissal but I got the fact that he was in pain. I understood that maybe he felt lost and confused and maybe that I was just supposed to give him space.

I go sit down and pick on my food for a good second before someone clears their throat.

"Go check on him. Maybe he didn't want to talk because we're around," Buhle says.

She has a point. I nod and get up, heading to our bedroom. The shower was running and our baby was still asleep. She's such a peaceful being and I hope that never changes.

I pick out a few items of clothing for my man deciding on a decent black shirt and black pants. If he wanted color there was a maroon pair of pants. I sit on the bed and wait for him to finish and when he does, he finds me waiting. I feel like a creep but the good kind if such existed.

"You didn't have to do that you know that right?"

"I wanted to."

He nods and goes off to lotion. I watch him go up and down until he finally comes to take his clothes and get dressed. All the while my mind is brewing with things I want to say.

"You should be resting... Nzwano needs you at your best." He says.

"She needs you too," I say and he looks at me. "Bangi I'm concerned about you too. And you're not really putting my mind at ease here. I don't want you spiraling because I know how dark these things can get."

"I'm fine."

"You see... You can't be fine Bangi. You just lost your father. That's big."

"You think I don't know that? Please Zano I don't want to do this right now," he says and gets up tucking his vest and shirt in.

"Fine I'm going with you then," I shrug and get up to change into something decent. He says nothing. When I'm done I carefully take Nzwano and her bag heading out with him. I promise my siblings to be back soon before proceeding the long and quiet journey to the main wing. I don't know why this quiet walk made me nervous but it did and I didn't like it. He opens the door for both of us to walk in.

I thought the outside was worse but this here was far harder to witness. I found it hard to breathe and stomach the atmosphere that I instantly regretted forcing my visit here. The silence is disturbed by the sound of clicking on the tile. The Queen, in a long black dress comes walking down the stairs.

"What is she doing here?" were her first words before I see her charging for me. I'm frowning.

"Ma, not this again! Stop! Ma!" he blocks her from getting to us.

I'm confused. What's going on here? "Get her out of here Bangizwe. I will not be under the same roof with the woman who killed my Senzo." she cries.

Wait what?

"Ma my wife didn't kill anyone."

"Of course you'll defend her, you love her, she has blinded you with her juju and you can't see her for what she is."

"Ma!"

"Yibhadi lento! Iletha ubumnyama nje k'phela kulomndeni! My son wouldn't have turned out like this had she stayed emakhaya le kwa hell. My husband would've still been here an- ..."

"That is enough, ma I won't hesitate to leave you right here and then if you continue like this! Zanokuhle did nothing to anyone. We all saw the condition of that doctor. She couldn't have possibly done that. Now apologize to my wife," he says sternly while holding her shoulders.

She's breathing heavily with anger and evident pain. This is before she turns her head to look at me, the coldness in her eyes was enough to make me believe all that she said.

"Never."

"What?" he sounds just as shocked to hear that.

"I said never," she repeated and I take that as my cue to leave before her anger turns physical. I turn and walk away ignoring Bangi who keeps calling me back. Just as I open the door I'm met by a mannequin and a man I've never seen before who walks in after greeting me with a bow.

I'm rooted to the floor, curiosity killing me by the second.
"Ah! Finally are the results in? Did that witch kill my husband?"

This woman!

"I think we should sit down Your Majesty," the man says
halfway from bowing.

"Did I say I want to sit down? Speak."

"Okay...well we..." He hands her an envelope. "...we can
confirm that His Majesty was already a couple of hours decea...
Apologies... I meant asleep when he was found."

"Poisoned? He was poisoned!" she shouts. My eyes go wide in
shock. "You poisoned my husband!"

I sigh and turn to walk away. That is enough abuse for today.

I barge into our wing, calming my daughter down. After settling
on the couch I try feeding her and she refuses only crying
louder. Buhle and Khaya come running to see what all this fuss
is about and form facial expressions only they could
understand. "Please take her." I say.

"I don't know what to do," Khaya says surrendering and
allowing Buhle to take the stage. She takes my tiny being while I
try to think but it's harder to do that when a newborn is crying
this loud for God knows what.

"She won't settle down," Buhle whines.

I get up from my chair, a bit irritated by her lack of effort before taking Nzwanoyezizwe from her aunt and walking off to our bedroom where I try calming her. It was at this moment I wished I could ask her why she was crying other than going through all of this for something as simple as fatigue. I check her nappy and it was still as empty as can be. I check her temperature and even try feeding her again but nothing.

"Let me," Bangi startles the crap out of me the second he appears from nowhere. He takes his baby and the moment he holds her she keeps quiet. The nerve of this young lady. He looks up at me with a cocked eyebrow before I hug myself and sit down again on the bed. "Were you pinching my baby or something?" he chuckles.

I can't stop myself from looking away because that statement and the current situation wanted to make me roll my eyes at him. He takes the bottle from right next to me, sits and tries feeding her and she actually sucks hungrily. "There we go."

Mxm.

"Were you ever going to tell me?"

"No," he says without hesitation making my eyes go wide in shock.

"No? What do you mean no?"

"Exactly that. I didn't want you running and hiding when you shouldn't be."

"Oh, so now I'm running and hiding huh? Bangi that woman just accused me of killing your own father and the King of this Kingdom and you didn't want to tell me that? You couldn't even prevent me from going out there right now when you had every chance to."

" I thought she'd be over her stupid scenario and let everything go over to the detectives so they can actually do their job."

"So she's been saying this?" I ask shocked and the moment he sighs

I knew the truth.

"Yeah...I... She's hurting Zano, I know she's not thinking straight."

"uhurteka kamnandi neh?" I roll my eyes.

"I want to go home. I can't stay under the same roof as someone who's hurting and pointing fingers at me."

"Sthandwa s-..."

"You're not talking me out of it Bangi. I need air and peace far from this chaos. I swear our baby is not even a week old but this is what we're dealing with now. I'm tired, I'm in adult diapers and I don't feel my best... I don't want all of this."

"So you're running and hiding..."

"mxm," I get up and head off to the bathroom to just breathe at everything that just happened there.

Am I insane for not wanting to be around a woman who dubbed me the murderer of her precious Senzo? Am I wrong for wanting peace for Nzwano at these early stages of her life other than going through these motions with her fragile self? Am I running?

I sigh remembering the look the Queen gave me and the words she spat at me in front of my husband. So is this because I found him first? I made a mistake then by doing so but I knew for a fact that I did not kill that man. And I respected him dearly. We were even on good terms the last we spoke.

There's a knock on the door. I don't even bother asking because I already knew who it was. He opens the door slightly peeking in. "Zakhele will be here to fetch you in 20, you should be ready by then."

And just like that, he's gone. I take a minute to gather myself and head out. He's not here. I grab a bag and pack Nzwanoyezizwe's things. The few dirty clothing and clean ones go into another bag before I get disturbed by my phone ringing.

"Nyiso?"

"You sound down mge, I'm guessing it's true?" she asks.

"Is what true?"

"The King," she just says and my mind half shuts down. I sink to the floor, seeing his lifeless body in my mind again.

"|..."

"Holy balls mge... This is real. I'm so hurt. This must be tough on you guys. How are you?"

"I'm a mess," I breathe out.

"Are you this side? I'll come see you."

"I..." I clear my throat. The bedroom door opens and again it's Bangi at the door. "... I don't think it is a good idea right now. Things are kinda intense."

"Oh... I see."

"Look mge I'll call you later okay?"

"Sure," she says and I don't even wait for her to hang up as I do first.

The silence makes me squirm and fidget with my fingers.

"Uh... Please call Zakhele and apologize for the inconvenience. I'll stay, only because I want to be here for you," I say and watch him smile a little.

"Thank you."

●●●

He ended up apologizing for what he said to me earlier today but I didn't take it, only because it was the truth. I obviously do shy away from confrontation and at times I shouldn't. I should be here fighting my truth instead of running away.

" It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of the King my father... He... I..." He sighs and looks down before the

royal spokesperson steps forward to save the day. I could feel his pain, and it hurt me. I get up, grab my bag and give him a hug before we walk out of here heading back to our wing.

"That got emotional quick," he laughs off the pain as he wiped away his falling tear.

"You don't have to pretend like it doesn't hurt."

"I can't be emotional all the time Sthandwa sam, I'm supposed to be strong for everyone."

I shake my head before hearing a very distinctive laugh coming from not so far from the direction we were headed towards. It is busy, but when I see her I'm shocked. I haven't seen her in so long I barely thought she'd actually still come around here. She spots us too, making it quite obvious that I was staring.

"Okay baby look I'll call you back later I just ran into some people... Okay... Mcwah Mcwah love you lots like jelly tots."

Like jelly tots? Okay...

"Hi guys... Your Majesties, I'm heartbroken and saddened by what has happened here in this palace and to this Kingdom. Ngithi Yobe Malinga," Khethiwe says and looks down briefly.

"Than-..."

"Anyway congratulations Zano on your baby girl, I heard and I'm so happy for you," she says after cutting Bangi short on his words. I quickly glance at him, shrugging off the weird vibes

from her and receive the hug she gives me.

"Thank you," I say.

"I know how hard it is giving birth to a child and for it to be a girl...I'd be hurt."

"Hurt? Haybo why are you looking down on your own kind?" me.

"I'm just sayin-..."

"I think you've done enough saying for today. We'll be on our way," Bangi saves her from the brutality I was going to give her had she called my baby useless because of her gender. Her new man must be driving her insane.

"Hungry?" I ask closing the door behind me.

"Just thirsty, do we have whiskey in this house?" My husband asks while sitting down.

I chuckle. "You don't drink like that remember. I'll make you something light to eat and then cater to our baby," I go put my bag on the counter and go make us both something light to eat. I'm so hungry, it feels like I haven't eaten in forever. Did I even have breakfast this morning?

Yes... Wait no.

We sit and eat in silence and I'm happy he's eating.

"So... What happens now?" I ask after clearing my throat.

"We prepare for the funeral," he says and looks at me. "A lot of press even when you've requested for privacy and quite

possibly the whole Kingdom being at a fallout."

"And Alakhe?"

"We'll find him."

I nod. "Maybe Khethiwe knows where he is and might leads us right to him."

He chuckles. "highly doubt that. Those two are the most inseparable pair of toxic humans in this palace. They're quite possibly back in each other's arms and all that fluff."

"Mr Jelly tots?"

"Could've been him..." he says and sits up, getting his phone from the pocket of his pants and dials a number before putting it to his ear. Right then and there I hear my baby crying. I get up, peck his cheek and rush off to find my siblings.

"How was she?" I find only Buhle here trying to calm her down.

"An angel. She's only crying now."

"Sorry for making you babysit for this long," I take her from my sister inspect her closely hoping that that would somehow show me why she's crying now.

"Nonsense... Why you acting like I would have a problem looking after Nzwano?"

I shrug and put her to my chest.

"I swear to you she didn't cry like this while you two were gone."

"The last time she cried like this was... I..." My mind trails off to that dreadful moment I found Bangi's father lifeless.

Why did my mind do that unprovoked?

"You okay?" Buhle asks me.

"I'm, fine. I think I just need to lay down for a moment."

All Buhle does is nod before I head off to our bedroom to try and feed Nzwano, which I'm glad actually works unlike earlier today. The door opens and Bangi walks in with a look of worry on his face adding even more worry to my dull moment.

"What's wrong?"

"I just got a call from my mother. She... Called the police to have our wing searched."

"What?" I'm taken aback by this. "Why would she want to do that when I've continuously stated that I would never do that."

"And I know and believe you... It's just that we need to convince her so she can get off your case and onto someone else's. Like the person who actually did this."

"It's fine. They can come. I have nothing to hide."

"I know sthandwa sam. I know." he comes to sit down next to me, and pecks my cheek before playing with his daughter's cheeks. "Why was she-..."

"Zanokuhle! Zano!" there's a knock on the door. Buhle. What the heck.

Bangi gets up before I can and attends to the door.

"I... Sorry but you need to come see this. They're everywhere."

"Who is?" I get up.

Oh.

The cops. Great. They show us their search warrant before assigning each other places to vandalize

They're turning everything over not even caring about the fact that the item was either very expensive and sentimental or that it belonged to royalty. I'm not saying they should care, but a little respect for our place would be appreciated right now. This is a mess I have to clean.

We stand there and watch. That's all we could do. The Queen comes waltzing in too and you could clearly see she was going through it. What is Khethiwe doing here?

"Search carefully. I want to make sure that I didn't allow a monster into this palace of mine."

"Ma," Bangi.

"Shut up Bangizwe."

I take his hand, squeezing it hoping he doesn't answer that.

He doesn't.

Wow, even my bag is searched violently. All the contents dropped onto the very counter it was on. I watch as my privacy

is invaded bit by bit and then watch in horror as a container I've never seen before comes up.

"What is that?" Bangi asks.

"I don't know. I've never seen that in my life before," I say.

"Well what do we have here?" an officer says.

"We found it." the officer puts the container in a plastic bag.

"Found what?" the Queen.

"Cyanide. My Princess does this belong to you?"

"What N-..."

"Arrest her," the Queen interrupts me.

"Ma are you mad? Leave my wife alone...wena you touch her I'll kill you with my own bare hands."

"I'm sorry my Prince, but I have to do my job...." I hand Nzwano over to Buhle again. "...Mrs Zanokuhle Shazi, I'm afraid I have to take you in for quest..."

"Yey, yey yey are you insane? Let go of my wife!"

"Bangi!" me.

Did he have to push him?

"Don't do that...please." me.

I sigh and take everything in as it happens so slowly...

Chapter Sixty.

*"Less ego and more understanding makes it more beautiful." x
Taniya.*

••

Darkness. I'm covered in a cloud of darkness and there is no light in sight.

What I feel next is a hard slap on the face before my eyes shoot open and I'm still here. These four corners are not doing me any good and how I managed to dose off with the amount of fear I have in me is shocking.

"Your Royal Highness... Please follow me." an officer says and opens the cells of this hell. I've been in here for hours and I already miss my husband and baby. My siblings too.

Is this where Bangi was as well cause it sure as hell looked nothing like my imagination.

"Sit."

I sit on the cold, uncomfortable chair staring at the man who walks in. He's the same man who walked me to the car that brought me here. I think I hate him. I think I hate the Queen too... And that tiny container of cyanide.

"Princess Zanokuhle Shazi, formerly known as Zanokuhle Dlamini. How does it feel being the murderer of the King of this Kingdom?"

I chuckle watching him sit down. He's stupid.

"I mean, it's pretty convincing that the woman who had nothing would kill the King so that her husband can get everything and ultimately go from nothing to something herself."

"Are you hearing yourself mara?"

"I'd speak with a little more respect if I were you. Out there you're a Princess but in here, you're my pet, my prisoner."

"I'm not a prisoner."

"Then why are you here?"

"Because I've been set up!"

"Lower your tone Mrs Shazi. I've seen too many liars in my career to know that this is one of them. "

I sigh and sit back because I knew this was about to drag.

"Ready to plead guilty so we can settle this case and throw the key away?"

"I didn't do it!"

"Then how would you explain the bottle of Cyanide we found in your bag?"

"I don't know. I've never seen that bottle in my whole life... Heck I barely even knew how Cyanide looks like until a few

hours ago."

"So you're telling me this bottle flew to your bag for no good reason."

"Yes... I mean no... I mean how would I know where the hell this thing came from?"

"Is this your first murder Mrs Shazi?"

"What?"

I'm sure my soul left my body the moment he accused me of being a murderer.

"I'm confused. Aren't you supposed to ask me where I was and what I was doing on the day this madness happened?"

"Go ahead."

"I was sleeping. I woke up to find a creepy Alakhe in my room before he disappeared to thin air. We had a meeting with the guards and then I had something to eat. This is all before I found| His Majesty deceased in the room he was kept in."

"How convenient too. You found him?"

"You're missing the whole point here!"

"Okay... Okay. Do you have anyone that would confirm your alibi?"

"Yes. My husband. The entire Palace...apart from my mother-in-law."

"Why?"

"I guess she didn't really like me that much." I take in a sharp

breath and look down at my knotted fingers. I just want to go back to 3 days ago and stay at home. Had I known this would happen I would be as far away from this as possible.

Ngaze ngazisola.

"Wait... There's a doctor who had been caring for the King. He was knocked unconscious... Maybe he knows something." He looks at me, nodding. Just as he was about to say something the door bursts open and another policeman walks in looking rather pale.

"Officer Mahlangu..."

Oh?

They speak in private, and I'm not sure what to think. They are bickering about something though and before I know it he turns to look at me. I don't like the emotion I'm reading from this.

"You're lucky you know that?" he turns to leave me alone with the cop that came barging in...

I hug him the moment my eyes land on him, tears gliding down my face. That was the longest day ever.

Click...

Flash...

Click...

These invasive son of a bitches.

"Are you okay sthandwa sam?" he kisses my forehead.

I shake my head. Someone framed me. Someone put that bottle in my bag and I want to know how.

"Let me get you out of here." he says and I quickly wipe away most of my tears.

The drive is silent and long. We're not going to the Palace it seems and I'm glad. I don't want to see anyone from that place. A Hotel suite smelling of lovely and calming Vanilla. He takes my hand and leads me to a bathroom where I find a bath filled with water and foam in it. "I want you to take a long hot bath, don't worry about Nzwano. Change and then come through for breakfast. Okay?"

I nod.

The water is warm, flowing freely around my body. I wouldn't have had this in prison.

I barely do any relaxing as I sat in that tub. I'm thinking of the shit Alakhe has done that is now pointing back at me. Is he the one that put cyanide in my bag after he had the nerve to kill his father like that. That man didn't deserve that. No one does. I soak longer than what I thought I would before getting out and drying my body. My belly has gone down a bit and that somehow puts a smile on my face. At least something is working out. I lotion and get dressed in clean fresh clothing, ready to burn those clothes of darkness I wore before.

I find Bangi seated by the table, talking over the phone to whoever. The food on the table looks amazing. I had prison supper last night which was not very...delightful.

"No Ama. She's right here with me... I don't want to set foot at that place not after the stunt your mother pulled..." he says as I sit down and devour on the delicacies in front of me. I don't think I cared about what each foods contained, I was just focused on the unbelievable flavours. "... You heard me right...no...Ama, I haven't aban... No jeez...listen can we talk later I have another call coming in..."

He hangs up and I anticipate him to take the second call that was coming in but he doesn't. He puts his phone down and heaves out a heavy sigh. So that was just a lie. Got it.

"So, uhmm... What do two jail birds talk about during breakfast?" I ask jokingly and hear him chuckle.

"Not talk about their fake crimes."

"Mhmm...I don't want to go back there again Bangi."

"And you won't," he says.

"How, when the only evidence they found is a bottle of cyanide in my bag?"

"You know nothing about that bottle so it's not yours. I'll personally make sure I find out who that thing belonged to and make sure they pay," he says and I can't help but think of the

mere fact that this man's father isn't even buried yet while we were doing this.

"When is the funeral?" I ask.

"Next week. It would've been officially 7 days... He has to be buried on the 7th one."

"Oh..."

"And it's a whole procedure even after that. Ama was just talking about the fact that her mother can't attend our father's funeral."

"She can't?"

He nods and my eyes go wide. I mean I would've laughed and jumped for joy because that woman is being denied something this big but that's actually painful. Too painful.

"Is that a choice she made herself to... To I don't know to do what." I ask.

"You didn't know this?"

"Know what?"

"It's tradition sthandwa sam. It has been like this for decades upon decades," he says and not a moment later it hit me.

"Does that mean...?"

He nods.

"Bangi no..." My brain is spinning in its skull, rotating in a 360 turn to God knows where. I don't want to think of Bangi dying

"Baby!" I say in shock, shutting the tap that was splurging nothing but ice cold water. How has he been standing here for so long and to top that off in cold ass liquids? "Bang, come on... You're going to miss the ceremony if you stay in here any longer."

"I don't want to go."

I sigh. He's been like this for the past few days and I don't know what to do or think at this point because I understood he was hurting. What I didn't know though is how to make him feel better while still making sure everything else wasn't falling apart.

"Can you at least come out of the shower then. Please." I grab onto his forearm, hoping and praying he'd follow me. He does and I help dry him out. The skin on his hands was all wrinkly and looked quite sensitive. "You, don't have to go if that's what you want."

"But?" he asks.

"But? But nothing."

"You're not even going to talk me out of this?" his voice is raw and raspy. I look up at him and hold his weird feeling hands in mine.

"As much as I would love to tell you what you should and shouldn't do, I have no right in telling you to do something you don't want to be doing. Would I say go and pay your last

respects to your father? Yes. But if that is going to do nothing but drag you back then you might as well stay. I'll stay here with you if you need

" I say and watch him nod before I reach for his lotion.

I decide to give him some space while heading off to go wake our daughter up for her bath. Her hair is growing by the minute it seems cause it looked longer than yesterday. I love this tiny being so much. She makes proud. I mean not to brag but I did push her out of my vagina... But Zano, who would brag about that?

I'm done bathing her in under 5 minutes. There was no time for fun and games today. As I dried and lotioned her tiny body I get distracted by Bangi clearing his throat. When I glance up I find him holding two suits. Both black but both very different.

"Which one do you like?"

"That one." I point to the one on the left.

So he's going?

The drive is quiet and dreadful. None of us want to speak about where we're going or how it's going to go down once we get there. None of us want to face the music. I remember feeling like this when we buried Nomakhwezi. Lost and dull. Or was it empty and purposeless.

It was bad.

The streets are filled with the Kingdom dressed in black out of respect of the day. We were dressed in white. The palace is encircled with flowers and candles, cars and even more people. I hold onto my phone as my door gets opened. I step out and thank Zakhele.

"You've got this." I say, pecking his cheek and going my own separate way.

The women in here are all sobbing to a massive picture of the King while and seated on chairs. The glances I get make me wonder if coming here was really the best of choices. The Queen, Khethiwe and more of the family is right there in front which made me decide to just take my seat right here at the back.

This is torture but I can't help but wonder how my husband was holding up. I shouldn't even think of texting him.

Sigh.

Why is Ama coming here? I swear I don't want any drama. She looks like a mess but I could tell she was trying to look proper. "Come."

"No thank you, I'm fine here at the back," I say.

"No, you're family. Come."

Bathong.

I take another glance around the room before getting up and follow her to the very front I dreaded. Was this really, really necessary?

Do I greet?

Do I not?

"Sit." Aunt Jabulani says patting the seat next to her. I sit hesitantly, as this could go two ways. She could either strangle me or she could comfort me. "Don't let her get to you. I believe you." she whispers to me and I think that's where I let out a sigh of relief.

We sit there for two more hours listening to stories of the King while I tried hard as hell to remain invisible. I got to learn more about the man I called my in law and it was beautiful to hear. I brush off the cold stares I get from Khethiwe and wonder what I did now to upset her this much. It didn't even sit well with me that I had to be in the same room as her when I could be at the hotel with my baby.

We get to a point of strong prayer and I believe that's when I really zone out into a world of culture shock. This is too foreign for my liking but I take it in praying for more than what was necessary. You're in a cult Zanokuhle.

"Amen."

"Your Royal Highness, it is time," someone says and they stand up. We're led by a woman in uniform who lights two candles, gives two women one and proceeds to throw rose petals on the ground. It's beautifully sad.

"Yawa yawa lembewu..." Aunt Jabulani sings.

Oh Gosh.

"Yawa yawa yawa lembewu, Yawa yawel'emhlabeni," we sing behind her lyrics and the emotions just come gushing back all in one go. This is really happening.

The men are all outside.

Oh my goodness.

His Casket is made of glass and you could clearly see him in there. This is too much and that became quite evident when the women cried louder. The Queen who was supposed to remain poise and strong's cries pierce right through me. She really loved this man.

I spot Bangi as he walks with them, Uncle Archie covering his shoulders in a way of comfort. To think that Alakhe would've been there too had he chosen the route of decency.

That was the last time I ever saw the King...



"My fingerprints weren't on the bottle of Cyanide you found in my bag? Shocking," I roll my eyes.

He clears his throat. "I'm very sorry for the inconvenience we've caused you Mrs Shazi, it was never our intention."

"You're on my turf now, I'd speak with a little more respect if I were you. Out there you're an officer but in here, you're my pet, my peasant," I say looking at Officer Mahlangu. I'll never forget this unbrowed man and his words. The audacity he has though to invade my space like this after how he treated me back at that jail, is beyond big and pumped with sunflower oil.

In fact...

"Please leave. I don't want to see you here anymore."

"Mrs Sh-..My Princess... I"

"I have things to do. Don't make me call security on you," I announce and watch him stand not even a moment later. The next one, he's out and I'm relieved.

He should've done his job first before calling me a murderer and a power-digger woman while demeaning my past like that. I get up to go get myself some water to drink.

I can't help but think of Zonke.

I haven't talked to her in so long that yesterday's call shook me. For the first time in forever, she sounded normal. She didn't

even ask for anything which made me wonder what was happening to her.

Why would she act like this after years of keeping her mean act?

Whatever was going on though, I was surely not going to entertain it because I knew how fast she could flick switches. Maybe she wanted to see Luthando... Maybe she wanted some information about the man who was once her lover but I don't think telling her would make a difference. Well, not that I knew anything about him or his whereabouts.

My phone vibrates and I'm quick to reach for it thinking it would be Bangi telling me he's coming back already. But its not. It's been 2 days since the burial and them going to wherever the King was buried for their cleansing.

Zonke?

'Can I come see you?' her text read causing me to frown.

'why?'

'please'

Yoh. I sit up and think about this properly. Okay I'll just have extra security around me and make sure Nandi and my daughter are safe. It takes me moments to text her the hotel we were staying at and Deliverance for security. This was it. I'm

all sweaty palms and anxiousness the second she tells me she's on her way here.

Breathe...

Breathe...

Bre-... "Your highness."

Crap!

"Yes?"

"You have a guest."

I nod and he walks out to get my guest.

She's a mess. Everyone is a mess lately. I want to hug her thinner looking self but decide otherwise. I don't want her toxicity rubbing off on me.

"Hi."

"Hi," I reply tight-lipped. Do we sit? Do we sing? Do we scratch each other's backs?

Where's Zwelakhe?

"it's good to see you again."

"Yoh, cut the bull please... Why are you here and acting so weird?"

"I can't sleep."

"You came to the wrong place then. I'm not a doctor."

"He told me everything."

"He who?"

"Alakhe."

"He told you everything about what?"

"Ki... Killing the king."

My eyes go wide in shock. She hands me her phone and it's text message upon text message between the two of them.

'you what?!'

