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## **The Song of an Orphan by Lunga El Bulana**

### **Prologue**

By the time the police had arrived, the real culprit had escaped. She fled and left her in that mess to take the blame. She did say it though, 'Ityala akusingomafutha!' she meant that a crime is nothing like a moisturizing oil. One cannot take it and wear it on her skin to look beautiful and be proud.

MaFaku walked in with her nose already flared up flustering a breath like a male horse. One would tell she's ready to kill with words like the dog she always barked like. Ntsika was slowly walking with his heart beating nigh to stopping. The trails of blood to where Nosisa was kneeling on top of a dead woman drowning in a pool of blood. She had a knife dropped from her trembling hands. She could feel their presence as they walked in. She could smell their different scents as they approach. The strongest scent she recognize was his, her lover's cologne.

“Drop any weapon you have at hand and slowly turn around. Hands in the air!” Bonisile said pointing a gun her way. He knew he can't hear a thing not even brewing thunder storms or a crumbling building like that of Jericho. He was just not used to the situation.

Ntsika walked closer and closer defying the orders of the cops. He faced her with tears already filling his eyes. It was true. The love of his life was nothing like an angel. She was deeply flawed, cruel and more than just a cheater. His Nosisa was a murderer. There he has it.

“Why?” that's the only word that came out from his lips. It was a whisper with his eyes shot strictly into hers.

The light was dim in the room, but between the two of them, there was no one who couldn't read each other's gazes even if it's in the fathom of an ocean. It's how they communicated most of the time as they were both from different worlds. Same language, but a foreign way of delivering the message to be heard. They found a common ground and same level of understanding in their eyes.

She shook her head with tears running down her cheeks. She desperately wanted to talk and explain, but how? She was now painted as a liar, a cheater and murder.

“I'm sorry Ntsika!” she whispered back accompanied by a sign language drawing that for him to get it.

“You are sorry? I gave you everything. I was ready to abandon my family for you. And you sleep with my father and then kill a pregnant woman in cold blood? How cruel can you be?” he was broken. Hurt even beyond repair. This was surely not the woman he had dreamt of. Not the one that helped him come through the worst. It was not Nosisa!

“My brother was ready to accept you. Welcome you to our family. All you could do was—oh

I said it! I said it a long time ago. You are not only deaf, but a deadly curse to my nephew's life!” MaFaku sputtered the words.

Ntsika looked at her one more time, disgusted and—conflicted. Part of him saw something in her eyes. He saw a mail that she desperately wanted to deliver on his mail box. She probably would tell him that she's sorry. That's what she was good at during the past days, weeks and months. It was too late for an apology. Very much late.

“You deserve to be thrown into a darker cell and die while at it!” he spat on the ground before passing by.

“Arrest this criminal Bonisile!” MaFaku said before shaking her sticky thin legs out of the room.

She closed her eyes and gave out her wrist to the man. Bonisile was quiet with a heavy heart as he listened to the cuffs clicking and creaking locked. She walked past him and they left her apartment decorated with a yellow tape as a crime scene.

She stood still next to Ntsika and stared at him. She wanted him to look up at the above his head. See the dirty pillows clouds gathering around the sky and the half of a moon. Then drop his gaze to her eyes again and see what he'll find in the Mistry of her eyes. He just never did. He was too angry and too informed with a distorted information. She wanted to tell him, she's being framed. But how? It was impossible. The evidence was there. She had a motive.

“UMama yimfama, utata sisiqhwala, mna ndisisithulu esazalwa sinje.(My mother is blind, my father is a cripple and I am just a deaf girl that was born like this!) You are none of those Ntsika. I hope one day you'll open your eyes and ears—see what you're supposed to see and hear what you are supposed to. Goodbye my love!” she found the ability to put it into words and emphasize with the sign language.

“Move!” the sergeant instructed pushing her into the back of the van.

The siren cried out loud on behalf of her neighbors and friends. Everybody liked her around here. They still believed she's innocent. They didn't care about the story of her relationship, married boyfriend and it's family.

Unfortunately, in the eyes of the law and those who have the keys to her freedom she was guilty. She was danger to the community—a murderer!

## Chapter 01

The two siblings walk into the dark careful not to make any noise. They park their car far from the consultation house of the traditional diviner. Flashes of the storm tearing the sky here and there. The moon is full and milky white—shedding clear light to clairvoyants and all white magicians.

“Do you think she's here?” MaFaku asks his brother looking around the yard.

“The dog must be barking by now, but there's a light on the windows!” he answers, brightening the foot path leading them in.

“Okay... let's hurry!” she answers, leading the way.

They knock at the door with holes everywhere for one to see the insides. The creaking sounds of dry fire wood comes from the inside swirling along with smoke.

“Knock, knock, knock!” MaFaku yells a bit peeking through the small hole on the threshold.

“Come in!” a rough voice replies.

MaFaku wastes no time and clucks the door opened. They walk into the room filled with smoke all over. It is squeezed in with herbs, animal skin and bones embroidering the wall.

“Kayise! (My cousin from my father's side!)” they greet her.

“Camagu!” she greets back and burps while handing over a reed mat for them to sit.

She is sitting beyond the sizzling ring of fire. They sit opposite her. “Qwakaza we need your help,” Faku starts talking.

“Ihee-heyi mhm!” she sneezes violently, collecting the bones. The beads on her dreadlocks are creaking like an ancient forest in a windy dry winter day. “Is it about the boy?” she asks.

They nod. “He has finally come home. MaMbamba is dead,” MaFaku answers.

“And so now what is the matter?” Qwakaza shoots her dry eyes at them.

“We have been trying to show him our treasure, but he sees ‘it’, not its ability, you know?” MaFaku says.

“Then tell him. Sooner or later he will find out. You can not give him something he doesn't want. The last thing you want is for him to get rid of it for good. You know the consequences of that!” she sharply advises.

Faku clears a throat looking at his sister, then back at Qwakaza. “What she's trying to say is that, he sees it in his dreams. The snake itself not in human form,” he explains.

Qwakaza's eyes turn to the back of her head, shocked. “That is not good. Are you sure the boy is your son?” she whispers.

They nod. “The albinism patch on the stomach all over to his back is there. Exactly like mine except for the fact that he looks like her mother,” he says.

“You should see him. He's tall like an electric pole, a bit lean, but strong just like my father. The physique is ours,” MaFaku supports his brother's statement.

“I don't know!” Qwakaza says, opening the pouch made up of animal skin. “Blow!” she orders them. They blow into it. She shakes the pouch with bones thunking. She praises their clan names and throws the bones. She stares at the bones and jumps up a little to side to side. She looks up at them groaning like a stabbed hyena with her gaze blood shot.



“Qwakaza what is it?” MaFaku is dying with suspense.

“I see Ntsikayekhaya, vuma!(agree with me!)” she starts prophesizing.

“Siyavuma!” they strike chords with her.

“He inherited his great grandfather's gift. Vuma!”

“Siyavuma!”

“Unamehlo omoya—mhm-mhm, vumani! (He has spiritual eyes, strike chords with me!)”

“Siyavuma!” that answer is slanting down with disappointment.

“Upheth' udondolo, vuma! (He is carrying a stick to measure depths of dangerous streams!)” she's shaking vigorously.

“Siyavuma!”

“Ndiv' ingoma, vumani! (I am hearing a song!)” she's crying.

“Ithini ingoma Qwakaza? (What is the song saying Qwakaza?)” MaFaku impatiently asks.

“Ingoma yenkedama—kubi, kumnyama, andiboni. Le ngoma itsh' okwesingqala, vuma! (A song of an Orphan—it is bad, dark, I can not see. This song is like a hiccup!)” she coughed, sneezed and groaned.

The two sit back with jaws mopping down the dusty ground while lightening flashing. The loud thunder roars and it rains heavily. 'They have to do something about this!'

NTSIKA

He slightly snorts, turning and tossing in his bed. He trembles with his whole body and burps with his jaws locked.

Suddenly his body drifts into the surface of the bed. He sees himself sitting down on a tree log. He's staring far before him at the veld warily. He sees a man he doesn't really recognize. It is him living inside that man. His soul and spirit is there. The man is running with a crowd chasing after him. And he's just sitting in the there in suspense.

'Ntsika! Take the stick and let it guide you, Tshaw' elihle!' an old woman looking like his aunt, the woman coming after his mother.

He stands up feeling empty inside. He stretches out his hand and takes it. He then helps the old woman to sit down. She supports her back with the wall of the kraal made up of stones. 'What are you going to walk with if I take your stick grandma?' he asks. He is like that, very considerate and kind hearted.

She smiles, patting his shoulder slightly. 'Don't worry, my boy. Uthango luzakundixhasa ze xa ndifuna ukungena ngaphakathi ndibambelele aph' esixhantini!' she says. (The kraal is going to support me and when I want to get inside, I'll hold onto it's poles!)

He nods and walks backwards still staring at her. He doesn't want to leave, but she sent her there to go and do something for her. She's an elder sending him on errand, he can't say no. 'I will try to be quick!' he tells the woman.

She nods, 'Ludondolo lokuv' iziziba ke olo Ntsikayekhaya. Ubambelele ungaze uluphuncule kodwa uluphucule! (That's a stick to measure the depths of rivers Ntsika. Hold on to it and never abandon it, but make it better!)' she whispers.

He heard that loud and clear, but then he's not about to cross any rivers, lake or stream. He's just going to dig up herbs in the veld to heal his father's wound from a snake's bite.

He sighs and makes his way down the hill and climbs another hill. He finds himself entering a forest with a symphony of birds melting his heart. The smell of berries from West far in the heart of the forest invites him in. He remembers his task and ignores that.

He sees a tall green leafy plant and African potatoes surrounding it. He walks to it and attempts to touch it.

'Don't pick it up. Dig up inkubele, take two steps backwards and you'll be stepping on it. Pick as many leaves as you want. Get home and crush it, then squeeze it's juices on his wound. He'll be fine. Let him drink umcham' emfene (a baboon's pee) too,' a soft undertone tells him.

He looks up and spots a tall midnight dark girl walking away with soft hairy long legs carrying her. She's wearing only animal skins letting her flawless skin graced with melanic majesty shine out there. She walks like she's got oil applied between her thighs with counted steps. She has a clay pot on her head underneath a small folded cloth placed on the top of her head.

'Hey...How do you know about my father's wound?' he calls out.

She doesn't turn nor replies, but evaporates in between the mist of the long gum creaking trees. He drops his gaze in disappointment. He shifts back to focus and takes the steps back then turns around. His eyes fall on the herb and picks it up.

'There he is. Kill him!' someone sharply shouts. A loud sound of people stepping on the ground forcefully and coming to him. He turns around and runs as fast as he can.

They're coming with violent dogs barking at him. He's tired and his knees are numb. They can not carry him anymore. What is this—my goodness! He thinks to himself not knowing what to do at all.

He runs further into the belly of the forest. He comes across a lake and remembers his grandmother's words. He tests the waters with the stick and feels the muddy ground far down. He looks back and throws himself in the pond!..

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“Ntsikayekhaya!” somebody yells his name from a distance with a bang at the door.

He jumps up and stands beside his bed wet. He wet himself and he's all sweating. How is this possible? He looks up at the door feeling rather very embarrassed. There's a loud knock over there. He quickly takes off his trunk and pulls a towel to wrap his waist around.

He opens the door and stands against it. “Dabawo?(Aunt?)” he responds to his aunt, MaFaku. She is his father's older sister.

“You sleep as if you're dead. Go and get herbs for your father in the veld. He's in pain!” she says.

“Aunty, he went to the hospital nje!” he makes a disapproving face and looks away annoyed.

“We can not depend on western medicines only Ntsika. Go and get the herbs, you will have breakfast when you come back!” she walks away.

He clicks his tongue annoyed and slams the door. He rubs his face and stares at his bed. He last wet his bed when he was seven years old.

He was late even then for his younger brother had stopped when he was four. To him it was different, they said he needs an ancestral ritual to be performed for him, imbeleko. His grandmother, did it for him with a chicken for she didn't know who he was. Her mother had just disappeared shortly after giving birth to him out of wedlock.

He just found his father Njongozonke Ndamase, a farmer and a carpenter owning an estate in North Crest, Mthatha. He has a wife and children, the other is even older than Ntsika.

NOSISA

She avoids the group of girls dwelling down the stream. She just greets and passes without caring whether they responded or not. They stare and start saying things about her. They laugh, clap hands and hold their lower lips. They know she doesn't hear a whisper.

She carefully takes steps on the stones and crosses the running stream to the other side. She settles there with the bath tub of her laundry. She then starts washing the clothes.

She spreads them out on the stones and grass until she gets closer to the forest for them to get dry. She hangs the sheets and blankets on the tree branches. Another girl comes to her side and looks at her.

“Hey...Can you please lend me your washing basin if you're not leaving already?” she asks.

She reads the extremely slow movement of her lips and nods. “Okay... I'll be inside the forest gathering some fire wood!” she hands the tub to her.

“Thank you,” the girl smiles. “My name is Nomathemba. I came on holiday to my aunt's house,” she introduces herself.

“I'm Nosisa. I'm sure you've heard a lot about me already!” she says, throwing her eyes at the girls down there. They always have a lot to tell about her and her family. They know almost everything about them as if they are an open book.

They even have theories as to how she got to be in that condition and her parents' condition. They say they are cursed.

“Don't mind them. They are just jealous of you. You are beautiful than them!” she shrugs.

Nosisa just smiles and lets her walk away. This has to be the first time she meets a girl that complements her. She's been told a numerous times that she's ugly. Too dark like a traditional pot even teachers would use that against her in class. They called her names remarking on her skin colour. If not her skin, then her disability. It was a lot for her—but she survived. She's fine and content with herself.

She picks up her panga and ropes to assemble together her firewood into a good looking 'inyanda!'. She hums a hymn from church trusting her instincts that it's the correct chant and rhythm she has in there.

She starts extracting the dry tree branches and placing it down onto her laid ropes. She walks around and extracts until she's done. When she's done, she assembles her firewood in order and ties it tightly into a shape of a broom. She then places it in a hideous place before walking in deep inside the forest.

She comes across mushrooms and inspects them. She smells them and pages through their folds to see if there are no maggots. She then picks them up and throws them into her reed basket. She also picks up indigenous plants to prepare lunch as soon as she gets home. She keeps looking up at the sun to estimate the time. It's still a bit early before twelve—midday!



She darts her eyes around feeling a heavy presence. She turns around and finds a young man sitting down with a knobirrie and spear. He looks up at her with a sharp terrified gaze.

“Hello!” she greets and looks at his bleeding hand.

“Hi,” he's staring.

She attempts to walk away, but that wound. He doesn't seem to know what to do with it. She turns around and walks back to him. “What happened?” she indicates to his injured palm.

He looks at his wound with his jaws moving meaning he's saying something. He presses the wound with a handkerchief. There's silence on his side with no movement.

She wiggles her eyebrows, sighing inwardly and kneels before him. “Let me see!” she places her basket next to her. She takes his hand and her blood rushes through at the sight of the flesh wound.

He says something again, but he's speaking too fast for her convenience. She doesn't say anything back, but just pulls his bottle green negligee shirt. She tears it's ends and he gasps. She doesn't even flinch at his protest.

She looks around and her eyes fall on a line of plants with green leaves. She walks up to them and extracts them. She searches the ground and spots a stone spread on the ground nicely. She

places the herbs and crushes them with the back of his spear. She then collects the crushed herbs back to him.

She takes his palm and looks at him, "This is going to be a bit itchy at first, but it will quickly dry your wound and heal it. We call it inkubele. You know it, right?" she asks.

He shakes his head and mutters, "Not really!" he's staring at her as if he's seen her somewhere before.

It makes her feel unsettled. She always avoids strangers and unfriendly people. His lips rapidly moves seemingly chasing words out of his mouth.

"You speak very fast. I don't get you at all!" she's staring deeply in his gaze. He looks away.

His shoulders drop, he's sighing. "How do you know this?" he speaks too slowly again.

"I was born and bread in this village. You are from the cities?" she is curious. He nods. "I can't tell!"

She focuses back on the wound and squeezes the leaves' juices on it. He flinches, locking his jaws and closes his eyes. She blows on it feeling sorry for him. She suddenly stops noticing it's dry. She finds his gaze shot at her. As soon as their eyes lock, he bats his silky long and few eye lashes looking elsewhere.

She ties him with the piece of his shirt across his palm. She looks up and finds him concluding to whatever he was saying. She stares blankly hoping that he repeats himself. He doesn't, but instead stares back awaiting her answer.

“What's your name?” she asks instead.

“Ntsikayekhaya. What is yours?” he says.

“Nosisa...” she lets go of his hand.

“Well, Nosisa you didn't answer any of my questions,” he enquires.

“I didn't hear a thing you said,” she bluntly states.

He frowns—confused. “But how? Are you deaf or something?” there's a shade of annoyance flashing by his face.

She continues to stare blankly at him and nods. “I am!” she admits to it.

He drops his gaze regretfully for a moment and looks up at her again. She's surprised that what she expected isn't there—pity in his eyes. “Are you serious?” he doesn't believe her. She nods. He nods back and asks, “Well, Nosisa can you lip-read?” she nods.

She is still surprised. He doesn't ask no questions at all. He throws no pitiful eyes at her or whatsoever, like stranger always do when she discloses her condition. She feels human

and normal too for a moment. And he's her favourite person right now!

"I have to go!" she protests as he holds her wrist tightly.

"I am looking for herbs for my father. Please, help me!" he pleads with his eyes.

"What happened to him?" she asks.

"He was bitten by a snake. He did go to the hospital, but he still wants some herbs. He insists," he explains, standing up in front of her.

She doesn't get it. The young man doesn't even know herbs.

"Did he tell you what to look for? Or do you perhaps know herbs?" she questions.

He is staring at her lips as she speaks as if he's now deaf too. It's making her shy. "I don't know. I don't even know this place very well nor do I know anything about herbs," he says.

She nods, thoughtfully. "You don't have siblings?" she is really busy today. She doesn't have time to walk around the veld looking for herbs for a man that has already gotten help. It's absurd!

"I do. I just...we always do things separately for some reason," he shrugs not really comfortable tapping into that conversation.

She immediately does the math and gets the answers. “Look, I don't know you or your family. However, I find what you are telling me odd. I don't want to get into trouble nor intrude. Take these herbs, inkubele. Pick up as many as you can and go home. When they ask because they will ask. Tell them a shepherd advised you to pick it for your father's wound. Find the reason why they sent you here alone. It seems quite important!” she advises instead.

“Oh!” he nods with his hands on his lean hips on that track pant. “Maz’ enethole!(Thank you so much!)” he mouths to her. She smiles faintly and walks away.

## Chapter 2

### NTSIKA

He keeps twisting his spoon on his food staring deeply at his shoes. His mind is pre-occupied, running back and forth to his dream. From the dream to that girl...Nosisa! Was that a revelation? 'Are you deaf or something?' his words ring in his mind. He's sad and disappointed in himself for being arrogant. 'I am...' her little soft almost inaudible voice chimes hard making it's way to his heart. Her sharp clear gaze...

"Ntsika!" he jumps up startled and clears a throat looking around the table.

"Father?" he replies, looking briefly at him as he sits far at the end of the dining table.

"You look troubled. Is there something you want to us to talk about?" he is concerned.

He simply stares at him thoughtfully and shakes off his head.

"No, I'm fine. I just miss grandma. That's all!" he drops his head to his food. His grandma died earlier leaving him as a qualified chef behind. It's a fresh wound. It's even worse now that he sees her in his dreams very much often lately.

"Oh...I'm sorry son. It will be alright. Let her rest, she's in a better place now—free from pain!" his father, Faku tries to comfort him.

“It's easy for you to say!” he picks up a glass of water.

“The herbs...” his aunt, MaFaku clears a throat turning into a new page. “Who taught you about them?” she wants to know.

His mind takes him back to Nosisa's words

‘When they ask because they will ask...’ is she some sort of a prophet?

“A shepherd helped me out. Are they helpful?” he throws a quizzical look at his father.

Faku nods. “Inkubele is mainly for flesh wounds,” he says. “Are you adjusting fine here? I know you're used to townships and the life of being in the cities!”

“I am. It's better than staying alone in a slum like I always did all these years!” he always finds something to make his father feel guilty for neglecting him. He wants to see him suffer from some reason. He hates it here, the grumpy bossy Aunt, his trying father and siblings whenever they are around. Church—oh he hates that one purely!

“I made a mistake Ntsikayekhaya. I am trying here,” Faku pushes his plate away with guilt flashing in his eyes.

“You said that already. I get it!” he digs into his food. He doesn't get it. He has a lot of questions in mind like his mother's disappearance.

“You've been spending most of your days out lately. Made any friends?” MaFaku always tries to break the ice with a new subjects. She never runs out of something to say.

It is these kind of questions that put him off. “No. I was just looking after the livestock,” he lies. He's been walking around the forest, stream and tuck shop looking for her. He wishes to see her again. It's been days since he met, but he is dreading to see her again. Talk to her, maybe throw in a few sweet words to make her blush. Perhaps, kiss her. He'd love to!

“I see. And so what are you planning to do this holiday?” another boring question.

“I am officially launching my canteen in campus,” he swallows his food avoiding their shocked gazes.

“You have a Cafeteria?” they both ask. He nods.

“I thought you were just selling some coffee and what do you call these things, sausage?” MaFaku is impressed. She means Russians.

“I started there,” he pushes his half dish away and wipes himself. He's been doing that for years. Growing up, his grandmother would buy him a pack of candies for him to sell for himself. He fell in love with food for it was the only symbol of love and the best way to communicate. He sold kotas in high



school. At the culinary school, he started baking fat cakes and cookies to sell them to a nearest college, Qhayiya.

He saw a need to try by all means to get a car. He got it. His business had spread to the university of Port Elizabeth which is now known as Nelson Mandela University.

“How much were you making for you to buy a canteen?” his father wants to know.

“A couple of bucks,” he shrugs.

“And the car? You bought it with that?” he asks again.

He stares at them for a moment before saying, “No!” he only used that money to pay for his studies. He rented a house in New Brighton for his grandmother and Mphuthumi, his younger brother. Taken out of the shack in Motherwell, his grandmother couldn't stop praying for God to richly bless him even more.

They exchange glances, “Where did you get it from?” MaFaku interjects.

“I stole it from a parking lot in Cape Town three years ago. I sold it off and bought another one,” he lays back on his chair looking at their jaws dropping to the floor.

“Yekwedini, uligintsa? (Are a gangster?)” Faku's eyes are nigh to falling off their sockets. His fists clenching from an itching urge to hit his jaw.

Ntsika stood up and cleared the table. “No, but I'd steal when I have to. It's what God says, ” he packs plates together.

“What is he saying—God?” MaFaku is terrified. This boy is not normal. Something's wrong.

“That it is not completely wrong to lie, but we shouldn't lie too much!” he answers. Their reaction is amusing to him, but he's keeping a straight face. What were their expectations? That he turns out to be a Jobe of the Bible with the hardships he faced growing up?

“That has nothing to do with stealing. I have never even come across such a verse in the bible. Lies are forbidden by God!” Faku, the best preacher coming after Mr. Mayiza says. When he preaches people cry and open their wallets widely.

“That's because you only read what makes you sleep at night,” he walks out of the room leaving their mouths hanging open.

His Aunt walks into the kitchen and says, “I'll do the dishes. There are chores for you as a young man in this house. I told you that,” she says, taking over. The house is spotlessly clean indeed. Their laundry baskets are always empty.

“I'll go to sleep then,” he walks out. He finds Faku standing still in the lounge probably still in shock.

“Sit. We need to talk!” Faku has had enough even his facial expression can tell.

They sit opposite each other and there goes silence for a moment. Ntsika is staring at the ground waiting for his father to say something. He just keeps sighing and shakes his head off staring at him.

“Ntsika!” he calls out.

“Father?” he looks up at him.

“Son, I know I never took care of you. Never looked for you and that you lacked a lot growing up. I have apologized for that, but I will not tolerate nonsense in my father's premises. The law is the law in this house and you will obey it!” he demands.

Ntsika nods, looking at him for a few seconds. “Of course, I will. When in Rome you do as Romans do, isn't it?” he is laid off.

“Exactly! Now tell me, where did you get the money to open that Cafeteria?” Faku shoots an intense gaze. “I want nothing, but the truth!”

“It's a tender. Anyone can get it. Why wouldn't I?” he is offended. “I might have done a lot of things in my past, but my grandmother never raised a thief for a grandson. Don't be too quick to judge, you gave birth to a thief if you think I am!”

“Ntsika, sit down!” Faku roars.

“Sleep well father. Don't forget to pray!” he slams the door on his way out.

NOSISA

The next morning she dresses up and sprays her brushed cut. She pulls in some boots and a long coat down with a black pencil skirt.

She wears a silver pendant, nicely placing it on top of her grey polo neck beneath that coat. She picks up her Bible, a hymn's book and throws them on her purse. She grabs two apples and a few coins for tithes. She walks out to the other rondavel and knocks. His father opens for her.

“Father, I am on my way to church. Are you coming?” she signals with her hands.

His father opens the door for her to get in. She finds her mother cooped up in bed with a tray of porridge. Breakfast in bed, it must be nice—she thinks to herself.

“MaDlomo!” she greets, taking a sit next to her.

MaDlomo smiles facing her way, “You are early for a change!” she's running her hands over Nosisa's upper body.

“Father is going to be preaching today and I'll be leading the choir for the first time!” she is excited about it.

“Ah, now I remember. Take off the coat, I want to see what you're wearing,” she says, pulling her zip down.

Nosisa chuckles, it's funny how her mother is so obsessed with how they all dress up. She designs clothes and bags as if she can actually see them. Sometimes she feels sad that God gave MaDlomo such a wonderful gift for only other people to see, but not her. It's unfair!

“I'm wearing a white beaded blouse, a grey polo neck to protect myself from cold and a black pencil skirt Mama. And a new pair of high heeled half-boots!” she says.

“Go on take the coat off. I want to check it out!” she is not convinced. Her father laughs limping to the wardrobe. He's already done dressing up too.

She sighs and takes off her coat. She lets her mother run her hands over her body. She smiles. “Satisfied?” Nosisa giggles as she spans her little behind. “Mama!” she moves back.

“You look beautiful. I still don't understand why you never let your hair grow. They were beautiful when you were young too,” she lodges a complain.

“I will start growing them when I start selling from our garden. Maintaining hair is expensive, you know!” Nosisa says, wearing back her coat. She has been looking for a decent job for the past two years after matric, but no luck. Her disability is one of the main reasons for her unemployment.

“I hear you. I just had breakfast. Did you eat?” she is concerned.

“Yes Mama. I'm fine,” she says.

“MaDlomo we better get going. Are you going to need anything?” his father asks, handing over an umbrella to Nosisa. His father hardly speaks, but he's very a warm and a loving person—strict too. He fears God and when he prays or preaches, he touches hearts and changes lives.

“Thank you Father,” she smiles, sitting next to her mother.

“There's a chair somewhere right behind you. This is my bed to share with your father!” her mother says, tapping her thigh so she'll move.

They laugh as that is a call for her father to stand on MaDlomo's right hand side. He stands there and her hand roams his body. She checks the tie, collar, the blazer. “You didn't give me your favorite blazer to sew your loosened button. I hope for the sake of time you're not wearing it, bhut' Thule!” she scowls at him, feeling the buttons of his blazer.

Nosisa leans against the wardrobe watching them argue over that. His father keeps mumbling to himself, looking away as if MaDlomo can see her. “You don't understand. If you two look dirty and clumsy there, people are going to look at me. I don't want anyone thinking that because I can't see I can't take care of my family. I'm a woman, your wife!” she fiddles with his tie almost chocking him.

“Of course, you are. But we are getting late—Ahem!” he violently clears a throat. “MaDlomo!” he slaps her hand away. He bends backwards with her checking his zip down there.

Nosisa quickly looks away and hideously laugh. “Okay...I think we need to get going. Father looks great Mama,” she says, walking to the door. His father can not stop shaking his head in embarrassment.

“Hayi MaDlomo!” he keeps roaring underneath his breath. MaDlomo chuckles and covers herself with the blanket.

“Pray for me bhut’ Thule!” she says with a bedroom voice instead.

Nosisa opens the umbrella still amused. They walk out of the house leaving her mother behind. On rainy days like this she decides not to go to church or anywhere far.

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There was a point in time where she thought she found love, then lost it.

However, she and her family were blessed with the most important thing in life—having one another's back. His father

takes care of his mother the same way she does to him. When each of them can't reach there, the other does it.

The church is twenty five minutes away on foot, just down the gravel road. They get there still in silence just holding hands and their umbrellas.

They get to the hall with the first song to open the service in motion. 'Bongani, bongani...' the congregants are singing. It's a Wesleyan praise hymn. His father smiles at her and nods, she returns the gesture letting him limp to his section. He's a preacher, his rank in church is nearer the pulpit down there.

She walks over to her choristers and raise thumbs up at them. They smile back waving. She stands at the front on an empty chair and opens her hymn. She sings, but she's not the best singer at all. She just learnt how to sing the same way she learnt to talk.

In a moment, someone pulls the end of her coat and tells her, it's time for her to lead the choir. She nods, nervously and looks at them. She hands over the microphones to seven vocalists to lead the songs. She's never been so excited in her life.

She climbs up and start counting for them to begin. The vibrant mood and smiles on their faces are even wider than she had taught them. She steals a few glances over the audience and notice the silence, astonished facial expressions—then tears



falling to others. She moves her hands leading the song with notes memorized on her head.

As she keeps the audience in check, her eyes fall at the back there. The hall is fully packed. She spots a guy in a black suit being ushered in. He sits at the third row from the back and looks up at her heart thugs. She shifts her gaze back not to lose focus and breathes softly to stay calm. Their gazes meet with time again.

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When the song is reaching an end, an average tall lady with an hour glass body walks in. She has her hair tied into a neat bun with a black bodycon dress and a brown leather jacket hung on her shoulders. She's beautiful—sinfully curvy too! Wait a minute—that's Nomathemba. The nice girl from the river. They make eye contact. She smiles a bit before she moves her eyes away.

She takes the choir through a nice ending, then a round of applause falls. Everyone stands up cheering while his father climbs to the pulpit, proudly.

She walks to sit down, but then something captures her attention. Nomathemba's hand locked and fingers intertwined with Ntsika's. They are sitting pretty close to each other, rubbing shoulders even. She sits down in disappointment for some reason!

2

NTSIKA

He keeps twisting his spoon on his food staring deeply at his shoes. His mind is pre-occupied, running back and forth to his dream. From the dream to that girl...Nosisa! Was that a revelation? 'Are you deaf or something?' his words ring in his mind. He's sad and disappointed in himself for being arrogant. 'I am...' her little soft almost inaudible voice chimes hard making it's way to his heart. Her sharp clear gaze...

“Ntsika!” he jumps up startled and clears a throat looking around the table.

“Father?” he replies, looking briefly at him as he sits far at the end of the dining table.

“You look troubled. Is there something you want to us to talk about?” he is concerned.

He simply stares at him thoughtfully and shakes off his head.

“No, I'm fine. I just miss grandma. That's all!” he drops his head to his food. His grandma died earlier leaving him as a qualified chef behind. It's a fresh wound. It's even worse now that he sees her in his dreams very much often lately.

“Oh...I'm sorry son. It will be alright. Let her rest, she's in a better place now—free from pain!” his father, Faku tries to comfort him.

“It's easy for you to say!” he picks up a glass of water.

“The herbs...” his aunt, MaFaku clears a throat turning into a new page. “Who taught you about them?” she wants to know.

His mind takes him back to Nosisa's words, ‘When they ask because they will ask...’ is she some sort of a prophet?

“A shepherd helped me out. Are they helpful?” he throws a quizzical look at his father.

Faku nods. “Inkubele is mainly for flesh wounds,” he says. “Are you adjusting fine here? I know you're used to townships and the life of being in the cities!”

“I am. It's better than staying alone in a slum like I always did all these years!” he always finds something to make his father feel guilty for neglecting him. He wants to see him suffer from some reason. He hates it here, the grumpy bossy Aunt, his trying father and siblings whenever they are around. Church—oh he hates that one purely!

“I made a mistake Ntsikayekhaya. I am trying here,” Faku pushes his plate away with guilt flashing in his eyes.

“You said that already. I get it!” he digs into his food. He doesn't get it. He has a lot of questions in mind like his mother's disappearance.

“You've been spending most of your days out lately. Made any friends?” MaFaku always tries to break the ice with a new subjects. She never runs out of something to say.

It is these kind of questions that put him off. “No. I was just looking after the livestock,” he lies. He's been walking around the forest, stream and tuck shop looking for her. He wishes to see her again. It's been days since he met, but he is dreading to see her again. Talk to her, maybe throw in a few sweet words to make her blush. Perhaps, kiss her. He'd love to!

“I see. And so what are you planning to do this holiday?” another boring question.

“I am officially launching my canteen in campus,” he swallows his food avoiding their shocked gazes.

“You have a Cafeteria?” they both ask. He nods.

“I thought you were just selling some coffee and what do you call these things, sausage?” MaFaku is impressed. She means russians.

“I started there,” he pushes his half dish away and wipes himself. He's been doing that for years. Growing up, his grandmother would buy him a pack of candies for him to sell for himself. He fell in love with food for it was the only symbol of love and the best way to communicate. He sold kotas in high school. At the culinary school, he started baking fat cakes and cookies to sell them to a nearest college, Qhayiya. He saw a need to try by all means to get a car. He got it. His business had spread to the university of Port Elizabeth which is now known as Nelson Mandela University.

“How much were you making for you to buy a canteen?” his father wants to know.

“A couple of bucks,” he shrugs.

“And the car? You bought it with that?” he asks again.

He stares at them for a moment before saying, “No!” he only used that money to pay for his studies. He rented a house in New Brighton for his grandmother and Mphuthumi, his younger brother. Taken out of the shack in Motherwell, his grandmother couldn't stop praying for God to richly bless him even more.

They exchange glances, “Where did you get it from?” MaFaku interjects.

“I stole it from a parking lot in Cape Town three years ago. I sold it off and bought another one,” he lays back on his chair looking at their jaws dropping to the floor.



“Yekwedini uligintsa? (Are a gangster?)” Faku's eyes are nigh to falling off their sockets. His fists clenching from an itching urge to hit his jaw.

Ntsika stood up and cleared the table. “No, but I'd steal when I have to. It's what God says, ” he packs plates together.

“What is he saying—God?” MaFaku is terrified. This boy is not normal. Something's wrong.

“That it is not completely wrong to lie, but we shouldn't lie too much!” he answers. Their reaction is amusing to him, but he's keeping a straight face. What were their expectations? That he turns out to be a Jobe of the Bible with the hardships he faced growing up?

“That has nothing to do with stealing. I have never even come across such a verse in the bible. Lies are forbidden by God!”

Faku, the best preacher coming after Mr. Mayiza says. When he preaches people cry and open their wallets widely.

“That's because you only read what makes you sleep at night,” he walks out of the room leaving their mouths hanging open.

His Aunt walks into the kitchen and says, “I'll do the dishes. There are chores for you as a young man in this house. I told you that,” she says, taking over. The house is spotlessly clean indeed. Their laundry baskets are always empty.

“I'll go to sleep then,” he walks out. He finds Faku standing still in the lounge probably still in shock.

“Sit. We need to talk!” Faku has had enough even his facial expression can tell.

They sit opposite each other and there goes silence for a moment. Ntsika is staring at the ground waiting for his father to say something. He just keeps sighing and shakes his head off staring at him.

“Ntsika!” he calls out.

“Father?” he looks up at him.

“Son, I know I never took care of you. Never looked for you and that you lacked a lot growing up. I have apologized for that, but I will not tolerate nonsense in my father's premises. The law is the law in this house and you will obey it!” he demands.

Ntsika nods, looking at him for a few seconds. “Of course, I will. When in Rome you do as Romans do, isn't it?” he is laid off.

“Exactly! Now tell me, where did you get the money to open that Cafeteria?” Faku shoots an intense gaze. “I want nothing, but the truth!”

“It's a tender. Anyone can get it. Why wouldn't I?” he is offended. “I might have done a lot of things in my past, but my grandmother never raised a thief for a grandson. Don't be too quick to judge, you gave birth to a thief if you think I am!”

“Ntsika, sit down!” Faku roars.

“Sleep well father. Don't forget to pray!” he slams the door on his way out.

NOSISA

The next morning she dresses up and sprays her brushed cut. She pulls in some boots and a long coat down with a black pencil skirt. She wears a silver pendant, nicely placing it on top of her grey polo neck beneath that coat. She picks up her Bible, a hymn's book and throws them on her purse. She grabs two apples and a few coins for tithes. She walks out to the other rondavel and knocks. His father opens for her.

“Father, I am on my way to church. Are you coming?” she signals with her hands.

His father opens the door for her to get in. She finds her mother cooped up in bed with a tray of porridge. Breakfast in bed, it must be nice—she thinks to herself.

“MaDlomo!” she greets  
taking a sit next to her.

MaDlomo smiles facing her way, "You are early for a change!" she's running her hands over Nosisa's upper body.

"Father is going to be preaching today and I'll be leading the choir for the first time!" she is excited about it.

"Ah, now I remember. Take off the coat, I want to see what you're wearing," she says, pulling her zip down.

Nosisa chuckles, it's funny how her mother is so obsessed with how they all dress up. She designs clothes and bags as if she can actually see them. Sometimes she feels sad that God gave MaDlomo such a wonderful gift for only other people to see, but not her. It's unfair!

"I'm wearing a white beaded blouse, a grey polo neck to protect myself from cold and a black pencil skirt Mama. And a new pair of high heeled half-boots!" she says.

“Go on take the coat off. I want to check it out!” she is not convinced. Her father laughs limping to the wardrobe. He's already done dressing up too.

She sighs and takes off her coat. She lets her mother run her hands over her body. She smiles. “Satisfied?” Nosisa giggles as she spans her little behind. “Mama!” she moves back.

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3

## The Song of an Orphan

NTSIKA

He dumped his father and Aunt to come to a better church than a gospel church, according to him. He grew up in a Wesleyan back in Gqeberha with his grandmother forcing him to go.

Well, he enjoyed himself today, seeing Nosisa conducting a vibrant choir like that! He just found what he never knew he was looking for. Something rare, unusual and worth a lot for him to give up to go get it.

When Nomathemba walked in, he was perplexed. He's one of his former girlfriends. It's been months since they last saw each other. She was all excited seeing him and he just played it cool. He wouldn't want the Lord to think he's breaking such an easy law; loving his enemies!



When the service was over, he watched Nosisa chatting to others and laughing away her worries. He waits for her to wrap one of those up. He just can't leave without talking to her. Maybe ask for her cellphone numbers, cook dinner for her later or something. He needs to make a move!

“Ntsika...fancy seeing you here!” Nomathemba says, standing before him.

He takes a breath. ‘Not now Satan. Not now!’ he scratches the bridge of his nose, looking at her. “There's nothing fancy about rural areas Nomathemba!” he has to comment on that.

“Maybe or maybe not. I may be new around here, but it's such a lovely place to be. The people are interesting!” she begs to argue.

“They are interesting,” his heart sinks as Nosisa keeps avoiding his gaze by all means.

“Yhu, did you see her choir? Very neat and elegantly dressed up. The way they sang was almost like they are angels...” she remarks, looking over at Nosisa. “She's so talented. Did you know that she's deaf? Like she can't hear a thing!”

“Yhea, I know that...” he waves his hand over at her. He sighs in relief as she walks over to them.

“Bhut' Ntsika. Nomathemba...how are you guys doing?” she asks, her voice rather too calm.

“We are good, thanks and you?” Nomathemba answers first, fixing the collar of Nosisa's coat. He is not seeing himself shining at this moment.

“I'm good. It was nice seeing you again!” she says with a faint smile.

“Same here. Girl, your choir...Hayi shame, I don't have words. That was out of this world!” Nomathemba says.

Nosisa blushes and nods. “Thank you. I try...” she steals a quick glance at him. He's just so lost and annoyed at the moment.

“I also want to become a member in the choir. I will talk to my uncle about it. You know, I recently moved back here. And this is Ntsika, my boyfriend!” she rubbing his arm.

Yhoo Thixo! He clears a throat and looks at her with kneaded brows. "Are we dating?" he grits the words in between his teeth. This better be a joke.

"Yes we are Ntsika. I forgave you for cheating!" she gives back the scowl.

Nosisa clears a throat and earns their attention. "Oh, you guys look good together! How long have been dating again?" she's curious.

"We are not da-"

"Ah, it's been years. Being on and off. You know how it is. Love gets tested everytime, but we are alright!" she cuts him off.

“Mhm, tell me about it. Well, then I'll to see you guys around. Hope to see you again next week!” the mockery smile on her face can't go unnoticed to Ntsika.

“Of course, we'll come darling!” Nomathemba bubbly says.

Nosisa nods and turns away. “Nosisa...” he finds himself calling her out.

“She can't hear you!” Nomathemba sputters the words.

“Yhea, right!” he walks away from her. She giggles walking to the other direction too.

He pulls his car and drives home, pissed. Getting home, he finds his father and Aunt sitting around the dining table. They look up at him, "Speaking of the devil!" Faku says.

"Afternoon!" he walks past them not waiting for any response. He goes straight to the kitchen and makes himself some coffee with a sandwich. He needs some strength.

"Ntsika come sit with us," MaFaku calls out.

"Yho!" he has no energy for that one. He drags his feet there and sits, taking off his blazer. He takes two bites from the sandwich and Nosisa flashes on his mind. His throat blocks anything that he intends on towing down. He places the sandwich down and drinks some coffee.

"We waited for you in church and you didn't pitch," his father starts.

“I went to the Methodist Church,” he answers.

“But we go to a faith mission in here. We are saved,” MaFaku states.

“Well, I don't like your church Aunty. You all have got too much energy,” he shrugs.

“Ntsika we are family. We can not have different churches. It doesn't make sense that way!” Faku remarks.

“It does make sense. We are not the same people. I grew up in the Methodist Church and I will not start a new one. I'd rather go to the tarven than go to your church. It's pretty much the same thing!” he says.

“Umntaka Ndamase!” MaFaku claps once holding her chin perplexed.

“Fine. So, have you thought about what we talked about?” Faku asks, progressing to the next level. They always have something to talk about.

“There is nothing to think about father. I'm not changing my surname nor am I allowing you to do the ritual for me. My grandma did that!” he begs to argue with everything that's being said.

“But it is important that we introduce you to our ancestors. You are one of us!” his father convinces him. So much for being ‘saved’!



“By blood you mean...Father, I'm not here for your inheritance. I'm simply honoring my last grandma's death wish. I'm sitting here trying to give you what you want, forgiveness. And you are taking advantage of that. I hate you. I hate you father with everything in me, okay? Let's just stop trying and forcing things here. If you bring this up one more time... I'll take it you want me to leave. And I will. There was a time when I used need you, pray that you look for me, but it's all in the past. You never did. You failed. So stop trying—it's annoying!” he leaves the room glaciated.

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Well, they are left with their lips dry and hanging nigh to falling off to the table. Their heads spinning and foreheads steaming with sweat yet dry as wood.

“Haa! I've never heard of this. He is purely a hooligan with zero respect for us,” MaFaku says.

Faku feels his words settling in his frozen heart of stone. The words, 'I hate you' sink in his mind. This has to be karma for all the bad he has done in this life.

"What are we going to do? He's been saying this months back. What if he knows something he shouldn't know?" he asks.

"No, it's not that. He is just naturally pig-headed. He takes after his mother, Yolelwa and you. We just have to take it easy on him," MaFaku argues.

"But have you heard what he said? That it was MaMbamba's death wish for him to find me? Why would she want that? That wicked old woman hated me long before Yolelwa went missing

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" he thoughtfully reminds her.

“No. What could she possibly do? She knew that he will need you at the end of the day...” MaFaku takes it slightly.

“I am worried about what Qwakaza said, Sisi. What if this boy already knows? Which boy would hate his own father to a point of refusing to be given his birth rights?” he's convinced that something is definitely up!

NOSISA

After dining with her parents they sat around the fire in the kitchen and conversed for a while. They parted ways with her father leading her mother to their rondavel. She then sweeps the kitchen and gets rid of the fire. She opens windows for fresh air to clear out the smoke. This is where she sleeps, there are two rondavels here.

The door moves with a folded piece of paper slipping in under it. She just knows, it's her father. She opens, "The goats are not all in Nosisa. We talked about this before!" he scowls at her.

She swallows, looking down, "Sorry Father," she apologises.

He shakes his head off, "Go check down by the school if you don't find them, I'll go look for them in the morning!" he says.

She nods and walks back inside. She wears her rain coat and gumboots. 'I need to get work. This thing of herding goats is not cool anymore!' she thinks to herself as she hurries to the veld.

She spots them not too far by the school. It's only four goats. She runs down and casts stones at them. She takes the route

going half way the stream. The goats run up the hill and she sighs in relief. They will head straight home with that route.

She walks to a big rock giving a nice view to the the sunset except for the fact that it's raining today. She climbs on and admires her village. The whole Mbhashe region clearly appearing to her. The tar road far away from her own village, the rail way rustily leading to the west. The Mbhashe river glitters with grey pillows of clouds gathering around. It's heavily raining and she's holding her umbrella shivering a bit from cold.

She looks around her feeling her nervous system dropping from a heavy presence. She comes across him, standing a few feet away—staring. He smiles first and she smiles back before climbing down.

He walks closer and opens his arms to help her down. Okay, that's a little bit too much, “No, I'm fine. Than—” she slips and tries to hold onto the rock, it's wet. She had trouble climbing

up, she doesn't know what she was thinking refusing his help. Now she'll fall right in front of him. He holds her hand and pulls her to him. She heaves a deep sigh, locking her arms around his neck. He has his hands around her waist and one leg with the other on the ground. "That was close. Thanks!" she clears a throat letting go of him.

For a moment she experiences Albert Einstein's theory that says, 'Cold doesn't exist, but it is simply the absence of heat!' One would swear she has just fallen into hell with fire leaping flames.

He nods. She steps back and collects herself, catching a breath. They lock gazes for a moment and he wiggles his eyebrows looking away. There's that awkward moment!

"How are you Nosisa?" he shifts his eyes back to her.

“I'm fine. Thanks and you? How is your hand?” she blurts out.

He shrugs moving to stand next to her against the rock. “It's better. Thanks for the other day...” he mutters. She nods. “I take it the rain is symbolising favor to my side,” he smiles.

She's confused. “How so?” she shifts her umbrella to him. He's wearing a yellow rain coat—so clumsy!

“I've been wanting to see you,” he avoids the word, ‘yearning’, she takes notice. It's easy to tell when the lips say this and the face says that. It's one of her skills to catch the real meaning hidden behind every word uttered. “And I did twice. Earlier on, I couldn't speak to you because of her,” he awaits an answer to that.

“I see,” she has nothing else to say.

“She isn't my girlfriend. Her and I are...we used to date back then. We broke up. I don't know why she said that,” he feels the need to explain as he should, according to her.

“You don't need to explain yourself bhut’ Ntsika. It's none of my business,” she shrugs. This attitude right there is the one that used to create troubles in her previous relationship. She gives less than what she feels.

“I wanted us to talk by the way,” he moves forward to the next subject.

Well, this is the part where she thinks he should've said, ‘Nosisa...of course, I have to explain. I'm really sorry about her being forward. I'm single sii!’ Her mind scolds her heart for being forward.



“About what?” she lets him hold the umbrella and tucks her hands on the pockets.

“That day...The things you said. I don't understand why you sounded like you were expecting to see me,” he pauses to look away before looking back at her. He continues to say, “You said what I have heard before, it was just the matter of wording and minimized events to the scene!”

“I don't get it. I have never seen you before, have you seen me before?” this freaks her out.

He shakes his head. “No, but I saw someone in my dreams the night before I met you there. She was dark like you, but I didn't her face. The voice is the same as yours. She advised that I extract the same herbs as you had said,” his stare is turning hers upside down, searching for answers.

“Bhut’ Ntsika that's a little bit too much, don't you think?” she's shaken.

He fiddles with her hands. “Maybe it is. Look...I don't know if what this mean, but it just felt like a revelation or something. I know it freaks you out. I'm sorry I told you. I just didn't have anyone to talk to,” he sadly confesses.

This is a mess. He dreamt about her and now he doesn't have friends. This has to be a joke. “Do you pray?” she asks. She is not a praying person, but she believes in God.

“Sometimes,” he shrugs.

“Consider praying everyday and harder than you ever did. It helps. Or just burn an incense and talk to your ancestors,” she

advises. “That's what my father usually says. If you wake up in the middle of the night struggling to sleep again, something is up. You must pray or burn an incense and talk to the underground gang!”

He throws his head back and laughs at her. He looks back at her still amused. “Underground gang—Nosisa!” he's gasping.

She giggles and shyly looks away. “Laugh at me one more time, I will call Nomathemba to discipline you once and for all!” she threatens. This Nomathemba is her biggest enemy now for some reason. She doesn't even want her to get close or else she will complicate things for her. She doesn't know why it feels like that.

He laughs a bit and wraps his arm around her shoulders, pulling her closer. She leans against his chest listening to the loud heart beat contagiously affecting hers. It feels like she's known him since forever.

## NTSIKA

Well, days went by tardily turning to weeks, then a month later, he's still frozen in his feet. He meets her almost everytime, they talk and she's friendly, nice and too kind. Still, he is scared to nakedly lay his heart on her hands. He doesn't know how to tell her. He's been making moves trying to kiss her first, it becomes better that way. It seems he has lost his touch on that because—Wow! She just let him lend on her cheek and politely tell him, she has to go home.

Right now, he's at home, setting a dining table while whistling happily. He's been practicing what to say. Invited her to a picnic later on. In two hours time, he'll be waiting for her to show up on their meeting spot. Down nearer the forest—her choice of place. She said it's a beautiful place to view the sunset.

“Ah, you're always in a good mood these days. I will say bye-bye to my flat as\* with the food you prepare!” MaFaku says,

walking in with her brother. These two are inseparable. They work together in the farm, same town and stay together. The wife is the one who goes on holiday and leaves her husband behind with his sister to take care of him.

Ntsika gives her a soft stare and walks out to the kitchen. They have stopped nagging him about rituals and identity titles. He can now breathe freely. He's been going around to see his father's business and associates. Letting Faku spend his spare time of the day and listen to his stories about childhood. He didn't have an easy one growing up, but at least he had a father. He doesn't understand how one can grow up with a father, then decide to be an absent one.

He serves them and sits down having a glass of water.

“Are you not going to eat?” his father asks.

“No, uhh... I've had some snack,” he lies. He is waiting for time to get there.

“Mhm, met anyone around the village? We thought you said you are going back to Ciskei this week,” MaFaku pries.

He clears a throat uncomfortably, “Hayi, no! I haven't,” he picks up the glass of water.

“You can tell us!” his father says.

“No, I haven't met anyone except for a few people around,” he keeps drinking water.

“Oh, okay. It's good to see you adjusting,” MaFaku says.

There's silence and he keeps tapping his finger down the table. He checks the time and gets up as quickly as he can. "I have to go somewhere. I'll get back in the evening. Probably won't have supper," he reports. They nod with no questions asked—  
Haleluya!

He pulls out his car and parks out of the gate. He checks if he has everything before driving down to the forest. Nosisa said, they'll meet there. He's so nervous!

In fifteen minutes, he parks his car up in the gravel road and goes down with the cooler box and a sport bag. He looks around and there's still no sign of her. He spreads a green flowered blanket and lays out a reed basket with fruit, chocolates, sweets and a bottle of wine—port wine. He places the cafe tins he stole from MaFaku's kitchen, Tupperware. If she would see how beautiful they actually look with the dust off and on the process of serving the love of his life. She'd die instantly—old women and Tupperware!

He chuckles at the thought and stands at a distance taking a look at the settings. He walks closer and fixes here and there. He opens a pack of pink rose petals then spreads them, embroiding the blanket.

He breaths and stares into space, paces around and scratches his forehead. "Ahem, Nosisa...my beautiful Nosisa...Hayi, no! It sounds so boring. Let me try this..." he takes a breath. "Baby ever since I met you...you make my heart...hayi mxm! Wha-"

"Nice set up. You've outdone yourself," she startles him from behind.

His heart slams hard against the bones of his lungs. He composes himself and turns around. The wind blows slowly slipping away that composure as he runs his eyes at her. Her petite body is drawn out nicely in a casual black T-shirt with a butterfly print made of beads around the area of her pointy



breasts. Her hairy long legs exposed in her shorts smeared with melanic majesty. Ever so smooth, radiant and alluring.

He clears a throat violently, looking at her. He voluntarily smile, seeing holes deepening on her chubby cheeks on that round face. Whoever said to him, long hair is a beauty crown got it all wrong.

He walks closer and stands still, she drops her eyes to the ground and slightly opens her arms. He takes that as an invite to embrace her. They mastered a very intimate culture in the past few weeks, communicating with their eyes and slight touch of a hand. He inhales her scent deliberately breathing on her neck. Wrapping his arms around her waist and snuggles on her neck with flames leaping and sizzling from hell between them. There's a fire, a burn and some desire baby! She never holds him back though.

She clears a throat and he takes that as a dismissal. He steps back, "You look beautiful!" he mutters.

“Thanks,” she looks away, blushing. She takes her shoes off and walks to the blanket. “Gosh, this is so nice. I don't wanna mess it up!” she smiles admiring the place.

He smiles in relief, “I'm glad you like it. I hope you're hungry. I prepared a mutton stew, mash potatoes, a bit of pastor topped with cheese and mushrooms, then chakalaka. You don't have any allergies, right?” he nervously asks. She shakes off her head. “Great then. You really look beautiful today—you're making me even more nervous!” he rubs his sweaty palms.

“Bhut' Ntsika!” she hisses melting like chocolate under extreme heat. There's that way she calls him. Bhuti! It almost feels like he's her husband already.

He heaves a sigh not getting enough of her sight. He moves to sit next to her and opens the cafe tins and they eat in silence. The silence is loud as they exchange bubbly glares and corny

smiles. When they are done he takes out serviettes and hands her one.

“So, you are really chef?” she strikes a loud conversation.

He nods, “I told you. Maybe I'll cook more for you in the future

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” he holds her hand.

She giggles, “Only if you were my brother. You would cook everyday and I'd do the garden instead!” she had mentioned that she doesn't like cooking. They share a hearty laugh.

“MaTshawuza, I'm sure by now you know how I feel for you. I mean your beauty has my mind going all over the place. That day when I first saw you in my dreams, your melanic majesty had my heart captured. Then I saw you in person—amehlo

akho avele agcwala uthando (your eyes were just full of love) and you took care of me, a total stranger. Who wouldn't fall? Uyandichaza (I like you) MaGqobodwana. I've been quiet for too long, I can't do it anymore. I want you, us to be something!" there he goes, giving in an incomplete story. He awaits her response.

She stares at him for a moment and looks away fiddling with her hands. "I thought we are friends Bhut' Ntsika. I just...I can't," she whispers, looking briefly at him.

"I told you a long time ago Nosisa. We are not friends. Ndiyakuthanda mfondini! (I love you!)" he protests lifting her chin up to make it a point that she gets that. She avoids his eyes and stares at his lips instead. "I know you've been talking to Nomathemba. She probably told you a lot about me, this and that, but with you I don't have to play. I have already won, okay? Just give a guy a chance. Asoze ndikuphoxe! (I'll never disappoint you!)" he adds.

“I don't know Ntsika. I really don't know!” she looks down at her fingers, suddenly finding her nails dirty to be cleaned up.

He shrugs and heaves a sigh. He's not a really patient man and this is just all new to him. Flashing what he has to girls out in clubbing and end up in bed with them is what he knows best. But this is a village girl, a different one, Nosisa. His car does not mean sh\*t to her, expensive clothes and all. She hardly looks at his body that way. She's just so laid back. It's like she doesn't care sometimes.

“Fine. You can think about it,” he says, opening up a cooler box. What he knows is that they will kiss this evening. He's tired of this forth and back of a game. He hands her an ice cream tub and a spoon.

They lay on their stomach and watch the fiery ball running back to it's mother's dun breasts. He takes off his jacket and places it over her. She mouths, thanks, he just lets out a thin smile. They lay there changing position to face each other. He feeds her the

ice cream and they hold an intimate conversation with their eyes.

“Sorry...Let me help you with that,” he says, after deliberately dropping an ice cream on her chin down to her chest. He slips the serviette from her. He leans over licks her chest clean, she gasps.

“Ntsika!” she's out of breath when he goes up slowly to her neck.

He goes up to her chin and runs his tongue feeling her shiver. He looks up at her face and finds her eyes getting a little bit corrupted. He holds the back of her neck, bringing her closer. Her breath flusters against his lips and he leans in, slightly brushing his lips against her—

“Ahem!” a violent throat getting cleared comes up from behind him.

“Damn it!” he moves away, worked up before they turn to whoever is standing there. He suddenly calms down and excited at the same time.

“Hey big bro!” a chubby boy waves over at them.

“Phuthumani! When did you get here?” this is a nice a surprise.

“Yesterday,” he answers.

“And you didn't call?” he asks.

“Wanted to surprise you,” he says. “Is that her?” he throws his eyes briefly at Nosisa.

Ntsika smiles and holds her hand. “Yes,” he turns his gaze to her. “Baby this is my younger brother, Phuthumani!” he informs her.

She clears a throat, “Baby? Really?” she's gritting through her teeth the words, nudging him. He drops a flashy smile at her and she looks away blushing a little. “Hi, Phuthumani!” she shyly greets him.

Phuthumani smiles, “Hey... it's nice to finally meet you. I heard a lot about you,” he squats on their set up and picks up a packet of lays. He opens it and eats.

“Phuthumani! You're embarrassing me,” Ntsika scowls at him.



She giggles, “Good things only—I hope!” she states.

A crispy noise of snacks comes from Phuthumani. He nods, attacking that snack very badly. “Of course. He even told me you were once an angel in your previous life. Can you believe it?” he shakes his head off.

Nosisa is amused taking her time to digest that. She steals a glance at Ntsika, then back at him. “That's a little bit too extreme, isn't it?” she comments.

Phuthumani shrugs and grabs a banana, then stands up. “This time around it's been only you. And the way you're so beautiful, I'm starting to believe that indeed you're an angel. You gave him salvation and delivered him from his forever horn-”

“Ey, P-man I think you should go back home, already. I'll see later buddy!” he's giving different faces, scowling at him.

“Okay. Enjoy the picnic then,” Phuthumani bumps like bed springs in those baggy clothes walking away. He's nothing like Ntsika. He's well fed with cheeks ready to fall off squeezing his lips to be small and pouty, then wet. He has a baby face for days—he's a teen though. Very bubbly so much that Ntsika doesn't like having him around, but misses him when he's away.

“Your brother is cute,” Nosisa complements.

He gives her a look, “More than I am?”

“You are no where closer to cute...maybe sexy would be the word!” she holds her lips, widening her eyes.

“Oh really?” his ego—dusted off, ready to flaunt it around. He moves closer to steal a kiss, but his cellphone decides to chime very loudly. Yha neh?! “Sorry I have to take this. It's father,” he excuses himself. She nods.

He shifts back a a little and answers it. “Taima?” he calls out.

“Son please, come home. Your Aunt needs to be taken to the hospital now. She's been bitten by a snake!” Faku reports. A snake, again?

5

## NOMATHEMBA

A soft knock comes from her bedroom door. She goes quiet and faces the ceiling with her heart beating hard. She's nervous with anxiety whipping her with a sjambok made up of steel. The knock gets loud, rapid and rough. The latch moves, but then it's locked.

It's been years since that knock does that, but everyday it comes it feels like death. It falls violently and takes a bite with its clawed teeth leaving her bleeding. She's damaged inside. She tried running free, but what is she without home? Without her siblings and her mother? She can't even maintain friendship. Take for instance, Nosisa. She went on and ruined it by dragging her ex on it.

“Thembi!” a male highly pitched voice calls out, banging the door.

She wipes away her tears and walks to the door. She closes her eyes and turns around the key. She walks back to bed and he lets himself in. He's wearing black boxers with an untied gown.

“Your mother just left for work. I missed you,” he sits next to her. His rough hands running underneath her night dress to her behind. “How was school?” he asks, breathing on her neck.

“It was fine!” she answers before reaching for the drawer of her night table. She walks away from him and grabs a bottle of water from the dressing table.

“Mhm... I can tell. You came back a bit fat than before. On the right places, of course,” he never changes. He said that long when she was only fourteen. She can still vividly remember it when he said to one his creepy friend, ‘after eleven it's dinner!’

“When is Mom coming back again?” she asks instead. She throws two pills in her mouth and tucks them with water. They are intended to sexually arouse her. It's been months since she started using them. Dumile introduced them to her. A married man she cheated on Ntsika with years back. He takes care of her needs in return for sexual pleasure.

“In a week or so. Oh, I missed you so much Thembi!” he holds her tightly, pressing his body against her from behind.

She doesn't say anything, but pays attention to her body. The pills are now working very much quicker. They are used to her system and she overdoses them. One is enough for two nights.

“Mawethu!” she whimpers with him inserting his fingers deep in her cunt. It's not a cry of pleasure, his hands are rough and he just can't do it the right way. It almost feels like he's picking up a moisturizing jelly!

“Come to bed!” he strips her off. He locks the door and watches her laying back. She's moist, too moist!

He climbs over and she lets him drag his own trunk down. There's no foreplay—just missionary with him humping for a minute before crying out loud like a rooster. His body trembling and eyes widened while she thought she was starting to get into the motion. He shakes off like a slaughtered chicken before collapsing on top of her. What a waist!

