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Unrequited Desires by NOMCEBO KHANYILE SITHEBE

Prologue

People talk about happiness as if it's the easiest thing in the world, they write motivational books and hold lectures worth thousands of rands, to teach individuals how to be happier and to live a more fulfilling life. I call bullshit. No amount of talks, activities, or numerous books lining up the shelves in my study have come close to teaching me about happiness. I'd say happiness were a myth were it not for those around me. Tailored suit check. Dress shoes check. Cologne

check. The items are glaring at me from their position on the bed, as if against this day but helpless to it all because when has Squalosenkosi Ngcobo ever been known to be rational where Siyabonga Shandu is concerned? My mind entertains the temptation of wallowing in misery but my ability to shut down quells any negativity before it can properly spread, and caused damage before I can show Siyabonga my support and be there for him. As a brother should. A big brother. A close friend. A confidant. A stranger.

He's getting married to the love of his life today. Nearly a year since his engagement, and he's finally fulfilling what he has dreamt of for most of his life, what he's talked to me about many a late night all teary-eyed and hopeful and lost and angry and very sad and too depressed. I've been there, through it all, holding him to foolishly replace what he'd lost. Wiping away every heart ache hoping to take the pain away. Handling him with care to remind him of the bigger picture, that he was more than the pain Nhlakanipho put him through, more than the loss, and loss of self. That he could always find himself again. Find himself while I lost myself in him. My thoughts are not given a chance to prevail in their misery before the bedroom door opens. A flirtatious whistle echoes in the bedroom, as a sweet,

feminine scent merges with the air. “Hey, daddy. Hey, sexy.”

The dulcet voice

sing-songs. I am given a back-hug, the small frame

unsuccessfully trying to

join her tiny hands at my front. “Waze wamuhle, boh! Let me fix your tie.”

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“Fuzelihle,” I say, my lips refuse to humour her with a smile,

“what did I say

about boundaries? What if I was naked when you came in?

Do you want yourmother

—”

“Cha, awukahle, Sqalosenkosi.” As expected, she opens her big

mouth to interrupt me. “We’re almost the same age—maybe

not exactly but I swear I’m

not twenty-three

. I’m actually thirty

-three, like you, in my mind, I am. I compliment you to boost you

r ego, and it's fine if I see you naked because there's nothing sexual about seeing you naked. It's like seeing a huge tree honestly."

"Is huge tree innuendo?"

"Cha!" an eye roll. "I would call you a pervert but I genuinely believe you're

socially awkward

and sometimes. This is why you ask such questions. I'm not

trying to sneak peeks at your dick, Bhuti

. I'm actually trying to get you to Siyabonga's wedding. I promised to make sure you'll come."

Her words make me frown. Have they been talking behind my back? Her and Siyabonga. I know we barely talk lately but has he really reduced our

interactions to having messengers like my older sister's daughter? It makes me angry, uncomfortable, because he hasn't approached me. He never

approaches me, not lately, bu

t he can discuss me with others. “You’re his tealady, now? Baas says jump and you ask how high?”

“Don’t be an ass,

Bhuti

. What else is he supposed to do when you don’t even make an effort to meet with him? To

—I’m not sure what’s going on betweeny’all. A

lover’s quarrel?”

It’s none of her business. The less people know, the better. The less we focus on the past, the likelier I can pretend it didn’t happen. Successfully, I shut

down

—

dissociate from the world around me until everything is blank.

No thought

s. No feelings. “Perhaps we should be leaving. I know you think it’s fashionable to be late but I’d rather we weren’t. Not on Siyabonga’s special day.” I’d rather die. I’d rather die than ruin this for him. Because I’m looking forward to his pure smile, the expression he makes when he’s genuinely happy —even if it’s not because of me.

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Fuzelihle graciously beams at me, her small hand reaching out to cover mine as she begins to drag me outside, only stopping at the doorway to grab one of my canes from the rack . “Am I pulling you too hard? Is your knee acting up?”

She weighs air. Her grip is air. I don't tell her, and instead shake my head as she leads me outside, to the garage where Bab' Shange is standing next to the

black Bentley. I bow my head in greeting, smiling at the greying man, before climbing into the backseat. Fusion music begins to play just as the privacy screen slowly ascends. The car begins to move

—

and a lump lodges itself

inside my throat. A phantom headache creeps in and it's like I can't hear

a single thing over screeching tires and crunching metal.

"Breathe." A dulcet voice instructs.

Right. I have to breathe. Sometimes it's hard. Sometimes it feels like shards of

glass slid down my throat to hide in my nightmares and anxiety that afternoon

—

to never allow me escape. Like taking Likuwe-

ithemba wasn't enough. "I'm fine," I tell Fuzelihle, gripping my thighs for anchor—

willing the

tension to ease out of my bones. "You need to stop telling me what to do. I'm older than you."

She gets my deadpan humour, and giggles repeatedly, snuggling into my body

and closing her eyes. "I love you so much, Sqaalosenkosi. I don't know what I'd do without you."

I'm not sure how to respond to the sappiness so I don't.

Fuzelihle takes this in

stride, knows very well

that I'm not one for small talk—

or any talk for that matter. The loud to my quiet, she initiates conversation and talks about work,

though she works for me, and tells me about office romance before she's telling me about a man she's met at a business gala

in Rustenburg. "Be careful," I say.

“We’re taking things slow. He knows about—he’s okay with it.

Liking

transwomen does not make you gay

—because I’m not a man to begin with. My femininity attracted him to me. The woman he saw. It won’t change simply

beca

use my pussy’s man

-

made.”

I choke on my saliva, caught off-guard by her bluntness, and is it a joke? What

she’s said. I’m not sure but I wasn’t eager to hear about man

-made pussies.

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Sure, I’ve been there for her—

through therapy sessions and her first HRT and

I went with her, for the different surgeries but I’m her uncle—

and there are

things I don't need to know. "Akube ugcinile ukung'tshela ngenkomo yakho, Fuze. I don't need to know all of that."

"I feel like I can talk to you about anything."

"You can, just not about...pussies."

"You like it, don't you?"

I am done with this conversation. She probes further, I've shut down. She talks and talks and talks. She talks until we reach the venue for the wedding. We're

at a church in Diepkloof.

Siyabonga's father is good friends with the pastor and he agreed to marry the couple. It's a typical black wedding, with cars lined

alongside the curb. People invite each other to these types of celebrations, hoping to score free food and alcohol. Unfortun

ately, Siyabonga's reception

will be held in Sandton

—
and only a guest invite gets you in. Fuzelihle disappears immediately we step out of the car. Nqobizitha is outside the church's heavy

-looking oak doors, standing with another short woman who leaves as

soon as I join them. I don't question it and hug my youngest brother. He tells me Chris is with Siyabonga, as expected. Sbanisezwe has

arrived but he's busy with Nhlakanipho, and he's taken Thatego with him. I

only nod my head as we discuss parenthood, his sons are doing well

—

and

they've successfully implanted an embryo. Twins, the doctors say, and they're

excited about bringing in additional family members into their home. Nothing much is going on with me, he knows this. Liyana stays with Khensani and on weekends that she cannot come to visit me, I try my best to visit her

—

and to

spoil her. It's not the same, of course, she's withdrawn and quiet, nothing ever seems to make her happy. She's only six years old.

At 10:30am, the wedding starts. We've all been allocated seats, and I count as family because my brothers and I are at the very front. It is not an ideal place and I'd have preferred the back but this is for Siyabonga, for him to see that I came, that I support him and want nothing but the best for him

—

always.

There's a choir upfront, singing a romance song I am not familiar with, and

Nhlakanipho is the first one to appear. Beside him is Mthobisi, the boy loves

10

him too much

—

and it is a good thing to be happy with the ones you love,
your family. It feels like forever that the dancing gets out of the
way and the page boy

appears. I don't know the little boy personally, but I remember
that he's

related to Siyabonga. Siyabonga. There he is. Burning brighter
than the sun, wearing a grey suit that compliments his hazel
eyes, his smile is glorious.

There's a look of reminiscence on his face, he only has eyes for
Nhlakanipho. I

watch him walk past us, watch him hug both his parents, watch
him beam

foolishly as Nhlakanipho shakes both his parents' hands
reverently.

We all sit down, and the ceremony begins. The usual topic
about love. The usual speech about how a marriage is an
agreement between two people and God. I heard it all in the

form of advices from the elders when I wed
Khensanitraditionally. Our white wedding was very small
compared to this one. Not
more than twenty people. We hadn't made the effort. For
different reasons. "Siyabonga, please repeat after me : In
the presence of the congregation, our
friends and family, I Siyabonga, choose you Nhlakanipho
Ngubane to be mylife partner
—"

The weight of the pastor's words are very heavy, like a ton of
rocks weighing
down on me. I get the urge to shift in my seat, I do, looking
straightahead...waiting, for that final confirmation
—

the final kill. The responsedo
esn't come for a while, or maybe it comes to soon—no
hesitance or doubt. "Ido."

Something like a punch lands on my gut as the
pastor continues. "To have and

to hold from this day forward, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow, to love and to cherish, and to be faithful to you alone.

This is my solemn vow.”

I hear Siyabonga say the words, repeat after him. All of them. With sincerity and warmth. With tears and emotion. With beauty and happiness. I feel the air leave my lungs when the enchantingly beautiful smile found in hazel eyes clashes with my own eyes. Am I smiling bright enough? Is my pride

showing? My sincerity. I don't know. Maybe not. His smile falters. Did he truly want me here? I'm not sure. Perhaps I should've

stayed away. Perhaps it was

too soon. Like it's been for the past year. I should stand and tell him I'd undo it

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all if I could

—

every syllable, and every little thing about that night. I should stand and tell him to not worry, I know it's all unrequited—

what I feel for him.

That I don't dare imagine having him all to myself even in my dreams.

It's all unrequited desires. I want to stand and tell him that's still okay—

if only we can go back to being how we used to be. Unrequited desires aside, I want him to smile brightly for me and mean it.

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Unrequited Desires : OneSgalosenkosi

When Sbanisezwe and I were reunited with our brother, we not only gained him but an entire family, and a place to call home

—

one that connected us to our roots, and gave us an identity. I guess this is why it was hard for us to hate MaKhathide

—

Sbanisezwe more than me

—
despite the unwavering devotion

and loyalty we had to Ntwenhle. I'm not sure if the idea of a new family meant

much to Sbanisezwe as it did for me, because maybe it was too late for him

—and in many ways I'd failed to protect and take care of him, but maybe having

a bigger family would ease my own load. A bigger family meant more men. It meant relatability. It meant having a

father figure and a role model. A good one. For the past thirteen years, Bab'Ngcobo has been such a man to us. He's held my hand more times than I can

recall, with his words and his kind heartedness and consistency. Finding our youngest brother meant covering our shame, and taking away the stigma of being fatherless. It meant doing away with the embarrassment of not belonging, of being an aimless drifter

—
existing but with no sense of direction or identity. At home, I am the eldest son

—
the first boy born in a stew of women. This is who I am, and it is a position that cannot be taken from me. It does not make me better than the women who came before me, or the others that follow after me

—but it's part of my identity. And maybe it makes me proud that my

ancestors deemed me worthy of this, despite the responsibilities expected of a firstborn son. Sometimes, it works to my advantage. Sometimes when some of the family is unjust and backwards in their way of reasoning and in the way they do things. Fuzelihle was ten years old when I met her

—
bright, an extrovert, and with too much femininity trapped within the body of a skinny boy. Back then, when we were introduced, her name was Mcebisi Nxumalo

—
a smart mouth who went to a private school in Durban, going through the hip-hop trend of wearing

baggy pants that somehow wouldn't sit on one's waist like they're supposed

to, and even baggier tank-tops that were always paired with snapbacks and Converse. It was the trend for boys all around South Africa, she did it to fit in

—

and to please her parents.

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I only, truly met Fuze when I was twenty-nine years old. She was a nineteen

year old depressed young woman, her masculine features hiding in women's

clothing and makeup

—

too much of it, like she was trying to drown in it.

Through chance I met her, at a club in Durban, and it hadn't gone well when I

saw her

—with the old men and the alcohol. It hadn't gone

well because it was Mcebisi that I was used to. Mcebisi who was still so intelligent, and enjoyed soccer, and dressed in chinos and corduroys, and loved to trim his hair

—

a metrosexual man like the rest of those his age group.

It hadn't gone well when I threatened to tell her parents, I'd been too blind

ed

by anger back then. That she'd lie to us about her sexuality when she knew perfectly well that three men within the family were queer, that we'd never

have judged her. It angered me that it was with old men that I caught her with, obviously not for money

because she's never gone without—

her mother being a principal at a school in Ntumeni and her father owning taxis in the area. It was never about money. Overtime, this is what I came to understand. The old men, they welcomed her femininity

—

and she could be who she truly was around them. Not who her family expected her to be. Never Mcebisi, but Amahle

—
and then later, Fuzelihle; when her father disowned her.

Numerous

family meetings later, and he wouldn't budge, he would be going against God's

will by allowing her to be what she was not, those were his words

—

and if it

were necessary, then disowning her wouldn't be a problem. He lost his wife in

the process, my oldest sister, because blood is thicker than water

—

and her daughter was more important. The day she applied for a new ID, Fuze decided

she'd be a Ngcobo—and that she'd honour her ancestors with her name. Fuzelihle Ngcobo, for the family who didn't understand her completely but

still accepted her. I watch her now, with little patience, as she tries on another dress that looks exactly like the one she was

wearing before. She always drags me to these things, the little fashion trips in between work hours, for one clothing item or the other. "You have less than thirty minutes before you're due back at work,"

I tell her sternly when she materializes from behind the curtains, wearing an un-ironed silken dress.

"What do you think of this?"

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"The fabric will burn if you iron it." "Uqalile." A huff, she looks down at the dress, pulling it down. Khensani always

says if you constantly have to pull something down when you're wearing it then it's not the right size. "You don't iron these dresses, it's fashion for it to be like this. Ken is taking me out tonight, I need to look good for him."

Right. Ken. The wh

ite man that she met in Rustenburg. We've never actually

met with this man, but Fuze worships the ground he walks on

—

a god that hasher at his beck and call. She will drop everyone and everything for him,

they've only been together about nine months, its d

isgusting. Watching any of

the young ones grow old enough to date is disgusting, most of the time I can'tstand it. "Engathi uzong'cika, ngane.

Nginendabani mina ngomlungu wakho?" "Weeeh, mood

-

killer! I should've asked Thatego to come along but we're not

that close and maybe he's busy at work. Chris yena

angim'thembi, he alwaysproves my theory that he's the Kanye West of South Africa—

fashion-

wise."

Silently, I agree with her sentiments about Chris

—although I don't know who

Kanye West is. For Fuze to compare him to Chris, it means his clothing choices

are hideous. I wonder if they work well for him like they do for Chris. "Are you done, MaFuze? You're going to miss out on lunch, and work on an empty stomach for the remainder of the day. That can't be hea

lthy

—

women and

their ridiculous diets aside." "I'm saving my appetite for when Ken gets here." The sound of her dangerously high heels make a clicking sound, she's prancing back to the

changing room. Alone again, I decide to order for her

—

because she needs to eat, and part of

me resents this Ken that I'm yet to meet. Also, the emptiness in Fuze's stomach tends to extend to her head when she hasn't eaten. It's my

responsibility to look out for her, as h

er uncle, as I've been doing for years

now. It takes her about ten minutes to return, dress thrown over her arm, grinning brightly at me. Seven hundred rand parts with me, as I pay for her dress

—

its always at the most convenient time that she remembers I am older than her.

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We make it back in time, just three minutes before 02:00pm. I made sure to collect her food as we arrived, and sternly told her to eat before we separated. Like usual, the office buzzes silently as I appear

—

and the ones who do meet my gaze politely greet me. This can happen more than ten times a day. The same greeting from the same people over and over again in one day for no apparent reason but to be unnecessarily polite. I still return every greeting,

stopping at Khungeka's desk to ask

about the health of her young daughter

—

and maybe she appears nervous but her child is better and has switched pre-schools due to the unhygienic state of the previous one. I always make sure to do most of my workload on Mondays to Thursdays, to allow myself

a breather on Fridays. Today is Friday, I've completed most of

my work and focus on responding to emails that have been calling my name since morning. New potential business. Inconsistencies on the books of an Indian-owned publishing company. What I cannot immediately deal with will be attended to on Monday. It's 04:30pm and I have to travel to Tembisa to fetch my daughter.

Bab' Shange is already waiting outside, in the parking area, and I give him the

usual respectful bow. Getting in the backseat, I wait for him to join me, once

he's in the driver's side I request that he play some music. We share the same

love for old school music

—George Michael serenades me with 'Careless Whisper', I feel the tension seeping out of my bones as I breathe in and out.

The car keeps a steady pace. To further distract myself, I decide to finish the book I have been reading for the past two days

—Danielle Steele 'Mirror Image'. I'm not sure if it's weird for men to read romance books like this but I

do. I read anything I find interesting. This book is.

My heart throbs against my chest as we park outside Khensani's home. A

familiar unsettling fear brewing at the prospect of seeing her again

—

even though I saw her last week, and the week before, and the week before. I know it's

guilt. We didn't just lose our daughter. She lost her unborn child as well—

a miscarriage due to stress. The symbol of her bond with Pitso gone, in the blink

of an eye. Two children lost just weeks apart. I can't begin to imagine the pain she's going through,

even when I see it

—

the depression and agony etched in

her posture, her voice, her face. It's my fault and if I had just—

“Sho, grootman!” Pitso saves me, like usual, he always opens the door right on

time. I want to call him a good man for not being resentful of me and the pain

16

I've put them through but it feels wrong. To call someone good because they don't hate you for your sins. “Beer?” “No.” I shake my head, wondering if policemen are allowed to touch alcohol in

their uniform

—even though he's in the comfort of his own home. “I'm good, thanks. Just eager to see my daughter. Where is she?” I look around the house, it's too quiet, maybe she's in her room. “Is Khensani home?”

“Yeah.” A gloomy expression disfigures light features as Pitso’s face scrunches.

He leads me to the living room, glancing over his shoulder as he continues,

“Some days are better than others. Uyazi nawe, this situation has been difficult on all of us. Right now, she’s sleeping. I fetched Liyana from school, and she

was doing her homework in her room. I was helping her actually. Let me fetch

her.” “I can come with.” “Not a good idea.” He shakes his head, moving toward the hallway. “I’ve seen how being in that room triggers you so much. Liyana doesn’t need any

negative energy around her. If her father is sad then she can pick up on it and

it will take a toll on her.”

He makes a valid point, I try not to be offended. With him out of sight, I grab a seat on one of the couches and wait. The family pictures decorating the walls momentarily distract me. Frames of Khensani and Pitso and Liyana. I would

be lying if I said my gut didn’t clench in unnecessary jealousy, caused by an irrational thought that I’ve been replaced somehow. I can’t be sure when

things changed but they have

—

somehow. Maybe before Likuwe-

ithemba's death, I don't remember. Maybe I haven't been replaced. This is part of the

sacrifice I made, when Khensani freed herself from me, and finally allowed herself to love another.

"Mmhhmm..." someone clears their throat. Pit

so, and clinging to his left leg is

Liyana. I can't accurately read the expression on her face but it's not enthusiasm. "Liyana, what do we say to daddy?"

It irks me that my relationship with my daughter has come to this, having another man raise her and teach her how to conduct herself. Even when she stayed with her grandparents in Limpopo, it still felt like she was my

17

daughter

—and that we had a connection. Now, there's a disconnect—

no

matter how hard I try to overcome it. The therapist we're going to s

eems

useless at this point. I've resorted to doing things my way, to taking it a day a

time

—

and being patient as a nun.

"Afternoon, Baba." The tiny voice finally speaks, she hides behind Pitso—

allshy.

"Kukhanya kwam," the gentle voice comes naturally. "Baba missed you somuch." I have. When we're apart I miss her, and the phone calls aren't enough. Sometimes, she won't speak to me—

and those days are the hardest. When

Khensani couldn't be bothered to car

e and Pitso is the one caught in between,

playing mediator. I owe him so much. "We're going to have fun, I promise." I have no idea what to do with her, hadn't thought

about it yet, but I will make sure that she doesn't regret spending time with me. "Ready

to go?"

Her eyes go wide and

—

is that fear? A lump lodges itself in my throat, I

swallow and it's like more form, so quick that they block my airway and make it hard for me to breathe. She's looking at Pitso, he nods his head and pats her

head, to the back of her neck

—squeezing gently. "Fetch your bag, nana. You're going to spend time with daddy. Promise to behave?"

"Pinky promise." My daughter returns softly, then disappears off into the

hallway.

"Give it time." Maybe Pitso's seen my struggle, or is it jealousy? Either way, all

the understanding in the world is written on his face. “Its not
easy for all of us

as well. Sometimes she just cries out of the blue. The therapist
says to allow

her this, for her healing.” I nod my head. “How have you been,
brother? You’re always so focused on us

that I forget to check in with you as well. How are you doing?
Do you need

anything?”

“I’m fine.” He always says this. “Coping well. Work helps, of
course, but one

day at a time

—that’s my mantra.”

Its mine too. But

sometimes, it’s about the hours—

and if they feel too long

then it’s about the minutes. Sometimes it’s about getting
through the next

18

second without feeling like I'll die because I can barely breathe.

"I will see you

around. Thank you for taking care of th

em." "Its not just me, Khensani's mother was here a few days

ago. I can't take all the credit." MaBaloyi. We don't talk lately.

She never fully recovered from Likuwe

-

ithemba's death. It was worse when we sent her to her final
resting place in

Mbongolwane. She felt the child ought to be buried in Giyani

but I stood my

ground. We haven't seen eye to eye since.

The drive to my house, in Saxonwold, always feels longer than

it should. I have a little girl in the car with me, six years of age,

sitting so far from me

—

and

glancing outside the window. I want to initiate conversation but I've somehow

lost the ability to

—and I'm trying hard to not panic because she's in the car

with me. A moving car. I was spared the horror of seeing the immediate damage done to

her when we had that accident, but I'd still seen the aftereffects of it. I'd seen her tubes going in her mouth and bandages covering her body. I'd seen her using a wheelchair. I saw all of it. I want to protect her—

with every fibre of my being. It's dark when we arrive at my house. She has to change and freshen up while I prepare dinner. Silly amapiano music plays throughout the house because most kids her age love this music. She also loves Sho Madjozi. I make her favourite burgers for dinner. While I wait for the patties to cook thoroughly, I

decide to call Nqobizitha. "Bafo." He answers almost immediately. "I suddenly don't remember how to entertain a six year old," I say, pressing

my back against the edge of the counter.

His chuckles resemble mine, there's a voice in the background...

C

hris. I can hear him tell Nqobizitha to pass me greetings. A smile pulls at my lips as I

shake my head. "You say this every weekend. I'm beginning to think you suffer

from anterograde amnesia like Sbanisezwe. Only yours is not chronic like his.

You don't know how to entertain a six year old, huh?" "Lutho, Bafo.

" Turning to f

ocus on the meat frying in the pan, I flip the burgers

to brown them on the other side. "Will you invite your sons to join ustomorrow? Maybe I can take them all to Monte Casino."

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"Or you could come over to our house. It's our turn to host,

Ndoda

You've missed too many of them already." "No can do. I want to spend time with my daughter." Nqobizitha remains silent, judging without voicing a word. "I'll respect your

wishes. Then w

e can hang out on Sunday, you and me, I'll even go with you to Tembisa." "Sounds like a plan."

Liyana comes back, we eat in the living room, watching Disney films. A few times, I catch her eye but she always averts her gaze afterward

—

and has still kept that distance. As far as boundaries are concerned, I do not want to cross them, not without her permission

—

her personal space is hers alone. That

doesn't mean I can't try to talk to her though. "Kukhanya kwam..." I call out.

She remains silent. A second

. "Baba?" her eyes are wide, she's looking at me. "Is it okay if I get closer? To talk." "Not too close. There." She shows me how much distance to keep. "What's

wrong, Baba

?"

"I miss you." "Oh

Ba

ba, I'm right here."She is, but she's not. We've al

I changed somehow but sometimes I can hardly stand the dark hole we find ourselves in. Sometimes it feels like I can climb out and rescue all the others with me. Sometimes I want to stay there with

them. "No. Not in that way, baby. I just mean—

I love your

smile. It's so

beautiful. It makes my heart go bam, bam! Like the fireworks we blew last year. Do you remember them? The colourful

ones that you loved so much." "Aha!" a small grin. "They were blue and green and pink—

so pretty! Come

closer, please Baba."

Her voice trembles, she looks fearful again.

“I wouldn’t hurt you,” I say. Maybe being around me triggers her memories. She was with me when she lost her twin. “I’m sorry I’ve made you scared.”

She shakes her head, climbs onto my lap and shuts her eyes. I thought we

were talking but she’s fallen asleep. Less than two minutes into it. Carrying

her in my arms, I cherish the feeling of her in my grasp and move to her room. I place her beneath the covers and pray for her. If a God exists then He needs to k

keep her for me. He needs to ensure that she’s healthy and that she’s happy

again. I ask Him to protect her

—

no matter what.

Its 09:17pm. I don’t have work to do. The house is quiet, too quiet. I don’t like

it. My thoughts run freely in the silence. This is how I find myself in the home

gym so late. Sbanisezwe’s been teaching me the art of boxing, and for me, it

clears my mind. I only stop because a small voice captures my attention. Its 11:30pm.

“What’s wrong?” My feet make quick work of moving towards my daughter. She’s holding her teddy in one arm, legs crossed, staring at me with wide eyes. “Bad dream?” “The bed is wet. I’m cold.”

Huh?

Was she sweating? I’m not sure but she’s shivering, with the way she’s

trembling in the light fabric of her nightie. I lift her and immediately feel a

wetness. “Kukhanya kwam...” her face is buried in my neck.

“Did you by any

chance wet

the bed?”