'I wanted to slit his throat but that would've been messy. I'm not crazy babe, I swear. I just knew he would've retaliated first if I didn't the moment he got out of that bed.'

'what did you do?'

I look up and she's watching me intensely. What the hell am I reading.

'it's amazing what cyanide can do to a person. He took forever to die though. Should've seen how he spasmed, contracting his hands and arms. I think I did good by cleaning him up and atleast making him look presentable. I think he may have done the number two as well but that's not important.'

'You're sick.'

'Sicker than you?'

'Honey you're sick too remember?' he double texted her and I feel shivers run down my spine.

'When can I see you. Zwelakhe misses you too.'

The way she just shifted back to this.

'you'll see me on Monday.'

Wait Monday? Which Monday? This Monday?

"Why are you showing me this?" I ask.

"Because I think I know where he's going," She states.

I believe her... But 'honey you're sick too' ?

"also I...I had a dream of you...you died in it..."

Chapter Sixty One.

"Monday."

••

Death? My death? How can they assign such a huge dream to someone like Zonke? A whole liar and a cheat. How do you start believing someone who's been believing her own lies for so long?

Make it make sense.

The question I have now is what do I do? Go to the palace and 'See the conundrum myself' or chase this woman out of here and call bluff. The second one seemed more practical, but there's a possibility that the man we've been looking for, for so long is actually going to that palace for God knows what.

I'm not giving her this phone back, until I have everything I need. She has her lips jammed between her teeth in what I'd describe as a look of anxiousness. I take a look at the conversations between tweedledee and tweedledum before taking screenshots. She hears the sound and reaches for her phone but I move it away giving my older sibling a stern 'no' look. The mannequins are not so quick to step in and hold her back, but I proceed to then send the screenshots on my email.

"Why should I believe you Zonke? You of all people know who you truly are and what you've done to not only me but

everyone around you." The words leave my mouth.

"Because it felt real, " she says.

"You want us to be real? Can we start by talking about you and Zwelibanzi, what's going on there... Or rather what Alakhe means with you'r-..." The front door shoots open disturbing my questioning fest. Bangi steps in and in a matter of seconds he's next to me.

Actually in front of me. Zonke looked terrified.

"Zanokuhle why is she here?" him.

Yoh. I don't even get a greeting when I missed him so much?

"I tried calling you," I say.

"That's not good enough. Get her out of here." he says and Deliverance and his men drag Zonke out of here while she called out for her phone. I did not think that would be happening right here and today. The silence that invades us the second she's no longer in our presence doesn't last long before he turns to me.

"What do you call this Zanokuhle?"

"I had security around me. I was handling this. I told you I tried calling you Bangi and you didn't answer my calls."

"One call and you give up just like that, like I don't have men around me?"

"It was two..." I mumble.

"Angizwa?"

"Alakhe is going to the palace."

"What?"

"If you bothered listening to me instead of shouting and going crazy at me for something I had under control then you would've known. I have texts here on Zonke's phone that prove everything."

"Don't start with me Zanokuhle. I'm still angry at you." he says and sits down next to me.

I know he's angry but so am I. I highly want nothing to do with Alakhe or Zonke but here we are again. Also, why is he fighting me and not the situation at hand. Entlek he's pissing me off even more. I take my pissed ass and go check on Nandi and my baby for my own sanity.

They're both sleeping and I don't bother them. The moment I turn back, I bump into my angry husband. He's just looking at me with an expression I can't read but I don't think I can be bothered to even do that.

I shrug. "So are you just going to stand there and breathe down my neck?"

"Give me the phone."

"No."

"Zanokuhle."

Mhmm.

I place it in his hand and move past him before feeling him grab me by my forearm. "Bangizwe," I sigh irritated.

"You're staying behind. I want you nowhere near the palace."

You're mad. He's mad guys.

"I know you think I'm crazy, but I don't want you getting hurt."

"Who said anything about me getting hurt?"

"I did. Deliverance make sure she stays put. I don't want her out of your sight," he says and looks back to the man who comes into my view.

"I'm not a child Bangi. You can't keep me here like that crazy fool wouldn't hurt you too."

"Rather me than you." he says and lets me go.

Bathong.

I follow him back into the sitting area, now frustrated at all of this.

"Bangi you're not leaving me behind."

"Deliverance I hope I'm not speaking to a wall. Make sure she stays here."

"Bangi."

"Do I make myself clear."

"Yes Your Highness," Deliverance responds.

I watch him take off his suit and tie, throwing it onto the couch before heading out and genuinely leaves me behind. I have no words.

I take a seat and look at the screenshots I sent to myself from those two. It makes me sick to read it over and over again but it also makes me wonder what these two would actually share in their pillow talk sessions. How dark would it truly get and how do they sleep at night after it all. I wonder if the man who was once our father knew anything because well... How could he not. If he could open his own daughter's thighs then surely he should know a thing or two about the loose screws in Eve's mind.

But other than that what did the not-so-sane Alakhe mean when he said Zonke is sick too. What has Zonke done for Alakhe to even put them in the same category? I have questions and sitting here is not helping me even a little bit.

I look up and find Deliverance guarding me like a hawk.
I smile and clear my throat.

It's been 5 minutes since Bangi left but it felt like he left hours ago.

I need to go.

The second I get up I feel Deliverance's presence get heavier and heavier on me. "I'm just going to the bathroom," I lie.

He nods slightly and I make my way to our bedroom again to this stupid bathroom. I dial one of the drivers numbers and ask him to prepare a car for me, but he downright refuses.

Damn you Bangi!

Wait, I can drive myself...

But my car isn't even here and getting the keys of these guy's cars is going to be a mission. I heave out a heavy sigh and get out of here, walking past Deliverance who follows me like a lost puppy.

"My Princess, I can't allow you to-..."

"Deliverance please, don't piss me off."

He keeps quiet and I take my seat on this annoying couch again, accepting fate as it was cause it was clear I was not going anywhere. Maybe it's for my own best. I could just indeed be putting myself in danger by forcing myself to a place I clearly wasn't welcomed to.

Besides the Queen and I are still on bad terms and showing up there would just make things far more sour than it is now.

My phone rings in the midst of my heavy thinking and I answer almost immediately thinking my husband has changed his mind. Wait... This is not him.

"Hello?" Me.

"Bangizwe's loyal wife." he says with a bitter chuckle.

"Alakhe?" my breath leaves me for a second and I freeze.

"U...Ufunani?"

"Don't you want to see what would've been all yours get crowned as King today."

Oh my God... not the image of him watching his father take his last breaths reenacting itself in my mind.

"I'll make sure it's entertaining... I know you love to be entertained. Actually which woman doesn't. You can bring that stupid brother of mine if you wish, wouldn't want him missing this special moment."

"Your children deserve better," my thoughts project louder than I intended.

"Still won't change anything. I'm claiming what's mine today. See you there," he hangs up before I can even say anything else.

I'm not even sure what to think or where my mind is after having a conversation with someone I can say with a full chest is a psycho.

Maybe sleep will do me well since I told my mind, body and soul that I'm not going to be involving myself in any of this anymore. Not even if itched to sit here and act like I didn't want to see the Queen's reaction when the almighty Alakhe crowns himself. I know for sure Khethiwe will be there to witness her 'whatever-they-are-now' get 'crowned' King of this Kingdom.

Shit.

I sit up, realising what all of that suddenly meant if it truly happened. There is no way I'm bowing down to Alakhe or even following the rules he'll make. I highly doubt this Kingdom will want to do the same after learning what this man has done to his own father, the late King. I wish I could stop this but I barely had a clue as to how I'd even tackle that. Could I even object to having Alakhe crowned.

Great job knowing all there is to know about this title and task Zanokuhle. Just the other day you found out you wouldn't be able to see or bury your own husband after he dies, you won't even know where he'd be buried and vice versa. Pain. I shake my head and look up to find Deliverance still faithfully guarding little miss me while standing at attention. I clear my throat and gain his focus.

"I need to go to the Palace, Deliverance. Now."

"My Princess, the Prince gave me strict instructions for you to stay put."

Bathong, I was here.

"He also said you shouldn't let me out of your sight

Advertisement

which means you can take me anywhere as long as you're watching me."

"But not to the palace Your Highness. I beg you not to make me go against the Prince's wishes."

"Deliverance, I need you to take me there. Now. It's an order."

He keeps quiet looking at me and I... Well I keep a straight face to convey my seriousness. He reaches for his wrist and presses on his smart watch. "Get a car ready for Her Royal Highness. I smile.

Hawu... Zonke?

I thought she would've left by now since Bangi kicked her out. She spots me too and comes running to my side.

"They wouldn't let me back in but I want my phone." her.

"Bangi has it."

"Wait why!"

"I told him everything you told me," I say and look around to the people watching us. "he's on his way to the palace."

"Wena ke?"

I give her a 'duh' look.

"I'm going with you then."

I was probably going to regret my decision but...

We leave the hotel and I'm still mixed with emotions now with added uncomfortability of sitting next to Zonke. I'm tempted to call Bangi and ask him if he's okay but flee from that idea.

"You never answered my question."

"What question?"

"Questions actually, I just never finished the second one."

I can feel her eyes on me.

"You and Zweli."

"Why are we even talking about Zweli? He was your boyfriend, not mine."

"Are you sure about that?"

She chuckles.

"Okay what was Alakhe talking about when he said you're sick too?"

"How am I suppose to know? Ask him."

Lord have mercy on me. This is the best he could do when he was creating an older sister for us. Thank you but no thank you.

A notification comes through on my phone and I'm quick to check again thinking its Bangi... Or even that Psychopath that called me earlier but it's neither. Officer Mahlangu?

'Call me when you get this. Urgent.'

Urgent?

What could be more urgent than a cold blooded killer getting crowned and it signaling a dark cloud upon my beautiful kingdom.

It rings once before he answers, sounding out of breath.

"You have a lot of nerve Officer Mahlangu to even text me like we're friends after everything you've put me through."

"My apologies My Princess. I... I have some information I'm sure you'll be glad to hear. It's about the cyanide bottle we found in your bag."

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I impatiently tap on my lap as I glance out of the window again. Today is definitely not my day.

She framed me?

What did I even do to her that would make her do such a malicious act with no consideration of what would happen to me. Or my Daughter.

She acted so sweet and curious kanti she was being a full on satan when I wasn't looking? Oh if I could I'd strangle her with my own bare hands.

And I said it! The time Alakhe came into the palace I knew he was getting help from someone from the inside and now I knew who. Jelly tots my left ass cheek!

Bangi was right too, they never broke up making me wonder what kind of hold does Alakhe have over these women, even the one next to me cause I knew she'd go back given the

chance. Maybe it's just the pure fact that he allows them to be evil around him which gives them this 'freedom'.

We all know we have some evil in us.

Finally we're here in the lion's den and I'm suddenly nervous with what I'd find in there. What if I was already too late and Alakhe got away with hurting even more people that got in his way. I see the car Bangi came in but no Bangi.

I call Officer Mahlangu and tell him of everything that was about to take place right at this very moment. I want this psycho arrested for good. I order Deliverance to get more men here too because I have no idea what I'm walking into.

'Good, you're here.' a text from Alakhe comes through. He can see me? Great now I feel even more paranoid. I don't even want to step out of here, incase something bad happens. Is it too late to turn back now?

Zonke steps out without any hesitation, walking to the stairs and up.

'Come out. Come see your husband and mother-in-law.'

My jaw is on the floor.

Bangi!

I'm out of the car in a flash rushing to the entrance too with these mannequins following behind me. "My Princess!" one of

the mannequins try to stop me but I don't. I find myself behind Zonke at the main palace wing all out of breath but still wondering of the unknown. Glancing past her frame, I freeze.

"Bangi," the words leave my mouth as a gasp as the scene in front of me unfolds. I cup my mouth but I was a little too late.

"What the fuck! Zanokuhle!" he faces me and the horror on his face told me everything about how pissed he is of me being here. "What are yo- I told you to stay at the hotel didn't I?" he roars.

"I-..."

"I invited her... Not Eve... but your woman definitely. Now you see who she's going to listen to the moment I sit on that throne?"

"Fuck you!" him.

"Language my boy. I can still make her brains splatter all over this palace floor." He presses the gun harder against his own mother's head and I hear her sob. "Now I'm not telling you again, sit down. I have no time for this."

More sobbing and unsettled feelings wash through me.

Why are these mannequins just standing there? Don't they have a 'protect the Queen against any harm at all times' policy? Come on! He is literally just one man... With a gun yes but still one man.

"Nani (both of you too) . Sit." I plonk myself right on the spot, terrified he might shoot me if I didn't listen to what he was saying. Zonke just folds her arms. "Sweetie not there. Zonke get her a chair. I can't have any of my honorary guests sit on the floor like we're barbarians."

I watch her just fold her arms in front of her chest.

"I'm not getting your fetish a chair."

"What did you just say?" Bangi.

"She's a big girl." Zonke.

He shifts his focus. "Khethiwe!" No Khethiwe.

"Where the fuck is this woman?" him.

"Probably came to her senses and left you again," Bangi says and the next thing I hear is a loud ear numbing bang. My heart is in my throat because only one person has a gun ready for use here. "Bangizwe!" the Queen.

"Say something again and the next one fired we'll be preparing for your burial."

Blood. Oh. My. God. The moment I try to go to him he points the gun towards me.

"Don't. Now... I think it's time I get to it before I lose my cool and not waste anyone's time. Mommy, sit here for me." he drags her to the nearest chair and forces her into it. Tears well up in my eyes as I watch him stride to the chair his father once

occupied with grace surely with the hopes that whoever would sit there next would be someone he's taught well and someone who would lead the Kingdom with pride and integrity.

His crown and staff rested there.

"Alakhe don't..." I hear the Queen cry.

"Shut it. I don't want to hear anything other than praises. This is my seat now. It's rightfully mine and whatever is meant for me, I will take."

I look at Bangi and he is clearly in pain. He looks at me too and I knew he was still angry at me. Who wouldn't though especially after he told me he wanted me safe. Now we were all here in the presence of someone who clearly gave no fucks on who he hurt. "Uzohlanya."

Not Mehlo. How did he even get in here without any of us hearing? "Who are you?" Alakhe asks.

"You and I both know that throne doesn't belong to you son, don't do what you're thinking of doing," Mehlo.

"Senzo?" the Queen.

"Who the fuck are you! Get this piece of shit out of here!"

No one moves including Mehlo. This seems to frustrate Alakhe because he redirects his gun and aims it at Mehlo, pulling the trigger countless times but the gun doesn't go off.

"My blood is all over your hands son, " Mehlo says.

"You're wasting my time. Guards get this thing out of here!" he says and puts the crown on his head. A cold breeze passes through me before Alakhe starts laughing. "I'm...I'm King now, and as King my first order is that we celebrate me and my greatness. From this day forth it shall be known as Alakhe's day. If anyone dare challenges me, I'll have them hung in front of the whole kingdom..." he holds onto his chest as that cold breeze passes through me again.

"Ngiyasha... Ngi... Ngisongelene..." he says squirming.

What?

I get up when he undoes his pants and drops the gun to the floor. Zonke runs to get it before any of the mannequins could and there's some relief in the atmosphere. She puts it away and the next thing I smell is of nothing more than death itself.

"Awu Jesu!" "Ngi... Ngisongelene... Oh my God!"

"Alakhe!" the Queen screams in disbelief while he laughs hysterically.

"Ngikalile mama. Buka ikaka mama. A big kaka."

I turn to ask Mehlo what is going on but he's gone.

"Alakhe, My boy what are you doing?" she goes to him like he didn't just threaten to take her life a couple of minutes ago.

Did she not hear the 'Blood on his hands' part?

Does she not want to believe this?

Her other son literally just got shot and all she can think of is Mr constipated over there who could've killed someone else too if that gun went off? "Mama look..."

"No Alakhe. Stop. Don't do that again. Pull your pants up."

"No!" he slaps her. "Ngisongelene!" and with that same energy he walks towards one direction.

He sits down again. What the heck is this?

"Mama I killed your husband. Actually we...Zonke yi Gwala. I tried hurting Zano too," he suddenly yells. "Not Zano I meant the baby. Zano is too special. I want her. I need her. I can see she wants me too."

"Uyabona wena uzo-..." He gets up from the floor but I'm there to stop him. "Bangi don't, don't. Don't."

"She's pure too, nothing like Zonke. Chemistry. Opposites attract. I hit her. She hits me back. She... We're too toxic for each other. It doesn't take much to kill someone. Poison, a gun, a knife, a scissor, the stairs, a car, fire... A pillow. Rope. She-..."

I think I was too focused on him speaking these things that just didn't make sense that when he just slumped over and the gunshots echoed in my ears, I was dumbfounded.

Chapter Sixty Two.

"it's over."

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Nzwano looked at me as she sucked hungrily on my breast. She latched on perfectly as I continued to caress her soft curly hairs with the tips of my fingers. If only she knew what was currently happening around her, she probably wouldn't have chosen me to be her mother. She should've picked a life with no bullets flying around or even a mother who actually listens cause now things were truly a mess.

For the first time in forever I'm laying here next to this tiny human wondering how my life would've turned out like, had I not met her father.

I probably was still going to be a wholesome teacher who loved and adored every learner sitting in front of her, while still being eager to teach and evolve them into better humans.

Maybe I would've met a normal guy that had a life that didn't have his life revolve around royalty, major responsibilities and the terrible spotlight. We'd have our own private life with no one knowing who Zanokuhle Dlamini even was in the first place. I wouldn't worry about if I wore a stunning designer dress out in public or if I said the correct things to people in this Kingdom.

So little would be expected of me and maybe just maybe I'd be happier bringing a child into an environment like that.

Bangi should've married Miss Princess back there... What was her name again... Nomuntu? Nomvula? Whatever it was maybe they would've balanced each other out just fine. She knows this life. She knows the ins and outs of it. She'd have respected him more especially after what happened a few hours ago. He'd be with her, all in good health and not blame herself for anything.

I'm so sorry Nzwano. Your mother is the worst. No one has ever wanted her in their life apart from this one stupid man who she even fails to obey. I've been arrested too... I mean what kind of a mother is that? Not the one I thought I'd be surely.

Now I'm teary again. Shit.

The bedroom door opens and just seeing him with the gauze covering where he was shot, makes me feel like I'm guilty. I was though... Because had he not defended me he wouldn't have such injuries on him. He'd be a 100% fine and happy. I've bought this man nothing but misery and drama. This commoner has completely ruined his life and now he has lost his father and brother... Because of me.

I couldn't even look at him with the amount of shame I have within me. He's not saying anything and that alone made the whole situation even more unbearable. I wish I was asleep, maybe then I wouldn't even have to face him at all.

He removes the bloody shirt he has on and disappears into the closet. This is my moment. I pull the blankets halfway over the two of us and place a pillow right behind Nzwanozezizwe before switching off my bedside lamp and close my eyes, but actual sleep failed to become one with me.

I could hear him walk out of that closet, sighing and closing that door. I could also hear him turn off the lights and make his way to here. Laying down besides me without even touching me. That hurt. But it also made sense. I deserved no affection from him now and forever.

Now all I have to do is leave and accept that I have nothing left for me here. Nothing at all.

"Sthandwa sam."

Hawe ma. Why is he doing this?

"Mamakhe I know you're not sleeping... Talk to me."

"I'd rather not."

"Why? Sthandwa sam."

"I was wrong. End of discussion, can I get some rest now? I'll be out of your hair soon."

"What's that supposed to mean? "

I keep quiet. He knows what it means and there's no way I was saying it again.

"Sthandwa sam?" he comes closer, holding me by my waist and hovers over the side of my face. He takes in a sharp painful breath and I think of his wound. See.

Nzwano stops feeding at that very moment. "Those bullets could've been yours. Even the one that hit you could've been fatal. It would've been my fault. I would've killed you Bangi." I remove his hand from my waist and control my useless crying.

"Angifanga nje sthandwa sam." he puts his hand back there and I remove it again before I sit up.

"Don't try making me feel better about this whole thing. It's not going to make me feel any changes. In fact it's just going to make me regret not listening to you or forcing the mannequ-... I mean the guards to do what I wanted. No one would've died today."

"What if you being there ended up saving mine?" he sits up too.

"That's only wishful thinking."

"I'm here. I'm not blaming you."

"Bangi why was your father shot in the first place?"

"He was shot because of Alakhe's trigger happy self."

"No... why was he shot?"

"The ceremony for Nzwano?"

"And what about Alakhe? He was shot because of me coming into the picture too. Can't you see that maybe you and I were never meant to be Bangi. Mehlo was lying. He maybe thought he was at the right place but he wasn't."

"What are you trying to say Sthandwa sam?"

"I think I should leave."

"Angizwanga."

"Things have been going south ever since I met you," I say and watch his eyes widen. "I meant since we met."

"So you want to leave me Zanokuhle? Is that what you're trying to say to me?"

I look away cause it hurt more after he said it. I hate feeling the way I was feeling because I love this man. I know I do.

"Answer me," he says and I could hear the break in his voice. "You want to leave me after everything we've been through. After all the fighting and the hate that nearly drove us apart? After all the rumors, the judgements and even the disapprovals from everyone you want to leave me?"

"I never wanted anyone to die in my name Bangi."

"No one died in your name Zanokuhle!" he says and lets go of my hand. "Ungiphula inhliziyo sthandwa sam."

With those painful words he gets up and leaves the bedroom without saying a word further. I feel like screaming and shouting wondering why this was the situation. What now?

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I couldn't even sleep that night, everything was just messing up my mind in the worst way possible.

Nzwano is the soul that makes me realise that it was time for me to get a move on things right now already. I move her to her cot before tackling the task of making this cold bed. I wonder

where he slept but I'm also wondering what he's thinking. He left here in a mood that makes absolute sense since I was just being a bitch about everything. After making the bed, I go open some curtains before changing little Shazi's nappy for her. I'll bathe her later so for now I'll pump and feed her. I take a quick ass shower with her in the bathroom with me and proceed to dry, lotion and get dressed.

When I'm done I decide on spending some time with her before she eventually goes back to sleep. Newborns sleep a lot, or it just mine?

Sigh.

I still haven't seen Bangi and I can't even begin to imagine where he was or what he was doing. Clearly he was still thinking of what transpired last night because I know I was. My phone vibrates. A message from Nyiso. She's heard.

'haybo mge Alakhe is dead too?' her text read and I had zero strenght to answer her. I sigh again and get up from the bed, leaving the bedroom feeling nothing but heaviness on my

shoulders. I knew heavier things were upon me... Like that dark cloud.

Where is he? Not in the kitchen or out at the back... Not even out in front. I look for him in almost every room until I find him in his gym lifting with the one good hand he has on him right now. I would tell him otherwise at this very moment but I'm sure he doesn't want to hear from me.

It takes me a good moment to decide to actually walk in and sit down on a bench here and wait. I try formulating something that would spark up a positive conversation but nothing makes sense as yet. Even the few glances I steal of him make me nervous, maybe even adding the aggression he's using.

"Argh!" he throws the weight down and I panic thinking he's hurt himself or something.

"Are you okay?" I interrogate concerned and up on my feet.

"I can't focus with you here." he dismisses me and his words push me back onto the bench. The look on his face was one I could'nt read today. "Why are you even in here? Did you come

here to tell me about you wanting to leave me again? Cause I don't want to hear it."

I- is that a genuine question?

"Bangi... I just want us to talk."

He gives me a blank look before coming to sit down next to me but with enough distance in between us for the devil to do as he pleases. He wipes off the sweat on his forehead.

Silence.

"I prefer to hear the people speaking to me." he says.

"Okay now I don't get why you're being rude," me. "I just wanted to apologize for yesterday and all that I said."

He keeps quiet and remains distant from me. If I didn't know any better I would take this as a sign that he has already written me off and that alone hurt even more. Why didn't I just keep quiet yesterday instead of ruining the mood for everyone like this.

"I know it wasn't the best thing to say or hear, but it's truly how I'm starting to feel. I'm bad luck to you Bangi and I know you can see it too."

"No, I can't," he says giving me that same blank stare from earlier.

"Bangi... I can assure you that this is not one of the things you expected out of marrying me. You never wanted my crazy sister double timing your entire family, lying and stealing from them while tarnishing their name the way she did. On top of that I know you didn't want that ruining the relationship you had with your parents even if it wasn't all of that before but it still wasn't like this. You could still go home and know that they love and will at least give you their time but now your mother won't even look at you without spitting on the floor because she blames me for not one... But two deaths."

"So you did come here to tell me you're leaving me again?"

I keep quiet unable to answer that because I don't think I knew where I was going with this.

"Are you leaving me Zanokuhle?" him again

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this time I could hear the crack in his voice that did nothing but tear my heart right apart. My silence is what eventually makes him get up and leave me seated right there still in a pool of my own confusion and hurt. I sigh for the longest time before taking myself out of there to somewhere else and cry. This was nothing but a gash to my heart that's making me wonder why it had to come by now, not even a month after having my baby.

I hate everything and everyone that's put me in this position. I hate them all especially that dead shit Alakhe. I hate him! He should rot in hell for what it's worth and I don't think I'd give a flying or swimming fuck about him. How I wish I was the one that pulled that trigger and ended him way earlier for my own sanity... And marriage... but I didn't. I instead allowed all of it into my marriage and now it could possibly be over. I've ruined the best thing to happen to my life right along having our daughter.

As I sat there crying my lungs out I couldn't help but think of people like Zweli who'd do vile things to us while in jail, my father who'd also interfere, the Luthando drama and my mother. And who was that all from... Me.

Was I still wrong for blaming myself for my emotions being all over the place?

Was I even wrong for feeling the way I was feeling?

Arms cover me, scaring the shit out of me but the moment I smell him I calm myself down. "Musukhala Sthandwa sam,"

I don't deserve this right now...especially the comfort I'm getting from this man right here.

I don't know for how much longer I cry for but when I stop my eyes feel nothing but irritated and my nose was runny. With a sigh I look up to him and gather some strength for what I want to say.

"I don't want to leave you Bangi." I say.

"I shouldn't have spoken to you the way I did... My emotions got the better of me and instead of trying to understand where you are coming from, I brushed your feelings off as invalid. I

just..." he finally looks at me with a frown on his face. "...I just want you to know and understand that none of this is your fault. I don't blame you for any of it, neither have I even thought of it like that. It pains me that the one thing you think is a solution might kill me because I'm practically breathing for you now. You're genuinely my everything sthandwa sam and I can't lose that. I won't lose you."

"I can't even make you happy right now Malinga,"

"Says who?" him. Okay well I... I look back down and at his free hand, placing mine gently in there. "I think we both knew that not everything was going to be easy for us and I highly doubt it even is in a marriage. Ups and downs are normal. You being here is all my happiness Zano, never doubt that."