She pushes him off and grabs a towel, then cleans herself up. She leaves him catching his breathe alone. She rushes to the kitchen and boils water with an urn.

She sees him getting back after sometime. He's dressed up nicely wearing his all black church outfit with a white collar. This is Rev. M. Siduko. The same uncle she spoke about back in church with Nosisa. He is married to her mother, Nobantu. She

is the only child that's not his. He has no children outside wedlock.

He walks out without a word nor a single glance at her. That's how he acts out of the bedroom. Like a good man, a saint and strict step father.

She goes to freshen up and stands before the dressing table. She runs her hand on her small growing bump with a faint line going down horizontally. A tear falls and she picks up an enamel plate. She places it hard against it and pulls up her waist shapers. She then wears a loosened t-shirt tying it a little on the side. She pulls on a pair of black jeans and sneakers. She combs her hair and ties them up.

She glances at her ringing cellphone and slowly picks it up. "Hello?" she answers with an under tone.



“Thembi—Nomathemba! How are you my baby?” another psycho. He's drunk and there is a lot of noise going on his background.

“Dumile...what do you want?” she hisses. They parted ways, not in good terms.

“The last time you said you're pregnant...is it mine?” same rusty questions!

“Who else have been screwing me Dumile?” she is annoyed.

“I don't know. You tell me...you do it for money, remember?— hash tag soft life!” he blurts out, breathing like a pig he sadistically is.

“Then why are you calling me? To laugh at me for letting you use me and toss me aside like old tissue? Messing up my ‘hash tag soft life’?” she is upset about it. She knows he'll always come back even when she has given birth. Married man of his type, a cop—they have no class. They love what they get because to be quite honest, it's quite rare.

“Are you keeping it?” he wants to know.

“I wasn't intending to, but by the time I found out it was already late!” she moves around, clearing her room.

“How far are you?” he sounds like he is in deep thoughts about it.

“Five months!” she tells him.

There's a loud silence, then a cough. "We'll talk!" the line goes dead.

She snorts and places her cellphone down. Her biggest worry is her mother. She is this woman that prays like God only has her to listen to. She even prays in tongues and her husband being a priest in the Methodist Church makes things worse. She has a high standard of living to maintain.

A beautiful house inside and out, well-mannered children—no dating allowed and a luxurious lifestyle. The Rev is not working, besides, waiting for the month end where people give out their ten percents of their hard earned wages and salaries. He's paid money for travelling and stipend. That's it.

NTSIKA

“We love having him around. He's a cool kid,” his father says, looking over at Phuthumani who is having a snack watching animations. He has huge headsets around his neck with a cellphone, then his brother's laptop. He's a little bit too hyper for a normal person. Very brilliant and a book worm, a total opposite of what Ntsika was.

“About this snake...where did Aunt come across it?” he curiously asks.

“She was in the garden ploughing. We suspect it's the one that camps underneath the warmth of soil,” Faku tells him.

“I don't get it. You were also bitten by the same snake, right?” he wants to know.

“Yes. Someone said it's not just a random coincidence. It's a sign that our ancestors aren't happy. Lately, I've been having

this disturbing dream of a dog barking at me and chasing me around,” Faku explains.

“One never reveals such dreams to anyone, a dog is an ancestor in your dreams. You are ought to respect it when narrating your dream,” he warns.

The alarmed look on Faku's face can not go unnoticed. “You know how to interpret dreams?”

“No, but my grandmother did know how to. I picked up a few things,” he answers, going through his phone. “Why don't you go to a seer to get a clear explanation?”

“I am planning to. You should come with

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” Faku says.

Ntsika stares at him for a moment before just nodding. He's been having horrific nightmares, but forgets them all the next morning. His grandmother used to say that is not a good sign.

“How come you worship ancestors and still saved on the side?” he's been meaning to ask.

“We don't worship them. We acknowledge their presence and respect them as our forefathers. We can not run away from the truth, that ancestral spirits are real and they are part of us!” he advocates for himself.

Ntsika nods and stands up to leave. “I hear you. Let me go hang out with some guys up there,” he says. His father nods.

He leaves the room and goes to his room. He takes a good look at himself in the mirror. He fixes himself. He wipes off his face and moisturizes his lips. Rolls his shirt sleeves nicely and loosens the first three buttons. Puffs a cologne and looks at himself, confidently.

He's rocking with all black that never really cracks. He wears his gold watch and stares at it for a moment. He takes it off on a second thought. Maybe his expensive taste is the one that scares her off.

He needs to be simple enough to win her heart. He throws his car keys on the bed and walks out. He walks such a long distance before reaching their love nest. He stands there impatiently. Nosisa has such a bad habit. She texted back saying she's on her way. This place is closer to her home yet she's always getting here late.

When she finally arrives, he forgets about her love for African time as a flaw. A lady is a lady, they always take their sweet

time in the world. And indeed patience is virtue—he's blown away.

“Hey...Did I keep you waiting for too long?” she asks like she cares.

“Not really!” he smiles, pulling her closer. “I'm sorry about yesterday. I promise I'll make up for it,” he grazes her lower lips softly with the back of his thumb.

She smiles and looks down with her hands against his chest. “I only have a few minutes Bhut' Ntsika. You said you wanted to talk about something important,” there's that blank stare.

“I feel like you don't care at all Nosisa. Why are you doing this to me?” he searches her eyes, hoping to find a feeling in that blank stare.



She throws her gaze down to his lips instead. “I don't know what you're talking about. I care about my friends!” right there, there's the problem.

“I'm not your friend Nosisa. How many times do I have to say that? Hayi bo!” he's freaked out. She bites her tongue looking away. “Nosisa!” he calls out turning her face to him.

“I have to go,” she tries to walk away.

He pulls her wrist back and she looks at him. “Okay—fine! Let me talk about what I wanted to talk about and let you leave!” he negotiates.

She stands still and folds her arms, “I'm listening!” she says, quizzically looking at him.

“I keep having bad dreams and-”

“Whoa, let me guess, I am strangling you in it, right?” she shoots an unexpected bullet.

“This not a joke. I need help here. Are you going to listen or not?” there goes a fight.

She shrugs making a face. “Go on!” she taps her foot down, staring at him.

“I have nightmares that feel so real at times, but I never wake up with them. I forget everything yet I can't stop thinking about the fear it actually left me drowning in,” he sighs. “And I- uhh...you know what, it's fine...you can go!” he suddenly feels stupid. Who burdens a girl that he's asking out with his

personal problems like this? Dreams out of all things. He turns around to leave.

“Boil impepho and drink it. Bath with sea salt and sprinkle it around your room. It will chase away the heavy evil spirits surrounding your room,” she advises, with a voice full of concern.

“Thanks!” he doesn't turn, but just walks away. Part of him hoping she calls him back, but knowing the person she is. He doubts she will. She's very proud!

“Ntsika, wait!” she walks to him almost like she's not stepping on the ground. He's turned around to look at her. She stands a few feet away from him. She heaves a sigh and raises her hands with her lips just rigidly parted. She can't get the words out, but her hands are moving.

“What? You know I don't understand sign language,” he is conflicted.

She sighs in defeat with her eyes filled with tears. She stares at him thoughtfully and takes out her cellphone.

“Wh...when...I...am...under...eeee—” she closes her eyes stuttering. He's never seen this side of her. It's sad. “under emotional strain...I can...” she sighs and takes a breath. “Talking is not my first language!” she sputters as if pushed by the wind.

He nods, slowly. “Okay!” he still doesn't understand what that has to do with anything. He watches her typing something on her phone with hands trembling. His phone vibrates and she puts away hers. He goes through her text, “I'M SCARED, NTSIKA!” he looks up at her.

Her eyes are clouded with a combination of emotions. He's getting even more dumb right now. Is she scared of his dreams or him or what? “Scared of what MaGqobodwana?” he's searching her eyes, trying hard to figure it all out.

She stomps her foot down a little and sighs clearly frustrated. She bites her lower lip hard looking at him.

She walks to him and goes on her toes wrapping her tiny arms around his neck. She smashes her lips on his. He moans with her capturing his lower lip, nibbling with it. He quickly wraps his arms around her waist and deepens the kiss. His stomach feels like it's spring with butterflies flying across. He closes his eyes carefully and drowns there, investing every emotion in him.

She moves away, catching a breath and they lock eyes. He smiles a bit, rubbing his lips together. The fear in her eyes can't go unrecognizable.

“I won't hurt you MaNkosayimthandi. I love you so much that it hurts. For you I'm willing to change in fact I have already changed for the better. Ndifuna ukuba nawe wedwa Nosisa. Wena qha, kungabikho omnye umntu. Jonga asoze

ndikuqhathe, soze ndikhalise futhi. Ndiyakuthanda mabhabha! (I want to be with only you Nosisa. I don't want any additional person. Look, I'll never trick you, I'll never make you cry too. I love you my baby!)” he mutters.

Ay sukani madoda, watsh’ umlilo bezongen’ eBhayi! It's official, Ntsikayekhaya Mayenzeke, the bad boy is now a real PE dyan. Look at his outfit, looking all max and sexy in black. He speaks nicely with girls nowadays!

He praises himself at the back of his mind looking at her blushing with tears threatening to fall. She's overwhelmed and blown away. He leans in again and kisses her with an intention to send her across the sky. He intends to give her wings like a red bull...

6

NOSISA

“YOU WILL TAKE A CLAY POT AND PRETEND TO BE GOING TO THE RIVER. PLEASE, BABE I MISS YOU!” a text from Ntsika pops in.

She blushes leaning against the wall and types, “OKAY. I'LL TRY...” she shoves it in her pocket. There's a shadow coming from the door. She quickly moves to the cupboard and resumes washing the dishes.

Her father walks in followed by her mother. They have freshened up already and there's a third party, Mathabo. That's a lady from church, she stays in the neighborhood. One of those luke warm people who keep them closer just to keep tabs on them. She doesn't want to be left in the dark not knowing what is going in their lives. A very dangerous type.

She exchanges greetings with her. MaDlomo instructs her to make some tea. She walks about the cupboard and lights the gas stove. She boils water and fixes a tray, then cuts some bread not forgetting to butter it up. For some guests like Mathabo, she uses peanut butter—she doesn't want her gossiping about how much poverty stricken they are to a point where they eat dry bread! Her tea has to have milk too.

She serves her and she smiles, scanning the cups, the side plates. “Thank you!” she grabs the saucer and side plate of bread.

“MaGqobodwana!” MaDlomo says, accepting a cup of tea too. She stirs it while listening to what Mathabo has to say.

It is moments like these that sometimes she feels like she doesn't belong in this universe. Looking at people talking and



laughing while you don't get a thing. She continues to dry dishes and packs them away. She grabs a clay pot and a doek.

There's nowhere she'd rather be right now other than her lover's arms. There they will stare at each other and converse with a new language introduced, a touch of a hand. Rubbing her body against his and holding him closer for dear life. Listen to each other's heart beat vibrating against their bodies. Now that's a meaningful conversation, loud silence and love unspoken, just scribbled and practically put into action.

Mathabo waves at her to sit down for a moment. She does.

“Nosisa my child, I came here because my nephew, my brother's son urgently needs someone who will work as a house keeper in his house. He is a police man in Mthatha and lives in North Crest. There are no children. I thought of you since you haven't worked in a long time. The money is good, it's plus minus four thousand rands per month!” she says.

“I just explained to her how you ended up quitting the other jobs like this one. But me and your father thought maybe you would like to make a decision on your own,” her mother says. Her parents always give her a choice now that she's older.

A job in North Crest and there are no kids? It's an easy one. If the employer understands her condition then this might work. The money is really good, but then, “What will I be doing if there are no children?” she asks.

“Laundry, dishes and cleaning around the house. His wife is a lawyer and she's heavily pregnant, very lazy these days. It's not a permanent job. It's only for five months!” Mathabo explains.

Nosisa nods. “I see. So when can one start?” she asks.

“As soon as possible. You can go there by this Friday latest,” that's too soon.

“Is it a sleep-in job?” North Crest is not too far, but transport here is very scarce. Ntsika hardly goes to his cafeteria now that it's Easter holidays.

“Yes, it is. You don't have to worry Dumile is a good man. He grew up here fetching water for your mother back then. He was actually pleased to hear that it's you, MaDlomo's daughter. He asked me for recommendations to avoid complete strangers working in his house,” she vouches for him.

“I will think about it Ma and get back to you by tomorrow,” she says.

“Okay...I will wait for your arrival. Now please, refill my cup before you go. This tea of yours is creamy—just the way I like it!” Mathabo says, clearing a throat that is burning with gossip.

Nosisa smiles and refills her cup. She watches her gobbling the sugar with an intention to finish it. Three spoons and a half plus the milk—this one is here to exploit!

She walks out, leaving her father sitting next to the kraal, reading a couple of letters from the school post. He might look he's not paying attention to anything. But if she comes back an hour later, the sun will fall off for chickens to eat it.

The morning is beautiful, horses are grazing grass in the green fields. They're snorting and sneering cheerfully in celebration of life. The scenic splendor has that mist smeared like a dragon's breath. The stream murmurs as it flows down the rocks and birds chirp swinging on top of the reed. It's a pity all this beauty won't last longer. It's autumn already.

She bends down and fills up her clay pot seeing no sign of Ntsika. She hates waiting for people especially boys. He should do the waiting not the other way around.

She stands up and gasps feeling water splashing on her legs. She quickly turns around and frowns before going down to return the gesture. It's him. He's been watching all this time, little devil!

They laugh and run around like children in a farm in summer. She doesn't remember playing like that even when she was a child. She had dolls and teddies to play with back at home. She'd see other kids playing, but they'd always tell her she can't because she won't hear what they are saying. Some said, their parents said she must stay away from her. Her mother is a witch and they are cursed in her home. When outside she would be strictly doing her chores and running errands for her mother. She only laughed and became free with her family. It's them who had the patience, care and love to fill up her heart.

Not even teachers would be nice instead they'd do the worst opposite. Tell her how much ugly she is. Make mockery of the color of her skin.

Ntsika picks her up and runs down the stream while she is screaming her lungs out with giggles in between. He settles in their nest and admires her face. She blushes snuggling her face on his neck and feels his chest vibrating as he chuckles.

There's silence and they are just holding hands letting the wind blowing their bodies off. There's no place she's rather be at the moment. He makes her feel like she's the only girl in this world. Well, maybe it's because they are always exclusively seeing each other. She doesn't want the whole village knowing about them. It would cause such a stare!

“Baby...” he calls out, rubbing her cheeks. She raises her eyes up to his eyes.

“What is it?” she searches his eyes.

He throws his gaze far beyond her shoulder for a moment. He smiles, “You are staring at me so intensely that I forgot what I was going to say!” he drops a fat kiss on her lips.

She giggles, “That means you were going to lie to me!” she pokes his chest.

“No, I wasn't going to lie!” he's laughing.

“Yes, you were. And you forgot it

” she throws her head back laughing as he starts tickling her. She rolls away from him and runs down the rocks. He comes after her and holds her when she's closer to the forest.

He holds her from behind and spins her around. She screams and giggles trying to free herself from his grip. They fall on the grass and roll over playing almost like Peppa Pigs!

He lays on his back and holds her waist still, looking up at her. They catch their breaths with him pulling her down to his face. She feels her spinal cord going ice cold as he traces his fingertip on her lips. He likes doing that, looking all thoughtful. "I love you," everytime he says it, he says it with confidence and a sweet smile.

She blushes and says it back with her eyes thrown deeper in the fathom of his gaze. She takes his hand places it on her chest. She never hears a heart beat, but feels it. He wants her to feel it too. It's the only genuine way for her to get the message across loudly and clear. By now, he knows how much difficult it becomes for her to speak when she's scared, too excited and—drifted into the world of roses with foreign feelings.



He understands quite clearly as he just smiles more like blushing too. He brings her closer and tightly hugs her. She inhales his scent and feels his heart beat humming against her chest.

He slowly turns and places her down, getting on top of her. Kisses her jaws down to her neck slowly while his hands massage her waist up to her breasts. He keeps looking up at her eyes probably seeking her go ahead, 'devour my skin', of which he gets.

It's a chest to chest, cheek to cheek moment between them. He opens her legs with his knee while biting and rolling a tongue on the nape of her neck. His hands going up and down on her spin. She takes them and leads them down on her behind. He looks up at her and smirks, squeezing it. She loves that. Her waist goes up as she closes her eyes swallowing a moan.

Her mouth opens on a soft gasp— he drops his head until only a breath separates them. She blinks meeting his eye before she

taps her lashes closed. Her brain sways and goes blank. He rubs his lips on hers, softly, slightly and easily kissing her.

With a gasp from shuddering he traces his tongue down her lower lip. He tastes like coffee grains with condensed milk. So divine.

She crawls her hand to his cheek feeling his soft stubble, then rubs it down to his aligned jawline.

She can feel his hums underneath her breath. She traces her hand further to his lower body, it stands still against his iron strong lean hip. She's tapped back with his most rigid and stern organ against her stomach. She fights the temptation and pulls away. He smiles flipping her over to settle on top of him.

“Look at the time, father is going to be so mad at me!” she grits the words staring at the scorching sun above them.

Ntsika checks the time and chuckles getting up, then dusting her off. The grass will just sell her off. He slips the cardigan off her. “It has too much grass...” he reports.

NOMATHEMBA

She watches him getting dressed before the dressing table. She stares at him with a lot of memories coming. The first time it all started. She was just a child. In him she always sees a reflection of herself scared and helpless.

“Why did you choose me Mawethu?” he is no longer an uncle, father or whatsoever. They are behind the closed doors now. Just the two of them.

He pauses for a second and looks at her as she stands in front of an open window. She opened it so the musk of such a sinful act could disappear.

“I feed you Thembi. Your father ran off as soon as you were born and I took you in. I sent you to expensive schools, model C's. Bought you nice clothes, attended your farewells just so you can have it easy in life. Today you're a graduate in a degree of your choice, you have a voice to shine out there as a presenter. Don't you think Daddy deserves what he always gets?” he's breathing down her neck, rubbing her mound and even digging it.

A lone tear falls and she quickly dries it. “You should've let me stay with my grandma!” she weeps.

He unbuckles his pants and pulls them down. “It's your mother's stepmother. What makes you think life would be easier there? I'd still be getting some of this anyway!” he pushes her to bend over and rams his way in. She screams in

pain. “What you don't get is how the mind works Thembi. It's always curious. You're your mother's daughter, a whore—look at you, your body and all. It got me wondering if the mother is that good, how does the daughter taste like? And oh my...it always feels so good that it sometimes—” he groans, chasing his orgasm. “Jesus Christ, Thembi you will never see the gates of heavens!” he drops his head on her back still camping inside her.

A hard knock comes from the door, “Nomathemba!” the voice shouts out.

“Sh\*t, it's your mother!” he quickly moves away and looks around grabbing his clothes. He slides down the floor and lies flat under the bed.

The knock comes again while Nomathemba dresses up. She wraps a gown around herself and fixes her hair. She puffs some perfume and sprays it all around the room.

“Hayi bo, why are doors locked in my own house. Wenza ntoni apho Nomathemba? (What are you doing here Nomathemba?)” Nobantu shouts already losing it. This woman, what could she be possibly doing?

Nomathemba opens the door and yawns, rubbing her face. “Mama!” she calls out.

Nobantu runs her eyes around the room and looks back at her. “You are still asleep at this time? Your siblings are here. Clean up your room and come join us. Where's your father?” she asks with her eyes still searching the room.

“I don't know. Is he not in your room?” she is an experienced mistress by now.

“No. Wait, are these his shoes?” the glare shot at her can't sway unnoticed. It's cold and full of suspicions.

“Oh these!” she clears a throat. “He asked me to polish them last night...” she says.

“And you didn't. Nomathemba! What if he's going to wear them somewhere today? Mxm!” she bends down and pick them up.

Nomathemba quickly picks the one that's right under the bed to prevent water from flooding in the room. “Here!” she hands the shoe.

“Are you okay? You hardly came back home ever since you went into the university,” she's only addressing it now. It's been fours years now.

“I'm fine Mama. I just get busy with the events and all,” she says, looking aware.

“I'm sorry I never supported your career choice. I'm a Christian Noma and so these things are a little bit unholy in my eyes. But your father told me how much good you are on air and at the stage as a host. He also says you're behaving well. I'm so proud of you!” Nobantu says.

Nomathemba nods simply as her mother brushes her arm, then walks away. She slams the door with tears welling down her face. She pulls a pair of pants and wears it with a baggy sweater, then walks out too. Mawethu is left standing still in middle of the room.

She is not interested in seeing those siblings too. They always used to treat her like an outcast she is. They even went as far as



saying that she's here to gobble their father's money. Them and her mother's in laws, Mawethu's family flock together.

She runs out of the house down to an abandoned home. She gets inside and sits down with goats running off. She cries hard with voices speaking in her head. 'Your Mama don't want you, your Daddy don't want you, your siblings don't want you, take your life!'

## NTSIKA

The dusk came with the time moving as if chasing the love of his life away. It's only in North Crest, just around the corner. He can drive there anytime, but for some reason his heart is very heavy about that. She couldn't bring herself into telling him in person that she got a job in there. She just tossed a text and told him, she's leaving on a Friday morning.

"Phuthumani says you're taking him to Dutywa. Why? Is he not happy here?" his father pulls him out of his misery.

"He will have plenty of fun there with his cousins. It's quiet here and I don't want him to overstay his welcome. He can be a little bit too handful sometimes!" he covers his untouched dish and shoves it on the microwave.

“Nonsense! We love having this boy around. I like him, he’s intelligent!” Faku says, looking over at Phuthumani who’s quietly watching the news with MaFaku in the lounge.

“You keep saying that he’s intelligent. You just don’t know how much troublesome he becomes. He can set this house on fire out of that intelligence,” Ntsika chuckles, looking over at his younger brother too.

“I like this boy Ntsika. We get along just fine!” Faku says. He’s not lying. They have been going to the farm together.

Ntsika only wants him to go, he’s in fear of what’s been happening recently. This snake biting people and all. It’s too much.

“You hardly ate today and you spent all morning out there. Is everything okay?” his father pries.

“Everything is fine. It’s just business,” he drinks the last drop of boiled sage as Nosisa had prescribed.

“Is it not going well? What’s the matter?” Faku asks.

“It’s nothing major. Just one of those days. It’s holidays so there are less clients coming in,” he says, moving to rinse his cup.

“I know I am probably the last person to say this, but I’m proud of you son!” Faku confesses.

Ntsika looks at him for quite some time before just nodding. “Thanks!” he walks out of the kitchen. Sometimes he hates the fact that he hates his father that much. He can’t help it! At some point, he just doesn’t know how to react to other things he says. “I’m off to bed,” he announces, opening the front door.

Phuthumani stands up looking at him. "Can I come and spend the night?" he gives him a look Ntsika just can't say no to.

"I thought we had that conversation about you spending the night in my room. You are not a baby anymore Phuthumani," Ntsika rumbles.

"Please...I won't eat anything," he begs with his voice breaking.  
"Well, no crispy snacks!" he shrugs.

"No! You are not sleeping in my room P-man. No!" Ntsika protests.

"Okay, can I at least come and finish my project? It'll expire in the next couple of hours..." he keeps pushing his buttons.

“It’s just animations P-man. You can always restart and build it again,” Ntsika unlocks the iron bars at the door.

“No, it doesn’t work like that. This one is different. Please, I’ll wash your car for two days, free of charge!” Phuthumani negotiates.

“Ntsika, give him a chance. He’s trying here,” MaFaku laughs, looking at the boy.

Ntsika exhales and walks out before turning around. “Two hours, Phuthumani. Two!” he walks away, hearing his brother’s footsteps running after him.

“Heyi, close that door wena!” MaFaku shouts.

“Sorry Aunty!” Phuthumani shouts out heading to Ntsika's rondavel.

Ntsika turns on the lights and Phuthumani admires his brother's room. It's always a masterpiece from heaven, it doesn't matter where it's located. Very neat and elegant.

He settles down in the couch with his backpack. “Nice room!” he fails not to say anything.

Ntsika gives him a look. “There's a study table. No, bubblegum under that table!” he warns before taking off his clothes. He grabs a black vest and shorts, then slips into bed.

There's silence for a moment and Ntsika reads texts from Nosisa. He replies back and smiles alone under his blanket. He feels a gaze on him and takes the cover off his face. Phuthumani clears a throat looking back at the laptop.

“Is everything okay P-man?” he asks, placing his cellphone away.

Phuthumani turns around with his chair and looks at him. “I don’t know if I’m paranoid or what, but there have been scary things going on here. Don’t you feel anything?” he thoughtfully asks.

Ntsika sits against the wall as his mind takes him back to his first couple of nights here. There were creepy things going on, but he never paid any attention. “What things?” he asks.

“On my first night, I heard the roof hammering as if someone is walking up there. I woke up and saw a shadow passing by the window. Sometimes it feels like someone is staring at me. I run out of sleep for hours, sweating!” he reports.



“Is that why you wanted to come sleep this side?” he asks.

Phuthumani nods. “Last night I woke up to the kitchen. I swear to you I heard voices talking over there and I thought Aunt and the old man were there. The light was off and I walked in. Someone was staring at me hiding behind the door!” he whispers with fear visibly drawn in his eyes.

That is the most creepiest things Ntsika’s probably never heard of. People hiding behind the doors in the late hours of the night, very creepy! “I don’t want to say you’re paranoid even if you’re not. I have been having these bad dreams too. But I hope some of this will help!” he says, opening the drawer and pulling out a sea salt.

“Grandma used that all the time. Maybe it can work, but I want to leave this place NK. I just can’t stay here!” Phuthumani takes a stand.

“I’ll take you back on a Saturday. You are taking the couch though!” he grabs his phone the night table and covers his head.

“What? That’s not possible. NK I’m a big guy, okay?” he’s standing besides the bed.

Ntsika chuckles, “None of my businesses!” he faces the wall smiling at his phone like a retard.

“I won’t cuddle you up, it’s not like it’s cold. This bed is big enough to accommodate the two of us,” he slightly slips in.

Ntsika throws a pillow for him to use as he is facing the other side.

They fall asleep and the light goes off, on its own. Ntsika feels his body drifting off as if being pulled from his feet out of the bed. His spirit leaving him. He feels no cold

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he's sleeping, but awake. He's just lingering between the motion of his being. Half asleep and half awake.

He stares at the shadow vividly appearing on the window. A woman!

“Sh-sh-sh...sh-sh-sh!” a shadow of a woman is walking around in circles shushing the baby. He is watching the woman with anger and hatred brewing inside him. The baby's cries pierces through his ears flowing into the bottom of his heart. Like a wound from a bite of a venomous serpent, his heart turns green and sore.

For the whole night he turns and tosses, hearing those cries in his dreams. Nothing else, but just hysterical cries of the baby accompanied by the hiccups of the mother. He's holding tears back too yet not moving to check if who is there. He's just rigidly standing in the dark, helpless!

## NOMATHEMBA

After supper, she drags her feet to her room. She's tired and thankful that her water broke while she was sitting alone in an abandoned home. If her mother was there, she was going to pick up the pieces and figure out the word, 'pregnancy' in the puzzle. She can't imagine the disappointment she will be regarded as. After so many years of lessons about abstinence, she fell pregnant. She is going to be thrown up and down with insults or even get disowned. The worst part of it is not knowing the father. It could be Dumile, the married drunkard of a police man or Mawethu, her mother's husband also known as the reverend.

She locks her door and settles in bed. She takes off her T-shirt and unzips the sides of her shapers before pulling them down.

She takes off the enamel plate from holding back her stomach. The bump is very much visible, her breasts are swollen and her feet too.

She rubs it and stares at it for quite sometime. "I wish I had a better plan for you to be born into a normal situation. A good father, family with warmth, love and care. I wish I could give you what I never had. Somebody to love you enough to protect you, love you unconditionally and always choose you. Prioritize you!" she whispers. A thin smile let out of her lips, "But mommy can always try, right? It doesn't have to be that bad. I can always run away, far away from home and everything. Find a job, apartment and have you...I swear to you if I knew earlier that a sperm had found its way to produce an egg, I would have gotten rid of that seed. You don't deserve any of this. Suffering and all...you deserve better. Even I wish I were dead than to be living this miserable life!"

She throws her head back and moans, feeling excruciating pain from her abdomen. She takes a deep breath and does that breathing exercise for quite sometime.

When the pain comes down, she drinks her supplements and sleeps. Not forgetting sleeping pills. The night tends to be very long for her when she's home.

Well, hours pass by and early at dawn when the roosters crow, she's awoken by a sharp pain. She can't help it, but scream. She's sweating.

She tries to breathe, but the pain is extreme. Tears fall as she sinks on her back in bed with hands balancing on the wall. Her water breaks and still the pain is there. She screams louder that a loud knock comes from the door.

In her eyes the room is blur, the closet is just huge and the dresser becoming small. Things are moving around like jelly. She has no energy yet the pain is eating her alive. The door is locked—they can't get in.

“Ahh—” she continues to scream.

“Hayi bhut’ Mawethu, stop worrying about the hinges and an expensive door while my daughter is dying in there!” her mother shouts.

The door is slammed down by force and it falls inside after quite sometime.

Nobantu steps in with her two siblings, Nobuhle and Nonophela standing behind the tall figure of their father.

“What is wrong Nomathemba?” she asks before throwing her eyes down on her stomach. Surely, anxiety whipped her hard. She’s a mother, of course, she knows exactly what’s going on here.

“I think...I'm in la-” Nomathemba doesn't finish.

Nobantu turns to these three cutting her off, “You can go. I will deal with her. I think she had an episode that gave her a huge shock,” for a Christian she always claims to be, she's a pretty much of a good liar.

“What episode?” Mawethu frowns, taking a quick glance at Nomathemba.

“I will explain later. Just go and get ready for your concert. I'll join you at the course of the day!” she says, pushing them out of the room. She picks up the door and closes down with it.

She shoots a very deadly stare at her daughter. “You are such an embarrassment. Did you have to bring proof that you're sleeping around? I have never got disappointed in my whole life, not even by one of my exes, Thembelani and it had to be



you, Nomathemba!” she mummurs the last part. “God must be very ashamed of you!” she taunts her.

She grabs a towel and boils water from the urn. Takes a bathing basin and gets ready to help her give birth right now.

“Nobuhle?” she shouts, seeing Mawethu's car exiting the yard. Nobuhle rushes to the room and stands at the door.

“Mama?” she calls out with her head wanting to look inside. A hard smack violently falls on her head and flinches, standing back.

“Take Nonophela to your grandma’s house. Do not breathe a word about this to that witch you call a grandma, are we clear?” she stares evilly at the child. Nobuhle nods rapidly. “Good, now leave. I’ll go pick you up later!” she walks back inside.

She places a towel in between Nomathemba's legs and a pillow on her back. "How far are you?" she asks.

"Fi...five months!" she hisses.

Nobantu's huge round reddish nose flares up with nostrils sneering like a horse. "Stop crying and just push! I wasn't there when you took a bite from a forbidden fruit that God clearly stated that you shall-" she goes quiet and holds her hand looking down there. "Again, it's coming. Who is the father?" she yells, hitting her thighs.

Nomathemba screams with only tears rolling down her face. They went about the exercise for quite sometime before she heard a faint cry.

She looked up at her mother's arms. There was her baby. She smiled before throwing her head back falling asleep. She's so exhausted!

It's a Friday morning, she just fell into a short prayer with her parents before leaving the house. She has a small bag packing a few clothes and shoes. Then another one with her toiletries. The last thing she needs is a huge bag while she doesn't know whether things will work out or not.

Her heart skips seeing Ntsika standing by his car staring at her as she comes. This is making her so shy and she's even losing her killer cat walk motion.

He looks good on a refreshed, trimmed brushed cut all the way down to his stubble. He's in black jeans and a simple negligee T-shirt slightly opened to reveal his rocky yet smooth looking chest—hairy too.

'One day is one day, this guy will grate my heart and feed it to the dogs when he's done. He's far too perfect in appearance!' she takes one of her many mental notes while her heart says the total opposite. 'Ntsika is a good person and I love him so much to let go. If he hurts me, then he hurts me!' that's her

heart swimming in a pool of oil. That same oil God kept sprinkling and rubbing on Aron's beard. Ntsikayekhaya makes her happy and that's that!

"Hey..." he greets first, leaning in for a passionate long and feverish kiss.

He smells so good and his touch against her skin—out of this world. He pulls out and smiles, looking at her from head to toe. It's the way he looks at her that makes her throw her gaze down, shyly.

"Hi," she regains some strength to talk.

"Umhle baby!" he complements, instead. He never goes into detail about how the other is and all. His tongue seems to be more into making her blush.

He takes the bags and places them at the back seat, then gets her door. She smiles and sits in. She quickly fixes her face for the last time while he goes around to his side. Folds her arms as he walks in.

He starts the car with soft music surely coming in his car. "Deep house?" she asks, looking up at him.

He smiles a bit taken aback. "How do you know?" he asks.

She smiles back and looks away. "I feel the vibrations on my knees mostly," she tells him.

"And you can tell the genre with that?" he's puzzled.

She nods. “Not all genres are easy to tell, but my parents' favourite and house music. My mother usually describes it to me and I pay attention to the movement and vibrations. She likes deep house and my father hates it,” she laughs a bit amused by an afterthought at the back of her head.

“Your father doesn't have a good taste then. What's there not to love about deep house?” he protests.

She shrugs, “It beats, beats, drag and drag, then drop, drag and beat again. Then, there is that moment where it's just silence, my mother says, there's a soulful sound of a disc...that's where my father gets bored the most because she be like...‘wait for it—wait for it...there it goes!’ By that time, I be feeling a dragging sound, then a hard knock. My father would be still and telling me, nothing was exciting about it. He says, it is just a sound from spoons and knives thrown in a drawer. I am then left to imagine that!” she shyly smiles with Ntsika throwing his head back laughing.

He slows down the car, still chocking with laughter. “Baby your family sounds so crazy right now!” he coughs, wiping the corners of his eyes.

She looks out throughout the window chuckling at the thought too. There are a lot of things her parents do that send her worries away. The tales they tell, some way too embarrassing yet still funny. She can never be the one to tell one of those.

The tar road swallows them to Mthatha. It’s an hour drive with a bit more accelerated speed.

She looks down on his hand slightly caressing her thigh. He’s focusing on the road and nodding his head to the music. She’s never met anyone like this. So carefree, less arguments and more loving. So, full of life. It’s the small gestures that makes her fall deeply in love with him.

They arrive in North Crest and he runs his eyes around, taking turns in between those streets. He finally parks outside a bachelor flat fenced with white washed walls. The gate is wide opened. House number 237.

He sits back and takes a breathe, then looks at her. "Promise me you'll say something if you're not feeling safe or unhappy. I told you, you don't have to do this. I can-" he clenches his jaws looking away as she cuts him off.

"I'll be fine

Ntsika. I'll tell you if I want to go home," she assures him.

"Should I get in with you?" he asks so filled of concern.



She lets out a thin smile. "I have to do this on my own, besides, he's an elder to me. I can't just rock up with a man in his house!" she reaches for the door handle.

He pulls her closer and stares at her eyes with a reprimanding look. "Aren't you forgetting something?" he is staring at her lips.

She smiles shyly and leans in. He pulls her chin closer and locks lips with her. It starts like fire, slowly and easy, then blossoms with leaping flames of desire. She moans with his fingertips flickering her nipples on top of her fabric.

He tardily moves to her neck with the other hand getting buried beneath her pants. Her zip voluntarily goes down on its own. He groans, feeling her dampness down there. He runs his fingers on her soaked folds totally ignoring her throbbing clitoral spot. She moves her waist opening her legs a little bit to give out hints. "Ntsika!" she squirms.

He looks up at her and drops a wet kiss on her lips. “Indoda uyibiza ngegama MaTshawuza?” he calls out. (You call a man by its name MaTshawuza?)

She shivers and gasps feeling his index digging in, gently. She fights the urge to close her eyes. How else is she going to get what he’s saying if she closes them? His voice is vibrating against her jaws as he speaks. “Ah—” she swallows a moan.

“Who am I to you Nosisa?” the command held by those eyes screams discipline!

She opens her mouth to speak and closes it. He’s rubbing it, the sensitive spot. “Ngconde!” she gasps the name.

He smashes his lips against hers, twirls his tongue exploring her mouth. She jumps the gears and all the machines to his lap as he's pulling her to his side too.

She's sitting right on top of him and holding him, leaning in. Her walls close in, sucking his finger in as he moves it. She trembles and screams a bit feeling a like she's floating up above the sky. Her brain swaying off and he's holding her jaws, wanting her to look at him. His eyes are all red and small—full of corruption!

She trembles and lets go of everything. She drops her head on his shoulder and holds him for dear life. She releases a gasp after gasp, feeling tears closer to falling yet her cornea is dry. It's just an urge of sensational pleasure.

He softly brushes her back and pecks her neck slightly. He opens the glove compartment and takes out a box of wipes. He cleans her up and zips up her pants.

Gosh, she can't even look at him in the eye anymore. He's looking for her gaze with a smirk smeared all over his face. "Are you alright baby?" he's cupping her face. She nods, blushing. "Ndiyakuthanda ke, uyeva?" of course, she can feel that she's loved. She nods snuggling her face on his chest.

A rough knock comes from the window. They are less relieved to the other person, the windows are tinted. She slightly moves back to her seat, pulling herself together. He buttons up his shirt and clears a throat, sliding the window.

A man probably in his mid-forties stands there, staring at them. "Who are you? Parking your car by my gate?" he asks.

"I guess you're Mr. Solubomvu. This is Nosisa," he introduces her instead.

The man looks at Nosisa, then back at Ntsika.

They hold quite a stare as if they will just jump at each other's throats. She clears a throat making them break the stare. Ntsika bites his tongue, tapping his fingers against the steering wheel.

“Awu Nosisa, kanti sowabamdala kangaka?(Oh, I didn't know you've grown this much!). I have been awaiting your arrival. Let us get inside,” Dumile says.

He's a giant. Silky dark with greyish gums and an extremely red tongue. At just one glance, one gets enough of his look and wishes not to look up at him again. They say black is beautiful and possibly flawless. Nosisa gets the feeling that they were not referring to him. He's not an easy man on the eye. Even his presence grabs and absorbs people's energy. His voice is rough with an intention to instill fear. One can predict just the sound of his voice before he speaks. He has such a forehead plain as that of a cow.

Ntsika gets off first while Nosisa sits still, she doesn't have to act like they are not together anymore. He surely did the math.

Ntsika gives her a thin smile and tightly holds her hand. There's that brief eye contact before he lets go. "I'll text you..." he mutters. She nods.

## NOMATHEMBA

She wakes up and looks around. The room is empty and it's warm. There's a heater placed not far from her bed. She slowly tries to walk off bed.

The house is empty. There's no one. Where is her mother and child?

"Mama?" she calls out, holding against the walls to support herself. She's in terrible pains right on her abdomen. "Mama?" she calls out again.

She stands by the window and peeks through it. There is Nobantu walking up from beyond the garden of their yard. She

tries to look carefully to what she's holding. It's an enamel brown plate...

She takes a sit around the kitchen table and waits. Suspense is killing her. She needs to see her baby, hold it and admire it. She doesn't care about insults anymore. She just wants to bond with her baby.

The hinges screams as Nobantu walks in. Nomathemba's heart slaps her hard making the hair at the back of her neck stand. Her eyes are settled on her bloody hands, a kitchen carved knife and the bloody plate. Her nostrils get filled by the smell of blood instantly.

She slowly stands up as Nobantu walks past her as if she is invisible.

"Mama?" she calls out with anxiety attacking her. "Where is my baby?" she asks. She's now thinking of the fact that the baby was a premature. She never visited the clinic, but has been going to the pharmacy and get only supplements. There could

be something that went wrong and...no that's not possible.  
"Mama?" she demands the answer.

A loud sound of steel blasts as Nobantu throws the enamel plate roughly in the dish full of dishes. She turns around like a serpentine, her shadow heavy on her own daughter. She sharply yells with her eyes opened up at her as if it's a cry of an owl. "Ubukhe wazala wena? Ubukhe wazala? (Did you give birth?)"



## NOMATHEMBA

She stares at her mother a bit lost as to what does she mean?  
Of course, she just gave birth!

“Mama, where is my baby?” she whispers, her instincts are telling her something about the woman before her. She refuses to believe it. The thought of it makes her sick and sorrowful at the same time.

“If you bring up this little nonsense about you giving birth again, you and I are going to have a problem. You are not going to humiliate me by having a child that’s fatherless under my roof. You know the rules quite very well. No sex, no kids before marriage!” Nobantu sputters the words.

Nomathemba stares at her in disbelief. “I am fatherless and you are the mother to this fatherless child. What’s wrong with me being that as well?” she will never understand.

“I will not have this conversation with you. I raised you to be a far better woman than I ever was and you will be. Uthanda ungathandi. (Liking it or not.) You will be getting married to the Ndamase's in less than thirteen months from now. You better be ready for it!” her mother’s word falls in the room, stopping the clocks from ticking. The time has just stopped moving in Nomathemba’s universe.

“Mama, you haven’t answered my question yet. Where is the baby?” she asks again. She’s completely ignoring the arranged marriage part. It is the least of her scorching ordeals.

“There is no baby Nomathemba. I took care of it, one thing you failed to do right months ago. It was not even healthy because it seems as if you never went to the clinic. You miscounted your months even. Pray that no one knows about this or your reputation will be tarnished forever. You will never get married with such a record. You will remain home and watch Nobuhle getting married before you. You will always be reconsidered for

an older man or a frail mentally ill man if not a disabled one like how they did with that blind woman married to a cripple. They then gave birth to a deaf, good for nothing child. Is that what you want?" her words sank on her mind.

"Mama!" she holds her dry and trembling lips.

"Go to your room and sleep. I will take care of you until you bounce back. And one more thing, don't ever mention any topic about a baby in this house of mine. You had no baby!" she walks away.

Nomathemba stands there wondering if she went to give away the child or not. Looking at that plate, she get chills from fear at it's sight. It can never be that Nobantu murdered an innocent new baby, right? 'No, she wouldn't be that evil!' she thinks to herself.

She crawls back to her bedroom. Feeling numb, devastated and in grief. Something in her kept weighing down her shoulders. She's nervous, under a trap of anxiety and in grief. There's a feeling of being lost and confused at the same time. Her heart bleeding with no announced reason as to why she suddenly feels so down. She keeps asking herself, 'What is happening in my life? Why can't I for once have a normal one?' that baby was her second chance to live. She had a reason to live while carrying him or her.

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Well, back in Ntsika's home, Phuthumani walks around the yard bored. He looks around and places down his packet of snacks. He walks to the kraal and stands by the bushy aloe plant. He stands there and pees. He hears crawly sound coming from the plant. He zips up his pants and looks in between the plant.

He doesn't see anything, but he's sure shaken. He turns around to leave and hears that sound again. He turns around and sees a long gold-brown smooth belt looking thing. He stands still and stares in curiosity. It moves slowly to the inside of the kraal

closely leaning against the dry wood, the wall. It then hits him, this is a serpent, a snake!

He stands a bit too far and stares in awe. He wants to call out Ntsika's father and tell him there is a snake. But then he's curiously wanting to see it. It turns and takes a curve up before it's other eye is aligned with him.

His heart races nigh to stop, he wants to run, but his legs are standing still. Everything is still and immobile in his body. It slithers away hissing with it's tongue.

Faku notices that he's standing in there a bit puzzled. "Phuthumani?" he calls out, scratching the bridge of his nose.

He doesn't move nor turn. He has lost his ability to talk, think nor move. He's feeling cold yet the sun is down to melt away rocks out there. He swallows the little saliva he has trying to

move. His lips are slightly slanting to the side. Bones on his arms feeling like they are getting twisted. His chest goes out a bit—he is in pain.

“Phuthumani?” Faku calls again, worriedly this time around. When he hardly moves on that spot and responds not, he just knows something went down. He holds on his forehead and hurries to him. His eyes first run around the kraal, he’s looking for it. He knows. “Phuthumani?” he shakes him vigorously before noticing his eyes changing angles and falling back with all of his cornea painted in white.

He fished out his phone and dials Ntsika’s number. It is in his speed dial nowadays. He runs to the house and comes back with water while listening to Ntsika’s ringing phone.

He drops it and sighs in relief when his car appears down the gate. But then there’s a pang of guilt and nervousness trapping him. How else is he going to explain this to him. This boy's life is over. He will not survive. He’s surprised, he’s still alive!

He runs to Ntsika's car and knocks desperately on the window. He parks the car and goes off a bit taken aback.

"There's something wrong with your brother. He's-" he doesn't finish. Ntsika's eyes locate Phuthumani by the kraal laying flat on the ground with foam bubbling out of his mouth.

He runs over to him and tries to hold him. "Phuthumani!" he gasps, perplexed. "He's having a seizure!" he grabs the bandana in his wrist and folds it, then slightly pushes it on his mouth. He's trying to prevent him from biting himself.

He picks him up as well fed as he is. He hurries to his car. Faku jumps in as well and they drive off to the hospital.

NOSISA

“This is our kitchen, you make use of the stove

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the cupboard and only this fridge. That one belongs to my wife hence the red huge sticker. She uses it to store her freshly baked cakes and desserts for events!” Dumile tells her. She keeps nodding. The kitchen is small, organized and very cold. “Let me show you to your room!” he says.

She walks after him down the tiny passage. He opens the first green door and says, “This is a bathroom with a toilet. You can use it. The last red door is my master bedroom, a no go zone hence the red door!” he is staring strictly in the eye when saying that. She rapidly nods and he nods back once. They move to the second door from the bathroom. There’s a yellow door. “And this my darling is your bedroom!”

She walks in and watches him testing the night lamps. There’s a single bed and two doors brown wardrobe. The window is huge and has cream lace curtain, only lace. “Thank you!” she says,



taking a brief look at the shiny new carpet. The wall is white washed and bare like that of prison cells. This house is basically freezing as if it's winter already. Dumile here is walking around with shorts and a vest.

“You can become creative with the way you pack your things. The last maid we had made that shelf from old crates and paint,” he says.

She looks at the book shelf, it has only three lone dusty books. It's really made up of cut and reassembled crates, then pasted against the wall. It's a nice one. “Last maid?” she looks up at him.

He nods. “Yes, we had a baby around,” he answers with his hands folded. His fingers tapping against his skin.

“I thought your wife is pregnant now!” she’s looking for a comprehension.

“Yes, she is. It was my baby with a former maid before the other maid came!” he replies, standing again the wall crossing his legs.

“Oh!” now she’s crept out.

He lets out a little smile, “Oh, hayi! Don’t worry I won’t come for you. You are just a child almost like a sister to me. Besides, I respect MaDlomo!” he assures. He searches his pockets and takes out a cigar and a lighter. “You have a problem if I take a smoke?” he asks.

“No, you can go ahead!” she says, taking her bags from the bed.

She opens the wardrobe and it's door feels so heavy on her arm. It's as if something is inside. When she manages to open it, she gets ready to hold something from falling but there's nothing. The whole wardrobe is empty. She swings the door and it feels super light. 'Okay, breathe Sisa...breathe!' her mind tells her that.

She unpacks her clothes and turns around to ask something. She is taken aback to notice that Dumile is not in the room anymore. She doesn't remember feeling him passing by. The door is still closed, she looks at the window feeling sharp cold piercing her skin. The curtain is flying up with the wind slightly whipping in. It was closed. She knows it was.

She walks to it and closes it. Her eyes fall down outside on the ground, she spots a shoe. A brown long pump and she reopens the window. She tries to reach down there and pick it up.

The door goes open behind her and she feels that with the rimming light flashing. She stops doing that and closes the

window. She turns around and hit the window with her back. There's a tall pregnant woman with messy hair holding a bread knife a few inches away from her.

She takes a breath seeing her holding a huge round cake. The knife is spinning around carelessly between her pointy finger and thumb.

"Hi...Nosisa, right?" she speaks so slowly for her liking.

Nosisa nods slowly. "Hi..." she greets back.

"I bought some cake and I'm boiling some water for coffee in the kitchen. Thanks for agreeing to come at such a short notice. I hope you got a sweet tooth," she says, placing the cake on top of the night table. She sits in bed and cuts the cake into for parts.

Nosisa notices a little bit of nuts falling off as she's cutting the cake. "Eh...I'm sorry. I'm gonna have to pass," she says.

The lady looks up at her with a gaze Nosisa can not explain. It sends her spine into a glaciated edge.

The lady grins and nods. "But why? I baked it especially for you!" she says.

"I'm allergic to many things. Nuts and dairy products for instance," she slips out a lie. She's not in any mood to stomach a cake tonight.

The woman stands up with the cake and nods. "Okay. I understand. Come, join me for a cup of tea then," she doesn't give up.

“Water will be fine. Thank you...” Nosisa begs to differ.

“Alright. My name is Nontsikelelo. You can call me Makalmi!” she finally introduces herself.

Nosisa simply nods. They walk out with the lady leading the way. There’s a shadow of someone inside the room with a black door with a window, opposite the bathroom. Dumile did not say anything about it nor acknowledge its presence. ‘Who could that woman be?’ she’s curious. She’s never seen a window inside a house anyway. Very odd!

The lady sits and she walks around the kitchen. She keeps looking back and asking if where is what. The kitchen is simple enough. She serves the lady the tea and she grabs a glass. She tries to open the tap in the sink but it doesn’t barge. Her eyes fall on a pail full of water across the room. She walks over and

scoops some water with jug that's already inside. She pours it on the glass.

Her eye darts on the table with a plastic purple flowered table cloth. While still admiring it she looks far in-between the pails as they are standing in line. There's something white and small over there with a bit of a brown taint. She looks closely and suspects that it's a tooth. She reaches out a hand to touch it, a knife is thrown on the table startling her into jumping up. She turns around to Dumile, he grins and mutters, "Sorry!"

She nods, noticing the tooth is not there anymore. It must've fallen on that side. She walks away and stands on her tracks noticing that the lady is not in the room anymore. People here are very sneaky.

She turns to look at Dumile, he's placing the cake in the fridge. The one that his wife uses to place cakes and desserts for events. It's a huge two doors fridge while the other one is just an ordinary fridge.

## NOSISA

Later in the evening, she prepared supper. She got the ingredients and a strict methods to do everything. Brown rice, green beans, carrots mixed up with baked beans to make a chakalaka, chopped peppers, macaroni dipped into mayonnaise and tomato sauce. She then sets the small dining table and turns on the lights.

Dumile walks in with his wife and they sit looking around the table. “Your dish looks good, neat and appetizing!” complemented the wife.

Nosisa smiles a bit and nods. “Thanks. Enjoy—” she hisses.

Dumile looks at his food and picked up a fork. He tastes the pasta and nods, throwing a little shrug. “She said, enjoy!” he says, looking at Nontsikelelo. She slips out an inhumane smile that got Nosisa questioning her sanity. She’s been trying to



figure out if she's reading too much into their conversations and facial expressions or what!

"I'll be in the kitchen if you need anything!" she leaves the room with their stares screwed on her back. She had placed her plate on top of an old microwave. She takes it and looks carefully at a red spot that grabs her attention. Two fresh and wet drops of blood on the width of the plate. She looks up above the microwave. There are upper shelves locked with keys attached on each door. She touches the key to open it before feeling a heavy shadow standing behind her. Something grabs her hand roughly and pulls it away from the cupboard. She turns around and takes a few steps back holding onto the base of the cupboard, good deal frightened!

"Oh, sorry! Thought I might help you to open this. Looking for something?" Nontsikelelo asks, wiggling her eyebrows with an unpleasing grin.

She slightly nods and directs her to the plate with her eyes. “I just saw that!” she hisses. Her words are cutting off, she’s under a lot of pressure right now. Verbal communication isn’t her first language, remember?

Nontsikelelo looks at the dots of blood and chuckles, relaxed. “Oh this? My God, Dumile!” she steers the key and opens the shelf. She takes out a shopping bag. It’s dripping water diluted with blood. “I sent him to buy livers for me at Spar yesterday. I guess, he didn’t put them in the fridge!” she says, opening it.

Nosisa's lungs get a fresh breath from her inhaling and exhaling of relief. It’s really a weighed liver with a price tag from Spar. She looks at her food, she just lost her appetite.

Nontsikelelo drained the livers and placed them in the fridge, cleaning the shelf as well. She turns to her and smiles a bit, then passes by patting Nosisa's shoulder. She gives no namable way of being, she has a displeasing smile with some sort of murderous looks sometimes.

Nosisa looks at her food and grabs the dish, walking out to the front door. She disposes it to a pail where she was told food is thrown there for pigs in the neighborhood.

She goes back and has a buttered bread, then walks to the dining area. The couple is done eating. She clears the table and sweeps the floor. She washes the dishes and announces that she's retiring to bed. They say, Good night, in unison while cuddling up in the couch watching TV. She nods and walks away.

She walks in getting a chilly greeting of an open window. She stands there for a moment, thinking. Now she is very sure that she closed it.

She looks around, searches the wardrobe while tiptoeing. Bends down to look under the bed. She doesn't find

anything in particular. She closes the window again and walks back to lock the door. She leaves the key in there.

She looks at the shelves against the wall beneath the window. She kneels before it and grabs one. There are three of them wired with spider webs. She looks at the one that has a thick length, an ancient tome. She puts it aside suspecting that it might be nothing but a pious book. She has no interest in religious books at the moment.

She grabs the second one, it is naked, torn and a bit burnt on the edges. Its colour was maybe white until it caught water and someone dried it up on leaping flames, it gives that idea in her mind. It's an interesting one even though it has no covers or what so ever. She peruses it and noticed there are missing pages. A highlighted sentence catches her attention. She holds on and runs her eyes over the small text; 'A great story starts from the beginning, but a thrilling story starts from a prologue giving you a glimpse of what happened in the middle of the...' she sighs, seeing that the quote is not complete. It's burnt all the way to the end.

She re-reads it though. She looks at the first huge book and thinks to herself, 'Let me check what's in here!'

She pages it and in the middle of it. She finds a paper, a purely white one. It is folded dapperly. She carefully unfolds it and moves to sit abreast the night lamp.

The note reads: 'When I woke up the next morning, I was drowning in pond of their misdeeds, house no. 237. One step in is an impossible step out. With the terror of the scaffold, I placed a full stop and closed the chapter of my life!—N. Siduko'

A giant shadow runs by the window and followed by a shorter one. Nosisa looks up frightened. There's no movement afterwards. She feels the urge to look behind her. She notices a shadow drawn underneath the door. The latch is moving. She opens her drawer and holds her pepper spray. She slides underneath the bed, shaken!

## NOMATHEMBA

Just as dusk slithers, the day bleeds into nightfall with her trying to come to terms that she lost the baby. She'll just crouch her legs in bed, skulk from the rest of the universe as per her mother's orders. Nobantu has always been stringent, but evil? It's hard to swallow that much of a larger pill.

She's convincing herself that maybe Nobantu took her baby somewhere safe. Well

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that thought is contradicted by her own childhood experience. She vividly remembers, when she spoke out and told Nobantu that Mawethu is touching her genital parts inappropriately. Something Nobantu could've prevented as a mother is what she motivated in a way. One can not even call what Mawethu did an act of vicarious depravity. Nobantu chose to insult her daughter instead of lending an ear. She called her names, an evil child; a curse and a disappointment of a spoiled brat!

Out of her vein of musing, she's pulled by a loud chime of her cellphone. "Hello," she snorts as if suffering from a blocked sinus.

"Thembi," it is a voice of a familiar man, sounding very much sober than the other nights. "I have been trying to reach you. We need to talk!" he says.

She scoffs in disbelief— typical married men! "Now you want to talk?" asks Nomathemba, hoarsely.

"I told you I'll call. We need to talk," he pauses. She scoffs again and listens to him continuing to say, "I want to be involved in the child's life, but Nontsikelelo must never find out!"

"There is no child Dumile. The baby is dead, okay? Now please leave me alone. Ndizilile!(I am grieving!)" the unbridled words slip out of anger from her trembling lips.

There is silence containing disquietude from the caller's side. "What? How?" he's walking about the bushes in the middle of the night with no moon nor stars. He doesn't know half of it, he'll never know!

"What do you mean how? Am I not telling you that the baby is dead? It is not breathing, that's how it is dead, Dumile!" she drops the line, fuming.

She sits there chewing her nails with her mind coming into realization of the highest possibilities of her own words being true. She drowns in suspense, doubts and sorrow. There's a strong feeling of grief right in the horizon of her heart. It makes her drown in acquiescence of despair. Yes, it is pushing her right into the anguish of giving into depression!

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However, somewhere in the veld a shepherd collects the flock of sheep from graspable fields. The fiery ball is hurrying to it's



mother's dun breast beyond the mountains. It is a cold evening with frost gently laying flat on the grass.

The man pauses his humming hearing an odd sound. He looks around hoping to see a female walking by with a baby at hand. None of that appears in sight from all the directions. He stands still and listens again. A baby's cry—it's faint and more of a hiccup soft than the basing hiccup of an owl. He hesitates to follow the sound, high chances are it is just the dark spirits of the night. He fails to ignore it though.

He follows the sounds until he steps back, his heart slamming hard against his chest as if it's a stone thrown afar. It stops beating for a second.

"Thixo, mthetheleli wezono. Haa!(God, the forgiver of our sons!)" The sight is blood curdling.

The baby is wailing surely being devoured away by the cold. He is naked with arms cut off, in a pool of frozen blood. The man closes his eyes and turns his back on him. A tear falls, he's never seen such. The cry dies down and he closes his eyes knowing that he's dead. He hurries to the closest homes to

report the incident! “I have never seen such cruelty. Jesus Christ what has become of our nation?” he keeps murmuring in total shock.

NTSIKA

It is now past midnight with doctors walking in and out of that room. Machines are beeping loudly with nurses shouting, grabbing and injecting his brother. No updates. He’s dying from suspense. He’s pacing around and sinking in the steel chairs.

Faku gives him a cup of coffee. He gets up on his feet and throws it in the bin. His father sighs in disappointment, but he doesn’t say anything.

“Where is he Ntsikayekhaya?” a bold female voice echoes right behind him.

Oh yini na, Satan does it have to be now? He turns around to his Aunt, Nomaza. A lady of class, curvy and wearing a flawless skin. “He is still-” he is cut off by her rumbling voice, scowling at him.

“What happened? Phuthumani never suffered from any epilepsy!” she stares at him for answers. She has her keys jingles on her marital finger wrapped with a gold stone. She’s with a knight-like build man with a shiny long beard, carrying her purse. That’s Nomaza for you.

“Stories, stories! Ay, wena you are just an excuse of a brother. Even every time that boy comes closer to you, this happens. You never fail to disappoint him!” she sputters the words. Her husband is rubbing her naked arm seemingly trying calm her down.

“It was nothing like that Sis' Aza. I swear, I had nothing to do with this. It just happened...” Ntsika shrugs, rubbing his face with emotions risen. It’s partly true, it is his fault. He should have taken him away earlier.

“It just happened? Ntsikayekhaya your issue is that you never listen. Awuva maan! How many times did I-” she averts her cold stare to Faku as he interferes. Ntsika tenses up knowing very well that these two are like water and oil. When he found out about his father, Nomaza said he shouldn’t go anywhere closer to him. She said he is dangerous and that he will ruin his life.

“It is not his fault. A seizure can happen to anyone. It’s a health-”

Nomaza hits the floor with her long pencil stilettos charging towards Faku. “And who asked for an opinion coming out of that stinking hole you call a mouth?” she throws a hard slap right in between his eyes.

Wrong move! Faku jumps up to retaliate, but then his arm is held roughly by the man. They hold a stare before he slips his hand off and tries to reach Nomaza. The man pushes him violently to the wall. Faku heaves a deep sigh and coughs looking up. Int’ ezingancamiyo ke madoda! (Those who do not

give up!) He's avoiding the man's gaze, but charges to Nomaza. That lands a punch in the face so much that he falls back to the wall.

"Oga, why is dat you come for my woman when I am standing right in front of you? Hee?" the man roars and clicks his tongue, "Mxm, Idiots!" with Nomaza now pulling him away.

Ntsika is taken aback—E-hee, an Igbo man? Nomaza will surprise you shame! He escapes to the bathroom leaving the security guards taking care of the fight!

Sweat drips from her body dripping to the floor as it just silent in the room. She shivers from cold with the night breeze peeling her skin sharply as if a middle is piercing her into pieces. She watches the key falling on the floor. The door slowly swings open with a shiny pointy black shoe tapping the carpet. She looks up the bed and slowly tucks the pepper spray on her waist. She holds up on the iron bars of the bed and aligns herself with it. She's as tall as the bed, she slightly forces her feet to fill the small rings of the fence molded to hold the mattress.

At least now she's on the floor that might be easier to notice and she's wearing a black T-shirt. She watches the feet of the man standing in from of the closet. He walks to the window, then to the bed. Her heart slams, slams, slams and stops when he bends down. His fingers holding the bed right next to her waist. She closes her eyes and says a short prayer. If she knew how to pray, she would've began a long time ago.

His eyes dart underneath the bed before he goes up on his feet again. He touches the blankets and smells them before huffing. He quickly walks out of the room. She takes a breath and takes out her phone to text Ntsika again. He's not answering any of her texts. She's the only one who can rescue her right now. She waits for him to reply but nothing.

“With or without you, I am going back home first things tomorrow. I'll survive this and leave this place on one piece!” she hisses under her breath. She didn't sleep a wink. Dawn came and she saw lights flickering by the window. She sat still and kept checking the time on her cellphone. At six o'clock sharp she slides off under the bed.

The window is opened and those books are placed on top of the shelf with the third one opened. She looks around and walks to it. She runs her fingers down it and sees an underlined text, then a comment scribbled with a red pen.