“I had a bad dream.” Her voice trembles. “About what?” “I

-

I don’t remember.” She hugs my neck tight. “I’m wet, the bed is cold. Help me, Baba.”

21

Unrequited Desires : TwoTemasiko

Ridge Manor is experiencing load-

shedding, that's the fl

at right across the street, it has been hijacked by some Zulus after the white man who owned the building died

—and it's like being in your own country. When South Africa goes left, they go right

—

and when we go right, they go left. I mean how else do you explain how they still have electricity on days that everyone in our area

doesn't? Or the random

Maskandi concerts they hold on their first floor on any random day? I swear everyone who lives in that flat is unemployed but the men are always drinking alcohol and their women can be found with more

than six plastic bags from Shoprite, doesn't matter the date of the month. "R10 chips!" Youssef yaps yet another order of fried chips. Must be nice sitting

on your flat ass the entire day while some of work ourselves
into overcooked

pork! Its 06:54pm. We're supposed to close in six minutes but
knowing Pakistanis and money, that won't be happening. It's no
problem though, the

overtime money will soothe my building anger. Not. Come
Saturday, I will be receiving my usual R300, and nothing more,
sometimes it's less, but it can

never be more. Not when you work for Pakistanis.

"Sisi, these chips are too small. I paid R10," there's a dark, lanky
man in front

of me. He is wearing isiphandla, holding the takeaway in my
already tooheated face. Gosh! Its 06:56pm, I am not going
to spend time in the backroom chopping an

entire bag of potatoes like a mad woman. Youssef doesn't pay
me enough for this, he doesn't! "Pho?" I raise an eyebrow,
handing the next orde

r of chips to

the lady behind him. There's about ten more other people I
need to attend to, he's not special. "If I give you more then
there won't be any for the others. Take the chips or give them
to next person if you're feeling generous."

“Weeeh! Why am I surprised? Your service has always been poor, always so slow and too greedy. Yini? You want the leftovers for yourself? I wonder which space they will occupy because every place is already too crowded.”

22

So very lazy. They all do this, target my looks when things don't go their way. I'm used to them—the entitled customers. I know exactly how to deal with them. Besides, if my service is that poor, why does he keep coming back? Clearly he's been here a few times. “Bhuti, your order,” I say to the light-skinned man standing behind the entitled giraffe.

“Are you fucking this man? What rubbish is this? He has bigger chips than

mine, and

—”“Next,

Sisi

!” the woman says ‘sorry’ to the man, pushes him aside and grabsher chips. “Thank you.”

Ah, the respectful ones always deserve more. Three more people to go. Clever

here will wait until sunrise if he has to, but he won’t be getting any extra chips

from me. By 07:12pm, I have served the final customer

—

and just for control, I go to throw the five remaining chips in the bin outside, in front of Clever.

“Mxm! Lento esho ngobuso bendoda, udelela kabi wena sgubu samafutha

amnyama. (You have the face of a man, and so very rude

—

you bottle of black

fish oil.”

One thing about being fat and ugly is that

you don't need to be told what you

already know. Clever should just wait until I make real money,

one day, he will eat his words. I will be a Khanyi Mbau/Bonang

Matheba/Faith Nketsi all in one

—

all light skinned and sharp nosed with no ribs. I know it will

never

happen but it's good to dream. “Not so much soap!” Youssef

butts in my business, accent thick. “Do you want to wash these,

Youssef?” I've worked for him long enough to put this shady ass

into place. About six months, we're best friends, I swear. H

e says

nothing, that's a definite no. No Pakistani would want to labour

the way black people are forced to. He's just good for looking

ashen behind the counter and collecting money the whole day.

“Thought so. Let me do my job and leave.”

By 07:45pm, I am

leaving the shop. I managed to steal Vaseline from Youssef's stock, to avoid having ashy skin like his, also he doesn't pay me enough to be

able to buy winter cosmetics. Not with the R600 rent he takes from my salary. He runs a corner shop in busy Doornfontein, surrounded by customers residing in all the flats around this place. The chips became a business the he

23

took on as well after his brother who owns a store in Eloff street told him to. We were selling fatcakes, too, but people were not appreciative and so we stopped making them. I pass MTN butchery, crossing the now empty streets, as I enter Noord. The place is always so smelly, with suspicious water filling the streets

—

and one of these days it will be turned into an informal dumpsite. I remember this one

Nigerian who couldn't take no for an answer following me, and closing his

nose before saying it smelled like rotten pussy. My question was how he knew

but he never said. That's men for you, they know everything about women

until you call them out and they turn to mutes. For me, this place always smells like those three men who forced themselves on me

—

rotten and poor.

My feet slow as soon as I see what's happening, just ahead of the ChickenLicken store. It's not like I've not seen it happening before

but each time it leaves me shocked. The man is struggling, probably because of the arm around his neck and squeezing. Two other men are searching the pockets of the man being strangled. His bag is on the floor, another fourth man is holding a laptop and saying something. One of the two who was searching the

strangled man's pockets moves to the back, to search there. People are

passing by as if nothing is happening. The last of the street vendors are packing away their fruits and vegetables, and all the other items they sell.

I can't say anything as well; because even though I contemplate deathsometimes, this would not be the way I want to go. I don't want to reach my

mother on the other side with a stab wound to my neck or face or anywhere.The robbed man has collapsed on the ground, curled like a fetus, and fighting

for air. With the robbers gone, I approach him cautiously. "Are you okay?" it's

a stupid question, I know. In my defence, humans generally make me feelstupid.

"Hmm—" the man chokes. He s

ounds like me when my coffee has gone down

the wrong pipe. Or when I do anything to strenuous for that matter. "Hmm.Hmm." "Calm down." I kneel in front of him, staring into glassy eyes that resemble apuppy's. Shame. He's big, and I'm sure it was embarr

assing for a big man likehim to have been robbed like that. I have a bad habit to laugh at the wrongtime and for the wrong reasons, so I avert my gaze, to the fancy laptop bag

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sitting open and empty on his lap. The longer I stare at how fancy it is, how expensive, I feel something rising inside me

—

my experiences with this place have turned me into that auntie, that mother

—

the nagger.

“Liphutsa lakho lekucala kutsi uhamba lana uphethwe sikhwama lesidulako. (Your first mistake was walking around with this expensive bag of yours.)” Seriously, who doesn’t know that you don’t walk around looking expensive in

Noord? Especially in winter. That

’s like leaving meat in a vulnerable place and blaming your dog for discovering and eating it. “Wena nje ube ngulosaziwayo waletilima leti tanamuhla ngoba basinuke sidulile usachamuka lekhashane.

Esikhatsini lesitako, ubosebentisa sikhwama sa... Hello Kitty.

(Those idiot smell how expensive it is from a mile away, and you were their celebrity for

the day. Next time, use a...Hello Kitty bag.)”He looks at me like I’ve lost my mind.What an idiot. I roll my eyes because this is practical advice. I’ve never

seen

anyone with a Hello Kitty being robbed. At most, they’ll laugh at him for using

a pink bag

—and it’ll even be better if its torn, it will make him look poor.“Yini?” I shrug my shoulders, helping him sit up. His face is dirty and he looks

in dire need

of water, I can’t help him with that but—

I grab one of my phones

from my pocket. My favourite tilili that’s held together by three rubber bands.“Where do you stay?”

The man sounds like he just had an asthmatic attack as he answers,

“Kat

hi

ehong.”

Oh. I

know where he gets his taxis, just ahead, he wasn't even that far from his location. Talk about bad luck! "I can't help you with transport money but I can

call someone who can send you money or fetch you. If that person uses Vodacom. I won ten minutes thi

s morning," I say. I was hoping to win data but

Nkulunkulu ubusisa labo lakanemusa kibo (God blesses those He favours),

this is why I'm stuck having to go use Wi

-Fi in Park Station, tired as I am, to

prepare for tomorrow. "Do you have any number?" "072..." he stammers a few times, until he gets the number right.

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Dialing it, the number connects and rings a few times before, "Wrong number!" it's a female voice, with so much attitude.

Funny she doesn't hang up though. It sounds like she's eating. "No, it's not," I inform her, "am I speaking to Monica?" "Who are you?"

And then? Attitude for what so late? “Temasiko. I’m with your boyfriend here,

Siyanda

—” she cuts me off, barging in to say she doesn’t want to hear anything about him. I am confused. Kanti

isn’t she the girlfriend? “Ma’am, he’s just been robbed and needs your help!” I interject, snapping at her. “They took all his money and he has no idea how to get home.” “Hahaha!” she laughs! I can’t believe this. “Tell him to ask Sheila or Palesa or Nozipho or Nocolo or

—who’s this latest one that he got pregnant, Rendani? Next time he mustn’t mess with me, he doesn’t know how powerful my ancestors are. Nonsense!” she hangs up. I look at the phone. I look at the man, Siyanda. “Tsk...tsk.” I shake my head

and sigh, tired of balancing my fat on my feet and sit my flat behind next to him. That auntie, that mother

—she’s coming back again, irritated. “Nawe uyabuca. (You’re so dumb.)” yep, auntie is out to give another lecture. “Kuto tonkhe

tinombolo longanginika tona, unginika lena yalentfombatana bowuhlekisananayo uyidlala? Ngiko mosi bakubambe inkuzi, banuke lobulima usachamukanje. (Out of all the numbers you could give me, and you give me the one that

belongs to an ex you cheated on? That's why they robbed you, they could sense your slowness from a mile away.)"

The puppy-

like gaze deepens, it softens my heart. Typical idiot I'm dealing with here. In the end, I have to go to the rank with him, to explain on his behalf

that he doesn't have money to go home.

The taxi driver is rude, but he agrees

to offer the man a lift eventually. Then I'm walking all the way to Park Station. It will be nine soon but they don't close for at least another hour or two.

You see the thing about being poor is that you find families in your poverty.

Here, at Park Station, we're a family of poor people who can't afford data and

know each other. I look around and meet the eyes of the thick gay man who is standing next to Spar, using Wi-Fi, he only does this when the guards have

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chased him away from the benches that are reserved for people travelling long-distance using Metrorail. Silently

—

with a bit of embarrassment

—

we greet each other and mind our own business.

I've removed my phone from my bra a while back, and I get to it.

Questions

and

answers

in

an

interview

i

s what I am searching once I'm logged on. Tomorrow is my off day and I don't know by what luck that it happened that I scored an

interview on the same d

ay. A sales company in Randburg. They don't need a matric certificate or any qualifications so this is why I applied. If it's a scam and I die then, I don't know what but then...

Most of the time, I feel exposed

—

like people can see through my poverty and struggles

—but it doesn't compare to the embarrassment of standing in the

open, using Wi-Fi like this. Everyone coming out of the store sees you, those entering Park Station can see you, those exiting can see you. And it's like the more you try not to be aware, the more you are. It's calculated, the way I keep

my eyes on my cracked Mobicel that's only three months old
but I'm clumsy

AF. Screen-grabbing the answers I find on Google, I then decide
to spend two more minutes checking my WhatsApp. Thank God
I removed my read receipts and hid my last-seen because
imagine the embarrassment of being last seen the previous
evening everyday. Never in the mornings. Or afternoon.

There's a message from Lwandle. He's a... I don't know what to
call him. An

entanglement. We meet sometimes, right here, and
talk outside

—

but mostly have sex

—and he's bought me

food a lot.

. But he's not a boyfriend, I guess.

What straight men can confidently ask a transgender woman to
be his

girlfriend? He's scared of his parents, and his friends

and colleagues. His

reputation will suffer. He wants biological children one day and I can't give him that. I understand where he's coming from, the consequences, and I don't

want to be the reason that he ends up miserable. But I appreciate that he like

s me. I like that he tells me I'm beautiful and

makes me believe that I look good for a fat woman. Sometimes I believe him.

He's an ego

-booster honestly. He says shit that makes me laugh and I love his

personality. He's good for me. He likes

me

, that's more than enough for me. It's not like I want marriage and kids and a home. I don't aim for the stars. I stay

grounded, always.

I

'm attending an interview tomorrow. Can't meet

—

me.

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My interview is at 10:00am. When I come back, I just want to rest and not do

any activities that will tire me. Lwandle is a sex freak who doesn't get that sometimes, and can't take no for an answer. He says I'm desirable. I wait

another minute for his resp

onse but it doesn't come. He's read my message but hasn't replied. The minute goes by—

and still no reply. I bite my lip and

connect with a passing security guard's eyes before looking down.

I'm sorry.

—

me. I leave soon after, when the message is read again but not responded to. Right now, I need to go back to Doornfontein, above our shop, to the little room I share with Mancane and her infant, to try and cram the answers to these

questions. Then I need to try and get some sleep, that won't be possible w

ith a one-month old in the apartment but I can try. It smells like russians when I enter the apartment. The stove, on the kitchentable, next to my mattress is now off and plugged out, and Mancane is sitting on her own mattress, breastfeeding her infant. Our room is just a four corner little room without a kitchen, bathroom or toilet. At night, we use the bucket and get rid of it in the morning

—inside Youssef's room that has a toilet. Its

next door. I bought a second-hand small kitchen table just last wee

k and I'm so proud of it. It's nothing fancy but it belongs to me. "Sawubona." I greet her, glancing at the bowl that serves as a freezer for meats

to peek at the packet of russians.

"Gal, unjani?" her voice is always so cool. Maybe it's a Zimbabwean th

ing.

"Your food is there."

I bite my tongue and thank her although I can tell that she had two more,

more than me. I've become that person, who counts and keeps track of food

because I am being starved right under my nose in this house.

This thing of sha

ring food costs isn't working. I always end up eating less. I don't complain because I don't want to seem ungrateful. Mancane dragged me with her to this

job after she quit handing out sangoma fliers on the streets. We were working for the same fake sangoma, standing in the middle of the streets all day for R150 per week. She saved me from a bad situation.

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"Good luck for your interview tomorrow," she says this and sleeps. Little Moyohas been asleep for a while now. Its

10:30pm, I'll call it a night and ho

ur later. I am running late. In my defence

, Youssef didn't fix the damn kettle like he was supposed to, and

to show its protest, the damn thing emitted fumes that smelt funny. So I had to take matters into my own hands and salvage any part of the kettle I could. My dad used to love fixing things and he always wanted a son to follow in his

footsteps, so he'd drag me around when we still lived in Swaziland, going all around Motshane to fix our neighbours' appliances. In the end, I got two

kettles of hot water. The instructions on the email I got said no jeans for dresscode so I bought a

formal black skirt kwadunusa the other day. It's a bit tight around my thighs but it makes my body feel firm and I look less fat. My makeup is the issue. I've downloaded videos on YouTube to learn but I don't think I

am there yet. Quickly, I apply it, to hide any features on me that could appear masculine. I am not a man. I do not like looking like a man. This contour thing never works on my cheeks, they still look like two big round fatcakes have been glued together side. When I say Nkulunkulu ubusisa lakanemusa kibo, I am not lying. I wonder

how it feels for all the Bonangs of the world to be God's favourite. I'll keep on

wondering

—but not now. Right now, I have an interview to get to. “Wish
me luck!” I tell Manca

ne.

“I did last night.” She’s breastfeeding Moyo again, looking
sleepy as she

yawns

—covering her mouth with one of her hands. “Good luck again!
You’ll nail it.” “Thank you.”

MTN taxi rank is always so full, with people going here and
there

—

and everyo

ne minding their own business. I am lost. In hindsight, I
should’ve come

here to ask which taxis go to Randburg. I have a piece of paper
with the address in my sweaty palm, and I look for the kindest
looking man here. There

isn’t one—

this is a taxi rank af

ter all. That means there’s Zulu men. The bastards treat being
rude as a paying job that they’re proud of. There, on

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platform five is an elderly man with a large potbelly. Maybe
he'll do. My feet

are turning into stew before I can even reach Randburg

—

so slimy and wet. God, I hate pumps!

“Sanibonani.” “Yah!” he looks at me up and down, seems
suspicious as his eyes narrow in on my face. “Ufunani?” “Ngicela
kubuta kutsi lamakhumbi lawa aya eRandburg yini? (Do these
taxis go to Randburg?)” I ask politely,

my voice pitched soft

—I've been training it for years. I didn't like how deep it
sounded before, it made me uncomfortable,

and has put me in more crap than I care to explain.

“Khuluma isiZulu, angikuzwa mina. (Talk in IsiZulu, I can't hear
you.)” there'

an air of arrogance around him, he puts his hands in his
pockets. Die, b!tch!

I try again, in the formal language of South Africa that isn't regarded formal by

Ramaphosa and the government but its not like these ones care

—

they havetwo entire countries within our own country. I am pointed to one of the

queues but it's so dismissive that I don't know if I join the right one, the lady in

front of me says it is. I ask her about the address and she tells me that she

works at Randburg Square, it's not too far from the place I'm supposed to goto for my interview. We sit together. She's on her phone. To not be a nuisance,

I take out my own phone

—

the much smaller, more embarrassing Mobicel thatplays music like her large Samsung, and takes pictures.

There's a

Korean song I discovered by chance on YouTube one day andinstantly fell in love with. It made me fall in love with the artist as well,because all his songs are so gorgeous

—or is it his voice? Maybe it's both. I

scroll to the B-list of songs, and find it quickly. Baekhyun

—

UN Village. Headphones turned up to the max, I close my eyes and immerse myself in the music. A weird fluttering feeling develops in my stomach, had been there when I stood in the queue with all those headed to different places for work.

A feeling of being out of place

—

like everyone was looking so glamorous and Temasiko Dlamini pitched up in her old pumps and second-hand clothes, and a wig that

has seen better days, wearing cheap makeup from Rakesh's store. I

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particularly felt compelled to look at the young women. The young women with their beautiful faces and long weaves and gorgeous nails.

It makes me depressed. I'm twenty

-

five years old and I've been working hard

for so long, doing this and that but my efforts are not enough.

Maybe its

because I have no matric. Perhaps I should've gone back to school but it's hard when you're eighteen and a

ll alone in a strange city. Johannesburg is nothing

like Nelspruit. Nothing at all like Motshane. I'm just disappointed, I guess. I'm disappointed in myself. My life feels so stagnant and it feels like I'll die poor. I'm disappointed in our constitution.

For all those talks about inclusion and

nothing to show for it. Maybe if I weren't constantly looked down upon for being a transwoman, I'd be doing what I love.

Maybe going back to school would've been possible. But it's hard. It's hard to constantly wake

up and live

in a world that doesn't want you to, a place where even breathing is risky. I'm

so disappointed for so many reasons and it makes me quite angry that it took

seeing other black girls making it. Maybe I'm jealous. Because I don't know what it's

like to be young, successful and beautiful.

Someone nudges my arm. I hope I haven't smudged my makeup. Rakesh's cheap makeup does that, and I don't want to look disfigured in front of my

possible employers. The girl shows me which street to take, and tells me to

just keep walking straight as I am already on Kent Avenue. I do as she says. It's

cold outside. Very cold. It's July so I guess this is expected. My feet still feel like

ice though, and don't cooperate much.

Aside from this company not needing matric nor formal qualifications, they said anyone is welcome, and so I decided to try my luck. The pay will be really

good. R3500 is a lot for someone like me who's never touched even R2000. I

want to buy brand new clothes and eat all the foods that I am constantly

craving. McDonald's. Steers. Debonair's! If it's a food store then I want to try it out. I'm tired of eating poverty, I need a change. I'm an overheated pig by the time I reach the place. It took me a good twenty

minutes to get here. There are about ten

—

no twelve

—

other people here. Inferiority punches my self-confidence again, because how do people look so

good unemployed? Do they have rich sponsors or something? I wouldn't mind

one myself. Three other people arrive just as an Indian lady calls us inside the

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building. Her name is Raveena. We're given coffee, and chicken mayo and

cheese sandwiches. I am thankful. We all nervously look at each other, and then our surroundings. The offices of the sales company are not that big, it's like those premises with multiple offices all doing different things. There are tables with computers but no one's working. There are posters on the walls about the roles of sales agents. There are paintings. Overall, their offices are small but gorgeous. After tea, we're each given medium-sized paper cardboards with numbers on them. Mine says three. I realize that that is the order in which we'll go. The first two finish pretty quickly then it's my turn. We go upstairs, through another section with people working, to an intimidating door. There are two more people inside which makes the interview panel three people. Why? For what good reason? My stomach sinks. Raveena looks kind but these two black women I'm not sure of. Strange because I should feel comfortable with them but black people

have a way of thinking they're better than everyone once they've made it in life. "Please take a seat," that's Raveena, still so kind. "Okay... Temasiko—?" "Dlamini," I finish for her. "Welcome." Still so polite. "My name is Ravee

na, I am HR manager here at Yellow Sun Media. This is Susan Nkosi, she heads the sales team this side. And

Sbahle is one of our team leaders." "Good morning." I hope I'm impressing them with my smile. "Okay. So we'll start with the interview." I don't

need most of the questions I googled last night. I want to order the panel to ask me those ones because I stood at Park Station, looking like an

embarrassment, but I don't—and sell them the pen that they ask me to. "It will

not only change your life but

that of your family's as well." I don't know whether my bullshitting skills are enough but they just nod. "Let's start the process so that you can join the who's who of families with prestigious pens—if you can give me your name."

It's too silent, but then Susan smiles and tells me she likes how I didn't give them a choice but to take the pen when I asked for their details. There's criticism but mostly they're pleased. I give them my ID copy when they ask for

it, along with my other documents. And the confused staring begins, just like

that. They pass my ID copy, from one person to the next.

"Mabutfo Dlaminiis...?" "That's my legal name," I say, mouth dry, "the ones my parents gave me when they assumed my gender to be male. That's not who I was though—

as you can

see for yourselves. My pronouns are she/her. My name is Temasiko. If it's

possible, I would like for you to

give me a chance." Perhaps I should've told

them this earlier but it never ends well, I know. We meet transphobes in the workplace, people who can fire you simply based on gender.

"Oh! I know that," Raveena smiles warmly. "Well not much, but it's like—you're born in the wrong body, right?"

“God does not make mistakes.” Susan Nkosi says. “He doesn’t. This has nothing to do with God, it’s about me—

and what I feel. Never once in my life have I ever felt like a man. How can I, when I was waiting for my vagina and boobs to grow since age seven? Do you think a

seven year old can pretend? I’ve always felt feminine, I’ve always been a woman. My sex doesn’t change that.”

They are not impressed, especially Susan. Raveena seems understanding.

“Right. So we gathered that you don’t have matric. Can you at least use a computer?”

Lol! I didn’t know that being a matriculant meant knowing how to use the computer. Anyhow, I don’t know how to use it but I can go to the internet. “I

know how to send and receive emails.

I know how to use my Mobicel,” I say. Having a smartphone is like using a computer anyways, though mine isn’t that smart.

Raveena giggles. I wasn’t trying to be funny.

“We’ll call you.”

33

It doesn’t look like it, with the judging looks from the two black women who

sit on Jesus’ left and right side. “Just please call me to fetch my documents if I’m not successful. Sometimes we run out of tissue at home so...” it’s not like they’ll be going to good use anyway.

This job was my only shot at finding

something more stable

—

financial-

wise. I’ve experienced too much transphobia in other places that I can’t even get a simple job as a cleaner. It’s

like aiming for the stars again. This is what I am yet again doing here

—

and I hope these ones can give me a chance.

Unrequited Desires : ThreeSgalosenkosi

“You have a child?” her smile has been plastered on her face for the past half an hour, I don’t think I’ve ever come across someone who grins this much. “How old is she?” “Six years old,” I reply as my lips curl

upward, uncomfortably, and I take another sip of my whiskey. The perks of having a driver means I can drink all I want with the comfort that I am not driving myself home

—

and in the process,

endangering the lives of others. “Her name is Liyana. So how well

do you

handle breakups?” I need a change of topic, discussing my daughter is always

off-limits.

“Why are you asking?” the lady, Rorisang, cocks a brow suspiciously. “Are you breaking up with me before we can even

see where this whole thing is going?"Yes, I think I am. So far, I've found zero compatibility between us—

and frankly

this feels like a waste of time. It's Fuze's doing—

a blind date she set me up on,

after creating an unnecessary profile for me on some dating app. I'm only here

to thank her for

for a big client she scored my company, we'll be looking at a revenue surpassing the major millions soon

—

and I have her marketing skills to thank for it. The same marketing skills are off when representing women she hopes will

—I don't know what her intentions

are with these women but

this is the second one. She's worse than that one who clearly wasn't over her

ex, and kept bringing him into the conversation.

“Okay. So what are your goals for the next six months to a year?” “As long as you’re not breaking up with me because you found someone else then I guess it’s fine.” Her cold stare tells me otherwise. “My goals are to get a promotion at work and to buy a car. Zothile bought one but its secondhand, and the way she boasts about it — like we get it, you have a car, we don’t. Anyway, I’m making sure the one I buy is brand-new. I know nothing about cars though, so maybe I’ll take you with and we can decide together.”

35

If anything, I admire the confidence. I’ve noted how she keeps making future plans with me, as if as soon as she set her eyes on me, she decided that we’re partners who’d be chasing the sunset together until

we grow old and grey. Sadly, she's mistaken. "Konje you said your birthday is when?" "December 16th," I say.

The wheels begin to turn in her head. Recognition of...something draws her brows together as she then narrows her gaze on me

—

searching for

something. "You're a Sag. I'm not sure if we're compatible—I'm a Cancer. You seem very uptight for a Sag, though. You're giving me Capricorn vib

es, Mr. All

business. You don't laugh, you don't smile, you're asking me all these questions like you're testing to see if I'm marriage material." "I've asked you three questions. You've asked me thirty

-

one." "See!" she giggles, I'm left wondering what

the joke was. "You've even counted how many questions I've asked you since we got here. That's a little...let me

not offend you. What do you do for fun? What kind of music do you listen to?

Your favourite movies? Craziest thing you've ever done? Or do you wa

nt me to

go first?"