He squeezes my hand gently and pulls me tighter to his chest. For the first time since Zonke decided to play God with Alakhe, I feel myself let go of all those narly thoughts that bought me nothing but sadness. Bangi was right, it's the people around us that make us fight.

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The day went by even slower with the news of yet another death spreading through the kingdom like a wildfire. It was chaos and people were questioning what the hell was happening in the royal house.

Some speculations even went as far as saying that we were in a cult and we're sacrificing royals for wealth. Some said we were bewitched and that we needed cleansing. I'll agree on the cleansing part but the other theories were just bogus.

Bangi was out again, saying speeches and confirming this truth that was still hard to grasp. Yes, Alakhe was gone forever but it just didn't feel real. I also couldn't help but wonder how the Queen was feeling now or how Ama and the entire family were carrying on. Zonke... Sigh... I got a call from her earlier begging me to post her bail, but I couldn't.

Not that I couldn't afford it but because something about what happened yesterday still made me question other things. I was going to go and try finding out the truth and if there's nothing to find out, I'll drop it all. I call Bangi telling him I was on my

way to see my sperm donor. I needed and wore a thick skin on my body.

'Call me if you need anything. I love you.' a text from my husband comes through.

'I will. I love you even more,' I texted him back before we got to the gigantic place with high walls. We're searched and scanned and then allowed into their premises. It does even look safe here but that was not my main focus right now. Right now it was setting my eyes on this man and getting answers. I sit in that interrogation room waiting.

I hear his shackles before I actually see him and his tiny body fill the room. He coughs and coughs and sits down and coughs and coughs. Okay not much has changed then.

"My Princess, I'll be right here." the guard says and I nod only, my focus still on this man.

"Nonozi."

"Hi." I sit back, hugging myself.

"I missed you."

"I can't say the same."

"I know. You still hate my guts. After everything I've done I wouldn't like myself too. How are my two children? Luthando? Your child? I heard you gave birth. I heard the King is dead too. So many things happening out there when you're in here."

"Mhnm..."

"I..." He clears his throat. "Also... Tell Zonke to... Uhmm... To go get tested."

My eyes go wide and my thoughts go numb. Tested for what exactly.

Yoh.

"It's scary in there my Nono. I have learnt to fig-..."

"Did you really kill my mother?" I interrupt him, not really caring for his story.

"What do you mean?"

"Is her blood really on your hands or you're just covering up for her, because I have people and evidence that tell me this."

The 'people' is busy laying in a mortuary, freezing cold to the touch.

"I want the truth from you. If you ever cared for me like you claim you do then you'll tell me everything I want to know right now."

Silence.

"Please... I beg you." I sit forward and look at him in the eye.

"She said it would be easy and we could make it look like she did it to herself. I loved Noma but everything that ran in my mind before that day was Zonke. I don't know what made me go back to her countless times but I did and each time it felt better and better. She said Noma had a lot of money on her and was even worth more when dead. I... Helped her that night but she was the one who drugged her first and when that didn't work she suffocated her with a... A... "

"A pillow?"

He nods and I feel my soul leaving my body that very moment.

"she tied rope around her neck even after I told her she's not breathing anymore."

"And afterwards she came to sleep right next to me like nothing happened." I say to myself remembering that night. "why?"

"Money."

"My mother's money that she slaved for."

"it wasn't even all there."

"But it was enough for you to leave us for another woman with nothing."

"She had the money uZonke. She probably spent it with that boyfriend of hers. I forgot his name, but believe me when I say if things were different I wouldn't have done this."

"But you can't. She's gone. We're never getting her back," I get up and not even a glance further I leave.

Chapter Sixty Three.

"Eventually, you will come to understand that love heals everything, and love is all there is." X Gary Zakau.

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Motherhood is something else. I feel like I keep learning day by day what it truly means and is to take care of another human being. There have been days where I just felt like shit and then there were days where I truly enjoyed listening to Nzwano jibberish her day away. It brought nothing but joy to my heart to have her with me day by day. I felt like someone's idol and nothing could tarnish that. Nothing could change how little miss here is viewing me with each passing minute.

Also, she was starting to look a little more like me now...or maybe I'm just starting to see the weirdest mixture of Bangi and I on her. What I loved though was seeing her smiling cause it looked just like her father's. The way she sucked on her tiny fists and drooled all over her daddy and I was the most heartwarming thing ever.

I'm obsessed...but I'm also gasping for a break.

Nothing screams responsibility like waking up in the middle of the night to attend to the same being that does not know her poop stinks.

I shake my head watching Bangi put her down for her nap in her crib ever so gently. It took longer to get her to go to sleep today and honestly I'm glad it wasn't on my turn.

"Success," he whispers and punches the air.

"Took you long enough," I say and focus back on the mirror in front of me while watching him from there.

"I'm sorry, but who'd she get that from?"

"Obviously you. I don't have anything to do with your baby's personality." I say tugging the hairs of this dangerously laid weave behind my ear. I looked amazing if I do say so myself. There was this newfound love I had within me and I appreciated it.

I mean who wouldn't drool over this sexy mother of 2?

"That baby over there is all you sthandwa sam," he stands behind me as I contemplate on which shade of lipstick I should put on.

"She can be all me as long as you're still taking me out to dinner tonight," I say.

I didn't whip out this gorgeous dress of mine just to stay home again like the last time we planned something like this. It was almost two weeks after a long back and forth with court cases and charges that were served to Zonke and her lover. I still cou- ... Actually I believed it all. This is Zonke we're talking about here and her being sent away to prison for not only one but

two murders shouldn't shock me that much anymore. Mr I'm-your-father got a reduced sentence but it still was a nice and satisfying one.

Perjury and being an accomplice in a crime are some of the ones that got him crucified too.

I personally would've loved to add the statutory rape in there cause what he did to Zonke was still wrong but...

"You hungry?" he rests his warm hands on my shoulders.

"Malinga I'm always hungry," I say.

Breastfeeding and pumping is no joke. "Please go get dressed, we leave in 10 minutes."

"Haybo who's taking who out here?" He asks and raises his eyebrows watching me attentively through the mirror.

"You are, but please go. I'm serious. I want this night happening," that was me desperate for an opportunity to ignite that before-baby intimacy between us.

"It will. Just let me admire my woman for a minute." he leans in and I can't help but roll my eyes.

"10 minutes Bangi."

"A lot can happen in 10 minutes," he says.

"Yeah, like us being late for our own reservation."

"Or making a sibling for that one over there."

"Bangi..." I burst out in laughter as I shake my head. I could see the humour written all over his face making it easy for me to brush this whole thing off. "...not happening."

"Intense. Use the red one. It'll bring out those beautiful eyes of yours," he pecks my cheeks making the heat from them spread all over my face.

"You have 9 minutes baba ka Nzwano."

"Fine. I'll leave since you want me gone so bad," he dramatically throws his hands in the air and backs away.

I don't know what's going on here too... But with his reliable advice I go ahead and apply the red lipstick tying in the entire look. The dress I bought way before baby Shazi was born finally fit me and even though things were not back to their original form, I still loved me in the mirror. It took me a while though to understand that these changes made me carry a life for 9 entire months. It definitely took some work and those joint-snapping-back-stretching yoga classes.

I stand and admire myself even more before remembering I need shoes that can go with this stunning dress. With the same motivation I rush over to the closet where I find Bangi buttoning up his shirt. Within minutes he's making noises of...appreciation.

"Mama... who are you looking so damn fine for?" him. I don't bother looking at him because he'd see the stupid grin I have on my face. "You married? Cause even if you are... then I'm willing to be that sidemans you never knew you needed."

I snort.

What?

Where are they? "What are you looking for down there when my heart is up here?"

"My silhouette satin court heels," I say and look at the second shelf of my shoes.

"Oh so you can talk. I thought you couldn't hear me," he says and I glance up to him stopping myself from rolling my eyes at him again. He reaches for a shoe box and walks towards me. "I think these ones will do the job just right."

I'm stunned. I didn't expect new shoes. No scratch that - new Tom Ford shoes. How much did these even cost cause I could tell even by the packaging that this was mad expensive.

"Aren't you going to open it?" he asks and I nod and shake my head at the same time, sitting down on the ottoman and open it. I'm met by two grey bags and a smaller one which I put aside eager to get to my price. Oh my gosh.

I look at him mouth wide open.

"Bangi..." I glance down again and take one out. Oh my God, I'm going to pass out right in this closet. "... Bangi you shouldn't have, but you should've, but you shouldn't have."

The gold masterpiece of a shoe looks like a crime waiting to happen. I was in love with a shoe that could quite possibly give

me wobbly knees and painful toes but it would definitely be worth it. The tiny padlock is everything too.

"Let me," he says and takes the shoe from me, crouches and puts it on my foot. It's a perfect fit. He does the same with the other one and I already feel like showing the world these.

"There we go. My woman is all set now."

I look at him and shake my head. "If this is your way of trying to get into my panties, it's working."

He laughs and gets up. I follow suit and hug him. "Thank you, I love them."

"You love me too?"

"Obvious mpintshi," I say and chortle before breathing him in. Amazing. I'm taller bathong.

"Haybo dawg." he laughs and lets me go, showering my cheek with kisses. I let him go on and finish dressing while I went to fuss over Nzwano and her stuff. I want to make sure everything she needs is here so that Nandi won't have to worry herself.

"Relax."

"I am relaxed."

"Nandipha knows what she's doing sthandwa sam. She's watched Nzwano plenty of times before."

"I know. I was just making sure."

He holds his hand out for me to take but instead I put my purse in there and straighten his tie.

"What a handsome husband I have," the words fly out of my grinning mouth before I hook my arm around his.

He opens my door for me and helps me in. Still the same man I fell in love with. Literally. He closes the door and I watch him walk around to his side. He's driving us tonight because he just wanted to make things a little extra special tonight. We still had mannequins accompanying us though which was not a big problem.

He goes on to play *the breakthrough album* by Mary J. Blige which I can't help but put my own vocals into it to obviously make it sound better. After an interesting 40 minute drive we pull up to an empty parking to the most posh looking restaurant ever. This man has taste...Nothing new - I mean he chose me after all. I chortle and unintentionally earn his attention.

"What?"

"Nothing. Sorry." I state and glance at myself once in the mirror as he parked away. Again he's out first, rushing to come open my door and help me out. "Thank you."

Inside is a calm, warm and welcoming ambience that instantly makes me love this place even more. We're greeted by smiles and drinks. Mocktails.

"Good evening and welcome Your Royal Highness. I'm Lihle. We

have everything ready and set out for you this evening. Please follow Chris. He will be your waiter for tonight."

Chris looks nervous bathong. "Hi Chris," I smile hoping that would make him relax a bit if he truly thinks we're stiff big figures. We follow him as he leads us to our reserved seats at a far almost secluded area. This man really booked the entire restaurant for us. I can't...

He pulls my chair out and I take a seat thanking him once more. When he sits down he takes the initiative again to order for the table. Excellent choices once again.

"Be nice." I whisper and take a sip of my drink.

"I am. What are you talking about?"

"The poor guy is shaking because of you."

"Let him shake a little." he chuckles while I just shake my head.

"But now, gimme your hands..."

I give them to him. "... So soft... So warm." he kisses the back of them.

"Your hands are just as soft, what do you mean?" I laugh.

"Baby that doesn't sound manly."

"Soft hands can be manly Bangi."

"Ah," he chuckles and takes a sip of my drink instead of his which makes me glare at him. "Yini? Ufuna ngiminyaniswe yiMocktail manje?"

"Mocktail kabani Bangi?"

"Yethu baby."

I roll my eyes and retrieve my hands before hearing my stomach rumble and tumble in its empty hood. I decide on distracting myself with his phone and take plenty of pictures of myself, us and just him alone. I take a few of the actual place because why not and I smiled thinking of the last time I used his phone for my own pictures. Surely it was wondering too where this chubby goddess went to for a while and while on there I couldn't help but scroll through our hundreds of selfies which I take full credit on. Gosh I see the change and I definitely see the growth. Nzwano doesn't even look like this anymore.

Bathong when did he take these and why was I pulling my face like that while holding that big ass tummy?

I'll blame that on a contraction. Yep. Totally.

"Sir are you stalking me?" I ask and show him the pictures he took of me when I was stuffing my face with a pizza. How did I not notice his presence here?

"You looked so cute...I had to."

I shake my head and head back to scrolling. Sigh. Pictures of his father and sister before he got shot looking so strong and unknowing to the fact that he wouldn't be here with us today

show up. The world is a crazy place because one would doubt that would happen but here it is and it hurts.

He comes to sit next to me - chair and all- before looking at the picture I was currently on. I lay my head on his shoulder and lock his phone, overwhelmed by how quickly this just wanted to make me burst out in tears.

"You okay?"

"Yeah," I breathe out. "I'm fine... Just can't believe it's been 8 months since everything. I don't even know how we got through it... Or even how your family made it through but we're here." I shake my head and look at him, his expression hard and focussed on whatever it was. This was before he took a deep breath and finally looked my way forcing a smile on his lips.

"I... I don't want us talking about this... But I'm glad we're here. Together. Breathing. Happy," he says before losing that smile and reaching for his drink. I reach out and hook his forearm with my hands.

"Maybe you should see someone."

"Someone? Like a therapist?" he asks and I nod before hearing him chuckle putting his hand over mine that was still on him.

"Sthandwa sam, you're all the therapy I need and have."

"Bangizwe Shazi."

"Sthandwa sam?"

"I'm serious. Very serious about this and you should know this."

"I do know this but I don't need therapy. I'm fine." he says and I want to keep poking but when I glance up Chris is steadily making his way here with two plates in his hold.

We eat, with the obvious silence and soft melodic music playing in the background. I'm sure he is now thinking of what I said not so long ago cause I surely was. He lost not only 1... Not 2 but 3 people in such a short span of time, that has to do something to ones mind.

"Will you talk to me if I said I'll think about it?" he startles me.

"huh?"

"You heard me."

I did. I absolutely did and call me selfish but I was happy he's going to do as I say. I nod and pierce through a piece of ravioli.

"Good now, tell me about the little trip you and your friend had two days ago."

I grin.

•••

I fell asleep in the car from the fun and amazing time I just had in that restaurant, bonding and loving on my husband - without any cries and him not being sticky from an intense playtime with Nzano.

We got to forget about her together for a brief moment and remember how it felt like when it was just the two of us. Trust

me there was absolutely no regrets of being parents around here, but the breather was needed.

Zanokuhle, you're being nothing but dramatic right now. I sit up and glance at the man who's seated in this car, in the obvious silence that woke me up. "You okay?" I voice out and it seems to startle him a little.

"Huh?"

"Are you okay?"

"I'm fine. Just thinking," he says and ignores the obvious vibrating going on in his pocket.

"Aren't you getting that?"

"I would rather not. I think we should go inside. It's getting late," he says and rubs his eyes.

I sit there for a good second wondering what's going on in my husband's head and if I should be worried. I sigh and gather my purse and phone before opening the car door. I'll ask when I think he's ready to give me something I can work with here. He's not following me. Is this about what I said back at the restaurant?

Oh, gosh.

Why did I have to mention his father today of all days?

Nandi is the second thing I see the moment I step into the house. I quickly remove my shoes and make my way to her with the intention of waking her up and allowing her to go ahead and rest in her chambers. She's really knocked out tonight which could only mean that Nzwano was a hand and arm-full.

"Nandi...Nandi..."

She moves slightly before awakening and sitting up at immediate attention. I shake my head, giving her a small smile.

"My Princess."

"We're back, Thank you so much for tonight."

"My Princess please don't mention it. You know I don't mind keeping an eye on the Kingdom's little princess."

"You can have tomorrow off for yourself okay."

"I...Thank you so much. I better get going then," she says and grabs her throw with her before leaving. The moment she's out I let out another sigh, take the monitor and continue to take my journey upstairs where I briefly check on my baby girl. She's sleeping like the angel that she is. I smother her with a few kisses before heading to our bedroom. I go put my shoes away and then head to the bathroom to remove the makeup.

His footsteps are what I hear first before I see him coming into view. I wish I could climb into his head and see what is going on

in there. I wish I could take away all his worries and problems like he takes mine away.

"My mom called," his voice vibrates through the quiet bathroom. I look at him a little shocked by that since it's quite obvious that we haven't been in contact with this woman. I'm waiting for him to say more but he doesn't. I'm not going to poke. "I don't want to talk to her...I don't even want to talk about her."

"Yes please," I nod and hang the towel back at its original place before making my way to him. The tension on his face has my heart aching. I snake my hands around his waist and hug him tightly. "We don't have to talk about her baby." my eyes find his, my hands rest on his cheeks and bring him closer to me kissing and tasting on his soft meticulous lips. He grabs onto my waist. It's not long before I pull away and give him a small smile.

"More," he whispers.

More? More what? More kisses? More me?

He lifts my dress up little by little and the moment its over my butt, I stop him.

Shit.

His sigh hits deep this time around and I know I've even disappointed myself in this situation. I mean I'm ready but...

"I... I'll go check up on Nzwano," he says and leaves me right there wondering why I had to do that. With my own sigh I head off to the closet to change out of the dress and into one of his 'old' loose tops and my own pajama shorts.

Stepping out of the closet I find him seated on the bed texting on his phone.

"I'm sorry. I-..."

He looks up causing me to halt at my speech and instinctively look at my feet and pedicured toes.

"I got scared." how my voice almost sounded like I'm trying to whisper when I wasn't in the plans of doing so has me weirded out.

"I scare you now Ma'Dlamini?"

"No," I look up just as quickly as I look down again, thinking about how quick I was to respond to that. "That's not what I meant."

"You aren't ready and I get that. We don't have to have to talk about this."

I look up again and find him in his dismissive state

back to minding his phone. I sigh and make my way to bed, a bit angry about how stupid this interaction was. I could also hit myself in the face for this too because deep down inside I was only afraid I wouldn't feel the same to him. Ridiculous I know

since I knew how the female body worked especially after pushing out a human.

"Malinga please move," I say trying to pull the blankets that he's sitting on over my body. He stands and I succeed in making myself disappear.

I can't sleep. I can't breathe properly under these heavy covers I've buried myself under, but I'm not about to move. Am I being childish?

Of course not. He's the one being ridiculous.

But now I want to know what the Queen was calling him for. I thought we were done with each other the day his lovely son defecated on the palace floors and having Zonke... Ya we know what happened. What more does she need and want from us... Or rather from Bangi?

She's going to put him back at that place I couldn't bare, all because of the unknown. I could go a lifetime without seeing my husband like that again. Why does that sound so selfish?

Sigh.

So now we're not cuddling miss selfish?

Don't turn Zano. If this is how he wants to be then so be it. I can be cold too. Very cold. Don't turn Zanokuhle. Don't do it. Don't you dare!

Mxm.

I throw a leg over his lower body after laying my hand on his warm dressed chest.

"Oh so now you're going to play the aloof game with your one and only wife?"

I see a glimpse of a smile play on his lips before he goes back to being serious again.

"Ukwatile vele Malinga?" I ask and reach to caress his beard, gently tangling it with the nail of my pointy finger.

"Awazi wena"

"Silwela ikhekhe lika bani kanti la? " I chuckle after he gasps and looks at me, not closing his mouth. We have amusement now, dancing all over his face before he slightly shakes his head.

"Ma'Dlamini is that how you want to play this?"

"But I'm asking." I giggle.

"Nami ngiyabuza." he smiles and I can't help but stare into those beautiful eyes of his.

"Had we talked like the adults we claim to be I'm sure we'd be in this bed fornicating already," I state and he laughs at my statement.

"Sthandwa sam, angisazi ke manje mina. One moment you're pushing me away, the next you're scared of me and now you're saying something else."

"I told you I'm not scared of you Malinga wami."

"Pho usabani?"

I shrug.

"Ma'Dlamini." he pushes for the answer he so desperately deserved.

"It's stupid," I say before hearing him breathe out. I sit up and brush my shoulder. "I'm scared I won't feel the same to you anymore."

"Th...That's it? Like are you serious," he says and chuckles.

"Have you not learned anything from me loving you all this time that there's nothing that I can hate about you Ma'Dlamini. I look at you everyday and admire the beauty that is you. You birthed a human with that body and I'm mature enough to know that things change because of that."

I honestly thought I felt dumb before but now I felt dumber-er-er-er.

"I think we should just get some rest, we have a long day tomorrow." he says and reaches in to peck my cheek. Before he could even pull away I have his face in the palms of my hands, attacking him with a kiss. My body moves to the touch he now has on my thigh, attracting me to his body. As soon as I'm on him he pulls back and looks right into my soul.

"Sthandwa sam, this-"

"I want you..." the words slip right out of my mouth.

"Come here." him. His lips taste so familiar...soft, yet so strong and intoxicating. It stole my breath for the short seconds it absorbed me for. "Get this off of you." his hands make contact with the nakedness I had underneath this top.

I toss the loose top aside, unable to avoid the pleased look he has on his face....probably from me obeying the command he handed to me. I fight the intrusive thoughts I had about the fact that I was still breastfeeding and didn't want to be leaking. Again I have my lips on his.

His hand went from cupping my breast...lower...to where they slid inside my shorts.

Before he even gets further than that, I grab his hand, stopping him. "Wait...let me go get something. don't move."

"What is it?"

"I'll be back now-now, I promise." I quickly peck his lips and rush to fetch the lube. I figured it would help, plus I've read that the first time after baby is more often very painful and off-putting, and I don't want that.

Where is it?

Got it. I basically sprint back and the confused look on his face is soon replaced with a tiny smirk. I wonder if he's also thinking of the first time we used the magic that is in this bottle.

I'm back to kissing him with him resting between my legs. His hardness poking at me as if begging for attention. My kisses trail down to his neck where I suck and peck gently. I hear him groan the moment I take his length into my hand. My insides shiver in excitement as I watch his reaction to my touch. Its beautiful.

"I missed your touch," he whispers causing my lips to twitch into a smile. I warm the lube with both my hands before stroking him once more creating a slippery adventure. Up and down...slowly...covering every inch of him. He hardens even more as I kiss on his chest.

He caresses my thighs, thrusting his hips into my hand. I twist my hand at the swollen head, gently pressing out the seed that oozed from there. He hardened more when I licked the saltiness off my finger before working my hands on his length again. My hands rotate smoothly going up and down."Do you like that?"

He replies with a nod and moan. I move my hand a little faster, a little tighter and with a little more kisses onto his body.

He pushes me back, allowing me rest on my back.

"Now let's get these off... Let me do my job and you do yours." he says tossing my shorts to the side and gets lube all over my cookie. I bite on my lips in anticipation. His touch sends a wave of something I haven't felt in so long... *Goosebumps*. "I'm going to put a finger in now..." he says and does so ever so slowly that I could absorb the entire feeling of being stretched.

He groans, grabbing and rubbing on my warm inner thigh. My body relaxes, easing into the motions being given to me. "I'm going to put another finger in you okay... Feel my fingers in there... there you go..."

Looking into his eyes when we're like this feels so forbidden.

"does that feel good?"

"yeah," I nod as he slid his wet fingers in and out of me.

"yeah? Well I mean it does I can see it in those beautiful eyes of yours... And what if I curl my fingers?"

I gasp, my abdomen contracting deliciously.

"Good?"

"Yes," I open my legs even more inviting him into my core. I thought this would be somewhat uncomfortable but I'm enjoying it way more than I should.

"Does it feel good when I touch you here?" he says rubbing on my clit in a circular motion. All I manage is a nod accompanied by a spasming head tilt.

"Yes," I reply feeling an orgasm build up surely.

"I bet it does... Now what if... I slide this in there."

His fingers are replaced with his length, and there —a tiny spark.

"I'll go slow...yes... Oh... Oh sthandwa sam you feel too good... You feel too good, give me these curves... Let me ride those curves... Yes..." he grabs onto my waist encouraging me to work my hips back as he kept giving me all of him slowly. "... Yes give it to me."

"I...I love that, don't stop."

Oh crap, Nzwano made a sound. Did Bangi hear it or am I hallucinating? Gosh... If she cries right now do we stop and attend to her first? Would it be child neglect if we keep going until we're done? Child abuse maybe?

But what if something is really wrong with her... Because she's not crying right now. What if... Oh gosh... I'm being a terrible mother.

"Come here" Bangi says.

Right sex! Gosh now I feel bad for zoning out like that. I watch him move to lay down next to me with his upper body propped up with his elbows.

I straddle him, resting my palms on his chest.

"...umuntu uzosangana la" Bangi says.

"Usanganiswa yini Malinga wam?"

"Uwena. Awudeleki namanje Ma'dlamini." he smiles and I can't help but blush.

"I want you inside me." I whisper the moment I catch my breath from that intense kiss.

"Then put me i-..." he says and I don't even give him a chance to finish his words. He penetrates past my folds and I'm suprised I'm taking all of him in.

My hips rotate...

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"And then?" Bangi asks sitting up on the bed, looking at me with slight confusion on his face. It's very early in the morning and I've been up since the little miss commanded so. "What's this?"

"I made my husband breakfast." the tray goes onto his lap before I sit by the tiny open space by him.

"Oh?"

"Yes, I have to spoil you like you spoil me, so I made you a croissants sandwich, filled with eggs - scrambled just how you like them, avocado and pork sausage... Which is not as great as the one you give me though, but it'll do."

"Ha, what?" he bursts out laughing.

"Don't laugh, I'm just stating facts Malinga," I clear my throat trying to stop myself from laughing.

"Heeh, ngiyimoshile ingane yakwaDlamini," he shakes his head.

"ngiyabonga kodwa Sthandwa sam, it looks scrumptious."

"like me?"

He laughs. "Awukahle boh, why is it starting to feel like I've been served the wrong breakfast manje?"

"Idla baby wam, you have a long day ahead of you," I laugh and reach in to peck his lips.

I go prepare a bath for myself and Nzwano so we could get one more chore out of the way.

"You still don't want to go with your husband?" he takes a bite from his sandwich. "I promise you it won't be that boring."

"I never said it would be boring."

When this public announcement was set I didn't feel like being out there as yet. The public was still too hectic for my liking and I would rather stay out of it, only because some people out there did believe that we had a hand in the deaths that happened not so long ago.

"I'll go ke Malinga."

"Hayi, I'm not forcing you."

"Do you want me to go or not?" I chuckle.

"Of course I want you by my side sthandwa sam, but not by force."

I give him a look before shaking my head and taking Nzwanoyezizwe into my arms, smothering her tiny face with kisses. I love it when she's not being a crybaby like today honestly.

"We'll be ready when you are."