‘And so you can run but definitely can’t hide from it. Azazel is everywhere almost like a deadly contagious disease. My dear children, you need to pray—’ it reads.

She looks up at the whole book and notices that it’s a more like Bible. The book of Revelation. What is Azazel? She’s never heard of the name before. The book is perused by the sharp wind from the window and it closes on its own with a bang. She staggers back frightened.

She walks to the wardrobe and takes out her clothes as quickly as she can. She starts packing and searches her denim jacket. She finds a Sim card and sits down. She swaps these Sim cards on her phone and send herself texts. She replaces the Sim card with her original again. She then gets dressed and does a breathing exercises.

She stares at the text on her phone and starts screaming. She lets tears fall and sinks against the night table. “Yhiyhoo, hi-hi!” she’s placing her hands on her head.



The door swings open with Nontsikelelo and Dumile walking in. They hurry to her as she cries hysterically. “UMakazi! (My Aunt!)” she calls out kicking her legs as they hold her.

They exchange looks a bit confused, they say something but she doesn't hear a word. By the looks of their facial expressions they are on her side here. She continues crying and throws her phone away. Dumile grabs it and pages it. He runs his eyes on the flashed screen and goes pale looking at Nontsikelelo.

“What is it Dumile?” she asks.

“Her Aunt passed away. Apparently she was the one looking after her mother and stuff. I didn't even know that Gqobodwana long stopped doing that. Poor MaDlomo!” he reports.

“Oh, shame. She will need our support!” Nontsikelelo says. Nosisa cries louder with her other eye studying their lips as they talk. She loves the dances of their lips at the moment, they are pleasing.

“Shh...Don’t cry Sisi, it’s gonna be fine. We will drive you to your uncle and back home. We are so sorry!” Nontsikelelo says.

They give her a glass of water so she’ll calm down. She stares into space in hiccups. “I need to go now. My mother surely needs me!” she says after some time. Her phone beeps and she sees a text from Ntsika. She quickly texts back while tears fall more just so these two will think she’s talking to the uncle that sent the message.

‘WAIT FOR ME BY THE MADEIRA STREET NEXT TO THE FINIX BUILDING (OLD MUTUAL)’ she taps send, then deletes it immediately.

“Oh this uncle is very unthoughtful. How can he just throw a text like that?” Nontsikelelo say. Dumile walks out to get the car read.

In a few minutes, she's at the back seat staring out of the window miserable with her bags. They driver her to the old mutual building, going up the small town of Mthatha. There are few streets and the main Street of the York road leads them straight to the building. They park in front of it.

Nosisa takes out her bags and walks out of the car. “We can wait for you and take you back. You don't have to wait for him,” Nontsikelelo offers. Little develina!

“No, it's okay. I'll manage. Thank you very much!” she says before walking inside the building.

She gets into the elevator noticing they are still parked there. Of course, they don't fully buy that story. She gets off on the fifth floor and walks down the corridor, looking for the bathroom. She gets to it and quickly changes her clothing again. She pulls a black pencil skirt, white T-shirt and a black pump. She looks at herself in the mirror. She nods, looking a bit formal like the ladies she usually see around here, wearing formal black and white.

She walks out and takes the elevator to the first floor and walks out through the parking lot to the other side of the building. She looks around and walks up, then notices Ntsika's car. She has lost them. She's sure they are still waiting.

Ntsika walks over to her looking like he was hit by a bus. He looks at her with a distant look before just throwing himself in her arms. She's supposed to be the one doing that. He holds her tightly, snuggling up on her neck. She wiggles her eyebrows in confusion and holds him back.

He pulls away and smashes his lips on hers, hard and very intimately. His hands roaming around her upper body steadily. She can feel him humming against her lips, she's trying to catch up with that, it's hard. She leans against the car with him pressing his body against hers. He's so hard down there and his breath has changed. That makes her a little bit damp down there, but they are in public. What is wrong with his mind? She pulls away and slightly pushes him back. He heaves a deep sigh and rubs his face. "I missed you. Are you okay?" he asks after sometime of catching a breath and collecting himself.

She releases a thin smile and nods. "I'm okay. Thanks for coming!" she says. Part of her is wondering why he wasn't answering her text messages. What kept him so busy that he couldn't get even a second to reply to her text? She could've died in that haunted house!

He nods and gets the door for her. She sits in and closes her eyes feeling a sharp pain from abdomen. She takes a deep breath and sits still. She feels sleepy with her head heavy as well. The cramps go hard down there. Her lower back is in pain too.

“Are you okay baby?” Ntsika asks, starting the car. She nods.  
“Are you sure? You’re sweating!” he’s searching her gaze.

“I’m fine Ntsikayekhaya. Just drive the f\*cking car!” she scowls at him and moans at the pain, sinking on her chair. One would swear her cycle is closer. She gets very sick when she’s nearer those days.

He steals a quick glance at her and looks away again. Something is off with him. “Period pains?” he’s looking back at her again. She looks away and nods, she thinks so. He doesn’t say anything

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of course he can’t because she’s looking far away from him. That’s a dismissal.

He turns on the music and gets on the quiet road. The time is half past seven now, the market is getting crowded.

He parks the car by S&P and walks out leaving her behind. She feels nauseous too. She looks around the car for any sweets of some sort to get rid of the nasty taste on her mouth. She ends up opening the car compartment hoping to find something. Her chest vibrates as the heart slams it hard, she can feel it on her mouth.

The door goes open and Ntsika jumps in. He looks at opened compartment, then back at her. She's startled. He wiggles his eyebrows once and fastens a seatbelt, something he hardly ever do. He places the shopping bags on the billboard and closes the compartment.

She looks at him. Is he not going to say anything? "What are you doing with a pistol Ntsika?" she hisses.

He looks at her and parts his lips only to suck a breath and close them again. He takes the shopping bag instead and takes out a lemon juice. "Do you feel any nausea?" he asks with a soft gaze fighting her conflicted stare.

“Ntsika!” she manages to say.

“Baby I am so tired right now. Please, let’s just not fight. Are you feeling nauseas or not?” he raises a brow at her.

She frowns, “I am...” there is no point in continuing with a struggle alone. He’s so laid back and she’s just angry. How she wishes he was Walter, by now he’d be studying her fast hands, the sign language!

“Okay...have a drop of this. I’ll take you to my flat in Southern wood so you’ll freshen up and rest,” he hands her the lemon juice. She does exactly that. He gives her a bottle of water and pain killers to.

He gets into the road without handing her one of those crispy looking things in that shopping bag. She’s suddenly starving. Is he not going to ask about what happened in there? Something



is wrong with him today. 'Simakade, let it not be cheating. It's too early for that. Hayi ndiyacela!' she looks away getting caught staring intensely at him.

In a twenty minutes drive, it is silent with just nervous glances being exchanged. She's seeing it now, Ntsika is the one carrying a heavy load than hers. He's the one who needs her more than she needs him. Her dark lonely hour has passed and she's in relief. It doesn't matter the time he came by but he point is he came through for her. She punches her lower back a bit to put ease to the cramps.

He slows down getting into the beautiful place of Southern wood. He parks the car by a line of flats and goes off. He slides the gate open and goes back, driving in slowly. The music is flowing alone, he's absent minded. His body is here with her, but the mind is on the side of the other town—maybe Port Elizabeth!

They walk out of the car to his flat. It's a three roomed flat. She looks around the small kitchen, a lounge nicely combined with a dining area. Then his bedroom with a door leading to his bathroom.

He places the bags on the sofa behind the door. "I'll run you a bath," he mutters. He looks drained. She looks around the room, it has a soft touch of black suede and brown fine wood.

He comes back and stands there staring at her. She turns around feeling his stare. "You can go in. I'll give you some space," he walks past her.

"Ntsika?" she calls out.

He stands still not turning around. "Are you okay?" she asks.

He turns around and nods. He lets out a tiny smile trying to convince her. She nods, definitely not convinced. He should do better next time. She walks to the bathroom with her toiletry bag and her phone vibrates. She slips it out and stands against the wall. She goes through the unsaved number's text.

‘HEY MY LOVE, IT’S ME— WALTER. I JUST WANTED TO TELL YOU THAT I’M BACK IN TOWN. I CAN’T WAIT TO SEE YOU AGAIN. I MISSED YOU SO MUCH. I BROUGHT YOU SOMETHING NICE FROM HAVARD!’ She gasps and holds onto her waist.

Where did he get her number? She changed it after months since he’s departure. Their relationship wasn’t working for neither of them. She has moved on. ‘Yhoo!’ she holds her lower dry lip in shock.

NOMATHEMBA

A hard knock comes from the door and it swings open without her answering. It's Nobantu. "Vuka, vuka!(Wake up, wake up!)" she slaps her feet. "You have to take a bath and join the meeting gathered up in the board!" she's breathing heavily and pacing around.

Nomathemba frowns, "What am I going to be doing there?" she asks.

"They found the baby in the veld. Dead. Now they want to test each and every maiden around this village. MamTolo, the old woman who's an expert in virginity testing will be inspecting your breasts. She will tell if who had just given birth a few days ago!" she tells her.

"Mama? My baby is dead? Is that what you are telling me?" the pain gets extreme. Her heart goes ice cold and more of a stone. She has had only the bitter part of this life, but this—it has killed her.

"Yewethu, wake up and freshen up. We have to show up there. I don't want people suspecting anything. MaFaku admires you for her brother's son, I'd hate it if you'd miss that opportunity.

That family has everything to set a woman for life!” she is drumming her hands against the wall.

“MaFaku?” the only Ndamase's this side are down there by the school. Faku has no son in her age. Bhut’ Jamangile is way older than her and already engaged. Who can that son be?

“Yes...the woman from the Kingdom what-what church! We usually meet in our conferences and pastors appreciation. Her brother knows you. They admire you and you are not going to humiliate me,” she says.

“But Mama, how can you do this to me? Of course, one can tell I just gave birth. I can hardly walk a long distance. I’ve lost weight and-”

“People know about your upcoming operation, you have an issue with an appendix church members will be here to pray upon your total healing. Even your father knows it, you better not mess this up. Wena ungumakoti wakwaNdamase wangomso! (You are a future daughter in law of the Ndamase’s!)” Nobantu says before slamming the door on her way out.

12

Days went by until it was a week later. In the evening the local traditional doctor, Qwakaza welcomes a tall man in a brown overcoat and a black wooly hat.

He takes off his shoes and sat down on the reed mat. Qwakaza sat on the tree log before him. The night is graced by a piece of a moon, half of it with stars tossed all over the sky.

“Dumile...how can I help you? Are you in trouble at work again?” the woman asks, there’s a mischievous smile.

He shakes his head off, “I wish it was one of those!” he answers.

“What is it then?” she blows her nose on her dress.

“I...I failed to slaughter the goat. She slipped right through our fingers. I don’t know how,” he reports.

“Who was she?” she asks, staring at him from the corner of her eye.

“The deaf girl,” he states.

There’s silence with Qwakaza tending on the fire. She sucks a breath with her teeth and sneezes a bit. “What happened?” she asks.

“She was...very alert-”

“Unlike the deaf girl you anticipated she would be?” she stares at Dumile as he nods. “That’s your problem with you all people. You underestimate others. Anyway, I don’t see why she would escape. She doesn’t have any special gift or strong ability to foresee things. But...” she taps her pointy finger on her side of the forehead. “She is intelligent. Very good with mind games!”

“I know that. I saw it the minute she disposed food in the trash bin. Turned down the cakes, but something else is with her. Throw the bones Qwakaza, please!” he pleads with her.

She sighs and picks up a pouch of her bones. “Blow!” she instructs him.

He blows in twice and she closes the pouch. She shakes it with her beads making that creaking sound. “Mhm!” she inwardly calls out to the darkest spirits of the world.



She gets sweaty listening attentively to the other spirits giving her answers. She tosses the bones on the floor. Twelve bones. She reads them and looks up at him.

“Mhm, Ndiv’ ingoma, vuma! (I am hearing a song, strike chords with me!)” she starts interpreting.

“Ndiyavuma!” he claps once.

“Nosisa is on a journey...she has a purpose...vuma!” she sneezes, whipping Dumile's face with the ox's tail.

“Camagu Mama!” he’s nodding even though he doesn’t understand.

“Ludondolo lwesithunywa sezinyanya zamathile... (She is a stick to measure depths of streams for an angel of unknown ancestors...)I can't see the man but she's here to seek comfort. There will be a time where she'll sing a song...tables will turn and her foes will leave to regret. Are you ready to be one of those?” she shoots a bouncy gaze at him.

He sweats and shakes his head off. “But she knows too much!” he warily says.

“About what? You or the demon you accepted?” she's collecting her bones.

“What are you talking about?” he hisses. He is not ready for this conversation.

She steals a quick glance and tends the fire. “The lesser God who’s fed from sin that you now worship!” she sputters the words.

“How do you know about that?” he is sharply, staring at him.

“About what? Azazel? Dumile I strengthened you when you were only a month old. I was there when your mother gave birth to you. I know you in and out...I am telling you now, that demon will destroy your life!” she warns. “You need to leave. I have clients to attend to!” she dismisses him.

A knock comes at the door as he was about to speak. He sighs and drops his eyes in shame. Maybe it’s time he gets rid of Nontsikelelo and her extreme sinister acts.

He walks out and stares at the woman walking in. She’s carrying a rusty tray with arms of a baby. His heart slams hard as he

turns around staring until she disappears to the inside of the rondavel. She's wearing a long coat and covering herself with a black scarf, then pulled on some shades. Black lipstick and long glittering nails. She's a goddess. He walks away wondering if who's baby is that? Who is grieving after such a cruel act?

However, Nobantu took off her scarf off and unzipped her boots. She places them carefully behind the door. She takes off her shades and smiles at Qwakaza.

“Ah, Nomqwakalala! I brought your things...give me the magic my friend!” she takes a sit with the tray.

Qwakaza looks at the pale flesh of body parts. She shakes her head defeated. She has seen a lot of things before, evil and cruel acts, but this one takes the trophy!

“You want your daughter to become the most influential and lovable lady amongst the society. Why not bring her to take the oath herself?” she asks, tending on the fire. She picks up the body parts and places them away.

“She is not like me. She’s...soft. I need to get her to toughen up first!” she says.

Qwakaza laughs hysterically and throws her head back. “Is that what you think of her? Nomathemba? If she is, how was she able to pull up a straight face with maidens of this society and got inspected knowing fully well that she is the mother of the painfully murdered innocent baby?” she asks.

“You think it was easy? I had to pull up my sleeves and petticoats for that to happen. I gave her no choice at all!” she shrugs, fanning herself from the smoke.

“One day she will surprise you to death!” Qwakaza says. She sees beyond the eye of a human being. She knows secrets of secrets. She lives in the dark to see the light. Somethings she has no control over, but let them unfold on their own.

“Start the ritual. I need to make my wishes to the oracle!”  
Nobantu boldly says.

NTSIKA

He throws himself into the dam and swims down. He drowns himself floating back and forth. His mind still filled of a lot think of. His hands feel like they are cuffed. He’s forced to choose in between the only family he’s ever knew and the newly found one. He never thought it would be this difficult to choose.

One of his friends, the most intelligent Zuko said, Faku will always be his father. No matter what happens, he’s apologized.

Put some effort in rekindling their relationship. He deserves a fair chance because life is too short.

He thinks he's right. He's been giving him a cold shoulder. Seeing him suffer as he would just throw everything he does back at his face. This is his parent one that he never had. It's not like Nomaza cared that much for them either. All she ever did was gallivant around with rich married men. And she finally found one to trap him with marriage. A Nigerian at that. That might not even be genuine, she's sure paid off to help him get some a South African permanent citizen. She has no right to take away his brother. Where was she when their grandmother died? When he had to go out there and hustle for Phuthumani to get soccer boots, full school uniform and go to model C schools? Go and study in a private and expensive multiracial schools in Cape Town? He's the best brother to him and he did his best he could to give Phuthumani what he never had growing up. How dare she judge him and make him choose?

It still doesn't make sense to him that his mother disappeared when she was about to get married to Faku. If so

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how did she give birth to Phuthumani four years later when she left when he was only three? It doesn't make any sense.

He takes a breathe, gasping as he floats up from under the water. He wipes his eyes and sees Nosisa sitting down next to his clothes.

They haven't really talked since that day. She tried comforting him and got her to talk. He told her, but she didn't say anything. Not even an 'everything is going to be fine' kinda stuff. He is somehow bothered by her not having a say to the biggest crisis of his life. He expects her to say something!

She waves and he waves back. He swims out and she throws a towel at him. He chuckles with her avoiding looking at his naked self. He dries himself up and pulls in some boxers and his pants.



He walks over and sits next to her. Kisses the back of her hand. "Hey..." he faintly smiles at her.

She doesn't answer. The look in her eyes is blank and it scares him a little. "Are you ignoring me?" she asks with her words cutting off. Her speech is almost inaudible. She's upset.

"What? No. I just...baby I'm not. We are fine!" he knows they are not. They haven't talked to each other for days.

She looks away for a while. "I know I'm not the ideal girl for you. I can't listen to everything you say and respond the way other people can. I know it is not easy being with me. You don't have to do this Ntsika. You can always go out there and meet someone..." she chews her lower lip, holding tears back. "I'm not the most beautiful girl in the world as well. I'm just me. Nosisa from a poor home. Never been in the university probably never going to set my foot there. But you...you have

everything Ntsika and I see no reason why you'd get stuck with me..."

"Nosisa!" he calls out, pulling her hand.

She drops her head in between her thighs and draws on the soil with her fingertips. "If you ever find that someone, please, do tell me. Don't string me along. Don't make a fool out of me. I grew up being a reason for people to laugh. Don't give them anymore reason. Just tell me and I'll take it like a man!" she hisses.

He throws his eyes around and wipes his eyes. This hurts. He takes a breath and there goes cold silence between them.

He holds her hand and she looks up at him. His heart shutters every time she throws that empty gaze. "Where is this coming from?" he mutters.

She drops her gaze and he lifts her chin up. She parts her lips to talk, but nothing comes.

He smashes his lips against hers. Pours his emotions in there. He goes slowly, easy before drowning deeper. He pulls out and looks at her.

“I love you Nosisa. I’m sorry I make you feel like I don’t love you enough. I do. I’ll never trade you for anything or anyone. There’s no one better than you. Trust me, I’ve been out there, seen the most beautiful ladies...I told them, I love them. Took many to bed, but it ended there. I’ve never met anyone who makes me feel the way you. The one who looks at me the way you do. Takes care of me, the one who’s opinion in my life matters. Every time I tell you that I love you, something moves inside me, it makes sense to tell you that. I want you not somebody else Nosisa. I don’t care what people say. To hell with your social status. I don’t care about anything. I just wanna be with you. If the timing was right I’d ask you to marry me.

That's how much I love you. It hurts sometimes because I always get this feeling that I love you more than you love me. Sometimes I just need to hear it from you in my own language—words Nosisa. Sometimes, I feel like I always say it first and that you never do. I always kiss you first, touch you and...sometimes I get this look from your eyes, so blank. Nosisa this is very easy you know. Just touch me, kiss me, send me a text and tell me you love me. Miss me more. Then you'll have marked your territory. Your insecurities are rooted there. I feel like you don't know what's expected of you in this. My love it's very easy just do me like I do you. Forget about our backgrounds and the world. I love you and that's all that matters to me, okay?" he wipes away a lone tear from her.

There, those emotions flooding into her eyes. She wants to say something, but she just can't say it. She keeps holding it back.

"I...I'll try..." she whispers. He sighs in defeat and nods. They stare and she moves closer. Holds his cheek softly with those tiny cold hands. She links her forehead with his and he waits impatiently for her to kiss him. She's scared, he can tell.

“Come on, you can do it. You don’t have to be scared!” he mutters.

She drops her eyes to his lips and leans in. He closes his eyes feeling his blood running all over, flustering his blood vessels. His heart races hard pumping more blood. He doesn’t return, but just enjoy her slight smooching on his lips. “Ntsika!” she hisses gritting her teeth slowly on his lower lip. He chuckles and responds with that slow pace of hers.

He pulls her to his lap and she voluntarily straddles her legs on either side of him. She moans kissing him hungrily when he slightly squeezes her behind. She’s a freak, he can tell. It’s always like that with the quiet type! He groans letting her grind on his hard tent. He pulls out kissing her neck and he is frightened to see some guy standing a few feet away staring.

He clears a throat looking at him. The man doesn't say anything. He's just hatefully staring.

He looks at Nosisa and signals with his eyes that there's someone behind them. She slowly turns around and tries to get out off his lap. He holds her waist tightly and looks at her with questioning eyes.

"You know him?" he asks. He's sweating at the reaction he's receiving.

She clears a throat and looks up at the guy. "Walter, what are you doing here?" she asks.

"I'm here to see you Nonny. Is this why you weren't responding to my texts? Him?" he seems very much good with sign language as well.

Ntsika slightly pushes Nosisa away from his lap. They stand up. Honestly, he feels threatened by this Walter guy. He's this tall and caramel-like guy with lips looking like some sort of a celeb. Even his English accent sounds different.

"We are not together anymore Walter. It's been three years. I had to move on!" she explains with her hands in support of that.

Ouch, so he's not her first! Her first is actually coloured and looks very much appetizing.

Walter chuckles and wets his cherry reddish lips. "We promised to be together forever Nosisa. You said you'll wait for me!" he takes a few steps closer completely ignoring Ntsika's presence. "You promised Nonny. You promised!"

## NOSISA

“We were young and stupid Walter. Don’t you get it? You are the one who even stopped talking to me first. It is so stupid of you to think that I’d take your word when you toyed with my emotions, lied and manipulated me while you were here. Life doesn’t evolve around you, at least not mine!” she protests.

“So now I’m what? A bad person? I loved you Nosisa. I loved you when no one, no one would look once at you way. I went out of my way to make you happy. When have I ever made you cry?” he attempts to touch her hands, but she holds on Ntsika’s arm. Ntsika confidently blocks his from coming closer, whoa ubhuti wakho!

“You know I may be deaf Walter, but I’m not dumb. You cheated on me with more than one girl. You made a fool out of me and somehow I ended up letting you be. I...I let you comfort



me with lies. I'm not the same girl anymore. That girl is gone so please, leave!" she boldly dismisses him.

"I never cheated on you Nonny. Those girls weren't sh\*t to me. They were just my sister's friends," he defends.

"Okay. Please, leave Walter!" she is not going to argue with him. Not in front of a fuming Ntsika. He's closer to blowing him with a punch right now.

"No-"

"She asked you to leave in two different languages. Which part of that didn't you understand?" Ntsika interjects, sending a cold stare his way.

“Who are you to-”

“And who the hell are you? The clingy and bitter ex she wishes she never dated?” he’s charging towards him.

Walter chuckles and looks at him from head to toe. “Wanna know who I am?” he tucks his hands on the pockets of his pants. “I’m her first everything, kiss, love and virgin-”

“I never slept with you. Gone are those days of you spreading lies about me to get a round of applause. He’s not one of your immature friends and he sure knows you never slept with me. Stop embarrassing yourself and get over it, somebody else saw something in me. And he’s way more attractive and mature than you can ever be!” she sputters the words.

He looks at her with disappointment, frustration and regret flashing in his eyes. His eyes go glassy, he has always been a guy that cries whenever they had a fight.

“Okay...I get it and I wish you all best with him Nonny. Just know that I may not have been the most perfect boyfriend for you, but I really loved you. I actually came back because in a few weeks I’ll be graduating as a formal priest. I wanted you to marry me because I have changed yet still very much in love with you. I wanted it to be you, but then I guess it’s too late. I’ll always love you Nosisa. Very much...” he pulls her hand places an envelope on her palm. Clenches his jaws with a suddenly red nose and red rimmed teary eyes.

She swallows hard and takes the letter. His gaze seems so sincere. He did promise to marry her when he makes it into his father footsteps. When he finishes his degree, he promised to come back for her. Take her to the cities and build a whole new life. Take her to college and help MaDlomo with her artwork. He had dreams of the two of them living happily ever after, but his actions back then were speaking a different language from his own tongue.

He turns on his heels and leaves. She opens the envelope and runs her eyes on it. It's an acceptance letter from Stellenbosch University and there's a scholarship. A tear falls and she quickly dries it.

She looks up at Ntsika and finds him leaning against a rock. He's throwing stones at the water a few feet away from them. She loves him so much. "I'm sorry!" she says, helplessly.

He looks at her. "It's okay. I'm fine," he shrugs before turning away to the silent dam.

She walks up to him. "You don't seem fine to me," she stands next to him.

“Why didn’t you tell me about him Nosisa?” he’s upset about it.

“You never asked,” she looks away from him for a moment.

“Why does it matter though? I chose you, didn’t I?”

“Of course, it matters Nosisa. You can’t be emotionally involved in our relationship because of him. And all this time I thought I was the problem. You made me believe I was. Now tell me, how does that not strike you as a matter?” he’s evidently frustrated, angry and disappointed.

“It didn’t matter to me Ntsika because I moved on, okay? It’s not like I know all of your exes!” she folds her arms giving him a look.

“But I don’t keep things from you. I never give you the wrong impression to feel special about it!” he shrugs visibly yelling at her.

“And I did that to you?” she raises an eye brow at him.

“You just did Nosisa. You let me believe I’m your first!”

“Why? Because I’m deaf? I can only luckily have a boyfriend at twenty one? You don’t think men find me attractive?” she’s upset too.

“That is not what I said!” he huffs, calming down. His own words are coming back to bite him.

“Then what are you mean Ntsika? That you being with me is a favor?” she chuckles in disbelief. “I get it. You are actually surprised I dated him. He’s almost at your level, handsome and sexy. Well, if it will make you sleep at night, he’s disabled too. Hence the fluency in sign language!” she turns around and walks away.

“Nosisa! Baby...” he is calling her out running in front of her. He holds her wrist. “Baby please, don’t go. Let’s talk about this!” he begs.

“No, thank you. I’ve had enough for the day already!” she slips her hand away from him with her letter falling out of the envelope. She leaves it behind unknowingly. He stands there watching her disappearing to her home side.

She gets home and lights the gas stove. She boils some water and washes her hands. She grabs the cabbage and starts chopping it angrily. How could he? What is wrong with men? Is

she that ugly? Why does it have to be her disability that defines her?

And Walter! That one is testing her. She applied every year in the universities for scholarship and fine arts courses. They kept rejecting her right through because she doesn't qualify. She applied in Lovedale and it was the same story. A week ago, she received a letter from this very Stellenbosch University and they had turned her down. Now Walter comes with a different response. It's obvious that he pulled some strings. And what happens when she goes there and that comes out? He might even use it against her. One can never trust a person. Walter is not a saint!

She stirs the pap and slows down the heat. She places the cabbage on the other plate. She pours some oil as if intending to fry some fat cakes. Ntsika! How dare he insult her like that? Mhm, her first? At twenty one? He must be sick in the head.



She takes out the envelope to look at the letter one more time before burning it on this gas stove in front of her. She opens the envelope and finds nothing. She pats the pockets of her pants, but finds nothing. She turns off the stove and walks out. She must've dropped it on her way here. She hurries out but comes across his father by the gate. He's from a funeral service around, he's wearing his preacher's uniform.

"Oh father, you are home already!" she says

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pretending to be just picking up some papers.

"Yes, I am back. Where are you off to?" he asks, closing the gate. He even locks it.

She smiles and continues to walk around picking up papers.

"Hayi, I'm not going anywhere Tata. I am just cleaning the yard!" she says.

He nods and chuckles walking away. “Alright ke masipalati! (Alright then municipality!)” he comments slyly.

Nosisa bites her nails praying that it doesn't find it's way to any wrong hands especially Ntsikas!

NTSIKA

He gets home still very much upset with himself and her. Why would she play him like that?

He decided to join his home boys in town at So-what lounge to distress.

“See, this is the reason why I never wanted to fall for no body. Women will drive you insane and act like a victim after that. They are bit\*ches from hell man!” Zuko says.

The others chuckle and he calls out for a third shot.

“So what are you going to do? She’s surely going to Cape Town next year,” Bandile asks, this one is from PE with him. They are childhood friends from Motherwell. He’s a model and a chef—biggest player in the game of dating. Got no commitments to anybody. And he’s a Mama's boy too.

“I don’t know man. I just wanted to get out of that village. The dust is too much for me to breathe!” Ntsika says. He grabs a cider from ice.

They all laugh at him. “Yhea, I can even imagine that. Chasing after a deaf village girl in competition with a Chris Brown like

n\*gga from Harvard with dope English and sh\*t!” Lungile comments and drinks his beer looking at him with an amused stare.

“Is she that good in dishing it up for you in bed bro?” Bandile asks.

“Never smashed that. NK turned into a pastor ever since he moved in there man. He’s changed!” Zuko shrugs with others giving him a look. “What? It’s true. Have you tapped it yet my guy?”

Ntsika opens the second beer in silence, they gasp with jaws dropped. He shrugs and drinks up.

“No ways. And you’re sweating like that beer you’re drinking, for what? No wonder this chick is doing you dirty!” Lungile goes crazy over the matter.

“My guy, you gotta lay down the pipe. Mark your territory or even worse, hit and run!” Zuko earns himself a dirty stare from Ntsika. He shrugs lifting up his beer. “You need to be in control dude. Or else you’ll lose it!”

“You really love her, don’t you?” Bandile asks.

“So much Bandile. I want to see her even at this moment. She’s...you won’t understand!” he lays back on the couch. “By the look of things I’ll lose her to that moron. I didn’t even know she’s interested in fine Arts...I’m such a bad boyfriend!” he murmurs.

Bandile shakes his head off feeling that one. “Listen man, you don’t need to compete with no body. Just show her where you’re at. It would be stupid of her to choose you over her career. And it would be selfish of you to expect her to do that. Now that’s one of your problems. Fix that and love your woman

right. Keep her happy and see if what else this other guy can do to win her over. I mean it's not like she didn't tell him off right in front of you. Meaning she's lost respect for him and earned more for you. From what you said, this chick is trapped in between a rock and a hard place. You need to avoid her choosing a devil that she knows, it's wisest thing to do. And you told her you thought you were her first, I'd go nuts too. She's not like any other normal person. She leaves with disability and that's how people define her. Rapists chase after her because they think that's the person who's never been touched. You're partly at fault here, but at the same time you need to find out what she really wants. You or him. Easy!" Bandile advises, he's drunk more than anyone around the table though. The others shrug. "Oh by the way, you got smash it before Walter hits it one more time!" he adds.

They release a loud gaffew and Ntsika blushes a bit looking away. "He never touched it! That I'm not worried about," he takes out a couple of notes to settle his bill.

“Don’t be so sure. Amankazana azakumangalisa kwedini. (Girls will surprise you boy.) Very dangerous, that gender!” Zuko says.

Ntsika chuckles and walks out without a word. He is not the ‘goodbye and how are you’ type of a person. If he arrives, he’s engaging himself to whatever people are doing. If he’s leaving, he leaves people in peace without a word!

He gets in his car and folds the letter. He throws it on the compartment. He’s murmuring a song to himself. He looks for an old CD and dusts it. He inserts it and plays some music, Celine Dion singing Think twice.

He grabs a bottle of water and drinks up and sinks on his seat. Beautiful ladies pass by exposing their skin, looking all fresh and sexy. Some wave at him and he slowly waves back like a foster kid in a foreign country, city and a new family.

He takes out his phone and types, 'I LOVE YOU SO MUCH SITHANDWA SAM. HAVE A GOOD NIGHT!' he taps, send. He then steers the wheel getting on the road.

His phone vibrates as he parks his car in front of the garage at home. It's a text from Nomaza. He opens it, 'I TOOK PHUTHUMANI TO ZITHONGA. HE'S WIDE AWAKE, BUT A BIT DISTURBED MENTALLY. ZITHONGA IS WORKING ON THAT, BUT HE'LL HAVE TO KEEP HIM AFTER HIS FULL RECOVERY UNTIL WE SETTLE HIS BILL. IT COSTS TWO COWS!'

See, she's updating him now that there's money involved. Why not pay it? Isn't she the rich and best Aunt in the world? He shakes his head off and for the sake of his brother, he responds positively. He's promising to settle it even though he doesn't have any money of that amount laying around. He has no choice but speak to Faku about it.

Well, getting off his car, he goes straight to his bedroom. He closes the door and sleeps.



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Well, the next morning he can't even bring himself into eating breakfast without seeing her. She didn't respond to his text last night.

He drives up to her home, he sees Walter from a distance just a few houses away from Nosisa's home. He slows down the car and watches. There's Nosisa standing before him. They are arguing with their hands going up the air.

He sits in the car and watches with his heart pounding hard. They argue and argue for quite sometime before Walter grabs her waist closer to him and leans in.

He closes his eyes with his blood boiling. Nosisa staggers back pushing him away. She throws a hot slap right across his face before turning around to leave. Walter pulls her back again attempting to kiss her.

She pushes him away and says something to him, seemingly defeated. Ntsika walks off the car before things get out hand. Bandile was right, she has to tell him what she wants. Is it him or 'him'?

He grabs the letter and walks over to them. She's alarmed to see him. He doesn't say anything but stands there. Walter rolls his eyes and walks away.

Nosisa walks over to him with a teary gaze. She's conflicted. "You dropped this yesterday!" he hands her the letter.

"Baby...Walter just came by to ask me about it. I texted him to come so we'll iron things out about this. I swear I didn't-"

He chuckles not believing his ears. “You texted him Nosisa. You f\*cking texted him!” he brushes his face feeling the hangover kicking in. He needs a glass of vodka before his head explodes.

She plays with her hands with words not making it out of her lips. “I...it’s n...” she closes her eyes in tears.

“I sent you a text last night. You didn’t reply and then you texted him instead. What do you want Nosisa?” he asks. He’s upset too. He’s shouting as if she can hear that.

She scratches her elbows as if cold. She’s sobbing with eyes sparkling with tears. She can’t speak. “Ntsika...” that’s all she can say for herself.

“What do you want Nosisa? Ufuna ntoni? Tell me!” he’s speaking slowly so she’ll get every single word he utters with his mouth. When she doesn’t say anything again, he nods. “Fine!” he walks away to his car. He drives off.

“You have been very quiet these last few days. Is everything okay my daughter? You are not your usual self!” her father wants to know.

She faintly smiles at him and sits between them under the tree shade. It’s been three days now, still no word from Ntsika. She sent tons of messages looking all desperate. He’s not saying anything just blue ticks.

“I’m fine. I just...Walter is back,” she says instead.

His father frowns, “The boy from the store? The one who helped you with your matric?” he asks. He always admired Walter.

“Yes, father. He says he’s done with his degree overseas,” she replies.

“Then you should be happy for him. Why are you so down?”  
MaDlomo caresses her back.

She faintly lets out a breath. “I am happy for him Mama. I really am. It’s just that his arrival made me realize how much of nothing I have accomplished after school. I passed my matric four years ago, but I haven’t done anything for myself. I thought by now I’d be building a least a flat in here. These two rondavels are falling off...we are still living off the social grants. It’s not what I wanted for myself after matric. I worked hard to get that admission to diploma to better my situation, but now...nothing is going right. I’m just stuck!” she shrugs, staring into space.

His father looks at MaDlomo and sighs sadly. “You are not stuck Nosisa. Look, this letter came by yesterday evening from the post. It’s from Ouma, she’s a white farmer in Cradock. My father used to work there as a jockey. I had written to her about your situation. She has agreed to take you in and train you as a horse trainer. I know how much you like horses. You will raise money for college and enroll earlier next year, then negotiate your working hours,” he tells.

She’s looking at the letter. “A horse trainer? This is super exciting, but it’s so soon. Sunday is too soon,” Ntsika flashes on her mind.

MaDlomo squeezes her hand. “You have said it yourself, time wasted never returns. Why waste time then?” she has a point.

She is happy about the opportunity. Having to do something else other than getting stuck in a home as a house keeper. Having to cry every night because she didn’t hear a child calling

her out to help with home work! She's suffered a lot in there when there was absolutely nothing interesting.

"Now go to the store while it is still early. Buy some tomatoes, onions and soup. Don't forget to get some Smarties with the change," MaDlomo says. She pats his father's lap. "Give her the money Gqobodwana kaloku!"

Her father frowns looking at his wife. "Smarties with whose change?" he asks counting a couple of notes. He pulls away his wallet from Nosisa, clearing his throat.

"You used to buy me ones!" MaDlomo shrugs.

"Mhm! Take," he gives the money to Nosisa.

She stands up laughing at them as they murmur to each other. They are arguing about it. She goes into the rondavel and changes shoes, then grabs a shopping bag.

“Don’t forget some Coke!” his father mutters as she walks out of the rondavel.

She nods and walks out of the yard. She runs down the gravel road to the store. She gets there in fifteen minutes time. It’s a bit far.

She greets a group of boys sitting by the corner in the shop. Some she went to school with, some she doesn’t know.

She walks in and buys what she needs and walks out. She also buys some butter milk with her pocket money. Have I mentioned it, Ntsika used to give her money sometimes! Her eyes fall on his car parking on the road—thinking of the devil



himself. He walks out wearing a black tracksuit. It looks like he was out to watch some football match.

She stands still waiting for him. He looks at her for two seconds and looks elsewhere. "Hi," she greets first as he approaches.

"Hi!" he says, passing by.

"Ntsika can we talk?" she turns around to look at him. He just stares at her and shrugs. She panics and takes a breathe. "Look, about that day I...what you saw isn't what it looks like. All of it. It's a misunderstanding that I just...look, I'm sorry, okay?" she's emotional about it.

He throws his eyes at the car and sighs. "I have to go. My father is waiting for me in the car," he doesn't wait for her to reply turns away.

“Ntsika please, I-” he just sighs as he turns his back on her. He doesn’t look back. He doesn’t think twice. It feels like he doesn’t care anymore!

She closes her eyes with tears racing down her cheeks. She quickly wipes them away.

She takes a breath and sprints out of the store. Her chest is in pains and her heart is no longer sore. It’s in a pool of blood, broken. That distant look in his eyes kills her inside. She’s been much in love with Walter in the past, but none of his acts once hurt her like Ntsika’s. She wants not to cry. She wants to be strong and let him be, but she’s desperate for his love. She yearns for maybe a last touch from him.

Today is a Wednesday and on a Sunday morning she’s leaving to Cradock. This means it’s over between them. She is never going to survive a long distance relationship with her insecurities.

She gets home and starts with the pots. She goes through her cellphone and blocks his number. It is better to just cut ties with him for good. It's clearly over. She dishes up for her parents and places her food away.

She stands by the window hoping to see him passing by seeking an opportunity to see her. He doesn't until the sun goes back home to cuddle in it's mother's dun breasts. She keeps wiping her tears. She's hurt and shuttered.

The day bleeds into night fall, she's wetting the pillow with tears and keeps turning and tossing in bed. She unblocks him and waits for his texts to pop in but dololo. Nothing!

She dials his number and hesitates not to press the green button. Oh, how she wishes she could hear, just the sound of his voice in that voicemail. It's so unfortunate, she can't. She

watches it counting down before it drops. She blocks him again and covers her head with the blanket.

Why is he doing this to her? Didn't he see the messages? The explanation she wrote? Did he even read those paragraphs? Oh, how she wishes she was a normal person! Somebody who can stand her own ground and stand up for herself. Explain the situation to him when the time was still right. She should've told him that it's him that she wants. If only her tongue wasn't so tied and words not burnt in her throat. Only if like Walter, he understood her first language too. Now he would know! She cries herself to sleep.

The worst part of it is that she's not about to let an opportunity of a lifetime pass her by. If Ntsika wants nothing to do with her, then it's fine. She will cry and let time heal her. She's sure that as soon as she leaves this village, she will forget. She's too good at goodbyes no matter how it hurts. Her tears are too quick to dry than falling. She cried so much growing up, it didn't change any of her situation. She prayed that God gives her friends she never had, He gave her Walter. And what did she do? Dated him and messed it up!

When Ntsika came by, she was already attracted to him in a way. But because she knew she needed friends than a relationship, she kept hoping they become friends. For the sake of always keeping him closer and loving him at a distance. She was protecting herself from this, loneliness and heart break. Then temptation and that burning desire got through her. And guess what? She just got burnt so bad!

NTSIKA

“I sent the cows. I hope he gets better,” Faku says.

Ntsika fixes his tie and nods before he starts the car. It's a Friday evening and he's driving to a church revival. He found no ground to say no after his father willing gave him the cows for Phuthumani to be okay.

His phone rings and he looks at the screen. It's Nomaza. He ignores it

but it keeps on. He grabs it, "Sis' Aza!" he calls out annoyed.

"Ntsika, I hope you didn't bring cows from that wizard's kraal. Phuthumani's illness was caused by the-"

"Then ask your sugar daddy of a Nigerian to buy the cows Sis' Aza. Aren't you the far too perfect and caring Aunt to him than I am?" he sputters the words. He's tired of being bullied by her. It's enough!

"Oh? So you are choosing him over us NTSIKA? After everything we did for you?" she screams to block his ear drums.

He takes a breath driving out of the yard. “You don’t get to run my life around Sis' Nomaza. You never did anything for us. Grandma did things for me and you stop acting like you care now. All you ever did was run around after married men. And it was fine, it’s your body, your rules, right?” he’s lost respect for her.

Faku keeps throwing his gaze back at his sister who’s sitting like a couch potato at the backseat. They keep smiling sideways and nod.

“Oh, wow! Okay, your ‘father’s cows’ are on their way back by the way. Obiyozo, my sugar daddy of a Nigerian called his brother to come and help. He’s a Dibia(Nigerian native doctor). Since Zithonga failed to help with the mental damage done. Just so you know, I’ll be there to pick up the pieces when things fall apart in that precious life of yours. Go on and let him ruin it like he ruined your mother’s life to get back at-” she holds herself back with someone seemingly stopping her at the background.

“Whatever, Sis’ Aza!” he’s done with a bitter her. This is his life. She had a father and mother growing up. Is it so wrong for him to want to catch up with one of the available parent? He needs a break!

He gets to the church for the three days revival. He sees Nosisa’s missed call, she tried calling. It must be when it was off. He needed sometime and a huge break. Everything is just too much. He will see her on a Sunday morning.

‘In the meantime, she must think of what she really wants. I’m tired of playing games!’ he thinks to himself. He switches his phone off and throws it on the billboard.

He walks into the church with Faku patting his shoulder happily. “Don’t be nervous here. Everyone is friendly. Just make sure you get to know people and socialize. You might even find investors here. There are many wealthy young entrepreneurs blessed by God!” he says. Ntsika nods while they keep nodding at people who greet passing by. Everyone is wearing expensive



clothes around here. Ladies are wearing long original weaves with perched lacquered nails. Some are just naturally beautiful, their bodies are to die for. They make him think of one person only at the moment. Nosisa!

They walk inside the huge Hall and ushers greet them with some much respect before ushering them to the front seats. They greet the old and young couples seated there.

He sits uncomfortably while the keyboard plays nicely with the worship team singing their lungs out.

A tall lady dancing and clapping to create the vibe in church stands forward to talk. Faku nudges Ntsika and whispers, "That's Ms. Nodayinge. She's our secretary back in the offices in the CBD. You'll work with her when you decide to join us!"

Ntsika nods, looking at this Zodidi. She's tall and a little bit curvy with an afro, she doesn't need to try. She's beautiful. "I see!" he says, seeing Nosisa on top of her. How he misses her right now.

"Hallelujah brethren's!" she shouts out with a huge voice.

"Amen!" they shout back.

She chuckles, confidently walking around. "Hayi, hayi...I can't hear you. I said, HALLELUJAH—" she shouts out.

They whole hall stands up and waves hands in the air shouting, "AMEN!"

She smiles, catching a breath. "Let me take this opportunity to greet our pastor Mr. Jolobe and our beautiful mother in spirit, Mrs. Jolobe...let us give them a round applause," she says. They clap, whistle with the keyboard ringing rhythmically. "And I greet our fathers, brothers, sisters in Christ, visitors and the Sunday School in the beautiful of Jesus Christ our saviour, Hallelujah?"

"Amen!" they chant.

"Eh...my name is Ntombizodidi of Nodayinge, I am saved. I love the Lord that gave in his only begotten son to die for my sins in the cross so that you and I can be given life to eternity. God saved my life from a lot of things and I am certain that He can also do that to you as well. Glory to Jesus," she says, calmly.

"Hallelujah!" they chant back.

“Eh, I am here to just to be your programs director for the weekend starting from now. Now I’m going to call upon Mrs. Siduko and her husband who took it upon himself to come and be with us in this revival Reverend Siduko. Mrs. Siduko will open for us with prayer also paving the way for Rev. Siduko to give us the lesson of the night. Thank you!” she hands the mic to Nobantu.

Ntsika frowns seeing a replica of Nomathemba. The surname is the same. He looks around and he’s surprised to find her seated in the front as well far on the other side of the aisle. She looks very pale than the last he saw her.

“Wabethelwa ngenxa yami esiphambanweni sehlazo ingakho ngikudumisa, ngithi uuphakem...” Nobantu sings with a very bold voice. A lovable and popular song by Kelly Khumalo featuring Hlengiwe Mhlaba. The whole congregation gets on its feet. They lift their hands up touched by her voice and vibrancy.

“Eh, My God!” she keeps saying before the song comes to an end. “Rikatharabasha!” she starts off with tongues with tears falling already. Ntsika is looking around all lost like a sheep left all alone in the veld. “Siza kuwe Thixo, sizomangala kuwe Thixo! Ilizwe libi moya wamandla. Siyakhala kuwe nkosh! Hearing a report of an child slaughtered and dumped in the veld is...akunyamezeleki Simakade. Kukrakra Thixo. Sithandezela abantwana bethu Thixo, bafihle Jehovah Elshadai. Oh, moya wamandla. Sithi fire kumoya wokuxhwilwa kwabantwana bethu! Fak’ umlil’ odlayo Thixo. Sithandezela iintsana zethu Thixo!” Nobantu cries hard. (We are praying for our children God!)

“Eh, My God—Mhm!” the crowd fall onto its knees crying.

“ Yini kangaka Bhelu leSabatha! Uthuleleni Thixo sitshabalala nje? Yi— ” she cries failing to continue. (We come to you O Lord. We are crying mighty God. We can’t endure this Alpha. It is painful. Why are you quiet God while we are getting destroyed?)

She just cries on the microphone and speaks in tongues!

“Eh, My God!” people cry more. This is the reason why they are gathered here. They are here to fight against such an evil spirit of children being killed so evilly. And Nobantu states the matter as it is to God. She’s touching hearts and making the whole congregation cry.

Ntsika slowly slips out of the hall and goes to his car. He searches his boot and finds an old box of cigars. He lights one and stands far away in the dark. He smokes and goes through his phone. He looks for Nosisa’s cellphone number and tries to text, but notices he’s been blocked. He frowns and runs to dial her number to call her even though he knows that’s an impossible trial. He calls and it tells him, he’s been blacklisted.

“Sh\*t!” he pulls in some more smoke. He hardly does this in fact he doesn’t anymore.

“You don’t smoke in church brother Ndamase,” a bold female voice startles him.

He slips his huge cigar burning his finger as he throws it to the ground. “Damn it!” he curses, quickly turning around. “Oh, umm...Ntombizodidi, right?” he brings out his hand for a handshake...

## NOMATHEMBA

In this course of a three days revival, she learnt only one thing. Life is a jungle itself—it's the survival of the strongest and an elimination of the weakest. It's an eat a dog or it will eat you!

She saw Nobantu praying in tongues and placing her hands on people's innocent heads. They fell, they were motivated to get born again. They don't know what she really is. Some maybe know, but they look past her mistakes and flaws and take only what's right. Some simply turn a blind eye in fear of the unknown!

She watched Mawethu sweating in that pulpit and preaching kindness, love and honesty. Is he honest, kind and loving? Nobantu praying about homicide and the cruel death of the babies whilst she's the doer. These two are a match made in hell. She keeps wondering if what would happen if she'd open her little mouth and chirp like a bird. Just to tell Nobantu of

what her dearest husband is capable of. One day is just one day. The truth will destroy her.

She has seen far too worse. It scares her, but will she ever be able to get away from here? They will always find her and probably kill her. She overheard their conversation. Mawethu said, 'Our kids live with us Nobantu. Everything we do, they can see. They know too much. It's either they join us or become the death of us!'

"Noma hi," Zodidi greets her after the service on the Sunday dawn.

"Hey Zods...how are you doing?" Nomathemba smiles giving her a cheek to cheek hug.



“I’m good. I’m good. It’s good to see you again in church Noma. You come once upon a time and disappear again!” Zodidi complains.

She sways her weave away from her face. “Well, it’s work. I get a little bit too busy and all, you know!” she shrugs.

Zodidi nods. “I heard you also graduated not so long ago. Have you found anything to do yet?” she pries. They went to school together and attended the same church. They used to be pretty much of good friends until Nomathemba chose a way Zodidi considered as a way to hell.

“Oh yhea, I’m a news reader and co-host at the campus radio for now. What about you? I heard you’re working for the Ndamases,” she decides to pry back as well.

“Oh, yes. I started working there after my matric actually. That’s how I managed to help make things better at home and study, you know,” she shrugs. Nomathemba just nods. “We should catch up sometime girl and you know just talk...”

“Of course. It was nice meeting you, Zodidi!” she touches her shoulder and walks away.

She walks over to the car and finds Nobantu standing with the Ndamases. She’s taken aback to find Ntsika standing here looking all bored too.

“Oh, you are here. Ms. Ndamase, this is my daughter Nomathemba,” Nobantu introduces her.

“Oh bethuna, is this her? She is so beautiful, taking after you. Hi Nono!” the woman greets, she’s light skinned with a wrinkled face smeared with foundation to make it look better.

She forces a smile and nods. “Hi Ma!” she hisses.

“How are you my baby?” she asks, really admiring her. This is too much, she’s not a kid anymore!

“I’m good thanks and you Mama?” she answers.

“I’m also good. Meet Ntsika, my nephew. In fact, Ntsika drive Nomathemba home and make sure she get there safe. We are remaining behind for a few things to iron up. Rev. Siduko will take us home!” MaFaku orders Ntsika. Ntsika simply nods and walks away. “Hayi Ntsika tyhini, sumshiya! Yehake, unjani na lo mntwana wamshiya ngoku!(No Ntsika, don’t leave her behind. Gosh what is wrong with this child!)” they all laugh at her as she tries to catch up with Ntsika.

He climbs into his car and ignites it while she climbs in too. He takes out a cigar and lights it before getting to the road. She doesn't remember him smoking before, things change...

The car is hooded with silence and she keeps stealing glances at him. He's still the same old Ntsika. Very calm and collected even when in a foul mood. He still chooses silence and sometimes he'd choose solitude.

"I heard you secured a tender for the cafeteria at school. I'm glad you're finally realizing your dream. I'm sure in a few years to come it'll be more than just a café," she starts off a conversation for old times' sake.

He drives down the gravel road and small paths in between the stamped homes carefully. "Thanks," he says throwing away the stomp of the cigar.

“How is Nosisa? Heard you guys are seeing each other now,” she throws her shoulders into a shrug hating the silence between them. Ntsika makes it feel like they are strangers. They used to vibe together, they were once a power couple. She was his five sixty and the main chick!

“Seems you hear a lot about me these days!” he picks up his chiming phone. He answers the call. “Eita!” he calls out sexily.

It’s his politeness, calmness and strong aura that makes it hard not to wish they were still together. For him to be hers, she’d give up everything, but hey...what could she possibly give? He’s over her completely. The sooner she accepts that maybe the better.

“I am going to her house now. I just hope she listens. I did the most horrible sh\*t to her man. I was a bit... you know—upset about the whole thing. She blocked the sh\*t out of me afterwards!” he tells the caller.

She listens carefully while staring at the cracking dawn of a Sunday morning. It's half past six in the morning.

"I guess so. I'll go strictly to her house. I think she said something about leaving in one of her texts. I just don't know where. The letter from Stellenbosch was talking about next year, right?" he sighs in frustration.

Mhm, so he is cheating on Nosisa already. She thought he was talking about her at first, but no. He's actually with a new babe from Stellenbosch University. Somethings never change. Maybe she should pay Nosisa a visit!

He drops the call and parks the car by her house. It's surprising to notice that he knows her home.

“Are you really a Ndamase?” she fails not ask. Her mind is going back to her mother’s words. Could he be the son?

“Yes Nomathemba. Now get off the car. I have better things to do with my time!” he roars.

“No need to bite my head off!” she rolls her eyes and goes off.

He drives off leaving a mountain of dust behind. ‘Ntsika Ndamase...Mr. and Mrs. Ndamase...Mhm!’ she smiles to herself imagining it written all over the stars breaking the dark. Her tears would be wiped away if that would come through.

NTSIKA

He is planning on sneaking into her yard and try to talk to her from the window. Or he will do it how her father does it, throw a stone underneath the door. She's a slight sleeper, surely she'll wake up.

He knows it's wrong and disrespectful

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but he needs to see her.

He parks his car two houses away and notice her father holding hands with her mother outside the gate. There's a van that passed by him when he turning by the store. What are they doing out there so early?

He gets off the car and swallows hard seeing no other way than this.

He walks over to them and greets. They greet back and exchange pleasantries. They seem nice, but of course they'll never be nice if he blows his cover.



“I’m sorry for coming this early. I just wanted to see the young lady who lives by here. The one who sells veggies from the garden,” he says. Nosisa told him, she sells the vegetables from the garden to those who wants it.

Her parents exchange looks even though the woman’s blind. “That must be Nosisa. What do you want from her?” the man asks. He’s the one who blessed his queen with the melanic majesty. The mother is light skinned and looking exactly like Nosisa. Now he gets where her looks come from. She took after both of them, but mostly her mother. The petite body with little curves spiced up here and there.

“Umm...I am Ntsika. I live by the store with my Aunt. We are new residents around. I took a bunch of spinach and never paid for it. I promised to pay when I get paid at work this week,” he lies.

“And so you came this early to pay for your debt? What’s the rush? It is only six in the morning!” her mother, MaDlomo cries out suspiciously.

Ntsika chuckles nervously scratching his forehead with his car keys. “Hayi, no. I was actually passing by to work Ma. And I saw you by the gate and remembered. I come home very late yilonto ndithe, heyi mandidlule ndize! (that’s why I said, hey let me pass by!)” he says.

There’s silence for a moment before MaDlomo clears a throat. “Well, Nosisa has just left for work. She won’t be around for quite sometime, but you can leave the money we will send it to her,” she reports.

His heart slams hard, “She...she left? To where?” he tries to sound calm.

“She got a job out of town. The local van just left with her. She is off to Ciskei. Now handover the money son. It’s cold out here,” the man says.

Ciskei? “Oh, umm...okay!” he slips out a two hundred note and hands it over.

“And how much is your change?” the man asks.

“Hayi, you can keep it bawo. I have to go!” he runs off to his car.

He starts his car and it roars before hitting the road on full swing. ‘Ntsika please...I'm sorry!’ her voice and words came back crashing on his mind.

He sees her smile, laughter and hears her soft giggles like birds chirping down the stream. Her touch, the texture of her lips—so soft and succulent in taste. He gets on the tar road and lets it swallow him.

The robots in eNkululekweni feel sorry for him and open up without him having to wait. He looks around Mthatha private hospital. That's where other buses park.

He goes in by the Spar, Kei cash and asks around. The men selling maize points him to the bus station. He parks his car and asks the Marshall.

“The buses going to Port Elizabeth Taima!” he impatiently says.

The man is fat as hell with his stomach closer to falling the ground. He has rolls on the back of his head with eyes huge and blood shot red. He looks at him and chuckles walking around,

indicating for the bus before him to move out. It is fully loaded. “You are late bhuti. The bus is full already,” he says before walking to the bus and hitting it.

“Ey, ey, drive out Tau maan!” he shouts. The bus slowly moves out.

“Which one is it? Is it gone already or what?” he asks, looking around hoping to spot her.

“Hayi kwedini maan! You are so annoying early in the morning. You are ruining my happy day—” the man says writing something down to his jotting pad. “Oh happy day—mhm happy day, happy day!” he sings out.

“Yeses maan, yerrr!” Ntsika curses and passes to the other guy standing at a distance. “Ola outie yam! Is the bus to PE out already?” he asks.

“Yhea, it’s that one!” the guy points at the bus driving slowly up the road.

“Ta bro!” he runs up there and tries to stop it. The drive doesn’t barge, what is wrong with these people. He looks around the windows and his eyes fall on hers. His heart beats hard and he puts his hands together for her to go off. “Baby please, don’t go! Let us talk my love...” he mutters with tears filling his eyes.

She swallows hard holding against the window in tears too. She shakes her head into a no. The bus stands by the tar junction. He begs with his eyes feeling his heart aching so much. She keeps shaking her head.

“I’m sorry Ntsika!” she mutters back.

“No...baby don't say that. I'm at fault here. Please, come back to me and let's fix this. I love you!” tears fall out of control. The bus coughs violently and moves to the national road, N2.

She draws out a sign with her hands and mutters. “I love you too!” and disappears.

He slowly walks back to his car and finds Bandile parking by. He had told him earlier, only him knows how he located him here.

He throws himself at the backseat and just bury his hands, sniffing. She doesn't love him, it's a lie. Why didn't she say anything about leaving? Why is she always prepared to just turn her back on him? Screw that Walter guy!

“She left Bandile...she chose to leave me here broken and hurt. Why?” he searches his best friend for answers.

“I’m sorry man. Just pull yourself together. You can still go after her. PE is our home, we own those streets!” Bandile tries to make him feel better.

“No! She left me Bandile! Why should I go after her? Why?” he wipes his face and lays back.

“Because you love her and you let pride get over you. Don’t you think she felt pretty the same way when you gave her a cold shoulder?” Bandile asks.

“Yima ke wena usecaleni likabani kanti? (Whose side are you actually on?) Hers or mine?” he gets worked up at Bandile's choice words. Yes, it’s true but did he have to rub it in his face?



“Your side dude. I’m trying to make you identify the problem here so you’ll come up with the solution!” Bandile shrugs.

Ntsika clicks his tongue and looks away. Fake friend! “You know what, just take me to Zuko's house. I know he will give me an advice of a lifetime!” he says. “I’m tired of being controlled and bullied by women I love. At first it was Sis' Aza now it’s her... it must be a curse!” he rumbles.

Bandile looks at him for a moment and nods. “You seem to find anything Zuko says right nowadays. So I’ll just take you to him as you wish!” he gets behind the wheel and drives him to Zuko’s house in Ngangelizwe township. Like he’s delivering a sack of potatoes, he leaves his car there and hikes back to fetch his own without breathing a word to him.

Part of Ntsika feels bad seeing his friend so down and disappointed. But he’s too upset with himself as well. Bandile will be fine!

Our story wraps around the days of our lives. Our dependence on friends, church leaders, life partners and the root of the devil (money). The ignorance people possess towards listening to their instincts and conscience in decision making. Forced relations, betrayal, twisted lies, temptation and spirituality.

The next morning in Cradock farm is bright and breezy. In the scenic-splendour-like farm horses and cattle still munch and graze fields. They snort and toss their heads in celebration of life. Some dawns are amazing when cracking with the mist, sometimes rising like a dragon's breath in between these tall towers and street lights of Port Elizabeth. It drifts up, circling the infrastructural art of the cities and townships like that of Motherwell, a township with black beauties. Cars hoot and whistles are blown calling out to hustlers herding down to North end and surroundings. It's far away from the farm.

Yesterday, when she got here everyone was waiting for her arrival. They seemed to well informed about her condition, some speak carefully with her. Some know sign language. Ouma said she will work in the farm's restaurant for three months on probation under her son, Owen's supervision.

He is a nice guy in his early thirties, he's coloured and a professional chef. He's the operations manager. She will get

trained in hospitality and culinary skills back in the kitchen. It's a skill Ouma believes anyone should have as a general farm worker. On the weekends, she'll go to the horses' training and learn everything about horses, from taking care of them, riding and racing.

She sweeps, dusts, unpacks and sets the tables. Turn around to the sizzling barbecues, smell of charcoal and burnt-meat that's surely mouthwatering. The pockets of that street vendor, car washer and taxi driver is going to be emptied as soon as the clock hits the hour twelve o'clock, the stomach will be growling for sustenance.

"Connie, are we hosting tourists only or locals as well?" she asks one of the workers on the floor.

"It's a mix. Taxi drivers, locals and tourists but most of the time it's locals," she tells her with sign language.

“I see, this is a nice place. How long have you been here for?” she asks.

“Twelve years, my Aunt used to work here. As soon as I passed grade 9 I got married, but then a few years down the line things didn’t work out. My husband left me with two kids, Wayne and Sabrina. I had to find work and I came here. Ouma gave me these skills and I chose culinary arts as my field of expertise. I love food as you can see, I’m a big girl!” she says, indicating to the flaps on her under arms.

Nosisa throws her head back and laughs. “I see. I don’t know if I can ever cook like that though. I always thought wine is only for sacrament in church!” she remarks.

Connie laughs joined in by a few of the chefs around them. She didn’t think they understand sign language and they are paying attention. She turns around shyly.

Glasses crinkle as she places them carefully over the counter, she begins to dust them off and display them beyond the bar.

She moves like lightening to the door and opens, changing the board into 'open!'. Owen walks in and smiles looking like a great deal cowboy in blue jeans, negligee brown shirt and a hat tied under his chin.

"Hi, you seem to be just fitting in fine," he says, walking to the counter. She nods, looking around. "I brought you this...it's an apron I won in my first international culinary competition in Mumbai, India!" he says, handing out the apron folded nicely. It's black and navy, the fabric is silk and rich.

"Oh wow...Thank you Mr. Owen. This is nice!" she smiling unfolding it.