I have memorized all her questions in order, although it was quite hard with how much of a fast-talker she is. She has boundless energy, like that of a child

—and the fact that I'm kind of viewing her like one makes me extremely

uncomf

ortable. This will never work out. "I read books for fun—there's an entire library I have back home, dedicated to all sorts of books. I'm currently revisiting Shakespeare's Othello, it's one of my favourite books. For music, I'm

a Zulu man before anything so it goes without saying that I love maskandi,

then old school soul and RnB, add in some jazz and fusion in there. I don't watch movies. The craziest thing I've ever done was agree to this date." "Sometimes I can't tell whether you're making jabs at me

or naturally snarky

—but it's there, mixed in with your uptight nature, I think you're a lot of fun when you want to be.” “I am fun.”

36

She takes note of my deadpan humour, and giggles again. “Do you want to get out of here? How far do you stay?”

I shake my

head. “I’m not taking you home with me, Rorisang.” She rolls her eyes. “Oh, so you’re like those rare men who get praised for not sleeping with the girl on the first date? Ugh, how boring!” “I don’t have sex on the first date because it’s a personal choice, it has nothing

to do with seeking praises. I do

not have sex on the first date because I prefer to

get to know you better first

—as a person. What you like, what you don’t like,

your sexual preferences. To give you the best experience. To give myself one.

That can't happen when the connection hasn't been

formed." "I get you." I don't know how she's managed to keep smiling for close to sixty

minutes straight. Nonetheless, her smile is gorgeous

—

all light dimples and

glinting eyes. I lead her outside, where I ask her to tell me when she's arrived

home safe

ly. For the first time tonight, the smile drops. "I don't know how I'm getting home since I thought I was going to spend the night with you. I don't have any cash on me." She's serious, the look on her face tells me. Irritation prickles my skin for so

many reasons

—

but mostly because of how casually she was willing to place

her life on the line for something that could've been potentially
life

-threatening. What if I were some psycho? Women are
an endangered species as it is, and to think this one was willing
to gamble with her life for a night of

passion is beyond me. “Kodwa nawe uke ungalisebenzisi
ikhanda

mawuthanda

—” I tell her, maybe we wouldn't be compatible as lovers
but she's beginning to feel more and more like a sister—

and if anything ever happened

to my own sisters, to the girl children in our family...

“Wokukhiphelento oyifake ekhanda, kewusebenzise ingqondo.”

My eyes point to the long hair she has on. “We don't live in a
world, in a country, that's kind to women. And yes, it's not your

fault, but it's still important to protect yourself. You could get
yourself into a dangerous situation one day.” “I know.” She

looks down, maybe embarrassed—I don't know. I'm not sure

why her voice has gone completely quiet when she spent the
duration of our...

'date' being a loudspeaker. "I promise to have my own taxi fare money the next time we do this again. For tonight, are you taking me home?" Bold of her to assume I'd want to do this again. It's that endearing confidence speaking again, I don't burst her b

ubble as my car pulls up right in front of us.

Bab' Shange needn't step out of the car as I get Rorisang's door. After she's

given her address to the elderly man I consider family, the partition screen

rises, leaving the two of us in privacy. "Block my number," I tell her, when we've delivered her home safely. "But—" "It's not you, it's me. Now, please enter your building—

just so I am completely

certain that you arrived home safely. You have five seconds." "No. I—" "Four." "Mxm!" she bangs the door

in my face, I watch her sashay toward her building

—

walking with so much ease in the tall heels, her black mini-dress blending perfectly with the night. About three years ago, I took the best decision for myself when I left the large financial

institution I was working for to start my own Accounting firm.
The

money hadn't been a necessity, of course, with the number of
family business

we have

—

but I wanted something to call my own. Something I built
from the ground, and nurtured with great care, and grew. L&L
Accounting does that.

We've grown over the past three years, I credit my incredible
team—

and we

are based in Johannesburg, Pretoria and Durban. It's been a
pleasure to

experience this, as someone who had always dreamed of being
an entrepreneur since a young age

—

even selling biscuits and sweets when I was in high school.

All the suited ones shake my hand on the way out of the
boardroom. We've

just had a meeting with the chief accountant and her team

—
about many things including unproductiveness in the p
ast week. She's two short, with one of her best accountants
having gone on maternity leave, and there's Khungeka

38

whose daughter seems to have gotten sick again. Lauren will
find someone to

fill in both positions, she's in charge of the hiring and
firing. "Who is that?" Fuzelihle asks the question. I don't know
when she joined me, last I saw her she was gossiping
with Lauren back in the boardroom, but she's also sneaky. She
walks beside me, her heels clacking on marble tiles, following
me to my office. "

Its none of your

business," I say sternly, though maybe it is. This girl that she set
me up on a

date with has been dead set on disturbing my peace

—
calls during the day.

Texts during meetings. Pictures and music I've never asked for.
She's

incessant, and I am slowly becoming irritated.

"You're not in a bad mood because of the meeting we just had, are you?"

sometimes her voice becomes baby-like

—
lost and innocent. Like all those years ago when she first went through with her physical transition process. That voice kills any bad mood I have.

"Of course not. Do you need anything from me? Lunch. You need to eat. What else do you need?" "Stop treating me like a girlfriend." She giggles, helping me out of my suit

-
jacket to hang around my chair. "I noticed you

walking in with your cane today. Is your leg bothering you? We can go to the physiotherapist together

after work. I want a chance to take care of you too." I don't get the chance to reply, when my office door opens and in walks

Sbanisezwe

—

in his normal Brentwood and black sweater. He hugs
Fuze before instructing her to leave my office

—but he's punched in the arm for it first. "Bafo—" a fist

-

bump. He sits down and makes himself comfortable. "You look
like you haven't been shagged in years. How did your date
go?" "Why am I not surprised? I should've known that Fuzelihle
told him, I won't be

surprised if they worked together on this

—

and maybe he chose the women for me. Only he would torture
me with women who talk about their exes, as well as those who
disre

gard their safety because they want to fuck. "That

woman is persistent. I blocked her number and now she sent
me pictures with

another number. An unnecessary headache nje. She's a
psycho."

Sbanisezwe chortles, mirthfully, with tears swimming in his eyes.

I don't know what's funny about having a goddamn obsessive psycho in my life. "Take it as a compliment. If she's obsessed with you now, imagine how worse it will be once you dick her down. She's at your mercy,

Ndoda

!"A frown wrinkles my forehead. "There's nothing complimentary about a person who won't take no for an answer, Sbani. If anything, it's a red flag. It's her type that kills their exes in the end. Obsession equals possessiveness." "True story." He laughs, rubbing his lower lip as he does—

and seems lost in

reminisce. To that Sihlangule mess no doubt. "I can't help you there because I'm not here to help you. I'm here because I want you to help me because you're a helper who knows how to help people in need of help. People like me." He hasn't changed.

Anterograde amnesia aside, he's still the same selfish idiot with whom I shared my mother's womb. "Ufunani?"

The look of boredom returns suddenly, he sighs, pressing his hand to his cheek as he looks at me for a long time

—unblinking. He's zoned

out, so

suddenly, I wait for him to come back. He does it with another sigh. "In October, I am marrying Thateho." Yes, I know this. Fuze won't shut up about it, though she's not close to Thatego—

and has been taking me to different designer boutiques to find

the perfect dress. "I don't really care about his family, and I'd kill them all if he asked me to—" "No. You wouldn't because I wouldn't allow you to. I'd kill you first before you

got to them, and you would allow me by virtue of me being older than you by three minutes

—" "Two minutes, thirty

-six seconds

—" "Rounded off makes three minutes. How can I be of help today?"

Instead of answering, the one younger than me stands, to pace back and forth

—

knowing very well I gain headaches from this. Maybe my cold glare gives him goosebumps because he stops, grins, and sits down.

“After...everything, with Sihlangule and losing Phaw

ulothando, and him

leaving for Cuba, then coming back. You know he’s been trying to make

40

amends with his family, it’s not like he gives them money or anything but he wants his mother’s love. She’s so involved in his life lately. I make sure they’re

not stressing him though. Anyway, the mother wants me to join her church in

order to marry her son.” Sbanisezwe and church? I don’t see it, at all. Laughter climbs to my throat,

unpreventable, and my young twin brother joins in

—but he’s mildly upset. “Why?” “What else, if not to make up for the bullshit I put her son through. ‘If it were up to me, I’d have you confess the nonsense you subjected my son to in front of the whole congregation’, that’s what she said to me. As if she cared at all.” “Maybe she doesn’t care but she’s not wrong

either. I'm still surprised that Thatego took you back, he's too forgiving—when it comes to you, he's too

weak-

willed. I'm not judging him for it." How can I, when I would move

heaven and earth for Siyabonga? A man married to a

nother. Who wouldn't give me the time of day. "Church isn't a place of magic though. It won't magically change you or your behaviour." "Ouch,

Bafo

!" he looks genuinely hurt by my words. "Watch your words with me, I'm sensitive now. I cry when watching Titanic and when having sex." He rubs his chest, licking his lips before continuing, "It's not fair to judge me for the person I was three years ago. Even a second ago. People change. I'm still the motherfucker who doesn't care about anyone but his family. Be

for everyone, Thateho is my family. You know better than anyone I keep my

promises. He hasn't felt my fist on any part of his body for years now. He never will again. I'd rather kill myself than hurt him, I promise you." "So you're going to be part of that crew that goes

to church now?" A wince. "Fuck that—I have nothing against Jesus but I don't want to visit his

house every Sunday to listen to pretentious men babbling about the magic that takes place in the bible. When are we discussing my ancestors? Why must

they talk about David or Abraham all the time?" "Angazi nami. Thankfully, I don't have to go to church. Lalela, I don't think it will be bad to do this. As long as they're not forcing you to be a member of their church. Church isn't only about

Jesus, there are good messages in

41

preachings, messages that you can apply in your day-to-day life. Messages about relationships and handling conflict. I think these will be good for you

and Thatego. Marriage isn't all glamour, Sbanisezwe, you'll be glad yo

u

attended these services when it's time to apply the teachings in your own life, and marriage."

He gives me an irritated expression, he hates when I am right

—

and then a

smirk forms on his lips. “You know I don’t need to jot this down.

I can just

sleep t

his advice away, and wake up blank tomorrow.” I give him my

own smirk, shrugging my shoulders. I won’t tell him that

he was here yesterday, with the same problem, and I gave him

the same advice. He’ll listen eventually, he’s just stubborn.

“What are the

latest developments on

getting your Nkanyezi here?”

He has a four year old living in the States with her mother. The

daughter

whose creation can be traced back to Sbanisezwe’s sperm—

that he so kindly donated when his traitor of a friend found

out he coul

dn’t have biological

children of his own. Eric gave her such a lousy name

—

Apple

—

because she

was the 'apple of his eye' but Sbani calls her Nkanyezi, its Thatego who gave her that name. "We're seeing her next month. They're flying down here with

her mother. Thateho is ecstatic, he loves babies, more than he does me

sometimes." "Don't tell me you're jealous." He shrugs, but doesn't say anything. Its 02:00pm, he wants to go out for lunch. I decide to indulge him, because it's been too long, and we deci

de to invite

Nqobizitha as well. He's not far from Benmore, he was buying Chris' favourite

chocolate from the garage when he want to fill up petrol. One of my favourite things in the world is to see the ones my heart holds dear, happy. My brothers, in particular. I feel a sense of responsibility over them

—

to be the father that

our biological father wasn't to us. Nqobizitha can handle his affairs quite well.

Its Sbanisezwe who I always have to check in on.

"I'm not paying," Sbani says when the waiter hands over the bill. "I was just invited," Nqobizitha pipes in. They look at each other and

chuckle

—

unbothered.

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Me, I don't even get offended anymore. I'm always paying. For Fuze. For them.

At one point, for

Siyabonga. My heart lurches at the thought of him. "I don't know what your partners see in you," I mutter with a roll of the eyes.

Obviously, I am teasing them. Nqobizitha is kindhearted, he loves children, and he defines what a family man is. Chris makes him a better person. Sbanisezwe is...complicated

—

like a difficult Sudoku puzzle. He sometimes lacks empathy, that makes it hard for him to interact with those around him in an on-

toxic manner. But he's loyal and gives freely. He and Thatego are the most

goal-oriented people I know. They grow each other. It's 03:45pm when I return to the office. Things have slowed down, but I focus on my workload, to reduce it for when Friday comes around. Fuze knocks on

my door to tell me she's leaving at 04:30pm. I remind

her that I still need to meet this new man in her life, and she gives me puppy eyes that tell me she

doesn't want me to, but it's been long enough. I just want to know what intentions this white man has with her. She's my responsibility after all, and

when

she cries, she comes to me. I don't want her yet another guy to take

advantage of her, to make her feel unloved when she deserves heaven and earth.

At 05:30pm, I make my way out of our office buildings. Greeting Bab' Shange

politely, I then ask him about how the rest of his day has been going. He tells me about his teenage son who has gotten three different girls from his village pregnant. The parents are fuming! They want him to attend to matters culturally for all three girls, it will be expensive on

his end. I'll help him out, of course, he's like family—

but I also tell him, his son needs to find a part time

job after school. The salary won't go to him, it needs to split it amongst all three baby mamas. I'll organize a job for him, and make sure the m

oney he

makes never touches his hand. It's the only way he'll learn.

Actions have

consequences. My phone rings mid-

conversation, a number I don't recognize. I am hesitant to answer, because of that Rorisang girl, but still take a chance.

"Hello?" "Oh, hello! Am I speaking to Mr. Ngcobo?" it's the voice of a white woman. "Speaking."

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“Oh, thank god, sir! I—um, it seems that your daughter hasn’t been fetched from school. She’s been in the staff room since four

-

thirty, and we’re unable to reach Miss Baloyi. Do you —”

Her voice suddenly sounds too far away as I register her words. Anger, like

scalding hot lava, builds inside me. Maybe I didn’t hear right. Surely this woman isn’t talking about my daughter. Not my— fuck! What the hell is wrong with Khensani

? ‘She’s depressed’ my mind supplies, and I get that I do—

so aml. But to not fetch our daughter from school, knowing very well the dangers of abduction and human-

trafficking in this country. She’s lost her damn mind! Liyana doesn’t deserve this, she shouldn’t have been taken from her grandparents for this!

“Bab’ Shange, we need to make a detour.” I ask him respectfully. Not questioning me, he does as asked, heading for the address I’ve given him. As we drive to Liyana’s school, anger makes way for hurt—

on behalf of my

daughter. I can’t imagine her confusion or fear. She’s not herself lately and I

know this will affect her

—its one thing after the other and she can’t catch a break. She can’t breathe. Not with her sister gone. Her mother may as well be,

to

o. Pitso cares after her more than Khensani does. I don’t think it’s working having her stay with them. I’m a workaholic but I can always limit my workload for her, if it means that she’ll be well cared after.

Mrs. Van Tonder is with her in the reception

area. “Liyana!” I shout, rushing to

her. My arms embrace her tensing form, and getting the hint, I pull away.

“Baba is sorry he wasn’t here for you.” “We got in touch with her stepdad as well. He said he’s on his way.” She shouldn’t have bothered. There’s no way Liyana is spending the night in Khensani’s care, not under my watch. “She’s my daughter,” I tell her. “She’s going home with me.” “That’s still fine.”

Liyana grabs onto my leg, as we exit the school building, and I want to hold

her and tell her she’s safe. I don’t get to do it until we’re in the car. She was still so hesitant about hugging me but in the end, she agreed. She’s sleeping in

44

my arms when I get another phone call from Siyabonga’s mother reminding

me about a dinner I promised to be a part of a while back. The elderly woman

won’t take no for an answer, even after I explain that Liyana’s mother forgot to fetch her from school today. “All the more reason to come, she needs to be

treated to a warm, home-cooked meal.”

This is how I find myself in Diepkloof, sitting across Nhlakanipho

—

he hates it when anyone calls him Gcinimyalo

—

who is quietly chomping on his food. My

daughter sits in front of the TV, with Kuhlekonke, having her dinner. “How’s work?” Siyabonga’s mother asks me. “Nothing I can’t handle,” I say. “You did good by going into the accounting field. At least you’re not stressing

about any babies dying under your care. Siyabonga lost his first patient last

week, and he hasn’t been okay. Did he

tell you he cries so much? I mean it’s

not fault, konke sikunika uMdali

—

but this one here views himself as S

uperman. He should've gone into accounting like you." "Kodwa uyakhuluma nawe, mkami!" Bab' Shandu frowns in disapproval, as his

wife hides her fa

ce in embarrassment. "Leave them alone. Our kids are

different

—and that's what makes them special. It should please you that they're all doing what they love." "Bengingasho kabi, kodwa Baba."

I laugh at their antics, like I always do. Siyabonga does too, his grin down-

turning when we lock eyes. Nhlakanipho always minds his own business, it's like he's not here at all. Discreetly, my eyes land on the silver band around his

ring finger

—

and it pains me to admit that marriage is a good look on him. He wears it so well, with cool confidence that can be mistaken for arrogance. Siyabonga is good for him, from the day I had met him until now.

Bab' Shandu wants to show him an addition he made to his whiskey collection. I offer to do the dishes, Mam' Thoko orders Siyabonga to help him. I can feel

my stomach sinking, this is not what I need. It's too late, we're in the kitchen, it's awkward. I don't know what to say so we work in silence—

until we almost bump into each other, and Siyabonga is pushing me away roughly. It's not

45

much of an impact on my much bigger body. "What the hell do you think you're doing?!" He hisses, clearly angry. "I was trying to return your mother's favourites cutlery where it belongs." He doesn't seem to believe me, as he narrows his gaze.

"Ufunani la? It's not like anything you do will cause me to fall in love with you."

And just like that he bruises me, I swallow the ball of air lodged in my throat.

"I know," I say, nodding my head. "Then what are you doing here?! You don't get how badly you've fucked up, do you?"

Because if you did, you wouldn't be here to intentionally hurt me like this! What the hell is wrong with you?" "Hurt you?" I shake my head. "This isn't about you, Siyabonga. Not everything is about you. My life is falling apart. I killed my daughter. I can't get in a car without feeling like I'll be dying the next second. My little girl, the one who

survived, is scared of me because she was in the car with me that afternoon. My ex-

wife lost her unborn child, and is losing herself. There's so much going on in my life that there's barely room to think about you. I came here because I am your mother's son, too. And she takes care of me."

He lets out a breath, I think he wants to cry

—he's always been a cry

-baby. Arms folded on

his chest, I watch his gaze waver. "This is all your fault,

Sqalosenkosi. This! Y-

You wouldn't have to go through it alone, had you not...gone there. Had you not ruined our bond." "I'm sorry then,

Siyabonga." I mean it. "I am sorry for falling in love with you." "I don't care that you fell in love with me!" he snaps, glaring at me with tears in his eyes. "You can't help who you fall for, I get

that. You can't help loving me like I can't help loving my husband—" that last word stings badly. "I'm not

blame

ing you for that. I'm angry that you had to tell me. Why?! For what good

reason? When you knew perfectly well that I loved someone else. When you

knew that it could ruin the special bond between us. It's like you went out of your way to destroy a decade's

worth of good memories, you went out of your

way to sever our connection. For what good reason, Squalosenkosi?"

46

I...don't know. Maybe it had to do with the alcohol. Maybe I was just tired of

him not knowing and felt he deserved to know. I was an idiot. A stupid idiot who behaved in such an uncharacteristic manner

—
and lost one of the people I

value the most in the process. “I’m—sorry.”

Siyabonga shakes his head furiously, rubbing his eyes, I take notice of the silver band on his finger

—
it belongs there.

“I want to be there for you so desperately. It feels like I can’t because I don’t want you to misinterpret

anything. There are so many things I want to tell you

—
about my work and my

husband. I can’t tell you I’m happy without feeling like I’d be slapping

you in

the face. I can’t tell you when I’m sad because I don’t want to read more into the comfort you’d offer. I can’t look at our past memories the same. Everything is a mess, Sqaalosenkosi, it’s all your fault.” “Doesn’t he think I know that?” “Not tonight, Siyabonga.” I don’t want to fight. I’m tired—

mentally. Emotionally. Physically.

He doesn't reply, manoeuvres past me angrily. I pack away the last of the dishes to find Nhlakanipho is back in the dining room with Bab' Shandu, he

looks at me contemplatively

—no doubt having seen his husband's emotional face. He's always so mysterious with his expressions that nothing is given away. The next second he's on his phone. A second later, my phone beeps.

We need to talk.

It's a message from him.

47

Unrequited Desires : Four Temasiko

He's back again—the entitled giraffe. Third time this week, if I don't count that

one where he came during my off day; Mancane told me he was asking around

for me. “Lesidudla esimnyama esineconsi (The temperamental fat girl.)” That's

how he described me, and in the same breath telling her that I am beautiful. I

wasn't moved at all, had almost retched my food—

or does it have to do with

the fact that we had leftover chips for dinner that night. I swear I can't stand the sight or smell lately. I can't even loo

k at potatoes without feeling offended by them. The audacity they have to have been created! I hate them with a passion

—but not like this idiot gossiping about me to the lady beside him. I'm too slow apparently. I hold my tongue because he hasn't directly

confronted

me but he'll pay. "Your chips!" handing over the takeaway to him, I make sure to keep my eyes

on him as he scans the quantity of his food

—

frowning in clear displeasure

—and put on my best smile. "For your cold

-drink, you have to go back inside.

”“Ey kodwa nawe, sgubhu samafutha, sibangani engaka? These chips are toosmall, you wouldn’t be happy with this. It’s not like I paid less than usisi lana,manje why does she have more than me?”

Because he insists on not letting me do my job, on getting under my skin, and

thinking he knows everything. “I don’t have in me to hold grudges against you,bhuti. My job is to serve you, I don’t have time to memorize faces so that I cangive you less than others. You’re a customer after all, you’re all equal i

n my

eyes.”“Gcwalisa ke (Add in more then).”I shake my head. “You asked for R10 chips, I gave you R10 chips.”“Weeeh! Kodwa ngonaphi ngidakwela iifebe zaseGoli!” his insults have noeffect on me. I’ve been called a bitch, a pig, loose—it doesn’t matter. “What, doyou want me? Is that why you’re giving me such a hard time? That’s whyyou’re singling me out all the damn time! And I don’t understand why this

kwerekwere hasn't gotten rid of you yet, you don't know how to do your job!Kuthi angik'sakaze ngik'bhekile, kuphele uk'phapha."He's an idiot if he thinks I'd let him get away with putting his hands on me. I've

been fighting since I came to this place

—

from that dirty pig who sold me to his friends, to the idiots I encountered one day on my way from Meat-A-Rama

butchery, I didn't have any money on me and so they wanted to take my wors.Did I not fight! Hell hath no fury like a hungry woman, I'd spent my last R20

that day and for the idiots to think they could get away with demanding thatmeat from

me...I fought. I fought and I won. I would fight this one, too, but I'd

rather not be jailed for animal abuse. Jail is not a good place for people like me, not when the police can be your worst nightmare.

"If you're not ordering anything else then maybe

you should leave. Your chips

will get cold." "Mxm! Uyadelela kodwa wena."

With him gone, and the momentary silence, I get off my feet to relax on the empty 20l bucket that serves as my chair, and check on the chips frying in the deep frying pans. They're not yet crispy. Maybe ten to fifteen more minutes.

My phone is functioning on 20% battery, and Youssef will lose his already

missing marbles if I use the toilet again. I've already been upstairs three times

already, and my shift began just two hours ago.

I have little bit of data, I'm not

sure if Mancane would be willing to leave Moyo for a few minutes to bring me

down the charger. Maybe not. She's so protective of her little boy.

Depression likes to visit me when its silent, like the caring friend it is, and I welcome it because what else do you do when a visitor is knocking on your

door? It's been two weeks since I went to Randburg. Two whole weeks and some days. I've given up, I just know they didn't take me. What else would be

taking them so long o

therwise? Its embarrassing the amount of times I've
checked my phone

—

like that annoying girlfriend waiting on broken promises. The
same girl I promised to never be, I became over a stupid sales
agent position.

Last night, I cried... I don't know why. I hope Mancane didn't
hear me, I must've sounded like a dying pig. I cried because I felt
like crying. Because

deep down, I had hoped to get the job

—

and against my better judgement,

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allowed myself to hope, when the situation hadn't been
different from all the

other times. "Oh, we're sorry but you don't have enough
qualifications," an

excuse one gave me for a cleaning job I had applied for, after they found out I

was trans. “You’re not the right person for the position,” another had explicitly

told me at a godd

amn bakery. I’m not sure why I had expected this interview to go well. They liked me; but so did the all the others; just not enough to hire.

“Tema! Where are you, man? R15 chips for the lady—fast, fast!” I hate it when anyone calls me Tema, and normally I’d snap at Youssef’s crustyface, but he’s chased my good friend, Depression, away. I can’t help but be thankful, and also for this job

—

although I met him through Mancane

—

but he

still gave me a chance. I’d

still be making R150 per week, sleeping around forovernight residence.

“Tomato sauce?” the lady asks. Oh! I grab the bottle from her and refill it, then hand it to her with a quiet apology. “Thank you. Usale kahle.” Sometimes my job isn’t so bad, sometimes I knock off in a good mood. Its

07:00pm, I managed to charge my phone, so I’m quickly going to use the Wi

-Fi. Its so dark outside, the streets half-empty, and I curl into my dying bomber

jacket, quickening my pace. “Sawubona.” Someone says beside me

.

God, I know we don’t always see eye to eye but why must you continuously punish me like this? I don’t like being approached like this, You know, but You still allow it to happen. Think, Temasiko! ‘Mute!’ my mind instructs me. The

idiot touches me

—

and i

nstinct tells me to fight but I don’t. I use my hands to make weird hand gestures, feigning deafness, until I notice it’s the idiotic

entitled giraffe. What the hell?! Did he follow me all the way from the shop?