"Mge it feels like it's been forever since we last got together," Nyiso says pulling out of the tight hug we shared.

"Right?" I quickly glance at our kids that played with Nandi not so far from where we sat. "Things have been happening... And I'm sorry if I've been too distant."

"Don't be mge. This life seems like a lot and quite frankly you're handling it pretty well. Far better than what I think other people would."

"I am?"

"Why does it seem like you're doubting."

"This whole thing nje mge... This Alakhe and Bangi's father's thing... It... It's..." I heave out a heavy sigh and sit back.

"I thought we've moved on from that. He's no longer someone we can consider a problem and the King...may he continue resting in peace. He didn't deserve any of this mess."

"I hate that this happened. I know I've thought once upon a

time that life would be better without Alakhe but now, I'm not so sure."

"Haybo mge are you saying you want that idiot back?"

"No, never. It's not that I want him back."

"Then what are you saying?"

"I feel this guilt within me mge everytime I think of how these men were taken out. Apart from my guilt this did something to Bangi. Something even I'm scared will make him do something out of character."

"Zano are you saying he's..." she glances over my shoulder.

"...he's suicidal?"

"No," I gasp. "Not that. I'm saying there are things that trigger this distant and depressing Bangi that I myself can't help. What makes it worse is that he brushes me off when I try to have him talk to me. Maybe I'm just overthinking this whole thing and it shouldn't make sense why I'm thinking the way I'm thinking but with everything that happened between him, the King and his brother... Losing them both is hurting him more than we - I may think."

"Maybe it's just him grieving mge."

"So you're saying I'm imagining everything."

"I'm saying it's natural for him to be this hurt by this. He lost two people for goodness sakes that he grew up around. Give him time," she says and has me biting in the inside of my bottom lip.

I nod, my mind thinking back at the nights I'd wake up to him wide awake on the bedroom couch... Sometimes crying silently and would just claim to be fine.

Or the days he'd pick on his food probably thinking I wouldn't notice he's not eating.

"Give him time."

"Sure."

Time.

Chapter Sixty Four.

"Forgive and forget?"

••

I'm staring at him as he carefully paged through the book he was reading to Nzwano so passionately. She seemed to love this one...or maybe she loved it more when her father reads to her than when I do because of this concentration she's giving him.

With me she'd be fiddling or wanting other things than that book.

I'm jealous, but I'm also smitten.

Another reason I'm happy she has a father like Bangi and he is the set standard for her when she's out there grown and making friends.

My heart clenches as I think of the fact that soon she'll be talking and thinking on her own. One day we'll be accompanying her to her first day of school and then have her go to primary school and then high school and then university. I go sit on the edge of the bed and continue watching and listening to him read to her.

It won't be long until she drifts off to sleep. My phone vibrates and I reach for it eager to see who was texting me at this hour. Nyiso.

'thanks for today. Love you mge.' her text read.

Sigh.

'don't mention it. Love you too.' I reply before logging off and tossing the phone aside.

"She's knocked out," Bangi says causing me to look to him as he closed the book and put it away with the rest.

"What can I say, you're good with her."

"So, did you girls enjoy yourself today? I know it must've been great seeing your friend again."

"It was okay. We talked about a couple of things including a little trip that could happen in a few weeks."

"Sounds fun," he smiles snaking his arms around my waist, holding me close. "Can I tag along?"

I just chuckle because our husbands were never in this trip's plans. In fact it was going to be me, Nyiso, Khaya and Buhle and lastly Amandla.

"I'll take that as a no," he chuckles too.

"I didn't say no Malinga wami, I just want to talk to Nyiso and then see if we can change the dynamics of this trip."

"Don't do that. Go, have fun and enjoy yourselves, I insist." he says shrugging. "What else did you talk about?"

"Uthanda izindaba boh Bangi," I laugh and try pushing him away but he only holds me tighter.

"Kanti yini benihleba ngami?"

I stop laughing all together because I was hit by a pang of guilt.

"Your name may have come up a few times."

"Oh? Good things only I hope."

My eyes drift off into the far corners of this room looking for an escape. "What's wrong sthandwa sam?"

"Nothing I'm just tired."

His stare manages to find me and keeps me there for seconds unend. "We talked about the therapy thing," I say and in an instant I'm freed from the arms that held me hostage.

"This again? Why are you making such a big deal out of nothing Zanokuhle?"

"Because this doesn't look like nothing to me Bangi. I know I may have been wrong for sharing this with Nyiso but I needed someone to talk to and someone to give me advice."

"Advice about nothing. I'm fine," he says and walks off to bed.

"Fine? How is not eating a proper meal for days fine? Bangi how is you having sleepless nights just after this whole thing okay for you when it clearly is not?"

"So you want me to see a therapist for a few normal days of no appetite or having no sleep?"

Is he even hearing himself? Normal?

"I want you to see a therapist because I know what you're going through and I don't want to see you get worse. There's nothing

wrong with it."

He folds his arms in front of his chest. "Did therapy work for you?"

"Why are you making this about me? And you know very well that I couldn't afford therapy when my mother died. You know how the situation was. Bangi it's fine ke if you don't want me to be a decent human and be concerned about the one I love and care about but if this is how you want to continue then I'll leave you be," I say, take my phone and walk out of the bedroom.

Morning came and I had only managed to get an hours worth of sleep. I won't lie, I was exhausted but I had to get up and attend to my baby's and mines needs.

Prayer?

Yes.

I get out of the covers of this empty bed and get onto my knees to say a prayer but... Nothing comes out of my mouth. All I see though is blood. Dead bodies. The sounds of guns going off.

"I'll go," his deep voice startles the crap out of me. "Ngicolisa about my insensitivity yesterday. I didn't mean to be an ass."

I wipe my tears with the back of my hand. "I'll go with you... I think I need it too."

"She hates me. She told me she wished I was never born. That night she called me to tell me that."

Bathong!

Isn't it enough that we have kept our distance and haven't bothered her even once? Also who calls someone to tell them that they hate them especially after birthing them. Is she trying to say she loved the monster more? Why? What did my husband do to her for her to even utter these words to him like this. She makes me angry. She makes me want to choose violence. She makes me want to slap some sense into her.

"I couldn't even understand why... I mean I get it she loved her precious first son more than she clearly loved me, but couldn't she keep that to herself? Was I that bad of a child that she considered Alakhe better than me?"

"Don't listen to her Bangi, she's...I'm sorry but she's delusional. I hope you're not believing this because you're far better than he ever was. Something is just not right here," I say the last part to myself still trying to absorb all of this.

I know I wanted to know this the moment it happened but now the dark looks much more comforting than being in the light.

"What do you mean?"

I sit back on my heels, shaking my head. "I don't know, I'm just trying to make it make sense to me but something just makes it feel like there's more to this."

"Whatever it is I don't care. I'm done with that Palace and that woman."

I watch him get up and hold a hand out to me. I gladly take it and he helps me up. A kiss on the lips and a helping hand to making the bed I tried sleeping on. We then go to make the one he was sleeping on before spending about an hour conversing with my husband. A peaceful hour before its interrupted by baby girl waking up.

I get up and pick her from her cot, the cry stopping as if it never happened before. She's suddenly one with a big smile and no teeth melting my heart. We did something right with this one, I can't lie.

"Morning Nzwano ka'mama... Azanke ahlupe? I didn't hear her cry ebusuku."

"Not really, but she did wake up."

"Awusahluphi ubaba wena," I chuckle and make my way back to bed to join daddy for her morning feeding session. "I think I'm going to stop breastfeeding soon."

"Why?"

"I've been doing this for almost 10 months now. My boobs need a break."

"If you feel like it's right then I'm not one to stop you."

"Have you ever tasted my breast milk?"

"Why ungasho ukuthi you want me sucking on your breasts Ma'Dlamini?"

I laugh. "I did not say that, I'm just curious."

He shakes his head scooting over hovering over Nzwano who gives him the side eye. What happens next has me laughing my weave off. She pushes him away from me and her breasts. Yes, her breasts.

"Kanjani manje, I was here first."

"Not according to her it seems," I brush her hairs and watch him attempt it again.

The kicking for me takes the cup and surely enough the provoked crying takes charge. I have no words.

"Mthulise."

"I didn't even do anything to her," he laughs and tries taking her from me but it seems we have both started something we won't be able to handle.

"Hawu ngiyacolisa Nzwano kaBaba. I won't do that again."

Sigh.

She eventually calmed down and had a quick playing session with her father but not before shedding some real tears. We headed down for a breakfast I quickly put together. I don't know what it is with me and watching Nzwano eat but it is so damn adorable. The way she shoves the tiny pieces of food into her mouth is a wonder.

"She's growing up so fast."

"I see nothing wrong with that. Less crying at night."

I chuckle and shake my head before handing her juice and take

a seat next to her.

"What are you talking about...the crying is the best part."

"I beg to differ and your sleep pattern will surely agree," he says.

"Yet you want a soccer team... Ziyakhala zonke lezinto phela don't forget that." I joke and eat away remembering that today is cleaning day which reminds me. "Baby?"

"Mhm?" he responds mouth filled with oats.

"Can I ask you something?"

"Something about what?"

"Promise you won't say no?"

"How can I promise you something I don't know about?"

"Just promise me."

He heaves out a breath and looks me right in the eye. "Okay, whatever it is that you want... You can have."

I can't stop myself from grinning ear to ear and thank him with a kiss on the hand.

"Thank you for allowing Khaya to come and stay with us."

"Wait what was that?" he lets out a nervous titter.

"You said anything I want..."

"I know... But you want your little brother to come live with us?"

"With everything in me."

"Well then, it's done. We have plenty of room here anyway."
I turn in my highchair and attack him with a hug that has my tears brewing. "Ngiyabonga Malinga wami. This truly means a lot to me."

"Akuna nkinga Sibalkhulu. He's family and I love the kid. When is he moving in?" I pull away and wipe my emotions away.

"I'm thinking after the trip and once we're all settled, cause I want to give you enough time to prepare yourself too.

Teenagers can be a handful if they want."

"Handful or not, he surely won't be that bad," Bangi says and I shrug. I haven't lived with Khaya for almost two years now apart from the week to week visits that aren't that long

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and maybe he has changed. Maybe Mrs Nkosi changed that. I don't know, but now that I have Bangi's go ahead I'll ask Nandi to inform her team about the coming change.

The room has to be ready for him the moment he arrives here and I can't hide my excitement.

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"I think that is enough for the day... Unless if you have any questions to ask before we conclude."

"Do you... Do you think I'll ever be okay with everything that has happened," I word and look my therapist in the eye.

He visibly nods and closes the book in his hold. "Time. Give it that much and we'll see. Just don't quit on yourself or put pressure on yourself when this is a process. It can get uncomfortable too but little by little we should be able to get you to a place of healing."

"Oh, I see... Thank you. I think that is all."

"Great," we both get up at the same and I shake his hand back thanking him for this first session of many that will hopefully help me deal with things.

I wonder how Bangi's session went and if he was just as willing to attend another one just as I was. Did he feel like he'd cope with everything? Do I even ask him or do I just mind my own?

I thank Deliverance for opening my door for me before settling inside.

"Can I be driven to my mother's place?" I ask my driver.

"eUlala my Princess?" he asks and reply with a yes, turning my head to look out the window. It's a beautiful day outside and honestly it's doing something to my soul. Something about going back to the last place my mother roamed made me... Excited?

The drive is long but I'm patient enough. I get there and it's a half done structure of the house I had planned on building on

this land. Everything stopped when things went south at the palace.

I step out and glance around. Lillian's house is still here and they have a dog now I see. A dog that won't stop barking too I see and it's just begging for the attention I don't need. But then again this motorcade is not helping one bit. I make my journey further into the yard scouting around when my eyes land on remains of the burning I did. I remember the fire and I remember the emotions that overtook me that day.

I think I hate that version of me. I don't ever want to see myself get angry to that point in my life ever again.

This project has to get back on a roll again so we can celebrate and have events here. I want to do something for Buhle as soon as she turns 21 and it will be big.

By the time I conclude everything I wanted to see I exit the half building back to the car I came in. An audience has gathered outside by the road, waving and screaming. Well... At least I'm not being showered by tomatoes and a bunch of 'You suck's'. With a warm smile and wave back. I get into the car and leave heading back to home.

My phone vibrates.

'thank you for putting my mind at ease, I'll see you when you get home then. Had an unplanned meeting with Mr Mnguni myself.' his reply text read.

Shame man.

I can imagine after an emotional session like this he gets forced into another draining meeting with Mr Mnguni. If I get home before he does, I'll prepare him a few things.

Nobody but the helpers are around, cleaning and packing away the grocery. I greet and get greeted back with the much expected enthusiasm.

I head upstairs to the playroom and find my baby playing with Nandi. They seem to be enjoying themselves and I'm not planning on disturbing them. Well not unless Nzwano had something to do with it. She turns her head my direction and smiles before crawling her way here. I can't ignore her now can I?

"So much for being subtle... Hey Nandi," I bend to pick my daughter up.

"My Princess." she gets up, puts a toy away and for a few seconds I'm stuck giving these chubby cheeks the kisses they deserve. Is she seriously pulling on my top to get to her milk.

"I'm sorry I took longer than expected. I ended up taking a trip back to my mother's place and grave to lay fresh flowers there

for her." I explain more than what was needed. These tiny fists are strong as hell.

"Oh. I'm sorry."

"Yeah don't be...But other than that, how are you? Nzwano didn't give you any trouble."

"As always My Princess. I like to believe she's comfortable around me which is why she rarely fusses."

I give in and whip out the breast, sighing as grabs it and feeds herself. Yes I feel like an object to miss ma'am over here which makes me wonder if that's all she sees in me. Am I just a walking titty?

I chuckle at these thoughts

"Please take the rest of the afternoon off. I got it from here," I say and make my way to the couch to take a seat.

"Thank you." she says and quickly puts the toys away before leaving. It's just Nzwano and I now.

"Kanti ningapha?" his voice catches both our attention.

"Malinga... You're back."

"Why do you sound disappointed?"

"I'm not." he comes to sit next to us. "Just expected you home later. Thought there would be enough time to prepare you a bath and something to eat."

"Hawu Sthandwa... If I knew I would've dragged on purpose."

I chuckle. "And act all surprised when you get here?"

"Uh-huh." he says getting comfortable on the couch, an arm around my shoulders.

"So... How was the session?"

"Not bad, not even focused on the heavy stuff which helped putting me to ease, you know."

"Same here...I was kinda nervous if I could say that."

"Why?"

"Just of what the help would be made up of. The fear of having someone know that much of me... Of us..."

"You don't trust him?"

"No, of course I do. I just can't imagine having my own issues I thought would end here, out there. Something like that."

"Mhmm..."

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"Zano... Zano..." he shakes me awake. My irritated eyes are met by the bright screen of my phone.

"What?" the irritation is on another level.

"Your phone."

"What about it?"

"It's ringing."

"Yoh... Who the hell would even call at this very hour... Hello..."

"Mrs Shazi?"

"Who's this?" I huff irritated.

"My apologies for waking you but I'm calling on behalf of a Mr

Dlamini here," the lady says and that only pisses me off even more.

"What does he want?"

"Your Honor, Mr Dlamini suffered from multiple stab wounds and is currently in the prisons ICU facility." she says and I frown.

How do I even react to that? Is Bangi hearing any of this and why am I the one called. This man has an entire wife and family that is not me.

"What am I supposed to say?"

"Uh... I-..."

"I guess I hope he heals. He'll be in my prayers." I hang up and switch my phone off before trying to fall back to sleep.

"Who was that?"

"Some lady... I'll tell you about it in the morning."

"Okay, sondela ke, ngik'bambe ulale."

I scoot closer and he spoons me before I hear him lightly snoring near my ear. At least one of us can fall asleep.

Bathong...

Why am I envisioning this evil man lying in a cold room with a small bed and machines all around him...also why is he stabbed? To the point of being in ICU? Is he doing this all for the attention? My attention? If not me then for the public's attention? Or my thriving siblings?

What is even going on in there? Do I even want to know?

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"What do you mean stabbed? As in..." Bangi asks switching the rattle toy from hand to hand, keeping Nzwano entertained. I pull the jeans over my butt.

"As in the kitchen knives were basically used to slice that man for human stew." I shrug.

"That is crazy."

"Crazier than me going to see him?"

"A little," he says with a chuckle.

"I want know what you're thinking... Genuinely, about this whole thing." I sit down next to him.

"Genuinely, I want what's best for you. If going to check on him will make your life feel lighter, then I'm all for it. Just don't allow him to take over your mental health."

I heave out a sigh and get up fixing my top.

"It won't. I love you."

"I love you too."

"I won't be long, I promise," I say grabbing my stuff from the bedside table and have him accompany me downstairs and outside to the motorcade.

Why am I doing this?

I don't like prisons. I don't like hospitals. I don't like the person I'm going to see so why even be here? I should be at home relaxing and unwinding with my husband and child but instead I'm here. Here getting stares from the guards and policemen and policewomen who tip their hats. I can't even smile or say anything because of the anger building up in me.

Did this man start a fight? They probably stabbed him because he couldn't keep his mouth shut.

"I'm here to see Mr Dlamini. He is in ICU apparently," I say.

"Oh yes... Can I please have some identification?"

"Of course," I dig in my purse, find it and hand it over to the police. It takes a while before they walk to another division of this prison. I hear a scream that sends chills down my neck.

Is that a cry and a body being covered?

God.

"This way." she's so unbothered. Even by the criminal that fights the cuff with blood all over his overalls. "Here he is."

When I look up he indeed was laying there, chest bandaged and face swollen. My anger subsides and now I'm overcome by fear.

Why fear out of all things?

"It's a miracle that he even survived the beating and 15 stab wounds he sustained."

"15?" My eyes go wide in shock. "Who did this?"

"The attackers haven't been found."

"What do you mean haven't been found? Wasn't he attacked here by other inmates."

"it was during their supper. There were a lot of people and none of them were found with weapons."

"Ini? How is that even possible. This place is supposed to be a rehabilitation centre not a murder sight."

"I... My Princess," she starts but I put up my hand up to stop her. She shouldn't anger me with the excuses that don't make any sense.

"I want him moved to a proper hospital that can give him proper care."

"We can arrange that fo... For you," she stutters and rushes off to somewhere leaving me with the mannequins and prisoner 4577.

Mxm.

"Why are you doing this to me? Huh? I'm trying by all means to forget that you even exist and then you pull this stunt? What do you want from me? You never cared but this is what you do to me? This is how you show your fake care to me? You have a wife, why not have her called? Why disturb our peace when I said I never want to see you again?" the words leave my mouth as I watch him lay there, not moving an inch.

My focus goes to the mannequins who stood there pokerfaced. They probably think I'm dramatic. They probably want to laugh too or something along those lines.

We wait for the lady who comes back with forms I read and sign before the paramedics come in and fetch him on a stretcher. He's cuffed to the bed as he should be before he can be pushed out. We follow suite, the lady next to me. Not a word is uttered. Not until we get back to the reception area.

"I'll be back here and I want answers." me.

Chapter Sixty Five.

"Since I can't be with you right now I will have to be content just dreaming about when we will be together again." Susan Polis Schutz

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I put the toy on the other chair and hold her tiny forearm as she balanced, making her way across to fetch it. She wobbles patiently and falls onto my lap with a shared laugh. The toy subsequently goes into her mouth and I stop her, putting it on the other side. She doesn't want to get up though, instead we're fighting over my top and I know this is a battle I'll lose if I didn't comply. So like the walking titty master that I am, I whip one out and she sucks ahead.

Ours eyes interlock and I find myself smiling at her. She's too precious for me to deny her any of this and maybe I shouldn't deny her this when she's the only one I have.

"Mama uyak'thanda uyezwa?"

There goes that no teeth smile that never fails to melt my heart, ngathi she can understand everything I've just said. Even if she didn't, I meant it. She has to know that we all love her, including her father. "Nappy change after this and then we'll play until you're sleepy."

I reach for my phone and check for any of the things I could've possibly missed while enjoying this play time session with Nzwano. An email... I'm already getting notices about Mr Dlamini and his hospital stay. He surely is making a better recovery than how I feel he would've back there in prison.

Oh Nonkanyiso texted me too and I'm sure it has something to do with our trip. I'm hit with the realization that this trip might not even happen anymore because I don't think you're supposed to leave an almost 10 month old alone for that long.

Sigh.

Maybe when she turns one Bangi and I will be able to engage in all that freeing and thrilling stuff again. Maybe if we also had a proper family I'd ask them to look after her for that time period. Is that too wrong for me to want?

"I don't think this will work for now. Maybe postpone? "

Not even a moment after sending that my phone rings

"Holy balls, mge uthini? I'm literally in front of my laptop looking for suitable places we could go to and you tell me this now? Wothi uyadlala."

"I'm serious mge."

"Haybo what changed? Did Bangizwe change his mind?"

"No not Bangi... Just me and the situation."

"But you were so excited. I was so excited...do your siblings

know you're cancelling."

"I'll tell them."

"uSerious vele vele?"

"As a heart attack. Askies mge."

"Yoh hayi ungibhore for the whole year shem," she says and I chuckle.

"Next time mge," I mumble before she hangs up. I don't know if was entirely wrong for that or if she should've understood more.

After Nzwano's feeding, diaper change and more play time I go put her to sleep. I decide to lay down with her for just 5 minutes and then I'll be up to make myself something to eat and get busy with work...

'Zanokuhle...'

'Who's th-... Alakhe? You're... You're... What are you doing here?'

'I came to visit you.' he smirks. One moment he's there at a far distance, the next he's in front of me.

He's pale, with dark veins running like river creaks through his forehead and face. Rotting... He's rotting... He smells rancid but he's here. 'Here we're alone. Here I can make you mine.'

'Crazy. Crazy.'

'Are you telling me you still haven't noticed that I'm in love with you? That I want you for me? I know I was an asshole but-...'

'Stop. Stop.'

'Don't you love me? Don't you want me?'

Little by little he's woven back to life. Skin dark and rich with coily and proud hair rising from his head. He comes closer and closer until he's close enough to suffocate me.

'Kiss me.'

'What?'

'You know you want to. Do it.'

I can't look away. Why can't I look away!

I gasp as my eyes shoot open. It was a dream. It was only a dream! God what kind of sick dream was that? What even was that?

At least my baby is still sleeping but there's absolutely no way I'm going back to sleep. I say a quick prayer and head downstairs with the monitor and my laptop. I know I said I'd get some work done but now I'm on Google searching for the meaning of dreams with dead people.

"Spirit of death?"

The more I search the more confused I get because it seems that to some it's Goodluck... Wait, no, nevermind that was a different heading.

But that dream felt so real.

The things he was saying were all him.

He's a psycho even in the afterlife.

Now business.

Forget about this stupid dream that is just that. He can't harm me, in fact he won't.

I manage to get in contact with the men that were working on my mothers house and fill them in on the fact that this project was continuing. I ask them to send me the details of all the materials they're still going to possibly need because unfortunately it seems like the previous ones were stolen. And they tell me this now?

Anyway.

After handling that I get to checking all my previous emails, from promotion to updates. An interview invite I never got to... Is this why people get PA's?

I shake my head because my duties barely amount to the amount of work Bangi does for this Kingdom.

I read more emails before coming across one that slipped my thoughts. The company name one. It has been approved and again I'm finding some excitement in my life.

My excitement finds me getting off the highchair and in search of a glass and some dust collecting wine. It's open. I pour it

halfway, downing some and nodding in approval. It tastes too good.

"Ma'Dlamini, utswala?" he puts his bag on the table and folds his arms in front of his chest.

"One glass...that's all I'm having, I promise

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besides we should be celebrating. Now can your wife get her kiss?" I say and the dream flashes in my head.

Sies.

"What are we celebrating?" he walks up to me. I hand him the Bottle and hold my glass up for a toast.

"Shazi's Student Support."

"It got approved?" he beams up.

I nod and clink our drinks together and sip to that. "I like that we're moving forward, together."

"Achieving milestones together."

"I'm proud of you Ma'Dlamini," he says.

"Ngiyabonga, but There's still a lot to do. A lot..." I put my glass aside as he took another sip and work my fingers on his belt.

"Yini ngathi you're taking this celebration elsewhere?"

"We have a few minutes to spare before Nzwano wakes up, wena just say the words if you want me to stop."

"Sthandwa sam you know I want to be inside you all the time."

"All the time?"

"All the time..." he says and presses my body against the cabinets, taking my lips captive in his.

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"Oh," I say and look his way, confused by why I sounded a bit disappointed by the news.

Nzwano squirms in my hold, if she wasn't as wet as she was right now, I wouldn't worry about it.

"He'd like to see you. He's been calling your name."

"I don't know... I'll... I'll look at my schedule."

What Schedule Zano?

I hang up and rub my fingers across my forehead. "He's awake?"

"And calling my name. Like I'm glad he's awake because I didn't want him to die, but..."

"Don't worry. I get it." he pulls himself out of the pool sits down next to me, legs dipped into the water. "I can go with you if you want. I know you have a clear schedule."

I chuckle and shake my head. "Thank you."

We sit for a moment with the wiggling Nzwano who starts to cry. "Haybo give me my little mermaid," he says and jumps back into the pool which stops her fussing. The second he reaches his hands out, she does the same.

Hayke.

"We can go around 14h00 then right?"

"14h00 sounds right to me," he says and I nod and watch them play in the water. At least two people in this family aren't afraid of swimming.

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Honestly I've seen worse at this point. Him looking like this right now is not making my blood curdle the way I thought it would. He's alive. That's good.

"Nonozi, you came... My son your Highness." he shifts his eye between Bangi and I.

"Mr Dlamini," Bangi.

"Does your wife even know you're here?" I ask.

Bangi goes to sit at the far end corner of the hospital room.

"I'm glad you're here." he avoids the question.

"She must be worried sick about her husband while you're busy calling for someone who wants nothing to do with you."

"I'm sorry."

"You can give me her numbers and I'll call her to come see you."

"You can't."

"Why not?"

"It's complicated."

"More complicated than 15 stab wounds and a battered face?"

"She left me Zanokuhle. Ungilahlile uFihliwe and I doubt she's ever going to come back."

"Eh." I try hiding my shock.

"I have no one. The moment she found out I made her sick was when it started getting rocky. She let me know the day I got arrested that she's taking everything I have. I'll never see her or our kids again."

Wow. I glance up to Bangi who shakes his head lightly.

"So..." I'm interrupted by his coughing. I'm quick to reach for the water and pour him some before helping him drink a little.

"... Do you know who did this to you?"

"Would you believe me if I said no?" he says.

"Did you atleast see something."