He smiles tucking his hands in the pocket and smiles. "Tannie believes in you Sisa. Give it your best. By the way it's Owen...no caps on!" he pinches her ear a bit before disappearing to the kitchen. People here are really nice. All she needs is to just focus, forget about Ntsika, Walter or any sad story of her life. This dating thing is clearly not hers.

NTSIKA

“I don’t know anything about estates father. I think Jamangile should be in charge. He’s been in this for years, isn’t it?” he refuses the offer to be given shares of Faku's estate.

“Jamangile is not serious. He needs to grow up first. He’d destroy this company if we give him just a piece of it. You can always learn and I trust you to be a fast learner

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” MaFaku interjects.

“Jamangile has been working in this company for years Sis' Ndileka. He has done nothing but good to it. I’m not against Ntsika joining the company but giving him shares is extreme. My son slaved here for years. He started way before he graduated!” Nolwandile, Faku’s wife shouts, getting inside the boardroom. She pulls a chair with her nose flared up with anger.

Ntsika flinches and sits back on his chair running his eyes to everyone before him.

“MaZigaye, it is not about how long you’ve been in the game, but the only man that remains standing. It’s about guts and potential. Ntsika owns his own company that he started from the ground with no financial support system and that means he can take this company of ours places with the potential he has. And Jamangile? How many times did I keep giving him money for him to start his ‘dream construction company’? He hasn’t even bought a mere wheel barrow!” Faku says.

“Fine. I will tell him to buy a wheelbarrow then you sign some of the shares to him to. Ntsika do you also have a wheelbarrow?” Nolwandile sarcastically asks.

Ntsika picks up a glass of water and drinks it at one go. His head is banging badly from hangover. Zuko took him out of town in a

party in Elliot-dale where they partied until they dropped. He doesn't need this while still nursing his wounds from losing a lover.

“Nolwandile this is not a game nor a competition. If Jamangile was serious about business, then we would consider giving him a fair share of this company. We are not saying we will never give him, but not until he proves that he's worth given control over this company. There is no need for you to buy him a wheelbarrow either!” MaFaku throws a scowl at the woman.

Nolwandile scoffs with her fingers tapping on the table. “Is this about my son refusing to get married to a girl-”

“Okay, that's enough for me. I need to be somewhere. Under normal circumstances, I'd say it's good to meet you again MaQhinebe!” Ntsika folds his files and walks out.



He drives out of the North Crest to So-what lounge. He walks in and takes a sit by the bar. He calls for vodka on ice and drinks to calm down his nerves.

Everywhere he goes, there's always something to remind him of her. Giggles, smiles, dark skinned and slender ladies—they are haunting him.

“Give me more!” he places the empty glass before the bar man and looks around. It's quiet with only those who are here to discuss business around unlike him. He's drowning in his own sorrows.

He picks the glass up and stares at it, admiring it. It will make him forget everything about her. Just for a few hours. He's empty and absolutely nothing without her, but with alcohol he escapes that reality. It's been a day, but everything has fallen apart in his side.

He gets wasted to drown his thoughts until he feels alright. As Dax always says, one gets drunk because alcohol makes him feel like he's not alone. He doesn't want to deal with himself today or even tomorrow until further notice.

"I'm fine now! Ta outie yam! (Thanks my guy!)" he throws a couple of notes on the bar and stands up. He walks out feeling his head subsiding and his mind drifting off to another part of the universe, jubilee!

He hums a song getting into his car and drives back to the Ndamase estates' offices. He takes an elevator up to his new office.

He leans by the door watching Zodidi sorting his desk. It looks nice than it was a couple of hours ago. He likes the nice view of Mthatha West on the window behind the office desk. The office desk is huge with his swivel leathered chair behind and three others in front.

“I need a couch over there and a coffee making machine in that corner!” he says, startling Zodidi.

“Mr. Ndamase, I didn’t see you there!” she walks away from his desk and stands in the middle of the room.

He smiles a bit and walks in with a bottle of sealed vodka. He stole it right in front of that barman and found his way out at the door with it. “Are people in this building not drinking at all? Is it a holy ground here too?” he asks, placing his vodka down. He hasn’t seen liquor around.

Zodidi giggles cracking her long lean fingers. “Your father doesn’t drink, does he?” she asks too.

“Is that a trick question Ntombizodidi?” he throws himself on the swivel chair. His eyes are blood shot red and the alcohol in his system is doing a good job slowly but surely getting there.

“You don’t strike me as someone who drinks and smokes. The way you do things tells me you’re in some kind of trouble,” she remarks.

He inwardly drags a breathe and throws his eyes in the view. “Well, I drink Ntombizodidi. I’m not a saint. In actual fact andibuseli ndiyabutya utywala mna mtshana. Ndiyindlamanzi tot! (I don’t drink but eat alcohol. I am a heavy drunkard period!)” he tells her.

She slips a warm smile which is quite unexpected to him. “I can see that, but why? What are you scared of when you’re sober?” she asks leaning against the door.

“Scared...You make it sound like I’m a coward, but I’m not, maybe sad would be the word. I just got problems, but those issues can’t let me reach out...I feel good now. Beer makes me happy nowadays!” he shrugs and peruses the files before him.

Zodidi simply nods with a flash of pity moving past her iris. “You drove here that drunk?” she asks.

He nods. “Yhea!” he replies, concentrating on the figures on the file before him.

“You shouldn’t drink and drive, it puts your life in danger and others using the road as well,” she gives a lesson.

“I have to get places with a car Ntombizodidi. And I bought that car just like the bottle vodka here!” he is chuckling. Christians and trying to turn around and save the whole world— manipulative much!

“I can drive you around if you don’t mind. Whenever you feel this good just for your safety!” she offers.

He looks up at her and laughs. He drowns seeing that she means business. He chuckles again, “Are you dead serious?” he asks.

“Your father said I should follow you around and show you how things are done here. I think that’s a great start!” she shrugs.

He chuckles, “And what if I’m going clubbing?” he is opening his laptop to get to work.

“Then I’ll have to take you there, but I doubt that will take long. You’ll eventually stop after whatever you are going through passes!” she states.

There is no point in arguing with this one. “I gotta a chauffeur in the car, whoa!” he mumbles the song to himself watching her walk out.

He opens the bottle of liquor before him and drinks up one more time. He closes it and shoves it under his desk on the lower drawer. He sniffs and gets back to his laptop. He types a few things and browse on his mail box.

He blinks hard trying to keep his eyes opened. He’s feeling sleepy all of a sudden. He’s not the one to sleep when drunk. He usually gets active and energetic. He stands up and takes a walk around his office, just to fight the strong urge to sleep.

He keeps yawning and feeling very tired. Like a dog, he goes around round, then sits on his chair and lays his head on the desk. He falls into deep slumber as if he’s never slept before.

“Mhm!” he keeps saying while snorting in between.

As usual like how it happens when he is sober, he feels his spirit slowly escaping from his body. He sees the man containing his spirit being chase by a lot of people. They are calling out his name. “Ntsikayekhaya! Ntsika!” he’s confused and sitting in suspense.

The man suddenly stumbles upon a full and scary stream. He looks behind him and sees the attackers approaching closer. He’s scared to go into the water not knowing how deep this is actually is.

The stick...he lost it! “Luphi udondolo lwakho Ntsika? Luphi— (Where is your stick to measure depths of dangerous and unknown streams Ntsika? Where is it—)” he jumps out from the dream and holds his right ear. Did something just blow his ears? He looks around and notices the city is flickered on with



lights. It's dusk already. He slept for hours having the same dream being played again and again in his head. That voice was his grandmother's.

What does this means? Damn Nosisa! If she was here maybe she'd know. She knows these things!

^Unedited^

17

NTSIKA

“Ay Ntsika, what are you doing here at this time?” Bandile rumbles opening the iron bars in his flat.

Ntsika burps and checks the time, it is now a quarter past nine at night. He throws himself in struggling to walk properly. Bandile sighs watching him singing and throwing himself on the couch.

He checks out his car and sees it pulling away with a lady driving. She hoots and waves. He waves back and locks the bars, then slams the door.

“Please, call her for me—tell her I miss her. I can’t live without her!” Ntsika cries out placing his feet on the coffee table. “I know you are somewhere out there, somewhere far away, I

want you back...neighbors think I'm crazy, they don't understand, you're all I have!" he horribly sings.

Bandile holds on his waist and throws a fit of laughter. "Chai, I am in for a high jump tonight!" he doesn't forget to say that one with a Nigerian accent.

Ntsika throws his head back feeling the vibe to himself only. "Talking to the moon—trying to get to you—talking to the moo—" he sings carelessly. Bruno Mars would sure just die ten times and rise again from death like Lazarus after hearing this disappointment of a friend Bandile has!

Bandile huffs and stares at him, pitifully. He walks to the kitchen and comes back with water. "Just drink up. It's work tomorrow..." he hands them over. He walks away to his bedroom and comes back to throw a blanket and a pillow at him.

They go to sleep with Ntsika singing and mumbling things about Nosisa. He sleeps in tears right through his drunk mind.

Well, the next morning he wakes up in that couch looking around. He rubs his face recalling of last night. If it wasn't for Ntombizodidi he doesn't know what would've happen with him and his car. He's never been that wasted, ever!

"You are awake early!" Bandile says, walking in from his bedroom.

He stands up feeling rather so embarrassed. The last time they parted ways they were not in good terms. "I'm sorry man. I didn't mean to intrude. I just didn't know where else to go..." he says.

Bandile stares at him for quite sometime. "Coffee?" he passes to the kitchen.

“Yhea,” he says, opening the windows. He stands there and gets lost in his thoughts. Maybe it’s time to go to Port Elizabeth and look for her. It’s obvious he just can’t function without her.

“Sure!” Bandile hands him the coffee.

“Ta!” he takes the strong coffee. And moves to sit down. It’s a bit cold today with dirty pillows of clouds gathering around the sky.

“So, when are you planning on putting a full stop to your drinking habit? It’s beginning to annoy me to the core!” Bandile scowls at him. He becomes more of a parent when he goes out of the way and so does he.

He loudly sucks in a breath and sips the coffee. "I just...I miss her Bandile. I stopped myself from going to her home again yesterday. She's the best thing that's ever happened to me," he pours his heart.

Bandile chuckles, "This is odd. You don't even have a month with this chick and you're already breathing through the wound in her absence!" he remarks. If he was once in love before, he'd understand where he is coming from.

"She's the first women I ever felt something genuine for. And probably the first messed up relationship with no blissful honeymoon phase I ever had!" Ntsika states.

"It's not like you're a romantic kind of a guy NK. Hayi bo!" Bandile gives him a look. They laugh.

“With her, I was. For the first time in my whole life I walked into the store and bought some sanitary towels, pain killers...googled how to make a girl on her periods feel comfortable and get rid of period pains. Take care of their nauseous feeling. Bought massaging oils and massaged her lower back, cooked for her and boiled some water for her water bottle to place on her abdomen. Ran her a bath. Asked how she’s feeling even though it felt all awkward, knowing whether she goes heavier in her periods or what. Isn’t that being romantic?” he is smiling at thought of it. He could tell that she was flattered. At first, she was uncomfortable, but she warmed up to him and even shared the bed with him for a couple of hours.

Bandile laughs and shakes his head off. Ntsika gives him a look. “It’s called being a gentleman. I do that for my older sister all the time when I’m around. I will do it with my daughter just one day so...it’s a no from me!” he votes him out. Bandile has a three year old daughter back in PE.

Ntsika chuckles. “Maybe I’ll try harder next time then!” he shrugs.

“Does that mean you’ll go after her?” Bandile wants to know.

He sips his coffee thoughtfully. “If I want to survive without the beer, then I don’t have a choice!” he shrugs. His mind is made up.

Bandile nods. “I must say, girls this side have the most strong love portion ever. I never thought I’d live to see the day of the sexiest bad boy falling for a girl this much. It’s very odd yet good on you!” he’s in support of his move. The fact that he doesn’t believe in love can’t get in the way of others finding it if they believe in it.

He sips his coffee. “The worst part is I was the one cooking for her. Hayi inoba undibiz’ ebhekileni la mntwana mfethu! (Perhaps she calls me from a magical pot!)” they share a hearty laughter. He spends half of the morning conversing with his friend.



He later travels to his flat in Southern wood and freshens up. He drives to his cafeteria and inspects it, taking a few notes of what to buy, fix and improvise. He sits at the back and focuses on his figures. From there he walks to the kitchen and converse with his staff members. He finds out if how they are in business and takes a look at the menu. He gives out tips on a few dishes and knocks off in the late hours of the night.

He drives to Mbhashe with a long face. It feels like whenever he tries his best, he never succeeds. He feels so exhausted but can't even sleep. Tears stream down his face. He loves her so much but it feels like it all goes to waste. She's too in love with him to let it show, that's his problem with her. He wants to be loved openly by her. He knows she's the one designed for him.

“There is really no one else Nosisa. I fell in love with you when I've never even seen you before. I loved you when I just met you, settled my heart into a race that it went off like my favourite athlete, Caster Semenya. It was all because of your

presence next to me...” he finds himself saying as he parks his car by his rondavel. There are three cars parking by the garage and the fourth one is in the garage.

He goes off the car and remembers to take a smoke first. Whatever it is that is going on inside that house, it is going to get into his wracked nerves. He smokes and takes out a bottle of brandy. He takes in a few sips and clears a throat from the bitter taste. He sprays his mouth and throws a gum of strawberry in. He pulls out his laptop bag and locks his car.

He heads to his rondavel first and changes into comfortable clothes. He walks into the main house, the bungalow.

He hears the noise of kids playing from the lounge and a loud conversation of the elders. Nolwandile, MaFaku, Jamangile and his wife and Faku seated in the dining area.

He walks in and the three kids look at him. They run to him and hug him. They are way too younger than Phuthumani which makes it very weird for him to consider them his siblings.

He smiles holding them and he picks up the youngest of them, it's a girl looking very much like Jamangile. "Hey, guys..." he greets. He takes out his wallet and gives them a few coins each. They joyfully thank him and go back to settle in the couches. "Bhuti is the best!" the other says. He smiles a bit at that.

He walks to the kitchen and finds a plate of rice, beetroot, cabbage, potatoes and some chicken. The rice, cabbage, potatoes and chicken are all dipped in mild curry—yellow rajah! He chuckles at the way it is presented, so clumsily and less appetizing. He closes the microwave and makes himself some sandwiches. He sits there and eats. He then makes some coffee and walks to the dining room.

They all look up at him as he walks in. Jamangile stands up with his wife. They are smiling up at him. "Awu, Nyawuza!"

Jamangile salutes him using his own clan. That doesn't sit well with him. He's a Tshawe not a Nyawuza!

He smiles, "How are you?" he asks instead, placing his coffee down. They shake hands and get into a brief shoulder bumping hug.

"I'm good. I'm good my brother. And how have you been?" Jamangile asks. He's light skinned just like his father, tall and lean with bold shoulders though.

"I'm good. Thanks man. It's good to see you!" he says. He looks over at Nowezile, his wife. He smiles gently, "Sisi...how are you?" he exchanges greetings with her too. She's a shy and quiet one of all the women in this house. A very good person from a distance.

They settle down and he notices that they just dined. “Your food is in the microwave. We had to go one without you since you didn’t come last night,” MaFaku says. She’s good at playing a role of a mother to him. He’s slowly getting used to it.

“Oh, I...got held up somewhere so I slept over at my place in Southern wood

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” he sips his coffee.

“Are you not going to eat? Let me go and warm it up for you!”  
MaFaku offers.

He holds her hand and smiles softly. “Thanks Aunty but I’ll eat later. I grabbed something on my way here,” he politely refuses the gesture.

MaFaku nods in disappointment.

“Father tells me you’ll be joining the family company soon,”  
Jamangile touches the sensitive topic of the day with  
excitement.

“Yhea...I’m still trying to see if it is worth investing my time in.  
You see, I am a very busy person and I love doing what I  
understand driven by passion as well,” he says.

“Like frying fat cakes for students? And selling sweet aids at the  
rank?” Nolwandile asks.

Faku and everyone give her a glare. Ntsika smiles and sips his  
coffee. “And carrying around a flask selling coffee to taxi  
drivers, retail front line workers and all,” he tells her.

“It is nothing as compared to estates. It needs someone more informed and educated when it comes to finances!” she replies.

“You are right. Which is why I am considering it. It is a good opportunity for me to learn and become informed and educated too!” he shrugs.

“Good choice! You will learn a lot in our company. There’s nothing exciting like mingling with sharks in the game,” Jamangile supports his statement genuinely. He earns a flinch pulling nudge from Nolwandile.

“And that means one can become a shark within weeks if they are brilliant enough and have the balls to pull it off!” MaFaku says glaring at Nolwandile.

There's a moment of cold silence and death stares exchanged between Nolwandile and MaFaku. Ntsika throws his head back drinking all of his coffee at one go.

"So, Ntsika when are you planning on allowing us to introduce you to the ancestors?" MaFaku presses another button.

"Look son, I am willing to go to your mother's family, apologize and pay off the damages I caused years ago. I am doing this for both of us. When I die I want you to have seen a good example of how a good father is like even though I was never one. You don't have to change your identity or anything. Just let me correct my wrongs—" Faku pleads with him.

"Can we do all of those in a month time? I have to be in PE in the next couple of days!" he suggests.



Faku and MaFaku exchange glances. They drop their gazes in defeat. “We need to do this as soon as possible or else the wrath of ancestors will bring out calamity. These latest events of serpentines attacking us and bad dreams to all of us will not stop until we do this ceremony. Please Nyaw-”

“It’s Khawuta. I’m still a Tshawe and I’ll always be one!” he corrects his father. The sound of his father’s clan doesn’t sit well with him. It gives him chills that are far from comfortable, but just creepy. It is just not who he is.

“Yes, that!” Faku looks away not pleased by the point of correction. “We will need to set a date for the Nyawuza's to visit your mother’s family. In the meantime, we have to consult our traditional healer, Qwakaza so she will pave the way for us!” he lays down the already planned program.

He simply nods. “Just make it snappy. I am only giving you the rest of the week!” he says. He will have to hire someone to go

look for Nosisa in the meantime. He just can't sit around and fold his arms doing nothing to find her. Time awaits no men.

## NOSISA

She is sweating. Turning and tossing in bed. She is seeing herself walking in the middle of a dark night forest. There's no visible foot path to follow out of the belly of this forest. The wind is whipping the long ancient gum trees creaking like an old rocking chair.

She looks up above her head to see the sky but there's just swaying tree leaves and more darkness. There's no star nor moon coming—not even a little spark to give her hope.

She takes a breath looking around. Even in the world of the wildest dreams her own being never changes, she still can't hear a sound.

However, her other senses are very strong and sharper than a needle. She sniffs and turns around to the north, south, west and east. She keeps rotating trying to figure out if where is that coming from. His natural odor and smell of blood.

She runs to the north with owls hooting while drifting in between the trees. The thunk-thunk of nuts falling off the tree to hit the ground goes high and she only feels that sound in her bones.

She doesn't walk too far before she looks closely at someone sitting on a tree log. She tries to look carefully at him while feeling the bad atmosphere of sadness around him.

She walks over to him and taps his shoulder, but he doesn't move an inch. She taps him again, but nothing. She feels the ground vibrating and she looks around. She sees a shadow running past them. She doesn't know the man running there,

but she hesitates not in following him. She runs faster after him before realizing they are being chased after. Knees go weaker and numb. She keeps falling and standing up, then run again. She sees the man staggering back at a sparkling huge quiet stream. She sees the long bushy grass beyond the stream.

She walks to the man to say something but it is too late for her to suggest anything. He just threw himself in. She stares at the fathom of the waters as they swallow him down with not a finger appearing.

The stream goes silent and sparkles again. She sits down next to it and cries hard. Deep inside her she feels grief. She feels somebody's heavy weight, scorching ordeals and exhaustion. At the moment, there's nothing she can other than to just cry!

The dream goes on to flash her beyond the stream wearing animal skins. She turns around to find Ntsika. He's sitting on top of the huge rock they used to sit on back in her village. Their love nest!

He's crying silently yet so hard that it breaks her heart. She hurries to him and kneels before him. 'Ntsika...I have been looking for you all over the forest. Where is your grandma's stick?' she asks.

He looks up at her with eyes red rimmed, teary and distant. His lips tremble before he throws his eyes far away in the mountains. 'My mother left me, my father is not here too. People are laughing at me, Nosisa. I am an orphan. I have no one—go!' he dismisses her.

'Ntsika...' she hisses as he stands up and turns his back on her. He walks into the sunset while she feels like he's stepping onto her little fragile heart. 'Please, don't leave me here...Ntsika!—' she screams before she feels somebody shaking her.

She jumps up and catches a breath. Her heart is really heavy and tears are all over her face. The pillow is soaked with her tears.

“Here, drink some water!” Tess, her roommate says. They sleep in the dorms in the farm.

“Thanks,” she says before drinking up.

Tess nods and gives her a coat. “Lets join others by the kraal on the fire. They have prepared some steak!” she says. She’s a very bubbly personality, short and slender.

Nosisa nods and rinses her face, then wears the coat, socks and boots. They walk out and find others already sitting around the fire. It’s a cold night, but the ring of fire is huge and sizzling.

Owen hands her a cup of coffee and their fingers click and rub against each other. He stares at her and she smiles nervously at him. "Thanks!" she says, grabbing a paper plate with buttered rusks and chocolate jester.

He smiles back and nods. "Are you okay?" he asks. She nods. "But you were crying," he pries.

"No, I wasn't. I just woke up from a quick nap," she assures him.

He nods. "Okay. Did-" he takes a huge breath to suck in some strength as Morgan arrives. She wraps her arms around his shoulders and kisses his face.

"Hey babe. You didn't invite me to the boot camp. Why? You know I like these moments of the night?" she says.

Nosisa raises her cup at Owen and smiles taking that one as her cue to leave.

She sits on a camp chair next to Tess and Jason. She looks around reading people's lips as they converse. Their little cold jokes take her mind off things. They have meat and more tea. She rises her eyes from the fire and catches Owen staring intensely. He slips into a sheepish smile getting caught. She slightly smiles back and warms her steak on the fire.

“Look at that Morgan hanging around him like he's some sack full of gold stones. They don't even look good together, she has a bad taste in men always. Owen, really? Couldn't she go for Chris—” Tess gossips.

Nosisa silently stifles laughter at the look in Tess's eyes as she says that. “Who is Chris?” she mutters. They are mirroring each other as they mutter to each other.



“His brother. He’s the hottest and works as an accountant, coaches rugby sometimes. Ooh, he’s got muscles for days. I wouldn’t mind snacking him for the night, let him use me anyway he likes. I bet he can make me reach my climax ten times, the maximum of female orgasms!” she tells her. She’s moving her lips a little bit too fast at some point.

“Owen is not bad himself Tess. What’s wrong with her liking him? I think they are cute together!” she presses her buttons to annoy her.

“Oh please. That girl is way out of his league and she’s probably here because of money. It’s how she rolls!” Tess accuses Morgan.

“You know her from somewhere?” Nosisa asks.

Tess nods. “We went to high school together and college before I dropped out. She was one of those divas thinking the world revolves around them. She be having big eyes like an owl, look at her with an ugly dress!” Tess hatefully speaks of her.

Nosisa giggles and nudges her. “Okay, about the dress you are right. It’s more of a colour of an owl. It looks like one of my mother’s petticoats I used to hate so much!” they giggle hideously.

“At least it was a petticoat. It’s a whole dress to her!” she mutters amused. “See, I knew being paired up with you wouldn’t be so much of a bad idea after all. Now I can freely gossip without anyone eavesdropping and passing the paper. No one will face me again!” she says.

Nosisa laughs hard and covers her mouth earning a few looks from the girls next to them. “Tess!” she nudges her.

“I’m telling you. I gossip for a living and they just didn’t seem to understand. How can one stay uninformed about people’s business. I need to know who’s dating who and cheated on who. Just to stay updated, you know?” she says.

“Ah gossip monger!” Nosisa giggles, having her steak.

Tess smiles and shrugs. “I know. You should grow your hair now and I’ll style it for you. We’ll get you a boyfriend in about ten months to come or do you have one back home?” she pries.

“Hayi bo, are you going to need to get updated about my life too?” she is amused.

Tess widens her eyes and nods. “Yes, we are friends now. So I must know. You will surely know about my bad choices in men

as well. Girl, I will tell you all about it. Owen knows one of them, the most horrible boyfriend I've ever had!" they giggle quietly before throwing their gazes up at the others.

She has never been called a friend before nor has she ever been with such a crazy one. She likes extroverted people the most even though she doesn't really know what kind of a person she is. Maybe this is why her relationships failed dismally way before they start. She isn't used to socializing neither do any of those she loved understood. The only person she's ever been with are her parents.

## NTSIKA

He rubs his eyes and looks up at Faku who's walking in with a tail in between his legs. He's from the Tshawes.

He closes his laptop and looks at him. "It didn't go well?" he asks.

Faku sits down and fiddles with his fingers looking so down. His face dropped and wrinkled. "They are disowning you if I go ahead with the ceremony. Nomaza was already there," he reports. He rubs his eyes and moans a bit, shaking his head in defeat. "They still blame me for your mother's disappearance," he adds.

Ntsika looks at him pitifully. "What happened to her? My mother," he has been meaning to ask about that.

Faku stares into space thoughtfully. "She...she left before we could get married. We had a little squabble. She woke up the

next morning and left without me knowing. I never saw her again,” he says.

“It doesn’t make sense. Where was I?” he wants to understand.

“She was pregnant with you when she left and I was about to send the cattle to her home. I tried looking for her, but no luck. Nomaza had cut off communication and refused to help me out. I tried looking for her, but then I was not that connected. I was still young and depending on my parents. I let it go after your Aunt said your mother was seeing another man. A soldier from Butterworth. I thought maybe he could be the father to you and not me. On top of it, Nomaza never mentioned anything about you being born!” he explains.

“Meaning that my mother left on her own will? Did you hit her?” he wonders.

Faku shook his head off. “We had our differences but I’d never raise my towards her even if I wanted to. She was not one to

be messed with. Sometimes you remind me of her. You look very much like her even!" he says opening into a thin smile.

Ntsika faintly smiles back. "Heard that a lot more before. I wish she had never left!" he says.

There's silence for a moment. "Who's that?" Faku asks, looking at the framed photo of Nosisa.

He throws his eyes at it and grabs it. He swerves his chair around and knocks against it with his index finger. "Just someone I know," he replies.

"Your girlfriend?" he asks, curiously.

"We can go on with the ceremony and let it pass. I'll deal with my uncles later!" he runs away from the question.

"Are you sure? I don't want to burn bridges for you son. Even though this is important and urgent I still don't want to be the

reason for arising troubles between you and your other family!” he states.

“Don’t worry about that. I’ll take care of them and make them understand!” Ntsika says.

“Thank you so much son!” he says.

Ntsika looks up at Ntombizodidi who’s standing by the door with a pile of papers. “Come on in!” he says.

Zodidi walks in with a Colgate smile and greets Faku. She places the papers and slips out a file, she hands it to Ntsika.

“There is an auction this weekend in Cradock. Mr. Thompson and the rest of the board thought it would be wise for us to be one of the bidders!” she says.

“Meaning there’s travelling involved?” Faku asks.



“Yes Sir. The Singh’s have proposed that we meet up on a Friday. They will host us in a farm over a horse racing. Then on a Saturday we go for the sight seeing,” she reports.

“I think you should go. We should wrap things up about that ceremony by tomorrow and then you leave on Wednesday,” Faku says to Ntsika.

“Horse racing, sight seeing and auction? How are those related to buying property?” he asks cluelessly.

“When you buy properties, it is very important to know the sole owners selling it. That creates the relationship between you and the other party for future references. See if they sell another one they will always keep you in mind before considering an auction. Basically, we’re building a bond to help us in the future!” his father explains.

“I see. Book a hotel in Port Elizabeth, organize one of your best cars and a well behaved chauffeur. And just get everything prepared. I hate unplanned trips!” Ntsika says. This grants him an opportunity to be there and start searching for Nosisa on his

own. He has sent a PI already and he keeps checking his phone to check if there are updates yet.

NTOMBIZODIDI

“I am here for my sister. She said I must come to for transport fare,” she heard her younger sister's voice from outside the boardroom.

Her heart shifts painfully and hammered hard as it throws her back to the bad situation back home. She places the pen down and walks to the door.

“And who is your sister?” Ntsika asks.

“Sis’ Zodidi! The tall one with beautiful dreadlocks with beads. She’s wearing a maroon pencil skirt today and a white blouse. And and...she is pretty!” the little girl innocently describes her own sister.

“Ah, I see!” Ntsika says laughing a bit as Zodidi comes out of the room. “Is this your pretty sister?” he asks the girl. She nods biting the ends of her shirt sleeves.

“Sisitha...you are here already. How was school?” she says taking her hand to the office canteen.

“It was fine Sisi. But teacher said everyone who hasn’t paid their fees have until the end of this week,” she reports.

She thought by now Zuko would have sent the money. What is taking him so long? “Don’t worry I will pay for your fees before the end of this week, eh?” the girls nods. She smiles faintly. She takes out a beef stew Ntsika had bought her lunch for her and some bread. “Sit down over there and eat. I have to make a quick phone call, okay?”

“Thank you!” the girl goes to sit down.

She walks out to the balcony and dials Zuko's number.

“Zods!” he answers the call with a noisy background.

“You are saying ‘Zods’! Zuko where is my money? Do I have to tell my cousin that you do not want to pay off your interests?” she threatens.

“Your cousin who? Dumile? He-he hayi ungazondihlekisa mna. I paid you the money I owed you. If you want an extra money from your little loan sharking business, then put your holy vagina in the menu. I’m sure it is tight as hell so we will all buy it. Stop acting all gangster with me!” Zuko says with his voice so full of mockery.

She paces around biting her finger and holding her tears back. “Zuko that’s not what you said when you needed money. You know the conditions of my loans. Do not push me. I am in no mood to ruin my relationship with Christ and get that little face of yours restructured. You will not like it!” she threatens. If only Dumile was still around but that one left a few days ago. He is the reason she is so broke and dry. He said he is in trouble and in need of money to run off to another province for quite some time. She gave him the money because he also used to help out on her home with everything more especially back when she was still a student.

“I would like to see you try. Dumile is not here to fight your wars now and help you rob us in broad daylight. You are not getting a cent from me, you witch!” he drops the call.

She huffs and paces around not knowing who to call at the moment. She places her thumb on Mr. Walaza's number, an old man she met the night she was driving Ntsika to Ngangelizwe. He sure did state that he is married and she should only text, then wait for his call. She didn't want to cause a scene and took his number. She should've deleted instantly after he left. A tear falls and she quickly deletes his number from her phone. “The Lord has plans for me to prosper...he will provide!” she hisses underneath her breathe.

She is not about to fall into the trap of the devil. She is a hustler, an honest one that will not go around selling her own soul. She will deal with Zuko in her own way.

She continues scrolling until she stops by Nomathemba's cellphone number. It is the better option. She dials it and swallows her pride. It rings for quite some time before she answers.

“Hello?” she answers firmly.

She clears a throat nervously. “Hey Noma. It’s Zodidi!” she squats against the wall.

“Oh, Girl! I don’t have your number so now I was little bit you know...how are you doing by the way?” she asks, cheerfully.

A tear falls from her but she smiles as if she can see her. “I’m fine. I’m fine. And you?” she is now thinking of how to go about this.

“I’m good too. I am so glad you called. I wanted to hang out later on just to get my mind off things. I was thinking maybe we meet by the Savoy,” Nomathemba proposes.

She sighs, “Oh, I see!” she swallows.

“Are you okay? You sound so down,” Nomathemba asks.

“Yhea, I’m fine. I just...I called because I wanted to find out if you can help me with...I'm broke Noma and it’s too bad this month. It’s fees, the rent and my mother’s treatment. It’s too much!” she cries out.

“Oh

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how much do you need?” Nomathemba asks.

She chews her fingers, “Uhhmm...a few thousands!” she hisses.

“Okay...how much Zods? I can only give you three point something!”—Nomathemba.

“Yhea, that one is fine. As long as I will be able to pay fees and buy food at home. Thank you very much Thembi!” she says.

“It’s what friends are for. Anyway, I heard Ntsika has joined you all,” same old Nomathemba, a gossip monger.

She giggles. “Noma! Yes, he works here. He’s going to be voted new MD in a few weeks judging by the looks of things,” she says.

“What? But how? He just got there and the Ntsika I know knows nothing about business in a professional level. The guy hardly passed his eleventh grade to get into the culinary school,” Nomathemba takes out Ntsika’s file.

“Well, he is going to lead and by pass all of us as business experienced graduates and direct. I feel sorry for his older brother. He started working here as a delivery boy while still in high school. I doubt if he ever even liked it, but now...things are hectic, you know!” she says.

“Iyhu shame Bhut’ Jamangile. I can already imagine how he feels, but Ntsika is a smart a\*s. He might take you guys to great heights!” Nomathemba picks a side.



“Most definitely. I trust him and the language he uses in the office is of a solid and experienced business man,” now she is thinking about the three point five on the way!

\*\*\*\*

During dusk far in the villages again, Qwakaza welcomes the two siblings in her rondavel. They ask her to throw bones and check the coast—they hate surprises, they claim.

She burps, sneezes and groans seeing only darkness. She can't see anything and it's annoying her. She collects the bones for the third time and asks them to blow. She calls out on her ancestors and tosses the bones again—there's something!

She looks carefully at the bones reading them. She closes her eyes and moans at the sound of hooting owls. The creaking sounds of trees and thunk-thunk of the night forest. Spider webs going up and down their webs.

She sees only shadows, no voices. It's very quiet. The other shadow is sitting down while the other is approaching that figure. She then hears a loud horn being blown then a song. It is

not just any song, but a song indicating a hiccup, sorrows and calamity.

“Mhm-m! Kubi, (It is bad!)” she says stomping the ground with her ox's tail.

“What do you see?” they ask.

“It's dark—I can't see anything but it's not going to end well for anyone. I hear a song, vuma!” she sneezes violently.

“You have been telling us about this song. I do not understand. What does it mean?” MaFaku is impatient.

“It's a song of an orphan, so full sadness, vuma!” she tells.

“Who is the orphan? Is it dangerous to us?” Faku wants to know.

“So full of agony. Vumani!” she shakes going down with one side of her body. It’s painful seeing these things for she feels them physically.

“Siyavuma!” they chant a bit hesitant. They want to know a name. Ngubani?—who is it?

“Full of calamity—the wrath of the ancestors. It won’t end well for anyone, vuma!” she continues to say.

“Siyavuma kaloku Qwakaza, but who is this orphan?” MaFaku doesn’t take other things seriously.

Qwakaza screams a bit and fans herself with the ox's tail. “I can’t see it, but there’s sharp cry, a hiccup...of an orphan. A song predicting the future...kubi!” she repeats pretty much of the same thing.

“Well, what about the boy? Can we come with him tomorrow? He has agreed to come. We need you to mark him to become ours!” Faku sternly demands. Ntsikayekhaya was never a

Tshawe but his son. It is time he becomes officially one and inherit his wealth, everything he has. Jamangile is just a weak and soft sissy even his wife does better than him.

“He has lost direction which led him to you. Vuma!”—Qwakaza.

“Oh, siyavuma!” they chant in elation.

“Things are about to fall apart for him. You will reap so little from what he has. The gift in his palm is untouchable, Vuma!” she goes on.

They swallow hard in confusion, “So that means we can not go ahead? Qwakaza this is the future leader of our clan. You have to get to that gift of his. Do something!” MaFaku says.

“Someone has it secured. It can only be manipulated if we kill her!” Qwakaza provides a solution.

“No, not another blood being shed! Who is it? Nomaza?” Faku asks.

“No...I can't see her, but she keeps praying on his behalf. She keeps asking for his protection from her ancestors . I can't see her, but Nomaza is not letting her guard down too. Vuma!” she is sweating laying on the side moaning with heavy breaths.

“Mxm esasibhanxa sentombazana! (That fool of a girl!) What is she doing this time?” MaFaku grunts in anger.

“She came back with a Dibia, vuma!” she whispers.

“Siyavuma! What is that? A new powerful foreign herb?” they ask. Nomaza is a herbalist by profession, she works very well with foreign native doctors. They are bound to fear her.

“A Nigerian native doctor. He is given thrice in one. One day he will pull the dirt swept into under the carpet!” Qwakaza screams with lightening striking from the window. A traditional pot placed closer to the fireplace is hit by that lightening. It breaks apart into pieces. She screams laying on her back before shaking with her whole body. Foam bubbles out of her lips.

These two look at each other terrified. “Qwakaza! What just happened?” Faku asks.

At that time MaFaku is already three steps to the door. “Usabuza?(You are still asking!)” she exclaims terrified. She gets on her feet and begs her thin legs to carry her up the hill to their car. Faku follows right behind her.

When dawn cracked a knock came at the door of the Ndamases. Faku opened and he is surprised to see Qwakaza. She's healthy as an ox. He smiles sheepishly at the thought of last night's epilogue. He wanted to help but his sister just ran off. He didn't want to be left alone. He knows nothing about those things.

"Faku!" Qwakaza calls out. She gets in and takes a sit behind the door on the bare tiles. She has a reed basket with herbs.

"Kayise!" Faku says not sure whether to apologize about last night or just let it go.

"Ah, Qwakzit! You are already here. Mawuqale ke ngoku umcimbi, (Let the ceremony begin,)" MaFaku says walking in wrapped up in a pink gown. She slept peacefully after running over the hill like that. She was very exhausted and she doesn't look like someone who's going to talk about it. If Qwakaza is fine now then everything is.

“Call the boy!” Qwakzit instructs.

They did call him and the ritual went on. She made small cuts on his lower back, upper back and joints of his wrists, knees, foot and shoulders. Cut a piece of his hair and they went to the stream. She instructed him to strip off. MaFaku and Faku were left behind in the car. They are waiting nervously.

Qwakaza clears her dry throat looking at his heavily mold body. This is too much for a boy, she thinks to herself staring at him down there. When they are talking about how strong and feisty Xhosa was, they are talking about him. Ndamase was lying, this boy is nothing like him in physical appearance and even on his face. He’s his own god, he became a finest version of whoever he looks like. The only thing he inherited from Faku is the lousy albinism patch on his stomach. Ooo, he has a fine shaft for days—long, smooth, strong, a bit thick and well shaved. The imagination of it when it’s hard and veins visibly swimming



under his skin makes her wet same time. Dumile has nothing on this even Rev. Siduko himself!

Ntsika clears a throat and turns away uncomfortably. He shivers from cold when Qwakaza throws a bucket of water all over him. She watches the bombs of water trailing down his back. The sight is out of this world for her!

She splashes him while mumbling something inaudible for one to make sense of.

This is not what his grandma used to say when cleansing him down the Kei river. He thinks to himself.

“I don’t dry myself when I’ve just cleansed...” he uncomfortably walks away as Qwakaza attempted to dry his back.

“Oh, I see!” she just wanted to feel what she sees nothing more. Why is he so uptight? Bloody sissy! Has he seen her a\*s and hips? He’s missing out too!

Well, they get through the ceremony and let days pass. Two days later...

NOSISA

“Today we are going to be at the horses field and welcome our guests. This is the list of guests you are going to be personally taking care of. Tess will assist,” Owen says giving her a red card.

“Mr. Singh?” she reads out the name.

“Yhea, he’s a regular client. He likes horses and so you must know everything about them just as we have taught you. He’s coming with one of his associates from Transkei, but you don’t

have to worry about them. They are not into horse racing!” Owen explains.

She nods and shoves the card on the back of her pants. They are wearing all black with gold and black aprons on.

“Who is N...Ntsika?” Tess asks as they walk around the field. They have done a lot of things earlier on.

She looks up at Tess and frowns. “How do you know that name?” she asks a bit shaken. “Have you been going through my things?” she keeps a diary somewhere. She doesn’t often use it but when days are too rough, she jots down a few notes about how she feels. It’s helps.

“No, but you scream the name every time in your sleep. Is he dead or something?” Tess never knew when to stop.

She throws a glare at her. “No. I don’t want to talk about it!” she looks away.

Tess nods and looks behind them before pulling her to the side. There is a Ford ranger coming with two people conversing and laughing loudly at the back of it.

“That’s one of our guests,” Tess says.

The car passes and parks by the stile of horses. These two go off. Nosisa’s heart slams hard twice before it goes silent. It’s in her mouth.

A guy with a white golf T-shirt, a gold watch—his favourite gold watch an black shorts. The neat brushed cut and bold physique, it’s him. He’s laughing his lungs out jumping off the car. He

opens his arm for the lady and holds her into his bold arms. Then places her down just like he used to do to her. She holds his hand and leads him to the horses.

She is beautiful with dread locks kneaded and styled. She's slender and tall—she doesn't need to try. Of course, she need to. It's obvious he's into lean girls like that.

He looks very much happier without her. He's doing just fine. Did he even try to text her?

“Sisa are you okay?” Tess snaps her out of those miserable thoughts.

She holds her tears back and nods. “Yhea...I'm fine!” she signals. “I need to use the bathroom!” she announces and walks away.

She gets into the bathroom and closes herself in there. She sits down and breathes. She thought she was over him. What is he even doing here with her? Men are thrash shame! Dogs—

Later on, she walks out and finds the restaurant packed with guests. She holds a platter of chapattis from Owens. “Table number 28!” he says and passes by. It’s the only table that’s not served yet.

She looks around for Tess but she’s no where in sight, she swallows a stone and walks to it. Ntsika is on his phone leaning against the wall next to Mr. Sigh and that girl. The girl is conversing and smiling seemingly laughing.

She gets annoyed by even the way she blinks. Even the fact that they are breathing the same air makes her angry. She has taken her man. Yes, NTSIKA is hers!

'But you left him and blocked him!' her mind goes against her bleeding heart.

'He started it. Were you not there when he turned his back on us? Ignored me like I never mattered to him? I sent him a text telling him I'm leaving on a Sunday and I waited for him to come. He never did!'

"Is there anything else you'd like to have?" she asks pulling Ntsika's attention to her. She's feeling his intense gaze on her, but she doesn't even look his side.

Mr. Singh smiles, "Just an apple cider for me and put it on ice!" he says.

"Coming right up..." she walks away.

She grabs the cider from the counter and waits for Tess. “Please take this to Mr. Singh,” she asks with puppy eyes.

Tess looks over there and finds Ntsika’s intense gaze. “That gentleman seemed to know you. He asked about you back in the stile. He saw you when walking away. Do you know him from somewhere?” “she pries.

“What? No...I don’t. Psss...I mean I just got here!” she says.

“Good then take the cider to Mr. Singh...” she winks attempting to walk away.

She holds her arm, “Okay fine! I’ll tell you about him. I just don’t want to face him now. Please take this!” she begs.



Tess giggles, “Wait for me in the patio then...” she grabs the cider.

Nosisa drags herself to the patio and stands there. She paces around nervously and Tess stands next to her. “So...how do you know that cutey?” she wiggles her thin eyebrows.

They take a sit on bench and she starts from the beginning. Tess pulls her closer and embraces her tightly. It hurts so much. Seeing him with another woman is just salt being added into her wound.

“I’m fine—I’m fine!” she sniffs cleaning her face up.

They turned around to Owen as he stands by the door. “Tess in the kitchen and Sisa you come with me to the horse stile,” he says.

NTSIKA

“Are you alright? You’ve been looking around as if in search of someone,” Zodidi asks as they sit around the table. The Singh’s just left.

He nods and takes a sip on water. The PI told him Nosisa never sat her foot in Port Elizabeth and just a few hours back he saw somebody just like her. It was her, but that white girl said it’s not. Oh hell

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he knows it was her. “No, I’m fine. I’m just tired. Is Bandile here yet?” he asks. Bandile came with only because he was around PE to visit his daughter and he loves horse racing.

“Yhea, he’s back in the gazebo. He’s with braai masters and jockeys there!” Zodidi says, having her chapatti roll.

He throws his eyes far at the stile. His heart beats to stop at the sight. Nosisa. See now that he's sitting here can see her clearly. That's her!

She's with the farmer's son, Owen. He knows Owen, they went to the same culinary school in East London. He was just a nerdy Christian nothing like what Nosisa would fall for...or so he thinks.

He watches them running around the stile with a horse. They feed them, brush them together. He gets suffocated every time Owen stands closely behind her. His blood boils when they throw dry grass at each other and run around. She runs out of the stile and he follows.

He catches her from behind, holding her petite waist and rotates with her in the air. She's that portable.

He can already imagine the sounds of her giggles. Did he mean so little to her? Here's looking so miserable and she's having fun without him. What is it with her and coloured men even? It hasn't been a month let alone weeks and she's already forgotten about him. How dare she break his heart like this?

"Ntsika!" Zodidi hits the table to pull him out of that.

"Ahem!" he clears a throat and picks up a glass of water. He gulps it down holding tears with his lids. It hurts so bad!

"Do you know them?" she asks looking over there at them too.

"Yhea...she is my...used to be my girlfriend," he says.

She raises a brow. "You broke up?" she asks the obvious. He shakes his head off failing to keep eye contact. "Oh?"

"It's complicated!" he never thought he'd say those words about his relationship status. To him it was either he's single or in a relationship or a friend's benefits kind of situation.

"If you still like her you better stop that!" she's looking over them laying on their stomachs on the grass. It all looks cozy, but to him it's blood boiling.

"You are damn right!" he places the glass of water down and walks away before Zodidi says something. She was just saying but he finds that as a brilliant idea. He's going to walk in there and get his girl. To hell with the likes of Walter and those of his tribe.

As he gets closer, Nosisa raises her head and looks his way. The anger melts away as soon as he settles on her gaze. She quickly looks elsewhere and rolls off the grass. She says something to Owen and walks up to the gazebo side. Owen rolls up to leave to but he notices him. He waits.

“Owen,” he calls out.

“Ntsika...how are you doing man?” Owen greets back.

“Good. Can I speak to her for a moment?” he’s looking over at Nosisa. She is heading back to the restaurant.

Owen turns around and looks at her. “Sisa? You know her?” he asks.

“She is my girlfriend. Siyajola—we are dating!” he emphasizes that part.

Owen’s face falls off a bit and he clears a throat. “Oh, I didn’t know you...like you are dating her? Nosisa?” he asks.

“Is there a problem with that?” he gives a murderous look.

Owen shrugs. “I mean I never thought you’d go for her,” he remarks.

“Why? Because she’s disabled?” he’s offended. A punch is on it’s way if he utters some BS one more time.

“Yes, well not really. She’s nice but I didn’t think she would go for somebody like you. She needs somebody patient and caring...perhaps gentle. You and I know based on your history in college you were none of that. You will hurt her NK!” Owen voices out his concerns. It’s a genuine one like that of a brother.

“You don’t have any right to judge me, Owen. I was still young and...look even though this is none of your business, I feel I should tell you that I really love that woman. I’ve changed for her. I know what’s best for her because it’s what’s best for my heart too. So can I take her out on a date tomorrow morning and you let me take her for a sleep over?” he asks looking over at her.

Owen shrugs. “Fine. We don’t work on Sundays, her colleagues are surely going home for Sunday lunch and all. But I’m watching you Ntsika. She’s got a whole future with a bunch of light ahead of her. Don’t take that away from her!” he walks past him.



“Thanks!” he hurries to the inside of the restaurant. When he steps inside he notices that they are doing the final touch ups to close down.

She catches him staring and Zodidi stands next to him. She walks away disappearing into the back door.

“Are you not leaving?” Zodidi asks.

“Tell Bandile to leave his car behind and go on with you. I need to be somewhere tonight. And...umm...you are going alone to the auction tomorrow,” he says impatiently waiting for her to come out.

“What? Ntsika that’s unprofessional and-”

“Just go Ntombizodidi. Maybe we’ll discuss your raise if this doesn’t make it to Faku and her annoying older sister!” he runs the back of his hand on her cheek and grins. “Just be professional and go for it. You got this Zodarara!” he walks away from her.

Zodidi huffs and walks out of the restaurant.

Nosisa picks up her sling bag while trying to take off her apron.

She walks out of the counter and places her bag down facing the other way. She moans in irritation as the knotted apron doesn’t move inch. “Connie please, help me untie this. Gosh, I don’t know why I made it so tight in the first place!” she grunts.

He looks around and finds a woman with blond hair. He signals that he's got it. He walks closer and slowly holds the laces of an apron. He unties it and breathes down her neck inhaling her scent.

She clears a throat surely realizing who might be there. "Connie?" her voice is trembling and ever so soft.

He turns her around slowly and looks up at her face. Oh, how he missed being this closer. He takes one step even closer and wraps his arms around her waist.

She swallows hard trying to put up a fight but of course, the fire is probably too much to deny. "Ntsika just stop it. I'm at work for God's sake!" she hisses hardly managing to say that audibly.

He chews his lower lip holding himself back from devouring those lips. He knows that once he starts they'll be no turning back. He takes a breath and steps back. "Can we talk?" he softly says.

She looks away protestingly. "I have nothing to say to you!" she is calm.

"But I do. Please..." he pleads even with his eyes.

She looks over at Connie and that woman winks at her instead. He takes that as a go ahead. He pulls her hand gently—he wouldn't be rough about it after 'the talk' with Owen.

They walk out to stand under the moon light. It's in the evening. A boy runs over to them and hands over car keys from Bandile.

He stares at her wanting to say something. Knowing what to say but doesn't know how to say it. "You look even more beautiful in the moon light," he complements instead.

She rolls her round eyes and blushes hideously. He takes a few steps closer and wraps his arms around her waist. She places her hands on his chest attempting to put up a fight again. It's a losing battle as he just breathes on her neck. He hears her gasping and her hands going soft against his chest forming fists. He smiles to himself, at least he still holds that much control over her body. Maybe in her heart too.

He wets his lips looking closely at hers. He closes his eyes feeling knots in his stomach as she slightly massages his chest and gasps for no reason at all. He hasn't done anything to her yet. He looks up at her and she's blinking a lot more with those silky long lashes.

He directly locks his eyes with hers and links his forehead to hers. Rubbing her wobbly knees against his. He slightly slides his other hand down her hip, slowly up her round butt on that jean. She hitches a breath wanting to drop her gaze but can't.

"I'm sorry I hurt you my love. I won't do it again. Soze ndiphinde baby, okay?(I'll never do it again, okay?)" he mouths to her.

She swallows hard attaching her body more to him. She doesn't reply even though she sure got that. To him her disability is not a chore, barrier or difficult to live with. He finds it rather different and romantic. Her own being taught him a different love language. Everyday he meets her he learns something far from sign language and deeper than words. He speaks less with her and focuses on action. Sometimes she never speaks a word but her mere touch confesses a whole lot of her affectionate feelings towards him. Her eyes scribble letters to him and they melt down his heart. He knows when to stop or when to go on with just reading her body language and receiving the mail from her eyes.

“Ntsika!” even her words cutting short sounds just fine in his ears because he doesn’t have to hear it but to see it. His heart drums hard as if closer to exploding. This is the love he never even prayed for. He feels blessed to have her and this time he’s going to keep her.

“Oh!” she moans going on her toes as he grabs her behind. She cups his face and smashes her lips on his. She’s kissing him hungrily for a minute before pulling out to breathe. She looks deep in his eyes with her eyes teary. “My love I’m sorry too,” she manages to say.

He didn’t expect that from her. It took a lot for him to admit his wrongs and apologize. He knows one thing about both of them in this stage. They are proud. And that pride brought them here.

He deliberately flashes a heart stopping smile a bit. As expected she blushes and pulls his jaws closer and kisses him again and again. Her other leg goes up and he holds it against his waist. They need a room! Moans and groans are starting to get much much highly audible. He picks her up and walks to the wall. He massages her butt more and goes down her neck.

“Gosh, I missed that—” she whispers in his ear. He likes how free and touchy she is right now. Initiating kisses and all. It’s all he ever wanted, being loved back just the same way he does.

She goes down and he lets her stand on her own before feeling her burying her hand deep under his shorts. Her tiny hand coming into contact with his hard and steady shaft. He groans snuggling up on her neck, biting it. She’s massaging it so softly and going down there on his balls. This is getting way out of control.

He first conflicts with himself. He wants to pull away and stop her. This is too much than what he can handle. If they were



intimate partners already, with no doubt—he'd rip her apart right now and here.

He slowly breathes inhaling all of her which is not helping either.

He's leaking pre-cum. He inhales sharply and looks up at her. He smiles a bit. "Yerrr... Nosisa, yhoo ha—a suka! Sundibamba, umosh' izinto ngoku wena baby! (get away! Don't touch me, you're ruining things now baby!)" he complains taking a few steps back. She giggles and looks away shyly. He looks down on his tent and brushes his face off, taking a huge breath.

20

THREE MONTHS LATER...

NOSISA

She rolls off Ntsika's bed and walks to the bathroom. She yawns looking around. It's clean as if there were no rose petals all over the floor and a bath full of sliced apples, candles and all. He had randomly surprised her with one of his romantic gestures. It's the Easter holidays and he came all the way from Mthatha to pick her up for a weekend with her parents. They are leaving early tomorrow morning.

She washes her face, hands and brushes her teeth. She runs her hands into her fresh cornrows and flashes her lacquered parched nails over the mirror. She's so in love with herself right now.

She walks back to the room and finds Ntsika busy trying to place breakfast in a perfect angle on top of the night table. He keeps fixing the red rose, dust off the tray and change angles of the plate.

“Ahem!” she clears a throat sitting in bed.

He jumps up and stands straight looking at her. “Good morning sunshine!” he slightly sits next to her. He snuggles up on her neck and trails wet kisses all the way to her jaws until he devours her lips.

When he breaks away she’s breathless. “You made breakfast for me in bed. What time did you wake up at kanti?” she asks sliding back under covers.

“Early...I just wanted to thank you for last weekend. I loved my birthday gift and the massage!” he smirks on the ‘massage’ part.

“Did you love the massage or did you love me trying to swallow you down?” she is getting used to talking dirty with him.

He lets out a goofy smile and looks away. “Both!” he murmurs.

She giggles and picks up a sausage. She looks at him and he smiles. She takes in the sausage and bites it seductively. He chews his lower lip and looks away. “Baby—don’t do that!” he cries out.

She laughs and brings the tray closer. She picks up the rose and smells it—very sweet! She goes for the beacon and feeds him.

They lay there and eat, teasing each other and laughing their worries away.

He places the tray away and she covers them up with the covers. "Honey," she calls out.

He pulls her closer with her waist, "Baby wam?" he replies, looking up in her eyes.

"Where do you see us in the next ten years?" she asks. She needs to know if what are his intentions. He'll never go to dinner in her home while he's still a boyfriend. Her parents maybe all loving and soft on her, but boys will always be boys to them. And they are Africans, very cultural. At home she's better off as single until she says a man wants to marry her. Even MaDlomo never entertained the idea of her dating. Boys are bad for her.

“In ten years to come I’ll be thirty five and you’ll be thirty one. We’ll be having six kids possibly four girls and two boys, twins between them. And you’ll be owning your boutique while I own a city lodge. You’ll be an experienced Mrs. Mayenzeke by then following my last name, making it happen!” he is fiddling with her hands while blubbering all of that.

She’s amazed and almost speechless. “Wow...how long have you been thinking of that?”

“By the time you were nursing my wound in the forest. I knew somehow that right there is my future, bright and chilled waiting for me to rock in and make it happen!” sometimes he makes her feel like he’s still pursuing her. “What about you? Where do you see us in the next two years?” he asks for a short term goal.

She giggles and rubs his bushy eyebrows. “I don’t know maybe already married to you if you ask me to marry you. There’s nothing I wouldn’t give up to wake up next to you everyday.

Travel the world together. Have my own car by the way—our house as well!” she says.

He smiles dropping a fat kiss on her lips. “I will have long married you by then. We will be on baby number four!” he says.

“Stop talking about having babies Ntsika. You know how I feel about that,” she raises her concern.

He sighs. “I still don’t get it Nosisa. I love kids and...I don’t care if we get a deaf, blind or whatever the case may be. It’s not even guaranteed!” he argues. There goes a fight.

“There are huge possibilities Ntsika. Look at me, my parents are both disabled and what am I? Deaf!” she protests.

“You know sometimes I don’t think you understand how you changed my life with what you call a disability. I knew love was there, but I never knew how to show it. I...” he sighs and reaches for his phone.

He goes through it and hands it to her. She reluctantly takes it and reads a text from Phuthumani.

‘I’M NOT SAYING THAT YOU NEVER MADE ME FEEL LOVED BUT NOWADAYS IT’S DIFFERENT. EVER SINCE I GOT SICK AND ALL, YOU WERE DISTANT AND I UNDERSTOOD THAT IT’S BECAUSE OF YOUR CONFLICT WITH SIS’AZA. BUT BELIEVE ME, AS YOU GROW OLD OR AS I GROW OLD YOU DON’T SHOWER ME WITH ONLY MONEY ANYMORE. YOU LISTEN TO MY STUPID STORIES ABOUT MY FEAR FOR GIRLS—PRETTY GIRLS! YOU MAKE AN EFFORT TO COME SEE ME, YOU LET ME HUG YOU AND EVEN CUDDLE YOU, I KNOW YOU’LL ALWAYS HATE THAT ONE. WHAT I’M TRYING TO SAY IS YOU’VE CHANGED A LOT AND I LIKE IT. HAPPY BIRTHDAY BY THE WAY. THANKS FOR GROWING UP TO BE AN INTIMATE BROTHER I ALWAYS WISHED FOR. I LOVE YOU...’



She looks up at him a bit emotional. He kisses her forehead and looks at her. “Do you now believe me when I say I never knew how to love better than just giving money and buying one happiness far from what matters until I met you? You did that Nosisa. I’m sure you’d do it to our kids too and if they become like you, I wouldn’t see that as a curse. It’s a gift—you are the one who always says God ain’t no fool. I want kids with you, please promise me you’ll think about it,” he begs.

She sniffs and nods. “I will!” she says. He pulls her to his chest. She’s scared of that one. MaDlomo used to tell her that she’s the only child because they were scared if they give birth again, the child might be even more than just deaf. They were just poor villagers in no condition to groom disabled children. With her they tried their best.

“Baby?” he calls out lifting her chin up. She responds with her eyes. “When are you giving me the cookie?” he asks like a child just blurting out an unexpected question.

She clears a throat and blinks a lot more. She looks up at him again, he's waiting for an answer. Is he supposed to ask for it like that? He could've made advances and hinted that he wants it. Try seduction and all. She wants to laugh at it so bad, but this is serious. "Umm...I...I didn't see that one coming!" she says.

He gives her a lazy look. "I'm not saying give it to me now," he shrugs running his finger on her nipples on top of her night dress. "I'm just curious. That's all!" he says.

Right now she just can't help it but laugh. He smiles looking away suddenly looking all shy. "I've been thinking about it...you know but the thing is I'm scared," she decides to be just as open.

"Mhm, I know. But you'll love it. I promise," he whispers.

“You don’t want it now, do you?” she looks up at him raising a brow.

He chuckles, “I always crave for it all the time nje baby. I’ve been waiting for you. I still will if you’re not ready yet!” he softly smooches her lips.

“Okay...” she whispers as he pulls out. “I feel like having an orange!” she randomly says.

He gives her a look. “I’ll peel it off and help you eat it the right way!” he states.

“What you mean the right way? I always eat it right

” she is laughing a bit. People eat oranges in different ways right?

“But wena you open a hole on it and start you know...” he’s giving her those bedroom eyes.

“No, I don’t know Bhut’ Ntsika. Why are you looking at me like that?” —Nosisa.

He sighs and smirks at the same time. “One day I’ll let you know why it makes me go nuts to see you eating it like that. And I wouldn’t want you to make a sound!” he kisses her seductively and squeezes her behind against his hard shaft. He pulls out instantly, then rolls out of bed. Strips off his clothes and evaporates to the bathroom giving her the sight of his fine a\*s!

“Honey!” she calls out desperately. Did he just do that to her? She snorts!

NOMATHEMBA

“You and I are not doing this again Mawethu. I am not sleeping with you. Get out of my room, you pervert!” she pushes him away.

“What? Oh please y-”

“One more word from you that wife of yours will come running in this room. Someone is going to leave this house in a body bag and it won’t be me!” she threatens.

“You think your mother cares? That she’ll believe a jezebel of a daughter who sleeps around with older men for money? She couldn’t believe you when you thought your a\*s was innocent. Come on, let’s face it you enjoy having me for breakfast as much as I do. Stop playing games and...” he pushes her against the wall trying to lower her pajamas.

“Just stop it!” she pushes him off but he grabs her arm.

He turns her around and slams her hard against the wall with her face. She flinches in pain. He pulls her pants down and throws his own boxers down to his own ankles.

Tears roll down her face as her trembling palms are pasted against the cold wall together with the side of her face. She feels powerless with no choice but to loosen up to it. She closes her eyes as he lubricates her with saliva on his fingers.

Seconds later, his shaft replaces his rough fingers. No matter how many times she's rammed by this monster, it's always sending her to an excruciating pain when he plunges it in. She cries out as her walls stretch around his huge shaft and his rod fills her up.

He huffs and flusters her neck with his bad morning breath, kissing her neck at some instances. It's just so disgusting to even think that his wife, her own mother is two rooms down the hall.

By the time his shaft is buried deep to her slit, when she feels his pubic hair brushing against the skin of her behind, she's pasted on against the wall like a limp dishrag, sobbing.

His mouth waters as he hits her in hard, sharp thrusts, pushing her red countenance further against the wall each time he sinks his rod into her.

Still, she begs him to stop even losing her voice to speak in the course of it all. He's murmuring something's as usual, talking dirty to keep himself going.

Then she feels his weight against her back, his hot breath in her ear as he snarls something filthy, and trying so hard to keep his groans down.