“Ufunani?” “Ngicela ukukwazi.”

The audacity! After all the nonsense he puts me through at the shop, now he

wants to get to know me. Ngeke! “No.” I shake my head. “Why ungafuni?” he tries to touch me again, I curve him, but his hand lands on my ass instead. “It’s winter. You need a good heater,

I am here for you. I

actually like you, for a while now.”

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No, he needs me for sex, he said it himself. And what’s with the touching?! Why can’t men ever talk without touching women?

Why do they always get

this unnecessary need to touch? Who gave him the

right? Not me, that’s for sure. “If you don’t want me to

embarrass you, I suggest you stop touching me! I told you no, so what’s your problem? Stop following me!” His face changes,

he's not the first man to play nice until he gets turned down. "Nxa!" His

saliva connecting with my face happens so suddenly that I don't really know how to react. "Ngithi nyak'zama! Take a look around you. How

many men have approached you since you left your shop? No one has stopped

you because you're not pretty to look at,

all they see is fat

—

and here I am,

doing you a favour because it's hard for your type to find men kodwa uzenza

ngcono wena. Inkinga yakho

—"I don't wait for him to finish, and give him the hardest slap I can muster, edged

on by my rising anger. Hopefully, it will send him back to Nkandla, to his parents, so that they can teach him about respecting women. He tries to say something again but I give him another slap

—and with this one, its like I can't
stop. Without waiting for him to recover, I slap him again and
use all the force I have to throw him against the wall

—

for someone who talks so much, he
weighs paper. "Don't ever touch me! Do you understand me?
We are not friends, I am not your lover. Leave me the hell
alone!" "Yho! Yho! Yho!" passersby chortle

, and those stupid vendors who never stick up for anyone, just
watch as the world goes to the drain in front of their eyes!

The giraffe has gone silent. Isn't that something? With one final
push, I let him go. Then I'm walking even faster to use the Wi

-F

i. I'm thirty minutes behind, thanks to that asshole, and it's
already 07:55pm. Spar Wi

-Fi ends in five

minutes! My WhatsApp isn't all that interesting, there's
messages from

Lwandle, he misses me. This is exactly like him. Ghost me for
days to come back w

ith a 'kambe sibangani?' text. I realized long ago that I'm weak for him. He wants to meet tomorrow, I agree. It's a sex date, I know. It's what I need,

right now I could do with some dick. Messages catered to and sent, I trudge back to Doornfontein. The walk is

tiring, I'm drained thinking about waking at 05:00am tomorrow, to make sure

that hot chips are ready for those bats who stop by the shop as early as

51

06:00am. Mancane is already asleep, I know not to disturb her. Changing into something warmer, and putting my phone in the charger, I decide to call it a

night. I'll eat in the morning. I think about my father a lot before I fall asleep. "Temasiko, hello?" "Miss Dlamini, hi! Raveena here, from Yellow Sun Media. You had an interview with

—"Yes, I did!" I can't help cutting in. It was three weeks ago, they said they'd get in touch but never did. I'd done my best to forget all about it. Recently, Youssef

had

even talked about a possible R50 increase, and though it's not much, it will help here and there. "I'm sorry—" her giggles make me embarrassed. "You were saying?" "You got the job!" she says passionately. "Congratulations! You begin on

Monday. Will you

be able to make to the same address at 08:00am?" "Of course," I confirm with certainty, avoiding Youssef's curious eye ahead. We're not allowed to take calls during work hours but I've said this countless

times

—

the big boss and I are besties. That glare on his face should tell you

how much. "Of course, I can." "Great! Please wear formal clothing, we'll cover your breakfast but bring lunch. It'll be a long day of training and induction and contract

-

signing." "No problem. Thank you!" "Alright. Don't forget to bring your bank statement and we'll need your tax number. Have a great day!"

Tax number? Where do I get it? These people forget that some of us have

never worked before, I don't even have a bank account for crying out loud!

Why would I slap myself in the face like that? Imagine waking up everyday, miraculously hoping for a couple hundreds in an account you know very well belongs to your unemployed, income-

less ass! The jokes would've been

writing themselves. Me, being the biggest one of them all.

I have to open a

bank account. I have to find out what a tax number is and why it's so

important.

But more importantly, I just got a job! A real job! I know God's making up for

that test He put me through with that giraffe a few days ago. I
smacked a bitch and passed the test!

Ngiyabonga

Smakadze

. My heart keeps repeating, and I

don't want to cry. Not the place or time. What I need to do is
give everyone bonus chips today, even that entitled giraffe will
get more if he's brave enough

to show his face. An

yway, it's amazing the kindness inside me when I am

happy

—

the customers get personal handshakes to go with their chips.
My service is taken an extra mile

—

compliments about the beautiful manner in

which Phumzile pours vinegar on her chips. I think I'll go t

o KFC to donate R2

after this, but I'm too poor to buy anything—the donation will suffice. I'm

proud of myself, this is me, giving back to my community

—

being newly

employed doesn't make me better after all. I wasn't sure where to open a bank account but

Mancane advised me to go

with the people's favourite—Capitec. It wasn't a good experience, the branch consultant had been so bitchy, until the manager stepped in. I don't know why

people pretend that I look totally different from when the world saw me as an

eighteen year old boy. I'm still the same person, who puts on makeup like

anybody else

—

and lives their truth

—

how that affects consultants in banks,

I'm not sure. It's all in the past though, I have a bank account. I have a tax

number, thanks to Mancane.

She's always been so helpful. Tomorrow's Monday, I am going to my new workplace. Youssef, he didn't take it kindly, I'm his best worker here but he knows better than to deny me this opportunity. Mancane had already found my replacement anyway. That's th

ething about Zimbabweans, they always have someone on standby, ready to care for one of their own

—

and help them put food on the table of their own

family. The lady, Trisha, has started working already and I've been helping her

get adjusted. It's cramped in

our apartment now, there's three of us, four with

little Moyo, I have to share the bed with Trisha. Youssef wants me out come month end so I have to start looking for another place to stay.

Tonight, I'm spending the night at Lwandle's. He's over half an hour late but that's nothing new with him. I've douched, and

taken care of my personal hygiene to the tee. It's bad with us fat people, there's always sweat

somewhere, like cooking pork or something. These two in the room with me

are gossiping in Shona, not about me but one of Mancane's boyfriends who is

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always prophesying about one thing or the other. Recently, about him and Mancane raising Moyo in his flat in Berea. If he only knew that he is

n't even

the baby daddy. Glancing at my phone, a pleased smile plasters itself on my mouth as finally, a

message from Lwandle comes through. He's waiting downstairs. I grab my

overnight bag, kiss the gal-

friends goodbye and head out. Lwandle isn't that

much taller than me, he is chubby

—
with the sexiest little potbelly on him

—
and he is the colour ochre, with a dimpled imprinted
underneath an evensexier beard. I am not in love with him but
when I look into his eyes, I see the

stars twinkling. “Hey, you!” I

hug him.

“Awu sdudla.” He kisses my lips. “Ready to go?” I nod my head,
though offended that he hasn’t complimented the way I look.
I spent good money on these clothes, to impress him, and
earrings aren’t cheap lately. They’ve jumped from R2 to R5; talk
about ridiculous inflations! That’s how street vendors are in
Johannesburg. “We like that you’re buying from us so often so
we’ve increased our prices to show our appreciation!” that’s
what they’re basically all saying. It’s a tough world here,
everyone

is here to make money.

“So how was your day?” he questions me. We’re in his car, it’s a
Golf. The old

ones that only white students would somehow win in all those
Free4All

competitions. I would've liked to win too, I can't drive but it would've been for

aesthetics. A seventeen year old with their own car, from rural Nelspruit no less

—boss would've been me, me would've been boss. I'm still bitter that he hasn't noticed the effort I put into looking good for him

but it will be embarrassing to order food

when I wasn't talking to him. So I must talk to him now. "They killed a Zimbabwean man—

threw him down

from the 10th floor, an innocent man who got blamed for his friend's bad

behaviour. The one in the wrong ran away like the coward he is. I hope he trips a

nd chokes on a fly's shit wherever he is—or a

cockroach's dick...whatever suits his fancy." Lwandle laughs, he grabs my hand to kiss my knuckles. "Do cockroaches have dicks, baby?"

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The hell is he asking me that question for? I don't know, obviously, I

can only

speculate. There's a reason I didn't do Life Sciences in school, to avoid being

asked these questions. This is why I always liked History better, so that I could learn from bad bitches

like Joan of Arc and all the others. "M not sure, baby.

How else are they ungratefully expanding in my apartment when they know I

can barely feed myself. They're selfish. This is why Mancane kills them." "Uyahlanya kodwa wena!"

Whatever. He knows I make a valid point. Lwandle stays in Hillbrow, a flat herents all by himself. Its 10:00pm, he pays the security guard and leads me to

the elevators. He's on me as soon as the doors slide shut. I kiss him back, with fervour, hoping he's enjoying this as much as I am. He stops when the lift

announces the 8th floor. We step out, and find his neighbour on her way to throw the rubbish in the big bins outside. We greet her kindly.

Inside, he doesn't give me a chance to say anything, and assaults me with more kisses. He's already working on my top. Everything is too fast, it

always

is, I can barely think, barely breathe. It's too fast, and I have my back turned to

him, my forearms balancing on the kitchen counter with my legs spread apart.

It's so very fast, the way he pulls my skirt up and prepares me. I close my eyes,

biting

on my lower lip to keep from crying out when he's met with resistance. He didn't prepare me enough.

It ends under two minutes.

I'm so mad at him! I didn't get off. He's disappeared off somewhere, and left me all alone in the kitchen. I didn't even eat

anything. Let me take my fat ass to

bed. He's already there, he was on his phone, he hangs up and gives me his attention. "Okay?" "Two minutes!" I hiss, folding my arms. "Hmm?" "Noodles!" I snap. Now I'm even angrier because I didn't get to eat anything. I'm grumpy when I'm hungry. "There's no difference between you and bloody Maggi noodles!"

55

He doesn't even look bashful. The audacity! "I'm sorry, baby—" the chilled

expression

on his face says otherwise. "Stress, at work. Ngapha my friend, Luzuko, is getting married. Mos, I told you neh? I'm travelling to the Eastern Cape soon, to support him." Ai! I'm no longer in the mood, I feel like crying. I didn't get both of the things I'd come here for—

no food, no orgasm. I go to sleep, he embraces me. In the middle of the night he fucks me again, and gives me a lousy climax. In the morning, before I go to bath, he does it again. My smiles are limited now,

because it doesn't look like I'm leaving this place with any money. He makes a joke, I reply with a simple, "Ha!" only money will make me sing all the other

hahaha-s.

We're dressed, he's going to show me where to get taxis that will take me to Randburg. "Here, transport is R28."

Ok

ay. R30? Maybe they sell lunch for R2 at Randburg, maybe lunch I don't know about. This one is into things, not me, I was always stuck at Youssef's. "Thank you. You said where do I get that steak and pap for R2 again? I don't

want to spend time searching f

or the place or get lost." "What are you talking about now?" "Umkhero." I open my palm to reveal the money –

three R10 notes. He rubs his face, releases a sigh, and fishes more money out of his wallet. R100. My eyes widen. This is too much! I just wanted enough to buy

streetwise one at KFC. I won't tell him that though, decline a man's money and he will forever think you don't need it. He'll begin to use that to his advantage, excusing his stingy behaviour. "Next time, I shouldn't have to speak up," I

say instead. He nods, tells me to wait in the bedroom while he goes to dispose off some

garbage in the huge bin outside. I don't know why we can't do it together since I'm leaving anyway. He comes back, and tells me it's okay for me to go ahead

without

him. He's not due at work for another hour. I don't question him,

kissing him on the lips before leaving.

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Randburg taxis found in Hillbrow place me just outside my new workplace. I greet the security officers and make my way inside. Like usual, people are

already standing outside, others are smoking. I'm not sure which group to join, but I do greet them all before isolating myself to stand near the door. It's cold, I'm trying to get the little bit of sun I can. "Hey. We were with you on the

day of the int

erview, right? I was wondering if we'd see around you here, I almost thought you didn't make it." There's a tall woman

beside me, with dark brown skin and big eyes that seem so innocent, she's wearing an afro so beautifully, complimented by the black dress she's wearing. "My name is Nthabiseng." "Temasiko," I grip her hand firmly in greeting. "How long have you been here?" "Two weeks now."

If we were interviewed at the same time, then why has she been working here longer than me? What took them so long in bringing me on board when they'd enjoyed my presentation. "That's nice. How is it, this place?"

"Not so bad," she tells me, and begins to talk about the other things. Your lying

ability is your best weapon. You need to be able to manoeuvre your way around situations while selling platinum rainbows, Property 24 mansions for free, and Ramaphosa himself to the customer; like any good sales agent. Okay,

we'll be selling their app here –

Yellow Sun. Nthabiseng's inner sales lady

comes out to play, she almost convinces me pigs were flying in
Alexandra

—

and then switches on me to tell me I need to see a therapist
because I believed

her; that's where the Yellow Sun app comes in, I'd have a
therapist to consult

with in mere seconds, just a click away actually.

"You're fucked up!" I say with a small smile. "Always flirt with
the customers. Promise the men your numbers, that's
how you'll generate more sales. I got three sales yesterday, it
was my first time. Our target is four sales per day."

Four?

That's it? One, two, three, four? Ai no, I got this! I got this,
Nthabi, I do.

Silly old me was selling chips to hundreds a day, watch me do
the same with

these ones. I heard we're getting a commission on top of the
basic salary,

based on the number of sales we make. I try not to get too ahead of myself as I

do some calculations in my brain. Yep! Burna Boy's singing about me in Dangote. I'll be living large soon, large enough to buy dollars—

if all they expect from me are four sales?! Standards are low around here.

Raveena materializes out of thin air, to call us inside. Those who've been here

for a while take the stairs. Me and three other people are called to the door that leads to the waiting room, and ahead of that is another office, through silent gossip, I find out that the office belongs to Susan Nkosi. The man with us lives in her hood, he and the two ladies here did an interview three days ago and they were called. I tune the voices out as soon as my stomach grumbles, I

didn't eat last night, we haven't received breakfast yet.

The entrance door opens, and in walks a tall man accompanied by Raveena. I

am putting it lightly when I say he's tall, the man is a thick tree—

all imposing height and intimidating muscle. His face is
ridiculously handsome

—

the golden brown skin, with eyes made of onyx gemstone, and
that beard! The man looks

as if he's been crafted by the gods, a real

-life Adonis. I catch a whiff of his scent, embarrassed by my train
of thoughts as he, for a brief 0.01 second, lock eyes with me
and smiles

—a dazzling yet subtle grin that doesn't give anything away.
Then he's gone, bowing lightly to all the others. "Sbanisezwe
Ngcobo?!" the girl beside me screams silently, to the one on
the

other side.

"No, he's not married yet. That's Nqobizitha, he's collaborating
with YellowSun for their mental health services. He's a
psychologist, remember?" "What? Do we have celebrities that I
know nothing of? I mean I'm always out of touch, yes, we don't
have TV at home so I entertain myself with scena

rios that

will never happen. “Psychologists are celebrities now?” I butt into their conversation, clearly I’m not living. “No. They’re not famous—

him and Sqalosenkosi. They just really, really look like the only celebrity of their family, Sbanisezwe Ngcobo. He was a boxer, he

did big things, so that’s why it’s always kind of hard to shut up about him. Plus his fiancé just launched his makeup brand, so there’s that. The other two are mistaken for Sbani, and if it weren’t for Nqobizitha’s ring then I think

we

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would’ve been confused by whether he is Sqalosenkosi or Sbanisezwe himself.” “Oh...” I don’t really care. “That’s nice.” Breakfast keeps us company for an hour. We’re only inducted after the

handsome man has left. Their building truly is beautiful and practical

—
as are

the working stations. But we're supposed to train for about a week before they can let us join the others and make money. I'm called aside by Susan and that other lady, I keep forgetting her name. I'm being sent to offices, and I

wonder

if I've done something wrong. "Yes, ma'am?" I look at her. "Mr. Dlamini—" she starts, putting on her glasses. "I've called you here because I need you to understand something before you start working. We've

shown you around this place, even showed you the bathrooms, but to avoid

any uncomfortable situations, I ask that you use the male's bathroom. We don't discriminate, we have gay workers, they use the male toilets. Since you're no different from them, I expect that you—" "I am different. First, I am

not gay. I am not a gay man. I am a woman, a hetero

—" "In other words you have the private parts of a lady? If we ask you to remove your skirt, won't we—" "With respect," I begin, looking at Susan's henchwoman, "how big is your

pussy? Do you shave it or is it like walking in the valley of the shadow of death? Does that make it easier for your man to locate light at the end of the tunnel? Speaking of tunnels, how wide is

—”“That is enough, Mr. Dlamini! Your questions are out of order! Do you know that what you’re doing qualifies as sexual harassment and I can take measures

—”“Then start with her, for daring to reduce my womanhood to what’s between my legs. That is sexualizing, isn’t it? And please address me properly, ma’am. Mr. Dlamini is not who I am. It hadn’t been hard for you when we first met,

now yo

u’ve seen my ID and I don’t know what you’re trying to achieve by continuously misgendering me.”

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And isn’t it funny? People will call everyone but transwomen, women. Let a man appear too weak and he’ll be called a woman. Gay, cisgender men like

Somizi will be called women. They will insist on calling transmen, women.

They're comfortable with calling anyone but the one who tells them this is who I am, this is what I feel, this is what I've always felt, a woman. It's just ironic to me. "You're going to use the male bathrooms. There was a case about a someone of your kind who raped

—" "We're not the same, don't paint us all with the same brush. Being evil is a personal choice, I have experiences with rape, I wouldn't wish it on the next person. I don't know why I should be telling you this but I'm not even

attracted to women, I am a heterosexual transwoman. I am attracted to men. I

am not a lesbian or bisexual. Even if I were, like plenty others are out there, I'd

never force myself on anyone. Please stop ins

ulting me." "I'm gaining a headache." Susan rubs her temples, her henchman mumbles something under her breath. The door opens and in walks Raveena. "Look at the mess you've created by bringing this lady

-

man into the company. He won't use the men's bathroom." "It's SHE, Susan, let's respect

her

—

please. We don't discriminate in the workplace, and I don't see why there'd be a problem with her using the women's bathroom. She is one after all. I'll show her to them. Anything else?" "You're going to regret

this one when he brings unnecessary politics here! One day he'll be suing the company and taking us to labour courts. A headache, I tell you. You'll regret this!" "Or maybe I just want your position," I mutter loud enough for her to hear,

following Raveena outside, to the bathrooms. Anger threatens to boil over,

humiliation making my cheeks warm, if I focus hard on the money I'll be

making, I manage to convince myself that selling myself to the devil will be worth it.

My happy place is made up of endless green, and a blue that feels different from the one in Johannesburg, it consists of ascending browns that offer a view that clears my mind in a way that others cannot. Eight modernized rondavels encircle the largest house in this place

—

a two-storey mansion that

MaKhathide and Bab' Ngcobo built with their sweat and tears; it stands out in

the whole of Mbongolwane

—

ethereal in a place already full of surrealistic beauty. The air feels different also, its pureness carries with it a light that soothes my soul and forces me to breathe. I feel it as I step out into the rising sun; to the hideaway heaven that so many take for granted; the grass squishing under my feet satisfyingly

—

an unmatched sense of inner peace settling in the depths of my soul. It feels good to be home

—

always. My gaze connects with Andile, who has just come out of his rondavel, wearing light brown corduroys and a tattered Kaizer Chiefs jersey, a Nike cap given to him by Nqobizitha on his

head. “Bab’ omncane.” His smile is polite, perhaps shy. “How was your night?” “Slept and woke up.” I pat his shoulder. “Sewuyakhona? Udlile kodwa?

Ungahambi ngendlala, ndoda. Liyashisa ilanga manje, udinga amandla. (Going

to work? Have you eaten? You shouldn’t leave on an empty stomach. The sun

is blazing now, you need your strength
).”

A chuckle. The young boy rubs the back of his neck, nodding yes, as he looks

beside my shoulder, to the kraal where the cattle are. “I did eat. Lindokuhle

gave me food, she sent me with this

—” he points to a two litre of water. “I’ll

come back for lu

nch. Don’t worry about me, I am well cared for.”

Sometimes, I forget that he and Lindokuhle seem to be having some sort of relationship going on. They're twenty-two and nineteen years old; and stupidly in love. Lindokuhle is Thandeka's sister's daughter, she replaced her aunt last year and there are no complaints on my side, she takes care of my family's homestead well, you wouldn't say that most of us are in different parts of the world because of her — and Andile. Even with my older sister back, they still are to be credited for how well-kept our home is. "Kulungile. Usebenze kahle."

61

"Ngyabonga."

I watch him walk away, leading the cattle out of the back exit, and then head on toward the main house where MaSibusisiwe is already in the kitchen. Schools have closed for

the holidays, many of my family members are here, including Chris with Lethulwazi and João

—

he left Nqobizitha in Johannesburg, meetings with a small company that wants to collaborate with him. Ndoni and her husband with their little girls are here. Ntethe wanted to come with her two partners, not under MaSibusisiwe watch... Ntethe must decide between the two who she wants to settle down with.

“Sanibona ekhaya!” I greet, giving my older sister—
my aunt, really

—

a one-armed hug and a kiss to her

cheek. “MaNgcobo, ngabusiseka ngibona wena ekuseni kangaka! (MaNgcobo, I am blessed to be seeing you this morning!)” “I hope you’re not trying to call me lazy,” she murmurs, stepping away to check on one of the many pots on the large stove. “We’re not a

ll early bird like you. I used to do that crap in my matrimonial home but no more. Its

nonsense, that thing! It's not like men are appreciative anyways." "Ihaba kodwa, Mam'ncane." Laughter places itself silently on my tongue. "Do

you women have to overanalyze everything? A simple compliment and now

I'm being given verbal essays about why you no longer wake too early in the mornings. Is it a crime for your favourite man to tell you that you look good?" "I don't trust you lot. Nqobizitha, Sbanisezwe is t

he worst of them all, and you

—I don't trust your introverted nature. Behind that silence is a naughty boy." "I am not a boy,

Mam'ncane

.

I'm thirty

-

three years old." "As long as you're not married, you're a boy. A real man heads his own family,

leads his wife

—

and builds himself a home outside of what his parents have built for him. He creates his own legacy. This is what Nqobizitha has done. Sbanisezwe seems to

—”“What’s for breakfast?” Nontethelelo waltzes in, dreads falling around her

messily like a beautiful halo, in those short pants of hers and a black bra for

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the gym. She is barefoot, looking as if she is suffering the consequences of a drunken

night. “Hey,

Bhutiza! Looking good, do you have a date with one of these village girls or something? Don

’t worry, Liyana will be in good hands.

What are we having for breakfast? Lindokuhle, please give me spicy eggs to

cure this headache I have. Ngaze ngafa!”“Kodwa awugqokile ngani?”

MaSibusisiwe shakes her head in disapproval, looking down at her pinafore and then Ntethe

—

as if comparing the two of

them. “We get visitors all the time. What if Mfundisi Shezi drops by again? Manyala maphi ozomkhombisa wona?” “Akazazi izinqe kanti, sisi? You’re telling me he’s a sixty

-nine year old virgin and that those five children he has are not his? They must belong to Jesus

then.” “Nontethelelo,” I start, grabbing her waist and pulling her back. She may give

no fucks but MaSibusisiwe is MaKhathide reincarnated, and that condemning glare on her face reminds me of my late mother. Her usually ivory skin is a

flaming red. “Do as she says. It’s not about u

Mfundisi not knowing izinqe.

There are certain things he shouldn’t have to see, and we have to respect that

and give him his place

—as the man of God. It won’t kill you to throw additional clothing over this...” “Only because you’ve asked so nicely,

Bhuti.

I'll come back with Chris and those brats everyone in this family keeps having. Except Liyana. She's not a brat, she's my little angel. Lindo, please those eggs when I get back, babywami!" "The way she behaves, you'd swear she wasn't a forty

-two year ol

d. I've never met anyone more in denial! Her time is up, she's expired! She should be in her home, catering to her husband's needs, popping children like a goddamn

popcorn maker

—as long as she wouldn't be here. This is not her place to fall back on when th

ings aren't going her way. Imagine an old woman like her without direction!" This a topic I am not a fan of discussing. Often times, I'd rather stay out of their

fight, because I never want it to appear as if I have sides. I owe loyalty to MaSibusisiwe by virtue of her being the oldest at home, the first fruit of

MaKhathide and Bab' Ngcobo's marriage. I owe it to the others to stand up for

them when she's being unfair. Only this morning, I want to get through breakfast peacefully. "People are different, MaFuze, marriage isn't the ultimate

dream for others. They exist perfectly fine without it. Ntethe seems to be

doing just fine." "Nonsense!" she dismisses me with a wave of the hand, and turns her attention to the pots again.

"Marriage is a blessing—

amongst us Africans especially. It is a good thing to be married, to leave home and be your own adult. What else are you born for if not to honour your ancestors by

multiplying? Ntethelelo needs to grow up." "We're born to find our purpose, Mam'ncane. It's

different for everyone.

Besides, you've been married on her behalf and gave her children—

the same

ones she cares so much for. Through you, she's experienced marriage. And like you found out it wasn't for you, maybe she found out the same." "I'd still be

married if your brother-in-

law weren't so stupid!" she murmurs,

curving around me to give a large pot to Christophe; who had just entered the

kitchen. "He was an idiot for thinking that I'd choose him over my own

children

—

confused as they are sometimes. C

ome, breakfast is ready." She

walks out, leaving Chris behind.

"Morning, Mapholoba." He grins a beautiful, innocent smile.