"I've never seen those two before. You get used to some of the inmates here but those two..." he says.

I put the glass down. "Two men did this to you?"

For his condition I'd have assumed it was done by an army.

"I think I should've died. They said so."

"Why would they want you dead if..." I drift off into unwanted territory. Someone wanted him dead...like him specifically.

Why is this worrying me when it shouldn't. I nod and get up from the chair.

When we get home I'm just flooded with thoughts. I honestly don't want this, not even the slightest.

"and then?" he asks and I notice that I'm holding his arm.

"Nothing. Sorry," I let him go and sit down on the couch.

"We can talk about it if you want," he says and at that very instant I became overcome with nausea. Something is in my throat and it just wants out.

"I think I'm going to throw up," I say and lean forward before cupping my mouth.

"wait here," he places the bucket by my side and I'm thankful he fetched it for me because not long after I find myself vomiting this knot out.

"It's okay sthandwa sam... Let it all out."

I'm disgusted with myself. How dare this situation affect me this much? I wipe my mouth with the back of my hand and attempt to take the bucket which he moves away from me.

"I'm sorry about that."

"Do you want water?" he asks and I just shake my head.

"I Just need to shift my focus. I'll be fine."

We sit in what I could only describe as tense silence. I get up and head to our bedroom to rinse my face and force myself to a calm realm.

Just need to get this out of my head because I don't need to giving him this much power. Power he doesn't deserve.

There we go... I let out a deep breath and rinse my mouth out. Gazing at my own reflection I feel my body go numb.

No.

I turn and look behind me and he's not there.

As he should be.

He's dead and I'm just having an hallucination.

Chapter Sixty Six.

"Look for the answer inside your question." x Rumi

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"Are you sure?" she asks.

"Yes," I sigh and pull the tiny jersey over her tiny body. A gloomy and cold day calls for extra warmth.

"You won't change your mind again?" she asks for what feels like the 50th time in this one video call.

"Yes!" I look at her and chuckle. "Bathong trust and believe me when I say we're going."

"What changed? Where are you going to be taking Nzwano because you complained about her."

"I have a husband don't I?" I giggle and kiss my baby.

"Weeh... Hayke shukuthi I'm back to searching for places we can go to. Befuthi this time they'll be expensive places to make up for my inconveniences."

"And who's going to be paying for your expensive trip?"

"Princess Zee... My mge in knight and shinning armour."

"Uyasangana impela ke manje."

"Vele uyazi. Anyway I'll send you the suggestions and we'll take it from there." Nyiso says and I nod. Not long after that she hangs up.

Good. "Your godmother is something else yaz...anyway let us go and watch dada on TV." I say, picking her up before smothering her chubby cheeks with kisses. We make our way downstairs and it's dead quiet. None of the helpers are here and you can feel it. Not even Nandi. I quickly grab a packet of chips for little miss and I.

As soon as the TV is on I'm graced with the most handsome man I've ever seen. The fresh haircut makes me thirst over him like he's not mine. Is anyone else looking at him and thinking like how I am?

I hope not.

I beat mina.

Okay. I'm lying but why do I feel like I actually would?

Does Nzwano recognize her dada or...

"This project is once again for the people and aims at nothing more than empowering the people of this Kingdom. More importantly the youth of EmaShazini. This initiative is not only set up to assist learners in schools with basic needs but it aims to relieve students from the costs of going to higher education."

I am literally beaming inside. This is beautiful to see and hear. I know I'm the one who's supposed to be up there pouring my

heart out because this is what I envisioned when he gave me the opportunity to start something to help my people.

Now kids and young adults can get education with less worries or fussing about their surrounding factors. I know we might face challenges along the way, but it surely will be worth it.

"Ladies and gentlemen of this beautiful land, I present to you Shazi's student support." he says and removes the tiny curtain that reveals the stunning logo of this initiative. I'm grinning as the sounds of clapping and cheering fill my ears. Even Nzwano is clapping and I can't help but once again smother this cute act with kisses and a chip.

As expected the press is eating it up, and journalists are sinking their fingers deep writing about something good for once about the Shazi's. It's been too long and I'm here for it. All of it.

I hope everyone out there is going to benefit out of this... Even if it hasn't gone through necessary trial and error. What if...what if it flops? Yoh I can't. I can't deal with that. How would that even make me feel after failing so many young people out there...

My phone snaps me out of it and I answer it rather hurriedly.

"Mkami."

"Shazi elihle?"

"You watched angisho?"

"We were hawks. Thank you Malinga. This is huge."

"I know, I struggled for a good 15 minutes to leave the building. The press is something else."

"I was just thinking of that. The good light has been missed."

"Would you believe me if I said one journalist tried their luck?"

"Luck, ngani? Ngawe?" I oddly panick.

"Weeh, Ma'Dlamini. Whats wrong with me getting hit on?" he chuckles causing me to shake my head and get a quick glans at Nzwano playing with her puzzle.

"Where do they buy this liver to approach what is mine? You're taken, akuna 'trying your luck' la," I say.

"Why are you making a grown, darkskinned man blush sthandwa sam?" he says and I could literally breathe the smile I knew he had on his face in. "but that's not what I meant, she tried asking about the throne and stuff."

I sigh and shrug. "Throne and stuff."

I don't know what to say. The Kingdom is still without a King because Bangi refuses to ascend to the throne as the rightful person. But anyway, it is not up to me.

"I know you're shrugging right now about this because you know how I feel about it. Her asking kind of bothered me."

"Your father wanted you on that throne Bangi."

"The same throne that killed him."

"Don't do that... In fact I think we should stop this conversation

before it ruins the mood we're in," I say.

"Now you're the one avoiding this conversation."

"You're not making it an easy thing to talk about."

Next thing I hear is something falling followed by a loud cry.

Crap.

"Weeh," I get up and rush to get my baby from the floor. I don't even know where this thing even hit her, that's if it did. I hush her, repeating the 'I'm sorries' like I was the one who inflicted pain upon her.

"Wangi shiya ephonini ke sthandwa sam, you had me worried."
he walks into the house, suit draped on his arm.

"oh Ncese," I say and turn to close my pot of rice. "Your daughter has a tiny scratch on her forehead."

"Where is she?"

"Relax she's asleep...hawu Bangi." He leaves me standing, heading to the only place I could assume.

"She's fine," I say entering the room to find him standing over her cot. I fold my arms in front of my chest.

"That's a big scratch."

"Big? You're being dramatic Bangi, she done far worse with her own nails." I say. He shrugs and tosses his suit onto the bed. "I called Nyiso and reconfirmed."

"Good. I'll talk to Lerato and have her cancel my meeting for tomorrow morning."

"Haybo why?"

"I'm taking you shopping."

I know I didn't need new clothes but him and I just going out for small things like this always makes me tingle inside.

"I'm not even going to fight you on that."

"Oh and before I forget...you leave in a week right?"

"I think so...I'll confirm with Nyiso."

"Yah...when you return there'll be a ceremony for my father at his brother's place."

Uncle Archie? Why not just say so?

"Oh."

"Yep. I couldn't even say we're not attending because it's for my father. "

I nod to myself and go sit down on the bed. He joins me seconds later and takes my hand into his.

"What if I fail at this being a King thing? What if I myself wasn't made for that throne? Are you even ready for that type of spotlight? Are you ready for the responsibility that comes with being by my side if I took on that seat?" I swallow hard, and look at our hands and the ring that was on his.

"Ma'Dlamini...khulumama."

"You wont fail Malinga...I've seen you work, I've seen you make this kingdom better and better without any selfishness. I've

seen you stay up late at night worried about if people would appreciate the hard work you've put in to make emaShazini great again. The kingdom has seen what wonders you bring to them and I'm sure they're hoping and praying that the you sit on that throne and continue leading them. Honestly if its not you then I'm not sure who it'll be that will do this." I say and plaster a smile on my lips.

"I needed to hear that coming from you sthandwa sami."

"I want you to trust in your abilities. You've done nothing wrong but serve your people, your nation...the same nation that your forefathers ruled over and led for centuries."

I watch him nod slightly before looking at me right in the eye.

"I wasn't born into this Bangi...all that I know is what I've learned throughout the years being with you and seeing what and how things happen. Am I ready...no, but I'm willing to give it my all if the moment comes."

"I love how you make me such a confident man Ma'Dlamini. You've just reassured me that if this is what needs to happen then I'll have you there with me. Ngiyabonga."

"Angisho amaSide chick wakho wont do what I do," I joke and he chuckles.

"They don't vele, just like how I'm certain none of your side men can do all the things that I do," he says and I fake a cough.

"Inganekwane leyo Ma'Dlamini."

"Asazi."

"Imihlola," he says and gets up. "Let me go freshen up and then we can do whatever okay?"

"You'll find me right here."



I slip out of bed and run a hand across my face like I wasn't exhausted not so long ago. Sleep left me an hour ago and I think it was all this excitement.

In a matter of hours we'll be up in the sky and landing in a place I've never been to.

Its going to be a long week.

I know.

We've never been apart for that long apart from the time of mourning and other things. if not that

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we're attached by the hip it seems. I'm not even going to mention my baby. I sit down and yawn for the longest time, wondering if maybe I could do with a bit more sleep.

I get up and fetch my phone from my bedside table before heading back to the seat where I basically try and find something to distract myself with. It's 13 minutes before my damn alarm even rings and there's nothing tangible I can keep

myself busy with. Everything has been packed and prepared for me. I sound like such a snob now when I think that.

I chuckle even when thinking of the amount of money we spent on the clothes in those bags. Ridiculous, I tell you. When I get up after minutes of time wasting, I head to the bathroom to take my shower and shave parts that need to be neat for when that bikini goes onto my body.

Fresh and clean now and I could possibly say mostly awake. We've stopped breastfeeding now which is great for me, it seems like its causing a bit of ptsd for Nzwano.

Poor thing. Wait, poor me and my body and being. It was time I cut the cord, even if I hoped I did it until she said no, but apparently that never happens.

"Awusangi vusi Ma'Dlamini," Bangi startles the crap out of me. "You want my heart stopping neh?" I say before getting back to putting on my bra.

"What are you even thinking of that made you not hear the bathroom door slide open?"

I clear my throat and reach for my robe.

"It's not that interesting I promise you," I add.

"Could've fooled me." He yawns.

"I'm not trying to fool you...but sorry for not waking you up, even for a shower."

"I've long seen that you don't want me living inside of you permanently."

"I think you can pay a few people to make that happen," I joke while shaking my head.

"Don't tempt me Ma'Dlamini." he smirks and makes his way towards me. I focus back on the mirror in front of me and reach for my face creams. Im not about to doll myself up just to sit in a jet for hours. Plus my skin has been cooperating for the past couple of days really...might be all this excitement.

His hands find their rest around my waist grabbing my attention once again.

One week right?

I smile, returning the warm one he was giving me.

"What?"

"Nothing. Im just in awe of your beauty time and time again."

"Ngiyabonga Malinga," I almost giggle before the slight sound of Nzwano catches us off guard.

Frozen we wait to hear if there's more but there's none.

I chuckle and shake my head. Being parents is something else.

"You sure you'll be fine with her?"

"I'm sure." He says rather confidently giving me a bit more assurance.

"Mmmm..." I close my face cream and run my hands across his.

"Malinga I think I have 5 minutes to spare."

He frowns. "Just 5?"

"Kanti ufuna ngaki?" I laugh.

"Atleast an hour." He chuckles and breathes in the back of my neck. His warmth melting me and the sight in front of me giving me just enough stimulation. "Do I have an hour with you?"

He kisses my neck, occasionally sucking on the right spots that make all this feel just right. My eyes shut the moment he reaches into my robe.

"Do I?" He asks again.

"Yehlisha ipanty Bangi." The words leave my mouth.

That deep chuckle tells me he understood my yes very well.

And there it goes past my knees, pooling by my feet before i'm basically pulled back a little. Gown comes off in a split second and I'm basically ready. Thirsty Zanokuhle is in power currently and there's no stopping her. I'm on my tippy toes, arching as best as I could before feeling warmth on my wetness.

I'm filled and immediately given a pounding of my life. He's fast and as shocked as I may be I'm enjoying it. The sound of our lovemaking fill the room.

None of us hold back. None of us caring about the noise.

He leans in grabbing on my neck before placing wet baby kisses on my lips embedding himself deep within...keeping it there till I feel my body shiver. I don't care if he breaks my back at this point.

"Leg on the counter." He says after sucking on my bottomlip like he's getting paid for it.

I push him back with my butt and like the great listener I am place my leg on the cold granite.

Through the mirror I watch him bite his lip while looking down. So focused...

When he looks up and catches me staring he shakes he head. He didn't look away even when he brushed his lips along the slope of my neck. His hot breath sending my skin into immediate goosebumps.

Slowly he enters me and between each kiss utters "I want you...to think of me... when you get on that jet...when you land...when you shower...when you breathe...ukuthi ushiye indoda endlini."

I gasp.

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"Iskhathi sokufika lesi Mge?" She gives me a look that made me feel like she knew my deepest and darkest secrets.

"Haybo what time is it kanti?"

"You're an hour late"

"Am I? Serious?" I chuckle before she joins in with a dramatic one clap.

"I didn't know Nzwano bites necks now." She says and I glance around me as men carried my bags to the jet. "Fihla mge"

Her subtle neck pat needs no further instruction as I hurriedly pull my braids forward. "Yoh is it that obvious?"

"Take this...it seems like uBangizwe doesn't play." She takes her headwrap off and hands it to me.

"Mosquito bite mge," I giggle a bit embarrassed.

"Sizobona ngayo iMosquito bite in 9 months time"

"Uyahlanya mge," I laugh and shake my head as we started our journey to the jet.

"Well we'll see." she chuckles. Once I walk in I spot my siblings and yell in excitement.

"Sis!" Buhle gets up and basically lunges at me in the warmest hug ever. "Finally, I thought you were cancelling on us."

"And miss a chance on being with my family and friend? Never. Yewena Khaya and your friend come hug me hawu," I say and extend a hand to the two young boys.

His friend; Tiro is slightly taller than the tall Khaya.

Where are these teens rushing to? We share a hug before going to sit by our seats.

I know it was supposed to be just the four of us here, but I suggested Tiro tag along so that Khaya's not suffocated by women.

An extra responsibility, but I hope he's a manageable kid. I'm not in the mood for fussing over teenagers...especially on our vacation.

We settle in our seats and wait. Not in an uncomfortable silence, but rather a silence that had me wondering how many more hickeys I had on this bloody neck of mine. I want to cry cause this man watched me trying to cover these up with some good concealer and didn't say anything about the rest.

God. Clearly everyone saw these and minded their own.

"Sisi uKhaya uneNtombi." Buhle says snapping me out of my thoughts and also causing Khaya to look up from the game he was playing.

"Hawu?" I smile.

"Why are you lying?"

"So now I'm lying

"You are. What girlfriend are you talking about?"

"Oh uyamphika?" Buhle.

Tiro is just dying of laughter.

"Sisi he even posted her on his status." Buhle lets me know and I can't help but be amused by this.

"Ouuuu...Khaya has a girlfriend? Is she kind?"

"Guys!" His voice breaks as he squirms in his seat. "Can we drop this please...besides I don't get why you're coming for me when Nobuhle is also in a relationship."

"We're not the same," Buhle laughs.

"hawu ya Zano ask her the questions, not me."

"Why not you?"

"Because it's my business "

"Our business." Buhle adds.

"Ayi young love," Nyiso says and the both of us chuckle.

"So cute." Me. "Right?" Nyiso supports.

"You guys speak as if you're old," Buhle chips in.

"At this point we are." Nyiso says and laughs as I nod in agreement.

"Yoh please while we're there, if niyajola nijole kahle. I don't think you guys need to hear me talk about how babies are made and stuff."

"Eh," Khaya looks at Tiro and then tries avoiding me by looking at his phone. "I'm serious. Babies are work."

"Also if you need proof that they're work, text me and I'll let you babysit my baby and Nzwano for at least 2 days."

Nonkanyiso adds.

Honestly...no. Also there are plenty of other things that come with fornicating with someone you don't even know that well.

There are sicknesses out here that are not reversible which makes me hope that they paid attention in class.

Once up in the sky I find myself thinking of what could possibly be going on back home. I'm sure by now Nzwano is up and being the handful that she is. Why am I suddenly feeling guilty about taking this trip? Sigh.

Don't do that to yourself Zano. You deserve this. Your husband even said so and he's never wrong.

I lie back sipping on the juice I got served not so long ago, drowning in more of my own thoughts about the throne conversation Bangi and I had the other day.

Queen? Me? I don't know. I think that has been stressing me out even more as we get closer and closer to the day of the cleansing. Technically the throne had to be occupied the moment the King was declared no more, but with everything and especially how the King died it wasn't easy...

Also wouldn't look appealing. Its a lot.

I wonder how Luthando is doing.

I should make the time to go see her.

Sip.

I hope the Bahamas treats us well.

Chapter Sixty Seven.

"Every moment is a fresh beginning." x T.S Eliot

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"I don't know what's worse, my headache or this weather," I say opening the blinds to gaze upon the litres of water gushing outside like it didn't see that we were here for some sun.

"Sit down and relax mge. How will the pills work if you're fussing with what God has already done? Besides I see nothing wrong with a relaxing day in where we can just rest...play games...gossip...and eat" Nyiso says.

"I choose gossip," Buhle props herself up from the bed.

"Im sure thats the only option you heard," I chuckle and rub on my temples.

"I agree with Buhle. Lets gossip."

"Weeeh, about who and what?" I look at both of them after questioning.

Now they're the ones looking my way causing me to frown.

"Hayi," I shake my head slightly and sit on the bed.

"Come on mge, you know your life is far more interesting than ours," Nyiso says.

"Yeah tell us about what more happens behind those palace walls that I don't know of," Buhle.

"Nothing happens. Besides I haven't set foot past those palace

gates in ages. "

"Come on sis, you can do better than that."

I shrug. I have nothing to share. Or rather I don't feel like sharing. What if I end up jinxing a lot of things by saying what I shouldn't.

"Uyabhora weMge."

"Tell her."

"Nisile hawu." I lay down on Nyiso's legs, folding my arms in front of my chest. "Do you guys ever feel like there was something wrong with Alakhe?"

"Mentally?" Buhle asks.

"Yeah," I nod.

"Sometimes. The things he did were questionable."

"Do you think he's resting in peace?" I ask thinking back to those uncomfortable dreams that I had a while back.

"Haybo...whats with that question?"

"I...Im just asking. He was killed afterall."

"But then they should've, as per procedure, performed some ritual for him angisho to assure that he truly does rest in whatever hell he is in." Nonkanyiso says causing me to sit up in shock by what she just uttered.

"Mge."

"Haybo, im not lying. The entire kingdom knows this too. Alakhe was no saint. Even our very own King wasn't, but he

managed to change. Alakhe not so much. Maybe something was loose in the head." Nyiso says.

"Hmm..."

"Why are we gossiping about Alakhe out of all the people?"

"I'm just thinking of what Khethiwe told me not so long ago...about her dreaming of Alakhe. He was being weird in this dream and then he suddenly he was rotting...like dead rotting...and he kept saying that here we're alone and that here he can make me his. He wasn't making sense because what he was saying was absurd."

"Eh," Buhle.

"Mge did you have this dream?" Nyiso asks.

"What? No. I told you mos. This was Khethiwe's dream."

"You talk to Khethiwe now?" Buhle asks.

I swallow silently.

"After everything she has done to you?" She adds on and like a fresh wound, it stings. I don't like lying but this is truly not something I want the world knowing.

Especially my husband.

But what good is it if I don't let him know such...

What good does it bring into my life apart from a life with secrets?

"Okuhle." Nyiso. I know she's serious now.

"You're not answering us."

"I don't know what to say." I crumble and hope for any sort of distraction.

"You're having dreams with Alakhe in them?" Nyiso asks.

"Does Bangizwe know?" Buhle follows right ahead and once again my lips fail to utter my thoughts.

"How long has this been going on?"

"Honestly not the kind of gossip I was hoping for," Buhle says.

"Zanokuhle answer me...us."

"I think we all know what I'm going to say to all those questions," I say and get up from the bed. Not even a step further more questions come flooding in.

"How can you not tell your husband?"

"Why not consult?"

"Why did you lie to us, I thought we were friends...family even."

"Because...its not normal!" I snap.

"Of course its not, that's why you seek help not shut up and hope for the best."

"Okay please stop judging me ke."

"Hayi. I'm going to judge you mina mge. Why not tell Bangi out of all people? Wena ngathi you don't love that man neh?"

"Uyahlanya. How can you even say that?"

"I'm pretty sure its not the first time you do this. Its not healthy."

That's it. I'm out. Stepping into the large living area where I meet the boys playing a video game of some sort. With a forced smile on my face I make my way to the kitchen uttering a quick hello to them.

"We ordered some food with your money, hope you don't mind," Khaya says without even looking up.

"Uh, sure whatever." I say.

The smell is calling me, even if I'm pissed as ever...at myself.

Pizza, fries, burgers, is this a rice dish...and an apple pie. How much money did these boys spend on this feast and why am I holding a slice of spicy chicken pizza? Its melting in my mouth like heaven and I don't regret the extra fries I stuff into my mouth.

Where's my phone?

Crap.

Wherever it is, its ringing.

"Zee, your phone." Khaya.

I rush to their side and find it fairly quickly.

"Malinga wami," I say and swallow.

"Udlani mkami?" He chuckles deeply. "Is this you answering my calls while eating becoming a sexy habit?"

"Don't call this sexy. I'm stuffing myself with pizza and fries."

"I'm also eating takeaways. I'm missing your cooking."

"It's been two days."

"Are you saying you don't miss our daughter and I yet?"

"No I'm just saying it has been two days. Start complaining at the fourth one at least."

"By then I would've hoped that you got onto that jet back here."

"And miss out on the Bahamian sun? Forget."

"Still raining up a storm?"

"It just feels like its getting worse. But plans will be made with Lucky."

Lucky is our tour guide, specially selected out of thousands just for us. Again the power that money has never ceases to amaze me.

"You'll tell me all about it then. What about your nausea?"

"Gone but now I'm stuck with a headache. I'm starting to think flying is not for me."

"Ncese sthandwa sam. I'd hug you to make you feel better but I'll settle with my little princess right here." He says and I smile.

"She's not trouble is she?"

"My own daughter? Trouble? Never something I can't handle."
He says and I can tell he was proud. I love this.

I love them having their moment without my interruption or interference.

"We had a fun day I promise you. Again she has noticed you've disappeared but she cant really pinpoint where to exactly. I also might have heard her say mama today...believe me when I say I couldn't hold back my tears." he says.

We talk even more about how their day went and even after spending almost an hour on the phone with this man, saying goodnight to this man was hard.

It happened eventually and I was down three slices of pizza and a handful of chips before gathering enough strength to go back to Nyiso's bedroom.

They were having a conversation. A serious one too judging by the looks on their faces.

"I'll go and take a shower," I say and try evaporating.

"Nah sis, wait. I think both Nonkanyiso and I owe you an apology."

"Yeah. It wasn't our place. we're sorry."

"Don't. I'll tell him everything and then get help."

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"Look at that one over there." Nyiso points and a tall, skinny looking gentleman from afar wearing pink shorts.

"Hayi."

"Wena everyone is a no nje. This is even becoming boring." She says and drinks her cocktail.

"No one looks like my husband moss, what must I do then?" I chuckle and sip on my orange juice.

"You had a type moss before Bangi

" Nyiso says.

"Yeah like Zweli...sorry," Khaya sinks back into his game.

Mxm.

"Beside him, you get what I mean."

"Yeah but they're not him."

"They dont have to be him, come on mge."

I sigh and scout around this practically empty island to see if any man stood out to me but none of them did.

Is there something wrong with me?

"Him," I point to someone. That should be enough.

"I know you're lying. You would never," she says causing me to roll my eyes. I glance to Khaya and figure this would be the best time to approach and tell him what I needed to.

"Khaya lets go get some ice cream." I said already getting up.

When he looks at me he gives me the same look I'd assume I give people who disturb me from my lunch.

I don't budge which makes him get up eventually too. He hands Tiro his game thingy and off we go in a somewhat uncomfortable silence.

I clear my throat gaining his attention once again.

"So how's school?" I ask and I swear I wanted to slap myself because I knew how school was.

"School is school Zano."

"And math? You still showing them who's boss?"

Zano!

Guilt is eating me up raw.

"Why are you asking me things you know?"

"Okay...how's Mrs Nkosi?" I ponder.

"She's old."

"That's not a nice thing to say," I chuckle.

"She also has a short memory span. It gets tricky but I think that's what makes her...fun."

"Do you still like staying with her?"

"Sometimes. Sometimes I miss back home."

"You do?"

"Duh. Its not the same," he says.

"Wanna...move in with us?" I ask and he halts.

Is that a smile?

"Yes! Are you kidding me?"

"Yeah?"

He gives me a look before slamming his tall figure into mine for a tight hug. Slowly I return it with nothing more than real love and appreciation for this genuineness.



"Lets do it." Buhle laughs and hands me a test.

"This is madness," I say looking at the box like I've never seen it before.

"Prove us wrong," Nyiso says.

"Hayke if I'm taking one, we're all taking one." I say and grab the ones on the bed and hand them out like candy.

"Me?" Buhle says with a frown.

"It better come out negative." I give her a stern look.

"Obvious hawu." she rushes off to the loo first leaving Nyiso and I alone to scold each other in silence.

"This is still madness."

"We'll talk after you prove that there's a little Bangi in there." she says and takes a test too heading to the bathroom.

Good Lord.

I sit and position the tiny cup before peeing.

Why am I not nervous?

Dip.

I put the lid on and head out. It goes into the plastic and Buhle shakes it. We wait in silence.

Waiting for the timer to go off...

Another Bangi? Why am I smiling like the idiot that I am when I'm positive that there's nothing invading my uterus.

I hear a gasp.

"One is positive."

"I told you." Nyiso claps once. "Congratulations mge."

"How are you sure it's mine?" I say.

"You sound like a runaway father." Buhle says and shoves another pregnancy test in my palm.

"Ah guys...fine," I go and dip it in the pee again.

I don't leave the bathroom this time. Instead I stare at my reflection in the mirror. Like really stare at myself.

Do I look different?

Do I feel different?

Yes...shit...do you mean, I'm...pregnant. A giddy feeling captures my insides and I find myself giggling.

Why am I remembering the unthinkable I did with my husband?

'Hmmmm,' he breathes out exhausted, leaning in to kiss my back. 'Thank you my love.'

There he goes again, thanking me for sex we both had. 'Thank you too Malinga.' I return too. Genuinely.