He slightly pulls out and spins her around. His eyes are red hooded with no sign of being human. He seizes her in a hug so tight and lifts her other leg up. He goes in harder, faster and races to catch his orgasm.

She looks at a vase on top of the dressing table right behind him. She thinks twice, but decides to take her chances. It's now or never! She slightly pulls the vase and opens her legs even wider for him as he buckles his hips against her mumbling things from the pleasure. "Are you enjoying that?" she feels the need to ask.

He holds on against her waist stilling deep inside and throws his head back. "Hell yhea!" he grunts.



His grunt becomes louder when a whole vase crashes down to his head. It sends him straight to the floor on his back. He blinks with his forehead bleeding. "Thembi..." he calls out. She throws a an iron and grabs a second vase. She looks into his eyes rolling backwards struggling to keep them open.

"UyothiThembi pha kunyoko, njandini! (You will call your mother Thembi, you dog!)" she lets go of the vase. She watches it smashing against his head. His head bumps to the floor and he looks dead to her eyes.

She grabs her phone and calls Dumile, her partner in crime. She paces around biting her nails. He answers on a third call. "What is it easy in the morning, hee Nomathemba?" he grunts. He's way too grumpy now that he's not working. He's suspended for disappearing without any notice.

“I need your help! I messed up,” she hisses looking at Rev. Siduko's lifeless body laying there on a pool of blood.

“What have you done this time around? You don't seem to stay out of trouble maan!” he roars. He's still half asleep at this hour, it is seven in the morning.

“I think I just killed someone!” she confesses.

“Hee?” he cries out in disbelief. “Nomathemba!” he is good deal frightened.

She doesn't get why he's puzzled, a few months back, she helped him bury Nontsikelelo, his wife underneath his bed. She knew right then that Mawethu's days are numbered. “Just hurry up Dumile. I am running out of time,” she panics.

“No, I am not getting involved. You are on your own!” he says.

“Wrong move!” she bellows murderously. “I helped you bury your wife. Don’t you think it’s time for favours to be returned?” her voice sounds scratchy as she whispers the threat.

Dumile sighs, knowing very well that it has just began—iqungu, the burning desire to spill blood after blood!

‘Will it ever come to an end?’ he wondered.

## NOMATHEMBA

She takes a sit on a chicken outlet in the market and orders a drink. She sits there pulling it with a straw while her gaze is going around. She located Dumile coming through the entrance. She raises her hand for him to notice. He walks over and tries to kiss her first. She moves back and gives him a look.

“Heyi hlala pha phantsi. (Sit down there.) Stop embarrassing yourself!” she answers at him.

His face falls in disappointment, but he hides it well. “USporo usishayile ispan! Mgay’ inyuku! (Sporo has done the job. Settle the full amount!)” he says.

Nomathemba chuckles. “I’m not paying anything. You pay him!” she argues.

Dumile widens his eyes in disbelief. “Are you crazy? Where do you think I’ll get 50k to clean up your mess?” he whispers, getting closer to her.

She takes a long sip with the straw and looks at him. “I didn’t bring a third party in this. You are the one who got all sophisticated and wanted the whole thing to look like an accident. You take care of it!” she hits the table slightly.

He clicks his tongue, “You are used to this thing of sending me around like I’m some sort of an idiot. I am not paying anything Nomathemba. You know for somebody who committed such a crime you are way too greedy and a pain in the butt!” he insults her.

“I don’t care what you say. I will not cover up your own evil deeds and let you pound on top of me for the whole night to release your stress for mahala. You out of people know that

very well. I live for standards, 'soft life'—pay Dumile. Ndiyema apho! (I rest my case!)” she stands up and picks her phone and purse.

He stands up too evidently furious. He points a finger and pokes her chest. “Don’t ever call me again. You and I are done. I don’t want to ever see you again. Stay away from me!” he whispers.

“With pleasure!” she walks out of the room.

She goes down the circus triangle mall. She walks around shopping from shop to shop to keep her mind occupied. On her way past American Swiss something drags her attention. She reverses and stares with her heart closer to stopping. It breaks. When they say jealousy is in the eye they mean that.

She watches as Ntsika stands behind Nosisa and helps her wear a necklace. He goes before her and takes a look at it and smiles

pulling her for slight hug, then kisses her forehead. Nosisa looks different, beautiful and flawless. She always noticed that she's nothing less of a dark beauty even though she was still down and dusty. Right now she looks like Naomi Campbell, an international super model. A star!

She blushes picking up a gold watch and helps him fit it in before the shop assistant helps them. Ntsika has his hand going up and down her waist, his lips not to far from her face. He was never like that to her. Why does it have to be Nosisa? What is so special about her? Disabled people! She has always seen how special they are being treated in parking lots, universities, departmental offices—it's always about them. And now they are all over umjolo? Ha—a, something's definitely wrong!

They walk out carrying shopping bags.

She walks backwards so they won't see her. She wears her shades and follows them. They enter a shoe store and she stands by the trash bin outside, watching them like a hawk. She

watches them taking a sit on the couch while the shop assistant comes at their service. She brings a pair of nice high heels. Ntsika takes it and holds Nosisa's foot, helps her out of her sneakers. He throws a sock in her face and they laugh about it.

“Look at her opening her big eyes like an owl. She is so skinny with absolutely no curves for him to hold on to. Absolutely no curves—she is plain like a capital letter ‘I’! What does he sees in that long mouth deaf illiterate girl? Nonsense!” she hisses underneath her own breath. Her heart is filled in by rage and hatred towards her.

She watches her walking around the store with those heels. Then they move to pick up Ntsika's shoe, she picks up a cream white shoe with a touch of suede. Ntsika smiles and nods before taking a sit and bringing out his foot. They laugh at the gesture together with the shop assistant.

“Mnk! lets see if how long will that last. You are busy showing off and rubbing it right into my face? Mm—ndizakukubonisa



amaqhekez' engqele. UNtsika yindoda ethi mna! (I will show you pieces of cold together with flames. Ntsika is my man!)” she huffs and walks away.

Her innocent heart has been filled with pure anger and evil thoughts. She wants the people around her to suffer like she did. Her heart is a vessel containing pain, vengeance and pure hatred. That’s how the devil slowly walks into her life. Then all of a sudden he is playing Michael Jackson for Nomathemba to hit a moon walk on his own tune. And unexpectedly the rest of the world has to revolve around her.

NTSIKA

“Aren’t you going to introduce me to your friend?” Zodidi asks. They are standing by the headquarters of Ndamase Estates.

“Oh, umm babe meet Ntombizodidi my personal assistant and Zodarara meet my first lady, Nosisa!” he says.

Nosisa smiles a bit at Zodidi

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she doesn't like her, he knows. “Hi, ‘Zodarara’. It's nice to finally meet you. I heard a lot about you,” she says.

Zodidi smiles taking offense of the name, ‘Zodarara!’. Ntsika wishes the ground can just swallow him right now—Nosisa though! “It's a pleasure. I am glad to finally meet the lady who keeps our MD occupied even during working hours so that we will slave off to cover up for him!” she sputters the words with a grin.

Nosisa smiles and cleans her nails, “Well, what can I say, he's the MD of my life too, you know...” sarcasm can not go unremarked from her tone as she carelessly speaks.

Zodidi squints her eyes in annoyance. “You th-”

“Alright, Ms. Jolobe I think it’s time for you to go back to the office. I’ll be back in an hour or so!” he cuts her off to put an end to the rising flames between these two.

Zodidi stomps her foot down cheekily. “Fine!” she says.

“Thank you!” he says. Nosisa leads the way to the car and stands next to it. He sighs and opens the door for her. Women!

“Did you guys just have to squabble as if you’re sharing my d\*ck?” he scowls at her.

“I didn’t do anything wrong. I was nice to her Ntsika considering the fact that I don’t like her!” she shrugs and digs her ice cream.

“And you had to call her ‘Zodarara’? Babe!” this part finishes him off. He doesn’t even know how that name came about.

“It’s what you call her or is it only for you and her to use? If so tell me so I’ll know,” she is intensely staring at him. Here he is not going anywhere.

“Okay...just don’t go anywhere near her. She’s harmless and so much in love with Jesus Christ. I don’t look at other women like that either,” he advocates for himself.

“Then she must stop answering your text messages and tell me uba wena you’re busy. It’s not as if it’s a phone call, hayi bo!

Telephone etiquette is not a requirement for evading your privacy!" she orders.

He chuckles and starts his car. "Okay ke baby I'll keep my phone away from her reach!" he says.

"No, you won't keep your phone away from her reach, but you will place it anywhere around your office. Inceku le kaSimakade yona iphume ezindabeni zakho, finish and klaar! (The saint of God must stop minding your businesses...)" she pouts her lips and goes through her phone not laughing about it.

"She goes through my phone?" this is news and very annoying to him. What's wrong with that girl?

"Stop. Talking, you know I can't hear you!" she deliberately looks far away throughout the window and eats her ice cream.

"Amen!" he exclaims and goes quiet. He gets into the road.

This is just so cute though—a whole her, jealous, eh! The first thing he will do when he gets back to the office is deal with that Ntombizodidi. How dare she? It's time to stop smiling too much. She thinks they are friends now. Mhm!

He has a proposal to arrange and make sure it is super perfect for her. He can't afford any fight to create a rift and plant seeds of doubts in her mind. The last thing he needs is to get rejected because of some broke personal assistant he pays off from his own pockets to perform his duties in that company. Ntombizodidi really needs to count her blessings!

The dark blanket of the sky has stars and a milky white full moon smiling over it. She watches Ntsika's spell binding eyes as they sparkle every now and then when he laughs. His white set of piano key teeth flashing out charmingly.

Every time when looking around it feels like she's in a dream. He booked out a small space in the balcony of Savoy hotel. It's nothing like having the view of the ocean and the sea breeze, but this is home. The chilled view of tall buildings and street lights flashed out in her small town is breathtaking. They are breathing fresh sizzling meat onto burning charcoals. Red wine, sweet delectable and pizza from down stairs.

The set up on their space is simple enough. A picnic with cushions on the floor and some goodies over a bottle of wine. She's in control tonight, she just can't seem to let go of his lips as they converse. She likes the flash of a smile that comes from him every time she steals a kiss. He actually blushes every moment and tell her she's beautiful. She likes those, "I like your eyes. I could stare at them for my entire life time," from him.

She places her wine glass away and blushes. “Well, I hate saying this but I find you sexy even when you wake up in the morning. Is it normal?” she confesses.

He laughs, flattered. “I don’t know but I certainly feel the same. Ndikuthanda noba uvuka, uqumbile, uncumile, usenz' izinto zakho...umhle maan Sana lwam. (I love you even when you just woke up, upset, smiling and doing your own things...you are just beautiful my baby.) I just don’t think I’d function very well without you. I’d feel greatly suffocated and...I’m not a praying person,” they laugh at that one. He’s quoting from a classic artist, Mandisi Dyatyis, he’s a fan of melodies and classic jazz these days. If only could look at it made him do—it’s heart warming.

“That makes the two of us!” she comments. They hold a stare in wide smiles.

He drops a kiss on her smile. “But I sometimes find myself closing my eyes every night and morning to say, ‘Lord I don’t know what’s right or wrong, but I thank you for giving me her in my life. For me it all feels right, let me not ever lose her!’ see that’s what built the little faith I have in him. You!” he tells her.



She giggles, “Yho uthandazela umjolo Ntsika!” they share a hearty laughter at her remark. At that moment she notices him wearing a mask of nervousness while searching his pockets.

She blushes and her throat goes dry as he kneels with one knee before her. Oh no, it’s too soon, isn’t it? She stares as he slips out a little purple box and flickers it open. The diamond stone lights her up reflecting itself in her eye.

A tear falls followed by the other. She takes a breath after breath and looks at him. He’s nervous and desperate at the moment. “MaNgcobeni, Mayiza, Magqobodwana, Tshawuza batshis’ emva naphambili, Nkos’ ayimthand’ ithand’ abanjani,” he praises her clan the right way. Her bones are feeling that one connecting deeper with those of her forefathers. This is the most spiritual way of getting into depths to somebody’s soul. If you want to build relations with an African praise their clans, it revives their soul. It brings favor in their eyes for you to find it. That’s one way to touch their hearts! “Bendisacela nzwakazi yakowethu undenze indod’ emadodeni undiphe isandla sakho somtshato, (Please beautiful lady from home make me a man

amongst men by giving me your hand in marriage,)" he's closer to tears, he was never really a patient man was he?

Now she sees why there are wipes besides the serviettes here. She tries to clean herself while he waits. Yes, he must wait! She blinks and fans herself, then looks at him. Oh

she can't keep him in suspense any longer. She's suffering from this. So, no!

"Yes!" she hisses with a smile in between her tears.

He drinks a bucket of breathe almost finishing the oxygen. He smiles and chuckles in relief, swallows nothing at all. He slips the ring in not in need to be told twice. They both stare at it as it shines in her midnight dark skin. She looks up at him at the same time as he. "I love you!" they chant in unison.

They lean over and share a passionate kiss for quite sometime, investing their feelings and emotions deeply on it. It tardily changes to steal their breath away before getting heated. She's on his lap and him against the wall. This love corner is going on fire, a waiter turns around with full swing not to disturb them.

Ntsika had made that one quite clear, no disturbances—he will call room service if he needs anything.

They groan and moan over and over. The moment is beginning to leap out of holiness. It is leading them to a hell hole so they'll exchange sweat.

He looks up at her with squinty and red flames burning with desire. He wets his lip and stares at her lips. His hand directing her to his shaft as hard as an iron. “How about we take this inside? I really need ‘it’ tonight if it’s okay with you my love...” he’s flinching at her soft hands massaging it. He leans against her lips kissing her. “Please!” he cries out as if she can actually hear him. She can only feel the words against her lips. She tastes the lust from his lips and she’s sure he can taste hers too. She’s wet as a lake at the moment. “Okay!” she closes her eyes and unbuttons his shirt.

He breathes heavily looking at her dropping the shirt behind him. He is left half naked. She looks up at him and smiles a bit running her hands down his rocky upper body. How can one hardly attend the gym but still be this fine as an Ivorian knight from her favourite historical romantic novels?

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He lifts her up in his arms and walks to their unsuited bedroom. He closes the door and locks it. He wishes to paste a sign written boldly, 'DO NOT DISTURB!'

He places her in bed in purely white covers with red rose petals all over. Lit candles with no lights on, creating the mood and taking off the tension. They don't need to have shovels to cut it down. There's a bowl of ice creams and strawberries right on the night table. A bubbling hot Jacuzzi awaiting them on the other side. Maybe at twelve they'll make use of it.

Their tongues dance, twirl and explores each other's mouths. He's completely naked and she's in a red lacey number. He keeps roaming her body with his hands and lips. He unclips the bra and tosses it to the floor. Takes her full breasts into his mouth, nibbles on her nipples. He swiftly moves from there to her stomach leaving marks as he expedites in search of her honey pot.

He cups her round behind and squeezes it just the way she likes it. His touch, kiss and breath leaves no room for worries,

anxiety or nervousness in her system. He kisses her on top of that lacy thong and she squirms attempting to take it off.

He looks up at her and shakes his head. “Not yet baby, you usually soften up the orange before doing that thing you like doing, right?” he smiles to the side seeing her eyes widen at the mention of that.

This night is getting even more interesting to her right now. What orange? She goes up with headboard holding onto it for dear life. He’s rubbing her soaked mound on top of her thong. Ever seen a pig when it digse and digs on the grass until it gets to mud? That’s what he does to her.

“Oh my...Ngconde!” she squirms with legs voluntarily split. The other is thrown far in the North and the other in the East. She must’ve been a s\*x freak in her previous life. This is not how she should behave when it’s only her first time but look at her. “Hayi shame MaDlomo rest mfazi. I fought a good fight for three months trying to follow the Bible scripture, three weeks and ten days with two more hours extra. I can’t do this anymore. Sikhomo is—Ah!” she thought out too loudly.

He smirks hearing her thong cracking as he just tore it. The way down to her toes was almost like it's located in Cape Town and he doesn't have even a lousy R5 to hike there. He saw the easiest way out and dug in!

It's beautiful, clean, shaved and very much innocent. May it be the last one for him to have until death do them part. May he be the only man to hit and it hit right just the way it's owner likes it until she rightfully hands it to him to own it—he did say he sucks at praying!

He looks up at her and mutters, "It's so beautiful like an orange!" isn't that her favourite fruit? Vitamin C—healthy as hell and good for cold.

She blushes, he'll never let go of this orange thing will he. She shivers with a cold feeling sprinting down her spine. He has her legs on his shoulders and hands fully occupied by her behind cheeks.

He slides his tongue, once, twice, thrice and she feels tears closer to falling. She's pulling covers as he blows on it slightly

and pokes on her clitoral spot with his tongue. “Simakade!” she calls the most high God in an ungodly hour.

He finally delivers the promise he once made to her—eating her like an orange. She trembles instantly and goes idle, while holding his head in. She’s breathing heavily, barely breathing with her eyes thrown far into the back of her head. “Oh, I eat the orange like that—fine you were right, okay?” she frustratedly says as third shock of wave comes.

He chuckles while digging his finger in watching her not knowing what to do with herself. She trembles and closes her eyes feeling the ripple of another orgasm showering her over. He smiles watching her toes curling up. He did that—yes, he did!

He goes up to her and kisses her as she tries to come back to planet Earth all the way from Jupiter. Now he’ll take her to the sun and back.

He rubs himself slightly in between her wet folds and looks at her. He likes her hands that are already around his waist. He’s

never met such a wild person for a first timer—Chai, introverted Leo's!

“I'll be gentle, I promise!” he mutters to her. She slightly nods. She trusts him by now, he made sure of it.

## NOMATHEMBA

She hold Nobantu to her chest and comforts her as she cries hysterically. The gate keeper of the mortuary closes the door. They have just identify Mawethu's body who is badly burnt and injured to death.

Dumile is such a creative bastard. He took Mawethu with his own car and went to fake an accident somewhere in the N2. She had taken a look at his diary and saw that he was supposed to be there first things in the morning which explains why he was up so early. She used that in her advantage and told Dumile.

And now he's dead. Nobantu is so broken and hurt. This pain she feels is nothing measured to her pain of having a baby killed like that. She saw her pretending and walking around church praying about it. Poor souls don't even know the kind of a person she is!

“What am I going to say to the kids? Oh God yintoni le indehleleyo imbi kangaka? (why is such a terrible thing happening to me?)” she cries out.



Nomathemba patiently becomes the hypocritical devil than the conniving, pretentious devil Nobantu is. She comforts her while celebrating down there. She will use her to get to Ntsika too. Then destroy her as much as she did.

Another candidate of hers is Ntombizodidi. She checks Ntsika's moves for her. Monitor his every move and tries to get closer so he'll tell her things. The good thing about this is that Zodidi is a child of God. She has always been dedicated to God. Like the typical lower class she belongs in. Every time she thinks something is immorally wrong she never says it. Of course, she's thinking about the benefits because at the moment she's dry broke. Her mother lives with her two unemployed older sisters who have a bunch fatherless kids each. Her mother is not well, she has a younger sister too and all of those depend on her. She's a victim of black tax according to her, but still too holier than thou to date wealthy men. So why can't she use her?

## NTSIKA

He stares down at her as she is deep in slumber. Her round butt partly exposed in the light blanket she's covered in. She's slightly placing her thigh on his lap probably still exhausted. He sips his coffee, slightly brushing her head. Nosisa—a very nice unpredictable somebody. Yesterday he saw her wildest side. At just the thought of it he gets a bit hard down there.

He smiles alone and covers his mouth in deep thoughts of it. He has a meeting later today with the Tshawes. He wants them to go represent him in her home and ask for her hand in marriage. He will just tell Faku about it. He still doesn't know how this will work, him being a Mayenzeke yet he's now camping in his father's house. It's complicated, but that doesn't mean his life should be on hold. He's chasing thirty now, he needs to settle down. Maybe having his own family will cut him some slack.

“Haa! Ntsika why didn't you wake me up? God, my father is going to kill me!” Nosisa pulls him out from his thoughts. She's looking at the rays of sunlight penetrating the hotel room.

He chuckles as she flinches trying to get off bed. He turns to the other side and places the cup of coffee. He pulls her back with her waist. He gets on top of her and kisses her neck. By now he knows she doesn't like him tasting her mouth before she brushes her teeth.

"I texted Gqobodwana and told him you went to town early to fax some documents to the farm. It's only seven in the morning, I'm sure he's still warming MaDlomo up!" he takes a huge risk saying the last part. Who wants to know what their parents do in the morning behind their closed doors?

She slightly punches his chest and giggles. "You know too much these days, don't you? Satan!" she shoots.

He chuckles, "I am older than you and your husband to be. I sure do know more than you do. Andithi ndikufundise ezinye izinto izolo ebusuku? (I taught you other things last night, right?)" he's being cocky now.

She blushes. "Nonsense! You were hitting the thighs all night. I had to teach you everything Ntsika. Such a disappointment!" she shakes her head off dramatically.

He laughs hard and stares at her in disbelief. “Okusalayo I’m not the one who went back on her word with God's scripture. Uphoxe uSimakade uqobo lwakhe ngoba uSikhomo (You disappointed God himself because Sikhomo ah—)” he imitates her moans making it a point that she gets the view. She giggles covering her face shyly. He takes her hands off so he will see her. “Iyha, was it not you who said that?” he wiggles his brows.

“Mxm! Nonsense. I will pray to God silungise izinto noSimakade (and fix things with God) and then someone will spend most of his time in a cold shower. The Lord is the forgiver, hallelujah?” she shoots back.

He frowns. “And I will marry you in less than a week and have you for breakfast, lunch and supper as a way to worship God. Amen!” he retaliates chewing his lower lip.

She frowns back. “Nonsense!” she’s defeated. They fall into a rumbling laughter.

He rolls over and scoops her up to the bathroom. He places her on top of the sink and runs a bath. They freshen up and go down stairs for breakfast. They sit out there and get served. She stares at him admiringly and smiles.

“I love you Ntsika. I really do!” she randomly confesses.

He holds her hand and kisses it. “And I love you babe,” his heart is warmed up. He never knew love would be such a strong substance to bring him so much joy. Life is easy to live at this moment. “Besides your parents who else are you close with? Somebody who can be part of the negotiations?” he asks. Nosisa never really talks about her family affairs. Of which it is justified. One can’t really take her homely matters to a boyfriend. It wouldn’t make so much sense, but he sure knows her family is scattered around. She hardly mentions her father’s brothers or sisters. She talks about MaDlomo's family just a little.

“Umm...my father’s family, ooGqobodwana. He has his two brothers and a cousin in Mthentu. He usually calls them when we are doing ancestral ceremonies,” she tells him.

He nods. “Are they still in contact?” he asks.

“Yes, even though we hardly see them. They meet on certain events like funerals and all,” she says. “Why are you asking? It’s not like we’re getting married as in now, right?”

“Hayi kaloku sithandwa sam we are! (Oh no, actually my love we are!)” he states. “I will write a letter and have a talk with my uncle’s this afternoon. By the end of next week it should be hitting your doorstep to your father. And I will pay for...inkomo kaGqobodwana! (for having you unlawfully!)” he smirks at her excitedly.

She giggles and looks down at her food. “Why are we rushing?” she asks.

“We are not. We are doing the right thing,” he argues.

“I am not ready to quit my job Ntsika. I don’t even have a cat in my name and you want me to settle down empty handed? That’s not fair!” she protests.

He sighs. “Baby...you will still work. Look, we’ll get married in whatever contract you want, civil or in community of property...I’ll personally help you rebuilding your home and getting back to college,” he improvises.

“You don’t get it. I don’t want hand-outs. I want to do it on my own!” she shrugs.

“Okay. I’ll let you do it on your own but I’ll be there as your husband not a boyfriend!” he taps his shoe on the floor and looks away.

“Still marriage is...things change when people are married. It doesn’t feel the same as before!” she complains.

He glares at her. “Did things change between your parents when they got married? Did Gqobodwana change his cologne so MaDlomo would be confused as to who to follow?” he sputters the words.

“Don’t drag my parents into this Ntsika. We are not them!” she argues.

“Sisi we are getting married. Andizazi ke ezizinto undixelela zona ngoba you said yes!(I don’t know these things you are talking about because you said yes)” he’s very annoyed right now.

She digs into her food silently. He also concentrates on his dish with anger. They dine with her avoiding his stares by all means. Dessert is served as well all according to their orders. She keeps stealing glances at his dazzling red velvet cake, it looks appetizing even though to him it leaves a bitter taste.

She moves her chair and sits next to him. She clears a throat and dips in. His heart melts slipping away his anger. He wiggles his brows in defeat. They eat and she places down her spoon and looks up at him. “I’m scared of marriage Ntsika. You know, my parents weren’t always in the honeymoon stage. There was a time where they wouldn’t talk. I’d skip school to take care of my mother while Gqobodwana was out there doing what only him and God knows what. Somethings drove him to liquor...a lot happened,” she says.



He looks at her and nods. “But they passed through it, right? They are still there. They brought you up and you turned out well. Look Nosisa, I never had biological parents. I never had a father figure and a structured family like yours. It’s a dream come through to me. I am not perfect, but I want to do this. I don’t want to die alone. I’m sure we can always make it work. Please, Nosisa don’t pull out on me. I’ll never take away your power, I just wanna a life partner and that’s it!” he tells her.

She nods and holds her hand. “Okay...” she hisses settling her gaze on his. He smiles and holds her hand back.

“Ndiyakuthanda baby!” he says.

Well

the rest of the morning was just about going through a few things about this huge step they are planning on taking. He drove her home and went down to his own home in the evening. He called the Tshawes and arranged a meeting. His uncle sounded rather uninterested.

He finds Faku, Nolwandile and MaFaku sitting over tea in the living room. He greets and sits down quietly. Ever since he did that ritual something has changed.

“Father I...would like to talk to you all about something. I don’t want you to hear it out there, but from me!” he makes the announcement after their small cold talks.

“Oh, you are now scaring us! What have you done?” MaFaku asks.

“It’s not nothing bad...” he shrugs. They nod curiously. “I’m getting married!” he tosses the bomb and lets it explode on it own.

They go quiet with just eyes widened and lips hung open. The siblings exchange looks. “To who?” they both ask in unison.

“Umm...a daughter of the Mayiza's in Mphesheya,” he says.

There is more confusion drawn on their faces. “Mayiza? In Mphesheya? What do they do for a living?” Faku asks. If it was a wealthy man he would know.

“I don’t know. He’s a well known preacher in the Methodist Church though. Everybody knows him with that,” he tries to describe his father in law to be.

“Iyeye, usiqhwala! (Oh my word, the cripple!)” MaFaku says with her mouth widened. She gives her brother a judgmental look.

Faku snorts taken aback, “What? A cripple? Isn’t his daughter deaf too?” he is asking him.

“And that is the only daughter he has!” Nolwandile adds. She is not coming across as surprised as them though.

“Is there an issue with that?” Ntsika asks taking a sit back.

“Yes...my son, you can not take a wife from that home. What is wrong with you?” he disapprovingly says.

“Don’t say I can’t because I will and no one will stop me especially not you,” he stands his ground.

“You know, my grandmother used to say, it is important to look at the background of the wife you are about to take. If a girl comes from a home with only one room, don’t marry her. She will drag you down with her. You can sure take a baboon out of the forest but not the forest out of the baboon!” MaFaku warns.

“Ah well, it’s a good thing we are not baboons then and she’s not from a home with one room. Not that it would matter to me. I grew up in a shack that would be wet all over during the whole summer season. They have two rondavels and two means there are many rooms available!” he begs to differ.

“Son—stop being stubborn. What are people going to think of us? That family has a curse. They are cursed hence the disability

going on from generation to the other. You don't want that!" Faku says.

"We can't take our cattle to pay for burdens to that household. The whole clan can't agree to that. No!" MaFaku supports his brother.

Ntsika chuckles and clicks his tongue before standing up to leave. "You were never going to represent me anyway. The Tshawes will. I just thought I must inform you. I'm not staying here anymore even and from that estate company I am resigning with immediate effect!" he slams door on his way out.

NOSISA

She takes off her ring and hides it on her jewelry box. She sits down next to her mother as Gqobodwana leaves the yard.

Her mother smiles and shifts closer to her face to whisper something. “Is your father still here?” she asks. She forgets that Nosisa can’t hear or just takes her as everyone else.

Nosisa laughs and nods as if she can see her too. “Yes. He’s left!” she confirms.

MaDlomo smiles massaging her leg as they are sitting on the reed mat on the floor. “Tell me, what did you want to talk about earlier?” she’s been dying from suspense and anticipation.

Nosisa blushes and covers her face. “I...kukhona abantu abalindeleke ukuba bafike kwiveki ezayo apha ekhaya. Zindwendwe zam! (There are people who are expected to come here at home next week. They are my guests!)” her voice is wobbly from nervousness.

MaDlomo tries to hide her smile but her dimples sell her out. “Oh? Ngamani ke? (Who are they?)” she is very quick to catch her drift.

“Hayi kaloku Mama uzobona ngelo xesha wethu! (No Ma, you will see them when they get here!)” she doesn’t want to kiss and tell.

MaDlomo throws her head back and laughs. She squeezes her sweaty palms. “Just tell me Nosisa and it will stay right between us!” she says.

That’s a lie. She never keeps anything from Gqobodwana. They talk about everything. “He came here to find his long lost father, Ndamase who has his homestead by the school in Mabheleni. He regards himself as a Tshawes though!” she says.

MaDlomo nods, smiling. “I see...now tell me, how long have you known this boy for? Does he understand you and not ashamed of you? Do you know his friends at least?” MaDlomo asks. His family wouldn’t know her, things don’t work like that. No dinners and being forward with each other’s family.

“I know his friends and they are nice people. He grew up in Ciskei with his grandmother, MaMbamba. His mother is also long missing. He has a younger brother who now stays with his

Aunt in Ciskei. He is a chef by profession, and a developing business man. He started his business of selling food from the ground selling sweets while still in primary with his grandmother's support until he dropped out of high school to fend for his brother and his sick grandmother. He managed to move from the slum to a better place, when his grandmother died earlier this year, he says she was at peace knowing he was leaving him standing on his own," she polishes her man's story.

MaDlomo nods. "And what about you? Do you love him? Marriage is an eternal commitment with it's own challenges," she is concerned.

She exhales deeply. "He loves me Mama, that he never needs to tell me. And I love him because he loves me. His love for me is enough for me to think that maybe we stand a chance," she advocates for her lover.

MaDlomo nods and clears a throat. "Have you two done the deed yet? I know how active you are. You can tell me," she pries. Today she's softer on the matter because they are talking marriage.



She frowns at the label given to her, 'active!' Hayi bo! "Yho Hayi ke ngoku Mama!" she mumbles to herself.

MaDlomo shakes off her head and chuckles. "What? I must know so he will pay for damaging our garden unless he was not first one...was he?" she asks.

"He was," she hisses. This is so awkward.

MaDlomo nods and smiles pulling her to her chest. She then softly says, "I hear. I will have a talk to your father about the whole thing. We have nothing against the Ndamases nor the Tshawes. We will have to pray about it though. I don't like the recent dreams I have about you. You need to pray my child. You see this stage you're in is not for weak spirits or souls. Pray—"

## NOMATHEMBA

When things are beginning with a great start one gets elated. They start off real good. They are excited and of course they're going around telling everyone about it. Things are really great until all of a sudden they hit the wall. Some people don't come out of here, this wall stuns the life out of some people. And everybody hits the wall. It goes around like a clock starting from 00 on the dot up to 12 on another dot. It doesn't matter if it's a villain, your foe or the most perfect man in this universe. Everybody will have to hit that wall. It's painful hitting.

Well, the sound of thunder and that of a rooster as it cries with a hen replying rumbles as the day bleeds into night fall rumbles. White ducks clap their wings violently and squeak! She tardily tip toes with her mother's black long rain coat on.

She watches at a distant as Faku and MaFaku hurry to the rondavel. She looks around and sees no fence securing it. As

soon the door closes, she walks closer and stands by the window. The window is broken as if someone threw a stone and it broke down. She stands there and slightly pulls the curtain aside. Her huge eye shoots inside and sees everything.

Qwakaza sitting there on her three log and her clients sitting on the reed mat. She listens as they exchange greetings.

“Qwakaza we have a problem!” Faku reports to the lesser god.

“Is it the boy?” she asks collecting and packing away a few things around her. She’s not loud, forcing Nomathemba to lean in and listen more carefully.

“He is telling us that he getting married. I thought you said we have full control over him!” he cries out.

Qwakaza shakes her head not striking chords with him on that part. “Manipulate not control. We will never have full control over that boy until we find the singer of the song of an orphan. His name and hers are written in the sky with stars graced by the moon with power vested in Qamata. There is absolutely nothing we can do to put an end to it. It is destiny—fate!” she tells with her nose sneered as if smelling something.

Nomathemba shifts seeing her looking her way.

“You never said anything about a singer before...what were the rituals about?” MaFaku does not understand it.

“To close his spiritual eyes so he will not see the real you. And that’s how you will have control over him through manipulation. Who is this girl he’s marrying? Is it one of those jezebels from the cities? You don’t look impressed!” Qwakaza says with mockery scribbled in her eyes.

“It would be far better than what he’s intending to bring us. The daughter of the cripple and a blind woman of the Thembu’s. She is deaf to make matters worse!” MaFaku snorts. The number of cattle is used to measure a man’s wealth even his beauty is cattle, but nowadays the depth of his wallet.

A cat walks in looking brownish with black stripes, it’s fat with light eyes as if they are stars, very galaxy blue. It makes a sound and Qwakaza picks it up chuckling dryly. She brushes it and looks up at these two.

“He is marrying Nosisa?” she asks not surprised at all.

Nomathemba’s heart beats harder even nigh to stop. What is wrong with Ntsika? How can he even think of doing that? They were very much in love back in the university and he had said he doesn’t see another woman other than her.

“You saw it?” Faku asks.

“I am not sure if what she is in the equation, but do not dare try that girl. If you keep fighting her and cause pain to her, that pain will be folded so many times to come back to you. You will face the wrath of the God’s and die poor, down being kicked on like dogs!” Qwakaza warns.

Nomathemba frowns. No, that can not be. Something can be done. This woman is just weak. Yes, she’s weak! She said it herself before that Ntsika's decision and choices can be manipulated.

“And so? You asking us to hold back and watch him destroy himself?” Faku asks.

Qwakaza brushes her cat slowly and looks up at them.

“Uyabona kayise, ubugqi ndibuthatha kudadobawo kabawokazi

emzini. Inkondekazi yasemaXhoseni maan, inkalanzinzi eyayinganj' idlala nambundlwana. Wathi ke wandilumkisa esithi, lumkela indoda elihlwempu. Linamandla, ubuqaqawuli, liqiqile lithe qwa alinaqwakaza futhi liyegqithisa. Ingqumbo yalo ndoda inqwa neyamanyange ethu noMvelingqangi wamagqobhoka, ixhwithantamo liya kukwenza into encinane lingaphakamisanga nocikicane ngakuwe. Lumka kayise. Lumka!" Qwakaza whispers with her voice dry as she warns them. (You see my cousin, I got witchcraft from the Aunt of my husband's older uncle in my in laws. An old Xhosa woman who was powerful, unshaken and very much livid and evil. She once warned me and said

be aware of a poor man in this life. His anger is of the wrath of God's and like that of a Jehovah. They need not to lift even the little finger to ruin your life. They are forgiving, brilliant, plucky and their core is faith in the most high one!)

"Qwakaza spare us the philosophies of your role models and give us a solution!" Faku runs out of patience.

Qwakaza sneezes and burps. “Angena amanzi endlwini! (And here trouble comes!)” she exclaims. She tends on the fire. “I do not have a wish to die. The boy has only you now. The Tshawes have turned their backs on him, I made sure of it on the day of the ritual. Now all you can do is manipulate him. What ever you do now know that it will have it’s consequences of calamity tomorrow and I will not be able to save you. Go now my cousins. I wish you luck!” she says more like she has given up on them.

Nomathemba runs and hides behind trees to wait for those two to pass before she follows. Her mind is occupied with a lot. She has to think of something.

NTSIKA

He jumps up from his sleep from a nightmare. He looks around not remembering anything he saw or heard. He looks at Nosisa hugging a pillow next to him. He sighs and picks up his phone, half past three at dawn.



He rolls off bed quietly and walks out of the room to release himself far by the kraal. He walks around and stares at the stars up there. Something is not right, he can feel it but can't put a finger onto it.

He sighs and opens the tap in the tank. He washes his hands and face, then sits down on the stand. He buries his face on his hands and tries to crack his head, thinking! He just can't figure it out.

He walks back to his room and sits in bed looking at Nosisa. He smiles a bit admiring her.

She has to be home at five or else someone will be up for a high jump. Getting her to come to his father's house took a lot of begging from his side.

He crawls to her and holds her from behind. His hand crawls over her hips and he slightly kisses her neck. She's a slight sleeper, she must've heard him when he walked out of the room and back.

She flusters her eyes open and smiles lazily. She pulls her cellphone and checks the time. She puts it back and closes her eyes ignoring him. He chuckles and kisses her neck while lifting her night dress up. She pulls it down, "Ha—ana Ntsika I'm sleeping here yhu..." she snorts.

He ignores that and keeps on kissing her neck making her loosen up. Squeezing and letting go of her breasts, he hears her breath hitching. He breathes heavily on her neck, biting it a bit. He lifts up her night dress and buries his hand on her mound, he smiles to himself. She's wet.

She moans feeling his fingers separating her folds. She slightly touches his hairy arms attempting to turn around. He holds her still not to move. She moans weakly trying to catch a breath as he sinks his finger on her opening. The magic is that neck kiss and a light squeeze on her behind. It automatically sends her legs open and hands over all the keys to him. He stirs her as she throws her head against his chest shutting her eyes. Her hands go down to him and tries to take his boxers off. He takes them off and presses himself on her behind. She pushes it all out and squirms begging for it.

He smirks and digs in slightly and softly. He closes his eyes feeling her walls expand and contract, sucking him in. She squeezes him in and he groans with his blood running a marathon from his heart pumping more. She always fights to dominate and succeed.

He pulls out and pulls her up so she'll kneel on the bed. He is taking it from behind to take control over her a little. She gasps as he pushes the expanse of her back to lie flat with her chest. He pulls her hands and folds them against her back.

He smiles at the view of all of it exposed for him to have it and oh, he does! Her beautiful behind raised upwards and backed up. He slams it with a bit of roughness.

She moans loudly as she feels it surge into her slick sheath, sliding a little bit deeper than what she's used to. She flinches. He feels her cunt lips stretching around his swollen shaft and his balls bouncing against her clitoral spot. He bends over her and grasps her tit with one hand and manipulates her clit with the other as he drives his shaft rapidly in and out of her. Her screams indicates that she is too close to cumming and so are his groans. The pure lust of the moment causes her insides to tingle and she feels the orgasmic ripple through her stomach as she spasms around his throbbing shaft. She pushes back against his bucking hips, knowing that his cum is filling her womb.

They kneel there for quite sometime, enjoying the sensations as each of them catches breathes from their satisfaction and sensations of orgasm.

He takes a breath and pull out with her collapsing to the side. He pecks her cheek and pulls her to his chest. “You’re so warm and just addictive down there. lintombi zakwaGqobodwana zimnandi kanje zonkew baby okanye wena you are representing them?” he mutters to her.

She just blushes hard and cracks a soft giggle. She snuggles on his neck and softly massages his jaws, partly drawing circles on his chest.

When the alarm falls off he wakes up and prepares a bath for her. Then takes her home before starting his day ahead.

He freshens up and drives out to Butterworth where his family originates. They await his arrival.

The drive is long as he passes a few towns from Transkei. Later on the day he finds himself going down his small town and heading to Zazulwana village. He parks his car up on the gravel road and walks on foot to his home which is situated three houses away from the gravel road.

His home is beautifully built and he’s proud to call it home because he had a contribution even though his uncles were

never there for his grandmother. She was a widow, her husband was their brother had died in car accident. Rumors has it that they kicked her out immediately after his death and he was the first son. They took away his house, cattle and everything. But every family has it's own clashes and fights so they let bygones be bygones after the money ran out because it does come to an end living one withered and dry.

He opens the gate and walks in. It doesn't look like there are elders around. He stands by the old kraal and wave at a boy.

His heart is heavy for some reason. The boy runs and stands before him. "Where are the elders?" he asks.

The boy is sixteen of fifteen just around his teen years. "Are you Ntsika?" he doesn't put any caps to his name. He nods and the boy shrugs. "Mom and dad left early in the morning. They said I must tell you that you stopped being one of them the minute you moved to live with a criminal and a murderer of their daughter. They said they know you are looking forward to taking a wife, abazingeni bona! (they are not getting involved!)" the boy reports.

## NTSIKA

“Kwedini (boy), you insulted your Aunt and told her this and that about her love life. You went behind our backs to camp in Transkei with that criminal. You didn’t just do that, but took your younger brother under his roof and what happened? He almost died from their witchcraft. That did not scared you, you went on and asked for his cows to pay your brother’s traditional aids. As if that was not enough you sent those rascals to come and insult us here. To open old wounds and rub it on our faces that they are worth of becoming parents than us. Flashing their cars and money in our faces as if we are poverty stricken in this home. They insulted the whole Tshawe clan because of you! And now you are here asking us to go there to be your puppets? No maan. Hayi kwedini! It was either you choose them or us. A man must have one clan to operate his life not two bulls in one kraal. Leave my house. I don’t want to see you here again!” his last uncle whom he got hold of from around the village told him so.

He walked out of the house with a tail between his legs. His chest was tightened and in pains. Nomaza is not answering any of his calls. He drives back devastated, hurt and so lost.

He parks his car by the garage in Ultra city as he arrives in Mthatha. He fills his tank up and throws his phone away angrily as Bandile's phone rings unanswered.

He slowly drives down town not wanting to go back to the village. He doesn't have the strength to face the Ndamases. He calls Zuko and that one is always available. He answers and tells him he's coming over his flat in Southern wood.

Ntsika drives to his flat and gets in. He opens the windows for fresh air and takes out his beer from the fridge. He takes out a few ingredients and makes some meat balls, boils some spaghetti and makes some sauce. He checks his phone leaning against the cupboard and answers a couple of texts from Nosisa. He moves to his banking app and transfers some money to her. A few minutes later a text from her pops in. She's asking if why give her this much money? He chuckles, Nosisa never asks for money or talk about her financial



struggles. It bothers him and he decides to just randomly send it. 'I MISS YOU, THAT'S WHY!' he sends.

He places his phone away thinking if what is she going to tell her? That he is marrying her as a spineless orphan with no solid relatives? He picks up his phone again and calls Zuko to cancel. Zuko sounds all disappointed but he can't. He knows Zuko knows no better solution than a tons of liquor and a groove with girls all night. Right now he doesn't need any of that.

He drives down to his village to look the devil in the eye leaving all that meal he prepared to neighbors to have it. Cooking calms his nerves and gives him life, helps him figure the missing pieces to the puzzle.

He parks by a church as soon as he gets to the village. It's open but there's no one other than two kids who just swept the floor and dusted chairs.

He walks down the aisle and sits down on the stairs climbing up to the pulpit. He buries his face in between his legs. He drowns in the vein of musing.

“A penny for your thoughts young lad?” someone asks.

He looks around and realize the man is sitting hideously behind the pulpit. He faces the ground again.

“Are you married?” he asks knowing the question sounds weird.

“For over twenty five years now!” the man answers.

“Any affairs in between?” he questions.

“No. Just a bottle of beer meddling here and there. Never turned out good, but the kind of a woman I had fought for proved to be more than what I had seen from her. A mother hearted woman, very kind and patient. Never a good liar, she never comforted me with those,” he confidently tells him.

“Fought for her? How did that go?” he seeks advice.

“I stood my ground with them. But my case was different. For you things are bad, really bad young man. Your people are right, at some point in life as a man you have to pick a side. It’s clear they are already casting you out. There is your answer!” there goes an advice.

Ntsika sighs. “And so I must change my identity?” he asks.

“No. They will just represent you or you can go to other Tshawes. There are so many Tshawes around the world. They can perform rituals for your wife and speak on behalf of you to the ancestors. Just don’t give up on your family. Keep trying to reach out for the sake of peace!” he advises.

“They will never give me a chance. I know it!” he says.

“There you have it...” the man tells him.

“How did you keep it together for twenty years without slipping up?” Ntsika turns out to a new page.

“Commitment, young man. Just commit yourself to what you love. Ignore the rest of the world. Protect her, listen to her, be patient and understand that women are complicated. She will challenge you, start a fight for no reason and at some point they never apologize. They apologize with actions some of

them or perhaps only my wife. Take your time studying her, know what she doesn't like more than what she likes, that will bring less arguments between you two. Lastly, open a spacious room for communication, talk about the most awkward things and don't even try to ignore. And...be a good priest in the bedroom, provide the service more often and it must be reviving always. Abafazi umfundisi ongasichukumisiyo isazela sabo xa athe washumayela! If you know, then you know young lad! (Women hate priests who can't preach to touch their conscience!)” they chuckle on his proverb.

Ntsika has already calculated the math. This is Nosisa's father from what he has said. There is no way he's telling him about his sex game with his daughter. The last thing he wants is to be thrown out the minute he shows his face in his house.

“I hear you—sounds like a lot of work!” he says.

“Well, there are benefits to it. If you have chosen the right woman, then you'll never regret it. That is the most loving

gender in many ways other than one. And they are forgiving. Just don't push it!" that's a conclusion.

A couple of men walk in wearing church uniform. He stands up and leaves the room without a word to the man beyond the other side of the pulpit. He drives down to Nosisa's home knowing that he's leaving her father in church. He parks a few houses away and waits. He texted her a long time ago, but he knows she'll take all the time in the world. It's dark outside the night has already fallen.

A knock comes on his window when he was about to sleep. He looks up and sees her. He smiles a bit and leans on the door of the passenger sit. He opens it from the inside. She gets in. He starts the car and drives out of her street to park a bit too far. She's carrying a café tin and it smell so good.

"You brought food for me?" he's smiling.

She nods. “Maize, pumpkins and sweet potatoes...I don’t know if you’ll like them. My mother prepared them the traditional way!” she says.

He grabs the café tin and a spoon. “Nonsense. Of course, I will like it. God, maize at this time of the year!” he cries out as he opens it. It is steamy. His mouth waters at sight and smell of everything. He picks up maize first. She’s staring and he fakes coughs looking at her. “What? I'm not sharing!”

She laughs. “You’re not supposed to. Andithi kaloku ndifake ivamna apho ngoku kufuneka uyitye wedwa. (I just put some love portion in there, you must eat it alone.) I’m just making sure you ate it all!” she tells him.

He chuckles, “Hamba uyothatha enye kaloku baby uphinde uthi fa-fa ingathi ayivakali kakuhle! (Go and fetch another one and spice it up, it’s not enough!)” he teases back. He doesn’t remember eating for the whole day. He closes the café tin and

places it on the billboard to eat the rest later. He grabs a bottle of water and drinks up.

“Are you okay?” she asks, massaging his hand.

He looks at her reluctantly and nods. “Yhea, I’m fine!” he whispers.

“Don’t lie to me Ntsika. What is it?” she insists. He swallows hard and attempts to look away. “Please look at me,” she begs.

“Baby I’m fine...” he assures her.

“When was the last time you burnt an incense? If you can’t talk to me at least talk to your forefathers or God...anyone.



Ungopheli ngaphakathi kodwa Ngconde, uyaqonda? (Don't bottle it up Ngconde, do you understand?)” she cups his face. He looks down and nods. “How did the meeting with your uncles go?” she touches the wound.

He scratches his forehead and stares at her blankly. “Not so well. They hate me. I guess I have no choice but to ask the Ndamases?” he says.

She's sad, but being strong for him. “Just give them time my love. You don't have to rush things. I can wait,” she advises.

“Oh

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wow! You really don't want to do this, do you? Hee!” he scoffs sitting back on his chair.

She sighs, trying to touch his shoulder of which he just slaps her hand away. “Baby I do want to marry you. I just don’t want you to rush things instead of trying to fix things wi-” she is taken aback by him cutting her off.

“There is no way to fix this Nosisa. Those people have been waiting for me to slip up. They tried to poison my own brother against me and now they are trying to tie me down. They don’t want to see me progressing in life and that’s it!” he yells. He goes on and on about how they used to treat him growing. How they made fun of him when he repeated the eleventh grade twice in a row and spent five years in high school yet never made it to matric. When he started working as a hawker, there was nothing more amusing to them other than that. Then all of a sudden when he got a car, they wanted him to come home and thank the ancestors by slaughtering a cow bought by him. “All they ever want from me is money. In their eyes I am Bill Gates not even an ATM but a screwing millionaire for them to keep exploiting!” he’s upset.

When she sees that he’s call, she takes his hands to his. “I’m sorry it feels like I’m on your side. You know I have been talking

to my mother about this as if I knew some of it would happen. It's okay, do what you have to do, I'll help pick up the pieces later. I do want to marry you Sikhomo. Just stop worrying too much!" he breathes at those words.

She pecks his lips and he pulls her closer for more. He goes passionately and slowly pulling her over to his lap. They kiss and touch, moan and groan before just cuddling up in silence for something closer to two hours. Ntsika looks up at his rearview mirror and sees two old man coming at a distance. The other is going up and down as he walks, he's crippling.

"Iyhoo!" he exclaims looking down at Nosisa. She looks up at him chilled. "Nanku utatakho esiza baby! (Your Dad is coming!)" he reports.

She frowns, "What? Oh my God, are you being serious?" she looks up and sees him approaching. She slightly moves to her side. "Drive me home it will take them sometime to get there!" she says looking back again. "Yho! Hayi ke ngoku!" she nervously bites her nails..

He chuckles and gets to the road leaving dust behind. He parks one house away. “Hayi bo Ntsika. Unlock the doors!” she is panicking.

He pulls her closer and looks up at the clear rearview mirror. He smirks, “Hayi fondini usekude la mntu uthe chu noAchuz wakhe futhi! (No dude, that man still too far and he’s with his buddy!)” he’s laid back and it frustrates her.

She holds laughter back, “Hayi Ntsika Gqobodwana doesn’t have buddies. Hayi bo!” she argues.

He laughs and pulls her chin up, “Okay ke yiza ndincamise ke ntombi kaGqobodwana!” he teases her furthermore. She laughs looking around before letting him smash his lips on hers. It’s passionate and full of love, but then short lived. “I love you!” he says.

“I love you too,” she says with the other hand unlocking the doors. She jumps out and runs to her house.

He leans back and watches her evaporating to her rondavel. He drives off to his own hole to hide. He parks his car and grabs his café tin of crops. He goes straight to his rondavel and locks himself in.

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At the Ndamase estates, a coloured man with a brown leather jacket walks into Faku's office. He smiles in admiration and they exchange greetings. The man takes a sit with a small book at hand.

“Ntsikayekhaya Mayenzeke...he has a clean past except for a certain case he was involved in with his child best friend, Bandile. There's a young man called Luke, a coloured boy from

Walmer who got killed in a car set on fire. The suspects were these two. They're both still wanted by Luke's brother, William," he says.

Faku nods. "Is there any sort of proof that they did this?" he asks.

The man shrugs. "I once investigated it and found a few things. I kept them to me and said there was nothing," he answers.

"Why? Were you not paid for it?" he doesn't understand how a PI withheld such information from a client.

"I had a talk with the boy. It was pretty much justified and it was not their intention to do it. Someone framed them and made them believe they did it," he says. It doesn't make any sense.

“I see!” Faku says and picks up his phone. He texts his PI to search for the name William the brother of Luke!

## NOMATHEMBA

The funeral arrangements are going well with Mawethu’s family all back in the house. They are supporting her mother because they are scared of her. She hears them talking badly about Nobantu behind her back. It has always been like that. They know what they know about her and their late son.

“Whoa, that woman is unpredictable. Who knows maybe we might not even get a cent from his property. Bhuti loved this woman with his all,” the other says.

“Sisi is the one who contributed more in these things and of course, she will gobble everything to herself. She controlled him too much. It was never love. I just feel sorry for his illegitimate kids,” one of them says.

“Oh, that one is the difficult one. She made it clear that she doesn’t ever want to see them in this house or our house, our home!” the conversation starter tells them.

“Yho, don’t remind me of that. Sisi is evil. One would swear she’s Satan’s first lady. You know that girl went crazy until she died leaving her children as orphans?” the other comments.

“Oh! Was this true? I thought it was just accusations,” the other says.

“It was true. I heard it from the horses mouth. Were you not there when she warned Lindiwe to stay away from her husband



or else she must go to the grave yard in Gxulu and dig Bonelwa's grave and ask her about who she really is?" the other exclaimed.

"Mhm! Amen. Undahlule (I give up!)" they clap once.

"Udlala ngoNobantu wena. (You take Nobantu for granted!) But, I support what she is doing. These women have to learn to love themselves better. Married men are off limits. When you give birth to a million children for a married man what are you thinking? It is just selfishness to even your own children. At the end of the day it is your kids who suffer the most. Even if they are taken by the stepmother, the fact remains, they are bastards children. They will live with that mark forever. Some people are stuck in life because of what the likes of Nobantu do to them. They punish not only you as a mother, but the fruits of your sinful deeds. When you see that a man is married just run for your life!" the other says.

"And it is true. We can always say women must stop going for other women but the reality is that, that will never happen. No one can get rid of what they love because they are people who

want it too. Even a gardener secures it's fencing and put poison for birds who get in regardless of the fencing. Andithi married people said until death do us part? Death is the fencing and a mistress is a bird!" the other comes up with a philosophy to support the other.

"But these men are the ones who go out there and lie about not being happy. They promise marriage to these women. You can't put the blame on them!" the other begs to differ.

"And wena you are a vessel of his happiness? Is your vagina filled up with happiness for married man to dish out sperms on? Doesn't it end with tears as well?" the room goes silent. "If a man is married and still pursuing you just run for your life sisi. The reality is no matter how we can go on preaching about women having to stop fighting each other it will never happen. Date a married man at your own risk. Be cruel enough to give a married man children and be prepared to have children who have no sense of belonging. Fatherless children who will be going around the world searching for light from witch doctor to witch doctor. Sometimes we will keep crying poverty, crime and teenage pregnancy blaming our children of being immoral

while we as parents failed at identifying the right man to have kids with. Why choose a married if you are okay upstairs, eh?" the view from there seems to be taking the cup home.

Nomathemba walked away already seeing herself married to Ntsika and getting rid of everything that comes down their pike. Children or a woman, just everything! "Ntsika you will marry me. Liking it or not!" she mumbles to herself.

A WEEK LATER,

NTSIKA

On the same morning of his departure, he sits amongst the whole Ndamase family around the dining table. There's one thing he loves about them, they let things pass—by-gones are by-gones to them. Today they are fine, laughing and joking around even after his resignation as an MD while Jamangile continues to be just an accountant. It's like he didn't tell them off when they viewed out their opinions on who he's about to take as a wife. They are past that and if they are pretending, then they are doing it on a professional level deserving an Oscar.

They hold hands and pray bless the food, then dig in. He watches them conversing with kids calling Faku, father. He can not miss how much delighted they look and how much loved they are. He wants that for his own kids. To have what he never

had. It would give him inner peace and restore everything that was once stolen inside him.

Jamangile and his wife take the kids out and Nolwandile grabs her purse on her way out to run some errands. He is left alone with these two. There's silence for a little while.

“You haven't touched your food. Don't tell me you are still upset about that day. You have been avoiding us for a week,” a woman that knows no boundaries cracks the ice with a shovel.

Ntsika places the cutlery down and stares at both of them.

“I grew up hearing from people that my mother was a good woman. She was from a home of fortune and wealth, but then along the way they lost it all after her father's life tragic end. I'm left wondering if she was never a child born with a spoon of gold in her mouth would she have left me like she did? If my

father was just a poor man would he have just abandoned me like that? The more you say something about the societal standards is the more I feel like you rich people always have excuses and sob stories for your wrongs. You never take responsibility, never really apologise even for the sake of peace and... that's not what I want for a lifetime partner. I want a mother for my children, somebody who's seen it, felt it and had it all before. Somebody who has been through what I've been through and that's her. It's just so unfortunate that I'll have to marry her as a spineless orphan I am. Take strangers with me to represent me for her lobola negotiations because of you. The more I stay here, the more I get to lose myself!" he speaks his mind.

They clear throats and exchange glances. "Son, we were just advising. If you feel so strongly about her, then it is fine. We will support you in whatever way you want us to. I can even give you the cattle to add on top of your bride price!" Faku says.

"Yes. We are hundred percent behind you. If it is that girl you want, then there is absolutely nothing we can do. We only want what is best for you!" MaFaku supports her brother.

He collects his car keys and stands up to leave. "I'll be in Port Elizabeth for the rest of the week from today!" he announces.

"You are going to Ciskei? No, Ntsika you have to be hands on in this new position you are in. You need to take control of things!" his father fusses.

"I said it last week father, I'm not taking the offer. I'm very busy with my own affairs!" he says fixing his watch. "I have to go!"

"Kanti what about the lobola negotiations? When are we going to see the Mayiza's? Are we not supposed to draft the letter already?" MaFaku asks.

"You keep saying 'we'...you and who Aunty?" he studies her face as she drops her jaws in disappointment.

“We are trying here Ntsika. If you want to continue being Tshawe it is fine, but we can not let you go there to be represented by total strangers. This is your father. He wants to be there for you and so is the rest of the Faku clan!” she argues.

“We will talk Aunty!” he leaves the room.

He takes his packed clothes into a small suitcase and goes to the car. His phone beeps and he finds a text from Nosisa. She's waiting by the tuck shop. He gets into the car and drives leaving a cloud of dust behind.

She has to go back to work as the easter weekend is over already. He's going to miss her though, those sleep overs and parking by the corners. Random kisses, smiles, holding the most soothing conversations with eyes and making love into the night.



He gets off the car seeing her standing by road with her luggage. He smiles charmingly and walks closer. She looks so cute on the brown simple pants and his baggy T-shirt tucked in on her waist, then his boomba jacket. He is waiting for the fight whereby she will refuse to sleep over at his place. He will tell her to bring back his clothes and lock her in as soon as she gets there!

“Umntu wam madoda...semhle maan baby

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yiz’ apha! (My person... you're so beautiful, come here!)” he mutters as they lock eyes. He pulls her closer while she first looks around blushing.

“Mmh! We are in public Ntsika...” she murmurs in between their lips crashing and slipping into a deep smooch. He smiles deepening it before pulling away right when she's getting up on her toes.

He takes her luggage to the car and gets the door for her. That one is a norm, he did it once and she waited for the gesture on the daily basis.

He gets on the road and drives. She sinks her seat and takes off her sneakers. She crouches her legs and sleeps off. He smiles a bit and turns on some music. His eye keeps falling on her phone as it flashes and vibrates from her pocket. She tucks it out and presses something then put it back.

He stops over a garage and pays for a full tank, walks inside and buys a few things—snacks. He comes back and finds her asleep. Her pocket is flashing as it is evident that there's a text coming in. He ignores that one and slightly rubs her shoulder, then kisses her cheek. She opens her eyes to him. “I bought you some coffee and snacks,” he offers.

She yawns and sits up straight. She smiles taking the coffee. "Sikhom' omhle! (Beautiful Sikhism!)" she thanks him. He lets out a goofy smile. "I would like some chicken though, dipped wings or nuggets..." she's slightly brushing his thigh while sipping her coffee.

He chuckles taking her hands off him. "Sundibamba kanjalo kaloku baby yho hayi Nosisa fondindini! (Don't touch me like that baby!)" he cries out, wetting his lips giving her a look. She laughs raising her hand up in surrender. He walks out.

It takes sometime and when he gets back, she's slightly falling asleep. She sits up straight as he slams the door. "Mmhm, smells so good! Thank you!" she says. He smiles voluntarily. He drives out of the garage.

He gets onto the road and sighs noticing that she's fallen asleep again. She did not finish the food. Her phone is still flashing or maybe he always catches it when it does so. He slightly rubs her hand and she does not move. He focuses on the road for a

minute before slightly tucking his hand into her pocket. She moves a bit and snorts. He clears a throat and takes a breath focusing on the road.

She goes quiet and still again. He slips the cellphone out. He sees a notification informing that she has 8+ unread texts messages. He swipes up and it requires a password. He flinches, 'Since when does she have a password on this cellphone?' he's annoyed.

He focuses back to the road and thinks. He tries her date of birth, his, her mother's... He does not know her father's birthday. He flinches and tosses the cellphone on the billboard. And now he's starting to suspect something, but holds onto the fact that she hasn't done anything for him to doubt her. But then again, there are times where he'd go visit her later on the day. She would have taken off her ring and he did not take that one seriously. He slides his window down to catch a breath and dry some sweat!

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“I still don't get why you're always to be soft on this boy. Going as far as offering to help him pay the bride price for that girl is extreme. You heard what Qwakaza said. We need somebody strong and bold for him not some vulnerable dumb girl!”

MaFaku paces around the office with her semi-high heeled shoes looking like a cabbage stem on her feet.

Faku is relaxed in his swivel chair and drumming down the table with a ballpoint. He keeps checking the time in his wrist with his eye readily expecting someone to walk in. “I need that boy to trust in me Ndindi. That's what I'm trying to do now. Getting him on board!” he says. His eyes lighten up as a tall and lean figure walks in. “Ah, Zuko! What have you got for me?” he asks.

Zuko places a file on the desk and stands afar. MaFaku looks at the file then at Faku. “Walter is his fiance's ex-boy friend and I've managed to reach him anonymously. He's out for blood!” he reports.