Sometimes, I think he's still eighteen years old. How else do you explain how he seems to be aging

backwards? As for this Mapholoba thing; between him and Thatego;

Nqobizitha, Sbanisezwe and I have heard it enough. “She seems to be in a bright mood today. Ntethe?” he giggles at my annoyed nod. “You should go

out, clear your head. Drive to Eshowe mall maybe. My sister, Zenny, is here.

We’re taking the kids to Richard’s Bay—even Liyana. She’s my little princess, I haven’t spoiled her in a long time.” “It’s fine.” He takes care of her, it’s true. Again, this is a thing between him and

Thatego. Christophe has experience with children, having his own, and with

twins on the way. Thatego has a... he’s a nurturer. That much is clear in his treatment of Sbanisezwe. Or when you’re visiting their home—there’s always a warmth that you find in Nqobizitha’s home also. The hospitality is out of this

world. Sbanisezwe’s house has become a home, its only that way because Thatego’s made it like that; it would be cold otherwise.

“Great! Make sure you do something fun, too. All work and no play makes

Sbari a very, very dull man. He should beg me to set him up on a date, he is an eligible bachelor after all

—

and so many women are curious to know more

about him.” My mind tuned him out at the mention of dates and women. I think I’ve turned

asexual somewhere along the way. It was like that before Khensani. It became like that with her in the picture. It is like that with her out of the picture. I

don’t dare think about Siyabonga enough to entertain impure thoughts about him. I respect the relationship he has with Nhlakanipho too much. “Sbari is an

asexual, ar

omantic man. When he looks at women, he sees blank walls, that’s all.” I tell Chris, heading for the exit to the dining room. This Rorisang girl doesn’t give up, I have never met anyone who has made me

want to chop my hair off piece by piece to tame my irritation. How is she accessing all these different numbers? I block one and I get another one

—

in the form of a romantic song about love. Or different pictures. Sometimes

books she wants me to read. A certain mental illness has told her that we're a

couple and she is not recovering from it anytime soon

—

if she can still boldly message me. Sphesihle stands in my line of sight, blocking the men drinking beer under the large tree, holding out a small dish with water and a dishcloth in another hand. "Here. I'll bring your food." "Kodwa Sphesihle." I wash my hands, and then wipe them with the clean cloth. "Thank you." "Anything for you. Your brothers are not here?" "No." I shake my head, returning her sweet grin. She's a neighbour's daughter

-widowed MaNsibande who raised seven of her children with just the grant money she gets from the government. At twenty-four years old, Sphesihle is the oldest

—

a deputy parent to all the others, a hustler.

“Why am I not surprised?” a cluck of disapproval. “Cha, bayalithanda iGoli.

Kanti yini engaka elaphaya ngempela? Indoda must come home at least twice

a month. Bona you see them once every three months, they’re not like you.”

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Nqobizitha overworks himself, he’s in a profession that he loves, this makes

him dedicated to his work

—overly so. Chris says he’s a stranger sometimes, he hates it, but he doesn’t voice out his displeasure. Its like he expects my younger brother to be a pr

ophet. Sbanisezwe won’t come here because he won’t leave Thatego alone in Johannesburg, he won’t do it. Thatego only comes here from time to time because he and Sbanisezwe are not married yet, his mother feels otherwise about him visiting the family of a m

an who hasn't fully done things right. It's bad enough that he and Sbanisezwe live together

and have sex. She expects amalobolo

—

if one of her sons is going to be gay,

then she must be imbursed for it, she's stressed this over and over again.

Sbanisezwe h

as given in. Things will be done in early September. He's playing nice, even going to church to appease her. It's not so bad, but he likes it very

much when the service ends. Thatego has taken to making them pray

together, he's always loved church so he's

pleased that Sbanisezwe goes with

him. As long as Thatego's happy, Sbani likes to say—he'd move heaven, hell

and earth for him.

“Ngiyagula mangabe ngihlala iskathi eside nginganyathelanga ekhaya, munt'weNkosi.” I reveal honestly. Home makes me happy unl

like any other place. I can trace it back to never having had a stable home before, so now, I cling to

this place as much as possible. “One of these days, I’ll move back here permanently.” “That would make me happy.” Our eyes meet, she has this mysterious

grin on

her face. “It’s attractive when a man likes to be home. Don’t go anywhere, let

me grab your food

—you must be hungry.”

I watch her walk away, just as MaSibusisiwe decides to join me. After breakfast, I had to drive her here, someone in the village was having a celebratory ceremony

—

thanking their ancestors for a car they just bought. To avoid being dull Sbari

that Chris was talking about, I tagged along. “You look more relaxed, happier.” She has a Savanna in her right hand. The only woman

drinking beer, beer around this place. After her divorce, she damned everything to hell

—reputation included. “Does it have to do with Sphehile?” “Cha.” My stomach turns uncomfortably. “Being home makes me happy.”

“When are you getting married again?”

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I should’ve expected this question. It’s the same one I get every time I come home, not just from her, but the others as well. It’s not good for a man my age

to be unmarried, to not have a woman around to take care of him, and his house

—to make him a man. That’s what they all say. “When the opportunity presents itself.” I put my hands in my pockets, kicking at tiny stones on the ground.

“It’s been presenting itself since you divorced lela Shangane elidelelayo.” My scowl doesn’t affect her. I did say she’s MaKhathide—

just as unkind. Her eyes

bore into my own, searching. “You’re thirty

-three years old

—

only one child. A

daughter. No male heirs. No wife. Your brothers have spouses, they’re

married. They have men for wives

—”“Awume, Mam’ncane

. Christophe and Thatego

—”“I have nothing against those boys,” she argues passionately. I know she doesn’t, she welcomed them with open arms—but it doesn’t mean that she’s immune from homophobic comments sometimes. “I’m just saying, please don’t be gay as well. That thing is like

a curse in this family. If not my father then my brothers

—and now my son. He’s turned himself into a woman. There’s so much confusion here. With all this money and wealth kodwa siyinhlekisa

—umuzi wey'tabane. Our only hope is you now, the least you can

do is remarry with a

woman

. Ulakhe lelikhaya, Mapholoba. Its all in your hands. This is not really my home, ngendela kwaMchunu mina. This is your

home, you're the man of this home, as the first born son, you need to make

sure it survives for generations to com

e. Marry a woman, build a family." "Chris has built so much of this home, Mam'ncane

. To dismiss that because

he's a man is unfair. That ego, even though he's not yet married, has done the same in the past year. I'm not going to marry some woman for her to

be

enslaved by you. I've been—" "The fact remains that you're not a man until you marry. Marriage gives you

dignity. It is a good thing, take it from me. Around here, your wealth means nothing without a woman to share it with. We need grandchildren

—
biological ones. Not these adopted children your brother has collected. Do you understand me?”

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“Of course.” I say, with no intentions of following through with her advice. Marriage is not in my cards anymore. Not because I’ve stopped living, not

because I want Siyabonga

—maybe I’ve just realized that sometimes people are meant to be alone. “Just keep waiting, okay?” “That’s it.”

A smile plants itself on my lips. I kiss her cheek, and wrap an arm around her, pulling her close to me. Sphesihle is returning, carrying a tray with dish bowl on it. She is the epitome of innocence, with her small face and even smaller frame

—
all light brown skin and hazel eyes. Her eyes remind me of Siyabonga,

they twinkle. “Muntunza.” I tease her. “Ngimdala kabi.” “Tell him,”

MaSibusisiwe

says. “Did I tell you that she’s looking for a job? You don’t have a helper in that big house of yours in Johannesburg. You could give

Sphesihle a job, that way she can send money home to her mother

—

and ease her of the load of taking care of so many children. She can live in your house,

just until she’s stable on her feet.” “Mam’ncane...” “Or help her get to school that side. She has matric—any college will take her.” “I will think about it,” I say. Hazel eyes are widened, appearing even

more

innocent, breaking any resolve I may have had. They look like Siyabonga’s. “Remind me, okay?” “I will.” Sphesihle replies.

“Follow me, let me serve you properly.”

I

,

m home.

This is the message I woke up to. It was from Nhlakanipho. I didn't have to think hard to know that he meant he's here in Mbongolwane. I'm not sure if he

came here for me specifically or if he had other matters to attend to

—

with all the community work he does around this place; computer labs, a recreational

facility and all the homes he's helped to build—but I agreed to meet up. It's

almost 13:00pm as I pull outside the large iron gates of his fancy mansion.



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Gogo would be so proud of him, of how hard he worked to do all this. Sometimes I feel for him, the people he worked so hard for are not around to witness all this splendour, to enjoy it and to express their genuine pride in

him. He won't ever know the smiles on their faces or see them living freely,

ha

ppy and without stress. It's sad that they will never experience this. He's at the front door when I exit my car, hands in his pockets, wearing all

-black to match his unchanging aura. Like usual, an emotionless expression, he

tips his head in greeting. "Shandu is not with me." I hadn't asked. "Usungayeka ukuqalaza. Khululeka."

Oh. Maybe its something I did without notice. I follow him inside his house, taking the time to appreciate its classiness

—

and the white décor that I know Siyabonga is responsible for, through Thatego. Nhlakanipho is an all-black

man, its Siyabonga who prefers bright colours. "Nice home." I've been here

before, but searching for something to say can turn anyone into an idiot. Nhlakanipho takes my idiocy in stride, nodding to one of the leather seats in his office. He pours two glasses of whiskey, places one on top of the mahogany desk

—
and then paces slowly. I force to keep the impending headache at bay.

“Sqalosenkosi, kunjani?” “Your pacing’s giving me a damn headache.” I gri

t out, rubbing a temple with my left thumb.

“Do you prefer we go out?” “Makes no difference.” “Yes, then.” He’s at the door, I grab my drink and follow him out. “How are you now?” “Better.” He has his back turned to me, a few feet away from me. “I’m fine.”

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The silence that follows is heavy but no one dares say a thing. I appreciate his backyard surroundings again

—
the garden I know Siyabonga is responsible for. The sound of birds chirping. The huge peach tree. Its peaceful out here.

“Aren’t you going to ask how married life is treating me?” “How is it?”

Turning to look at me, Nhlakanipho smiles

—

maybe smirks. He gives me a one-

shouldered shrug, and downs his whiskey, sighing right after.

“I’ve met

the one who completes me, Squalosenkosi, he takes care of my soul and do you see this tree? The shade it provides after a long, tiring day? That is Siyabonga for me. My refuge. You know Sbongakonke said my ancestors chose him for

me.” “That’s great.” I aim for indifference. “It is,” Nhlakanipho agrees, nodding his head. “I’m not sure why I called you

here

—

but I thought you ran away so I followed you because

—” “My life does not revolve around Siyabonga.” I snort, offended. I’m not sure

why they expect me to spend my every waking hour thinking about him

—even unnecessarily. “I’m sorry to disappoint you and him.” “Noted.” He smiles without giving anything away. “I don’t like to speak for him but he’s happy. Most of the time, he’s happy. I hope I’m part of the reason,

because everyday I wake up and aim to love him better than I had the daybefore. To thank him. It

's what he deserves. For taking care of a 31 year old

man. He comes home and finds dinner, that makes him happy.

He likes to dothe laundry, it makes him happy. On

off weekends, he likes to visit different

markets and do some shopping. He's started talking

about children. Not now

but he talks about them." "Why are you doing this?" "You're his

brother, aren't you? Haven't you been here through it all? A

constant. You deserve to know. I want you to know that I am

not abusing hislove

—

and that I am taking

care of him."

I don't doubt it. From the first day I met him, it was obvious that he loves

Siyabonga. For a while their love fascinated me, it seemed beyond reach

—untouchable. Like I'd spend the rest of my life searching for it and still not find it. "Don't they all say that?" maybe it's my bitterness speaking. After

everything he put Siyabonga through and he

—

"Maybe Siyabonga can speak for himself. Tell you, because you're his brother. I am not his mouthpiece after all, right?"

My stomach immediately

twists something nasty. "What?" "And you can tell him about work, so that he can bring you pieces of cake even

though you hate them, to cheer you up like he used to when you had exams. He tells me you used to study together. And maybe he can really be there for

you without you having to hide Khensani and all the other issues." "Nhlakanipho—" "If you've managed to put aside what you feel for him for all these years,

offering him nothing but brotherly love and support then he can try and fix what has be

en severed, right? A connection that spans decades isn't forgotten just like that?"

"Is he...here?" I look around.

The sliding door opens, and in the flesh is Siyabonga

—

looking beautiful as ever. He stands next to Nhlakanipho, appearing nervous and unsure.

"Sgalosenkosi..." his voice is quiet. I want to embrace him like all the other times, tell him he needn't look so fearful and that I'll always be here—

a constant.

"I'll give you privacy." Nhlakanipho says this after he's held Siyabonga in his arms, after he's kissed him—

and forced me to witness the intensity of their

connection. After he's taken me back to all those

years ago, when they were too bright to look at

—as they are now. "No swearing. No crying. Screaming

and hugging is welcomed

—moderately. Good luck!” he heads back inside.

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Unrequited Desires : SixSqalosenkosi

When Nhlakanipho leaves, he takes all the oxygen and words with him, making it somewhat difficult to breathe, a deep awareness of my surroundings settling in. The birds seem to be chanting something in their chirping, arhythmic song of sorts that is pleasing to the ear. I take a breath, removing my hands from my pants-pockets, wanting to do away with the noisy silence

—and how deafening it is. “Ngane...” the word is breathless on my tongue. “Mehlomadala.”

A cautious mask paints itself over alluring features. Siyabonga clears his throat, folding his arms around himself in a manner that screams defensiveness. Batting long, thick lashes that fan his cheeks, I watch him release a light exhale and toe from one foot to the other

—

restlessly.

“Sqalosenkosi—” I love the way he says my name—

ever soft and delicate

—different from my brothers and those around me.

“Sawubona, I

-I...long time

indeed.” “Last I saw you, you were angry at me.” “I hate that you made me feel bad. When you apologized for being

-

for...” a

frustrated pause, judging by the way he fidgets and wiggles his shoulders. He

pulls down the sleeves of his black shirt and shakes his head.

“Why did you apologize for being in love with me? I don’t like how that made me feel guilty over something that you can’t help. Something that I can’t help as

well,

because I don’t—

a-

and you made me feel guilty.” “It wasn’t my intention,” I say, still keeping the distance. Any close proximity of any sort made him antsy the last time, suspicious, though I’d never give him more than platonic touches. He doesn’t get it, that every moment I’ve ever

spent being there for him

—

holding him through his tears, advising him, every gesture; it’s never been with the aim of him loving me back. It’s never been

manipulated to suit my fantasies. Even with all the love that lives in my heart

for him. “I was just—things would be better if I didn’t love you at all, Siyabonga. If I loved you like I love my brothers, your husband, my family.”

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He wants to say something but his mind is blank and empty
—or maybe it’s

just so incredibly

full, of too many things, all at once, that he can't figure out what it is he wants to say. This is what it looks like to me, because I know him

—

inside and out.

“Right now,” my tongue runs along the fold of my lips, “you’re smiling at me

because you know I love you. And even though your smile is sad, and

sympathetic, I still love it too.”

“That’s not—” he looks at his feet.

I swipe a hand down my face, to chase away the warmth on my cheeks, and

repay him his nervous smile. “Everything would be easier if I didn’t love you, Siyabonga.” I repeat to his very still frame, studying the fear clawing at the heaving chest all over again.

“Maybe you wouldn’t be so afraid to smile at me. Like you are now,” I add. “Maybe one day, it’ll all be different—

one of these days

ys.” Sometimes I can’t tell if the reason I am still in love with him is because I won’t allow myself to move on. Sometimes it feels like I’m holding me back. I don’t know how to wake up and feel nothing though. Of all the books in my home, I haven’t found

one that reveals such a secret. “Just be patient with me.” “This is what I hate, when you say things like this! Like you did back home.” Anger writes itself on his forehead, causing his features to bunch. “I’m like the villain whose crime wasn’t falling

for you, who has you at his mercy. As if I

hold all the power. I can’t help being afraid because I don’t want to hurt you! You were right that time, this isn’t all about me; it’s about you also and that

look in your eyes. The sadness you see in my eyes is the same one I see in

yours. I don’t know how to help you get rid of it quicker; pushing you away isn’t helping. I—miss you! I miss everything about you and I’m tired of

questioning every gesture. This is why I hate you for telling me, Squalosenkosi. This i

s why I hate your apologies. I don't even know what I'm saying. I have so much on my mind."

I can tell.

"I'm sorry." "What for?" he makes an irritated sound. "Save your apologies. I don't need them. What's done is done. Nhlakanipho told me to accept that things are

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different and will never be completely the same; whether that's a good or bad thing is up to us to decide."

"Oh...?" I keep my eyes on him, watch as he takes two steps forward—

still so

cautious. "What do you propose we do then?" "Stop giving me so much pressure." His voice doesn't waver, he's irritated. "It felt that way when you apologized for being in love with me. Stop all of it, please. I want

—I don't know how we can go back to the way we used to be but

I want to try. I miss you so much I can hardly stand it. You were my brother. It

sucks that things have changed.” “I’m still always here, Siyabonga. Be

lieve it or not, I can put what I feel for you aside and be there for you

—

as a brother, a confidante. You tell me how you

need me to be there for you and I will. I’ve always cared for you, romantic feelings aside, you’re my family.” “I—love you.”

His words catch me off-

guard. I’ve heard him say them a million times, and

they only sound sweeter with time. The expression on his face is heavy and thoughtful, it shows in the way he nibbles on his lower lip, arms wounded tighter around himself.

“Sgalosenko

si, I

—love you.” What is

he s

searching for in my eyes? “You’re the only brother I have.” “What about Christophe?” I’m still searching for the correct way to respond to his declaration, something that won’t make him uncomfortable. I don’t want

him to revert to the reserved Siyabonga, that suspects my every word and

action. “Do you think he’ll be happy to know—” “He’s just my best friend. You’re my best friend and brother.” Has he noticed that he’s taken too many steps closer? Barely a foot separates us no

w. I can

feel his heat, and smell his natural scent; something akin to peaches. “This makes you super special.” “What’s changed, Siyabonga?” call me a pessimist but I have to know. Has he

awoken overnight and decided that he wants to try and salvage the bits and

pieces of this...whatever this is. "I thought it was better we were apart. That I kept my distance, and you kept yours." "I miss you."

That's all he says. And perhaps its explanation enough. Perhaps complications needn't be sought

-

after. He's missed me, that should be enough. I've missed him too. There's a mad woman constantly blowing up my phone and I wasn't able to hire his attitude to tell her off. "I miss you too, Ngane."

He smiles. Where do we go from here?

He holds his hand out. "My name is D

r Siyabonga Shandu-Ngubane. I work

with sick children a lot, preemies and such. It's my passion. I love to help

people. My team and I saved two twenty-seven weekers the other day. I was so happy, I cried

—and I wanted to tell you all about it because I knew you'd be proud of me...but we weren't talking. I was scared." "Why were you scared?"

He shakes his head, bottom lip jutting out beautifully. I want to pinch his cheeks and embrace

the hell out of him, to tell him he's the most perfect thing to have walked the earth. I settle for cocking my left brow, he mimics me.

"That's not how it works." "Sqaalosenkosi Ngcobo." I take his hand, swallowing it whole, its warm in my

touch

—

soft.

"I run an accounting practice. It's not about the money, I just wanted something to call my own, outside of the identity of my family. Fuzelihle scored us a major client just weeks ago, and I wanted to celebrate that with you. To thank her, I went on a date with a woman she matched me with on a dating app. Her name is Rorisang, otherwise known as nuisance, and she hasn't stopped bothering me since our date. I wanted to tell you because I know you'd handle her better."

His eyes are going to bulge out, he chuckles

—loud and carefree. "Haibo! Are you serious?"

Sometimes, it's better to show than tell. Retrieving my phone, I open myWhatsApp, to show him the countless different numbers and messages. "I have a psycho on my hands." "I'll help you," he says and

gives me my phone back. "Just let me devise a plan." "I knew I could count on you." His smile drops a little, he licks his lips, I try not to dwell on the action. "No.No, you couldn't. The last time I checked on you was when you left the

hospital, th

at was months ago. I haven't had the decency to visit you and—
"You've called once or twice, Siyabonga. Don't be hard on yourself." "S not enough." He protests passionately. "Once or twice a month isn't

enough. We used to talk everyday about any and

everything. Now it's never about how each of us is really doing. All our conversations are shallow. I'm scared to tell you anything." I shrug my shoulders, now I feel bad. This is all me after all. I'm not sure how we're supposed to move past this withou

t that night lingering on us like a badcloud.

“I’m sorry for my words that night. I saw it in your eyes, I hurt you.” “I’m sorry, too.” “Stop apologizing so much!” He snaps, and lifts his hand to...do something. He freezes halfway and retracts, looking anywhere but me. “Things are not the same.” “We can work past this, navigate around it, if it’s what you want. Otherwise, I can still keep the distance

—

again if its something that you would want. Tell me what will make you comfortable, Siyabonga, and if its within my powers then I will do it.” “I just know I miss you.”

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Perhaps I make things awkward again, by remaining silent. He doesn’t complain. For a while, we look at each other

—

all hesitant smiles and awkward

glances. I notice how he's playing with the ring on his finger, it seems to be an absentminded gesture. "Is he treating you, right? He told me he feeds you, that's good. I don't

want you to starve. Does he cater to the other needs as

well? Your emotional and mental needs. Is he taking care of you?" An eye roll. He lets out a tiny laugh, nodding his head frantically. "I am happy,

Sqalosenkosi. He cooks, I like to clean. He listen

s to me and we're a partnership. He's taking care of me, you'd be surprised how much. You'd love

him for it. I am happy, but it felt like something was missing without you in my

life. I'm hoping I have you back. Then I'll be more than

happy." "For as long as you need me, I'm here." "It's not all about me. What about you? You were upset that night. What's wrong, is it your leg?" "Khensani's depression is blinding her to many things. She forgot to fetch my

daughter from school that day

—

and by the time I found out, it was so late. My

daughter is unhappy lately.” “Then have her live with you. You’ve been her primary caretaker forever anyways, both the girls. Your wife’s always been irresponsible and I don’t know what you saw in her because clearly she was n’t wife material. Wamoshaimali yamalobolo kodwa, Sqalosenkosi.” “Mawuphelelwe izinto zokusho kungcono uthule, angizwani nomsangano, Siyabonga.” I cut my eyes at him, it feels natural to chide him like this. The same way it feels natural that he responds by flinching, and looking at his feet.

This is the old us. “I’ve told you time and time again that you know nothing about the nature of our relationship. Khuzeka, Ngane.” “Well I don’t think its fair that she behaves like a bitch simply because you...fell in love with me. That’s what this is about, angithi?” “Konje ikhanda lakho libuye lingasebenzi mawulambile. Woza, uyodla.” I grab his hand, then almost immediately let go. He clears his throat, re-joins our

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hands and sways them. “Weird?” the air around us has returned to being awkward.

“A little.” He admits. “But I don’t want to let go. I like how you make me feel safe. Like all those other times. Anyway, what are you making me?” “You have a husband.” I snort. “I told him not to cook because you’d be coming here. How about

Amasi? Mthobisi left to buy Amasi

, he’s been gone for a while now, but he’ll be back.

You love Amasi

. I’m craving them.”

“Who do you have wrapped around your tiny fingers?” I ask. “You.” Our eyes connect, he smiles. “Am I wrong?”

“No.” My smile fades a little, becoming less bright.

Mthobisi reminds me of Sbanisezwe, with his mischief and the way he has a

way of viewing things differently from the rest of us. He’s eighteen years old,

doing matric at a private school that he says he hates, and plans on being a Maskandi

singer after he finishes school. Nhlakanipho is against it, he’s become the boy’s father—

a job he clearly does well. I watch them interact, the bickering that Nhlakanipho's occasional glaring will mute.

It's not particularly awkward here but the tension is there. Nhlakanipho still

wants us to talk, what about I am not sure. He seems at ease though, sitting at the head of the table with a calmness that seldom leaves him. Siyabonga used to say that him and I are the same, that this is why he was drawn to me out of all the others —but it was always platonic. For him, it's always been. "I need to take this," I interrupt Mthobisi mid

-

question, about what I do for a living. "Its

Nqobi

zitha." "Tell him I'll call him later. We need to discuss something." Nhlakanipho

orders.

"No problem." I stand, heading out of the dining room. "Yah, kwenzenjani?"

78

“Sgalosenkosi!” his voice sounds urgent, it immediately spikes my nerves. Did

somethi

ng bad happen? Was he in an accident or something? “I need you to goto Zenande’s.” “Why, what’s wrong?” I still don’t like the sound of his voice. He’s moving

around, I can hear it. He drops something and curses loudly—a scream. He’s frustrated. “Nqobizitha!” I snap, now I am worried. I can’t get into this bloody

phone to get to him and find out what the issue is.

“Zithobile,” he says. He’s the only one who calls Chris this. “He called and I missed his call. I tried to call him back but he’s not responding. Then I’m getting a call from MaMbatha from, she stays three houses away. There’s—gunshots. Gunshot sounds were coming from Zenande’s house. I told Chris to

limit the time he spends with her because her husband is a goddamn psycho! The man was

—”“Let me go.” I interrupt him, already heading back inside.
“I’ll call him, but he

left again this morning because Zenande wanted to take the
kids to the beach

and it’s the holidays—”“WHY!” Nqobizitha roars into the
phone, his anger is palpable. He’s moving again, cursing every
deity in the universe. “Why doesn’t he ever listen to me?!

If that son of a bitch

kills him then what will happen?! He doesn’t owe her
any loyalty, goddammit so why is he so stubborn?”“Calm
down,” I instruct him as my eyes connect with the others.
Siyabonga is

the first one on his feet, as if he can sense that something
dangerous co

uld’ve

possibly happened. The look he gives me is worried.