'You okay?'

'Yeah, Im perfectly fine... just curious.'

'About what?' The tone in his voice is suddenly to serious.

'You suffocated me.'

'You didn't like that? Cause I'll st-...'

'No no no...relax. I didn't say I don't like it, in fact its quite the opposite.'

'So you liked the choking?' He asks and a bit too embarrassed to say it out loud I only manage a nod and a bite on my lip.

'That's what you call it? Who taught you that?' I giggle.

'Don't you worry about that.' He chuckles and finally releases me from his capture. 'I think I've taken up enough of your time Sthandwa sam.'

'5 worthy minutes,' I breathe out and collect myself.

Crap.

His words ring fresh in my ear as I reel from my drooling session. 'I want you to remember...when you breathe...ukuthi ushiye indoda endlini.'

Enough Zanokuhle.

"Eish...what if the air makes me sick?" I say getting up from the tub of water I had submerged myself in. My body seems angry at me for something it allowed to happen.

"Then you send us money and we'll tell you about our day." She laughs and my jaw is literally on the floor. "I'm kidding hawu mge."

"I see I've ruined this holiday," I said wrapping my body with a towel.

I didn't even feel like going out anymore at this point. I dry the rest of my body with her marveling at what we could be doing on our next two days here while all I'm thinking of doing is dosing off in bed with a bowl of snacks next to me.

"Mge, are you even listening to me?"

"I am," I lie and lotion. "I might send you guys the money and then you go ahead."

"I was joking mara mge"

"I feel like I'll be dull company."

"Yoh. Zano mara."

She leaves the bathroom for me to finish. I wear my pajamas again and grab some snacks. After sending Nyiso a decent amount of money I lock my room and watch some television.

I think this pregnancy is going to be hell. Where did this sudden nausea come from? I can't eat fish now? I feel like screaming but first where are those ginger gummies?

Is that my phone ringing?

Bangi?

"Malinga wami," I manage.

"Are you okay?" He asks.

"Haybo why?"

"You sound like you did the day before yesterday and the day before that...and the guards tell me you've chosen to stay indoors today. "

"These guards...And what exactly was that sound?"

He chuckles. "Sthandwa Sam you don't sound like yourself."

"Mhhh...maybe I caught something here in the Caribbean," I say.

Ahha finally the gummies.

"Hayi sthandwa sam why haven't you gone to see someone for this? Actually let me get the guards to-..."

"Bangi baby no I'm fine. I promise you."

"I don't believe that. I'm switching to video call I wanna see you."

"Bathong Bangi..." The words leave me and as they do my phone rings indicating a video call. "...you are so dramatic."

"Am I being dramatic when I say you look tired?"

"No you're not actually. I'm exhausted."

"Buya ekhaya sthandwa sam," he says and I cant help smiling.

"Nzwano misses you too."

"Is Nzwano making you look for excuses to get me back home sooner?"

"The same Nzwano who's currently asleep from all the fun games we played today?"

"I miss my princess," I say.

"I feel like she has grown too since you were last here," he lets me know.

"I'll be home soon. It'll be like I never left, but then I have to tell you something when I do land. it's important."

"What is it about?" The look on his face is suddenly all too serious.

"Did you miss the part where I said when I land?"

"I want to know now," he looks right at me.

Sigh.

"Khuluma Sthandwa Sam," he encourages.

"Bangi please."

"Im not hanging up until you talk."

I heave out another sign and glance at the opening by the curtain.

"Zanokuhle."

Yoh. okay.

"I had a dream a while back."

"Okay...we all dream, what makes this one so important sthandwa sam?"

"It had Alakhe in it."

"What? How?"

I sigh again before telling him exactly what happened in this dream. Explaining it to him felt so relieving but just as heavy. He didn't have much to say after the fact and maybe I was not ready to hear that much from him about this.

"We'll talk," he says and hangs up.

Okay.

That was not that bad.

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"Mandla, let me talk to Luthando..." I say irritated by now. He's been dodging my request for the past 6 minutes on the call and honestly I was irritated.

"Luthando?"

"Yes, Luthando. Why are you acting like you don't know of her."

"Hayi I do. i just...she's not here."

Oh finally we're getting somewhere.

"Where is she then?" I question.

"With her Grandfather."

Grandfather?

"Will you call me when she comes back?" I ask.

"I don't think that will be possible."

"Mandla are you drunk?"

"A little...look I have to go okay, don't call me again." he says and not a second later the line goes dead.

What the fuck just happened?

Buhle and I look at each other. I guess we have another trip when we land back in our kingdom.

Chapter Sixty Eight.

"What you don't know wont hurt you."

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The dramatic entrance we make once we touchdown in the Kingdom of wealth has me hiding and ducking because I was tired. Sick and tired, literally. I just wanted to be home and rest even more. We're all escorted to our respectful rides and I make a promise to Khaya that I would call and have him let me know when he's ready to be moved.

I heave out a sigh thinking and knowing that I'd have to talk to Mrs Nkosi about this because she has practically taken care of my brother for about two years now.

I have to think of a gift too but what it could be, I have no idea. I sit back and close my eyes drifting off into a peaceful sleep.

"Thank you for proving that my wife was indeed in safe hands. You've made me proud, I'll take it from here." I hear the sound of husband's voice speak.

We're here already?

I wipe the sleep off my eyes and step out of the car with his help before coming face to face with the man that I love. He gives me that warm smile of his that reaches his eyes, making his eyes look nonexistent.

"Beautiful woman...welcome back to my arms," he says and I basically throw myself into them.

"Ngiyabonga husband." I blush and take the risk of breathing him in. "You smell different."

"Different? Good different or bad different?"

The question alone makes me think long and hard whether I loved this smell or not.

"Good different." I finally say and slowly pull away from the hug.

"Good cause I just bought it. Saw it in a dream and went to buy it. In the dreams you were gushing all over your husband."

"Why are you acting like I wasn't gushing over you before this scent?" I chuckle and pout waiting for my kiss which I receive.

"The more gushing, the merrier," he shrugs and snakes his arm around my waist, leading me to the entrance.

"Hawu, my bags?"

"They'll be taken care of, for now I have a little surprise for my wife."

I haven't even been here for 5 minutes and already there's a lot happening.

"That was not necessary Baby," I say glancing up at him. He looks proud honestly which make me wonder what this surprise is really.

"You can't stop me if I want to," he adds.

"A surprise? Is it our daughter in a cute little tutu?"

"Would you like to see our daughter in a cute little tutu?" He titters.

"I think it would be so adorable. Maybe even have a mini photoshoot with her."

"Noted sthandwa sam." he says and pecks my cheek.

Well if it isn't that than what is this surprise?

Our doors are opened and inside I'm met by two humans. A gentleman and lady both dressed rather elegantly. I plaster a smile on my lips but feel how my brows furrow in confusion. What's this?

"I know this may not be ideal but allow me to introduce you to Miss Hadebe and Mr Tuyo. I've handpicked them specially for them to make your garments for the ceremony."

My eyes go wide.

"The ceremony happening this weekend?"

"Your Highness if we may..." The lady speaks and looks at her partner. "...I apologize for interfering but I can assure you my Princess and you My Prince that we; Me Tuyo and I are very fast and precise with our work."

"That's what I was about to say sthandwa Sam."

I give him a look before sighing. "Malinga wami..."

"No. You're not wearing something you already have in your closet. And I'm not taking no for an answer," he says quickly.

The firmness he had in that address was certainly making me trust his judgment.

"Okay. My husband has spoken...I think I have a few ideas already."

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"I love this one too...ngiyabonga sthandwa sam." He says admiring the timepiece I got him from our vacation before I got too sick. I was hoping he liked everything I brought him because I'm never quite too sure what to get him when he basically gets me the world. "I think I'll even show this one off at the ceremony."

"Is your mother going to be there?"

"Angazi sthandwa Sam. Sizabona khona."

My back rests comfortably on the continental pillow before my hand rests on my belly. "If she's there-..."

"We avoid her."

"I-..." I stop myself and nod in agreement.

"We can pretend she doesn't exist even, would make everything way better."

As much as a piece of me wants to forgive and forget about everything, a big piece is saying fuck it. She dug this hole and now she has to lay in it. Caring for someone like her is pathetic anyway. But what if she makes a scene? Calls us words? Will she as Queen be escorted out? I wonder.

A yawn...really?

"So you said something about Alakhe."

Yoh. Sleep runs far out the door at the mention of its name.

There is no way we're tackling this topic when my return was almost two hours ago. "Why?"

"Why?"

"Why keep it a secret for that long?" he questions putting the watch away.

Dammit.

"Don't say it like that. It wasn't a secret."

"What was it then? If you only decided to tell me a couple of days ago?"

"A burden. Look Myeni wami Alakhe is dead and I would've liked to keep it that way. The plan is to move on right?"

"Dreaming of the dead always means something. You know this especially with our mother and all. Alakhe in your dreams and in the state he was in doesn't look like a good sign."

"It was just a dream Malinga."

"I'll let uncle Archie know of this 'just a dream' that you had then"

"Baby."

"Can't convince me otherwise sthandwa sam. What sort of witchcraft is this? Haybo." Bangi says and gets up from the bed collecting the things I had bought him.

Yazin lemme sleep and just allow him to do whatever he wants.
I put an arm around my sleeping daughter and allow sleep in.



Here I am again thinking of a lot of things...like why pregnancy symptoms get worse the second you know of your pregnancy. Is it me being dramatic or is that just the law around these streets. Bangi hasn't noticed anything I think so far, and damn I thought this would be easy and fun keeping it from him and let him figure it out but sheesh.

I want to ask stupid questions like 'do you think I'm gaining weight already' or 'Do you think it's a boy this time or you're a certified girl dad?'.
Its a lot.

Battling nausea the entire day is also not fun. I chew on this ginger gummy and think that even the taste of this is getting really...weird.

My hair is getting done later today and at least that made me excited.

Stepping outside the shower I dry my body and do a quick inspection of my body. "Sthandwa sam have you seen... what are you doing?"

"Huh?" I clear my throat.

"Is your stomach hurting?" He frowns.

a TV? Will I get my breakfast served here and have it fed to me..."

"Hayi hayi hayi, what fantasy is that manje? Don't be a brat. Everything is going to remain the same... and I expect you to treat the helpers here with respect just like you always have."

The TV one is doable though but I'm not telling him that, futhi he has pissed me off with this mindset of his.

Prince Khayalakhe now?

I don't want to laugh.

"Okay." he sulks picking his bag up and walking in further. I have the helps bring in the rest of his bags and unpack it for him.

"If you're hungry, you know where the kitchen is." I say and leave him in peace to wonder and get comfortable.

Downstairs I find my husband seated by the huge glass windows in silence. After standing in one place myself waiting to see if he says anything I move forward in wonder. Maybe he's just in his relaxing element. I sit next to him and glance out at the calming outdoors. This is a really nice spot I have to say.

"Is he happy with his room?" Bangi asks after an eternity of silence. "I saw how much you were fussing and worrying about it."

"He was being a bit of a brat. But he'll be fine."

I watch him nod and move myself closer before laying my head on his shoulder.

Silence once again fills the room and I find myself remembering that we had my brother under this very roof. What is he doing? He's too quiet for my liking.

"I've been thinking of the dream I had last night."

"The one that kept you up almost half of that night?" I ask sitting up again. I would've stayed up with him too if my sleep was not so overpowering.

"Yep. That one."

"What was it about?" I ask and he frowns like my question was all too foreign. "Hawu Malinga, I wasn't in that dream, why are you looking at me like that?"

"Because I told you about it immediately after," he chuckles and reaches for my hand, brings it up to his lips and kisses the back of it. "I guess my wife was too sleepy then

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even if she was agreeing with everything I was saying to her."

I clear my throat with my lips pressed into a thin line. "I'm sorry Malinga wam. Please tell me about your dream again, I promise I'm listening."

"Are you feeling better today?"

"Bangi tell me."

"You've been quite the sleeper lately, I'm worried that you might've really caught something back there."

I caught *something* alright.

"Bangi I'm fine hawu. But now I'm curious about your dream, talk."

He smiles a little before he starts talking. "Everything of nature was green. A healthy green. It was beautiful. You were seated Sthandwa Sam, next to me with me holding your hand just like I am right now."

I glance at our entwined hands and smile like the idiot that I am. I am an idiot in love.

"We weren't lost sthandwa sam. The place felt familiar. You said something but I can't remember what it was. And then all too sudden a light golden like where my father's throne was, shined through. Not long after that I saw him. He walked tall and strong holding something wrapped."

"Something wrapped?" I ask.

He nods.

"I remember his words though..." He pauses to scratch his forehead.

I'm not fighting him over what happens in his dream and what he can recall and what he can't.

"What did he say?"

"He said *'Your wife has helped you right my son. She has given you what most of us couldn't...happiness. She has given you peace and comfort. I died knowing your were in good hands. I died knowing you'd be the King this kingdom needed. I want you, Bangizwe, my only son to sit on that throne.'* "

Shit, I'm in tears.

"*'Stop blaming yourself for my departure. It was my time to join my father. Here...take him... love him. Protect him.'* "

He pauses for the longest moment.

"Bangi you're scaring me," I breathe out wiping the rivers that left my eyes .

Dreaming of the dead is not something I favour.

"After he said that I woke up with you in my arms. I was holding you like you were going to run away or something."

"Lol, me?" I titter sniffing like crazy. He was holding onto me now that I recall and I didn't think much of it honestly until now.

He handed Bangi something wrapped... could it be this baby?

Also, *Him?*

Are we having a boy?

Crap.

"Hawu...Sthandwa sam... please don't cry. I didn't mean to make you this emotional."

"With all that you said now I'm wondering how you're not a mess like I am right now."

"I've been processing it since 03h00 in the morning."

I heave out a sigh and lay back on his shoulder. The silence that fills the room once again now is of a different aura. It's comfortable. Its making me think long and hard about everything I've just been told.

'I died knowing you'd be the King this kingdom needed. I want you, Bangizwe, my only son to sit on that throne.'

Hold on. Only son?

Doesn't the late King consider Alakhe as his son anymore? Moes kuyashuba in the dlozi world, even when you don't think so.

"My Princess...My Prince," Nandi's voice interrupts my wandering mind. She's holding little Nzwano who looks ready to jump into our hands. "I've fed and bathed her already."

"Thank you Nandi." I say as Bangi takes her. Nandi bows and leaves. The smile on this chubby adorable face has me melting.

"She's growing up so fast its becoming scary."

"She is. I'm happy she looks more like you the more she grows."

I feel like she looks more like him but I'm not fighting, instead I lean in to kiss her cheeks like I've done a billion times. Her laugh melts my heart.

"Sthandwa sam..."

"Malinga wami?" I continue making this little angel laugh by making funny faces.

"Is there something you want to tell me?"

"Something like what?"

I finally stop and look at this man.

"Are you...wait let me rephrase, are we...pregnant?"

Hallelujah!

Amen!

Took him long enough.

"Why would you ask that?" I tease.

"The signs sthandwa sam. This dream too. My father handed me a baby wrapped in a cloth too... it can't all be coincidental."

I'm all smiles right and honestly I can't stop myself.

"Ma'Dlamini omuhle, Sibalukhulu, Mdlovu, Magaduzela, Magaga kaNsele, am I being too forward mkami?"

"I may have taken a test...it may have come back positive."

As if Nzwano understood what I just she lets out a loud yell.
Children.

"So we may be having another baby,"

"Maybe..." I tease and giggle.

"I'm definitely taking you to your gyne. I want to be sure." he smiles.



"I...I like it." I lie and look at myself in the mirror in front of me.

"Are you sure sthandwa Sam? You don't look particularly excited about this one like the previous one," Bangi says and that honestly was the truth.

This dress looked better on paper, whilst on my body it looks quite...I don't know but it just didn't feel right.

"My princess would you like me to tug it in more here by waist?" Miss Hadebe asks.

"No, I think I know what the problem is... Its this color."

"You don't like the yellow anymore?" Miss Hadebe asks and she couldn't hide her frustration.

"Yes."

"What colour would you prefer then?" Bangi asks.

I shrug. I don't know, but it can't be yellow.

Chapter Sixty Nine.

"Sometimes the darkness is comforting."

••

"Will you stop it for a second with your fussing, you look perfect." Bangi says. My hand lowers from my face and he closes my mirror.

"You mean it?" I ask.

"When have I ever not?" The confusion on his face is evident. The sigh I heave out next is enough to voice out my frustration.

My encounter with this family once again feels like a task today. I just woke up feeling not so in the mood for this entire thing. Maybe I just wasn't really in the mood for people other than my husband and my daughter.

"This will go by fairly quickly sthandwa Sam. I can see your not really in the mood for any of this."

"Believe me I've missed the family, but not for today."

Deliverance is the man that opens my for me before helping me out. I already spot them dressed in gowns to die for by the entrance. I wonder if they knew about our arrival or they just guessed. Or maybe they were taking pictures because it just doesn't make sense as to why they'd just be standing here like this.

"Zano!" Samukelo is the first to greet me out of the bunch, throwing her arms wide open. As soon as I get a whiff of her perfume I knew this was going to be a struggling day. She hugs me warmly but I was only fighting the almighty nausea I had brewing in me all too quickly. "You look stunning."

"Waze washesha boh makoti!" Aunt Jabulile appears from behind Zinhle.

"Hawu, I cant help it you guys are slow."

"Bangizwe." Uncle Archie calls out.

"Babomkhulu," The handshake they share is firm and makes me quite emotional.

Uncle Archie is technically Bangi father now or rather the closest thing there is to that. Somehow I wish they were closer, then maybe they would talk more often. They would probably be each other's strength, but asikho lapho.

We greet the rest of the clan and I manage to sneak a ginger gummy into my mouth. Up and in we go, into this massive house.

"Uright?"

"Ngincono," I whisper back to him. He nods slightly before pecking my cheek and gazing ahead.

"I have to go somewhere. You go to the women. I'll find you there."

"Eish...okay."

"Ngiyakuthanda hawu. I know you don't like me being far away from you and stuff," he boasts and I can't help but titter.

"Awume wena. Hamba."

"Iqiniso. My kiss ke." He squeezes my hand.

"It's beginning to look like you're the one with attachment issues here," I complain but still get on my tippy toes to give this man a kiss.

The smile he leaves here warms my heart but as quick as my heart warmed up, it quickly ran to hide when I noticed some of the ladies were staring.

"I think it's time you spilled the secret Zano. What are you feeding this man kahle kahle?" Samukelo asks sitting down, drink at hand.

The moment she asks that I couldn't help but remember that Siphos was still an ass for creating an entire human with a side chick.

I thought royals were put in a school where they can all learn how to behave and whatnot, but I guess not. Some of them can still turn out to be assholes if they want to be. If they're destined for failure that will inevitably be the outcome. It won't be some old teacher who's been teaching them how to eat, sit or talk's fault.

"Tell me now so I can change my witchdoctor." Landiwe says.

This one rarely talks.

"True. He always looks like he's drunk off you." Zinhle says.

"I think you guys are overreacting," I take a seat next to Asanda.

"Is it the sex?" Thandiwe.

"That look he gave you phela is giving 'uyayishaya iwoman on top lo'," Landiwe.

My jaw is on the floor. I don't know whether I want to crawl underneath this earth and resurface when this topic dies or... or something else.

"Hayi guys behave," I take a quick sip of the drink I take from this tray of drinks .

This tastes funny.

Wait, shit is that Alcohol?

"Fuck! No, no, no, no!"

"Haybo, Zano!" Samu.

"You okay?" Zinhle.

Crap. I didn't even swallow and clearly I didn't say all that in my head. All eyes are on this chubby chick wearing a red dress to a cleansing ceremony. The feet I have to think on are wobbly with worry. If these women find out my secret

I'm done for.

"Her drink tastes fine moes," Asanda says.

When did she even take it from my hand?

"Nawe wayiTasta vele?" Thandiwe comments.

"What is that supposed to mean? Its not like any of us here would drug Zano." Asanda shrugs putting the glass back on the tray I took it from. "Please get us a batch of new refreshments."

The help quickly removes the tray from our presence when once again I'm reminded that I haven't explained myself.

"It tasted like cherries...I don't like cherries."

Oh the lies.

I see Samukelo and Landiwe nod while the rest just gave me looks I couldn't fully grasp.

"Mhhmmmm...cherries." Zinhle.

The lady doesn't buy it.

Somehow we manage to conversate like proper human adults, catching up and just really having a few laughs here and there. I get to find out that there could be a new Shazi bride coming along. It's exciting really. We also get joined by Ama whom I haven't seen in so damn long it feels wrong. She looks a bit more grown too...but skinnier.

I felt bad. She's the baby of this family and I feel I should've looked out for her more.

"Excuse me...can I get the bathroom please," I ask and get led by one of the helpers here. As we made our way I couldn't help but wonder what the elders and the boys were doing. The secrecy and privacy that goes on here is beyond me. "Thank you."

It smells of vanilla in here and its squeaky clean from the top to the very bottom. I sigh and go pee. I wonder what questions they're asking each other now. Are they interrogating Amandla or offloading another hefty gossip portion.

I wipe and flush.

How is it this silent in here? Only the sound of ice from one persons glass was making noise. Amandla looks bored, if that was the appropriate word to use while the others looked stiff.

"Wow," I breathe out and sit.

Silence.

Thick uncomfortable silence.

The type of silence that makes you wonder if they're thinking about how crooked your nose is or that your hips aren't symmetrical. And then all too sudden the clicking of unstable heels echo's through the room. My shoulders feel heavy.

I don't like this feeling at all.

Ama is just as tense, and when she notices I'm looking at her she stares down at her knotted fingers.

"Interesting... having a cleansing ceremony for my husband whilst me, the wife is not even invited."

Yoh. That right there is my que.

"Sit down wena you ungrateful slut. I don't even know who gave you the permission to stand up when I'm talking. Is it because I'm not the Queen anymore?" She spoke in her tipsy state.

"Ma please stop it."

"Thula wena stabane. I don't even know where you've seen amanyala lawo owenzayo kahle kahle. Ujola nomunye owesfazane, sies! Ngaze ngayizala ishit!"

"That is enough!" Aunt Grace appears out of nowhere to aid this situation.

Ama is sniffing in the far corner and I knew she was embarrassed if not ashamed.

"Thula nawe Gracious! Waze wayibhadi boh."

"This is not the place."

"I think this place is very much it since were starting on a clean slate. Did you tell your husband about all his other babies that you killed wena Gracious? Was it 3? Isdima sakho kade saphela."

My eyes are wide with shock. I think I see Bangi in the corner of my eye.

"What about you Jabulile? Always acting like you have your life together when your own household is a mess. You keep preaching to your followers that relationships are supposed to be healthy but your own rotten child can't keep his itchy hands off omunye umtwana."

My eyes are now on Landiwe whose face has practically disappeared from view. What the what!

"You're one to talk. Where's Khethiwe huh? Gone because of that phethetic son of yours who deserves nothing but hell!"
Jabu fights. "At least my son is trying!"

"Isibindi!" She claps her hands and looks around the room like a mad woman. "You have no right to speak about my son like that, no right whatsoever!"

"Why? Because you made him with Archie?" Jabu asks.

Before I can even pull a face Zinhle jumps in to ask the question that would clear all our confusion.

"Mama, you mean Uncle Senzo."

"I said what I said. I still cant believe my brothers were blinded by the snake that is this. You're judging everyone in here but forget your loose self!"

"You know what...tell them. Tell them all and don't forget to

add that I loved Archie more than Senzo. Don't forget to add that I only chose Senzo for status and the title. I bore Archie and Senzo their first sons and I didn't kill any of them."

"How dare you be proud of such nonsense!" Grace.

I'm rolling in my head from all of this news. This woman can keep a secret because wow. My mind would've never thought this poised woman was cheating on her precious Senzo. The same Senzo she lost her marbles for the day he turned cold. Or maybe she started to fall in love with him and all that other gist that we might never understand.

But her and this respectable man were getting it down and dirty all those years ago...kanjani broe? I cant see it and that really is my flaw because I know how love is.

Love can match you up with someone you would've never pictured in a million years.

Love can make you fight battles that were never yours to begin with.

It can sometimes kill you. Literally.

I've seen love make me comfortable and worry at the same time. I've seen it make me a parent and I've seen it build me. Why should I be shocked that over here it chose to be a lie and fabrication of some sort that may very well ruin lives.

I feel pity for Uncle Archie's wife. She stormed out of the room the second it got confirmed that Alakhe was her husband's son. Judging by the empty space next to Ama, Landiwe went after her for comfort while these ladies continued to bicker like they weren't adults.

"Brothers? You slept with both my father and... and my uncle?" The anger and confusion in his voice sat so foreignly on my ears.

"Did I not make sense the first time I said it?"

Wow. She's beginning to sound cruel and selfish...just like Alakhe.

"Guards, remove this thing from our premises. Immediately!" Grace orders and these mannequins are quick to respond.

"Don't you dare touch me. I'm still the mother to the King of this kingdom. You are still a whole bunch of nobodies in my eyes."

"Take that phethetic title and shove it up your ass while you walk out of here!"

She was about to respond when Uncle Archie shut her up with just a look. This man has said nothing since all these accusations began... he didn't even try to deny anything.

We watch her leave, the guards following right behind. Grace is next to leave the room. Her husband too.

"I suggest we finish what we came here for. What happened here... never happened, am I clear?" He finally speaks. Our answer is minimized by a chuckling Jabu. "Mxm" her.

Sigh.

•••

The silence is eating me up alive in this car. How we went from the purpose of getting cleansed and celebrating to just digesting heavy crap is not really as shocking as it should be. Lol, does that mean I've been trained well? If that's the case than do I pat myself on the shoulder for a job well done?

He's playing with his beard, something I rarely see him do because that's something I usually get up to.

"I need to go see Ama," he says very suddenly.

"Oh..."

"You still want to go see Luthando today?"

"No, I want to be there for you."

"You going to see Luthando does not mean you're not there for me. Besides, I'm fine. I just want to see how my sister is doing."

I heave out a sigh and sit back.

"Promise you'll call me then if you end up not being fine?" I say.

"You too."

"Yes me too. But I'm going to see a baby. I'm sure she's so adorable and big now."

"I want pictures." Bangi says, a faint smile on his lips .

"That's an obvious request my love. I'll take plenty of pictures of Lu." I say and lean over to lie on his shoulder. "I'm glad the cleansing ceremony is over. Makes me feel like we've done your father something good."

"I hope that's how he sees it. I know he saw what happened but I do hope he's happy."

Now I'm the one smiling a little. Kuningi...

"My Princess...we're here." Deliverance says not a moment too late from when my eyes shot open.