Faku goes through the file and looks up at his loyal servant. “How is he related to this? I said I don't want anything to do with her. It will be very obvious that I have a hand!” he bellows throwing the file back into his face.

Zuko catches it and turns into an old photograph of three kids sitting onto a lap of a white man with a goatee. It is an old jalopy they are tucked in. “Take a closer look at that!” he says, giving the file back.

MaFaku who's slowly dying from suspense stretches her long neck to feed her curiosity. “And what is this?” Faku asks.

“William, Walter and their late brother who was said to be killed by Ntsika and Bandile back in New Brighton after a cars' race...” he says.

“Oh, and so what do you plan to do?” Zuko is making him so dumb all of a sudden.

“Walter has already started advances to get the girl back. He sure wants your son dead, but not if we get to him first. But Ntsika has to know that somebody is after him, his worst enemy. He wouldn't risk letting his skeletons out of the closet!” he tries to clear the mist with the sun on Faku's dim side.

“And how will that go to where I want it to go?” he doesn't get it. The plan is just useless to him if he can't be the one to hold Ntsika's deepest secrets.

Zuko folds his arms and heaves a deep sigh. MaFaku closes the doors and closes the blinds. She pulls out a bottle of Smirnoff from underneath the office table shelf. “Take a sit Zuko. Then take us through your whole planning!” she says, relinquishing a shot to him.

Inside those closed doors, they plan and strategize on how to put all of Ntsika's plans on hold. The plan does sound solid and effective. What they never realized was that there is someone at the door. She's leaning in and listening to the smallest sounds of words slipping out of their tongues. As they always say, walls have ears. Then the real question is what is she going to do with little information she has?

## NOSISA

They arrived in the afternoon in Port Elizabeth, but first they passed by the farm. She dropped off her luggage and left with him as he kept twisting her arm that she sleeps over. He always win that fight. She's addicted to him though. His touch, hot breathe against her skin, smiles and jolly sweet kisses. He's amazing!

Right now they are sitting on the floor of the balcony watching the beautiful Sea side in North end. The sea gulls flying forth and back. The lights flickered all over to steal the mystic beauty of the night.

He's watching her instead while leaning on his back against the door frame. She looks at him and smiles, he thinly smiles back. He shifts closer and brings her closer. Links his forehead to hers and fiddles with her hands. She holds her jaws and slowly captures his lips. She sucks on them while he just carefully



closes his eyes not responding for a moment. She goes on and on until he slowly returns the favor. He's letting her lead the kiss.

He crawls his hand up her thigh and buries it underneath her pants. He chuckles finding her not wearing any underwear on. He brushes her mound from damp to wet, sliding his fingers through her folds. Grazing his thumb slowly on her clitoral spot. She gasps and deepens the kiss, but he keeps it sloppy. Her hand travels along his body down to his waist. She pulls him closer to feel his warmth. She moans as his finger slightly stirs on her opening with juices flowing. She goes down his neck and bites on it. He goes deeper driving her to a close urge of an orgasm. She holds his jaws tightly and kisses his lips, but he's responding slowly for her liking. She moans going down his jaws with her kisses and holds him tightly feeling her toes curling. He pulls out and shifts back. She looks up at him with questioning eyes, she was close!

"I have to use the bathroom!" he stands up and leaves the room.

She rubs her face and leans against the wall. She takes out her phone and goes through the pictures of an old jalopy burning. A newspaper with the headline of the incident. Ntsika and Bandile are mentioned there as suspects.

Ntsika's shadow passes by and she tucks her phone back to the pocket. She walks back inside and catches a glimpse of him going to the kitchen.

There's a glass of gin, his favorite in liquor on the table before him. He looks up at her for a moment and throws it in. He frowns at the bitter taste and pours another shot. He places it carefully there and stares at her again. He smiles. She nervously smiles back.

"How does it feel like to be deaf?" he asks, taking a sit on the kitchen stool.

She shrugs. "It's quiet. I live almost like a fish, all it knows is being under water and swimming, no sounds. I bet it doesn't even know it is swimming. It's just like breathing, it comes naturally," she tells him. She wonders if what took him so long to ask. It's a question people ask all the time in different ways trying not to offend her.

He nods and throws a second shot down his throat with a flinch. "How come you know how to talk when you've never heard what you are saying?" it's a difficult question he's posing over there.

"I grew up with Mrs. Hilliard helping me out. She was a retired teacher in one of the schools with those with my disability and more. She was good friends with my parents for my father used to work in her tuck shop!" she explains. "It was never easy though. It takes time to register what people say, but it gets better and better everyday," she says.

“What are your thoughts like if you find my language different to yours? Do you have an inner voice to listen to and argue with?” this is starting to feel like he doesn’t know her at all. It’s like they are total strangers.

“I do, but I wouldn’t say it’s a voice because it is silent. I only have it portrayed in sign language with my own fingers. I do argue with myself sometimes like when I first met you. My mind wanted me to just run, but my heart argued that I help. A lot of things when said, they don’t only settle on my mind, but my heart too. Many reasons why I prefer not to say much more than my actions,” she replies.

“Sign language...was it his mother who taught you? Mrs. Hilliard?” his eyebrow is snapped up on the other side. She can’t read his gaze.

“I don’t get your question,” she enquires for an elaboration.

“Was Mrs. Hilliard your ex- boyfriend’s mother?” he plainly repeats the question. He’s calm and in composure, but his eyes have what’s nothing like tranquility in them. They are wild, bloody rimmed and teary. It scares her, but at the same time arouses her. The way he’s looking at her now hints that he can just rip her apart and roughly give it to her. There’s an itch for that inside her. She’s fighting a beast that wants to unleash itself and be with his leashed wild beast too.

“Yes, she was!” she answers catching the glass of vodka as he just tossed it across the counter to her side. She picks it up and throws it in. She flinches at the bitterness and pushes back the empty glass to him.

He doesn’t catch it and it goes straight to the floor, cracks and smashes against. He glances at it and looks back at her unshaken nor bothered. “And so you and him grew up together?” he asks.

She shrugs. "He was twelve when he came by. He wasn't able to speak then, well he could, but he had suffered a past traumatic experience. When he was seven he witnessed his brother dying of fire burnt by a mob in New Brighton. He died while he watched, he screamed and apologized on his behalf, but then he was just a kid. After that he went mute," she tells him.

"Mute? And so he talked when which God came back from heaven?" he asks with no shade of pity to what she told him.

"When I met him he was speaking sign language opening a room for me to learn even more. My father was trying, but it wasn't the same. I had no friends, Walter became one. One day, it was the twenty eighth of July

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my birthday he wished me a happy birthday in words. His family was there and they were delighted that he spoke. Slowly taking it as each day comes, he got back to words!" she says.

“When you started dating...were you in love with him?” he sits back watching and studying her face.

“No. Initially, I thought I was but it is only now that I realized I just felt home in him. I was not used to people, handsome and sexy guys being interested in me. He never told me more often than I’m beautiful, but the fact that he would hang out with me, kiss me meant something to me. I held on to it and said the words, I love you...I never thought anyone would be interested in me until I got to high school. I hid the fact that I was deaf there and played boys like guitars. Still they never told me, I’m beautiful. And you came around and said it. The way you said it made me feel like I am, I placed my guitar aside and sat in fear that one day you’ll pick up the same guitar and play my heart like nobody’s business!” she wears her heart as she says the last words.

“Lets say I wasn’t in the picture when he came back from Harvard. What would’ve happened to your reunion? Would you

have taken him back?” now that’s a difficult one. “Be honest with me Nosisa!”

She nods hesitantly. “I would consider it. Everyone deserves a second chance, right?” she smiles nervously at that.

He just stares at her blankly. “Maybe or maybe not! You are quite good with oral sex...” alright that’s a little bit too much! He pours a shot and pushes it across the table for her. “Did you learn it from him?”

She chocks on it and continues to drink. How considerate of him—she tosses the glass on the table! “No. After he left I discovered that he was with a lot of girls from my village. Her sister’s friends too and they gave him what I never gave him. I took it upon myself to search about intimacy and stuff. You were my first experiment in everything,” she sheepishly hides a smile while saying that.



He drops his eyes obviously hiding how flattered he is right now. Men and pride flock together. “He’s been texting you, hasn’t he?” he’s calm.

Sweat trips and falls down her spine. “I swear I keep blocking him, but he keeps using different numbers. We are not talking,” she defends herself.

“Is that why you locked your phone?” she nods. “Why not tell me? He’s harassing you, right?”

“I just...I thought he’d stop...” she shrugs.

“Or perhaps you wanted to give him a chance. He deserves it, doesn’t he?” he’s biting his tongue. She shakes her head closer to tears. “Then what was he saying to you?” he asks.

“Nothing...he was just... you know begging me to get back to him and all. Baby I promise, I am not considering it!” she trembles.

He throws a glass against the wall right above her head. She screams and ducks her head shaken. “Of course, you will not consider it Nosisa! Vula le phone ngoku! (Open this phone now!)” he orders.

She picks up her phone and tries to type. It goes unlocked and she trembles with a tear dropping. “I don’t believe him, that’s why I didn’t respond!” she’s too quick to explain.

He huffs and throws the phone against the wall. “How can you keep this away from me Nosisa? He is accusing me of murder and wena you are sitting here lying into my face. You are protecting this bastard what is wrong with you?” he’s speaking too fast, gobbling words.

She slowly moves back breathing heavily from fear. She can't talk nor understand him any more. He paces around the room and makes a few calls visibly shouting at those people.

He paces around and keeps checking the time while he takes in a couple of shots. She's sniffing scared on her own corner. She watches him as he walking out to the front door.

He walks back in with Bandile and three guys she's never seen before. Bandile waves at her and she nods wiping her tears away. They talk and it is just now that she is reminded of how hard and painful it can be not to get a thing especially when people are probably discussing you like you're not present.

Ntsika throws his sharp gaze at her and picks up the pieces of her phone. The guys take the phone. They are creepy. The other is wearing a black vest with a huge tattoo all over his arm to his chest. The other is skinny with a khaki shirt unbuttoned with a chiskop signed, '28' at the back of his head. The third one is just cute in a black goofy tracksuit with styled eyebrows

that catches her attention. He's midnight dark than all of them with round eyes and dark cemented lips. He's hairy just like Ntsika with the same height leaning against the door frame, smoking.

Ntsika points at her and, "We need to talk!" he says that twice in different paces.

She swallows hard and drags her feet. She catches Bandile whistling while shaking his head off looking at her. "It's about to go down!" he mutters for her to get that one. The others smirk at her and walk out.

She braces herself for 'the talk!' that is 'about to get down!' and walks into his room. He closes the door right behind her. The room is dark.

Her heart skips at the gun placed in bed shining in the dark. He follows her eyes up to it and back to her. “Ntsika!” she hisses as she slightly hits the wall with her face.

He breathes on her neck pinning her hands against the wall. His other hand strokes her tits, he pinches them. She flinches as they get hard coming with pain. She feels him hard against her behind. She fights to turn around, he but pins her harder and pulls her pants down to her ankles. He unbuckles his belt and flickers his fingers down her slit and wet folds. He kisses on her neck and bites down to her shoulder, squeezing her behind. “Oh—ouch!” she flinches as he unexpectedly rams his way in. She closes her eyes and tries to break free. He tightens his grip on her and deepens his strokes sending her against the wall even more.

She sees no way out, but to partly surrender and holds onto his lean thigh. She moans as he goes faster and even more rough. She feels him settle in deeper with each stroke and holds him in. And it starts like that a war for dominance. He roughly throws her around while she takes those deeper strokes, gets deprived the pleasure to reach orgasm. She turns around and

slaps him hard across the face. He rubs his cheek and shrugs before throwing her to the dressing table. She holds onto it before she can turn around, he's there serving her from behind. He keeps the eye contact with her from the reflection of the mirror.

He goes deeper and deeper and she feels her knees going weak. A shock of wave rushing all over her body. She's trembling and he keeps hitting that spot at the end of it all. She decides to beg as tears fall from pleasure. She's emotional from what she sees from the mirror, what he's doing to her body. Tears bust out as he holds her tightly around her waist locking lips in between on his teeth. He's looking at the depths of her soul, talking to her, begging her and ordering her at the same time to stay with him. He wants to know if she really knows him.

"Sikhomo!" she screams feeling him holding her tightly against him while she contracts and explodes as a volcano. The animals they are right now are not domestic ones, but wild animals—wounded. She breaks into tears squirting as he stills deep inside her and sharply shoots his semen inside her. He always does

want to pull out, but she holds his buckling hip and open up for him to settle comfortably until he collapses on her back.

He looks up at her from the mirror and pulls out his semi-hard rod. He picks her up and throws her to bed. Her eyes widen as she realizes that he's not done... "Ntsika I-"

He places his finger against her lips and wipes those tears of joy off her. "Shh... you didn't talk when he texted you!" he softly murmurs. Good Lord he's still on that? "Now turn around and lie flat with your chest. I wanna see that sexy behind in the air!" it's an order she can not defy! She glances at the clock above the door. She swallows hard, 09:45pm laying her forehead down and bracing herself. The night looks very much happier in it's youthful hours!

But then instead of his shaft slamming into her opening, the door falls inside by force. Ntsika pushes her aside and shoots first as his gun was right in bed. It's like he was expecting that. Nosisa freezes as a bullet flies by to the dressing table. And Ntsika's bullet shoots to the attacker's chest and he slowly slants to the floor. He's wearing a balaclava but she sees through it. Those galaxy blue eyes. She screams out in shock. "Walter!"

## NTSIKA

He watches her tightly pressing a cloth on Walter's severely bleeding wound. It's been over thirty minutes of waiting and he's still on her lap.

"No, no...Walter please don't close eyes. Please..." she begs as he slowly closes his eyes.

Kwanda walks in with Fifi, his mob doctor. They look at him and Fifi kneels next to him feeling the pulse. "Take him to the car. Move!" Nosisa staggers back crying hysterically.

They hold him out and Bandile walks in. He looks at Ntsika and back at Nosisa. There's a huge rift between them. He walks to Nosisa and holds her before she reaches the floor.



“Baby...oh, no!” Ntsika panics. He picks her up to bed. “Call Fifi before she leaves,” he orders Bandile.

“She just fainted. Use some water. Fifi has to stabilize Walter before-”

“I don’t care what happens to that bastard. Just get Fifi's arse here now Bandile!” he roars. Bandile walks out with no questions asked.

Fifi walks in a minute and examines Nosisa. She does the traditional remedy, water and a towel on the forehead. Nosisa slowly opens her eyes after quite sometime. Ntsika jumps up and holds her hands.

“Walter...where’s Walter...” she whispers with pain scribbled in her eyes.

That sends a sharp pain to inflict Ntsika's heart. He's no longer just insecure but naked. He lets go of her hands, dropping his gaze in disappointment. He walks away and stands by the door as Bandile holds him back not to leave the room.

Fifi exhales looking at the time. She asks some questions from her with a sign language leaving the other two in the dark. She keeps nodding before covering her up and looking at Ntsika.

"Just make her something to eat and give her a lot of water. I suspect she's pregnant!" Fifi tells him.

"She's what?" Ntsika and Bandile asks at the same time. They exchange confused looks as if they are both to be fathers.

“Come see me tomorrow so I’ll be sure. In the meantime no liquor for her and stressing her out won’t help either!” Fifi says.

Ntsika rubs his face. She told him she’s on birth control. It is not true. She can’t be pregnant at least not now.

“Dr. Matabane...” Nosisa softly calls out. Fifi turns to her. “Can I please come with you?” she’s ignoring Ntsika’s gaze.

Fifi looks at Ntsika. “I don’t know...” she swallows hard at the glare she gets from him.

Bandile gives him an eye and nods. “She is scared of you. Just give her time!” he advises.

He holds back his tears and walks out of the room and the house as well. He gets into his car and drives out of the North end.

He passes by the garage and pours full tank, then hits the road to Mthatha. His phone keeps ringing. It's Bandile, Kwanda and Fifi. It's not Nosisa. He doesn't know what to think anymore.

Deep down he always knew to her she's just a second option. There are far better people in her life. People who understands and communicate with her better. People who know her and her difficulties. He's not that. He can't even say a 'hi' in sign language. She teaches him this and tomorrow he's forgotten it all. All he ever knew was to spoil her, put a smile on her face and show affection and love always. But he failed just a few couple of hours ago. What was he even doing with a gun in bed with her?

He heard Walter's foot steps and knew there was an intruder coming. It had to be him and so he just shot with all that anger,

insecurities and jealousy. He pushed him to the urge! And now what? He's the bad guy? Why would she even cry over a pervert?

At the early hours of dawn, he arrived in Khwezi township in Mthatha. He drives into a rented yard with lined up flats.

He parks his car and walks out, he counts the flats and on the seventh door, he knocks.

“Who is it?” a sleepy voice asks from a distance.

“Ntombizodidi khawundivulele torho! (Ntombizodidi just open for me!)” now that's the person who gets him even though sometimes she oversteps the boundaries. ‘Jehovah's witnesses are naturally nosey!’ he says to himself whenever he thinks of her forwardness.

## NOSISA

Fifi shows her a room in at a terraced house totally out of town closer to Uitenhage. There's a computer lab in the front while other rooms are upstairs. It's cold around here with creepy and scary people around. They are just staring at her as she passes. She holds onto Bandile's arm until they get to the room.

It's a single bed, a huge built-in closet and nice dressing table with white washed walls. There's a floor rug all around like in Ntsika's room, somebody who fears cold.

"You can take a shower and use Ntsika's toiletries, wear his clothes and all..." Fifi says unlocking the closet and the bathroom door.

"This is his room," Bandile says clearing her confusion even though she didn't ask. "For desperate times!" he specifies.

She doesn't say anything but just nods her head in understanding.

She places her overnight bag on the rocking chair facing the window. She sits in bed and stares to the ground as they awkwardly stand there staring at her.

"Hey...it's okay. Walter is gonna be fine. We just need him for questioning. He's been stalking you Nosisa. The guys found a couple of these in his bedroom," Fifi hands her a cellphone.

Her heart beats to stop and she tries to swallow it back as it is now in her mouth. Her pictures from childhood up to yesterday in the farm. They are all over his wall. It even looks like some sort of a museum. She scrolls down and holds her mouth from gasping. There's a box she knows very well, his treasure jewelry box from back then. MaDlomo bought it for him. There are her

underwear's, the ones that disappear from time to time. Even her ugliest underwear is there dry as a sun paper

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that brown panty she has kept for years! She hands back the cellphone to her.

She looks up at Bandile. "Did he know?" she hisses.  
"Ntsika...does he know?"

"He suspected. A car was following you guys from Transkei while he kept sending the messages to you. The last one said he's outside. He demanded to see you because we responded. He thought it was you," he tells her.

"What? But why was he upset with me?" she now feels bad.  
Where could he be?



“Wouldn’t you? If Nomathemba for instance would reveal your skeletons to him and he doesn’t tell you about it. He pretends everything is okay...wouldn’t you be upset? Suspicious? Feel betrayed? Hurt? How would you really feel Nosisa?” She holds tears back and tucks out her phone to text him. “He won’t get any of those. His cellphone is off—we’ll go look for him!”

## NOMATHEMBA

She has left home in the early hours of the day to a witch doctor in Libode. She just got here in the afternoon, then waited. She sits before a tall fire next to the kraal in the middle of the night.

There’s an old man sitting beyond that fire wearing sacks from head to toe. He has scanty grey hair, his short beard as well. He’s aging like fine wine though. One can tell he was quite something in his youth days.

“Nomathemba Dunga!” he says with his eyes closed. The second name has to be her father’s last name is not familiar with it. She doesn’t care. “You came here for my fame of love spell, haven’t you? Ntsikayekhaya, an angel chosen by the ancestors of a woman, his mother. Nosisa and him are inseparable. Any of those who attempt to have their days numbered. Who am I to mess with the plan of the almighty?” he says.

She gets irritated in that instant. What a waste of breathe and her time to listen to that nonsense. She has been waiting for the whole evening for this consultation and this is it.

“I know that already. Are you refusing to help me?” she doesn’t beg.

“You have a dark cloud lingering over your head. You are full of anger and vengeance of which it is fine. Unequngu! It makes you human, but there are boundaries not be overstepped Nomathemba. Qwakaza, Dumile, the whole Ndamase clan

situated in that area shall perish and suffer from overstepping those boundaries with it's generation to come. But if you wish to shoot your shot, I can refer you to someone who fears not to face the wraths of the almighty!" he says.

She sits up straight interested in that one. "Who?" she asks.

The man crosses his hands and bows his head twice before flashing a face from the fire. Nomathemba shifts back in fear, but then she sees a familiar face. A girl with an afro wearing beads and a necklace made up of a snake's skin. The man then answers, "Ntombizodidi Jolobe!"

NTOMBIZODIDI

"Ntsika? I thought dreams never come through!" she's surprised to find him on her doorstep looking like he's been hit by a Gautrain.

“I’m sorry to just barge in like this. I-”

“No, no! It’s okay. Come in!” she closes the door behind him.

He walks in and looks around. She’s living in a two roomed house squeezed in with her younger sister. She’s living here to be away from the daily black tax at home.

“You can take the sleeper couch. I don’t have much space as you can see,” she nervously says.

He nods and sits on the couch. He checks the time on his wrist watch which sends her eyes to the clock on the wall. It is three am in the morning. “How often do you pray Ntombizodidi?” he asks taking off his jacket.

She hands him a blanket and a pillow. “All the time. Coffee?” she offers.

“No, I'm fine. I just need to dose off that's all!” he says taking off his shoes.

She nods. “You never pray, do you?” she asks.

He shrugs. “Does it work? Does he ever answer your prayers and do what you've always prayed for in this life?” he asks laying on his back.

That's a difficult question. For years she lived with a disturbing ability to see beyond what meets the physical eye, but no one paid attention to it at home. She resorted to a spiritual church and created a strong relationship with God. Sometimes she doesn't feel human at all. Sometimes she hates the name 'Jesus' for no reason. There's a book she keeps away from

everyone where she draws the most scariest things. Beasts and satanic signs of which she doesn't know how to draw when she's this normal. She has been to prophets before, traditional seers and witch doctors. All of them tell her the same thing, 'I can not tell what you are. I've never seen one of your kind in my whole life. Your shadow is cold and heavy. That's not a good sign. It's who you are, but I certainly can't help you!' they keep honestly telling her while looking terrified. They then dismiss her. She gave up and now she's the one who sees things about people.

"Ntsika...your grandmother can't get to you. She can't walk and her walking stick is with you. You have to give it back before it is too late!" she blurts out.

## NOSISA

The next morning, Bandile drops her off at the farm. As soon as she gets to the restaurant, Owen tells her Ouma wants to see her. She walks off to her chalet. That's where Ouma spends the rest of her days, having some tea, wine or mongering gossip with her old friends, former workers and neighbors.

Today, she's reading a magazine with an old lady that she's quite used to seeing around. Her name is Yvonne, always in two pieces of formal outfits with a hat on and a scarf, then heels as if she's not in a farm way out of the city. Wearing a red lipstick with a puffed wrinkled up face. She's resisting aging by all means.

She greets and Ouma greets back. She orders her to take a sit. There's silence for a moment with cold glares from Yvonne. They are unsettling.

“Nonny...this is Yvonne, Sylvia's older sister,” Ouma says.

There's silence and just a nod from her. She's trying to think about this Sylvia woman. Could it be the same woman she knows? “Mrs. Hilliard?” she asks, thoughtfully. There's an earthquake emerging in her chest and she sweats from anticipation.

“Yes. Mrs. Hilliard...” Ouma nods with a blank expression. She hardly talks and she's a very calm person. The type that is very much unpredictable, one never knows what's she thinks. “She is here about Walter's disappearance, hoping that you might help her find him!” she concludes.

“But how am I going to help her? Did she go to the police?” she acts like she knows nothing about whatever they have in store for her. The last thing she wants to do is crossing Kwanda and his gang. Let alone getting Ntsika into trouble.



“We know about Walter's obsession over you and the incident that went down in your boyfriend's house. We don't want to cause trouble. That boy you are with has caused us so much pain in the past. Walter is my husband's nephew and I love him just as much. We have lost our son to that boy in the past. We can't lose Walter too!” she pleads with her.

No, those sob stories are not going to work. Kwanda will not kill Walter anyway. He is a pervert and dangerous to her. She's not about to sell Ntsika off to them either.

“I don't know what you are talking about Ouma. Nothing happened in the house yesterday unless it happened outside. I can't hear any commotions from outside so I wouldn't know. I'm sorry about your loss as well!” she states.

“Nosisa...please, help us with just a location and we will go fetch him. He needs to have his meds and get back in the right

state. I beg of you!” she takes off her glasses and wipes her glassy eyes.

Nosisa sighs. “I'm sorry Ouma...but I can't help you in anyway with this. I don't know any of what you're talking about,” she refuses to come on board.

“Please...I am be-” Ouma is cut off by Yvonne.

She starts off talking very fast with her hands in translation of it. Why is Nosisa not surprised? Of course, she'd know sign language if she is Mrs. Hilliard's sister.

“You don't have to beg her. Walter went out of his way to make her life better. Tried to get her to the Stellenbosch university, but what did she do? Threw it back in his face. And he had to beg Ouma for this opportunity to make something out of your useless miserable life. And you bite the hand that feeds you.

You are cruel and a curse to his life. We are not going to beg you, but you will have to pick a side. It's either us or your gangster wannabe of a scumbag. Walter did everything for you and now what? You're whoring around not giving a sh\*t about his well being. What did I expect from a woman of your status. The mind is even darker than the skin, dumb and very -"

"Enough! If I knew that your righteous, smart nephew found me this job I wouldn't have come. You don't have to insult me. I will leave!" she storms off the room.

She walks as if walking over hot coals to the dorms. She starts packing and collecting all of her boxes. She pulls her luggage out and leaves the dorm. The farm workers stare from windows, doors and some wave as she leaves. She waves back and sniffs holding tears back.

She really thought she got the job because of his father. Now she's back to square one. She can't go home. What will she tell

her parents? They will die of heartache and high blood pressure.

Owen waves at her sadly with his other hand on the pocket. She waves back and exits the farm.



The cab drops her off at Bandile's house in Summerstrand. She knows all of Ntsika's best friends' addresses for some reason. She rings the door bell and waits. She rings again and the door swings open.

Bandile is taken aback to see her. “Nosisa...what brings you here?” he asks looking at the bags.

“I... I quit my job!” she says. The look in his face is judging her. She knows what he thinks. “I need the keys back,” she adds.

“Did you tell Ntsika?” he asks.

“About what? The keys he willingly gave me to get into his apartment whenever I feel like it?” she's being sarcastic right now.

Bandile heaves a slow sigh and takes out the keys from his pocket. “We changed the passwords and the locks. From now on you'll use an access card to the front door,” he hands her the access card and the new pair of keys.

“Thanks!” she turns around to leave.

Bandile grabs her arm. She flinches and turns around. He lets go. What is it with them and being so rough? He stares at her thoughtfully. “Uyakuncanywa umjita Nosisa(The guy loves you Nosisa). He just needs the same patience you need from him. Everyone have their own syndrome just like Walter. Ungamlahleli izandla! (Don't give up on him!)” he mutters even slowly for her liking.

“I'll keep that in mind!” she says. He nods and helps her carry the bags.

He offers to take her to her destination. The drive is silent and short enough. He helps her in as soon as they get to Ntsika's house. He leaves her locking every door.

A notification drops on her phone and it's money from Ntsika. So he's not answering her texts but just giving her money? Sometimes she just doesn't get it. He really has the ‘syndrome’ as Bandile generalized it!

NTSIKA

‘MaMbamba! Makhulu?(Grandma?)’ he keeps calling his grandmother

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but she just keeps humming while doing the dishes. His heart shatters and sadness fills his inner being. “Makhulu!” he whines. She turns her back on him and walks out of the room.

He jumps up at a slight tap on his shoulder. His eyes come across Zodidi's face. He sits up straight and rubs his eyes. The sunshine is already blazing the room and it's cleaned up.

“Bad dream?” she asks.

He still remembers what she said yesterday. When he asked her furtherly, she brushed it off. He's certain that he never told anybody about the details of his dream.

Strangely enough, today he woke up with a dream unlike the past few weeks. "Just stress! Work stuff!" he says wearing his shoes. "Where are you going dressed up in black?" he asks, he grabs his car keys. And goes through his million missed calls and messages.

"To a funeral. Do you remember Reverend Siduko?" she asks walking around packing things away.

"Yhea..." he says viewing Bandile's text. Then Nosisa's telling him she's sorry. He places his phone away and folds the blankets nicely.



“He passed away in a car accident. We are burying him today!” she says.

“Mhm, I see!” he says. He sees a piece of paper flying out from underneath the pillow as he just picked it up. He bends down and takes the paper. It must've been inside the pillow case. He unfolds it from the same curiosity that killed a cat. There's a list of names he knows. He reads it to himself:

‘1. Phuthumani

2. Dumile

Nomaza

Ntsikayekhaya

NB: The wicker woman is somewhere closer to an orphan!' he quickly squashes the paper and shoves it down the pocket of his pants.

“What is going on Ntsika? You look out of it especially yesterday. Your father is unhappy about your resignation as well,” she asks.

He wears his jacket and clears a throat hiding away the shock in him. “Don't worry your holy self Zodarara. I am doing just fine. Thanks for letting me camp in. I have to go!” he says walking to the door.

“But you haven't had breakfast yet...I-”

“Don't worry about that. I'll be fine. I have to dash somewhere!” he doesn't wait for her argument, but walks out slamming the door behind. He jumps into his car and drives out. He parks down the road and lays back off.

‘What is going on in my life?’ he thinks to himself confused by everything. Himself, the latest events, his disappearing and appearing dreams, his relationship and latest actions. This is not him at all...

## NOMATHEMBA

“Ngeny’ imini ndohamba! Ewe ke, ndohamba ndisiya ekhaya. Noya na? Ewe ke, noya na phezulu? (One day I will go! O yes, I will be going home. Are you going? O yes, are you going up there?)’ this is a very popular hymn in funerals in the Eastern cape. It is taken from the book of hymns of the Wesleyans.

Nomathemba sang it like an old Wesleyan chorister and a member of guild. She is in all black, wearing shades and standing by her dearest mother and siblings. The boy is not very much triggered while her younger sister is on drugs at this moment. They had to give her pills to control her emotions.

Both these two are not her favourite people, but right now they need a shoulder to cry on. And she is that shoulder for them. She watches as Ntombizodidi goes up and down ushering people with other church members from Nobantu's church. Her mind flashes back the deep conversation she had with the man from East.

‘She is the only one who holds the keys to their separation. It is a bit tricky because it's either someone holy and able to identify with her gets to her first. Or somebody else penetrates the shoved and abandoned unholy side of her. There was only one person who could get to her, Nontsikelelo...’ the man told her so!

\*\*\*\*

At Faku's office;

“Zuko I thought you said you had a plan. What is this that I hear about my son almost killing someone? Is that your plan? To turn him into a murderer?” Faku spits fire.

“It was a good plan until his dum...ahhh!” Zuko goes down slowly with his eyes widened and blood slowly filling his mouth. He touches his bleeding wound on his neck and hits the ground.

Faku jumps up and looks around. “Zuko?” he notices the window has cracked. That sound was of a bullet. He looks over to the building opposite theirs. There's nothing.

He rushes out of the office not functioning properly in his head. He is not safe. He makes a quick phone call and reports, "We are under attack. Zuko is dead!"

"You started this...And I will teach you a good lesson not to mess with people's head anymore!" a thick Afrikaaner accent rolls out of a smooth tongue.

He throws his head back taken aback and looks at the screen of his phone. "Madoda?" he calls out to be sure. This is definitely not his brother.

"He is still having a great time in an ice cold bath in his basement at the farm. This is William by the way. I heard you've been dying to be in the ring with me pal!" the voice is so full of mockery.

He sneers furiously. "If I dare-"

“Oh, please! Spare me the bullshit\*t. You don't want me telling your lost and found son about his mother's whereabouts now, do you?” there's a glaciated minute of silence.

He has him by his scrotum, he just can't move. “What do you want?” he grits the words in between his teeth.

“An eye for an eye!” the other says. “And Walter. The one your son's friends kept hostage!”

“My son didn't do anything to you. He was framed. And yes, I can arrange that, just give me the details!” he is desperate.

“Well...we will talk. By the way I need somebody to clean moola for me. I'd love, love to have that plantation in Cradock. I'll send

you the papers to make it mine!” he greedily chuckles before the line goes dead.

Faku doesn't think of anything else other than just his cousin, Qwakaza. “Unyele kwelicala liza umoya ke lo. Ndizakumthumela ngenkwenkwez’ anye umnqundu wakhe!(He just got onto my wrong side. I will strike him with lightening to death, arse hole!)” he curses and swears underneath his breath.



## NTSIKA'S NARRATIVE

I have been looking at the note I found at her house. She prays, harder and in tongues. That day in church I almost stood up to say I accept Jesus to be my personal saviour bluh-bluh! If you know what I mean. I trusted her because of the way she carries herself. Everytime I look at her I see something special, something unexplainably amazing. There's always something that pulls me closer, telling me that there might be something to reap in her. But right now, I'm confused.

Waking up in her house and finding such a note woke me up though. It's a scary note and creepy—satanic even! I realized that I am living in a shell full of excuses. I let the beast inside me sleep for too long so much that I don't trust myself anymore.

I just started recognizing that excuses are not valid. They are fabricated, conjured up and they are lies. My grandmother taught me one thing about this life. That everything good in life

begins with a challenge. So if I want to have my dream I better get my arse up and have it!



I sat across the table as they stare at me waiting for the agenda of the meeting to be delivered. I hate what I'm about to do, but life has to go on.

“I called you here because I have no one. I walked out on the people who were there morally when I grew up to build a relationship with the available biological parent I could find. I did that. Now I'm gonna have to ask you to do just one thing for me. Help me get a wife to build a home with!” I tell them.

They look at me with delight and pride sparking in their eyes. I called the whole Ndamase clan. “Oh, Hayi ke now you have

spoken like a man. Impondo babhem! (A real Mpondo man!)”  
the other says.

“Don't worry about that. We have plenty of suitors for you. You will just choose an apple of your eye!” the other says.

I shake my head in disagreement. “No old men, I don't think we're on the same page here. I need you to represent me not choose for me. I already have the ‘apple of my eye’!” I let out a thin smile.

They raise up their heads and exchange glances, some impressed and some confused. Faku clears a throat.

“Mhm, Hayi! He did tell me about it. And...we have agreed on the...girl... he's about to take. All that we need to do now is just send the letter and ask for a date for delegations. Mhm, yha!”

he swallows hard seemingly the words are not easy to come out of his lips.

MaFaku keeps getting in and out doing the duties of the daughters in law of this house. I can certainly see that she's dying of suspense.

“Well, then we have been here for all day. I think we should also agree on something like a date suitable for all of us!” I say.

“Ahem!” father's uncle clears a throat and coughs violently just for attention. “Well, son we are proud of you and the step that you have taken. But...do you have enough money for everything? We don't like doing incomplete things. Umnyadala kufuneka ubeyinxikela, sidl' inyama, abantwana badlal' ugqaphu ngesoseji Kwedini! (A ceremony must be huge, let us eat meat and children play with sausage skipping on it!)” we all laugh.

“Mhm-m! Your grandfather is right. And the woman...is she beautiful with curves here and there?” the other bellows failing to whisper.

I chuckle, “I love my woman tall, darker and slender Malume (uncle)!” I state.

“Ewww! That type is usually from a line of the royal house of Xhosa. Hayi ngesikhwele kwabo ungatshel’ endlini ndiyakuxelela! (They are very jealous you'd burn with a house, I'm telling you!)” the other cries out.

We all laugh and I had a time to reflect. A time to learn about them as individuals and I think it is not very safe with them. They are mostly a bunch of womanisers. Maybe it's because they are from back in the days where patriarchy was still very much natural. And maybe I have gone too soft myself. Listen to me judging...

Later on the day, I turned my back on my home to Port Elizabeth. Faku was already headed out looking disturbed with his sister. Aunt is one of a sneaky woman, very nosy and uptight. She needs to stop hovering around father like that. One would swear they are a couple not siblings!

While on my way to penetrate King Williams town, Kwanda calls. I pick up this time around.

“K-way!” I call out.

“Heard William has been hospitalized after holding your uncle hostage. Zuko, that drunkard friend of yours is dead too. This is war NK,” he's speaking so slowly. I bet he's high as hell while reporting these shocking news.

“Zuko is dead? And William? What happened? What does he have to do with my father?” I don't get it.

“William threatened your father into selling him a plantation. There's more, but I just can't crack through it. He was struck by lightning at the early hours of the morning!” he tells me.

“Lightening? Did I miss something last night? It didn't rain in this side,” this is hilarious.

He chuckles. “Your uncle's farm is in Graaf Reinet!” he informs.

“Oh, I see. And Walter? What did you do with him?” I ask parking by the garage and pay up for a couple of litres.

“That one is about to skip the country. I don't want to kill him just yet. Your girl admires him,” he sighs. There's silence.

“There's no denying it, he played a very important role in her life. We all have a past and people whom we care about, but

they mean danger to us. That you need to get through your skull!”

“I do get it K-way. It's just that...” I take a breath and get back to the road. I said I'm done with excuses. “I get it. I was wrong, but I just feel like... I'm a second options to her,” that's not an excuse. It's a feeling. That's what I always get from her.

“I suggest you go see her and come back to tell me that again. That you are indeed a second option!” he drops the call before I say something.



I park by Cradock at about eight in the evening. I listen to Owen's cellphone ringing unanswered for a couple of rings. I keep trying and he finally answers. “What do you want?” he is super annoyed.



Okay! "I'm at the entrance. I need to see Nosisa. Please, it's sort of urgent!" I hate sounding desperate, but she's not answering any of my texts. In fact those text just ticked once.

"She is not here. She left!" he says.

"What do you mean she left? Don't you have dorms here?" I don't get it.

"She left the farm Ntsika. She quit the job and thanks to you for ruining her life!" he clicks his tongue. The line goes dead leaving me hanging there, confused.

Quit? Thanks to me?

I started the car and drove into the friendly city of Port Elizabeth. It's not that friendly to me anymore. I try to call Bandile, but it goes straight to a voicemail. Of course, it would. He's probably busy with some whore in another's man's house.

I press hard with my foot in the paddles and go in full swing down the free way. Passing by the townships I let the way to North End swallow me until I get to the belly of it. I rise up to the upper part of it, Central. That's where my apartment is. I press the remote to the entrance and park the car next to some expensive car. I go off and notice it's one of these foreigners we live with in the building. Drug lords with rented apartments for their Mistresses.

I look up in the building and notice there's light on in my room up in the seventh floor. I walk into the reception and run into the elevator. It moves me straight to my floor and I turn and turn, then come across my door.

I pull out my wallet and slip out an access card and open. I walk in and look around. It's spotlessly clean and cold the lights are all on. I slowly walk in and place my keys on the TV stand. A scent of berries fills my nostrils and I just know. She's here right behind me.

My heart becomes the most active organ in my whole being. I turn around to her eyes lighting up with that big forehead. She has an afro growing and took off her cornrows. I'm ashamed of myself to even look at those eyes after I just sped off.

A tear falls from her other eye it knocks my heart so hard that I can feel it tearing off. "Hey...please don't do that!" I walk closer hesitantly.

She sniffs and just throws herself in my arms. I hold back my tears. Everytime we fight it seems like we always run away. We grow apart only to hurt each other.

NOSISA

She sobbed in his arms and he picked up to bed. He let her pour it all out with his own heart beating to stop. She always get the feeling that he's scared of something. At the beat of his heart, she fell deeply asleep. If she lost the opportunity to better her life, then maybe it's a good thing she has him catching her into his arms when falling.

She wakes up in the dark room and turns on the night lamp. She spots his watch on the dressing table. She goes off the bed and taps the cold carpet to the kitchen with the nice aroma already leading the way.

She stands by the door watching him walking around the kitchen. He pours himself a glass of milk and drinks up while staring the pot. He's half naked with an apron covering his abs up. She smiles to herself and looks up at the clock. It is one o'clock in the morning, but it is thoughtful of him to cook. She's really famished.

He lifts up his head to her and smiles warmly. He takes off his headsets and waves for her to come. She smiles back and walks. He looks at her bare feet as she comes closer. He looks up her waist to the face and raises his eyebrow.

She blushes. It's the way he decides to look at her sometimes. He holds her waist closer and pecks her forehead, nose down to her lips. She goes on her toes and reaches for his lips. He just drops a kiss and looks at her. She's yearning for those lips. She pulls his jaws down and initiates the kiss.

He responds seductively and picks her up to the counter. He goes down to her neck, biting and twirling his tongue on it. He

goes up again and kisses her lips. “Wanna talk to Ngconde?” he asks. She blushes and nods. “Okay—” he murmurs, then pours her some milk.

He turns to the pots and does his thing while she waits. He dishes up on one plate and places it next to her. He stands between her legs and refills his glass with milk. He prepared pap and a lamb stew in the early hours of dawn.

“What do you want to talk about?” he is looking into her eyes.

Isn't he supposed to ask why she was crying? Strange. “I'm pregnant!” she blurts out. The words leave her in fear, anxiety and nervousness. In her life, she would never say somethings because of the fear of how one responds. But she had to tell him this one. She found out early in the morning when Fifi sent her a text. She said she must come for a test.

He doesn't show any emotion, but deep in his eyes there's nothing for her to be scared of. He plays with her hands and looks at her for a while. "Are you happy with it? The pregnancy?" he wants to know.

She shrugs. "I don't know," she hisses honestly. "Are you?" she worries so much about the other person.

He nods with his eyes suddenly becoming moist. "I am Nosisa...I am very happy," his hand is softly running down her flattest stomach. A tear drops followed by many. He looks down and sniffs.

He's going to make her cry too. She touches his face softly as if avoiding not to hurt him. "I know you will be a great father Ngconde, but what are you scared of?" this has to be their first pillow talk off the sheets.

He wipes away his tears and looks up at her. Sometimes she just loves the fact that she's deaf. That forces Ntsika to look up at her so she will see him wearing his emotions. So she will always tell the truth from his lies. She's a good reader of body language and facial expressions. It's a natural ability.

“I know you love me Nosisa. I feel it everytime, but I just lose it somewhere down the line. I get insecure. I get scared of rejection especially coming from you. I worry about a lot that makes me not to be the ideal man of your dreams,” he wears his heart.

She smiles a bit. “You should be scared because I will leave you!” she bluntly says. The look in his eyes when she said that. She giggles and continues to say, “If you ever hurt me...Ever play me like a guitar!”

He chuckles nervously, “Don't play like that MaTshawuza. See I almost died on the spot!” he complains.



She giggles. “What makes you so insecure? What do you think is an ideal man for me?” she is curious to be in his head.

He runs his fingers on her chest and inhale. He goes down to rub his lips against her chest until he reaches her breast. He cups them up and leaves bites. He trails up to her neck to her jaws. He looks at her and she composes herself as her breathe just hitched.

“A man that always spends his time trying to figure out how it is like to be you. A man that never forgets that you can't get a sound. Mna baby I sometimes stand behind you and say something, then wait for you to reply,” he shrugs.

She throws her head back and laughs. This is the craziest thing he's ever said. She holds herself back and looks at him. He's serious. She clears a throat and raises her eye brows to pay attention to him. “Okay...continue!” she says.

“You never seem to have an issue with it and I thought maybe it's because you never notice. That was until we started going around exclusively. People know your language and everytime they converse with you, I start to see how free and happy you'd be. And I get the feeling. When I was in Bali, I would speak English all day as broken as it was. I hardly passed my eleventh grade so I'm sure you can imagine just how tough it was being a foreign country. This other day I met a Zulu guy. I used to hate Zulus but right there, I was so happy that I started speaking isiZulu with him and he was speaking isiXhosa vice versa,” he pauses.

I hold myself back from laughing and nod. I know the feeling. He's right. “I see...” I say.

“I guess what I'm trying to say is that the past few days got me thinking that maybe I'm not exactly what you need. What kind of a husband will I be if I can't even say a ‘Hi’ in your language?” he is really serious about it.

“Ntsika siyathandana. You can't compare ooWalter to you. Do you think South Africans just knew how to speak English? It was once a foreign language too. Besides we have our language, a love language. We are talking now, aren't we? From your kisses, the way you look at me, your heart beating seven times in a second and...and the way you do me...you know,” she blushes looking away from him. “I just get the message from those gestures. It's a language!”

He laughs, giving her a mischievous smile. “The way I do you? How do I do you?” he wets his lips with his hands rubbing her lacy soaked panty down there.

She snuggles on his neck, gasping and then a moan escapes with his thumb manipulating her clitoris. “Undivisa kamnandi Sikhomo! (You make me feel good Sikhomo!)” she whispers closer to his ear.

He lets go and looks at her with a smile. His eyes are corrupt just as well. He massages her engagement ring and stares deeply in her soul. "The letter will be delivered to your home tomorrow afternoon!" the bomb hits her back rising her heart to her mouth.

"What? Umm...I thought... Baby that's...that was fast!" she's out of words.

"I know. So how far are we?" he keeps massaging her stomach softly when he thinks of it.

"It's a month from today," she says.

He leans in and kisses her only to leave her thirsty for more. "Oh ilishwa lakho baby wavele wabamba zibekwa nje. Awadlal' amaTshawe uyabona, mithisa qha! (Oh your bad luck baby, you

caught on your first time. The Tshawes don't play, we just knock you up!)” he teases her with a mocking smile.

“Go to hell!” she rolls her huge eyes hitting his chest.

He chuckles and picks up the dish that's been long waiting for them to eat. “If it is a boy, I will name him Sisa!” he proudly tells her.

She giggles with that warming her heart. “Okay...and if it's a girl?” she asks excitedly. He sure knows how to change minds and steal fears.

“Salizwa,” he says.

“Mhm okay, I think I'm going to enjoy this pregnancy. And right now the baby wants fat cakes...” she looks at him with a smile.

That drops his jaws and he stands backward. “Already? Hayi baby!” he stares at her.

“The flour is right behind you on the second bucket. I bought some vanilla and extra oil too...” she wiggles her eyebrows. He once mentioned, he hates baking the likes of fat cakes and bread. He's done that his whole life. He even went as far as saying, that will be her duty of all times for visitors. But who likes preparing the dough?

“Hayi Baby...” he protests with his hands on his waist.

She places her hands behind her on the counter as if the stomach is big already. She rubs herself and looks at him. “It's

not me who wants it!” she says faking a sad expression. There, he's starting to fall for it.

“Okay...just don't cry!” he turns around to the bucket full of flour. He's saying something.

She holds her mouth and laughs silently. She is going to enjoy this pregnancy!

NTSIKA

“Ey man, yesterday I was hanging out with this chick. Yhoo, ubasiwe la mntwana mfethu! (That girl is hot bro!)” Ntsika chuckles as Bandile starts telling him about his one night stands. “Those curves and... damn!”

“And so what? Are you going out with her again?” he asks. There answer is no, he knows.

“What? No ways! Speaking of going out... Is your PA single or what? Pss... don't answer that. I'll get her!” he rubs his hands together.

“Zodarara? No man, you don't stand a chance. That's a God's saint from those churches ‘Rikatharabosha fire!’...” he side smiles and makes a sound sipping his coffee.

Bandile throws his head back laughing at the way he just imitated their way of praying in tongues. It's one thing they



always found hilarious in church. The understanding of that gesture was never provided to them and the rest of the universe.

“Sounds interesting. I saw the way she looked at me the other day!” he smirks.

“Don't even think about it. I don't want drama in my office, please!” he takes a spoonful of cake.

“Hayi fondini, it's not like I work with you. And I will be quick with it,” he shrugs.

Ntsika laughs, “Hayi Kwedini, quick with what?” this is a mental case. He's certain he was never like him.

“Quick with everything. You won't even realize I had something to do with her. Anyway...are you ready for fatherhood and being a husband?” he sits back looking at him with admiration.

“I can't wait. I have eight months to go. I've been googling things about pregnancy and stuff!” he says excitedly. The image of him carrying a baby in his arms. That same baby growing up to call him, Dad.

“I know the feeling but I'm not going to lie to you...fatherhood is not a child's play. You will fight a lot, sleepless nights and deprivation is added in your case. It really needs patience Hayi le nto yenu nimane nibalekana. Akufuneki magwala pha! (Not this thing you two are doing, running away whenever you feel like it. That's no place for cowards!)” Bandile states.

“I know. I know. I'm up for it. I'm sure it's not that difficult but because it is you... It restricted you from sleeping around so...” they laugh as he gives him the knowing look.

Bandile had a child while starting college while life was a still a blast to have. Sometimes he'd run from his babymama to partying. Ntsika would come with a lunatic baby mama to find his arse passed out in a couch somewhere.

It took time for him to come to terms with the fact that he was a father. By the time he wanted to fix things with the baby mama it was too late though. She had already moved on with somebody else. She was tired of fighting a losing battle. And for that they sure do respect her for loving herself enough to realise there's life beyond an unplanned pregnancy and all. It was really plucky of her to do that for herself—choosing her own peace and sanity.

“So when are we getting her?” Bandile asks thrilled. He can't wait to dance until he drops and drink like there is no tomorrow. “The bride!”

“They gave us Friday next week for the negotiations to start. I just made a purchase of a couple of cattle, horses and a few goats,” he says. He is almost left with a blank account. Estimating ilobola isn't easy considering the fact that he will pay damages on top.

“Even horses? How many cows?” he asks.

Ntsika chuckles at his questions. Sometimes growing up in townships makes them both a combination of dumb asses when it comes to cultural affairs. “I don't know, but she told me it's part of it. I guess I will hear from them because she was just guessing!” he shrugs.

“And the goats?” he asks.

“I'm hoping they will be lenient on me when it comes to damages by letting me give out a few goats instead of a cow!” he sips his coffee.

“Hayi bo fondini! I damages zantoni ngoku?(What damages?) Are you going to tell them she's pregnant?” his eyes are closer to falling off their sockets. Bandile and paying for everything don't mix together even his daughter delivers a speech whenever she wants a pair of expensive shoes while he can just buy simple sneakers from Pep. He is stingy when it comes to finances.

“No, not that. I deflowered her before marriage and so they will know,” he explains.

Bandile smirks. “How will they know? She's not even attending the virginity testing conferences. She was never a member Ntsika. And you are marrying her now!” he will never get it.

“I know, but trust me villagers are way too intelligent than you think. They know and besides I don't mind. She deserves to be honored and-” he laughs as Bandile raises his hands, cutting him off.

“I heard you. And I get that she's flames in bed. You are whipped everywhere and I'm stuck with you!” he pushes away his coffee. They laugh.

“Ey man, remember what I told you about? The note I found in Zodarara's house?” he remembers and takes out the note.

“Yhea, let me see... Sometimes I don't get why you are so attached to her. She always gives hints of being some sort of danger to you, but you keep going back,” Bandile scowls at him while unfolding the note.

“You make it sound like I'm doing something more with her. We work together man. It's not that deep!” he shrugs.

He pulls out his phone as it vibrates. He smiles feeling his heart softly falling to swim into a pool oil, the same one God kept applying on Aron's beard. He types one of a sweet paragraph back to her as well.

He's getting used to texts back and forth. It's about to be an eternal way of communication between them. He was never a fan until now. Texts are just so romantic and bring in warmth and sweet melodies in his heart.

Sometimes when he's feeling down he just scrolls down on their chats and reads. It's almost like it's a book and she's his favourite author. That one author who always uplift his spirit and put a smile on his face with just one line. It doesn't matter how many times he has read it before, everytime he reads it, it evokes that feeling.

Falling in love is just the sweetest thing he's ever had. This love is just so strong hence the weakness in him. He gets an instant boner everytime he looks at their other kinky and sexy talks. He's never shared so much of intimacy and matters of his heart with any woman before. He thanks the stars for all of it. The woman of his dreams...

“You know I didn't like Zuko and those new friends of yours. But right now I'd prefer being with them than to watch you acting like some sick puppy with diarrhea here...” he quickly places his phone down and wipes his smile away. Bandile continues to say

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“I might as well go hang out with Zodarara. I heard Satanists are freaks in bed!”

“Satanists? That's quite a huge phrase!” he is perplexed to say the least.

Bandile pushes the paper across the table. “Well, from my religious studies I strongly believe in a strong philosophy of-” he's cut off by Ntsika.

“Don't give me Harvard references Bandile. It's just me—NK only!” he raises his hands. He knows Bandile will come with these big bombastic phrases and quote old philosophies with riddles. It's what he studied, he's a philosophy himself, but then life took him out of college to a culinary school.

“Okay fine. In simple terms, what's in there is a list of people she needs to kill to get to the real enemy. See there's an NB talking about the wicker woman,” he says.

Wait a minute. That's what Nosisa also said. It's just a list and a note, how the hell are they so sure that they are to be killed? What is he missing? “Nosisa says a wicker is somebody who has an ability to connect dots and help one reach their own destiny. They put things together,” he pauses at the confusion and curiosity kicking in.

Bandile nods. “The literal meaning being somebody who makes baskets for a living,” he informs him. “I strongly believe there is a reason why you went in her house that day. There's a reason why you found the note, but what happens when she realizes that it went missing? ”



“Do you think she wrote it?” he's scared of the answer.

“Most definitely. Don't tell me you don't know the writing of your PA. I mean who else would it belong to when it was on her pillow case? Wake up and smell the rat Ntsika!” he warns.

“I think it is time for me to consult someone Bandile. These signs I keep getting are messing with my head!” he says.

“What signs? Is there anything you are not telling me?” he is concerned.

Ntsika drops his gaze for a moment and raises his hand for a waiter. He asks for a refill.

“Before I met Nosisa Faku was bitten by a snake. They sent me to the veld to look for herbs. They didn't even give me a hint as to what to pick up. I had dreamt of it all the previous night. She was there—Nosisa. She showed me the herbs and walked away. And I met her the way I had I told you I met her in that forest!” he says.

“You've always had that ability Ntsika. I don't understand why you haven't consulted anyone!” he argues.

He drops his gaze. “There you go...” the waiter says, placing a cup of cappuccino on the table.

“Thanks man!” he says and stirs it thoughtfully. There's is silence for the longest time. Bandile is sitting back staring at him. “I know. The weirdest thing that happened that night in her house is that she spoke about my grandmother like she knows her from somewhere in my dreams. She told me Mambamba can't reach me because I took her walking stick. That I must return it!” he reports.

A loud sip of coffee dominates as they both fall into a vein of musing. This is complicated and there's no easy way to go about it. Bandile is an analyst of dreams, some sort of a tarot from the philosophical studies he took years ago. He learnt and practiced some of the western ways of spirituality. Ntsika trusts him on that.

“Tell me more about this walking stick? Do you remember any of the dream she quoted from?” he enquires before calling on a waiter for another cup of tea too. He asks for a slice of a red velvet cake and some custard on top.

“I saw myself sitting in the middle of nowhere in a tree log. But then that was my body only. I then saw a man looking exactly like me yards away from me, running. He carried my soul with him and like a commentator I was curiously watching his every move. Paying attention to the large number of people running after him... Because a dream is a dream, I see myself standing by the kraal in Zazulwana. My grandfather's kraal and Mambamba hands me the stick...” he tells more and the completes dream.

“A walking stick to measure the depth of streams you're about to cross. And she came about the next day in the forest. She advised you to pick up the herbs and what to say when you get home. Nosisa may not be a clairvoyant nor a dreamer, but her spirit has some sort of vibrance. Her aura carries something. I don't know about how ancestral powers work, but I'm looking at her and thinking of udondolo from your dream...” Bandile interprets.

Ntsika clears a throat staring his friend in the eye as if he's about to get the whole uncomplex explanation in his eyes. “Are you telling me that she's the walking stick? That's...I don't know!” he shrugs in confusion.

“What are the chances that she's not? How else do you explain her being in your dreams and appearing in real life?” there goes a question feeling like a rhetorical one. It needs an answer, but it has none. Dololo, tu, cwaka—mhm! “It's the only way to explain it, but what I don't get is Ntombizodidi's message. It is twisted!”

“You are God damn right. If Nosisa is my campus of life, then what does she mean I must return her? Does she die?” the words are not easy to say, but it's a thought from trying to comprehend the whole situation.

“According to her, it is death. Of which I doubt that's holy enough and honest. It's a trap of the devil if you ask me. Le nto ayithethayo ifana nokuthi kukho isidlo se-steak ngaphandle kwe-steak!(What she is saying is like saying there's a steak meal without steak!)” they fall into a loud gaffew loosening up.

“This is very complicated indeed. But still there's something I need to figure out about this girl. There's just something in her, I know it!” Ntsika says. He has seen her in his dreams, nightmares for a numerous times, but he never wakes up with the dreams. It's almost as if he sees an event unfold and suffers from amnesia same as soon as he wakes up.

Bandile sips his coffee and nods. He then feels the need to warn him and say, “I hear you my friend. But be careful not to set yourself on fire with the devil who won't even wince when you're burning into ashes...”

Marriage...it's an exciting term because in their minds it holds the same meaning to a wedding. They forget about the work that comes with a life time commitment. The challenges, trials and tribulations. They celebrate and congratulate those who have made it there.

Pain and hardships. This is what human beings seem to love in a way. Love is not love if it contains pain, but you'll find them telling you love is painful and beautiful. It's safe to say humans find sadness beautiful. They make it a norm not to be broken. They go around with pain inflicting it to the innocent because they believe it's there anyway.

They expect everything to be hard. They make things hard especially parents. They are sometimes driven by jealousy, family feuds and competition. They end up very much uptight, controlling and some too much overprotective.

Well, what is the case in Nosisa's life? Her father's brothers arrived earlier this week and spoke. They came to a decision to hold the negotiations to their home in Bumbane, in the Thembu Kingdom.

And there are the horses, goats and a cattle grazing and munching the green fields outside the yard. The home has a couple of rondavels and a new bungalow house unlike in Nosisa's father's house. Here stays Gqobodwana's older brother with his children. He has beautiful daughters who are a few years older than Nosisa. Two of them are younger while the other is at the exact same age as hers.

Ntsika's family has arrived and now they are sitting inside the rondavel. The sun is scorching hard forcing them to take off those coats they had on. One can tell Faku is not really impressed by the look of this home. He thought he'd have grounds to convince Ntsika otherwise.

On their side there are two uncles, Madoda, Faku and Vuyani. Ntsika is the fourth one whose trouser keeps shaking and his foot shaking on his boots as well. He's so nervous about everything. He's been looking around to spot her, but nothing. Of course, he wouldn't see her until all of this gets over and done with.

Well, the other side has two uncle's and Gqobodwana is the third. He is nervous and anxious in his own corner. But he's elated about the whole situation. He never thought this day will ever come for his daughter. Growing up, Nosisa showed no signs of interest in people in general. It was never easy for her to settle in the community. They kept squabbling with the neighbors over their bullying children towards his daughter. She was always home if not at school. The white family's involvement, the Hilliard's played such a huge role.

The two groups are very much different in social standards and the way they carry themselves. One could tell the Ndamase's are Christians and elites influenced by the western ways of doing things, amagqobhoka. On the other side, the Mayiza's are



simply cultural and they live from way back. They follow and honor their traditions always, amaqaba.

The three Mayiza's walked to sit by kraal joining their guests. There is no clay pot full of beer or amageu for anyone to dust off the thirst. As guests that is very much expected but these are not just guests. They are here with an intention to build a relations with them and so they should wet their hosts' thirst first.

They exchanged greetings and then there is silence. The Mayiza's stare up at them. Dumakude, the older brother pulls out his inhaler to prepare a fresh smoke. Gqobodwana pops the joints of his fingers. And Mfanelo takes off his wooly hat and carefully places it on his knee. All of them seemed occupied while the Ndamases awkwardly exchanged looks.

A throat is cleared. “Hayi Tshawuza sipehelele apha! (Well, Tshawuza this is it!)” the spokesperson of the Ndamases, Madoda says.

A slight cough with a sharp side gaze is directed to him by the other spokesperson, Dumakude. “Andivanga ke?” he begs his pardon instead.

“Hayi Ngqobeni sithi sipehelele apha!” Madoda simply repeats it for him with no elaboration.

“Hambisa, indlebe ziphulaphule, (Elaborate, the ears are listening,)” Mfanelo says, he is lighting up his wooden inhaler as well. He feels sorry for Faku's sneered nose as the smoke swirls up high. He locks eyes with him and blows the smoke up. He side smiles mischievously and fixes his red blanket over his shoulder.

“Well, all in all MaGqobodwana, the Ndamase clan has been captured by a flower in your garden. We therefore kindly request that she comes to start the fire to cook in our home,” the spokesperson says.

“Oh, and now the girl that you are talking about, who's she? We don't have flowers in this home, but children!” Mfanelo interjects.

“It is the daughter of your brother...ehh...oh, what's her name again? Uhh...” Faku thoughtfully says. It's a trick ancient people always use to get their hosts to say the name instead. The Mayizas don't say anything but waits for him. “Oh

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now I remember—Nosisa!” he finally says.

“This is the first time we are hearing you talk ever since you got here in the Mayiza's. Well, how did you locate our home? There are violent dogs in this village, where is the stick you used to chase them away?” things started to get hitted as Dumakude said.

They placed a couple of bank notes on the ground before the hosts and bottles of red brandy. “There is all that you have asked for Tshawuza!” Madoda says.

“Seems as if you're men,” Mfanelo says looking at them unfazed.

This reaction disappoints Faku. He expected an act of some sort when they see money. But these people are cool as a cold fizzy drink if you know lemon twist le igqogq' umqala!(the one that clears a throat!) There's one thing about Xhosa men, they are quite a complex personalities. When you expect them to be rude they are nice. Expect them to heat up and bubble, they lay back and relax. They are very unpredictable!