“No. No! I am his husband, he should listen to me. I told him to
we’d visit

Mbongolwane another time but he came there anyways. I told
him to limit his

time with Zenande, she’s a married woman an

d

—”“CALM DOWN!” I growl. He’s talking too fast, like a delirious person. “Don’t you dare get behind the vehicle in your state of mind. Stay put. I’ll call Bab’Shange, he’ll fetch you.”“Sqalosenkosi...” his voice is trembling.

79

“He’s fine. I’m sure he is.”“Why is he so goddamn stubborn?” he keeps repeating. I don’t know. I don’t want to hang up but I have to. My phone call with Bab’ Shange is brief. The

others are looking at me as soon I return my phone to my back pocket.

“There’s a suspected shooting in Zenande’s home,” I say. “Chris and the children are with her.” Does it make me selfish to be thankful that Liyana didn’t want to go anywhere today? I don’t know. All I know is that my daughter is safe, I’ve lost so much that I can’t help but be

thankful that she wasn’t with Chris. She’s home and safe. I hope Nqobizitha’s family is too. He’d die otherwise.

Unrequited Desires : SevenSqalosenkosi

Chris has suffered an injured ankle, the story is not clear how but he attempted to play superhero when Zenande and her husband were having

their debacle. I don't blame him though, I would've done the same—

for my siblings or anyone close to me. His efforts proved futile when Mxolisi shot and killed Zenande before turning the gun on himself. The children survived, it's

clear that he didn't want them involved in whatever problems he had with

Zenande.

“Be kind.” I remind Nqobizitha when the nurse tells him he can see Chris. We're at Mbongolwane hospital, this is where Chris and the kids were taken.

My mo

ther's youngest ignores me—

eyes blood-red and worry lines etched all over his forehead. Anger is at the very forefront though. “Its not his fault—” “With respect,

Bafo

, spare me.”

I watch, dumbfounded, as he pushes past me. Nhlakanipho has been holding a worried Siyabonga, and I contemplate checking on the children but they were

busy with a psychologist. An awkwardness soon follows that isn't caused by

any of the people with me in the hallway; rather its coming from the hospitalroom. The mumbles are too soft at first; and then they increase tempo,

particularly Nqobizitha's voice. “WHY?!” He asks the question he'd asked me just hours ago. “I told you to not come here, didn't I? Now

look what happened. Do you have

—” “Don't raise your voice at me, Nqobizitha!” Chris snaps back. “Its not my fault,

I

—”“IT IS YOUR FAULT BECAUSE YOU’RE ALWAYS SO DAMN STUBBORN!” Another roar. “You’re so obsessed with

gaining

independence

that you’re g

oing against my every word. If I propose we go left, you will insist on going right

just to prove a bloody point!” “That’s not true!” Chris’ voice turns shrill, as if made of glass—

and cuts into

my ears. “That’s not true at all. I just wanted to come home, I missed home. It’s

81

not like there was anything for me and the kids to do back in Joburg anyways,

you’re always working and when you’re home it’s like you’re not there. All you

talk about is work and launching that stupid app

—”“Don’t change the topic

, Christophe. This is not about me and my dreams you

feel are too stupid, that you can’t bring yourself to support—

although I have yours, from the beginning. This is about you and

how you should learn to listen sometimes. How you seem to

need a reminder that marriage is a partnership. How else is it

going to work if you makes all the decisions? Bukamanje; a

woman and her husband have died. Our children have been

subjected to a traumatic experience. How is that fair to

them?”“I didn’t know this would happen!” Chris snaps.

Siyabonga looks between me and Nhlakanipho; a desperate
look that begs us

to mediate in his eyes but I’m going to keep out of this one for
a little longer. They need to talk. Marriage isn’t always
so perfect and theirs is no exception

.

“You knew that she left the Eastern Cape escaping her husband.
You knew she was in the process of getting a restraining order
against him. I’m not saying you shouldn’t have been there for
her but—you didn’t have to bring our

children into the picture,

Chris.” Its silent for a while. “You should’ve been there for her from a distance. Call me a bastard but I’d rather nothing happened to you. Your marriage is fine. Angaz’ ufunani emishadweni

yabantu

—kakhulukazi messy marriages.” “She was my sister.” “I

know.” Nqobizitha doesn’t sound apologetic. “You’re my life.” “Chris told me she was cheating—and that her latest pregnancy wasn’t with her husband. I think she reconnected with Jabulani. Uyamkhumbula, baby?”

this question is aimed at Nhlakanipho.

“Cha.” Siyabonga’s husband shakes his head. I don’t have time to ponder on this revelation as the sound of clicking heels captures my attention. I am not surprised when I am met with Thatego. He’s

bare-faced, curly hair pulled neatly into a bun, wearing grey sweatpants and a

sweater that both look too big on him; Sbanisezwe's clothes no doubt. Mymother's middle son wears similar grey clothing, with a beanie covering his head. He's holding Thatego too close to him, arm wrapped around the younger's shoulders.

"Tell me the son of a bitch ordered a one way ticket to hell already. I'd hate—" "Don't mind him," Thatego cuts Sbanisezwe off. "He wouldn't do anything that

would risk him going to prison. We were lucky enough to get space on the flight. I

—

what happened? Is Chris okay? Where are the children? I hope everyone's safe." "Everyone but Zenande." Siyabonga leaves Nhlakanipho's side to go hug Thatego. Sbani is reluctant but eventually, he relents. "Sawubona, Thatego.

Long time. Awusangivakasheli wena...into oyaziyo ukugxuma phezu

kukaSbanisezwe nje kuphela. (You don't visit me...the only thing you know is

to jump on top of Sbanisezwe.” “That’s not true,” Thatego makes an embarrassed sound. He taps on his cheeks, and glares when Sbani chuckles. “I’ve just been busy. With my makeup line. Then my main business. Please tell me what happened? We heard there

was a shooting.” “Zenande ubefeba, isphukuphuku sendonda sam’bulala, saphinda sazibulalanaso. (Zenande cheated. Her stupid husband killed her, then himself.)” Sbaniseems to have the whole story. “Has Daily Sun come to report on this already

y?” “Konje uyabheda wena.” Nhlakanipho snorts. “This is serious. Three children

have been left without a mother. A brother

—

your brother-in-law

—

has lost

his sister. A father is without his daughter. Kubi, ndoda.

Kumoshakele.” Sbanisezwe doesn’t react; maybe he’s zoned out again. Although his nod of acknowledgment says otherwise, he’s drawn Thatego to him again; standing

behind the shorter man

—

chin atop his head and arms surrounding him in a grip that says he's not letting go anytime soon. "Who's going to get the kids?"

Now that both parents are dead." "Knowing Chris, he'll be fighting for custody of them." Siyabonga says.

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Thatego exhales heavily, looking emotional. He rests his hands atop

Sbanisezwe's, and his engagement ring glints under the bright lighting,

snuggling into the giant behind him. "Is he their godparent?" "Cikicane—" Sbani snorts in a way that makes me chuckle. "We're black

people. Godparents for what? Whoever wants those kids will take them and

raise them." "Its just bad timing becau

se Chris and Ncoba are expecting twins right now.

That's four babies. Imagine adding three more children and bringing the number up to seven! Yho, I don't know how they will do it." Thatego seems to be thinking hard.

"Maybe they'll just let the grandparents raise the children. It's their son's fault after all, and they are still alive. Though I'd feel otherwise having the parents of the man who took my sister's life raise her children. I just—no." Thatego

again pipes in. Siyabonga seems to agree, silently. It's quiet for a while until Sbanisezwe

breaks the silence by asking if Thatego is fine. "Aw'shodi ngalutho?" "Cha." The other smiles. "I just—where are the kids now? I'll go check on them. They must be traumatized."

Siyabonga offers to show him before I can reply. Sbanisezwe follows both of

them; he wouldn't let Thatego wander off on his own—

even with Siyabonga. Nhlakanipho and I are looking at each other awkwardly, until I remember that

my mother's youngest was trapped

in the hospital room with Christophe. I make an excuse to check on them, one that Nhlakanipho readily accepts. The

sounds are no longer loud enough to be heard outside, so when I do open

the door, I am taken aback by the sound of sobbing. It's too soft. Nqobizitha's

joined Christophe in bed, he still looks so angry

—

and appears even bigger next to a tiny Christophe

—

as he embraces the younger man. I decide against joining them, and close the door quietly.

“How about we grab something cold?” Nhlakanipho asks me.

84

I won't protest. The brief reprieve will do. Something tells me it won't last a very long time.

Temasiko

“Shh...” these are the sounds we hear as soon as we’re upstairs.

People are

moving around, finding their seats, and preparing for their morning. I stand

awkwardly near the stairway, hoping I don’t take up too much space, as Susan pushes past me and one of the girls I trained with. “Shh, umsindo!” Another

person says. Susan stands in the middle of the room, glancing around aimlessly, laptop carried on one arm. Her smile is devious, I see it in the way the others are

cautious of it, how they return the fakeness. “Morning, guys!” she greets sweetly. “Have you made your tea?” the others grumble their different

responses, its like being in pr

eschool. “Good! I’ve come here to introduce you

to your new colleagues. Please be kind to them, and show them the ropes; if

they don’t understand something, don’t hesitate to help them.” “No problem, Miss Susan!” someone says. They must be the teacher’s

pet, the annoying one who tells on everyone in class. I scan my surroundings to search for the owner of the male voice

—nothing. Haike. I won't be sure who to avoid

here.

“I'll let them introduce themselves—one by one. Kenny, you'll start. Your

name and s

urname. Work experience. And where you stay.” Shame, she seems

to like Kenny very much, even when we were training, he was always being

singled out. Teacher's pet in the making, maybe. “Then the person next to you

will introduce themselves and so on, right

?”

Kenny smiles a charismatic smile, I think he knows he has her by his yellow fingers that look like fish fingers

—

very long and good-

looking. I heard he's not actually South African, and that he's lying when he says he's Pedi, that he's actually from a country called Benin

—

wherever that is. The only Benin I know

is Bernini, but he looks just as delicious as the beverage. He must've been in

South Africa a long time to have learned Sepedi, far longer than me. The only

Pedi I know is 'ke bolela le wena', if

that's even Pedi. I can't separate it from

Sesotho, it sounds the same to me.

85

"Morning everyone. My name is Kenny Phoshoko—" the girl I trained with snorts softly beside me. "Originally I'm from Polokwane but I came to Joburg a few years ago. I've worked at Outsurance and then Clientele before

—”“So you’re the one who likes to call us to tell us that we’ll die one day!” it’s a

female voice, belonging to a tawny-skinned chubby woman wearing cat-styled glasses. Her twisted braids are pushed back into a ponytail, revealing her

free face; there’s too many freckles on her face, she is absolutely

gorgeous.

“Yes, that’s me.” Kenny entertains her joke, as the others— including Susan

—laugh. “Now I’m here. I live in Alexandra.” “Sizwile—” Susan looks at the girl beside me expectantly. She introduces

herself, keeps it too short that I find myself annoyed at her. So she has nothing else to say about herself? With the spotlight that was given and she prefers to get it over and done with so that everyone can focus their attention on silly

old me? There’s a lump in my throat, I hated presentations at school—

and

Miss Kunene would tell me that I’d need the skills one day. She didn’t lie. “I’m Temasiko Ntsandvoyenkhozi Dlamini. I’m from

Swaziland, but my dad is from here; Mpumalanga. We moved back here when I was 16 years old. I

moved to Joburg at 17 years old. I don't have much work experience, I was selling Youssef's chips for R10 at Doornfontein before I got this job. I still live

in

Doornfontein. What else? That's it." By the time I've finished, even my anus is sweating. I hate, hate presentations! Susan is looking at me as if I've offended her, her face pulled into something

that resembles someone having a battle with their poop in the toilet. I thought

I did well. There's truly nothing spectacular about me. I'm just a girl who came searching for gold in the city of gold and have found anything but it. I'm as

unspectacular as this place

—

but not as phony. Nokuthula has to introduce herself next. Then Susan is getting to her meeting. She congratulates teams that reached their daily sales targets. Then she calls

out the ones who didn't do so well, the bad performers.

They're having a sales

marathon this Friday, winners will take away varying prizes with them. The workers are not as enthused as I expected them to be. This is how I know that whatever prizes they have in store must completely suck.

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“Okay, thank you. Have a great day and let’s make those sales!”

she walks

down a stair,

seems to remember something as she pauses. “Oh, and Mr.—

I mean

Miss

Dlamini must’ve forgot to mention...she’s actually a man who feels

like a woman. For the ladies, you must know this

—

to take any precautionary

measures if you need to. I don't want anyone feeling uncomfortable. He's a woman. Make sure you do everything inside the bathroom and —" "Why can't he use the male bathrooms instead?" I don't know who says that, I don't even know how to react. I'm still stuck on

the fact that this woman just did that

—

in front of everyone, she really did that.

'Take a breath.' I tell myself. It's hard. "Because he says he's a woman and the South African law says he's allowed to do so. If we argue that he uses the male bathrooms then he could take us to

the labour court. Let's try and not make a big issue out of this, just be carefu

|

from now on. If he does do something then you report to me and I'll look into the matter. Right, let's get to work. Ndalamo, please assign the new staff their seats." "Yes, Miss Susan." So he's the teacher's pet. A tall, dark

-skinned man built thinly. He looks at me, frowns, and focuses on the others. I feel my cheeks

grow warm, a shame I haven't felt in years overcome me, and I hate it. That another person has the power to make me feel bad over what I can't help, over

who I am, and get away with it will

I forever anger me. "Your desk is here. This is how you log onto the different systems." I'm not even listening at this point. "Palesa will help you if you're lost, don't be scared to ask." "Tha—" he's gone. I didn't get the chance to thank him. Whatever

. There is a list of contacts on the computer screen, these are the people I need to pitch to.

There are other screens that I try hard to recall but I can't. Too much eyes are on me. I can feel them. I don't feel safe. "Is it okay if I use the toilet?" I a

sk the lady beside me. What is her name again?

"Yah." She waves me off, chewing gum sloppily. It's not even been five minutes, I know, but I need to recollect myself. If I don't

then something bad might happen; something that could last for days, weeks. I

don't want to have to pull myself out of a dark hole. Right. Passage. Male bathroom. Female bathroom. Someone's just joined me, its that Ndalamo guy.

I enter the female bathroom, find an empty stall, and lock the door. I want to

scream, I don't. I sett

le for digging my fingers into my palms. Fuck that woman! Fuck her to the deepest pits of hell! She had no right to do that.

Nonewhatsoever. Eventually, I have to leave the bathroom. I have to get back to work. People are still looking at me, too many o

f them. I don't like this at all. Being centre of

attention has never been a childhood dream. Marrying Prince Charming like Cinderella did, was. Wearing a beautiful, white gown and walking down the aisle with my father, was. Not this. By lunchtime, I don

't have a single sale. This thing is harder than it looks. Its not like Youssef where I'd wait for customers to come so that I could offer

them my amazing service. These clients are rude; they curse
and they hang up

on you, they don't wait for you to finish your pitch. My ego's
been bruised

worse than any beating I received from my father. These idiots
need therapy, for how angry they are at a mere sales agent like
myself

—if only they'd give

me the opportunity to explain that to them.

I've warmed my food in the microwave, it's not much; just chips
and bread —

that I've been eating for the past week because Lwandle hasn't
called —

and

now I don't know where to sit. I don't make friends easily.

Its partly my fault

for not making an effort but I prefer to be alone. Less problems,
you know. There are chairs outside, I occupy the ones furthest
from everyone and access

the company's Wi

-

Fi. It's one of the few good things about this place. There's a message from Lwandle, he wants me to spend the night in Hillbrow.

I am not about to say no. Maybe he'll give me money. If its anything like that

R100 he gave me a few weeks ago, then I will be able to buy meat at Meat-A-Rama butchery. Their meat can be cheap. Where else will you find about twenty chicken feet prized at R10? Or their beef liver that starts from R8? I send a message back, accepting the request just as someone blocks the barely there sunlight by sitting next to me.

"Hello." Its Nthabiseng, the girl who remembered me from the interview. "My

name is

—"

88

"Nthabiseng. I remember you," I say.

She laughs, nods her head, as she opens her lunch tin. Seven colours. Did she

come here to tempt me? “That’s right. I’ve been seeing you sit on your own for

a while now so I decided to join you. You

’re the awkward type, akere? The

introverts nton-

nton.”“To a degree.”“Here.” A fried chicken leg lands in my lunchbox. “No need to pay me back. Anyway, I heard you’re from Swaziland. I love SiSwati. It’s a pity I never had a

boyfriend who was Swati.

Are you fluent in it?”“Yes.” I mean I grew up there. And even when I came here with my father, we

were still in Mpumalanga

—

South African Swati headquarters.

“Can you say something in Swati?”“Ufuna ngitsini?” I ask. “Anything.” She giggles happily

.

“Ngiyakwenyanya ukusebentela lite, utangibhadala malini? (I hate working for free, how much will you pay me?)” I tease. It takes a while but she seems to

understand eventually. I giggle back at the cautious expression she gives me.

“Ngiyadlala hawu.” “Very funny. So how’s your day going so far?”

I’m tired when I get to Hillbrow—

emotionally, mentally, physically. My day

didn’t get better at work, it just got worse because Palesa is about as useful as

a wet tissue when her help is needed. I made a sale but it turns out that the client gave me incorrect details and when I tried to call them back they

wouldn’t answer. Susan’s made sure that people are uncomfortable around

me, that they talk and make snarky comments. She made sure that they follow me on my way home, that they talk loud enough behind my back. Those two gay men that I work with. Her words made sure.

Lwandle has told the security guard to let me in. I knock once on his door and then open it, to find a bright pink shoe carelessly thrown near the doorway. It belongs to a child.

What, is he running a daycare now? The noises are next

—too incoherent and squeaky to belong to an adult.

“Lwandle?!” I call out, passing the empty kitchen. He’s in the living room. “What’s going on? You’re running a creche, baby? Sebabani ke labantfwana laba?” There i

s a girl and a

boy in the room with him, both can’t be older than five years.

The girl looks

around three years of age, maybe younger.

“Sewufikile!” he stands to give me a kiss. “Baby, meet my sister’s children. The girl’s name is Sedilaka. And boy

-boy h

ere is Mandlenkosi.”

Oh. I don’t know his family that well. At all, actually. I try not to let it bother me because it’s not like we’re together, together.

This is just... an entanglement. I knew the day this one wouldn't allow me to be seen by his friends

because

'reputation'. I've said before he's good for my ego. I've said it before that I'm

unspectacular

—but at least in my blandness, there's still someone who wants me. Someone with a well-paying job, flat and car. Someone who seems to have his life in o

der. He's not a mazihlalela. "Oh. They're visiting? Where's your sister?" "She is going to Pretoria for an interview tomorrow. So that's why the children are here." He says, picking up the little girl when she says

Tata.

"I need you to

stay with them

for a while. I'm going out to—" "How long is a while?" I interrupt him. It's not that I don't like children but I've had a long day at work, he knows this, I sent him messages about Susan's

behaviour

—
and for him to dump me with these children when I barely have energy for anything is not fair. “Lwandle, I’ve had a long day at work. I came here because I thought you’d help me vent and just listen. Maybe... hold me.

Kodwa hhayi. Kimi kubukeka kwangatsi awunendzaba nje wena netinkinga

tami.” “Of course, I care baby.” He leans down to kiss my forehead. “Kodwa nawe, I told you to stop stressing about that woman. What’s so bad about telling them that you’re a transgender woman? You’re not ashamed of it, its who you are. There’s nothing wrong with what she did.”

90

He doesn’t get it. I want to slap his face so hard, his head starts spinning. Every

day I wake up and live my truth

—

openly or not

—is an extreme sport. I'm a

walking statistic and I have to work hard to protect myself against those who live only to disagree with who I am

—

to the point that they murder those like

me. To the point that they rape, harass and humiliate. Susan wasn't just

talking, she was gambling with my life, and putting me at risk. It hurts that this

idiot doesn't see it that way. "She was wrong, Lwandle. It's not one's responsibility but my own to tell my truth. She's turned people against me at

work, people who hate me for simply breathing the air they breathe, because

I'm not what they want me to be. I hate that you're taking her side. Tha

t you

don't take the time to educate—"I'm sorry ke, baby." He shuts me up with a kiss. I'd push him away if he weren't holding a child. "Here, take this." From his wallet, he retrieves a wad of

money. "Please look after them for a few hours. Buy food with this." And

with that, he leaves before I can fully protest.

There's R1000 in my hand. So much money! I've never touched this much

money from him. He has groceries in his home so what does he mean I should

buy food? Junk food, maybe? "What do kids your age eat?" I ask the older one. "Lollipops and chips!"

Oh, those cost R1 each. Does that mean the remaining balance is mine? I

should ask to look after these two more. "No." I shake my head. "We'll get you real food. Wear your shoes, let's go."

91

Unrequited Desires : Eight Temasiko

What Lwandle meant by 'a few hours' is that he'd spend the entire night out,

leaving me to mother two children, when I am not experienced in that

particular department, and that he'd make me miss work –
as a newcomer and someone not well-liked by my colleagues

–

with no way of reporting to

anyone that I wouldn't be coming in today. To say I am fuming
is putting it

mildly, I am seething with red, hot anger; to the point that my
hands tremble when I place two plastic bowls in front of the
kids.

“Thank you, auntie.” The older one gives me a toothless grin. I
can't bring

myself to return his innocent smile, its bad I know; but the
sooner he learns

life isn't all colourful rainbows and sunshine, the better. “You're
welcome.” I've made them porridge, the same

way mother used to make it

—with margarine, milk and sugar. “Do you know how long until
your uncle gets back?” I mentally clap myself across the cheek
for this stupid question. “Never mind, don't answer
that.” “Mommy said we're spending time with Tata. He's going
to take us to the zoo to see animals.” Oh, little one. He'll find out

the hard way that adults don't keep their promises, that all they do is lift hopes and lie. If they're not doing that then they're shedding off the superhero persona they trick children with. If they're also not doing that then they're exploiting trust and manipulating and taking advantage of. Adults are the crappiest people on earth, but I will not include myself in that list, I never allow myself to interact with children

—

and for Lwandle to put me in such a position makes him the crappiest of crappy

human beings. "Don't get your hopes up," I tell the young one, Mandlenkosi. "Tata keeps his promises."

Okay then.

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"What do kids your age do?" I've had to feed the little girl, I still don't know her correct age but she's too young to self

-feed, and she was making a mess.

“Do you like TV? Do you play games?” “I like to play outside with my friends.” Mandlenkosi doesn’t swallow his porridge before replying, and giggles an apology when bits of white drizzle

down his chin. He’s an enthusiastic eater though, though I’ll credit my cooking

skills as well- all that time spent learning from my mom was worth it- and

asks for more. “Mthokozisi lives next door, he’s my biggest friend in

the world. His big sister likes to kiss the lady from the 13th floor. Disgusting, auntie, all of it is ew

!”

For a five year old, he sure does gossip a lot. I think kids in general never

know when to shut their mouths, it’s part of their charm but also wh

at is sooffputting about them. The front door makes a sound

—

opens and closes. Low footsteps can be heard in the short hallway, brief, as the devil appears in the kitchen. Nothing about him seems out of place, though his eyes are red-

rimmed, as if he hasn't slept at all. "Baby—" he reveals a toothy smile, running his hands all over his chest, and comes closer as I rise to my feet. "You're

still here, I

—"

My hand connects with his cheek before he can spew more garbage. How dare he?! No calls. No texts. No updates. I worried about him last night and I tried to

call but he didn't answer. He didn't bother to respond to my messages. I've

missed a day at work because of him. My hand connects with his cheek again, as the tremors return

—

racking my body. Lumps form in my throat, seething anger overtaking me. Any attempts of going in for another slap are halted by a

harsh twist to my arm. "AAAHH!" I scream. "What the hell is wrong with you?!" he frees me. "Me?" my voice turns shrill; disbelieving! I whimper, at

tempting to soothe the

pain to my arm. Lwandle is cutting his eyes at me, looking at me like I've done something wrong, like he didn't leave me all alone with these children. Like he didn't make me miss work.

"I've been calling you most of last night, you

asshole! I-

I called you but you didn't answer. You left me with these children,

not telling me your whereabouts, made me skip work- as a bloody newcomer-

and I haven't reported. People already hate me there, that woman is on my

tail

—

and I just know that s

he's looking for ways to get rid of me before I can

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even decide for myself and you've made things worse, Lwandle. You don't care about me, all I'm good is for a fuck—"WATCH YOUR MOUTH!" He growls, and puts his hand on my mouth,

pressing hard. “You’re scaring my sister’s children. Look at them! Konje uyahlanyawena. If you didn’t want to, you should’ve just said so. I’m only good for money in this relationship, isn’t? I

can’t rely on you—and you’re secretly hoping that I’ll marry you and build a family with you but you can’t do this

simple thing for me. I did the most important thing, took the first step to

introduce you to my sister’s children—

and this is how you treat them? Look at

those fearful look on their faces, because of your nonsense!” The boy’s eyes are wide, maybe concerned—and I don’t want to feel shitty but I can’t stand the look in Mandlenkosi’s eyes. Maybe I shouldn’t have raised my

voice. Maybe I shouldn

’t have put my hands on Lwandle. But I was angry, and

he did me wrong first. All I wanted was for him to get here like he promised,

so that I could get to work. “Lwandle—” “No!” he cuts me off, I’m too frozen to respond to the little push back he gives

m

e. "I told you to stay with them for a few hours. Did I lie, DID I?!" It's too loud, the way he shouts. "If you had a problem with it, you should've told me, told

me face-to-

face that you didn't want to." In my head, I know he's being selfish and that he's bullshitting. But another part of me tells me he has a point. He said a few hours, he didn't say how long; I should've told him that I wouldn't be able to watch these kids for more than a few hours because of work. Now they're looking at me like I scare

them. "But logic should've told you that I have to go to work the following morning,

Lwandle. To me it seems like you were out to sabotage me, purposely. Why

would you do that?" "Not everyone has an agenda against you, Jesus Fucking Christ! You don't ev

en have anything to your fucking name, why would I want to sabotage you? Stop

making petty excuses, next time I won't leave the children with you. This was a test, and it's clear that you're not ready to meet my family. Obviously you don't want to build a future together."