How embarrassing...

Only God knows when I fell asleep. We indeed were parked right in front of Thokozani's house and sheesh, it looked pretty unkept.

My door is opened. The grass was as tall as my knees. It even looked like no one was living here anymore. My eyes traveled to the boys that played by the streets.

I'll question them if there's no one in here. Slowly I made my way to the door and started knocking...and knocking and knocking. Haybo Thokozani.

It sounds quiet in there too. Does that mean they're not home. So...I should've called first.

I try knocking one more time before I hear something falling and breaking. "Fuck!" The loud curse peaks my curious mind and I find myself opening the door to meet Thokozani...no wait what's that smell?

Is that the smell of pee?

"Thokozani, open some windows man. How are you breathing all of this in?" My hands are already working on opening the two I see in here. The difference is miniscule but atleast it's there.

"Fuck...you made me drop my alcohol Zanokuhle."

"You're drinking around Luthando now?"

"I spent my last cent on that bottle."

"Since when do you-...Thokozani when last did you shower...or at least eat. Entlek where is Luthando?"

If this is how he looks and smells then I'm terrified to see little Lu. I go searching for her in this quiet building and find nothing. I thought that maybe she was sleeping or something.

"Where is she?"

I'm getting pissed. He sits and pats on his chest and pants without giving me an answer.

"Thokozani."

"Don't you have R20?"

"I asked you a question Thokozani. Where is Lu?"

"I told you already!" He snaps banging on the table. "Do you see her here? No! Now can you leave me alone?"

"Take me to your grandfather then. I won't bother you after that." I say calmly.

Two drunks in one day and if I wasn't pregnant I'd have a glass myself.

"Get out Zanokuhle. Get out and never come back."

"What? I'm just here to see Luthando."

"And i'm telling you to fuck off. Get out!" He throws a glass on the floor that has my heart racing in a matter of seconds.

"Okay...okay...cool." I back away before I get myself injured over nothing really.

Whats wrong with this guy?

I swear I might never ever set foot here ever again. I'm even regretting letting him father Luthando.

"My Princess what are you doing here?" His neighbour startles me.

"I...I was here to see Luthando." I can't even force a smile onto my lips. "But its fine I'll come see her another time."

"Luthando? The little girl? What do you mean you came to see her?"

"She lives here."

"Lived here. My Princess I don't know if we're grieving

differently but-"

"What?" My brows furrow. "Im not grieving, what do you mean?"

"That little girl died my princess. about a month ago..."

It's not possible.

It can't be.

Chapter Seventy.

"Being delusional saved me."

••

"Zanokuhle...baby wake up." The voice of my husband pulls me back to consciousness. "There you are. Thank God."

I remember everything. The words that neighbour spoke, were still fresh in my head. I didnt know whether to cry or to be angry. Anger is good right?

I have the right to be pissed at Thokozani. I have every damn right to hurt him with my bare hands for this.

"Sthandwa sam, whats wrong? Breathe... breathe... look at me." He cups my face and makes me look at him. The confusion in his eyes is enough to tell me he doesn't know. He doesn't know Lu is gone. Her body is cold and we didn't know about it.

"Where's my phone?" I ask, noticing more than ever now that I was in hospital. Why do I have a bandage around my arm.

Ouch...okay it hurts.

"Here it is." He hands me the phone he dug out of my bag. I don't even say much as I begin searching frantically for anything. Maybe he texted us, emailed us...called us even and we somehow missed it. Maybe he told us ages ago of what happened to Luthando but our lives were just too preoccupied with garbage.

"Sthandwa sam, you're shutting me out."

"I'm looking for something."

"Like what? What's going on? You pass out and all the information I get is that my wife has been rushed to a hospital and now she's telling me that she's looking for something on her phone. Come on."

"Has Thokozani called you?"

"No. Why?"

Till this very hour and moment I couldn't believe what we were dealing with.

The wound in my heart hurt more than the wound on my arm which was healing, unlike us.

I couldn't help but hold my baby closer and kiss her more than I ever did before.

I couldn't help but love her more than I ever have. I wanted to protect her with my soul because my life just didn't seem enough. This world was cruel enough to take a soul as young as Lu's, which clearly showed that no one on this entire planet had the might that God does.

I hated how our questions never got answered.

I hated how we now have to move on like she never existed...
And deep down I couldn't help but blame myself for all of this.
Maybe if I took her in to live with us she'd still be here.

"Sthandwa sam... Please sit up, You have to take your vitamins," Bangi interjects my thoughts, bottle in hand and a small smile on his lips.

"Thank you," I sit up, taking them from him and down them quickly. "Slipped my mind."

"That's why I'm here right?" he convinces me but once again my mind is back at it. I don't remember the last time we sat down and had a proper meal... Or even laughed till our tummies hurt in this building.

'I'm coming!' I remember saying before grabbing my keys and hanging up on that idiot I thought I liked. We met by the passage, with Buhle helping Zonke keep up on her feet while she yelled and breathed loudly. Khaya peeked out of his room. I tossed the keys to him and told him to go start the car while I went back to fetch Zonke a bag I bought her for this baby.

I remember finding them by the front door.

Chery was up and running.

My mind replayed how we rushed to that public hospital and how we had to wait before we got any sort of assistance from the nurses or doctors in there.

... How the doctor came and told us she had been delivered safely. I remember the first time I laid eyes on that baby, how Buhle and I melted...but then I remember Zonke's horrible treatment towards her baby.

I remember naming her Luthando because I wanted her to feel loved by those surrounding her. I wanted her happy and safe, even if it meant dropping her off at a strangers house.

Thokozani.

Oh what have you done to this innocent baby?

You could've brought her back to us if she was too much for you to handle.

She was so happy on her last visit here. So full of life... And now all we have are these memories and pictures which made the whole thing even harder to accept.

"I'm going to see my therapist later on today... Don't you want to come with me," he squeezes himself right next to me. I look at this man, long and hard enough to notice the tiredness on his face. His unkempt hair and beard pointing and prickling at my palms and fingertips. My head lightly declines his offer before I sigh out.

"I have to go somewhere too."

"Where?"

"I'm going to see Zonke."

"For what?"

"All of this. I doubt she knows."

"Sthandwa sam this woman rejected her child while she was alive, what makes you think even for a second that she'd care now?" Bangi asks me and I know I've thought of this but why was I thinking of it again? It makes me feel like maybe he's right.

She doesn't deserve that... But maybe she does. I think she does. Come on world...

"I think you've made up your mind already... Okay. I'll have security ready for you and your journey." he says and gets up. "I'll go make us something to eat okay?"

"I'm not hung... I mean okay." the words almost get me in trouble.

I take myself upstairs where I check on our daughter and Nandi before going to refresh my face and bandages. Bangi always does this for me so it definitely felt weird trying it out for myself. She's healing up pretty nicely.

As I'm wrapping the bandage around my hand I hear the bathroom door slide open. I pay no mind to it because I knew it was Bangi... Wait...

Bangi how? The bedroom door is still very much closed and there is no way I wouldn't have heard that open.

"Malinga? Are you in there?"

Nothing.

Strange.

I quickly finish up before getting up to go check and there was no one there. Maybe it was just me and my occupied mind that imagined the door opening like this.

The second I turn to leave the bedroom something calls out my name.

What the hell was that?

I grab the door in an attempt to close it but something falls to the ground causing me to yelp, jump and bump into a chest.

His chest.

"Woah, Sthandwa Sam calm down. What's wrong?"

"Something is in there Malinga," my heart is beating hard in it's cage.

"What do you mean something is in here, lemme check."

He let's go of my face to go inspect and as sure as I was delusional he comes back with nothing. Even if there was someone in there, where would they hide?

"It's okay

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there's nothing in there."

"I know. This whole thing has me paranoid I guess. Sorry if I scared you."

"Ah, Don't worry... your big, strong and handsome man is always here to protect you," he states and I couldn't help but giggle.

"Be serious Malinga."

"I am. You're saying that like I haven't protected you from predators and wildlife and aliens and zombies..."

"Weeeh ima kancane nje."

"Deny it all you want gorgeous but you know it's true," he takes my hand and we walk downstairs to eat whatever he prepared.

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Mafungwashe is sleeping right next to me in her crib, peaceful as ever after a chaotic playing session.

Bangi had gone to his session, Khaya to his soccer practice and I was wallowing in my 'loneliness'.

My peace is disturbed by a mannequin who walks in here. I frown, sitting up. "My Princess, my apologies for disturbing you. There's a man outside here to see you."

"A man?"

A man other than my man?

"Do I know this man?"

"Yes My Princess."

"Okay... I guess you can let him in, but not alone."

He nods and walks out. I take my baby and go put her in one of the rooms down here with a helper. I was not taking chances. The second he steps in I'm taken back to that stuffy house and the rancid smell of alcohol and pee . My anger is at it's peak because I cannot understand why he'd have the audacity to show face here after everything.

"I don't want you here. Leave." I say, the mannequins already had him in their hold when he started pleading.

"Please... Allow me to explain...please Zanokuhle..."

"Explain what? The fact that I had to find out through the neighbour's about Lu?"

"No..." he quickly stated.

The tears in his eyes didn't touch me, but maybe I wanted to hear him out. I nod and the men let him down. "I'm giving you a minute and then I want you out of my face."

"Okay. I'm sorry... For not letting you know about Luthando. I didn't think it would get this far... And I didn't think I'd be standing here saying that my daughter is dead. I felt like my whole world shuttered when she left this earth."

"Get to the point Thokozani."

"I didn't kill her if that's what you think. I watched her die in my arms and It still haunts me, every morning, every evening... Every second."

"30 Seconds." I fold my arms in front of my chest, holding my emotions on a tight leash.

"Zwelibanzi."

A cold chill runs through my body as he said that name.

"I found out that Zweli... Your ex was my daughter's father."

"What?" the words leave my mouth as a whisper.

"Zonke and Zweli were fucking right under our noses and we didn't know. They proudly made a human and then... Things went south. That's why she didn't love Luthando. I thought it was because of me but that went out the window the second I found out not even an ounce of my blood was running through her veins."

I feel my body give in and I land on the couch. My face buried in my palms. "What the hell."

"He sent men. They... They..."

"No, stop."

"They killed my baby."

"Stop."

"I hate myself."

"Thokozani stop."

"I'm sorry...I should go." he says. I don't bother saying anything. He leaves and I'm drained.

Why?

There's no way I'm letting Zweli live after this.



"Well... I'll call you later babomncan," he hangs up before heaving a heavy sigh. "They'll be coming over this weekend."

"Oh."

I didn't want guests. I didn't want them in our space like that. I also didn't want to face the awkwardness that came with the aftermath of two weeks ago. That's how long it has been since everything and just how long it took the media to take hold of the scandal that came with the Queen and Archie.

I still couldn't believe they made an entire human.

Just like how I couldn't believe the two jailbirds made a baby too. The same jailbird that had something going on with our supposed father. Zonke is sick nje. Sick! sick! sick!

Makes you wonder why you could even start trusting humans like that. How do we even end up believing strangers when they tell us that they care for us and love us and everything under the stars when they could very likely be liars?

Pathological liars futhi.

"I know it's not too ideal but I think the sooner we get this over and dealt with the better."

"What is this meeting even about? Also what makes your uncle think that things will go well this time around? Your family can't seem to get along even for a simple cleansing ceremony."

"I don't know... And I know that. I don't even want this although if they believe something good will come out of this then lets just go with the flow. But then again if it all goes south we won't have to see them for the next couple of months or so," he says causing me to chuckle.

"That was dark." me.

I get up to go put on my pajamas after smearing my body with this calming lotion. I deserved that long hot bath I took because I was not about to pretend that everything was fine. Luthando occupied my mind half of the time, to the point where I forgot my brother lived here now.

"Do you think your Uncle will explain himself this time around?"

"I think he has to at some point, otherwi- Wait, baby... what is that?" Bangi asks as I hung the damp towel up.

"what's what?" I frown looking at him. My eyes follow his and land on a mark I didn't notice before. "A scratch?"

"What did that?"

"I don't know. Must've happened in the bathroom."

He's beside me, inspecting a simple scratch to the point of suspicion.

"Bangi."

"There's nothing in that bathroom that could've done this."

"You're starting," I turn away. "maybe if I was in the bath and I felt something then I'd probably be saying the same thing as you... But right now it could have been my nails even."

That is my denial talking. My senses were higher than a kite and I refuse to believe that something other than my nails did this to me. No. No. This wasn't here when I lotioned. I would've seen it. I would've felt it. Futhi on the belly I rub everyday...

"Okay... Fine...then those nails have to go or I'm cutting your nails myself." he says looking up at me.

I can't even bring myself to smile even when he kisses and rubs on my belly. He was making it a habit again and I didn't mind it at all.

"Does it hurt?"

"No. Only a little really."

"I'll go get the kit."

"Haybo Bangi, for a scratch?" I chuckle watching him get up.

"I want no marks on my woman's beautiful skin."

"So sweet..." I run my fingers through his beard before continuing the task I had given myself...

I snuggle closer to my husband, wondering why today was such a task to fall asleep. It was cold too. Cold even under these sheets and I wondered how.

If I was this cold then how cold was Mafungwashe?

I step out to go check her in her crib and she felt just fine really. So it was only me?

Maybe I'm getting sick.

Back in bed I force my eyes shut and hate the visions that came before me. The only one that brought me some sort of peace was the tombstone we were having baby Lu made. A Beautiful little angel holding a stone that wrote everything about her short life.

"Zanokuhle."

"Mhmmm?" I turn my head slightly but hear only the sounds of this man snoring. This man is talking in his sleep now?

I booked him his favourite barber for tomorrow and that excited me. I've also arranged his tailor to bring over a couple of suits and shoes that he could pick from for the orphanage visit we were going to. I won't lie, I was proud of the fact that I pulled it off without him finding out. Futhi booking and organising things without this man noticing is a challenge on its own.

What the hell?

What just touched my leg?

I sit up, my heart in my mouth as I looked around in the dark. That was not Bangi playing footsie-footsie.

Am I okay?

No I'm definitely going crazy. Is hallucinating a pregnancy symptom cause it seems like I'm doing a lot of that now.

Footsteps?

They clap-clap across the wooden floor and I swear I see something short sprint past before something drops. I yell the second it jumps on the me. The light comes on and it's gone. I'm still fighting it off me, afraid to jump out of bed.

"Sthandwa sam what is it!" he begged in worry. I pull my knees up and hug them.

"Something is in here Bangi."

Chapter Seventy One.

"When it rains it pours."

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"There's nothing in here sthandwa sam. I've checked everywhere." he says, frustration written all over his face.

"I promise I saw it in here. I know I sound crazy right now but I swear."

"Calm down Mkami, I believe you." he says and sits right next to me. "What did you even see kahle kahle?"

"I... Don't even know, but I felt it. It jumped right onto my face Bangi and then disappeared."

"How about we pray?" He says and I nod quickly before we both sink into heavy prayer.

The moment we said Amen, I felt better.

"I'll stay up with you until you fall asleep, how about that?"

"You need to sleep. Tomorrow needs you at your fullest." I say.

"Nice try but you're not getting rid of me that easily." he makes his way to his side, climbs in and covers himself in our sheets.

"Come."

I waste no time laying on his chest hugging him. "You feel so cold baby. You should've said you needed a cuddle."

I chuckle. "Please don't switch off your light."

"I won't," he says. I scan the room again and sigh. At least I didn't wake Nzwano up...

Morning came and by some miracle I managed to drift off to a peaceful sleep. I felt better in the morning honestly.

The people I hired came right on time too and seeing the look of appreciation on my Husband's face made me dance with glee inside. I didn't bother putting on a dramatic make up look today because I knew we'd be awfully busy. I get dressed in a form fitting dress and comfortable high heels.

"Your Vitamins," he hands me one and water.

"Ngiyabonga Malinga wam."

After downing it I fix Nzwano's shoes and put her down. Her tiny fist goes into mine and we walk ever so slowly out of here. The motorcade was ready to escort us out to this orphanage not so far from here.

The second we got there our doors were opened and we were met by the screams of children, each holding a miniature Emashazini flag in their hand. The smiles on their little faces brought joy to mine and I couldn't help but look at my baby who rested on my hip. I wanted to make sure she was comfortable with all of this but little miss over here was even waving.

Bangi confidently led us to these kids which hugged and greeted us. The love was in the atmosphere and honestly they didn't fail to make us feel welcomed.

"His Royal highness, her Royal highness thank you so much for coming and welcome to UMUZI Orphanage, I trust you'll have a wonderful visit." the Lady dressed modestly says.

"Thank you Prayer." Bangi says. Soon after we followed behind.

"As you may know we've been running this orphanage for almost 25 years now and we've housed over 400 children of all ages. These kids are truly what drive us to continue forward even within the struggles and challenges we face."

The inside of this building looked exhausted. I couldn't help noticing the dullness of the paint and cracks on the floors.

My eyes land on a cabinet with multiple trophies in them. I stop to read them.

Kefilwe Mokoena, 100m running.

Yoliswa Ncwadi, 150m hurdles.

Ntombiyodwa Shabalala, choir participation.

Armand Koen, Rugby championship 2020.

"These really are outstanding children as you can see My Princess." Mrs Prayer says.

"Indeed. Are all these kids still here?"

"Yes... We allow them to take their winnings whenever they leave the orphanage officially. That way they can motivate themselves even after they've stepped out of here and tackled adulthood."

"That's beautiful," I say smiling at her.

We continue ahead to a huge opening with chairs and tables that were set up. This is where she said they'd have their breakfasts, lunches and suppers together as one humongous family. I cannot even begin to imagine how much work it is to ensure that every single one of those kids we met outside are fed. I'm also pretty sure not all of them eat similar things which means plans are made for them.

"These are their beds?" I ask lightly pressing on the mattress that looked in critical condition.

"The orphanage can't afford to purchase new beds for the kids. The donations really only cover the important parts of these children's lives."

"I see." me.

"What does it cover then?" Bangi interrogates.

"Mostly food costs and the cost of keeping the lights in this place on. The last sum of money we received we managed to take the kids shopping for new clothes." she answers.

We walk out after seeing most of the rooms and taking in the situation. Some of these kids sleeping spaces looked personalized. Some had pictures hanging on walls, some in frames by the side of the bed. Teddies...books...a few toys. She showed us where the grown children slept and the condition looked better but still...

"With some of the funds that we get we pay the ears that come to listen to the problems these kids face. Some have been through quite traumatic events and relive them every now and then. We did have therapists that would come in and volunteer their services, but unfortunately times have changed," she narrates.

"It's amazing how attentive you are to these kids needs."

"If we don't do it Your highness, then who will. These kids come here with almost nothing and I never want them to leave here with nothing."

She managed to show us all the Corners of this building and it definitely needed fresh hands to bring it back to standard again. The few last hours we spend playing and doing a few activities with the kids.

They take pictures with us and we listen as some of them share their stories. Heartbreaking stories too at that.

I'm glad there was no media here to disturb or interfere.

Nzwano slept on her dad's chest as we rode back home.

"Do you think that was enough... The money that we donated?"

"You think 13 million is not enough? Bangi futhi that was plenty." I say and even remember than this money will only cover their needs minus the renovation of the entire building,

college costs for the kids there and things such as toys. I personally think that's plenty. "Relax Malinga." his hand receives a gently squeeze from mine.

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"Zano, wake up." I'm shaken lightly. My eyes open to meet Khaya standing there and what is this?

I was crying in my sleep?

"Haybo what do you want? You can see I'm sleeping." I wipe the tears away.

Believe me when I say I was exhausted.

"I wanna go out."

"Then go out Khaya I don't see why you had to wake me up for that," I say and understand the moment I say that ukuthi I was not being rational. "Where are you going?"

"A party with friends."

"Party? Haybo Khaya since when?"

"Please. All my friends will be there."

"Uyophuza?" The question leaves my mouth. I felt like a parent right now.

"Yes... No..."

"Khayalakhe Dlamini."

"What kinda party doesn't have booze sis?"

"The kind for underage teens."

"Don't act like bewungaphuzi Zano at my age."

"I didn't drink vele," I fold my arms in front of my chest.

"Okay ke but I'm asking you nicely... Little brother to older sister, can I go to this party?"

"Khayalakhe if you come back here sloshed I swear..."

"I won't, I promise." he smiles and I shake my head.

"Mhmmm... Don't disappoint me ke. You know now things are different. Do you know what you're going to wear? Are you taking your guards with? Do you need cash? Your ride?"

"Yoh... It's just a party... But yes, yes, yes and I've spoken to Mr Mda the one who fetches me from school and he said it wouldn't be a problem."

I nod and reach for my bag to grab a few notes to give him for spending on whatever he may need.

He was happy and that made me feel like I was doing right by him. Him and I share a weird love language but it's there.

He leaves me to get back to sleeping again. Before I could lay down the door opens and he's back again, standing there in silence.

"Oh and don't forget I want you back here before midnight, got it?"

Nothing.

Not even a glance.

He just stared blankly ahead, arms by his sides.

"Khaya, I'm talking to you." haybo just when I thought our relationship was going well he does this. I get up ready to give him the talk of his life when he walks out closing the door.

Uyangihlanyela lomtwana.

In fact he's not going anywhere anymore.

I pop out, looking both ways of the hallway and don't see him. I find him downstairs on his phone, with Bangi who's playing with Nzwano.

"You can't ignore me like that when I'm talking to you Khaya."

"What are you on about now?"

"I gave you a curfew and you said nothing about it."

"Curfew?"

"I said be back by midnight."

"Oh, okay no worries."

"But you're not going anymore."

"What! why?"

"Yeah Sthandwa sam... Why would you change your mind."

"I promised you I'll be on my best behavior, what more do you want from me?"

I can't find an answer for that, instead I heave out a sigh and think about how dramatic I was being. "I'm sorry, go to party."

With that I head back to our bedroom to rethink my unnecessary violence.



They are here.

Kuyaphitizela nje la kwami with the helps going left

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right and center with the final small touches. The house smelt amazing and yes, I was hungry. I think that's the only thing I cared for right now other than this stupid meeting.

In they walk in unusual silence and I could feel the tense atmosphere without even trying. It was heavy and expected, especially since people were cheating and lying about it.

Zano, stop being so judgemental.

Where is she?

We greet each other, forcing a couple of smiles here and there before heading off to the dining area. "I'm sure I've said it before but your house... Amazing," Thandiwe says.

"Try something else to break the ice wena," Landiwe says.

"Oh what do you want me to say? What a fake family and unnecessary meeting? Oh wow Zanokuhle we barely spoke in the car you know," she says in mockery.

"Ayi fokof ke," Landiwe says.

"Nawe"

"Grow up, both of you," Aunt Jabu interjects.

I hear a 'mxm' before utter Silence. We sit and wait. Bangi and his uncle are not here yet. I would much rather not be here too honestly.

Was I wrong for that?

I hear footsteps before a sight comes to view that warmed my heart.

Amandla.

I get up and engulf her in a warm hug, glad to feel her return it.

"You made it." me.

"Family right?"

"Always." I say and hold her hands in mine. She looks better, still too tiny for my liking but I could see she was trying.

"Come."

The rest greet her and we were back to waiting.

"Where's my little niece?" Ama asks.

"She's with Nandi in her playroom. You can see her after this," I state.

"I'd like that."

"Heeh Zano which reminds me, my deepest condolences for the loss of your sister's child. I can only imagine how it must've felt finding out such shocking news," Asanda interrupts the peace.

"I-..."

"I know Uncle," Bangi's voice takes me out of my 'misery'.

"In fact get used to me calling King Bangizwe," Archie chuckles alone.

"I'll try."

"Good good... Hmmm... Zanokuhle, Amandla."

Again we're up, hugging and greeting this tall man.

"I hope you two are well," he says taking his seat. Bangi sits
Between Ama and I.

"All will surely be better once the dusts settle," I add.

"I think she means once you explain to us what the hell is going
on with this family Archie." Grace says.

No. What?

"That is not why we're here. I've said it once that what
happened back at the cleansing ceremony never happened."

"But it did happen Archie. And it fucked us all up-..." Jabulile
speaks and I couldn't help but want to leave this room. He
shuts her up by only putting his hand up.

Hectic.

"Jabu respect my decision for once," Uncle Archie says and a
few throats clear around the table. "The only matter bringing us
here together today is that of Bangizwe ascending to the
throne. It has been long overdue and we feel it is time."

Hawu?

I look at him questioning why he didn't tell me this.

"His coronation will take place in the coming month as we prepare both Bangizwe and Zanokuhle for the big days ahead. Announcements shall be made to the general public after this meeting has been dismissed. Expect tabloid and articles written about this... Some may not be in favour of, but let that not deter us from the goal."

I finally look away from my husband and to the entire table. Smiles. Archie looks proud too to be announcing this news.

"So it's official?" Zinhle speaks.

"A bit sudden but yes. We'll let our spokesperson know of this soon and get everything underway."

Yoh.

I have a headache because what?

I know I was encouraging for this to happen all along but now that it's here, I'm shaking...Figuratively.

"I guess celebrations and congratulations are in order for our new King."

"Here yee he-..."

"Archie we have swept this under the carpet for far too long now it's becoming a mountain."

"Grace be decent! You can see we are in the middle of celebrating our son here," uncle Archie says.

"We can celebrate all we want but this... This will still haunt us. How long have you and miss thang been sleeping with each other?"

"Weeh Jabu what if they're still messing with each other as we speak?"

"I wouldn't put it past them. They can lie for the entire nation these two."

"Poor Senzo."

"Usathi Senzo, nangu yena la uBangizwe. The same son you're grooming into a King has to deal with you knowing you slept with his mother."

"Enough you two!" Archie interrupts.

"Enough yamasimba. You let that woman disrespect us in front of our kids," Grace.

"Poor Amandla had to be embarrassed in front of everyone for her sexuality. For what?" Jabu.

"So you think solving this in front of them is the way to go?" Archie.

"You got exposed in front of them, might as well keep it consistent." Grace says.

"Clearly Archie, ngoba you've been avoiding us and your wife who's been sleeping at my place, crying herself to sleep every night for the betrayal you caused her," Jabu adds.

I can't believe how silent we are in comparison to these loud women.

"What possessed you to sleep with your brother's wife even?"

"They were not together!"

"Hawu?"

"I was first okay. I love her and I was going to marry her not my brother. We had plans. Big plans and then Alakhe happened. I was hurt. She chose him over me and life moved the fuck on! Are you happy now?" he bangs on our table and with a dramatic glance storms out.

That was rather... Pathetic really.

Vague too for all the drama these two women brought forward.

"Yoh. Uthe he loves her."