“BooNgqungqushe sisaya kubhunga kuba hleze kuthi kanti nizizibhabhadu nje ezinesizungu anaziwa nayilontyantambo na kakade! (Ngqungqushe's we will go to privately talk. It might happen that you are just vagabonding out of nothing to do at

all and that even that flower doesn't know you!)” Mfanelo announces before they rise like ruined mushrooms, iinkowane.

They walk into the rondavel and sit down. They wait for Nosisa to walk in and she does. She silently greets and sits down in the Reed mat opposite her uncles.

“Err...my brother's daughter, my neice we have seen you growing up. It was not easy but you have pulled through. You are wiser now and that you have shown us. We are proud. You did not pour us with a bucket of humiliation, but made us smile and be proud to call you one of our own. MaGqobodwana we are here to tell you that the cattle outside the gate is the bride price for you. Ngamafuphi wena MaGqobodwana, MaTshawuza, MaNgqoben’ omanz’ andonga siyakwendisa namhlanje! (In conclusion MaGqobodwana, MaTshawuza beautiful MaNgqobeni, we are marrying you off today!)” Dumakude said while Nosisa carefully read his lips.

She then dropped her head in silence. She saw the wooden inhaler hitting the floor and looked up. It is Mfanelo. He lets out a thin smile, “Do you know these people though? We never asked!” he asks the question that was supposed to be posed before the speech. They chuckle as they nod.

It was evident that Nosisa was not to say a word but just nod. They then concluded it is done. They must continue!

NTOMBIZODIDI

Today, she just felt her head heavy and spinning. She has painkillers and locks herself in Ntsika's office. She lies on the couch with an intention to take a nap and let the pill work.

As she drifts to sleep, she feels her skin heating up a bit. She's on the dry bushy veld and there is fire coming before her. Leaping flames that sends high degrees of heat from a distance.

She moves back and her hair goes kr...as the flames catches it. She turns only to find sizzling flames of fire already too close.

She looks at the right and left and notices she's surrounded by fire. This is hell. She screams not knowing where to go. She's about to burn to ashes, sweat trips from her whole body as smoke fills her nostrils. She coughs struggling to breathe before hearing someone calling her name.

“Ntombizodidi! Give me your hand...” she's shouting from a distance of the right side. It's dark with smoke swirling up everywhere. She slowly goes that side as the voice keeps repeating the words.

She sees a tiny hand with the palm open for her to grab on it. She can't see the person and she stands still as if not feeling the heat anymore. She looks at the lines of palm. What catches her attention first is the lifeline, it is so long. And her destination? It is quite farmiliar to Ntsika's. The person is heading the same direction as him, but, “Who are you?” she asks.

The hand shakes and there are droplets of liquid falling on Zodidi's head. She looks up thinking it's maybe raining. The sky is dark, pillows of clouds are scattered around wrinkled across the sky. Lightening keeps flashing as the storm brews from the north instead of coming from the west. Instead of the clouds to tear up water, it is blood. She looks down at the palm of the unknown person. Her heart skips as she sees it holding a knife covered in blood.

There's a silent sob that is filled with sadness. Moans of agony from drowning in sorrows. She looks up in the sky again for answers as to what is before her. She sees a purely white scarf flying across the sky. A shower of blood being spilt from the north taints the scarf so badly.

“She didn't do it. She's innocent. No...” she cries out wishing she could reach the scarf and wash it away. She cries and screams with her screams sounding like a horse's cries. The storms bellows and roars after her with caves repeating after.



“Do not be like this Ntombizodidi. You have to do this. Find the wicker woman. She is the chosen one for us to manifest more powers. We need a lamb for the sacrifice. Time is not your side. Move—” a woman begs from behind her.

She turns around and sees a woman sitting in the middle of the leaping flames yet not getting burnt. The woman looks exactly like her, the skin tone, tall figure and the hair. Everything...“Who are you?” she hisses.

There's a flash of wrath and sadness at the same time in her eyes. “They stole you from me Ntombizodidi. That bloody woman stole my life. I was just an orphan and I had found a home in your father, but that wicked woman stole my happiness!” the woman says.

“What are you talking about?” she asks. The woman disappears living smoke where she was.

A soft sound of jazzy music comes from the background pulling her back from the dream. She slowly opens her eyes and jumps up noticing Ntsika sitting behind his desk.

He did not come to work yesterday, rumors has it he was in the lobola delegation in Nosisa's home. "Oh, Mr. Mayenzeke you are back..." she says, rubbing her eyes. She is embarrassed for him to find her sleeping on the job.

"Yhea! Photocopy these for me!" he says then continue whistling at the song playing on his radio. He bought a radio to the office only to be listening to classic music and afro pop. "Notomato undenzile bo wandithathela abant' bam. Notomato undenzile bo wandithathel' indoda yam... (Notomato you have ruined me and stole my children. Notomato you have ruined and slipped away my mafwrab she )" he sings along the old song as if it is the latest.

He is in a very good mood today. She guesses the negotiations we're successful. She grabs the papers and walks to the door. She bumps on someone as soon as the door opens. The papers fly to the floor with the stapler creaking to the floor as well.

They both try to catch all of this and the other catches the stapler first. "Sorry!" they both say looking at each other.

Ntombizodidi's heart slams hard at her eye meeting hers. She drops it to the papers and starts picking them up. A drop of blood wets the purely white paper. She quickly looks up and finds her rising up. She hurt herself with that stapler.

"Oh my God, I'm so sorry...I'll fetch the medical kit. Please, take a sit!" Ntombizodidi sincerely says.

"Oh Baby...come let me help you with that..." Ntsika rushes over to her.

Ntombizodidi watches him placing his white handkerchief on her bleeding cut. She swallows hard and walks off to grab the medical kit. She sits next to her and takes her hand from Ntsika's.

She removes the handkerchief and the hand is tiny, dark just like the one she just dreamt of. But she needs to be sure about the lines. Are they the same? Her index finger traces down her lifeline before she's roughly grabbed on her wrist.

She looks up at her and finds her gaze glaring deadly at her. Her heart pounds nigh to stop. The grip is becoming tighter on her wrist and so flinches. "Nosisa...you are hurting me!" she says, staring into the mist of her darkened blank gaze.

"You don't go around reading people's palms without their own permission. I came here to tell you that I need stop dreaming of

you while you are still alive. Stop haunting me!" she grits her words through her small lined up teeth furiously.

"I don't know what you're talking about!" Ntombizodidi says helplessly. She really doesn't. Things are just as complicated to her. "Excuse me!" she needs to pray hard about this.

She needs to fast, steam, cleanse, light candles and climb the mountain for answers. She needs to go the forests and the veld to pray. Wild prayer with an empty stomach is all her soul is hungry for. She can't continue living like this...

## FIVE MONTHS LATER...

Marriage, I did say it's a complex concept. A heavy load on ones shoulder more especially when there natural foes surrounding the participants.

For the two newly wedded couple it is not easy. It only took them three months before the strings cracked. They lost control of the car. Some days they are fine and some days—it's quite difficult.

Nosisa is heavily pregnant with mood swings very much abnormal. She's working on an art project by the way. She's waiting for funds after she put together a business plan. Her husband helped her register the company and let her be with the investors. He advises here and there.

He stands at the corner of the room leaning against the wall with his head. He has his blazer at hand and the briefcase by his leg watching her. She's wearing reading glasses and yawning over and over. Tapping her lacquered porched nails on the keyboard typing a large scale of papers. There's a huge ancient tome on the table.

He never knew she was so much of a book worm until now. But she's one of a multitasking woman. She keeps the house clean and cooks even though he always warns her against it. She's pregnant, she can't be working hard. Nowadays they fight a lot. She wants sex, the next moment she doesn't. She wants them to cuddle the next minute she wants to be alone.

She doesn't feel like seeing his face with his big head and so he must just live her alone. He does just that. While carrying his big head out of her space, a long paragraph comes in from her complaining. She's lonely and he doesn't love her anymore. Oh, it's too much!

Now he is wondering if he should walk in or not. He did not sleep here last night, but at the office. Going to his father's house will raise more questions. It's no secret, they don't like her nor does she. He's caught up in a complex situation.

“Hey...why are you standing there? Come in,” she says, taking off her glasses. She's in a good mood today.

He picks up his brief case and walks in. She takes his blazer and goes on her toes, kisses his cheek. He smiles. She takes his hand to the bedroom.

She looks at him, “You didn't sleep home last night. Is everything okay?” she's calm.

“Everything is fine. I just passed out and realised it was late to drive. I'm sorry...” he says, loosening his tie.



“It's okay...I will run you a bath. I prepared your favourite,” she walks away before he speaks.

He takes a breath, relieved. “My lucky day, huh!” he takes off clothes and places them on the laundry basket. He makes sure he doesn't drop his socks on the floor this time around. They fought a lot about that in the past few weeks. The thing is Nosisa is a neat freak. And he only noticed now. Yes, she would clean everytime she went for a sleepover. He just never thought it was that deep. Girls do these things to prove a point.

She comes back and her eyes running down the floor. She takes a breath and catches him staring holding a breath. She laughs, “What? I'm not going to say anything...” she says picking up his briefcase from the floor.

He chuckles and walks to the bathroom. The bath looks warm, bubbly and just what he needs. He gets in hoping she'd join him, but maybe it's not such a good idea.

Nosisa walks to the kitchen and sets the table nicely. She missed him and when he didn't come home she was tempted to call that little whore, Ntombizodidi. She really does hate her a lot these days. And her husband? She loves him, but sometimes she just can't help it. She gets all suffocated by him. The more she looks at him is the more she realizes he has a big head, too much bushy eyes and everything about him is just annoying her. He is just annoying, but at the same time he's what she want. It's confusing.

She can tell he's now a little bit uncomfortable. He walks like he's walking on eggshells. She visited her mother and told her about it. She advised her to be more quiet about her feelings now. Just to avoid saying things she might regret later. MaDlomo says she will give birth to a child looking exactly like him. 'This child better not try me. How can you do that to me? I'm the one carrying you around and forced to hate on my husband!' she keeps thinking to herself.

Ntsika walks in looking all fresh and smelling like lavender. Her favourite scent of all times. She got rid of everything that smells like rosemary in this house even her most expensive perfumes.

“How are you?” he asks, slightly holding her waist.

“I'm good. Just been missing you,” she says, placing his hand on her bump. It's not too much nor making her look like her a hippo.

He nods and massages her softly. “I missed you too,” he smiles excitedly feeling the baby kicks. He looks up at her

“Did she just kick?” she nods, holding back tears. He keeps insisting that it is a girl. He bought everything for a girl child and the pram is there already. He's impatiently waiting for her. He lifts up her T-shirt and kisses her stomach, talking to the belly. She laughs throwing her head back as he even tickles her.

He picks her up and heads to the lounge. He places her on the couch and cuddles her up. She lays on her back on him and looks up at him as they converse.

“I was thinking of selling my other car, ” he tells her.

She frowns, “Why?” he just bought it not a year ago.

“I want to settle the payment for the apartment in PE. And purchase four cows to keep on the farm. I spoke to Gqobodwana about it and he doesn't mind. I hope you don't,” he says.

“What is going on Ntsika? Why are you acting so weird lately?” she's taken aback. Whenever he's at the village he never skips going to her house. At first he helped her father with the farm

and kept it secret from everyone. His father has a farm, why not invest in it?

“I know you'll never say it for peace's sake, but my family doesn't really like you. So I thought maybe it's best that I do something in your name. Something that no one can have access to even when I'm no longer there. I don't want a will and a law suit trying to rule my property when I'm not there. The apartment will be on your name,” he says.

“Is that why you refused in community of property?” she hisses. She was a little bit hurt when he bluntly refused it when the lawyer mentioned it. And his aunt was elated about it.

He nods. “I love you and everything I do now, I'm doing it for us. Phuthumani has to work for his own things one day. He's not entitled to my money. I took him to school and I know you'll never turn your back on him when he needs you the most. I trust you with that one,” he slightly brushes her belly. “I trust you with my life MaTshawuza!”

She goes quiet. This is scaring her. There is a lot that they haven't solved in this life. The note he found in Ntombizodidi's house. His disappeared dreams and her own unclear dreams. It's a mess. And now he's speaking like somebody on death bed.

“I dreamt of you last night,” she says thoughtfully.

She feels his heart beating more faster than it should. A dream is now a phrase he fears. “What did you dream of?” he asks.

“An old man sitting by the kraal crushing herbs. He was wearing brown sacks from head to toe. It seems I knew the village. It's in Tsolo, eMjika. He kept calling your name...I desperately wanted you to respond, but you didn't. You left me in the cold crying of despair, then something strange happened...” she swallows hard not wanting to tell him that part.

“What?” he is curious.

“Zodidi...she came to comfort me and rubbed my back until I fell asleep!” she looks up at him.

“I don't know what it means. Do you?” he asks.

She knows. Of course, she does. She has these excellent instincts that are just able to sense the mood and put the pattern together.

“You are spiritually called and the man could be the one who's supposed to lead you to the right way. I'm sure if you'd go to eMjika, you'd find him there,” she has dreamt of this man before. When she was seven. She still remembers the dream as

if it was yesterday. He told her to bring the boy before it is too late...

He swallows hard and sucks a breath. "And Zodidi? You accused her of witchcraft and never apologized for it. I'm surprised she's now comforting you in the dream. What are you going to do, go back and tell her you were wrong?" he's always like that. Starting a fight everytime she mentions the fact that he needs spiritual guidance.

"Zodidi is not holy nor unholy. She's in between and the choice is hers to make. She's caught in the middle of her family feud. She's a dancer in a sad song of an orphan!" she finally gets it off her chest. MaDlomo knows Zodidi's mother from back in the day. Her death was a tragic end.

"I don't know. I still don't get her meaning in the dream!" he's ignoring everything else.



“When one appears massaging your back in a dream it is said that the ancestors are in support of your friendship with her. Or maybe she is no coming to harm you, but to be of help. But my guts are not telling me that in this case though!” she explains.

## NOMATHEMBA

She has been close to Ntombizodidi and sometimes starts conversations about Ntsika and his wife. But the matter is that this is going very slowly for her. Nobantu is quiet and just minding her own business. She cut ties with the Ndamases.

She saw that waiting for what is not guaranteed to work is not going to help. She resorted to another witch doctor that gave her a portion for lost lovers. She has a clay pot that she keeps under her bed. Every midnight she takes out and places Nosisa's picture inside. She burns a few herbs and starts casting a spell on her. It's what she does every night and during the day she stalks her. The intention is to get rid of her in that marriage, isichitho!

“He slept at the office last night. I guess there's trouble in paradise,” Zodidi says.

“I still don't get why they can't just divorce already. It's clear they are not compatible!” she bellows.

“I doubt if Ntsika would take you back even if he'd divorce her. He once told me he doesn't find going back to an ex quite a great idea!” Zodidi begs to rub salt on her wound.

Nomathemba scoffs, “Wait until I make him find it ‘quite a great idea!’. I need your help though...” she says, looking strictly into Zodidi's eyes.

Zodidi picks up her wine glass of red wine and looks at her through it. She's thinking before letting the wine flow slowly to her tongue and she swallows.

“With what?” she asks.

“Ntsika shot a guy by the name Walter and his father struck the brother's cousin brother, William with lightning. They then sent Walter out of the country. He's a nut case... I will send a few messages to the Ndamase estates to scare him off. You'll monitor the progress for me. Find out where they are searching, their next move and all...” she wants her to be a mole.

“And how is that going to help you?” Zodidi asks, carefully placing down the wine glass.

“You already know too much my dear friend,” she says, clicking her cellphone. She watches Zodidi's phone reporting a message. “That is what's in it for you. Might increase with a job well done!”

## NOSISA

As the days go by, she notices slight changes in Ntsika's behavior. He's spending more time at the office. Comes back with his breath tinted of liquor. He is totally avoiding her. This morning he lashed out at over a simple breakfast.

'Do you want this baby not to survive? Listen, I know you don't want her but for my sake, don't do anything sinister. And one more thing, no more dream talks and all that madness in this house!' these are his exact words ringing at the back of her head.

She's now covering her face with a scarf and getting off a taxi in Water fall township. There's a prophetess she knows here.

She gets off the taxi and looks around before crossing the road. She takes a glance at the address at hand.

Counting houses, one, two, three and turning by the corner down a bore hole and turning left. The first RDP house is the exact location. She walks inside looking around just to be sure no one is following her. Ntsika sent a text and told her he'll be back at nine.

She does not knock as the door goes open before she does. A young boy wearing brown kneaded sacks walks out and looks up at him. She takes off her shades.

“MaDeyi says you go back to the gate and wait there. She will come in a few minutes!” the boy says, slowly for her to understand.

She nods and walks away. It is not the first time of her coming here. When she was fifteen, she suffered from heavy headaches and anxiety. There's only one logical explanation to those when you're an African living down in the villages. Evil spirits attack you...

She waits there impatiently and MaDeyi walks out with a bucket of water. She throws it at her and she closes her eyes shivering from cold.

She walks inside following the prophetess. She sits on the reed mat. There are white and blue candles lit on the middle of the room. MaDeyi sits on her side with a basin of clear water and a bible.

“My name is Nosisa kaMayiza. Ndibonisele, (Show me the way,)” she says to the woman while placing a couple of notes on the mat.

MaDeyi nods. “You saw the man again,” she is asking more than just stating. Nosisa nods. “Then when is your husband doing things the right way?”

“He is in the dark. He holds little faith on these things. He hardly knows of the word of God let alone his own culture!” she shrugs in defeat. It makes her want to cry.

“Talk to him and show him the way. You are the neck and his heart leading his head,” MaDeyi makes things look easier than they actually are.

“I am trying but he doesn't want to. I'm trying Ma!” she tells her.

“Try harder!” the prophetess says. She picks up the Bible.  
“Wash your hands in the basin,” she says.

She washes her hands on the basin and they start with the main reason for being here.

MaDeyi stares at the water for the longest time with her jaws slowly flanging until they reach the floor. She sniffs and looks up at her with a distant look. Pain, sadness and worry clouding her face and eyes.

“What do you see?” Nosisa asks, knowing that things are not really good on her side. That facial expression whips her inner being with anxiety.

She continues to page a Bible and runs her pointy finger down it. She silently reads and suddenly stops just staring at it. She rises her head maybe she's regained the strength and guts to deliver the message.

“You are out of time. Everything that is to happen now is going to be the almighty taking control. Their plan was ruined and so they have turned into a new leaf. Just like how Jesus was born and crucified again. It was never part of the plan, but the devil tempered with God's plan. His crucification was as a result of a failed plan, but the resurrection was God's new plan. Through the crucification he let the blood of his son to wash our sins... it's done Nosisa. Just be strong. Pray harder and it shall pass...”

NTOMBIZODIDI

She crouches her legs and leans on Ntsika's shoulder as they watch the movie in her house. He spent the late hours of the office time here even yesterday and that day. He doesn't talk much about his marriage and scorns of time.



He places the empty bottle of beer on the table and looks down at Zodidi. She throws her eyes elsewhere. There's always something about him, his presence and gaze. She has always hid it away. The way he makes her feel, all heated up and so full of humanly desires.

“Zodarara can I ask you something?” he says. He never gets drunk but with just one beer or two, he's fine. And that name she hates and he knows. But she voted...

“Sure...” she says, stealing a quick glance at him. He's staring intensely and it's quite uncomfortable.

“The night I came here you said, you didn't know dreams come through. What did that mean?” he wonders.

“I had dreamt of you knocking on my door step, but it was twisted. It was like I was home back in the village...” she says.

“I see... I saw a movie the other day titled, the wicker man!” he states. Her chest rises up and down. There's a note she lost

around here. It had a list of his family and that concept was there. She doesn't know why she wrote it.

“Oh, sounds interesting! What is it about?” she plays along. She's hoping this conversation is not rooted to where it should.

“It is. And it got me wondering though...what is a wicker?” he asks.

“I don't know. Didn't you Google it or something...” she chuckles nervously.

“Or maybe you tell me about the wicker woman!” he says, calmly looking down at her. His expression blank like a night without stars nor moon.

She's sweating. “What?” she gasps feeling cold still heavily placed on her neck.

“You scream, I blow your brains off! This pistol is silenced to make sneaky whores and witches sing like their own pats,

owls!” he threatens while pushing her off him. He's still laying on the armsrest.

She looks at him and raises her hands shaking in her boots. “Ntsika please, just put the gun down...please!” she begs.

“Why? You know my brother, Aunt from my mother's side and had their names written on a note with a three headed beast. I never told you about them. Why?” he's swimming in so much tranquility. The room becomes heated though. “Start talking!”

NOMATHEMBA

She has been sending fingers, shirt smeared with blood and all these scary messages to Faku. All of it wrapped up in a nice gift bag. She heard they sent a whole search party to go look for Walter and trace those gifts. That's highly impossible.

Now she's sitting before her witch doctor. A Nigerian native one. The man drums a metal making an unpleasant sound while chanting in his own language. She's impatiently waiting while

the man is looking up at the dark sky. Eyes looking like those of an undertaker, Cane's brother!

“My lady...the moon is full. Therefore your opponent went to see a prophetess. What would you have me do? Get rid of the prophetess or work on the herbs and holy water given to your foe?” the man gives out options.

She thinks for a second. It is quite dangerous to come for messengers. She doesn't need too much trouble on her side.

“Work on those herbs. Make her husband not to ever be able to even look at her. No one must stand her body odor not even her own mother!” she orders. She will personally go and warn her to stay away from Ntsika afterwards. “If she heals from this, then I will make her cunt be a field of maggots,” Ntsika is hers and she will do everything in her power to make it happen. It will happen...

“As you please. Your wish is my command!” the ‘my friends’ don't play na. Oya, those people dey come deliver!

“The boy is heading to the right direction. Nomathemba is working on it. I just don't know if how it will turn out,” Qwakaza says, puffing on her wooden inhaler.

“Nomathemba? Nobantu's daughter?” Faku asks. They exchange looks with his sister, puzzled and perplexed.

“What is in it for her?” MaFaku asks.

“You told me to entangle them and I did. Nobantu came with her daughter's water that she was bathing with and I mixed them with his hair. And this here,” she takes out a small bottle with a portion. “Is a mixture of herbs diluted with Nomathemba's bathing water. Mix it in his food and look what is going to happen. All your wishes will come through. That girl will leave your house for good!” she says.

“And the pregnancy?” Faku asks.

“Well, sometimes people just have to learn the hard way. Let her suffer with a fatherless child!” Ndileka, MaFaku yena Faku's sister says.

## NTSIKA

“Okay...okay...I know this sounds stupid, but I don't know why I wrote that. I write a lot of things and I later don't know how or why...I sometimes know things I shouldn't know about people. I...see things that are not normal and...”

“Spare me the sob stories. Just tell me why Ntombizodidi? First, you answer my wife's texts on my phone and now you are stalking me. And you're giving me that bullshit\*t. You think I'm going to believe that?” he deliberately shoots the couch right next to her.

She screams a bit and muffles herself with a palm. “It's true. I don't know why...what I know is you have to die...someone wants you dead and they want me to kill you. They have been wanting me to kill you. It should have happened in church that day I met you. I had the gun and the silencer, but the holy spirit took over. I prayed that night and everything in me went back

to normal. No voices in my head, no nothing!” she sniffs looking at him strictly in the eye.

He blinks feeling his heart falling for her gaze. “Why didn't you kill me then? You serve me lunch, water and everything in the office...why come for my family?” he yells.

“It's a possibility. Between your younger brother, Nomaza and Nosisa, there is a wicker. You have a destination to go to and the wicker is the one keeping you this far. I just don't know who the wicker is, but it's between your wife, Phuthumani and your Aunt. I swear I was never going to listen to those voices. I have been going places, consulting seers. It has cost me a lot of money, but no one can help me. They just can't tell what is in me. Some say I am called to be igqirha (traditional diviner), but I know that's not true. I swear I'm trying not to kill you. I don't want to hurt you, Ntsika!” she whispers slowly standing up.

“Why?” he asks defeated. She swallows hard and goes quiet. “I don't believe you one bit Ntombizodidi!”

“Okay...can I show you something? Take it from the first drawer on my dresser. It's a diary!” she says with her hands in the air.

He walks there and shuffles on the drawer and finds it. It's a pink diary, locked. He turns to her, “The key!” he demands.

“On the jewelery box. Right next to you!” she says.

He opens the box and tosses out the watches and earrings stuffed in there. He finds the small key tied on a gold fine necklace. He opens the diary and points a gun at her. “Don't move!” he gives a glare to send her nigh to the finish.

He pulls a chair and sits facing her. He places the gun on the table on his right arm. His heart skips as he sees the bold drawing of a woman with three eyes. The other eye on the



forehead. Then snakes on her shoulders down to her lap. On her head there's a rolled snake like a doek with seven heads.

He looks up at her. "You drew this?" he asks a good deal frightened.

She nods. "I don't remember when or how, but I know I drew it. I can't even draw in actual fact, but I have that. Every now and then there's a new drawing especially when there is a full moon!" she tells him.

He pages through and comes across a folded note. He picks it up and shoves it into his pocket. He keeps paging the book and comes across a male angel with yellow eyes. There's a bubble speech saying; 'For your dreams to be fulfilled give me the child in your womb to be me mine!'

He thinks of his own up coming child. Ntombizodidi is dangerous. She's a threat! "What's this?" he asks.

She walks closer and stands next him. "A fallen angel...Azazel. He's a lesser god that feeds on people's sins," she says.

He closes the book. He's had enough. He takes his gun and fiddles with it. "Did you share this with anyone?" he asks.

"No. My mother never wants to listen and my father died a couple of years back. I don't even have real friends except for your lunatic ex, Nomathemba. I don't really trust her with this..." she sits down in bed. "Sometimes I even attempt to kill myself..."

"What stops you?"

“You always show up when I just poisoned my tea in the evening. I want to die in my sleep. Peacefully!” she taps her foot on the ground silently.

“I have to go!” he stands up to leave.

“I heard you talking about your brother the other day. Saying he was healed by a Nigerian native doctor. Do you think he can help me too?” she asks the most complex question he's ever heard. He doesn't know these things.

“I don't know,” he walks away slowly.

“Please, take me to him. Ndiyakucela Ntsika. If he fails then I'll accept my fate and just die. I don't want to hurt you!” she begs.

“I don't know Ntombizodidi!” he really doesn't know if he wants to get involved. He just wants peace.

She nods and sits back in bed, crying hysterically. Her cries shoots into the horizon of his soul. He walks towards the door and holds the latch. He drops his eyes to the floor with his heart breaking for her.

He lets go of the door and walks back to her. He sits in bed and hesitantly holds her. He hugs her and lets her cry in his arms.

NOSISA

Last night she watched him tiptoeing into their bedroom. He undressed and slightly got into bed. He cuddled her from behind, but then when the clock clicked the hour two o'clock he jumped out of bed.

He ran to the bathroom back and forth. And this morning she's finding a note on the night table. He left to East London on a business trip. He has hired a house keeper to keep a close eye on her and she will arrive later today.

She sits in bed a bit confused. She thinks and tries to make sense of it all, but nothing makes sense. She sighs and makes the bed. She walks around the house cleaning up. She makes herself some breakfast before taking the laundry basket. She takes out his clothes from yesterday. They smell of a perfume she's not familiar with. A perfume just like her previous one

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berry scented. She frowns feeling like puking.

She throws his shirt and jacket back. She sees a paper appearing in the pocket of his pants. She slowly bends and picks the pants up. She fishes out the note. It is a white paper folded and a bit squashed as if Ntsika was stealing it from wherever he took it from.

She opens it and her heart bumps hard against her chest as she recognizes that hand writing together with the text. She'll never forget that night and event. Where did he get it from? She doubts if he still remembers her telling him about those texts. Which reminds her of the question, what is Azazel?

The note reads as follows: 'When I woke up the next morning, I was drowning in the pond of their misdeed, house no. 237. One step is an impossible step out. With the terror of the scaffold, I placed a full stop and closed the chapter of my life!—N. Siduko'

\*\*\*\*

On the other side, Ntsika parks his car up in the gravel road in his village. He walks on foot down the river heading to the forest. He sits down there and throws stones on the fathom of the stream.

He hardly slept with a bad smell that suddenly flooded his nostrils. He kept throwing up until he couldn't stand it anymore. He wanted to wake his wife up and ask her if she can smell that, but the mere sight of her gave him a feel he's never had. Disgust.

He decided to just leave the room. He stood at the door for quite sometime. Staring at her as she peacefully slept. No matter how much he tries, weird things happen. Consulting? He did consult his father's healer, Qwakaza.

Qwakaza told him Nosisa is the one bringing him bad luck.

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“She is cursed. Her family have a history...the curse fell a long time ago and the circles around and round. And looking at the event of of misfortune in your life...the curse has fallen!” she told him.

“Is there a way to help her break the curse? It's not her fault!” he said.

“Well, I would say it is up to her. They are a family of witches. The curse is going on their line of generations because they are witches,” she perplexed him.

“I don't understand. Nosisa is destined to be with me. I saw her in the-” he was cut short by Qwakaza.

“The dream where she showed you inkubele. Sometimes people play with our minds. See that girl knew you'd come. She messed with your grandmother's grave. The soil of her grave



was used to make her appear in your dreams. Say what they want you to believe. You can go to other diviners for the second opinion if you don't believe me!" she had said to him.

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See why he never wants to go to spiritual seers? They are pure home wreckers. Why are they always seeing family members bewitching others? What would Nosisa gain from hurting him? She's the mother of his child.

And right now, he's considering helping Ntombizodidi. Maybe this is what he needs to do. To get to the bottom of everything else going on in his life. He can barely breathe when thinking of her cries and the heaviness of her tears on his shoulder. He feels like it is his responsibility to help her feel better.

To him there's no denying the fact that the universe led him to her in a way. Not in a romantic way, but in another way. There's just something in this.

He picks up a call from Bandile. He was talking to him through texts and he mentioned the current events going on his life.

“Eita!” he calls out.

“So just like that? You are leaving? Nosisa is seven months pregnant. Anything can happen!” Bandile barks on the other side.

He sighs looking far into the mountains hiding away the friendly city of Gqeberha. “I hired someone experienced as a midwife. She'll be fine,” he says.

“Ntsika you can't do that. How are you going to help Ntombizodidi if you can't even help yourself? To be quite honest, you have changed. Ever since you met this man you call a father everything started falling apart. You are about to lose more!” he warns.

“My father has nothing to do with this Bandile. I don't need help with anything. If there's anything I need to do it's this one. Ntombizodidi is assigned to kill me, but sh-” he is cut short.

“Really? A possessed imprisoned soul? It would've been better if she was a witch, but no. She belongs to Azazel. Her mother willingly gave her up to him before she was even born!” Bandile says in a whisper.

“What? How do you know that?” his lips are just dry from perplexity and shock.

“The bubble speech to the drawing of a male angel you told me about. Azazel is not even an angel, Ntsika—not even a fallen one. He is one of the four princes of hell, Lucifer's first creations. And the-”

“Okay...enough! This is not a movie or one of your philosophical ideas. This is real life in Africa not America with white folks. Azazel is just a theory of the Westerners to believe not us,” he argues cutting him short.

“And do you consider yourself an African? You just performed a ceremony to the clan of your biological father, the one who never paid for your damages, never introduced you to his ancestors the right way. You want us to have the conversation about africanism with you involved? Did they perform imbeleko for you?” a rain of questions is falls with anger from the one on the line.

“This is not about my family and leave my father out of-” he's cut off as fuming as he is.

“No, it's not, but let's talk about you being an African. Come on, tell me. Did they pay the damages and mend the fences with the family that raised you up? Did he perform imbeleko? Introduce you to his ancestors or did he just hit the last nail on the death of your relationship with your family? Where is your mother Ntsika? Why did she leave not looking back? Why is Nomaza possessing so much hatred towards your father? Where do you come from as an African?” there's silence. “Why are-” Ntsika clicks his tongue angrily and turns off his cellphone.

## NOSISA

The lights go and off, she just knows there's someone ringing a bell at the door. She gets the door and frowns.

“Thami? What are you doing here?” she asks opening a room for her to walk in. She knows her from back in high school. She was one of a quiet student. She saw her recently in Port Elizabeth working as a midwife in Fifi's hospital.

“Hi...I am-” she steps back flaring her nostrils. “What's that smell?” she asks.

Nosisa sniffs the air, but nothing. “What smell?” she asks. She slightly scratches her itchy forehead and eyebrows. She's been feeling funny all day.

“You are developing a rash too and...what's going on with you?” Thami asks.

“What do you mean? I have a-”

“You have a very bad smell even though I can you showered!” she says, worriedly.

This is embarrassing. A bad smell? How? She's lazy to bath but she bathes once a day in the morning and everytime when her water breaks without notice...

She smells her armpits and there's nothing wrong. “I don't smell anything. And yes I showered this morning...” she says, frustrated.

Thami stands back and nods. "I suggest you go back home. I can't be here!" she walks off the room leaving her in awe.

Could this be the holy water MaDeyi gave her? She has used them before and they never had any effects. She closes the door with her heart sore as the sharp sword sticks in.

She decides to go to her room and grab a Bible. She takes a down and wraps her head. Then kneel down opening her Bible, then lighting a purple candle to strengthen her spiritual being. She reads a small scripture and then closes her eyes to pray.

"Mvelingqangi, Maxhob' ayakhawuleza, Bhelu leSabatha ndiyazandlala. Ndiphakathi kwamadabi, iintshaba zindombethe. Andisenawo amandla, amehlo okubona avalekile, iindlebe zona akuzange undiphe. Kodwa ngalomzuzu ndicela iindlebe zomoya. Ngaleyure ndicela ukubona. Ndiphe amandla!  
(Heavenly father, our saviour, the beauty of Sabbath I lay



myself upon you. I am in between wars, the enemies are surrounding me. I don't have the strength anymore, my eyes to see are blinded, you never gave me ears. But at this minute, I am asking for spiritual ears. At this hour, please open my eyes to see. Give me strength!)” she goes quiet not knowing what else to say.

She has a lot to say but she doesn't know how to say it. How does one pray for their husband who walks about like a headless chicken? How does one tell God about a bad odor a total stranger just told her about. Is it why Ntsika left? Because he can't stand her odor?

“God I...” her lips tremble with words refusing to come to life. She sinks on the floor as she's on her knees and painfully sobs. But this—is only the beginning, that's what makes it more painful the most.

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“Obi—I am all sweaty an...hh!” Nomaza gasps with Obiyozo lifting her up to the counter next to the sink. The window is open.

“I like sweaty!” he bites her neck pulling down her pants.

“Close the blinds at-” she screams as he slams his way in. She feels her walls stretching up to accommodate his abnormal shaft. She throws her head back, digging her nails on his shoulders. Her other hand on his gum tree like hip as he moves, his thrusts are deep and rushed.

“Aza, you taste so good...like pepper soup!” he groans hitting her harder. She holds her mouth to preventing herself from laughing in between those moans. “I love your...damn it I love you too...I mean it!” he says going rigid as she shudders squeezing him in as well.

He growls like a stabbed hyena holding her closer against him and she crosses her legs around his waist. This moment feels so good. Ever since they started getting under covers together as 'friends with benefits' on top of being married for the sake of his papers, they never had intercourse this way. He always comes from behind and she didn't mind. The less skin attached, the lesser the strings are attached.

“Obiyozo! You have to pull out...” she whimpers holding his waist as he thrusts faster. Her legs trembling and toes curling. She feels herself spasm.

“Let go then...Oya this is too much na!” he groans. She is holding him closer. “Aza!” he's losing control, stilling in and drilling her more.

“I can't...please, don't pull out!” he is getting confused. One will never understand the feminine language.

“Ewoo-o! Chai, you are fire na!” he drops his head on her shoulder breathing heavily. He just let it all rain inside her as she exploded like a volcano too.

“You have to get me pills!” she says catching a breath.

He wets his lips looking down at her. He swallows hard drinking her breath. “I love you Aza... it's been quite some time since I've felt like this. I asked you to marry me for papers, yes, but I also knew I liked you. And now this feeling is just getting bigger with each day. I love you!” he confesses his ‘lov’ for her

She hides away her amazement and keeps a straight face. His accent, baritone and just his personality. Very loud, outspoken yet so down to earth. He's almost like your ordinary extroverted Xhosa man, but he's Igbo. The kind that tells you the truth the way is with an extra ‘o’ at the end of each insult. And he hits it right everytime. The stamina—ay shame, she is

happy. And the finances, this man knows that as much as she works for her own money, she still needs to spend his.

“I need to go and meet the Dibia. I will be late...” she says

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trying to get down.

“I spoke with him over the phone. He's out of town. Your nephew is looking for him so he went to meet him half way. He's hoping to find him before something else blocks his way,” Obi says sightly brushing her thighs. She feels him getting hard again right inside her. He is looking into her eyes as he speaks.

“Ntsika? What does he want from him?” she asks, worried. Ntsika is still her nephew. She cares deeply for him. She's in a process of getting rid of Faku for good this time. And Obiyozo is the key to that, he knows it too.

“I don't know. We just have to wait and see, abi?” he answers slightly kissing her neck.

“But-”

“Baby...baby?” he calls out lifting her chin up. “Focus. I'm trying to get somethings str—” he thrusts in deeper. She opens her mouth widely and closes it again with her eyes. She swallows those moans and urges to scream. “straight here. I said I love you!”

“Obi I told you. I don't want any complications in my l— oh, God likwerekwere elinani na eli—Simakade!” she moans holding him closer.

He is used to those words especially when they are arguing. She be like, ‘Andinamnqundu nalonto ke mna. Hlala nemali yakho elikwerekwere. Unayo le nto ucinga ndithe nqa! (I don't give a

sh\*t about that. Keep your money, you foreigner. You always think I will beg!)

“And you like this Kwerekwere, abi?(right?)” the strokes given in got her shouting a big, YES!

He smirks and pulls out. She shoots a glare spited. “Obi!” she calls out.

“I need you to look me in the eye and tell me you don't feel sh\*t about me Aza. Be honest with me because we are always gives these ideas. At first, I thought I was going crazy until I realized that I don't want to live without you. I know you care and feel something for me to oo. Just say it...” he begs.

She looks elsewhere with a straight gaze. “The pills Obi...just go get the pills from the pharmacy,” his sperm must've arrived and busted an egg by now. She's automatically carrying his seed and

therefore she can not think of anything other than that. Having a child is the last thing on her mind let alone with a foreigner, iyhu!

He sighs and lifts her up. She holds onto him as they head to the bathroom. They take a shower and walk out, then get dressed. He helps her wear a necklace and stares at her from the mirror.

“You are beautiful,” he tells her.

“I know. My friend move we need to get going!” she says, standing and walking past him.

“She was transferred from KZN to this side. They will transfer her to Wellington in the next couple of weeks. Don't you want to go see her?” Obi asks leaning against the wall.



Nomaza turns around and looks at him. “You did that for me?” she's surprised. For him it was way too risky to do. Someone would've caught him and start trouble for him.

He nods. “There is nothing I wouldn't do for you Nomaza. Even if it means crossing the rivers full of crocodiles,” he states and drops his gaze to the floor. He does that all the time when he's sad. He usually says, one should keep up a straight face and smile, but lower their eyes for sadness might be written there.

Her stilleto clicks the floor as she walks to him. She touches his hand. “Obi!” she calls out. He looks up at but not in the eye. “Why the sudden change of a heart? We spoke about this...”

“I never knew I'd love again. I was betrayed by a woman I loved and assumed that all women are the same. Until I met you...Do you know how many years I left Nigeria?” he asks.

“You never wanted to talk about it. For all I know you might've killed people there. And left for South Africa because you've even burnt the bridges for yourself!” there's only one thing that brought them together, transparency.

“I left to Malawi with my sister. She died three years later from pneumonia,” he pauses. “I left for Kenya...The laws there are a little bit too harsh. I had to leave again until I settled this side. You helped me out in return for gold, of course. From the very first time I laid my eyes on you in that jazz festival, I knew you were not just any lady. You were a good digger, a thief and pretending to be a hooker only to drug them even before they get you to bed. Leave with their accessories and money...I hated you for it!” he honestly confesses.

They are straight talkers with no coats to dress up their wrongs.

“Every man would hate me hence I never wanted no entanglement with them. I'd better steal than sweat and have what I'm supposed to enjoy as a job!” she shrugs. A flaw is a flaw, a judgement is a judgement and a sin is a sin.

“Well, we crossed paths once again and you proposed your own deal. I tried my way with you and you turned me down. Stepping me on the toe calling me a Kwerekwere one more time. I don't want to lie to you I was very hurt by the words!” he lets out a thin smile. They get that they are humans. There's no need to feel embarrassed by who you really are!

“And it still hurts you, doesn't it?” she asks carelessly. He is what he is. He should just embrace it.

He slightly nods. “It's the labels that comes with it. That we are perverts, wicked and all. It reminds me of the days when one of our would be burnt into ashes. The concept was highly used by then,” he wears his heart to be seen as it is.

“This concept came from the way you speak your own language. It's an onomatopoeia. It has nothing to do with segregation or xenophobia in our country. All of those who are from the African countries are called that, but not those who are from Asia. We call them amaKula those ones, the Indians from the north because they are black,” she explains.

“Then why do you use it when we are arguing? It is an insult!” he argues.

“I use it because I know you hate it. The intention is to hurt you at that moment because I'm angry! But sometimes I use generally because I feel silly...” she shrugs.

He can't help it but laugh. He's never met anyone like her. Once she gets closer to you she leaves no room for hatred. “What made you become intimate with me?” he asks.

“Temptation. The sooner I realized that amakwerekwere are human too, was the sooner I realized ubatyhini ingathi umuncwana kwaObiyozo lo...ndabetha kum! (that Obiyozo is a bit cute too...I indulged myself!)” she slaps her hip as she says that.

He laughs even though he doesn't full get that. “Umuncwana intoni?(What is umuncwana?)” he asks.

She just laughs and pulls his hand. “Come, let's go!” they walk out.

He drives her to the prison and drops her off careful not be seen. She has her scarf covering her face with shades.

She walks inside and calls Detective Bonisile, the one on Obiyozo's payroll.

“Aza?” he calls out.

“Yes...” she says looking around.

“Follow me!” he says.

They walk down the corridor. The walls are bold and cold with an unsettling aura. The iron bars are opened and she steps into the dim interrogation room.

“Wait for her...” Bonisile says and walks out.

She sits still and waits with her heart beating hard. The door swings open and the guard walks in followed by her. She looks older and better than the last time she saw her.

She stands still by the door looking at her. Nomaza stands up and stares at her with tears filling her eyes. They stare with their minds flashing their childhood nostalgic memories.

“Nomabhelu!” she whispers.

She drops her eyes and cuffs crinkle as she walks closer.

“Nomaza!” she bluntly says before sitting down.

Nomaza sits down too. These walls changed Nomabhelu. She was a very warm person, a fan of hugs and kisses. Smiles and the room would be filled of her laughter. She passed that on to her children more especially the first born even the naivity.

“How is everyone? Mother?” she asks.

Nomaza looks at her with pitiful eyes. “I sent you letters Bhelukazi. Didn't you get any of them?” she asks. The telephone wouldn't go on to the other side.

“No...” she answers.

“Mother passed on...” she breaks the news.

Nomabheli simply nods and goes quiet.



## NOSISA

She stood at a distance watching MaDlomo crying. She holds onto Gqobodwana and wipes her eyes. "Take her to Sabela. Ndincede Gqobodwana yini usana lwam luncinci kangaka. Iyhoo! (Please Gqobodwana, my baby is so young for such...)" she cries out begging her husband.

He took her to her rondavel and came out to Nosisa. She's standing by the kraal alone. The taxi that bought her here was driven by an old man. It was empty for many rejected her. The man was kind enough to take her alone and he said she shouldn't pay for it.

She hates the condition she is in. She puffed all of her perfume and took a long shower before going out. Still the smell was there judging by how people looked at her. It was really bad.

She turns around as her father taps her shoulder. He looks so lost, hurt and drained. He trusted and loved Ntsika, but now—maybe all of that admiration is gone.

“Wait for me in the rondavel. I will go look for a transport to take us to a seer in Tsolo. There's a man who can help us,” he says.

She thoughtfully looks at him. Love...maybe what she shares with her parents is not love. It is an attachment and a bond very much unbreakable even by dark forces. Ntsika left surely because of the smell. He didn't have the guts to say it and so he just upped and left. Is that the idea of love? That everytime when things go wrong one runs away?

“I can call someone and find out if they can help,” she says.

“Who? You said this boy is out of town!” he hates Ntsika. He can't even call his name. By now he would be calling him his son not even a son in law. But he messed up.

“A good friend of his. I'm sure he wouldn't mind,” she suggests. He simply nods before walking to his rondavel.

She goes through her WhatsApp and sees that Bandile is online. She's never spoke to him over the phone. She types a message and just states the matter as it is. This is not her friend or husband to start up with cold ‘hi or HUD’s!

She paces around for quite sometime before a text drops in. He just told her to give him an hour.

She thanks her stars.

“He's coming. You can stay behind with mother. It's not a good idea to leave her alone in such a state. I'll be fine,” she tells her father.

He nods. “It will be okay...Come!” he embraces her with the smell as it is. She lets a tear fall followed by many.

NTOMBIZODIDI

She watches him as he walks into the garage to buy some snack for the road. The minute he disappears, she steps out and takes out her hair pin. She looks around and goes down, she starts working on the tyres. She opens the bonnet and runs her eyes down to the many tubes. She closes and opens, then sets up a few things.

She closes it and walks back to the car. Ntsika walks back in. He draws a deep breath loudly and hands over her things.

“Thank you...” she takes them and places some at the back. She fastens her seatbelt.

He gets back to the road looking all handsome and yummy more especially when serious. He grabs a bottle of water on the other hand. She watches him as he pulls it's opening with his teeth. She imagines him pulling down her red lingerie with these same teeth.

He drinks up and licks his wet lips. She chews hers and looks away not to get caught staring. She gets on her phone and works her magic, then watches his phone go totally off. She switches hers off too.

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In prison;

“And Ntsika? How is he?” Nomabhelu asks after a long moment of silence.

Nomaza looks away and taps her finger on top of the table.  
“Mama told him about his father and urged him to go look for him!” she reports.

“What father?” she snaps.

“Ndamase!” Nomaza shrugs.

“And you let him? Nomaza!” she hits the desk furiously and sits back looking at the alarmed guard.

“I had no choice. A lot went on and he cut us off. You know how uncles are. They disowned him and I'm quite sure it looks like I had a hand in it. I tried. I really did,” she defends herself.

“Well, you didn't try enough Nomaza!” she bellows.

“It's his son at the end of the day. He was going to find him anyway. It's better if we just tell him the whole truth

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” Nomaza argues.

“There is no truth in this Nomaza. Go and fetch my son from that monster or else all of us will die!” the fear and anger in her eyes is quite visible for her sister to read it all out.

“What are you talking about? Ntsika has a calling and we can't keep running away from that. He needs to know his identity fully!” she begs to differ. “Yes, Ndamase is dangerous, but Ntsika doesn't have to suffer for the sins of his father and your sins. He-”

“He is not his father! Ntsika and Phuthumani are of the same man. I was two timing him!” the words slip out of her tongue as fast as the wind. Nomaza raises an eyebrow surprised.

NOMATHEMBA

“Dumile? What do you want?” she asks getting into the front seat of his car.



“I need your help with something...” he says looking around. He takes off his hoody and breathes looking at her. He's terrified.

She looks around a bit confused. It is closer to dusk. “What is it? I thought you said you don't want anything to do with me anymore,” she gives him a look.

“I know what I said. Please, I need you to be honest with me. When you said you are pregnant, was it true?” he asks.

There's silence. She lives off a certain drug to sleep and eats antidepressants not to see things. The picture of her new born baby with missing arms dead is still in her mind. Her standing in a line half naked with other village girls. It suddenly felt like they were prisoners as that old woman kept inspecting their breasts. The look in her eyes when she finally reached her. It was sad, judgemental and full of pain. She was also ashamed of herself for keeping quiet. Nobantu would have been punished for her evil deeds. Until this day, she still wonders if what did she do to her baby.

“I miscarried!” she says.

“Thembi! Please...” he begs for only the truth. Nothing but just the truth.

There's silence for a moment.

“Why now? Why are you suddenly so interested?” she asks.

“I...there's a baby crying in my house every night. The other day I walked out of my bedroom to follow it up and...it was a woman wearing a long coat holding a baby in her arms.

Shushing it and slowly walking away. The second night I drove after the woman and I ended up there...” he points at the veld with his head. Far at the exact location where the baby was dumped and found nigh to the finish.

“And so?” she swallows hard unable to meet his eye.

“It was not Nontsikelelo's baby. Nomathemba just tell me. What happened to the baby?” he asks closer to cracking up. As a man as ugly as he is, crying would definitely make her run out of this car. He looks horrific.

“I miscarried and dumped the body there!” she lies. She keeps protecting her family everytime no matter how much she tries to expose them. There's always something tying her tongue and holding her back from telling the truth.

“And my cousin? Where is she? ” he asks.

“What cousin?” she is getting annoyed.

“Ntombizodidi...how long were you two getting along? Were you close when you were pregnant?” he is scaring her.

“No, why?” she sits up straight. Any news about Ntombizodidi are just as interesting to her. She didn't know they were related.

“She is on a mission to kill me, uncle and you!” he says. “We need to help her before she harms herself even. She's possessed by the same demon that had possessed Nontsikelelo!” he says. The mention of his wife still freezes even the time. The way they killed and buried her will forever be engraved on their memories.

“What demon?” she is confused.

“Azazel!” he shouts as if expecting her to know that one.

She scoffs and claps once. “Siphi na apha? EMelika? (Where are we? In America?)” she sarcastically asks.

“There are high possibilities that she is the one who possessed my wife. The same way she made you miscarry!” he is frustrated. “She is angry and that demon comes from her late mother. My uncle did him bad and my mother too. She is possessed and she doesn't even know who she is. Please, just help me!”

“How can I help you Dumile? How? This has nothing to do with me. I have a man to capture for myself. One that will do right by me not what you all have been doing!” she refuses, bluntly.

“She killed our child-”

“My mother killed the baby as soon as he was born. See? There's no Zazela, Zazazela, Za-ntoni-ntoni involved! You are on your own!” she drops the bomb.

The journey to Tsolo wasn't long but to Nosisa it felt like the whole year. She was sitting uncomfortably at the backseat of the car. Had all windows opened to get rid of the bad smell she couldn't sense. Bandile didn't seem to mind except for the fact that he felt sad. The whole dilemma had affected his whole life. Ntsika is like a brother he's never had.

They grew up together in the township. They flew across the sky together. When he went to college while Ntsika never sat his foot there, there was no rift between the two of them. Someone once said you can't have the same friends you had five years ago, but he was wrong. Ntsika is his best friend. The one that never gets jealous of him. When he graduated in college and struggled to get a job, he advised him to take a learnership at the culinary school he was in. That's where he fell in love with cooking. Ntsika would always encourage him, call him over so they'll bake. He made it a norm until he got used to baking and cooking and it became his hobby too.

He keeps stopping the car by the villagers and ask for directions to Sabela's house. It doesn't take him so long before they get there.

She walks off the car and he tells her, he'll wait in the car. She nods and thanks him. She walks towards the entrance.

At a distance, she sees the man sitting next to the kraal on a black crate of beers. He's crushing herbs wearing brown sacks from head to toe, just like she has always seen him in her dreams. She was always right after all. Her dreams do mean something and she interprets them correctly.

How she wishes Ntsika was here to witness this. Maybe he'd start believing in what she says. He's too much of a Thomas, believing is seeing to him.

She opens the gate and walks inside. She notices dogs approaching, but the man reprimands them almost immediately.

She walks to him and greets. "Camagu MaTshawuza!" he greets back. He points a reed mat spread right before him.

She sits and goes quiet not comfortable. Who would be knowing what they're polluting the air wherever they go?

"I have been waiting for your arrival. What took you so long?" he asks, grabbing a handful of the green crushed herbs. He throws it into a bucket of water next to him. He crushes more.

"I had no reason to come until now," she says.



The man looks at her for the longest time and nods. He continues to crush the herbs. "What reasons have finally brought you to my father's premises then?" he asks.

"I..." tears fall. She just sobs silently wiping her tears with the small scarf she had over her shoulders. She can't even say it.

Sabela touches her shoulder and heaves a deep sigh. He stands and pulls her up. "Thula MaGqobodwana. Akukho nento le ntomb' am, sizakuyilungisa wena le nto! (Don't cry MaGqobodwana. This is nothing my daughter, we will fix it!)" he says in attempt to comfort her. "Just take off your clothes!" he orders before disappearing to one of his many rondavels.

Sabela is not an old man as the one she had always imagined. He's maybe, her father's age or so. He is from the line of royal Xhosa's as well, the Nzotho clan...

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On the road to the East London, Ntsika loses control over the car. It swerves out of the road screeching while it's breathing a dark cloud through the exhauster. His biggest fear is to burn into ashes with a car. He hits a tree and the airbag helps him out from the attack.

He sweats and gasps before looking over to his side. "Are you alright?" he asks.

She nods, looking a good deal frightened though. "What the hell just happened?" she asks forcing the door open.

They walk out and take a good look at their ride. He whistles before trying to open the bonnet. He fans his face from the smoke and coughs stepping back. This needs a mechanic. His eye lands on the two tyres, "How the hell did I drive here with

two flat tyres?” he's amazed. This right here, tells him he almost died.

“We need to get going. East London is in like four hours away from here!” she says, picking up her cellphone. She tries to turn it on, but it gives her a red signal. “Damn it! Flat battery too,” she rumbles.

He looks for his and finds it on the car compartment. That's the weirdest place he's never placed his phone in. He tries to turn it on, but same thing. “How the hell did I get a flat battery? I hardly used my phone today. I haven't even checked on my wife. I'm dead!” he cries out looking around. They are in the middle of nowhere. Cars are rarely passing by.

He walks to the road and tries to hike

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but none of those cars pay attention to that. Hours go by until it is half past eight in the evening.

He gives up and walks back to the car. He finds Zodidi sitting at the back of the car, snacking with red teary eyes. He sits next to her even though the chilliness of the evening was getting to them. He grabs the packet of biscuits and eats one.

“Are you alright?” he asks.

She looks at him and let's out a thin smile. “Yhea...I'm fine. Something to drink?” she offers, sparkling water.

He takes them and opens up. “Thanks!” he takes a sip. “We have to spend a night here. In the morning I'll walk and see if I can find any nearby filling station,” he says, then downs half the bottle of water.

“That's a great idea...we don't really have a choice,” she comments, staring up at the stars.

He blinks a bit feeling his head spinning a little. He drinks the water once again to wave away the fuzziness. He closes the bottle slowly and places it back to the basket. He grabs an apple, clearing a throat violently.

“Zodarara...what's in the water?” he asks with his voice wobbly. As he stares at her, the more he notices a lot of things about her body. He's looking at her with a different eye. There's sexual attraction now.

She looks at him confused. “What water?” she asks.

He rubs his face fighting all of these sudden feelings. He's shivering from cold. It's becoming extremely cold while his blood is rushing from his heart as it pumps it faster. His blood

vessels are crowded and overflowing. He picks up the bottle and gives it to her.

She grabs it and shrugs. "Nothing. The bottle was sealed. You opened it yourself!" she says.

"Then why do I suddenly..." he blinks and slightly walks away from her.

She frowns and looks at the bottle. She walks into the back of the car and sits next to him. "I can even drink it. I swear I didn't put anything..." she opens it and drinks up a few sips.

It didn't take long for her to feel some tupa way. Numb at first, then so full of energy and erotic desire.

Before they knew it—her mouth sought his as she feels her toes curl. She has always wanted to kiss those sexy lips, but not like this. She climbs on top of him regardless of his attempted protest. Pressing her breasts against his chest as their tongues wince

in and out, driving their desires higher has him tamed. She let her hand slide off

his hip and go down in his front; searching for that large bulge between them. His pants are preventing his shaft as her fingers trace the outline of its length through the tight fabric of his pants. Her breathing is hot and rapid as she tries to squeeze his hard manhood. She pushes her drenched opening deeper onto his probing fingers.

He is putting up a weak fight with rapid flashes of Nosisa. He sees nothing other than her right now. Her flawless lean body, soft with small curves good enough for him to dig in and get satisfied.

That night when he first made love to her. Her nails sinking on his back and slightly slapping him as he tried to enter the gates of her heavens. How he'd pull her down from going up with the pillow all along with the headboard. It was a tough night ending up with the both of them very much elated and happy. Her screams and heavy breaths, slight biting of her bottom lip and the sexy look in her eyes. The tears that ran down her face as she reached her climax for the first time in their second round.

“Nosisa!” he calls out looking at Zodidi’s eyes.

He groans a bit feeling his hard shaft stretching her wet folds. She is staring right into his eyes even though he keeps calling out the wrong name. She's upset about it, but she's under an influence of an unknown substance.



They both cry out like animals filled with sadness yet elated as they drown deeper into the pond of temptation. At this moment sadness is beautiful.

“Nosisa!” he calls out for the last time stilling deep inside Zodidi and letting his body go rigid, shudder again, then let it all rain inside her.

He sees Nosisa standing up from the grass and walking away without a glance towards him. His heart shatters. He is alone...a real orphan turned into a zombie. ‘You did this to yourself... it's your fault Ntsikayekhaya!’ there's a voice ringing at the back of his head as he slightly falls asleep.

Zodidi also collapsed right on top of him, she's drifting to sleep too. There is a pang of guilt as she thinks of a pregnant Nosisa left all alone back home. She'll be strong!

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In North Crest, Dumile sits in front of an old shelf of books. It's dusty with spider webs smeared all over. He runs his eyes on it trying to find answers. This was his uncle's bachelor's flat, Ntombizodidi's father.

A lot of books here are signed with an initial; N. Siduko. That confuses him because the only Siduko he knows was Mawethu, the late Rev. Siduko. The one he helped Nomathemba in covering up his death.

He went over his uncle's house and found his wife, the woman Ntombizodidi currently calls a mother. He did have a conversation with her even though her memory and mental being is not really fit. She's a mental case. She started getting sick after her husband committed suicide. Yes, Ntombizodidi's father hung himself on a tree in the veld.

There's a lot that his family had swept off to the under carpet for Ntombizodidi not to ever know. Right now, it seems like everything is coming to an end. At this point he doesn't know whether, the truth will set them free or not.

He sighs and stands up to his room. He grabs his leather jacket and puts on a cloth cap. He is determined to meet the family of the late Rev. Siduko. Because of what Nomathemba said about Nobantu killing his baby—he knew better than to call her. Her involvement would cause her trouble.

He is going to meet the aunts and other family members of the late Rev. Siduko. He's hoping that they give him the information he needs. Tell him who is this N. Siduko signed in every book there especially the religious books.

TWO YEARS LATER...

“The man from down the street? I definitely think he's perfect. I mean I heard he is a retired professor. I think you two are compatible Aunt Miriam!” Nosisa lets out a mischievous smile, placing down her watering can.

The woman laughs holding onto the fence as they are gossiping each of them standing on their garden. “I don't know. He has been buying me books. My favourites, you know I'm such a sucker for love. I like them exotic and erot-” her eyes move to Nosisa's entrance.

Nosisa slowly turns and notices a car pulling over. It is no doubt that it is Ntsika. She takes a breath and braces herself for this one. “Mmh, seems that I have a guest!” she says.

Miriam nods. “That young man... I heard he was married. What's his story?” that's a problem with hanging out with gossip mongers.

“We were married and separated two years ago,” she answers picking up her watering can.

“I see. I like that he takes his time to come and see his child!”  
Mariam pries.

Nosisa simply smiles. “Let me go attend to him. It's a good thing he is here. He will babysit for me while I go run my errands,” she thoughtfully says before parting ways with Mariam.

She meets Ntsika on the paved way to the front door. He has a lot of things with him—shopping bags. “Hi,” she decides to greet first.

He stands still looking at her as if thinking of something ever so deep and complex. Ever since he came back to his senses about the whole thing—his own child, he has been giving her that look. A distance look. “Hi...” he greets back.

There's silence and quite a stare held between them before she turns her eyes to the car. It's a new one, a black sports car. She notices there are still more shopping bags. “I'll take those!” she announces before bumping on his shoulder.

He tries to move to the left as she does so too. She stands still and stares a bit before dropping her gaze and slowly walking past far away from him. There's no word spoke. Ntsika has changed. He never says the words, please; thank you or sorry. He never eats too much anymore, that one is evident from his weight loss. He is just him—an empty vessel which tends to make an annoying noise sometimes.

She picks up the shopping bags and goes to the house. She finds him in the lounge with the clothing shopping bags. She also separates them, taking the food to the kitchen. It's baby clothes, toys, food and her groceries as well.

“Is she asleep?” he asks. That's the only conversation they have. Everything is about the baby.

“No...uhh...Bandile took her for a walk around the shopping center,” she states.

His jaws drop, his eyes too. “But I texted you and told you I'm coming...” he lodges a complains.

“And Bandile had it all planned for the whole week,” she shrugs.

“And so what do I do now? Go back without seeing my child? What are you playing at Nosisa?” he scowls at her.

She rolls her eyes and stands up to leave. “Yewethu akukho mntu wathi yibayimbaleki yodumo uCaster Semenya uphinde kwawena ubengathi unguOscar. UBandile akayanga kulala eMall. (No one said be an athlete, Caster Semenya and be Oscar again. Bandile is not going to sleep at the mall!) Wait or leave my house in peace!” she has done a lot of begging in the past. It all ends here.

He dips his hands in his pockets and walks out to stand on the veranda. She walks to the kitchen and stands by the window watching people as they go up and down the streets.