His words sting, I pride myself in being desensitized to most things but not this. Why would he even want to test me in the first place? What kind of...is it

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love? We've never talked about this before. I'm getting a headache, I have no

i

idea what his words mean; what he's hinting at. He is giving me a disappointed look, like I've hurt him somehow, as if he didn't hit me where it hurts just minutes ago. "Do you love me?" I can't help questioning him. "I thought it was obvious." He shrugs

his shoulders, rolls his eyes at me before

shifting the attention to the kids. "Are you ready to go, guys?" "To the zoo, Tata?" Mandlenkosi's eyes light up. "Yup,

little man.” I am pushed aside roughly, as Lwandle gets to the children.

Whirling around, I watch him wipe them clean with the most tender care. His eyes are all soft and I see those stars twinkling again; dimples make an

appearance and he’s happy. “Come, my little princess.” “Lwandle?!” I call out, he went to fetch their jackets and bags. He’s at the door

now, hands holding both children

—

and back turned to me. I only finish what I

wanted to say when he gives me his attention. “I’m sorry...” taking a breath, I continue, “I don’t want a love where I have to continuously prove my worth to

you

—

through tests or the bullshit you put me through these past few hours.

I...” I don’t think I can say it. It will feel weird, having this is weird—

and it

hurts when he hurts me but I still want him. Maybe I love him, I'm not sure. I think I do. But I don't think I can voice it out loud.

"I—

erhm, my heart jumps

when I see you and I see stars in your eyes that I can't see in anyone else." "Are you into poetry now?" he shakes his head, but he's using his amused tone. "Do you love me?" I don't think I can adm

it it, its so embarrassing. To be weak and fall in love. To have butterflies and imagine the unthinkable, the unattainable. To dare think

that someone like myself could be the object of someone's affection. For a long time I thought I wasn't meant for love. To find and receive love. It's the weirdest thing. "Maybe?" I try to come off as cool and collected but maybe I fail. He's laughing hard at me. I am embarrassed. "What's so funny?" "Nothing. I love you, okay?" then he's out of the door.

I sag against the wall as soon as the door closes, and run a hand down my face.

That was one humiliating experience, I don't even know which parts made me

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more embarrassed

—

the kids being scared by me or me putting my hands on Lwandle or his words. All I know is that I

am humiliated, and now I don't know why I shouted at him, I should've been calm and told him that I didn't like what he did. I should've stated every reason in a polite manner. I didn't and now he thinks I hate those children. I don't. When I feel bad, I like to clean. This is what I'll do. I did it last night, after I'd

put the kids to sleep but maybe I can do it again. He has a Bluetooth speaker in this house that I connect to my cracked phone. Music makes me feel better, I

don't think

when I'm listening to music—

and it offers me therapy that I know

I wouldn't find anywhere else. Recently, through Baekhyun, I've discovered more kpop songs; and it's all I search for at work.

Anyone

by a group called Seventeen starts to play. My mood switches to one hundred

—

energy coursing through me bountifully. Starting at the bedroom, I remove the covers and turn everything in that place upside down to properly clean it. His wardrobes are next, and I find pink flip-

flops I've never seen before; but they were not hiding and I don't want to assume things because all shoes have their space in the wardrobe anyway. It's

just these ones were behind his work boots and All-

Star takkies. They're not

mine though. I place them at the very front and leave the bedroom sparkling clean before moving to the spare bedroom.

"Baby?!" A masculine voice calls out. "Here!" I say, he's back. Good. He must explain these clothes I've found here, the women's clothes. "Spare bedroom."

The children are gone, he loo

ks exhausted, the sun is setting outside. I didn't realize how much time had gone by, but I couldn't stop—and even now I'm feeling antsy, just standing by doing nothing. "Baby, what's

this music?" "It's kpop." I point out, though he doesn't look at all interested. "This is EXO's

Tempo

.

I found female clothes in this wardrobe. There's a suitcase in there. In

your bedroom, I found pink flip-

flops. Are you cheating on me?" "Really?" he snorts. I've offended him. "Am I so stupid that I'd hide clothes of

some

one I'm cheating with in plain sight? When I know that you visit and—"

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"Men are strange creatures," I tell him, wiping a bead of sweat from my

forehead. Overcooked pork is what I am at the moment, and my thighs are rubbing together uncomfortably although

h I've not gone anywhere today—

and

haven't done any rigorous activity. Cleaning is nothing. "You'd be surprised at

how stupid most of them are. This is why they caught. Now my question to

you is are you caught as well?" "Maybe women are worse idiots. You

r insecurities drive you to find things

that aren't there. I am telling you that you should give me more credit, don't insult my intelligence by making it seem that I wouldn't know how to cheat on

you and get away with it. That is not what I am doing, hence the clothes that

are in plain sight. These are my sister's clothes. Sometimes when you're nothere, she visits. Obviously she doesn't know about you." "Are you hungry?" I change the topic, dropping the feather

-duster onto the

floor. I'll come back to finish clearing this mess, right now it's better if I cook. "What do you want for supper?" Lwandle looks

at me as if I've lost my mind. "Can't decide? I'll make chicken curry with rice then." I pause in front of him,

leaning up to kiss him on the lips before proceeding. At the door, I remember

something and giggle as I add, "Oh, and Solly's dead." "Hmm? Solly?" "The cockroach Mandlenkosi found and killed this morning. Poor thing left a

wife and kids behind. Sedilaka wanted to bury him, we used bits of your coffee

to do it. Burial site is by the window sill." "You and your shenanigans!" he's not mad, there's a grin on his face.

Aside from Susan questioning me and giving me a verbal warning, most of my

week goes perfectly well. It's like nothing can keep me down, not even the

rude customers I encounter

—

the ones who hang up on me; the ones who tell me where to get off and those who put their phones next to the TV as I am

pitching. I can't trace where the high comes from but I've experienced it

before

—

the world is my oyster and I am untouchable. I generate eight sales

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for the week. That's second to Kenny who has made sixteen sales. T

he girls we came with are not that great.

"You're very talkative when you want to be." Nthabiseng notes, stabbing a fork into her macaroni and mince to eat. "It's like you're drugged up on sugar. Third day now." "It's Friday." I shrug my shoulders. "I have every reason to be happy. We're knocking off early." "We are." She smiles. "So... about your problem with your landlord. You're supposed to move out month end, right?" "Yeah." "I have a flat, I was staying with my friends but she moved to better p

laces in Midrand. Rent is inexpensive, very affordable actually, and if you want you can

move in with me. You don't have to pay this month's rent, since it's the middle

of the month anyway. Rent is R1000 and we can split it up between ourselves. You buy yo

ur own electricity and bathrooms and kitchens are outside. It's just

one big room so we can separate it into half

—your room and mine.” Oh... my eyes widen. She's honestly the kindest person here. The only one who

really talks to me without having any oth

er agenda but to be friendly. “I'm a transgender woman.” The words leave me. She knows this but I feel the need

to remind her. Mancane knew this, she never minded. For a Zimbabwean who grew up in a Christian home, she was very understanding and non-judgmen

tal. I don't remember a time that she was uncomfortable by my presence. She's like a sister to me. “I am a cisgendered woman.”

The smile she gives me makes me blush. I pat my cheeks to keep the vetkoeks

from overcooking, and return her smile. “Okay. I can move in tomorrow.” She cocks an eyebrow. “Don’t you want to check the place out first? To see if it’s up to your standards.”

“No.” I shake my head.

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“Impulsive.” She giggles. “I like you.” “Mancane, I need your help!” I shout, loud enough for her to hear over the song she’s playing. Trisha came with a

Bluetooth when she moved in. They

play Zimbabwean music a lot, it’s amazing how it sounds like Venda music

sometimes.

“What is it?” she’s ca

rrying Moyo in one arm. He looks adorable, wearing

matching maroon tracksuit and cute Van’s takkies I bought him at Pep. They

were on special, and only cost me R22.99.

“My pots are crying again. How did you say I remove the tears?” “Uyehlula wena.” Man

cane sighs, and signals for me to move away- as she occupies the 25l bucket I was sitting on, and gives Moyo to me. He makes a blubbering sound and jerks his head, I balance him

—startled. “His neck muscles are not strong yet, so he can’t control his movements.” Hmk. I was scared that he was trying to headbutt me, for something I may’ve done to offend him. You never know with this one. He makes a sound as if he’s

clicking his tongue when you call him little Farai-

that’s the name of his daddy

that could possibly not be his daddy who lives in Berea- and he has a cute afro that makes him look like little Shembe, I called him that the other day and he swore at me with his nose and eyes the same way toddlers do

—

but this one is only three months old.

“Inkinga yakho awuqinisi isandla.” Mancane says as she washes my two Hart

pots for me. I bought them from iphara a while ago, he was selling them for R20 each, and I bought them because where else can you get Hart pots for R20

from? Unfortunately, I can't magically

make them reflect my face like Mancane does

—instead they cry and show tear streaks in place of my face.

“Ulivilawena. Uyoshadwa ngubani vele?” Eish! Must she always sound like my mother though? Also, I don't remember

talking to her about marriage. She must give me a break, at least I can cook

and clean. “Mancane you hate doing laundry. You're the last one to talk.” I

sway Moyo side to side gently, to prevent his tiny cries.

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“I still do it. And I'm damn good at it. Wena uhlulwa ibhodwe kuphela. Angekeushade kodwa.”

Its not like I want to get married anyways. My mind visits Lwandle but he

didn't mention anything about marriage. He just said that he loves me, and introduced his sister's children to me to determine if I were ready to meet the

rest of his family. That has nothing to do with marriage. He can always change

his mind. "I don't want to get married vele." "There's no woman who doesn't want marriage." That is true. I'm just not other women. I am Temasiko Dlamini. I dance to the

beat of my ow

n drum. "Maybe it's his diaper. I'll check it," I say when Moyostarts to cry. The house is overly peaceful today, with Trisha's loud self at work. I'll still tell her goodbye when it's time to leave.

Nthabiseng messages me about an hour later. Its 01:30

pm. She's downstairs, waiting in a silver Toyota Corolla. I don't have much personal belongings—

just enough to fit inside a small suitcase. My two pots are in a Shoprite bag. They are rude enough to make sounds as

I descend the stairs, on my way out of the store. Youssef gifts me R50 and the cheapest chocolate in the shop. I am

thankful, Pakistanis are not usually generous people. Just as I've said goodbye

to Trisha, I meet the entitled giraffe outside, standing with three other guys. He opens his mouth and shouts something. The good thing about this headphones I found in a taxi back from work the other day is that they function on both ears and are loud enough to drown out any unnecessary noise

—

and enemies of peace. My eyes scan the crowded street to find the silver Toyota Corolla Nthabiseng was talking about. She shows her face and waves frantically from the window. I shake my head, giggling.

“I almost thought you’d changed your mind.” She says as I enter the car. There’s a lady sitting next to the driver—breath-takingly gorgeous. “You’re unexpected, not easy to confirm.” “I’m tired of bathing inside small basins. It’s been so long since I las

t used a shower

—” at Hillbrow, there used to be showers that you could pay to us.

When I was homeless, I made sure to utilize them whenever I made enough

money on the streets. “And I’ll just be glad if I don’t encounter the smell of hot

chips for the rest

of my life.” “Well, you may be offended when someone on our floor decides to make them. I did say that we share the kitchen, right? It’s like one big room with multiple stoves that are built in. We also share the showers but don’t worry, there’s hot

water

for everyone.” “I don’t mind a change of scenery,” I say, “with the places I’ve lived in, your place sounds like heaven. Thank you for being so kind.” She dismisses me with a grin. “This is my friend that I was telling you about,

the one who lives in

Midrand. Her name is Rorisang. Rori, this is Temasiko.” “Tema, hi!” I’ve never met anyone with such bright teeth before, like she’s advertising for Colgate or something. “Nice to meet you.” I hate it so much when people call me ‘Tema’. Despite this, I

can’t bring myself

to tell her that I prefer my name the way it is. She looks like those women that

you don't want to disappoint. The pretty ones who get their way in life—

as

she just did. Her beauty is unrealistic, too good to be true.

“Nice to meet you too.” I make a sudden movement and my pots embarrass me. “I didn't steal

them. They were on discount

—R20 each,” I say. “Where do you get pots for R20?” the pretty girl asks. “This is Johannesburg. You can buy a Brazilian wig for R100 and then sell it t

o

the person you bought it from for free on the next street.”

They laugh, including the driver

—and the pretty girl shakes her head. “That is true. I learned the hard way.” “I've been learning since I came here.” “Anyway,” her happy giggles finally co

me to a halt, she glances at Nthabiseng

through the rearview mirror, “about that guy, will you help me?”

Nthabiseng sighs, seems reluctant. I wish I knew what they were talking

about. “Friend, I’m not pretty like you. If this guy is not interested in som

eone

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who looks like you, what makes you think that he’d fall for plain Jane like me?

Maybe you should find

—”“He has money. MOHNEY—a lot of it!” she drags her words, enunciating each syllable. “How many young dudes drive Bentleys? Guys that are attractiv

e and seem to have it all-

except for the fact that he walks around with a cane, he’s perfect. If I can’t have him then you can try.”“An entire dating app? And damage my relationship with Paul?”

Pretty girl rolls her eyes, even the way she does it is beautiful, and turns in her

seat to look at Nthabiseng. “I won’t tell him if you won’t. This guy isn’t even

into sex, he turned me down first date. Ayivuki maybe. That makes everything

better.” “I don’t know... what do you think, Temasiko?” Oh hell no! Why am I being brought into their affairs? I don’t even have the full gist of what they’re talking about. “Do what makes you happy.” I

shrug my shoulders.

“That’s lame advice.” Pretty girl, Rorisang, says. “But money makes her happy.” Nthabiseng rests her head on my shoulder, I don’t push her away, as she joins our hands and closes her eyes. “Let me think about it. I have a boyfriend

who

gives me everything I want after all.”

Unrequited Desires : Nine Sgalosenkosi

The soft rustling noises outside only capture my attention because I am a light sleeper. They sound like tiny footsteps, as if

someone is walking on the toes of their feet, headed for my door until I hear a fiddling sound, followed by repetitive small thuds

—

no doubt the result of fists

—

banging on my door. I'm

on my feet faster than the rest of my body and mind can process

—

and an intense pain shoots down my left leg, forcing me to pause and steady my steps.

"Baba, can you hear me? Please open the door." A little trembling voice pleads.

My eyes widen, and this time I ignore the pain, rushing to the door to yank it

open. "Liyana!" I don't want to raise my voice but what is she doing outside

the main house at this time of the night? Its freezing cold outside, she's only wearing the rabbit onesie I put her in just hours before. "What's wrong?" I lift

her in my arms, a liquid sensation soaking into my skin, as I shut the behind

me. "Kwenzenjani, ndodakazi kaBaba?" "I'm wet." She croaks, giving me a tearful look, and cups my cheeks. Her hands are stone cold. "I had a bad dream, Baba. A

-

And I... there's a m

-monster in my

room. I don't want to sleep alone, Baba."

I nod my he

ad in understanding, and maybe this shouldn't be so unexpected,

since Likuwe-

ithemba's death, she dreams often—

bad dreams. But the

bedwetting is new, this is the fourth time now that it's happening around me. We talk with her psychologist, and it's common,

for many reasons but her

advice on how to prevent it have proved futile. “It’s fine, Kukhanya kwam. You’ll sleep with Baba, I’ll always protect you. Is that okay?” she mentioned a monster in her bedroom, it must’ve been the result of her bad dreams. “How did you leave the house?” she’s too short to properly open a door that has too many locks, not to mention the alarm that she would’ve set off. “Window. Likuwe

-

ithemba told me to open the window and run.”

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Tension attacks my body, making me freeze

—

as my daughter regards me with

all the seriousness in the world. “Fuzelincane,” I start, “Likuwe

ithemba is with our ancestors. Remember we talked about this when you woke up at the

hospital? She hasn’t returned, muntuza, she’s gone—

but here with you,

always.” I tap her chest. “I saw her and she told me to use the window to run, Baba. I’m not—lying.” She’s getting upset, the expression on her face says it all. “She told me to come to you.” “I believe you,” I say

to appease her, those tears crawling down her red cheeks. “You’re so cold. Let’s get you warm before bedtime. I don’t have your

favourite bath-

salts here. Do you mind using Baba’s soap? We’ll pour most of it in the water to give you bubbles, as long as this angel of mine is fine smelling

like a man. What do you say?” “I want what you want.” Her voice is so small, she snuggles into my chest. “What I want is what you want. What do you want? We can go back inside the main house and use your favourite bath-

salts instead. The choice is yours.” “I don’t want to go back there. I want to be here with you.”

I nod my head, placing her on her feet to help her out of her onesie. She shies away from my touch like she did earlier

—

and each time I am reminded that I no longer have the privilege to father her like I used to when we were all together. There's distance between us; a disconnect. "Do you prefer to do this yourself?" "I want what you want." Frustration pools in my head, because it's clear my touch makes her uncomfortable- though she won't explicitly voice it but her body is tense. "I want you to remove your underwear, please. Then get in this towel to keep warm. I'll fetch you now, let me run your bath." She doesn't acknowledge me, but does as requested. I take a left in the small hallway, and open the door to the bathroom. Opening the upper cabinets, I grab my bath-wash, pour it into the running water, and test the temperature,

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finding it perfect. Liyana is sitting on the bed, I ask for permission to hold her

—and her arms outstretch. “Thank you.” Her tiny voice whispers. “Its hot.” “Too hot?”

She shakes her head. Leaving her for a second, I go to grab my phone from the bedroom before re-

joining her in the bathroom. She’s splashing the water,

murmuring something quietly to herself, the sight causes my lips to quirk into

a thin smile. “Its been long since I read a story for you while you bath. What do you want me to read today?”

She shrugs. My heart drops to my stomach, the smile remains on my face

e. “Let’s see...” I

remember at six years old, I used to love those Arthur books

—

and would get

them from the library. Some of them I wasn’t able to return because

when we went through a place where he genuinely thought he was a pet dog and would chew on them like a good puppy

—not. “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.” I do a quick scan of the contents of the story on my Kindle. “There’s a movie

about it too. I can read the book now, and next time we'll watch the movie." "You don't like movies." Her voice is too much of a deadpan, too similar to mine. "I want to do it with Bab' omncane Sbani. He likes movies—

and I eat

delicious food with him." "We'll see..." I tell her, and then with her go

-ahead, relay the story to her. She giggles at some parts, stopping me to ask questions and the authenticity of what I am telling her. We only stop when her water turns cold, as I drain and

refill the tub with hot water. She asks me if I don't want to wash her body, but

of course I do,

she's my daughter—

anything that will relax her and make her feel safe, I will do.

This is why I wash her body- unsuccessfully avoiding her

ticklish spots. "Wash your little treasure," I say, "don't scratch yourself—

and

don't use soap." She nods. "I think I peed inside the water." "It's fine." I grab a clean towel from the towel rack and instruct her to stand as

I wrap the fluffy item around her small body. In the bedroom, I help lotion her

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body and put her in one of my old shirts because all her clothes are in the bedroom, my socks are too long for her small body and she looks comedic but the relaxed expression makes my heart swell. I climb in bed with her and hug

her tiny frame close. "Nkosazane yami, I love you. Sleep well." "Hold me when I sleep." S

he breathes into my neck. Liyana wet the bed again in her sleep, I woke up soaked in the morning, she

cried expecting me to... I don't know what she expected but I wasn't able to fully calm her down until Sbanisezwe showed up. He's good with animals and

children, they seem drawn to him for some reason

—

his inner child that never perishes perhaps.

Through MaSibusisiwe, the entire household learned that my daughter wets the bed, what with the way she poked at my and her

mother's parenting skills—

because a six year old is too grown to not be able to wake up in the middle of the night to utilize the bathroom.

We didn't fight

-

at least I didn't when I put her in her place

- but women are loud. They have high-pitched voices that are unattractive to the ears and have the ability to transform their faces to unpleasing creatures. This is why I made sure to say my piece, moved past it, and let her argue with herself for most of the morning. It's noon now, most of the family is nowhere to be found but

Nqobizitha is h

ere, waiting for Christophe because they're supposed to meet with Mxolisi's family to discuss the way forward as far as funeral

arrangements go.

It's a mess, Chris' father refuses for his daughter to be taken to the Eastern

Cape to be buried with the family she married into. Traitors, he calls the Mrajifamily, for not being honest about the mistreatment of his daughter that

eventually led to her death. He has been back in Mbongolwane with Chris'

mother for about a year now, quietly living the village life-

and would've welcomed Zenande back home with open arms.

He wants his daughter's body. He wants the children. He wants everything in Zenande's name—

and is not apologetic about it. The whole thing is a mess, Zenande has been one with her ancestors for almost a week now with no clear solution about the way forward.

I find Nqobizitha sitting outside his and Chris' rondavel, on a crate, green

metallic bowl on his lap-

he's eating Amasi. Lethulwazi is sitting on the stoep

next to him, playing with a toy truck and making car sounds that are somehow

louder than Ntencane's

Njengempukane

that is playing from inside the house.

"Bafo!" he gives me a thoughtful smile, nodding his head at me.

"I thought she wouldn't let you go." He says about

MaS

ibusisiwe. "I've been meaning to talk to you."

Leaning against the peach-coloured pillar, I shake my head, tucking my hands

into my pockets. "Women exhaust me, this is why I am divorced. They can't say their piece and keep it moving, I've heard the same

thing since morning.

Tell them that and they look at you like you've committed the biggest crime on earth." "Chris is the same way, and he's not a woman. My own personal parrot." If this is some sort of complaint then his face doesn't show it. He has a s

ilily smile on

his face, shoving another spoonful of Amasi into his mouth. “Before I forget, with everything that’s happening, how are you?” “Don’t worry about me.” He’s my responsibility, and not the other way round.

Questions about my wellbeing are about as unnecessary as sexual intercourse.

I clear my throat. “What’s the latest with the Xulus and the Mrajis?” I know

how messy in-laws politics can be, when my daughter died- and Khensani’s

family thought they could guilt-trip an already guilty man into allowing them to bury Likuwe-ithemba in Giyani, and further have Liyana permanently in their care. It was a hard time, very stressful, and took a toll on my mental health but the end was worth it. My deceased daughter lies with those who came before her

—

emagcekeni asekhaya. Liyana and I see each other almost every week. It was all worth it.

“Cha, khohlwa. I didn’t call you here to try and play problem

-
solver.” Nqobizitha punches my thigh, and cuts his eyes at me.

“I called to ask about

you and Liyana. How

is your relationship going? How is she doing?” “I... I am not completely sure.” A frown creases my forehead as I exhale quietly, and gently kick Lethulwazi’s truck back to him.

“Sometimes she’s cold, sometimes she’s warm –

it must be a female thing.” Nqobizitha chortles, fisted

hand covering his mouth.

“What do you want me to say, Bafo?” my own lips quirk up. “If she didn’t turn into a mute when you talk to her then she’d be attending all her sessions with you. That Indian woman doesn’t seem to know what she’s doing

-

my daughter remains unhappy.”

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“I’ll look around for others in the profession, but it’s not good for her to move

around so many people a lot. It will be hard for her to get used to them, to form trust and build a meaningful relationship. Before that, I do want to try and talk to her again

—

a

nd... how is her home life with Khensani?" "One of these days I'll be taking my daughter from that woman." I snort, gaze averting to the empty kraal and then the expanse of green ahead. "She's not fit

to look after my daughter, with each passing day I am

convinced of this." The

reason she wanted Liyana to live with her was to fill in the hole of lives lost; and I let her be because I was empty myself- still am-

but she's not getting better. I don't expect her to heal overnight

-

I haven't myself

- but above

everything else, Liyana matters the most. "Liyana always says everything is fine. When I ask her, she tells me she enjoys living

with Khensani and Pitso.” “I see...” Nqobizitha scrubs the side of his cheek, his beard, and hums quietly. “Bedwetting is quite common, Bafo. Approximately 15 percent of children wet the bed at age 5. It happens more frequently in children with developmental

delays and emotional and behavioural difficulties.” “I think it was triggered by the accident. She gets night terrors often, and

speaks of a monster in her bedroom. Now, she’s speaking to Likuwe

-ithemba.

When she escaped her room, she said Likuwe told her to.” “Those are quite common with children. João comes to our bedroom often

with a similar problem. I blame Chris for

that, he’s always kept him with us in

the bedroom and now

—” “Your sex life must be suffering.” “Its never been better actually.” Nqobizitha smirks just as the door opens, and

out walks a smiling Chris

—and maybe his eyes are sad. “See for yourself.” H

accepts the kiss Chris plants on his lips, as the shorter grabs the empty bowl from Nqobizitha and walks toward the main house, with Lethulwazi clinging

to his leg. There's a limp to his walk—familiar. “Am I good or am I good?”

I snicker, rubbing my nose,

and shake my head. “Don't ask me rubbish.”

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My response makes him chuckle, he stands and irons out his Brentwood,

before fixing the sleeves of his jersey. “On a serious note, I want to talk to Liyana before we leave. It's nothing you should worry about

t

—

just the psychologist in me checking in. But bedwetting is very common, sometimes it's genetic

—the same way Sbanisezwe used to do it as a child.” Sbanisezwe was scared of the dark, when we were very young, that’s why. It seems that Liyana is too. “Do you have any solutions other than getting her to the loo fifteen minutes before bedtime?” “A couple.” He pats my shoulder, squeezing softly. “I’ll tell you all about it. Let me support the toothpick first, as his husband. I’m not suspecting the worst, do

n’t worry.” “What do you mean by the wor—”

One of the boys who works here captures our attention by opening the

smaller iron gate, the sound reaching our ears. “There’s your future wife. Is that a lunchbox she’s carrying? Please keep something aside fo

r me...especially

if its sweet potatoes or corn.” He walks away. “Sawubona,” Sphehlehle smiles as she gets closer –

beautiful like usual. Allcornrows, a shiny skirt that momentarily blinds me and a pink vest. She removes her dusty flip-flops and I dismissively tell her to join me, noting the reluctance on her pale face-

maybe its Pond's, my mother used it all the time. "Ma

S

ibusisiwe said you're angry about something, so I brought you this—before your hunger can cause WW3 here."