"Hayi it's not over mtase," Jabu high-fives her sister as they shared laughter.

I guess we'll see with those two.

"Hayi Jabu I think we can now celebrate and drink... You do have some wine on hand right?" Grace asks.

And so it begins.



"Thank you for coming Makhosi," I say as the man gets ushered in.

"Akuna nkingi ngane yami ehhe, uyazi ngenza umsebenzi wabaphansi," he says and chants something I doubt was for my understanding. "mhhmm..."

"Do you... See anything?" I ask scanning the house for anything that would just prove that I'm not going insane.

He doesn't answer, instead he walks towards the stairs and up he navigates. I keep my mouth shut following behind him. Bangi has gone to another session with his doctor and Nzwano is sound asleep.

Khaya was just in his room being himself with a video game the last I checked.

"How long has this been going on?" he suddenly asks.

"How long has what been going on?"

"Your problem?"

"What problem?" I know... I had to act stupid in order for me to see if he truly knew what was going on here.

This is not Mehlo... Even though I wish it was.

"mhmmm... Yyheeyy..."

"Makhosi," I frown.

"I see something." he says.

"Something? Something like what Makhosi?"

"A dark cloud."

Okay we're getting somewhere.

"Makhosi."

"This cloud is making you and your husband fight," he says and I find myself tilting my head in wonder. "This is not a good thing. We have to cleanse this house immediately."

"What do you mean its making my husband and I fight makhosi."

"I see him hitting you and hurting you. This curse is deep. I need a bucket of water now." he says and I take my confused ass downstairs to find a bucket and water. Heading upstairs, I couldn't help but wonder what this guys was even talking about.

Hitting?

Me?

Bangi?

I must really be going crazy.

I find him in the hallway of our rooms looking around. I still don't trust him, but I'm hoping whatever he does works. I watch him mix different muthi's and get to sprinkling the the house with it.

The smell was making me nauseous but I had to soldier on...

...for the sake of peace.

Chapter Seventy Two.

"It takes a million people to build up a good reputation, but it takes one stupid fool to destroy everything they done." x Lucky Dube.

••

He left.

The house felt... Meh.

I headed to the kitchen to grab something to nibble on while I called Buhle to check up on her.

We have a lengthy conversation, with her telling me about what has been happening on her side of life.

I fill her in about the upcoming ceremonies and tell her I'll arrange for her to be fetched. I'm also reminded about getting her a designer to make her whatever she wanted to wear.

Soon enough I found myself back on mommy duty, playing and feeding my little princess. She was growing and I know this was a regular thought to me but it is just all too beautiful to see.

Yes, I pushed this out of my vagina. And yes, I'm about to push another one out in a couple of months.

I have to get back to my yoga earlier this time to ensure I'm ready for when delivery day comes. Oh I couldn't wait to hold our baby in my arms. Have that newborn feeling all over again. I

better not be getting addicted to something that takes a piece from me each time.

Another person I have to thank more often is Nandipha. She's a godsent. I would've probably never been able to cope had she not been there to assist me.

I think I never thank this life enough. It has given me so much that I didn't ask for. So much that has pushed me to do better and give to those that don't have what we do.

How am I so tired after just a few minutes of playtime?

Am I... Unfit.

You're pregnant Zanokuhle.

That's my excuse and it's final. Futhi it's a very valid excuse on my end.

I get up, all out of breath and head to the kitchen for yet another snack. I think I was just hungry but treating it like a bleeding wound and putting a plaster on it.

Maybe I should just cook something quick and easy, plus Khaya might want some of it too.

A wrap?

I might as well.

"mhmmm...Someone is in a good mood," Bangi startles me, wrapping his arms around my waist and hands resting on my

growing belly.

"You're back."

"I'm back sthandwa sam. Miss me?"

"Not even," I joke seasoning the chicken that I was busy slicing.

"Befuthi why would you think I'm in a good mood?"

"You haven't touched a pot in forever Zano."

"weeeeh."

I watch him switch on the stove for me and put a non stick pan on it. He grabs some olive oil and a stick of butter before adding a little in there along with the butter. I'm watching in awe, because I didn't ask this man to do anything yet he's doing this.

"What else can I help with?" he questions.

"I've got this Bangi. Really I do."

"I really don't mind helping you babe."

"I know but I want to do this. So wena just sit down and tell me about your session."

"Are you sure?" he asks tilting his head slightly.

"I'm sure," I mirror his actions and just then Nzwano waddles in making her way to her dada. She pulls on his pants and I hear him sigh, clearly accepting defeat.

"Okay," he picks her up and goes to take a seat on the high chairs.

"I'm glad someone is able to get through to you when I dont." I joke and get back to preparing these wraps.

"Ignore that, I'm curious on how our son is treating you today."

"I feel fine. Just starving every second its frustrating. I'm not planning on gaining any weight this time around."

"Eat sthandwa sam. I'm not about to have you starve for something you can easily lose." he says and makes a face that makes Nzwano laugh.

"Hectic."

Easy to lose?

He must think I'm him.

I manage to make six delicious and simple wraps in total before calling Khaya to no avail.

"Sit, you know he eats on his own schedule," Bangi says taking a big bite from his food.

"But I want us seated together, eating. You know I'm trying to make that a solid thing among us."

I take a seat and eat anyway after wrapping his food up and storing it in the fridge.

"Oh and also my session went well, you asked about that. I think I'm understanding myself a bit better than before."

"Good. I'm proud of you." I smile and peck his cheek.

"So... My Queen, how ready are we for tomorrow?"

"Do I really have to speak?"

"These are officially going to be your people my love. You have to address them. Plus I'm sure they'd love to hear from you."

"It has really began neh?"

"Yep, futhi I'm proud of how you handled it sthandwa sam. You didn't crumble even when the news was announced. You're always ready for a challenge," he says.

"Speaking of challenges... Your mother."

"what about her?"

"How did she take this? Had she said anything to you? To Ama?"

He clears his throat, feeding Nzwano a piece of avocado.

"Ama may have mentioned something about her drinking a bit more now... But she hasn't mentioned anything about her saying stuff about us. Which is a win on my side anyway."

"True," I mumble and realise that I forgot to pour us something to drink. I really have been out of the kitchen for a while.

•••

" Khaya, "I knock on his door and get no answer. I try knocking again in the hopes that maybe this time he'll hear me

but nothing. He must be wearing his headsets. I open the door slowly much to my curiosity and frown when I dont find him in his room.

Confused I walk in further, the bad smell bringing my entire body to chills. This boy needs to open a few windows for goodness sakes.

But they are open...

And what is with this mess?

"This boy is really testing me out neh?" I say and spot something odd on the other side of his bed. "Khaya?"

The closer I got, the more this odour came at me. Wait why is he laying on the floor?

"Khaya vuka... Come on get up and get onto the bed, this can't be comfortable," I say after crouching and shaking him lightly by his leg.

Nothing.

Well. I guess I'm lifting him.

Reminds me of back when he was younger, falling asleep on the couch and having one of us lift him to bed. This would usually be after we fought like cat and mice for him to go sleep.

You could usually tell by his drowsiness.

At the end of the day I think we were all like t-

Wait a second...

He's ice cold to the touch.

I feel all the blood leave my face and all my fears pooling right at the pit of my stomach.

I must be dreaming.

"Khaya," I finally gather some strength to touch him again and it was still too cold. No. I refuse to believe.

"Ba-"

Silence.

I can't scream. Something has its arms on my shoulders and I can't let out a sound. Even if I tried with all my might and will.

"Zano..."

Lord please don't let this thing hurt my family and I. Don't let it hurt my baby. "... You thought a silly sangoma could get rid of me with that so called muthi of his? Pathetic."

I try again to scream but nothing. I was feeling defeated little by little.

"I have you Zano. You are mine. You will suffer."

What is this thing and what is it doing in our house? Why is it hurting us?

All of a sudden I was okay with this thing just bothering me only. I didn't need it doing this to my brother or anyone else in this house.

"Do you see how much power I have now over everything?"

You have nothing, I think to myself. In fact I was not scared of this thing. If it wanted to hurt me then it can go right ahead.

The pressure from my shoulders moves and whatever this thing was appears in front of me. Khaya? With a sinister smile on his face. In the blink of an eye it changes from him to my husband.

I couldn't hold back my shock and believe my tears to betray me at a time I barely needed them to. "Come to me."

What is this thing?

"Come to me. Come. Come."

My hand is lifting and motioning towards the hand this thing held out. I was fighting the involuntary movement, but was failing.

"Good... Come..."

No!

And just like that it was gone. I let out a scream of pain before hearing Bangi's voice.

He broke down the door I don't even remember closing.

"Sthandwa sam what's going on?" he storms in with guards.

I don't even know anymore. I don't even know if its really him now. I can hear my baby crying from somewhere here. He sees Khaya on the floor and immediately feels on him. "what's going

on here? He feels by his neck and sighs out.

"He's still breathing." he's in his arms quickly. The guards help me off the ground.

•••

I'm pissed, pacing up and down this doctors office thinking about my brother who was not responding to anything. The only thing that made sense was that he had a pulse, nothing else.

What is going on here?

Was I scammed by that old man and led to believe he would chase away whatever that demonic thing is thats in our house?

I'll have him found and punished.

Oh Mehlo, have you abandoned us? Especially now that we need you most?

I feel like crying but at the same time I feel sick.

Who knows how long he was laying on that floor in his state while I worried about my stomach. I wish I got there sooner to protect my mother's son from such hell but now I feel I've failed him and her. I couldn't even bring myself to call Buhle and tell her this. I know I was wrong but...

"Sthandwa sam, please come sit down," Bangi basically makes me jump.

"Don't do that."

"Don't do what?"

"Don't sneak up on me like that."

"I didn't sneak up on you Zano, what are you talking about?"

"You were that thing Bangi. That thing changed into you right in front of my eyes and..."

"What thing?"

"The thing that's in our house Bangi!" I snap.

"Calm down sthandwa sam," he gets up from the chair he was seated on.

"Calm down? Bangi are you hearing me? We called that man to come and help get rid of whatever that thing is in our house but it later comes out to attack not only me but my younger brother? It changes Bangi, I saw it with my own eyes. I know now too that I've seen it before. This time it was holding me back...calling me even to come to it."

"What?"

"Bangi it scratched me. This thing attacked me. I don't want us to go back there until I'm certain it's fine and won't hurt any of us."

He's quiet, only nodding to my statements before taking me into a hug. I think I needed this because it made me feel so safe again. It made me feel like he would fix all of this and protect us - his family.

"Uh... Excuse Me your Royal highness..."

Oh the doctor.

"What's going on? Is he okay? Can we see him?" I bombard.

"I'm afraid what I'm about to tell you may not be what you want to hear but after running multiple tests on Mr Dlamini, we have determined that nothing is wrong with him."

I'm quiet. I figured.

"We're still willing to run more tests on him and hopefully get him awake soon."

"Then go that. Do whatever it takes," Bangi says and the doctor nods and leaves us looking at each other knowingly.

●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●

I waited for Bangi to return like a hawk. I was counting the minutes even. He went to fetch a few things back home to bring here to the hotel room we slept in last night.

If you call the tossing and turning thing we were doing sleep.

My husband even wondered what step we could take now. The door of the hotel opens and the moment I see him... I freeze with wonder. I wanted a sign that it was truly him within all this paranoia.

"It's me sthandwa sam, breathe."

And just like that I sigh and rush to him for a hug. I grab a bag from those he bought with and walk to the the couches. "Did anything odd happen when you were there?"

"Nothing happened. It felt quite normal," he says sitting next to me. "Give me you hand."

With a frown I do as he says, watching him take something out of his pocket. He slips it onto my hand and I nearly choke with shock. "Why?" "Maybe it'll help," he says.

I haven't laid eyes on these since I safely stashed them in our safe. I notice he has his on too. The fact that I even took them off is absurd, surely that's why Mehlo has been avoiding us like raisins.

"Do you...think this thing will follow us?" I ask, running my fingers on these beads.

"I don't know sthandwa sam. I'd like to hope not," him.

"Me too. I don't want this thing hurting my baby.. Or you."

"I'm more worried about who's doing this thing to us."

"You don't think it's just Alakhe's spirit being restless?"

"Could be but I'm starting to think it's more than that."

"More like we're being bewitched?" I ask.

He nods. "I think so."

Well then... Who the fuck is that bored?

Chapter Seventy Three.

Semi finale.

"Troubles they don't last always."

••

'Why keep on blaming yourself for this? You had no control over what happened... And I want you to understand that. You hear me Zano?' the tone in her voice is stern and serious, yet I didn't feel any sort of demand from it.

'Yebo ma.'

'Good. Now be there for the ones that are there with you while you still can.'

I watch her take Luthando's hand and they practically disappear from my view. Slowly the sight of our bedroom ceiling comes into sight before I let a smile find place on my lips.

She visited in my dreams and nothing could've made this day any more special.

Oh wait...

A couple weeks pass and it was like our lives had just began. It was chaos left, right and center for the Shazi clan and being a part of that was truly exhausting. By tomorrow the man laying on chest will be King and I... Zanokuhle will be... Queen?

If you told me to slap myself and wake up from that dream, I would gladly because it was just surreal. I glance at the clock beside me and capture my lips between my teeth. I've been up for an hour because of my thoughts and my nerves.

Everything had to go perfectly with the schedule planned, which is why I also think I was up. The thought of being late to such didn't sit well with me. Futhi I felt like waking up this cutie of mine.

Nothing should go wrong. Nothing can go wrong, right?

This man shifts from my chest to resting his head on his pillow while his hands comes to find shelter on my boob under this top. He gently squeezes before I hear a sigh leave his mouth.

Is he awake?

"Bangi..." I whisper and he groans, moving slightly in the bed.

"Baby, vuka."

"Just a minute."

"That minute will cost you," I answer.

"Kanti what time is it?"

"05h45."

He immediately props himself up with his other hand and looks me straight in the eye.

"You're kidding me right?"

"No, why would I joke about this?"

"Sthandwa sami, even the helpers are sleeping. It's way too early to be up... Or are you seeing things again?"

"No, I'm not seeing anything. I think my nerves are keeping me up."

"Relax," he says and lies back down again, still fondling my breast. "it's going to be okay, trust me."

"I trust you."

We lay there in silence and I can't help but wonder how today was going to go. I've seen the coronation process and it's work from the outside. Even the celebration part of it looked like work. You would swear I would be ready by now but not even.

"Lala sthandwa sami," Bangi says.

"I'm not sleepy." I respond and huff before attempting to get up gently. He allows me and as soon as I'm out, I stretch and watch him look at me.

"You're abusing my baby."

"kanjani manje?" I frown.

"you're not sleeping enough. That means my baby isn't growing enough."

I titter. "and who told you that Malinga."

"The gods of our land. They tell me a lot of things sthandwa sam...now come back to bed, it's getting cold without you."

A smile finds its way to my lips before I gracefully sit back down again. I face him this time. His hand pulls the covers over the two of us all before he rests it on my waist.

"So much better."

"You just like touching me wena."

"nothing wrong with feeling on what's mine."

Right there my cheeks heat up and I snuggle closer, shutting my eyes...

"Sthandwa sam..." soft kisses get planted all over my face.

Wait, I actually fell asleep? He has the widest, most gorgeous smile I've ever seen. "it's time."

"Oh God," my body shivers with nervousness.

"Relax..." he kisses me... Long enough for me to want to hold him closer to me and deepen this kiss.

I don't know why but that's just what my body does.

Feeling his warm skin on my hands...

He climbs on top of me, his hands feeling on my bare skin too. I allow him to kiss on my neck, feeling the little nibbles make me weaker than I already was. The tingle of my pussy was enough to make me want him to devour me immediately. I tug on his

pajama pants bringing his body closer to mine and that's when I felt his hardness. The smile that floods my face... I can't.

"I missed being between these thighs," he says looking at me, lust all over his perfect face.

It's probably only then that I realized that I haven't given this man his goods for a while now and now I was going to do it again.

Crap.

"Baby..."

"Hmmm?" his reply is muffled by the fact that his head was buried in between the ladies.

"I think we should...stop."

"Huh... Why? Did I do something wrong?" he asks concerned eyes on me.

"No. I promise. But maybe we should... do this after the ceremony you know." I mention and bite on the insides of my cheeks.

He lays back on my chest and heaves out a sigh.

He stays quiet for the longest second of my life before uttering the words "Okay, give me a second."

"I'm sorry Malinga." I say all too quick.

I really am...sheesh, I even started this.

"I'm all yours once this is over." me.

"Give me a moment..."

"Are you crying?"

"Haybo, no." he says and the silence fills the room once again. We laid like that with me waiting on whatever this man was doing until I felt it... Oh...

The guilt!

"For my sake, I think it's best I shower alone," Bangi mentions, pecks my cheek and leaves me on this bedroom to marinate in even more guilt. Guilt that leaves me chucking.

••

"Come," Uncle Archie says before I glance at Bangi who takes my hand into his. He gives me a reassuring small smile as we begin following behind this man. Through the corridors of his mansion we walked until we got outside and into his car. Once inside, no time is wasted. We drive out and onto the road to this healer I've never heard of.

He apparently is the one who performed the same ritual we'd have performed on us on Bangi's father and mother. We reach some township...I was expecting woods and stuff but I'm not

getting that. Instead I'm getting a pretty decent house with a very decent yard.

Bangi opens my door and helps me out of the car before we hurry in. There was clearly no time to waste at this point. Uncle Archie knocks on the front door and the door opens as if someone has been waiting.

"I was just about to open," the old man says, shifting his eyes between the three of us and then to my belly. Again I'm looking at Bangi who squeezes my hand for a bit more reassurance.

"This way." the old man commands and leads us into his house. It's clean but reeked of incense.

We get to what I'd assume is his place of work where he instructs us to remove our shoes. Once more no time is waited as he prepares some water and herbs. Honestly the only reason I'm even doing this is because of Bangi

nothing else...oh and tradition and the procedure I guess.

He applies an oily mixture on my wrists, forehead and feet and proceeds to do the same with Bangi. He comes back to asks me to lift my top slightly so he could do the same to my belly.

I panic. Not with my baby...

"Makoti..." uncle Archie.

"I know you're being vigilant, but I would never harm the son of this Kingdom, my Princess," he says.

He knows I'm pregnant?

"son?" Archie.

"It's okay sthandwa Sam," Bangi finally says something and that is clearly all I needed to follow out the simple request. At this point this man could tell me to jump into the ocean and I believe I would do it.

Is that normal?

I lower my top once he's done. He instructs us further to get onto our knees and think of all that we want from today. The goodness of it and so forth before telling us he's be sprinkling us with the water he was talking over earlier.

He chants words of protection. Proclaiming that no harm would come upon Bangi and I and our babies. No one with ill wishes would prosper and none of the evil that was planned against us would win. Any malice would fail and only good would shine...

"Bayethe... Shazi... Malinga..."

••

The previous trip left me quite spent. Bangi of course went his separate way to perform some of his private rituals that were required of him. These were apparently done to prove that indeed the rightful king was crowned.

The mini scoop he told me though is if he is indeed King of Emashazini, As soon as he puts on that crown it has to rain as a sign of God and the ancestors acceptance. If that failed to happen...deep sigh.

Also he had his hands on a lion?

My goodness.

Back in the now and my glance out the window can confirm that I've never seen this many people in my life.

Our wedding had nothing on this.

All of them screaming loud enough for them to be heard in this car that drove us back to the Palace where the coronation would be taking place.

Traditional dancers paraded along the path while mannequins stood there at attention.

The contrast.

Believe Mafu to be banging and screaming at the window too because of these people. Surely she's enjoying this too much. The car comes to a stop by the entrance.

It's even louder now that my door is open...but these people were for us... With us. That warmed my heart. A guard takes my daughter, walking with her to the inside of the palace. Bangi waves at his people, looking very much in his element and in place. He even has that gorgeous smile on his face that I loved so dearly.

Of course he takes my hand again and leads me up the stairs. I'm careful not to tumble over in these high heels on front of all these people who have their phones out. Inside I spot *ibutho*. The sound of them chanting the Shazi clan names and the ululation fills my ears.

My heart is beating hard against my chest.

Am I going to faint?

I better not. Not today if ever.

Are those my siblings?

Oh seeing Khaya here and well brings so much warmth to me. Just a few weeks back I was afraid I'd lose him because of the creature that was tormenting our house but God pulled through for our family. I'm even happy to see Buhle here. My best friend Nyiso is also here with baby Ncebo and her husband. They look stunning.

This is also when I notice a lot of people that hold some sort of status within Emashazini. Politicians and known artists that were invited.

Some I could honestly care less about.

My stomach growls and I knew I had to get something in my system or I'd be sick soon.

I feel like crying because honestly what do I do now? There are procedures here...rehearsed to perfection and I want to ruin that?

"You okay?" his voice pulls me away from the drama in my head.

"Yah," me.

He doesn't buy it. I can tell with the look on his face.

I take a seat right next to Ama who welcomes me with a smile and a gentle shoulder squeeze. I spot again other Kings and Queens from foreign dignitaries and maybe that came with even more intimidation. I swear just thinking of how they lead their countries successfully brings unknown doubt to me.

You got this Zano...

...you really do.

The ceremony commenced with a lengthy prayer, songs and an imbongi bringing even more life to this ceremony. The women ululate. Soon enough my man takes his stand and makes his vows and oaths in front of his people.

Those that didn't believe this man would fulfill every single thing he mentioned here today clearly have no idea who he is.

I watched proudly as the eldest member of the family placed his lion skin sash on him, the head resting on his shoulder.

This I believe was serving as a sign that he indeed did conquer that part... Believe me when I say I'll be asking questions tonight. That's even if I'll get any answers.

And lastly the crown his father wore, gets placed firmly on his head.

Okay I'm emotional now. These hormones are really doing the most. I told myself I'd be poised and not all of these things I currently am.

The last step is with him receiving his spear and shield. And as if the moment couldn't get any more precious the crowd celebrates.

"Bayethe Shazi!"

"Bayethe uMalinga Bayethe!"

Soon enough someone yells "it is raining!"...

••

"Haybo you should've said something sthandwa Sam, futhi I knew something was wrong the moment I asked and you gave me that look." he says with my head rested on his chest, hugging his waist while he held the back of my head and back. I'm even surprised as to why we weren't asleep while almost the entirety of the palace was.

Today was surely something if I'm being truthful. A day of deep culture and celebration that I'm still processing.

"I didn't die."

"You're lucky you didn't even get sick my Queen," he says and I can't help but halt in our slow dance and look up at him. Something happened within me when he called me that. It's not even new but it sure felt new.

The serious look on his face slowly fades seconds later revealing a small smile. "Don't look at me like that, you know I'm right."

"Look at you like what?" I smile knowingly. He raises his eyebrows before a yawn overtakes him. "I think it's time we go to bed. You need rest, tomorrow is going to be just as busy."

"You're right," he says and lets me go to go switch off the Dobie Grey song that played softly. I take care of the empty sparkling wine glasses that had orange juice in them and go put them away. Bangi brings the mini platter in just as I finished rinsing

the glasses. I grab a mini pie, like I didn't just say I was full a couple of minutes ago.

"Leave it. The helpers will take care of it."

"But we have hands Malinga, " I finish chewing and swallow.

"Can you be spoilt for once? Come here."

"I'm already too spoilt what do you mean?" I chuckle.

"You aren't to me."

I shake my head and take his hand before we turn to leave. I almost drop to the floor with who I see standing there. Not wearing green this time like all of the times we've seen him. Yellow.

"Mehlo?" Bangi says.

"Bayethe Nkosi," he says bowing. "The battle is being fought. With those..." he points "...I'm able to get closer to conquering this battle for you and see who this villain is who has casted this darkness upon Wezanokuhle. The hatred runs deep."

"Why would anyone hate my wife? To go as far as hurting her brother? Harming her through things!" he sounds angry.

"My Kin-..."

"No cause why don't they face me instead?"

"Hayi Bangi."

"Is it my Mother? I've had enough of that woman!"

"Bangi please calm down," I say but you know the duck saying with the water and them shaking it off and stuff. Yeah that one.

"Tell me the truth Mehlo, is it or is it not that woman? You're able to appear and disappear just as you wish but fail to tell us who's doing this?"

"This is evil I've never seen. It's like this person contracted the devil himself. Give me time."

"It's Okay Mehlo. Besides nothing has happened in a while." I mention before Bangi can attack this man further than needed.

I know that didn't mean whatever was happening here retreated... But it sure soothed my heart knowing we weren't crazy and that he was trying.

And just like that he was gone.

I heave out a sigh.

"That was uncalled for Malinga," me.

He says nothing but instead let's go of my hand and leaves me standing there by the kitchen, heading to our bedroom it seems.

Hectic.



I couldn't join Bangi on his long line of meetings duties and the one interview I missed today because this pregnancy decided it wanted to remind me it was boss. I looked bigger now too which was a good sign to me, but remind me again why this has to be so difficult?

My Nzwano slept on my lap as I continued switching my attention to the TV and my phone... Oh and the snacks.

Crackers.

I yawn and try shaking off the tired feeling that played me like a guitar but it felt like I was failing.

'Mge, I had took a pregnancy test last night.' Nyiso's text reads.

"Weeeh lentombazane," I say now back on the TV screen. This horror movie wasn't even hitting the right spot. The decisions she was taking was honestly going to lead her to her death.

'And?? Tell me about it hawu.' I reply and try to focus back on the movie. All the while I could feel the heavy sleep fighting with my will to finish this story...

Kwavele kwamnyama endaweni.

I get up and walk I don't know where to, but I walk. I call out a name. No response.

Just darkness. A Vibration.

I look down and I'm barefoot, walking in what felt like water. There's something there far ahead.

A light source.

I run-walk towards it and the closer I got the more it started smelling foul.

I stop in my tracks and listen to the nothingness. The figure, clothed in black gets up and walks around the figure that laid on the floor, holding a black candle in their hand.

"You wanted her. Now you want to be destroyed by a nothing old fool? Futhi you're not making the other one suffer enough slima. I want them all to suffer especially wena. Vuka! You will never rest in peace." the voice growls before I feel the ground shake. Wait this is blood, not water... Oh no.

Not him...Not him looking at me. He reaches a hand out and I catch a glimpse of her!

My eyes shoot open to find a teary eyed Khaya in front of me, holding his phone and a worried Nandi who held my crying baby.

"Wait She's awake! Oh Thank God she's awake Sbali. Fuck you wena Zano you scared us," he says, tossing his phone aside and engulfs me in a hug. Confused I hug him back...

But still can't get the image of Khethiwe's cold stare out of my head.

.....**The End**.....

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