She will never forget how Ntsika left her for another woman. He sent a text message telling her that ‘love is not enough,’ and demanded a divorce. She begged even going to his door step with Bandile, but he didn't barge. A week later, Nomathemba



was taken from her home to the Ndamases. He paid a bride price for her as well and his wedding?

There was no wedding not even a traditional one which left her wondering. Was he doing this because he wanted to or was he under an influence of something?

She jumps up a bit and turns around as Bandile touches her shoulder. She smiles a bit. “Hey...why didn't you tell he was around?” he is referring to his friend.

“I didn't want to disturb you. And he waited!” she shrugs. There is Ntsika sitting on the couch holding his two years old baby girl. He only came around now. All this time he hasn't been coming nor sending any financial support. He had no reason at all. In this little time he's been spending with the baby one can tell that he's really good at what he does. He loves kids and the patience is there.

“Do you think you might find it in your heart to forgive him one day?” Bandile asks opening the fridge.

“I never held a grudge against him. I was ready to stick with him throughout the turmoil, but he made his choice!” she replies honestly. It still hurts.

He nods and starts preparing breakfast. She helps here and there, then they set a table. She walks to the language and finds Ntsika kneeling far behind the sofas with a tie up on his head. He's assembling a rubber toy and conversing with the little one. He keeps throwing kisses here and there. She holds her tears back remembering and missing those random kisses. He's naturally a loving somebody.

He tickles baby Sally and laughs along with her. He pauses and looks up at her. She smiles faintly and he smiles back before dropping his eyes to the floor.

“We prepared breakfast. Come join us!” she offers.

He nods and takes off his tie. He stands up and Sally raises up her arms to him. She's a chubby baby looking exactly like him even the skin tone. Nosisa doesn't own a thing in her. Talk about the hypocrisy of babies!

They walk to the dining room and Bandile meets them on the way. “I'm sorry I can't be joining you anymore. I have to hurry to Sisitha's school. She's not feeling well,” he reports.

“Oh my God is she going to be a okay?” she asks worriedly.

Bandile smiles, “She will be fine. It's the period pains. You know how she gets at times, your twin in stars!” he replies.

Nosisa smiles and nods. “Text me if she's not feeling any better. And no hot chocolate, please!” she yells as he runs to the door. He turns around and winks with a mischievous smile.

Ntsika sits down and stares at her for a moment. He wiggles his eyebrows and dishes up for himself. Sally demands everything he takes in, bacon; eggs, avocado—just everything. He lets her be.

“You and Bandile are pretty close,” he says settling his eyes on hers. His heart beating very hard as it always did. He'll never stop loving her and that goes with hurting her. He wants to stay away for good because it's good for her own peace, but you know how the heart is.

“We are!” she says not quite sure if what's that supposed to mean.

“He lives here?” he asks. She shakes her head off. “But the other day he came by and slept over,” he blurts out.

She looks at him a bit perplexed. “And you were here?” she asks. He doesn't say anything. “Are you stalking me?”

Yes, he is. He stands far by the park and watches the house with binoculars. In the morning at six when the nanny walks in and Nosisa rushing out for a morning jog he drives past. He planted a camera in the school where she coaches gymnastics. He attends the same church as her and watches her conducting the choir. He misses her every day and night. He's not happy at home. It's been months since he started this crazy act.

“I was coming by but then saw him walking in. I waited for him to leave, but he never did!” he's staring at her intensely. “Is there something going on between you two? You can say it...I won't be mad. It's not like we're married or anything. I left you...” he shrugs with a breaking voice. It's a good thing she can't hear the sounds.

She chuckles and reaches for Sally as she's slightly falling asleep. She's all wrapped up in oil and Ntsika is shiny as her. "Then stop asking about my love life. Bandile is your friend. I'm not so much of a whore you always thought I am!" she mutters.

He hands the baby to her and she walks out of the room. He pours himself a glass of wine and stands in front of the window.

Nosisa comes. "I have a few errands to run. I will be back in a couple of hours. How long are you staying?" she asks.

"The whole day...I missed her," he replies turning around.

"I see. I'll go for a quick shower!" she says.

“You named her Salizwa...” he says more like he is asking.

She nods. “We agreed on that,” she shrugs. This is exhausting.

“Even after everything?” -Ntsika.

“I honor my word no matter what life throws at me. I was taught the hard way!” she says.

He nods. “I miss you a lot. Every night, day...kunzima...(it's difficult...)” he holds tears back.

She stares blankly at him for a moment. She always would see him by the shopping center following Nomathemba like a

sheep. Paying or typing a pin on a speed point, then take a back step. He seemed like he's carrying the whole world on his shoulders.

“At least it is difficult to you. To me it was a whole knife clenched on my spinal cord bleeding!” she tells him.

A tear falls from him and he quickly wipes it. “I know. I was holding that knife, remember?” his lips are trembling, eyes red rimmed. Pain is unexplainable in his eyes hence he can't keep telling her how painful it is living without her.

“Why did you do it? Wasn't it enough to get me pregnant and abandon me? What is it that I didn't have that they had?” she has always been yearning to hear those answers.



“Nothing. There was nothing wrong with you. I was just stupid and I still am...” he states.

The lights go on and off. The baby is crying. They both head to the nursery. She picks Sally up and she cries for her father instead. Nosisa frowns, “Really now Salizwa? Mhm, I will get you,” she says handing her to him.

He takes her with his fingers coming into contact with hers. She quickly lets go and walks out. He sighs.

He sits down and plays with Sally. He walks to the kitchen and finds some yogurt for her. He feeds her and not forgetting to play. Sally is just a female younger version of him. She is active, a smiling-happy baby and very friendly. A room with her is filled with giggles, but she sleeps a lot. She eats, play and remembers to rest every now and then. Laziness comes from him too, MaMbamba used to have a head time with him in performing his house chores.

He carries her to the nursery again and changes her diapers, then put her back to sleep. He looks around for an air freshener but doesn't find it. He walks out to the bathroom and finds Glade. He's not sure if it's good for kids. He walks down to Nosisa's room and knocks. The lights go on and off. She walks out wrapping a towel around her body. She has rolls on her wooly long afro. She has changed a lot. A real Naomi Campbell is what she is.

“Uhh...I just changed her nappies and I need an air freshener. Wasn't sure if the one in the bathroom is baby friendly...” he says avoiding looking at her body. He's scratching the back of his head craving for some of that

“Oh!” her eyes slightly fall down on him and she walks away.

He looks at himself and heaves a huge sigh in embarrassment as he sees in just a minute he has a huge tent camping in his

front. “Yhoo Hayi ke ngoku!” he curses trying to just calm down. And breathe.

She comes back with the air freshener and he walks away. He comes back again and knocks. There's no answer this time around. He walks in and stands by the bathroom door. She looks at him from the mirror and ignores him. He walks to her and places the fresher in the shelf right above her head.

His closeness towards her sends her throat dry. She clears it. He looks at her reflection and hesitantly touches her shoulders. She flinches and he lets go. He just breathes on her neck still staring at her in mirror. He can still see the fire in her eyes even though it's weaker.

She swallows hard and turns around. He wraps his arms around her waist and holds it tightly just the way she used to like. She hisses feeling all of her body in a shock. His hot breath flusters against the nape of her neck only to send chills down her back.

His lips rub on her skin and his tongue swipes a little, tasting her. She gasps closing her eyes. “Ntsika...” she moans as he grabs her behind. Her mound comes in contact with his tent. He lifts her up and places her on top of the sink.

He devours her neck and she throws her head back running her fingers on his brushed hair cut. He loosens the towel and grabs her breasts. He goes down and sucks on them, one by one. His finger running up her slit, massaging her wet folds totally avoiding that zippy area.

“SiKhomo, please maan!” she begs for it.

He looks up at her and unbuckles his belt. His shaft springs out ever so strong with veins swimming under his skin. He throws the towel to the floor. His shaft comes in contact with her, he flickers it up and down her clitoral spot.

He slightly knocks on her opening and closes his eyes, growling as she screams dripping juices. "Harder..." she whimpers for more.

She's been living in much starvation all this time, it's evident. He humps up leaning her against the wall and her holding him for dear life. He counts his deepest thrusts and feels her exploding again and again praising his clan names. He reaches his own destiny with her third orgasm and growls like a stabbed bull.

She lets tears fall feeling him touching that sensitive tissue there. He waters it with his thick cum filling her up more and more. She trembles and pulls him closer, letting him rest in her.

He snuggles up on her neck catching a breath. He sees a small bottle of pills from a distance. He reaches for it and reads it.

Contraceptives. That means she's—his heart sinks and he sweats. She's sexual active? He tries to open them, but they are still sealed. That's a good sign, right? He takes them with.

She breathes heavily slightly wiping away her tears. The lights go and off, the baby cries.

He looks down at her. “She took after me with everything even the good timing she has. Giving daddy and mommy some time to get personal with each other,” he teases.

She rolls her eyes and blushes hidingly. “This shouldn't have happened. I have to go!” she slightly pushes him away.

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Later on the day, Ntsika parks his car outside his home stead. This is PE. People moved here for some reason, maybe to monitor Nosisa's movements after she lost a good fight she had put up to get her husband back. And moved here.

He holds his gun and loads it before tucking it on his waist. He walks out of the car and goes inside. He finds everyone around the dining table as expected. He hums a song; “Ndikondle, ndikondle. Ndikondlele amany’ amadoda. Ndikondle ngemali yam!” it's a song he heard from the side of the Mpondo land.

The room goes quiet as he steps in. He closes the door and looks at them too. “Yintoni kwathuleka ngathi kungen’ ingelosi? (Why are suddenly quiet as if there's an angel coming in?)” he asks.

Nomathemba stands up to him. “Oh God you are drunk!” she says.

“Hey voetsek hlala phantsi, mnqundu! (You sit down, arse hole!)” he swears shooting the ground next to him. They scream with MaFaku being the loudest.

“Oh nkosi yam Ntsika what is wrong with you?” she cries out.

Ntsika shoots a glare at her before looking at Nomathemba. “Sit down!” he orders. She does and he takes out the envelope he has. He gives it to her. “Sign!” he throws a pen at her.

Her eyes widen as she looks at the bold words at the top. She looks up at him with begging eyes. “Faku, Nyawuza...we can fix Thahla. We don't have to divorce and-”

“Don't try me!” he places the gun on her head.



“Ntsikayekhaya that is your wi-” that's Qwakaza coming in. She lives here now, it's funny how she seems to be enjoying everything. The wealth of this family seemed to be doubling and tripling ever since he joined the family business.

“Ndiyeza kuwe wena gqwirhakazindini! (I am coming to you witch!)” he scowls at her.

Nomathemba keeps sobbing which is pressing hard on his impatient side. He pulls the trigger, shooting her left arm. Everyone screams but he gives them a glare. “Ndithe tyikitya apha wena, hule! (I said sign here, you whore!)” he is calm.

“Son...please let us-” Faku is cut off.

“Thula nomlomo ngathi uyityiphu! Ndim othethayo ngoku, (Shut up with a mouth looking that of chicken! I am the one who speaks now,)” he bellows.

Nomathemba signs with pain eating her away. “Here...” she sniffs.

“Jamangile scanner ezizinto pha kwedini (scan these things there boy) and email them to my solicitor. The address is right there!” he orders. Jamangile does as he says while scanning the room looking for an weapon. “One wrong move, I blow your first daughter's head! Isolicitor ligqwetha ungenz’ ukunyaba kwakho pha. Khawuleza! (A solicitor is a lawyer, don't do your foolishness there. Be fast!)” he threatens. The alcohol in brings out a very disrespectful side of him.

Jamangile looks over his cutest daughter and wife and swallows. “I won't do anything I promise just don't hurt them!” he begs. This one has always been the Lazarus of this family.

“Wena Nongcatyana (You thin legs) nurse her wound!” he orders MaFaku around. He turns around to Qwakaza. “Go sit next to your cousin brother!” he says.

She slowly walks with a tale in between her legs. “My ancestors are going-”

“Heyi voetsek ngoku! Your ancestors are going to meet you in the next couple of hours,” he stands by the window to have a good view of the whole room. He takes out a cigar and throws a lighter to Faku's wife. “Yizolayita apha wena Novungamile. Uncume this time ukufa kusondele! (Come and light here you grumpy woman. Smile this time for death is closer!)” he orders. She slowly walks to him and lights the cigar in his lips. He looks at her and chuckles. “Ufane waqumba!” he remarks in a tone full of mockery and blows out the smoke. He cocks the gun pointing at Faku.

“Now let us talk. Where did you bury my umbilical cord?”

The room goes cold and eyes are nearer to falling off their socket. How did he find out? How did he know? Who have he been talking to? This is a disaster. It's over!

40

NTSIKA

“Qwakaza!” they all shout as Ntsika just shot her second knee.

“Quiet!” he shouts. “Wena I asked you a question, where is my umbilical cord?”

“Okay... it's in the kraal. We can go take it first things tommorow morning. Please...let her go to the hospital!” Faku begs.

“Was that too hard? Wena Sanelisiwe let's go. If I don't find it. She dies. If you call the cops on me, you die!” he says, grabbing the fifteen years old girl with her arm. “See that green small light on the air conditioner? That's a bomb, it's connected to each and everyone of you. If any of you runs or tries something it'll be suicide!” he's a psychopath, they think.

“Please, not my daughter...please!” Jamangile begs.

“I don't have a choice. Y'all started this. I will end it!” he walks out with the girl.

He drives out of the penthouse. He heads to New Brighton and parks the car by a local chisanyama. He looks around and gets on his phone. He makes a quick phone call to Kwanda.

He scans the area and sees him coming from the inside. He places his phone down. He is angry and his blood is boiling. One is asking themselves what happened?

Well, the day of his affair—Zodidi told him to go back and let be on her own. He did. As soon as he got to Mthatha he was paid a

visit by Dumile. They spoke about the demon possessing Zodidi. The affair and everything. Dumile is no held up in hostage.

He went home to Faku's house and there was surprisingly a dinner going on. Nobantu and Nomathemba were there. He sat down with them and dished up for himself. Suddenly, a certain line from the conversation he usually has with Nosisa graced his mind.

It was about food poisoning. 'Our people this side are very creative. Men don't put poison in your beer anymore, but smear it on the other side of the knife, then cut the meat for you. Women don't sprinkle it on your food anymore, but moisturise your plate and let you dish up for yourself and eat for the last time!' those words made him look carefully at his plate. It was a bit moist and wine was already poured on everyone's glasses. Red wine—they hardly have liquor in their house to raise his suspicions. He suspected that something was wrong.

It was then that he decided to turn his back on Nosisa. It had to be done. He had to pull up his pants and man the hell up. Act like a zombie while tiptoeing on their conversations, eavesdropping.

And Zodidi? She came back to the office as Nomathemba's best friend—her messenger.

He saw that it would be much easier to draw her closer and let her betray Nomathemba. He had countless affairs with her. Letting her come over for dinner and drug Nomathemba's wine, get up to no good under her own roof. At the course of it all, he'd hear a lot of things

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plans and plots against Nosisa.

It was a must for him to cut ties with her for Nomathemba was even more vigilant as an eagle. But she sure never saw what's coming.

“This is her. Jamangile's first daughter. Keep her until I come back!” he says.

Kwanda nods and opens the door for the girl. He's smoking as always. “Don't mess this one up!” he warns before walking away.

He drives out of the New Brighton letting the road swallow him to Mthatha. He parks in the middle of nowhere to decide. ‘In Tsolo, eMjika, if you could go there you'd find the man...’ Nosisa's voice rings at the back of his head.

He takes a U-turn and goes down to the route leading him to Tsolo. Knowing his umbilical cord was all he needed to know according to the prophetess he consulted a year ago.



## NTOMBIZODIDI

She left everything three months ago and followed the dibia. She stays in a prophetess's house in Walmer now. The dibia read her palm and predicted her future. He told her the chances of her living are low. She must fight against the demon in her.

Now she is waking up in her home where she came to seek answers. The dibia said she is a dancer to a song of an orphan. Ntsika and her late mother. It is either she cleans her conscience by completing the task of the wicker, Nosisa or let the demon, Azazel win. It will then be a generational curse.

At night she screams out of her dream seeing a white scarf being spilt with blood. That dream is frequently repeating itself with the woman urging her to kill. She is heavily pregnant and the baby is Ntsika's. He knows, but chose not to breathe a word when she told him. She's the one who tempered with condoms

anyway. He bluntly had said it, they were never going to be anything more than just two lonely people having fun.

She rubs her stomach and walks off bed. She grabs the white candles and lights them. Wraps her head around with a doek and drinks a glass from the holy water. She kneels down to pray.

NOMATHEMBA

“He was just scaring us. I have to go and make this right. I have a plan!” she says.

“No, he will kill my child!” Jamangile bellows.

“If he had the guts to, he would have blown Qwakaza's brains off. He is angry and he will make a lot of mistakes. On top of that, he is emotionally wracked. He can buy anything we sell him now!” she says, wincing to her laptop.

“What can we possibly use against him? This boy is just stubborn. We were closer to introducing him to the serpent!” Faku roars.

“Well, my sources has it that he went to visit Nosisa. He's been spending his time there!” she says.

“What? But what happened to the portion? I have a feeling it never worked. He has been playing mind games all this time!” MaFaku says out of shock.

“Tha is not possible. He was behaving!” Qwakaza moans in defence of herself and talent.

“What we need now is a solution to the problem. Bandile and Nosisa once tried to do something. I have pictures to prove it. Now that's the first step and we will have to come up with a story to pin this to them. Blackmail the prophet he's been meeting!” she has everything planned out.

“I don't think that is good enough,” MaFaku says.

“It is...when he gets here we must argue. I need you to be good at it. Wait till he comes back!” she sits down and starts downloading the nasty pictures of Bandile Nosisa half naked in his kitchen.

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Obiyozo has a white doek wrapped around his hand and an artificial mustache. He is wearing the long dress-like Muslim clothes and slippers. Bonisile opens the visitors room and he walks in.

He spots Nomabhelu from a distance. He darts his eyes around the whole room to see if there's anything suspicious. Visitors here are sometimes visitors to another visitor. One has to be extra careful.

He sits down and raises his eyes to her. They hold quite a stare. "How are you?" he asks with an undertone.

She smirks and shrugs. "Good!" she says.

He nods. Nomaza looks so much like her older sister with everything. The mischief, energy, but not personalities. Nomabhelu is the most beautiful and introverted. Very quiet.

“I have been monitoring their moves. There was an incident at the penthouse. I think they are held in hostage. Something big is coming. I just can't tell what it is!” he reports.

She looks around and goes close with her face, he leans in a bit. “Get someone to kill him before he finds out!” she grits her teeth.

## NTOMBIZODIDI

She sits down on the stoep with her Aunt, the sister of her late father. There's cold silence while she waits for an explanation. A long time ago when she was still staying here, her mother did say things that were scary. She didn't understand nor pay attention to those. That's when everyone in the family said she is mentally disturbed. And the white doctors confirmed and labelled it as some sort of traumatic stress what-what depression.

“Your mother was an orphan by a woman Maputo. She told your father that her parents died in xenophobic attacks of Gauteng. She met your father then and they fell in love,” she tells her.

Ntombizodidi is taken aback. It is surprising. She is nothing like a foreign breed. The woman she sees in the dreams speaks

isiXhosa fluently as well. “And what happened to her? Why is she haunting me?” she asks.

“When she was about to get married to your father we were the odds against it. She was a foreigner, a stranger in our home and Nobathembu was your father's first girlfriend. We liked her instead. We did a lot of things to get rid of her. It was not easy!” the Aunt says.

“Why? So what if she was a foreigner? What was wrong with that? Was she not a human being?” her heart breaks for her poor mother. They stole her from her. They lied to her and let her live a lie her whole life.

“She fought and fought but never won. I personally went to a witch doctor ndamfak’ isichitho somzondo (and casted a spell so she'll have a bad smell and aura). Your father turned his back on her for good and she then saw it was enough. She surrendered and found a place to stay not so far from here. She stayed alone with people discriminating her. Gave birth to you.



Wayeyintlekisa kulendawo, engenabani kanye nje ngenkedama de wazibulala! (She was ridiculed in this village, alone and just an orphan until she killed herself!)” she says.

“How did she do it?” she asks.

“The last time I saw her it was in the evening. I was starting to regret myself because of the way she was. I apologized for my evil deeds. She was fine, she had said it. ‘Don't feel sorry for me, I had it all before but then life brought me here. I'm still fine!’ those were her exact words. You were living with us now and we gave her no say in it,” she clears a throat and swallow a lump.

“And then?” —Zodidi.

“Later that day Dumile's father called out to people. He told us he saw goats looking up into the opened flat where she stayed.

He called out for her, but there was no answer. He walked in to see what the goats were looking at. And there was Patience, hanging on the rafters, cold!" she says.

"Dumile's father? The rapist? How sure are you that he didn't kill her? You said it yourself she was fine. She confirmed it!" she knows a lot about Dumile's father. And what he was passed on to Dumile. She would put a lot of a fight with him growing up trying to take chances. She never allowed him to bully her until he saw that she was never going to give in. He befriended her instead.

"Well, some suspected that. We don't know, but that's how she died. Afterwards Dumile's father died at the mine underground. Wawelwa yitafile samngcwaba. Emva koko kwathiwa uyabonwa ezimele kanye kulandlu yayihlala uPatience! (There was a tremor and we buried him. After that people claimed they could see him hiding in Patience's flat!)" she wipes her tears away.

“But how?” Zodidi finds it hard to believe this. But these things happen frequently around the village. When witch craft is at its best one has no choice but believe every rumor whispered.

“It didn't end there. Your father went crazy. It started small-small-small. He would say she's seeing a woman holding a baby and shushing it. She's wearing a long coat standing by his window in his room. The coat was Patience's favourite, we all knew. A month later, he was hit by a car at night wearing his night garments. We suspect he was following the sound and the shadow he claimed to see until he got to the tar road,” she pauses.

Zodidi holds her dry lower lip, shocked. “Was it her?” she asks.

“Later on, a popular witch doctor the father of the late Mawethu Siduko was consulted by my mother seeing such unfortunate events happening. He told her Patience was his daughter. And so he is taking care of everyone of those who tormented her to death!” she starts confusing Zodidi now.

“Siduko? Maputo? Hayi bo, ndibhidekile ke ngoku Dadobawo! (I am now confused now Aunt!)” she asks for light to be shed.

“He was the one who found a job for your father in Gauteng. He abandoned Patience whom he had gotten from a foreigner. She never knew who his father was but Siduko's wife would never accept her. She was another vile woman not to be messed with. Patience's second name was Nandipha. It must've took him some time to reach out to her hence the anger and turmoil after her tragic end of her life,” she answers.

“And you? How come you never died together with the woman that took what's hers!” she angrily asks.

“Siduko was burnt with his hut one night by the villagers. They suspected he was practicing witchcraft and killing people,” she stretches her finger joints making that popping sound. “It was the only way to put an end to what he was doing to our family.

But someone said a curse has a fallen and an orphan has sang therefore there must be a dancer to the tune!”

NTSIKA

The moon was full all night as he drove down to Tsolo. He got into the village, Mjika in the early hours of dawn. He parked by the gravel road and slept.

He is woken up by the ray of sunlight blazing into his eyes. He rubs them and yawns. He walks out and stretches his arms before releasing himself.

He clears a throat and sucks in a long breath getting back to the wheel again. He reminisces of the dream he had. Sitting on top of a huge rock watching the fiery ball rolling back to it's mother's dun breasts. He was alone, hurt and confused at the same time. He was exhausted.

He laid on his back and stared up at the sky as it went dark. Then the moon came by looking up in half yet crescent. Then a star dancing around it. That uplifted his mood and made him want to fight. He felt energized.

What Khoikhoi's, the indigenous people would say is that, a piece of a moon facing up in the sky...is a sign that one will have a girl child.

He sighs and ignites the car. He sees a group of boys passing by and asks for directions to a man he doesn't know.

“A man that wears sacks. I think he is a traditional diviner!” he says.

“I think he is looking for Baw’ uSabela gents!” the other says.

They come closer and direct him. The way is paved and good for the car. He thanks them and gets on with it.

In a few minutes, he parks his car by the entrance and goes off. He looks around and sees the big kraal filled cattle that Nosisa would talk about. He sees a brown cow with no horns, that's the exact cow he keeps dreaming of ever since he regained his dreams.

His heart skips as his eyes fall onto a tall man sitting by the kraal in brown sacks in deed. He slowly opens the gate and the goats, sheep, chickens and every sort of live stock that's not in the kraal runs to him. He's tempted to run away, but he stands still.

They all stand before him and stare. The man stands up as well a bit amazed. He throws his eyes far by the doors of the rondavels. There are people over there also staring in awe. He

clears a throat looking over at the kraal. The cows are mooing while standing closer to a corner intensely gazing at him.

Even dogs that he always dream so bad about are not so violent. ‘Ha-ha-ha! It means your ancestors are happy to have you back home after a long time. They are pleased with your presence!’ MaMbamba's voice rings in his head. This would happen when they'd go back in Zazulwana. All goats and sheep would come by especially when he just woke up on their first night. But this not his home!

“Nzotho

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Nyelenzi, Maphango, Gxugxa, Hebehebe, Ngxale, Hili, Silawu...”  
the man praises a clan that is surely not his.

There's an old frail woman coming. She's walking with a stick wearing glasses. “Ehh...Ntsikayekhaya! Mgqwetho, Mbonda, Magatyana, Hlongotha, Gwadela, Ntsibankulu, Yuthu...haa!”



the woman vibrantly says like an old retired Xhosa praise poet. She is full of joy while he feels something he's never felt before.

As they call those clan names, his bones are moving, creaking and rubbing against each other. His whole being feels some sort of elation as if they said, Tshawe...

The man stands before him and unlike he does to Faku, he can not settle to his gaze for too long. He knows it is culturally rude and disrespectful for him to stare into an elder's eye like that. He drops his gaze in respect. The man drops his knobirrie and embraces him.

He first swallows hard and slowly raises his hands up to hold him back. There's a deep feeling he can never explain not with words. He's never felt that. It's confusing.

The man continues to whisper, “Siqa somile, Mhlahleni ukuba sefile, Malamb’ endlile, Njeke inoboya, Makhul’ alingane nentaba kahili...Nyelenzi!”

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Back in Port Elizabeth, there is a sniper on the roof top opposite the penthouse. Obiyozo and Nomaza are also here. They are waiting for the right time to send just one bullet to the bottom of his heart and get rid of him. Once and for all! They have been waiting for so long for this moment.

They have wine while the sniper is busy looking for a position. There are kids around and many of these people are injured. It seems they have a mob doctor and their own security as there are cars parked outside the high way.

“What is your story with this man?” Obiyozo asks letting Nomaza lean against his chest.

“We dated back then. He went for my sister and she didn't know. When she found out she was in too deep. She didn't back down. I was mad at both of them. Nomabhelu was a good girl, loving church and all...” she sighs.

“Or maybe you thought she was good girl,” Obiyozo looks down at her.

She nods, throwing her gaze far at the sea side. They are under the stars. And now she's getting all naked with him. They are no longer stranger's having fun. They are in it too deep.

“She was a good girl and he changed her. I warned her but it seemed I was jealous because he had chosen her. She was wrong but never wanted to admit until it was too late. He

started getting violent with her. I don't know how everything else happened but she got involved with a resigned military guy. They dated behind Faku's back but he sure found out. Nomabheli started disappearing for days on a run," she tells him.

"And you would take the children in?" he asks.

"She gave birth to Ntsika and brought him to my grandma. He was twin but his twin didn't make it," she thoughtfully says.

Obi laughs a bit. "It explains why he is so slow. The other one must have been a head and him, a tail!" he comments.

Nomaza laughs too. "You are right in there. He never even finished his matric. Dom dyan! (Dumb so much!)" she strikes chords with him. "Then our own Albert Einstein was born and brought home too, Phuthumani. She never came back. I tried

searching for her with the connections I had. They last saw her in Tsolo, but no one knew who she really was. Five years later, I heard she was imprisoned for trying to illegally ship drugs in Nigeria,” she says.

“She was a kwerekwere there?” Obiyozo hisses. They laugh.

“I had to pull some strings. Threaten and kill some people for her to be moved this side. Her case was a very difficult one. It was more than I could handle. Faku threatened to kill her if she gets bailed or freed in anyway. She was safe inside than out. If you weren't there now...maybe she'd be dead especially now that she's been moved to our province!” she tells him.

## NTSIKA

He consulted the man after that confusing moment. He kept referring to him as 'son' of which it is quite a norm for any elder to regard a young man as his son. But it felt more tense and meaningful. It got his heart overwhelmed and warmed up a little.

The man gave him a few herbs and told him a storm is coming. He said he must go home and fix things with the Tshawes. Make things right this time around. That as soon as he has made peace with them he must come back.

He also mentioned that he will have twins in the next couple of months. He is not sure how to feel about that. Zodidi can not give him children. Nosisa would never give him a chance if he comes with another burden on top of what he already has.

About the umbilical cord, the man said he will personally deal with Qwakaza. He said, 'Everything that has happened is strictly rooted from spiritual wars. This is our fight, me and you. They want what we were given by our ancestors. Be careful!'

When he asked if what to do to his enemies specifically mentioning Qwakaza. He answered, 'Take her as an elder. Avoid creating a rift between the people who had your back when you were dumped out in the cold. There is always a way to fight your closest enemies. You are about to face the storm!' he kept emphasizing on that.

Strangely, he was introduced to some of the children and people who were around. The family members and some exchanged cellphone numbers with him. It felt like they know him from somewhere while he doesn't remember a thing. He did not ask but just went with the flow.

‘When you come back...you will discover the whole truth about your identity. And all your questions will be answered!’ these were the man's last words before he left.



The minute he arrives in PE, he sees a line of cars and a loud siren by the penthouse. There's an ambulance and a police van. Nolwandile is crying her lungs out with MaFaku being pulled away from the ambulance by the cops. There's a yellow tape at the entrance of the house written in bold black letters. It is a crime scene.

“What happened?” he asks the man he recognizes—the detective, Bonisile. He is on Kwanda's pay roll.



“Your father has been shot a countless times on his upper body. There's a suspect—” he swallows hard slightly giving him his phone. He is not allowed to disclose such information.

He takes it carefully not to be seen by many. His heart bumps hard and he blinks, then looks at the picture again. No! “That's impossible. Nosisa doesn't even know how to shoot. Let alone doing it like a sniper!” he blurts out feeling sweaty.

“I don't know. I'll look into it!” Bonisile says and walks away.

He looks around and notices that Nomathemba is not around. He walked over to Jamangile who is holding his wife and kids closer. They are sad with jaws dropped and to some tightened.

“Where is Nomathemba?” he asks.

“You? This all your fault Ntsika. You brought that girl in our lives, now look what she has done to us!” MaFaku cries out poking his chest.

“Do not try me. My wife had nothing to do with this!” he bellows with his hands itching to hit somebody. “What was she going to gain from killing him? She doesn't have time nor the energy to squabble with you!”

“Not when she doesn't want her dirty washing out there in the cold. How stupid can you be? Your bloody whore was sleeping with my father, your own father!” Jamangile throws the clay pot only to break out shock.

Nolwandile turns to him a great deal shocked by the news. “Uthi kutheni?(You said what?)” she begs his pardon.

Ntsika feels his eyes closer to falling off their sockets and bumping around like a ball. "That's absurd. What are you smoking? Human ashes?" he doesn't want to believe that. It is not true and it will never be. But Jamangile is the lesser liar or cunning person of all. He is always taking a sit back in most. He wouldn't lie about something like that.

"I saw father's car driving out of her house the other night. It was months back. I asked him about it and he denied it at first. I threatened to tell mother. He said Nosisa called him to beg him to speak to you on her behalf. She was desperate to have you back. She made coffee for him and that's the last thing he remembers. The next morning he was naked with her on the couch," he stares at Ntsika for a moment and shrugs. "He begged me not to say anything. That's why I decided to move out of the penthouse with my family. I knew this would happen!"

Before Ntsika could speak, his phone rings. He tucks it out and the incoming call is from Ntsikelelo. That's one of the guys from Sabela's house.

He ignores it at first, but answers as it keeps ringing.  
“Ntsikelelo?” he is not in the mood for small talks.

“Are you...are you in Port Elizabeth yet? We need you to come, it's urgent!” somebody is panicking over the phone.

“What happened? Where are you?” he asks.

“Ngumalume...ba...bamdubule usesibhedlela phakathi kwenyama nozipho...hhh...(It is uncle...the...they shot him, he's at the hospital in between life and death...hhh...)” the person sobs silently.

His world crumbles as he feels the storm bellowing from a distance. He looks at his phone as it goes off with the caller running out of funds. He sees a message notification that seem to have been there from yesterday. It's an unknown international number.

He clicks on it and comes across unholy pictures. His chest tightens. He takes a few steps back looking for balance not to just collapse. She said there was nothing going on.

But there she is pinned against the wall with her hands all over Bandile's tattooed back. She has her lips slightly parted with her eyes closed. Her leg is lifted up to have her mound rubbing up with his tent on those pair of pants. He is devouring her neck.

He clenches his jaws and holds back the tears, turning off his phone.

“Oh

ilishwa lam! (Oh, my own bad luck!)” the orphan sings with no dancer in sight. It feels like the whole world is just crumbling onto him like the walls of Jericho!

The night is dark with no breaking stars. No moon, no nothing. It is quiet with only gasps, groans, moans and sniffs from agony.

NTOMBIZODIDI

She finds herself at Nosisa's door step with her heavy bell. She wants to make things right and complete the task of working with the wicker. The first step is to confess to every crime and apologize. Earn her trust or at least the benefit of the doubt.

“Ntombizodidi? What are you doing here?” Nosisa asks, standing by the door. She looks even more beautiful than

before. She's dressed up cutely in a black track suit and some comfy sleepers.

The night will be cold one can judge it from the crispy dusk.

"Hi, can we talk?" she asks. Nosisa looks at her hesitantly.  
"Please... I am not here to fight!" she ensures.

She stares at her for quite a while before moving to open a room for her to walk in. She closes the door and leads her to the kitchen.

They sit down and she starts with the long story. Nosisa is attentively listening. She didn't expect her to be calm and civil after what she did in the past. She feels a pang of guilt every second when her eye meets hers.

“My mother was Nandipha Patience Siduko...” she concludes.

Nosisa thoughtfully looks at her and says, “Ntsika is on his own. He chose to, but I do have something that I believe it belongs to your mother here. It is signed N. Siduko!” she says.

There's a knock coming from the door and she notices the lights going on and off. Wow, that's creative. She has been wondering if how does she know if there's a knock at the door if she can't hear a sound.

“I will get it and you can go get the letter!” she says. Nosisa nods and walks down the passage.

She walks to the door and opens only to be met by a lady dressed up in all black. She has a hoody covering her up. Their eyes meet and they are both shocked to find each other here.



“Ntombizodidi?” she is a great deal perplexed to find her here.

“Nomathemba!” she calls out in shock and fright too.

Nomathemba shoots a sharp deadly stare with her nostrils sneering up. “What are you doing here? Are you rubbing shoulders with home wrakers now?” she bellows. Her hands are against her stomach in the pocket of her sweater.

“Between you and I, we are the home wrakers. You bewitched Ntsika and snatched him from her and I rode his d\*ck right under your nose!” now that was a wrong move.

She screams with a sharp pain peircing through her chest. She moves back until she gets to the dining area. Nomathemba is following her swearing. “Greet Zazazela for me on your way to

hell. Tell him I'll be wearing izaza(shades) on your last wedding, you whore!" she says that with a deep thrusts of the knife sinking in.

She slowly slants to the ground with her screams falling on deaf ears. Nosisa appears from the down the passage and covers her mouth shocked.

She runs to her and kneels next to Nomathemba. She slips out the knife from her and Nomathemba stands up. She takes out her phone and a pistol.

"Hello, please help...I think there's something going on in our neighbors house. There are screams calling for help. Maybe it is robbery or something. Please!" she smirks looking Zodidi while her gun is pointed at Nosisa. "Yes, Walmer park, house number 45..." she sings out the address. She throws her cellphone on the pocket and giggles.

“Nomathemba...” Zodidi hisses as she takes the breath sharply.

She kneels looking at Nosisa. “My love, this game of love is not the faint hearted babies like you. You see now all of my battles will be for you to fight. Abakwantsasana bazakufika ngoku and you will be held responsible. Ityala akusingomafutha mntaka God! (The cops will arrive now...)” she says.

Then her hand wraps around Zodidi's neck and she strangles her to death. The way of strangling is professional and less tracable. She just placed her three fingers against her neck to close in the pipe of breath. She fights with her legs shaking and kicking like a slaughtered chicken. She slightly lets go and feels her soul slowly leaving her body. Nosisa drops a tear and whispers, “Ndikuxolele Ntombizodidi. Hamba! (I have forgiven you Ntombizodidi. Go!)” she says.

Zodidi's soul flies out of her body while she sees that white scarf getting tainted by blood. Her blood.

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Obiyozo takes down his binoculars and nods to the sniper and hands him a brown envelope.

“Good job, but I need him dead!” he says. “Follow him to the hospital and disguise as a doctor or some sort of a hospital worker dealing with patients. You know the drill my man!” he orders the sniper.

## NOSISA

By the time the police had arrived, the real culprit had escaped. She fled and left her in that mess to take the blame. She did say it though, 'Ityala akusingomafutha!' she meant that a crime is nothing like a moisturizing oil. One can not take it and wear it on her skin to look beautiful and be proud.

MaFaku walked in with her nose already flared up flustering a breath like a male horse. One would tell she's ready to kill with words like the dog she always barked like. Ntsika was slowly walking with his heart beating nigh to stopping. The trails of blood to where Nosisa was kneeling on top of a dead woman drowning in a pool of blood. She had a knife dropped from her trembling hands.

She could feel their presence as they walked in. She could smell their different scents as they approach. The strongest scent she recognize was his, her lover's cologne.

“Drop any weapon you have at hand and slowly turn around. Hands in the air!” Bonisile said pointing a gun her way. He knew he can't hear a thing not even brewing thunder storms or a crumbling building like that of Jericho. He was just not used to the situation.

Ntsika walked closer and closer defying the orders of the cops. He faced her with tears already filling his eyes. It was true. The love of his life was nothing like an angel. She was deeply flawed, cruel and more than just a cheater. His Nosisa was a murderer. There he has it.

“Why?” that's the only word that came out from his lips. It was a whisper with his eyes shot strictly into hers.

The light was dim in the room, but between the two of them, there was no one who couldn't read each other's gazes even if it's in the fathom of an ocean. It's how they communicated

most of the time as they were both from different worlds. Same language, but a foreign way of delivering the message to be heard. They found a common ground and same level of understanding in their eyes.

She shook her head with tears running down her cheeks. She desperately wanted to talk and explain, but how? She was now painted as a liar, a cheater and murder.

“I'm sorry Ntsika!” she whispered back accompanied by a sign language drawing that for him to get it.

“You are sorry? I gave you everything. I was ready to abandon my family for you. And you sleep with my father and then kill a pregnant woman in cold blood? How cruel can you be?” he was broken. Hurt even beyond repair. This was surely not the woman he had dreamt of. Not the one that helped him come through the worst. It was not Nosisa!

“My brother was ready to accept you. Welcome you to our family. All you could do was—oh, I said it! I said it a long time ago. You are not only deaf, but a deadly curse to my nephew's life!” Mafaku sputtered the words.

Ntsika looked at her one more time, disgusted and—conflicted. Part of him saw something in her eyes. He saw a mail that she desperately wanted to deliver on his mail box. She probably would tell him that she's sorry. That's what she was good at during the past days, weeks and months. It was too late for an apology. Very much late.

“You deserve to be thrown into a darker cell and die while at it!” he spat on the ground before passing by.

“Arrest this criminal Bonisile!” MaFaku said before shaking her sticky thin legs out of the room.



She closed her eyes and gave out her wrist to the man. Bonisile was quiet with a heavy heart as he listened to the cuffs clicking and creaking locked. She walked past him and they left her apartment decorated with a yellow tape as a crime scene.

She stood still next to Ntsika and stared at him. She wanted him to look up at the above his head. See the dirty pillows clouds gathering around the sky and the half of a moon. Then drop his gaze to her eyes again and see what he'll find in the mistry of her eyes. He just never did. He was too angry and too informed with a distorted information. She wanted to tell him, she's being framed. But how? It was impossible. The evidence was there. She had a motive.

“UMama yimfama, utata sisiqwala

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mna ndisisithulu nje esazalwa sinje.(My mother is blind, my father is a cripple and I am just a deaf girl that was born like this!) You are none of those Ntsika. I hope one day you'll open your eyes and ears—see what you're supposed to see and hear what you are supposed to. Goodbye my love!” she found the

ability to put it into words and emphasise with the sign language.

“Move!” the sergeant instructed pushing her into the back of the van.

The siren cried out loud on behalf of her neighbors and friends. Everybody liked her around here. They still believed she's innocent. They didn't care about the story of her relationship, married boyfriend and it's family.

Unfortunately, in the eyes of the law and those who have the keys to her freedom she was guilty. She was danger to the community—a murderer!

NTSIKA

As devastated as he is he held his baby from Mariam. He shushed her like a mother. It is the kind of love he has, the one that sometimes bleeds naivety only to hurt himself and those he loves.

He walked to his car and turned on some heater watched the baby sleep. He sits there in silence watching MaFaku disappearing to the car they came with. His mind takes a stroll down the memory lane.

The current events were just a mirror to him. Showing him how much stupid he actually is. How much of a useless human being he is to Nosisa's life. What could he possibly do to make everything right?

His own words as he swore at her came back to haunt him. Of course, they fight and fix it at the end of the day. But this one, it's the last straw.

He picks up his phone and calls Kwanda. It's answered on the first ring as if he's been waiting for it.

“Sho!” he answers.

“I think we need an attorney. Also check the street cctv footage, Nosisa's house too!” he reports.

“Mhm, okay...where are you?” Kwanda asks making a hissing sound. He's always smoking.

“By her house. She's just been taken to the station,” he says.

“I see. I'll get the guys to get on it. You owe me NK!” he reminds him.

He chuckles. "It's not a problem. I'll sell you three percent of Ndamase's estates!" he says looking at Bandile approaching from the wing mirror.

"Are you serious?" Kwanda is probably on his feet right now.

"Yhea...we've come a long way and...I appreciate you man!" he genuinely says. This is his childhood friend too. The partner in crime. They'd bunk classes together and get up to no good at all. Kwanda dropped out after failing his eleventh grade. He opted for a college. He's a carpenter with a side hustle, criminology that is.

"We'll talk!" he says excitedly.

Ntsika drops the call and looks up at Bandile who is kicking stones with hands deep in the pocket of his pants. He rolls the window down and they hold a stare. There's a flash of guilt in his eyes.

Ntsika shrugs. "Get in!" he says.

He hops in at the backseat and sits still. Ntsika starts the car and lets tar road swallow them up to Bandile's house.

"Are you not going to the station?" he asks.

"No. Please call in the nanny. I have to be somewhere!" he kisses the baby and hands the cot to Bandile.

Bandile stares at him for a moment and nods. He wants to say something but Ntsika shook his head into a no.

He doesn't want to talk anymore. He is exhausted. Bandile takes the baby and walks out. Ntsika gets back on the road drives down to the outside of town.

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At the very same time Obiyozo sees Nosisa being escorted to the interrogation room on his way to see Nomabhelu. He thoughtfully stares and sighs before walking away.

He finds Nomabhelu and he sits down before her. The room is dark with a small lamp on.

“He's hospitalized. Chances of living are very low. But I've sent someone to take care of him for good!” he whispers.

“Don't. Let him suffer to death on his own. I want him to wake up and see the damage greed caused. His own greed!” she says, sitting back on the steel chair.

“What damages?” Obi asks.

“Ntsika found his father. They will get the placenta and everything he stole for wealth. The serpent that kept biting them was trying to notify them that he was not their own. You can already imagine what else will happen now that it farmished—a snake will always be a snake...” she thoughtfully says.

“You save its. Raise its and feed its, then its comes back to eats you!” Obiyozo sat back. He is at peace. His own enemy has come to an end finally. Oh yes, he was his for in underground world!

Nomabhelu gives him a look, “When are losing that accent? Its, its—hayi maan it's annoying!”



## NTSIKA

He arrived in the Kei river and as per his expectations, he found a young boy looking far in his teen with candles. He is sitting on the stones waiting.

He turns around to him as soon as he walks out of his car. He walks closer and takes off his shirt, jacket and trouser. He's left with a vest and boxers.

“Your intuition has improved. I was told you might not come!” he says. “We will start from helping you find chakra. Then cleanse you, wait for Sabela to be discharged to continue with the rest of the rituals. Lead yourself and talk to your people!” the boy says.

Ntsika swallows and grabs the white fabric and wraps it around his waist. He kneels down to the candles and lights them, then place them in on top of the stones while water is running through.

He takes the incense and tries to light it. It burns and goes off. He keeps trying and tears fall, he wipes them away and tries again.

He looks around and finds no one. The boy left. He kneels down and closes his eyes. "Dear God..."

NOSISA

She smiled in her dream seeing Ntsika running down the dam where she has been waiting for him to come. He is wearing beads. She stands up and watches him going down on his knee before her. He looks up in her eyes for her to read his lips.

'MaGqobodwana, MaNgcobeni, Tshawuz' batshis' emva naphambili, Nkos' ayimthand' ithand' abanjani ndivulel' indlela! (pave the way for me!)' he muttered.

She looks up at the clear sky and down at the shiny quiet river valley, Bhili. This is the most dangerous one. People drowned hardly come back alive. But it is calling him in.

“Nyelenzi, Nzotho, Maphango...ndikulindile hamba ngalendlela. Nalu udondolo lwakho ubulise eMaTshaweni, kooTogu, Ngconde, Sikhomo...nakuBhala uZithonga, uthi ndithe MaMbamba ndlezana ebele lide lenyis' izizwe ngezizwe...hamba ke Sitho somile, Hebehebe...(I will be waiting for your return, go this way. Here is your stick to measure the depths of the streams and send my regards to the Tshawe's...to MaMbamba too, tell her I said thank you for she is a mother of all nations full of generosity. Go Hebehebe...)” she praises his clan giving him a small wooden spear. That one is designed for traditional diviners so they will dig up herbs with it.

He takes it and turns his back on her and walks into the river. He walks until he sinks and disappears with the water closing in as if nothing had just disturbed their swaying movement and shine. She sits down next to the river and sings a song awaiting for his arrival.

She jumps up from the dream as she feels someone shaking her slightly. She stands up seeing Bonisile.

“Your lawyer is here to see you!” he says.

“A lawyer?” she asks not really certain. It seems it is still very early.

“Ntsika got you someone,” he answers.

“H...he did?” she's shocked to say the least. Just yesterday he told her he wishes that she could rot in jail.

Bonisile nods and leads her out to the interrogation room. She finds a fine man as tall as hell waiting for her impatiently. She sits down and folds her arms. It's cold inside these unfriendly walls.

“Hi...” she greets with her eyes going all over the place. She's nervous.

“Mrs. Mayenzeke...I just wanted to hear your side of a story. It's just a procedure I don't think they have a case. You'll be out by the end of the day...” the man says relaxed.

“They said I killed her. Kidnapped people and-” she's cut short as she's just frustrated and blurting way too fast.

“Calm down. The real culprit escaped. Nomathemba. She left even the borders of the country. This was planned out. No judge wants to spend their time with this. The man who attacked in Tsolo is in for custody and many more except for the sniper!” he says taking out a few papers. He gives them to her with a ball point.

She runs her eyes down it and signs. “I am no longer a Mayenzeke. We are divorced

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” she says pushing the papers back to him.

“No, you're not. What was never legit was the second marriage to Nomathemba. Ntsika married you on civil terms. He never submitted the papers nor signed on the dotted line,” he stands up to leave. “I'll look at the statement you made from Bonisile. Just breathe. You'll be out of here by the end of the business day. I promise!” he mouths to her.

She sighs and looks at him thoughtfully. “Are you sure Ntsika hired you to do this?” she asks.

The man nods. “I am advocate Sanqela by the way...” he says before making his way out.

Bandile walks in. He sits and stares at her quietly for a moment.

“He came by the house last night. And dropped Sally off. He did not speak much and left me worried. Do you think you might know where he could be? He was not in a good state of mind,” he says.

She drops her eyes and thinks of her dream.

“He is going to be fine. I take it he finally accepted who he really is. His song finally came to an end. The dancer is gone anyway!” she says.

She can tell Bandile doesn't get a thing from that, but he's relieved that he's fine.

“Someone took pictures of that night...sent them to him. He knows!” he mutters, frustrated.

She drops her gaze once again. “He had a countless affairs and even left me for those people. Even if I had went ahead and slept with you he wouldn't have a right to judge. He's the last person to!” she hisses.

He rubs his face. “It's not that much easy for me, you know. I'm his best friend. The idea of me getting undercovers with you surely does kill him. He's disappointed!” he states.

“But nothing happened, right?” she takes that one lightly. She will never apologise for it.

“When are they releasing you?” he asks.

“By the end of the day... hopefully!” she says. “How is Sally?” she asks.

He smiles. “Ah, that one! When she's around people she doesn't seem to think of anyone else, but the one in front of her. She's good!” he says.

She nods. “Thank you Bandile...” she sincerely says.

“Anytime...”

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At Dora hospital, Faku slightly opens his eyes while he has tubes connected everywhere.



He looks at his wife and sister as they are standing next to his bed teary.

MaFaku's phone rings and she picks it up. "Hello?" she answers standing a bit far from the bed.

"Hello Mam, you are speaking to Linda Sokhuthu at Mthatha private hospital. Is this Ms. Ndileka Ndamase?" the lady asks.

"Yes. What is it?" she asks with her lungs already filled with air making it difficult for her to function.

"We are calling to inform you that Mr. Madoda Ndamase has been involved in a car accident. You are needed to come and sign a few papers for his operation to go on as the next of kin. We have been trying to call you for the past couple of hours—"

A tear falls and she just drops the call. She turns to look at Faku before Nolwandile's phone rings. "Hello?"

“Mama—ubhut' Jam...ubhuti Jama eh-hehh...” the person just cries hard over the phone.

Nolwandile looks at the screen and begs the pardon. “Makoti? What are you saying? What happened to Jamangile?” she asks.

“U...uJamangile uzixhomile yhuu (Jamangile has hung himself!)—” the wife of a husband whom took his own life sobbed loudly.

“Iyhuuuu umntwana wam bethuna, iyhoo!” Nolwandile wails like a widow who's husband died in a war. Her phone reaches the floor and she slowly follows it.

MaFaku cries hysterically and calls on the nurses. She knows what is happening. This is worst than just a bite of a serpent. The latest song of an orphan is playing for them to dance to it. Qwakaza had said it. This is calamity!

The machines beep on Faku's bed and the doctors flood in pushing MaFaku out. Her thin legs fail to carry her anywhere this time around. They had to sedate her and admit her too.

“Yhoo hayi imbi lento yababantu. Bonke bazong'ong'oza apha kwezibhedi ngoku? Oh shame, iziaram zenkosi! (Oh this is bad. They are all going to lie on these beds now. Oh shame, poor people!)” the other gossip monger of a nurse says.

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Nomaza parks her car by the station and watches the gate swinging open. Nomabhelu walks out wearing a black track pant and a dusty pink T-shirt carrying a backpack.

She stands still and looks at the sky. She smells the salty breeze from the sea. Sea gulls fly up crying as if congratulating her. She couldn't wait to see her children again even though she is nervous about their reaction. It is yet going to be another difficult journey for her, but at least she's free in this dom. Faku is dead only to leave her the sun.

She walks up to the car and hops in. Nomaza drives without breathing a word.

She stares out through out the window as they head to Zazulwana in Butterworth. She needs to be home and get cleansed. Her ancestors must've been looking for her in all these years.

She then wonders if why did Sabela not reach out to her. He promised eternal love...

## NOMATHEMBA

She lives under the cave far at her village of her home. She forced Nobantu to withdraw even the last cent she had. Sold all of Mawethu's assets and left his children nothing at all. Nobantu is sitting right here with her tied on her ankles and wrists.

She tends on the fire and looks at the pouring rain out there. There's enough firewood for them to stay for the next three

days. She is waiting for her new identity pass and passport to skip the country. Kwanda and that detective thought they could catch her. She chuckles to herself everytime she thinks about it. Clearly they know uThembi-Nomathemba!

She let them believe she flew to Harare and that all of this was planned. All she ever wanted was for Ntsika not to ever leave her. She wanted what she never had. What Nosisa had. Talk about obsession!

“Your husband sexually harassed me from the age of twelve. You want to know why he did it?” she looks at Nobantu who looks like a wet chicken.

“I'm sorry...” she keeps hissing with tears flowing harder than the rain out there.

“After eleven is lunch! He said it and started molesting me. Putting in the first finger, the next one until his thumb would fit in. And he told me I was ready for the real deal. I told you about it. I really hoped someone would hear my voice, but none...” she grabs a box of pizza and eats. “But don't worry I will leave

you behind with your children and I will never look back...As soon as this last money kicks in, I'll be out of your hair!" she says.

"Where will you go? They are looking for you everywhere!" she asks as if worried.

"I don't know yet, but all I know is that I need to be alone somewhere in the world. Where no one knows me. Have a fresh start, alone!" she thoughtfully says. She is never going to let karma come to her as a form of justice. She has to change her address and let it find her in exile!

## Epilogue

×Unedited×

NTSIKA

“You are my father, aren't you?” he asks taking a sit next to Sabela's bed. He was shot on his arm. He's doing good so far...

“I thought your mother told you or someone in your home,” he answers staring at him.

“Why didn't you come look for me?” he asks.

“I did. Your mother was on the run. I never knew your home and I am just a healer, not very connected like the man who claimed to be your father,” he says. “But that is no excuse. I'm sorry...”

He nods. “And so what now?” he asks.

“Go back to Zazulwana and gather around all the Tshawes. Apologize and ask them to cleanse you...your mother is back home as well. I will come with my people and pay the damages for you and your younger brother. Then you will go on with accepting your calling. There's a lot that you need to understand about it as a twin,” he tells him.

“If I accept it, what will it be? Water or the forest, the mountain perhaps?” he wants to know.



“Well, you are the one who should know. Signs of a child of waters are cold/sweaty feet or hands always, dreams of waters, snakes and a lot of things related to the water—high sex drive. I can safely say you are very wild...” he smirks. Ntsika looks away clearing a throat, it's valid but he ain't gonna confirm it. Sabela chuckles. “We are a kind that works with water and prayer. Our gift comes from the ancestors who were strongly believing in Christianity... That's why it took you so long. You never prayed Ntsika until you could see the storm and spilt milk!”

He swallows hard. “I tried,” he rubs his palms.

“What are you planning to do about MaTshawuza? Your marriage is not traditionally recognized yet,” he asks.

“I will have to re-do everything if she allows me,” he says with an under tone.

“You are not in good terms?” the question rubs salt on his wound.

He shakes his head off. “I messed up big time. I'm even ashamed to look her in the eye again. I just had to leave and get my things together. I'm scared,” he nakedly tells the stranger.

“I know the feeling but eventually you'll have to face your fears. Try to explain to her that it wasn't her but you. This wasn't even witch craft but izinyanya had to set you apart from her, you were relying too much on her of which she is just a campus. It had to be done,” he says.

“I don't know...” he hisses underneath his breathe with his tears held back by his lid. “Ndiyamthanda kodwa...I always hurt her. She deserves better...”

“Then find the better man in you and give it to her. It might take her time to come around but she will. Just be patient,” Sabela advises.

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A MONTH LATER,

Ntsika parks his car by the sea side in Port Elizabeth. He stands out there and scans the place, looking for her. He did the right thing. Got cleansed, Zodidi's dead child was also given her birth and death rights so there will be no commotions in the future. He started over and re-married Nosisa even though she is just giving him a cold shoulder. All they ever talk about in the house is the child. At night she urges him to take the couch or place pillows between them.

Sometimes he wakes up at night to find her cuddling him up. As soon as she wakes she pushes him away, of course. Earlier this morning, he found a box dumped in the thrash bin. He doesn't know whether to be angry or civil about it. He started this.

He spots her sitting on the sand dunes watching the waves. He walks over there and she sees the shadow.

Overpowering the salty sea breeze, his cologne and a mixture of herbs, sage floods her nostrils. He fills her heart with so much tranquility and his heavy presence brings warmth to her. This is why it is so difficult to break ties with him. He owns everything she is. Her whole being. His aura is different

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very strong making hers weaker and feel very much safer especially in his arms.

She looks up at him and he smiles nervously. She blinks and stares back to the waves, smiling to herself. He always knows

where to find her. And he likes disappearing. He's one of the dumbest people she's probably ever met.

He sits down next to her and looks at the sea too. There's loud silence for quite sometime. He's not bringing any flowers today, that's a first. She's disappointed. She loves throwing those flowers back on his face and give him a piece of her mind. He must relive that pain he caused her.

He searches his pockets and tucks out a small chocolate bar, P.S. He hands it to her. She slips it thoughtfully—she likes chocolate so much these days. 'I love you!' for a change there's a different message from the cards of apology.

That's so thoughtful of him. She blushes as he takes it back and opens it for her. Now he's making her feel like she's Sally. Their Sally. She takes it back and takes a bite while he tucks her afro behind her ear.

He signals an unclear and incorrect way with his hands. She thinks he's asking if how is she.

She giggles and looks away. "Mnk! Ay Ntsika you are the dumbest person I've ever met. Like, for you everything is just difficult," she tells him.

He smiles looking away. "Isn't it why you are my chosen one?" he mutters.

She looks elsewhere and nods. "Maybe..." she hisses underneath her breath.

He turns her face to him and stares into the depths of her soul. "That day you said, your mother is a blind woman, your father is a cripple and you just a deaf village girl," he pauses and takes a breath. "Did it mean that you are really done with me?"

“No. It was the same song you kept singing. A wake up call. I was hoping you use what you have to get what you don't have. Use your eyes to know what didn't hear. And walk to where the truth and liberation lies both spiritually and physically,” she tells him. “It also meant that whatever that happens to me from that day forward I will accept. I have had it all in life before. Anywhere where life places me, I am fine. I am content with who I am...”

He nods and takes out the box he picked up from the trash bin. She swallows hard and her eyes wander around the whole place. He softly holds her chin to have her face him.

“Why didn't you tell me you were pregnant?” his eyes are getting moist yet he's still calm.

“I was going to tell you. I was just...I wasn't ready to!” she says attempting to look away. He holds her chin tightly while his eyes are panicking.

“And you thought it was fine to abort without me knowing? Nosisa...” he mutters, defeatedly.

“Open the box!” she orders throwing her eyes to it.

He hesitantly does and finds the pills. The pack is still sealed. He swallows a bit relieved and looks up at her. “You didn't?” he can't breathe. She shakes her head off. He smiles a bit overwhelmed. He drinks a huge bucket of air.

“But I'm scared...” she hisses looking away.



“Don't be. Everything is alright now. I know better than to follow anyone else around other than you. Ndiyakuthanda Nosisa!” he drops a fat kiss on her lips.

She lets him have a bite on that chocolate and pulls him closer for more kisses.

He looks around and looks back at her mischievously before pulling her to the top of his lap. They share a feverish one, full of passion and lust. He slowly goes down her jaws to her neck.

He buries his hand under her underwear and runs his fingers on her wet folds. He finds the opening and she snuggles on his neck, heavily breathing. She rides and rocks on his finger before her toes curl. She squeals as she reaches the climax sucking his fingers in. He smirks and lets her unbuckle his belt. She rubs his tent on top of the fabric of his trunk.

She looks up at him and pecks his lips. "I told you I'm not ready for sex until we get married!" she gets off him leaving him like that.

He curses underneath his breath in frustration. He stands up and runs after her fixing his belt. He pulls her wrist. "What do you mean get married? We just got married last month. This month is about to end too," he complains.

"White wedding...white wedding TakaSally!" she folds her arms.

"What? I'm broke as hell, but we can do a small gathering. Invite friends and family in two weeks," he comes up with a solution.

"No! Which is Aunt will be left outside and which of your friends is not going come?" he sighs with a slight frown. "See? I am not about to make unomgogwana womcimbi ingathi kungcwatywa ikati (a small ceremony like a funeral of a cat) just because wena you can't live without sex. A wedding takes a

maximum of six months to be planned by then financially we will be doing good, then we will talk. I'm watching you even this pregnancy doesn't mind oral intimacy from Daddy. I think he or she is taking after me even with the creativity. Allowing Mom to teach Daddy a valuable lesson of life!" she says rubbing her invisible bump. She is getting fat though, on the right places which is driving Ntsika a little bit over the edge.

"Come on babe, I've been apologizing nje? Oh yini na MaGqobodwana mfondini!" he begs.

She shrugs. "Your mother is coming for dinner. We should go and prepare something nice, don't you think?" she pulls his cheek.

And from there, these two lived to get to know Ntsika's family. Getting to know their deepest flaws and imperfections. Balancing a life free of excuses and overcoming their worst fears.

From the experience of going around the world looking for a father, one learnt that desperation can close your eyes completely. Choosing the devil that you already know is better than an absolutely new one. Knowing yourself better than anyone else makes it easier for you to follow your instincts rather than your heart. Introspection is an important aspect of life.

And not everything you see is what you get when walking right into it. Life is a tree with leaves as chances, but calculate the risks as well...

Excuses sound best to the person making them up. But they are lies, fabricated and not valid. They make you feel alone, disregard the ones who love you the most. They make you a slave in the mind and suddenly you'll be so full of them. Sob stories... they are an opposite to the song of an orphan!

.....**The End**.....

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