To learn that she and MaSibusisiwe were discussing me rubs me the wrong

way, I frown but bite my tongue. I don't really get angry. Never really. "Do I look angry to you?" I cock an eyebrow. "If angry has become a synonym for handsome then, yes, you look angry."

I do a double-take, surprised by the boldness; not that I particularly mind.

"What is in there?" it doesn't mean that I can't ignore her...is it advances?

People can appreciate the good looks of another without attaching romance to

it. It's not like, I myself, am b

lind to the beauty Sphe possesses. She takes after

her mother. "My baby brother expects sweet potatoes and corn."

“I do have sweet potatoes. I also heard tripe is your favourite and so I made it for you.” “Thank you,” I say. “It’s lunch time, shouldn’t I dish it for you?”

I don’t verbally respond as I leave Nqobizitha’s rondavel, headed for the main

house. She is behind me, walking ever so slow

—

fearful perhaps. Strange for

someone who was bold just seconds ago. “Kwenzenjani, awufuni sihambisane

njeng

amasondo emoto?” Her giggles are reserved, she picks up her pace, until she’s beside me. We used

to be close back in the day, I wrap an arm around her shoulders and push her

forward. “For a punctured wheel, you move so quickly!” “Are you making fun of

my knee?” I pinch the top of her shoulder. “I like the way you walk, it’s a compliment. The stagger is not prominent,

especially with the cane

—there’s an appeal to it. Ngathi ukewaba yinkabi.”“Mangabe indlala ikudida ikhanda khuluma, uyeke umsangano.”“And if I say I am hungry, will you feed me?” the tone is suggestive, brave

again. We enter the house, I shake my head, retrieving my arm from around her

shoulders. “You wouldn’t be able to handle any food I give you, Sphe. Leave

that kind of food to

the adults.”

“Why do you always act like you’re decades older than me? I’m old enough for you to marry and build a family with. It’s not good for a man like yourself to be

alone. Who will help you to build this home? To keep it standing for years to come? Ayikho indoda

engam’dingi umlekeleli...even your brothers have partners.

What’s so wrong with you having one?”“You spend too much time with

MaS

ibusisiwe.”

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“I’ll prove myself worthy. We’re still going to Johannesburg together, right? I’ll show you that I’m wife material. I’m a virgin, Sgalosenkosi. You’re the perfect

man to have saved myself for

—and maybe I’m being too bold but I’ve wanted you from the first time we encountered each other. Remember?” How can I not? We’ve known each other for six years. She was only

a baby when I met her at eighteen years old, at a river not too far from here, when

Andile lost a few of our cattle. I don’t want to dwell on her nakedness, it’s uncomfortable to think about, I was 27 years old. She didn’t scream or

anything, just led me

to a place beyond the green forestry. “You were and still are a child.” “I’m 24 years old, turning 25 in August. You’re only 8

years older than me. I don't know why it's such a big issue when our parents have 15

-20 year age

gaps... sometimes more. It's not like I'm a child anymore." She doesn't get it, part of me still has the image of the child I met at the river. A

bigger part looks into hazel eyes and they remind me of Siyabonga

—

how they

twinkle when she smiles. Or how they're mischievous sometimes.

The only reason I... sometimes my stomach will twist and turn around her, like the last

time I saw her. It's not attraction, I am sure of it. "You sound like one." To tease her, I pinch her chubby cheeks. "Muntuza." "I like it when you call me that." "Because you're a baby vele." Her face remains youthful. I drag her to the kitchen, where we find Thatego. He's doing something at the fridge.

"Thategoka Sbanisezwe."

He jumps, peers over his shoulder, and sighs. Sometimes I forget that he still scares ea

sily, that his trauma won't allow him to completely freely live his life. "I'm—sorry." He has this bad tendency of apologizing unnecessarily. "Your brother wants my Cuban sandwiches, I want to make them for him. He's strapped in Liyana's room, watching The Chronicles of Narnia." He looks between me and Sphe, smiling to himself softly. "Should I come back? They take a while to make but Sbani will get over it." "It's fine." Sphe says, before I can reply. "Just please show me where the plates are. I want to dish his food."

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Thatego's left brow is going to touch the top of his head. "Right. They're, um, the regular ones are here. The fancy ones can only be accessed through MaSibusisiwe. They're for special occasions." "The fancy ones, please." "Right." Pain-torn lips meet each other in a soft smile, Thatego nods his head, and returns something back inside the fridge. "I'll talk to MaSibusisiwe"

."As far as the fight for Zenande's body goes, Bab' Xulu fought hard and won. It

was not without a fair deal of below the belt comments and tribalistic behaviour from both families. Nqobizitha has been there for Chris, through it

all, I've watched his consis

tency

—

how unwavering it is, for more than a decade now. He sits with Chris at the front, joining his family, as the preacher goes on and on about what a lovely woman Zenande was. He was paid, Zenande was not a church woman; her reputation around this place

wasn't

the best either- if the snarky whispers and snorts mean anything. I sit a distance away, with Sphe on my right; and Sbanisezwe and Thatego on the other side. Khensani came with Pitso- for a few years, she was part of this family and built solid relationships with some of its members. Siyabonga opted to be at the very front, to show his support

—

and Nhlakanipho never leaves his side. Intentionally, my gaze remains fixed on the preacher, for awhile until someone loudly comes waltzing in, disrupting everything.

“GIVE ME MY SON!” He shouts. I remember this guy, from the few times we’ve crossed paths; Jabulani. He was Zenande’s side. I stand, along with Pitso and Sbanisezwe. “Don’t touch me, ndoda! Ngizok’gxoba mina!” this he says to Pitso. “I don’t care about this selfish woman, she chose to die before we could be a proper family

—akahambe! Just give me my son; Mzukisi, woza kubaba.” Mzukisi is Zenande’s three year old son, he is Mxolisi’s son. Why is this drunk fool muttering nonsense at someone’s funeral

—and so confidently?! “Chawendoda, if you want a beating, just ask nicely for it. Let’s take this outside. Don’t do this rubbish here.” Sbanisezwe grabs Jabulani’s arm roughly.

“Haisuka wena!” Jabulani spits in Sbanisezwe’s face. “Haisuka, man! Su

ka! This selfish bitch has messed with my life for too long, always stringing me along because she knew I loved her. And just when I think she loves me back, she decides to leave

—with my UNBORN CHILD! I’m taking this one,” he tries to maneuver past Sbani a

nd is pushed back. “Hey! Hey! What’s your problem?” “Jabulani...” people are whispering loudly. Chris’ voice can be heard from here but I’m not sure what he says. Nqobizitha was the one who called Jabulani’s name.

“Jabulani...” “WENA!” In a split second,

Jabulani breaks free, and aims for Nqobizitha,

pushing him back with excessive force. “WENA, DOTI!” he roars. “It didn’t

work out the first time because of you! Because you got the woman I love

pregnant! Now she’s dead, it’s all your fault. Futhi ngizo—” a knife materializes in his right hand. “Yey man!” Sbanisezwe has put him in a

chokehold, and any attempts to stab him are futile. Jabulani struggles until Nqobizitha grabs the knife from him. By now everyone is gossiping. The preacher is dead silent. C

Christophe's eyes are wide, he's coming at Nqobizitha with lightning speed. I don't have time to process that as I push Sbanisezwe away from Jabulani. He'll kill the man with how hard he's punching him and telling him to shut up. Jabulani won't do it, he's

drunk

—and the world has to know. “This is YOUR fault!” he screams at Nqobizitha. “You made her pregnant. You stole her from me to give her to an abuser!” “Sbani, stop it!” There's Thatego, attempting to pry his fiancé away from a bad

situation

—

to save hi

m from murder charges. “Stop it, right now! I

-

I don't want to go back there, please stop.” That's all the breakthrough he needs. But Jabulani's face has already suffered damage. It's not like he cares with the way he keeps shouting. All of this is

Nqobiz

itha's fault. He was too selfish. He made Zenande pregnant. He caused

the rift between Jabulani and her. He stole her from Jabulani and led her to her

death. It's his fault that she died.

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Unrequited Desires : TenSqalosenkosi

Funeral proceedings had to be seen through until the end, Christophe's father wouldn't have it any other way—

as his daughter has suffered enough, and needed to rest. Words cannot accurately describe the tension that soon followed, as Mfundisi Nxumalo called upon witnesses to express the kind of woman Zenande was. No one would believe a word that fell off silver tongues from then on; each word being met with hushed criticism and snorts instead. It was an extremely uncomfortable moment to witness

—

the confused

expression on my brother's face. Chris' indifference.
Lisakhanya... she was removed from all this by Chris' mother,
her and her brothers, they went back to the Xulus homestead
and have not been seen since. I'd like to think that the

worst is over, now t

hat we've put Zenande's burial behind us; and that

whatever issues that have arisen can be calmly addressed, once
the shock dies down for everyone involved. I lost Nqobizitha as
soon as everything had been finalized, along with Christophe.

Pitso and Khensani have just left. And Sbanisezwe, he came to
tell me that he was taking Thatego home; what with his partner
gaining a panic

attack shortly after we buried Zenande. Sbanisezwe's violent
behaviour triggered it, the sight and smell of blood is what he
can't

stand; it subjects him to his past trauma, he killed a man once

—

bludgeoned him to death with a

chair and he prefers to not think about it, because it's the only
way he can

avoid the events that led to him murdering Naoki. But Sbanisezwe is an idiot, too impulsive and violent for his own good.

“You’re not going back to the Xulus, like everyone else?” “Cha.” I shake my head, as Sphesihle wraps a hand around my arm, walking with me to the car. Bab’ Shange is already waiting outside, ever serious. “My

fam

ily comes first. Right now, they need me.” I’m worried about the emotional state of everyone, their mental wellbeing, and how they’re processing everything that’s happening. “I’ll come with then.”

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It’s not like she arrived here by herself, she was with

me. Siyabonga and Nhlakanipho spot me from a distance, and the light-skinned one with hazel

eyes seems angry for some reason. Telling Bab’ Shange he needn’t wait

outside, because I can get my own door, I wait patiently as they trail closer.

“Get in the car, Sphe.” She observes the two approaching men, and then nodsher head. “What’s wrong?” I ask them. “Siyabonga is wondering if we can follow you home.” Nhlakanipho says,

rubbing his nose irritably

—he’s against it, that’s easy to tell. “To offer

emotional

support. I, personally, think it’s too soon. Those two need to talk, clearly they didn’t know about this.” “I know Chris,” Siyabonga speaks firmly, “this will break him. He will need the emotional support, I am his best friend and I need to be there for him. For you to deny me

—” “I didn’t deny you anything, Phakade lami.” Nhlakanipho nails Siyabonga with

an unimpressed expression, blending in perfectly with the all-black suit he’s

wearing

—aura and everything. “This is why I told you to ask Sqalosenkosi

first.” “Because you know he’ll say no.” A glare finds me; daring. And maybe he has a point. There’s no way in hell they’re following me home, to discuss anything with Chris when the rest of us haven’t. When Nqobizitha

and Chris are most likely trying to figure things out. When both families

haven’t come together to discuss the way forward. Then there’s Lisakhanya.

Everything is a mess, and Siyabonga has a wet mouth sometimes

—

especially

where Chris is concerned, he protects the man like it’s his job to

. He will only

add to the problem. “You’re right.” I tell them, getting my door.

“Go home. I’ll

keep in touch. This is a family matter, between the Xulus and Ngcobos.

Iyobuye ibonane, madoda.”

Siyabonga bites on his bottom lip, appearing angry but he kno

us better. We've known each other for over a decade, he knows I don't change my mind easily. It won't matter what he tries to say. With a polite, "Uhambe kahle," from Nhlakanipho, I give Bab' Shange the go

-ahead to drive off. My heart jumps to my throat like usual, beads of sweat forming along my temple, as my pulse

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accelerates. These are not panic attacks that Thatego has; at least I don't think

so, I just become severely anxious inside any mode of transport

—

and cars are worse.

"Do you have a headache?"

a hand gets in between my thighs, squeezing

gently. "Don't worry about all that funeral drama. I'll be right by your side

and

take care of you." "Sphe—" "Even if it's just as a friend. I just want to be there for you, there's no need to discuss the nature

of our relationship now, it's something we can revisit whenever everything has calmed down."

Above everything else, her touch is grounding

—

the way her fingers dig into

my thigh; the occasional tap, tap, tap. I don't recoil at the touch, and lean back,

closing my eyes.***

It's only 13:43pm, and where there should be life within the gates of this

homestead, there is nothing but silence. One of the cars that had been taken to

the funeral is parked near Nqobizitha and Christophe's rondavel. There are no

children playing outside

—

and a toy scooter sits by its lonesome at the patio, different toys scattered around the polished stoep. Where is Lindokuhle and why has she not taken care of this mess?

The silence outside doesn't compare to the noise inside the house. It's the TV, mixed with children's voices, and one adult

voice. Lindokuhle. “Lindo.” I greet, making my presence known. “Kunjani?” “Fine, Bab’ omncane.” “Baphi abadala?” I don’t know what I’d been expecting but it’s definitely not

this kind of silence. Not that I thrive off of chaos or enjoy it but the silence is worrying. Did Nqobizitha and Christophe make it home? Where are Khensani and Pitso? I di

dn’t see their car, but maybe they parked it inside the one of the garages. The car that was parked outside Nqobizitha’s house belongs to

Sbanisezwe so I know that they made it home.

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“Sbani is taking care of bhuti Thatego. He was red when he got here, an

d

crying. Mam’ Khensani is at the back with her husband, they’re enjoying the sun. Bab’ omncane Nqobizitha and bhuti Zithobile are in their house. They said the kids are not allowed to go in

there." Oh... I wonder what they're doing. Have they talked?
"How long since they've been home?" "Half an hour."

I nod my head. Maybe I should give them another hour before
going to

interrupt them. If they're talking things through then that's all
that matters.

Sphe sits beside me, and talks about MaNsele whose husband
hid three children from her, she found out a few days after his
burial that he had been unfaithful throughout their marriage.
Rumours are that she killed him, through food-poisoning but it
was never proven. Footsteps echo in the hallway, just as
Sphe leaves for the bathroom. It's Pitso,

still in the black attire he wore for the funeral, looking grim. I
don't blame him. "Bozza yaka." His fist meets mine in a fist

-

bump. "I was just passing through to get Khensani something
to drink. Didn't know you're

back, o jwang? Eh baba,

what a hectic funeral." "Tell me about it," I sigh, quickly
monitoring the time—

it's thirty-six minutes

too early for me to check in on Nqobizitha and Christophe.
“Jabulaniuyasangana ekhanda. Of all the days he could’ve done
this
rubbish and he
chose today.” Pitso shrugs, and hides his hands in the pockets of
his black jeans. “Akanatiming, I agree.” He clicks his tongue,
shaking his head in the process. “Marawomen lebone. You’d
think they’ve learned their lesson with all the GBV cases
that happen, that they report all the time at the police station.
For the period 2019/2020, a total of 2695 women were
murdered at the hands of men. This means this kind of thing
happens every three hours
—and I mean that’s easy
to tell when the news report on it daily. But they still... Why
place yourself at
such a risk? Even in death, this woman is causing
problems.” Something about the way he says this rubs me the
wrong way. “What are you
trying to say, Ndoda
?”

“That women should stop putting themselves in these situations. I see it all the time at the police station; they cheat on their men, pin babies on them that aren’t theirs—and let’s face it... these are people’s lives they’re playing with, people’s emotion

s. Is it a surprise that the husband killed this lady? Its clear she couldn’t help falling pregnant for everyone but the person she was in a relationship with.” “Haibo,

Ndoda

!” my hackles raise, I growl quietly, cocking an eyebrow. “You’re a goddamn poli ceman, are you hearing yourself right now? You’re excusing the behaviour of weaklings who can’t control their emotions and butcherwomen because they’ve been wronged. Who’s right is it to play God with the life of another? There’s no justifiable excuse to

take a life

—unless you’re offing bastards like Mxolisi, who ruthlessly murder women.” “You’re putting words in my mouth. That is

not what I—”“What did you mean?” I cut him, narrowing my gaze on his perfectly composed self.

“Nothing.” He rolls his shoulders and sinks his teeth on his lower lip. “I can tell that we’ll argue about this. You’re misunderstanding me. I am against violence of women but all I’m saying is—

forget it. Let me get my woman that drink, she must be dying of thirst.”“Pitso!” I call out, he’s almost completely disappeared off down the hallway. “Is Khensani safe with you?”“Don’t disrespect me, Sqalosenkosi. Not like that, please.” The expression he makes is one of an offended person. “I love my woman, and your child. They’re

my f

amily, I would never harm them.” His eyes move to the far left, where the

kids are

—soft as they land on Liyana. “Khensani is my queen. Liyana is my little princess.”

Liyana jerks her head at the mention of her name, and just as quickly she looks away.***

I never get the chance to wait out the full hour to invade Nqobizitha and Chris' personal space, because of the noise that captures everyone's attention barely ten minutes after my conversation with Pitso. It's coming from one of the houses outside; judging by the voices, it's easy to tell which one. Thatego rarely raises his voice when he speaks, the same goes for Sbanisezwe. Nqobizitha shouts when he's angry, so does Chris. "Keep them here!" I instruct Lindokuhle, referring to the children, as I rush out of the main house to investigate the noises outside. Something crashes from inside Chris and Nqobizitha's rondavel, followed by someone screaming words that are too muddled up for anyone to understand.

The door is still closed. They'll forgive me for breaking it down but that's what I do, because knocking is not an option.

"Nqobizitha?!" it's gone silent. "Bafo?"

I find him in the bedroom, half-naked in just his pants that are undone, sitting on a messy bed and rubbing his face aggressively. The room reeks of...really? It seems as if they resorted to fucking instead of talking things out. Are they a pair of goddam teenagers? Chris seems delirious, and I do my best not to focus

on his nakedness but my brother's essence is trickling down his goddamn

thigh, mixed with what looks like blood.

My eyes widen. "Nqobizitha!" I snap, dragging him up by his pants. "What the hell did you do to him?" "No. NO!" Nqobizitha roars in my face, he's just as delirious—pained. "I didn't

do anything to him. It's what he did to me! Ask him, tell him to tell you. He KNEW! FOR A FULL FUCKING EIGHT MONTHS, HE KNEW, AND HE NEVER SAID ANYTHING. I HAVE A WHOLE DAUGHTER I KNOW NOTHING ABOUT

AND THE TRAITOR I SHARE MY BED WITH KNEW!"

What?!

Shock smacks my cheek, as I shift my attention to Chris. He hasn't said

anything, too busy searching for something to wear, he drags the jeans up his

bruised thighs and winces. "He

w-

won't listen to me. I—

am leaving. I-

I can't do this." "You're not going anywhere!" Nqobizitha snaps, roughly detaching from my grip, to aggressively grip Chris' arm.

"Do you hear me? You're going to sit your

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ass down and tell me why you kept my daughter from me

—

you and your evil

sister! You betrayed me, Chris." "I did no such thing!" Chris tries to break free from the clearly iron

-tight hold.

"She was going to tell you. It wasn't my place to say—

do you honestly think it was easy for me as well?! I found the truth out by chance and I've had to struggle

—”“There you go again, playing victim, making everything about you—

like usual.

What's new, Christophe?” Emotion wells forth on Chris' features, thin chest heaving, as he again

attempts to escape Nqobi

zitha's grip. “This has to be about me as well, you

asshole! How am I supposed to feel, knowing you fathered a child with my

sister? You wouldn't be happy were roles reversed, and—

”“Why did you do it, Christophe?”

“LET ME GO!” Chris screams, he's next

to the dresser

—

and a picture frame falls with a loud crash to the ground. He steps on it, unintentionally, and screams

—tears streaming down his cheeks. “T
-This is what you do to me,
Nqobizitha? You’re choosing violence—”

“No, no.” Nqobizitha shakes his he

ad furiously, eyes red-

rimmed. “I didn’t do this. I didn’t throw anything at you. You did
that to me, just minutes ago. Now you’re stepping on glass. You
know exactly what you’re doing.” “Let him go, Bafo.” I pipe in.
Their house is a mess, too many thin

gs on the floor

—the broken vase, and now the picture frame. Who knows if
there’s more shattered glass hiding under the mess of clothes
on the floor? “This is not who you are. You’re better than this—

let him go. Clearly both of you are not in the right frame of mind
to talk about anything. Let him calm down and

—” “FINE!” A frustrated roar. Nqobizitha drops his hand, Chris
uses the opportunity to try and push him away but he must’ve
forgotten he’s a midget

trying to push the walls of Jericho. My youngest brother is
unfazed and glares

down at his husband. "Leave! Make sure you bring my daughter here when

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you come back, and that you tell her the truth. My sons are not going

anywhere with you." Doe eyes widen, Chris shakes his head frantically. "I am not leav

ing my

children with you! Not in the state you're in. They'll need me." "No." "I wasn't asking, Nqobizitha!"

"Neither was I. Those boys are mine, you didn't want them to begin with—

and I had to convince you to foster. Like usual, to get what I want, you must be

convinced. They're mine, they're Ngcobos. Argue with your dead sister if you don't like it." "NQOBIZITHA!" The look I give him doesn't faze him. He's too angry.

Chris has resorted to teary gasping, packing away his clothes as fast as he can.

“Five minutes, I want you gone.” With those final words, Nqobizitha grabs the

nearest clothing item and dons it

—

before walking out.

I want to follow him, but Chris needs me too. He’s walking on broken glass as if it’s nothing, and grabbing more of his clothes.

Is he planning to leave forever? “I’m sorry.” This seems like a good place to start, I have no idea what

to say to him.

A headshake. Quiet sniffing. I watch him attempt to close his suitcase. He’s put

in too much clothes in a mid-

sized suitcase. “I want a divorce.” “Chris...” I don’t think he means this, he’s allowing his emotions to cloud his

judgment.

“You don’t mean that.” “I do. I will file for divorce, watch. What about me, and how I feel? I found

those papers and I just had to accept that my husband made a child with my

sister. I couldn't even properly process everything because Zenny begged me

to keep it a secret

—until she deemed it fit to confess. Even then, I'd just have to accept it and get over it.”

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“How... how did you find out?”

He shrugs, pulling a few clothes out of the suitcase, before wiping away the tears that refuse to stop overflowing.

“I—don't know where she got Nqoba's

DNA from but she had it, and she—she conducted tests again for when something happened to her. She wanted to give the results to her lawyer.

Because she wanted Lisa with her rightful parent.”

I see... a frown creases

my forehead. Maybe she's always known that

Mxolisi would kill her then, or she suspected it. “That was good thinking.”

Chris snorts.

“Let me tend to your wounds.” I tell him. He gives me a confused expression. “Why would I want you to touch my anus, Sqalo?” a cough jumps to my throat as I sputter. WTF?! I made no mentions of

butt-

holes. “I’ll take care of it with a good soak. Your brother’s a sadistic

barbarian who used sex to

—it doesn’t matter.” “I’m talking about the wounds to your feet. You’re stepping on glass.” That’s when realization sets in on his face, facial expression morphing into one of extreme pain. He won’t allow me to tend to his wounds though, and begs me to fetch Lethulwazi and João instead. Deep down, he knew Nqobizitha

wouldn’t allow him to leave with the kids so he wants to say goodbye—

for the day. I nod my head, but Lindokuhle will have to come and help clean this mess

so that the children won’t see it.

Sbanisezwe is in the kitchen, Thatego is sitting on a stool at the island, along

with Lindokuhle, she quickly rushes to Nqobizitha's rondavel at my instruction. "Are you okay?" my eyes train on Thatego. He's makeup free now,

skin tinged with tired pink.

"Better." He says, and rests his cheek on his palm. "Your brother cuddled me to sleep." "And now I'm making him his favourite—avocado and olives pizza."

Sbanisezwe says, moving around the kitchen, clearly proud of himself. The

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song playing changes to a song about existing for love; and mentions

something about war between man and woman. "What's the time frame until we contact Khumbul' Ekhaya?" his flour

-

coated fingers press into Thatego's cheek, as he kisses the complaining man. "Hmm?" "What are you talking about?" "Christophe. He's leaving, right? They all do— but how long until we call the camera people to bring him home? He's not going to leave my brother just like that." Sbani seems so sure of himself.

Thatego sighs, leaning back into the giant behind him

—

who is resting his chin on thick curls.

"I don't know. First, I need to sit down with Nqobizitha." I tell him, just as

Lindokuhle comes back.

"Two policemen are outside," she murmurs.

Sbanisezwe and I look at each other.

"They're looking for you, Sbanisezwe." Her eyes are nervous. "Wh—at?!" A weak crack from Thatego. "Why?"

This has to be about Jabulani. I just know. And judging by the look on

Thatego's face, he's beginning to realize this too. He shakes his head, clinging

to Sbani, as they walk out. My head throbs on one side, signalling an oncoming headache. There's a conflict going on outside, the loud voice belongs to Thatego. Then another tiny voice calls out, it belongs to my daughter. "Baba..."

I whirl around quickly, half-distracted by the noises that seem to be coming from all around me. "Fuze...what's wrong?" "I—" There's a loud scuffle outside. Pitso seems to materialize out of nowhere. "What is going on in this household?" I'm not the only one who's realized how

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chaotic it is. "I'll help her. It's fine, you can check what the fuss is about at the door. I'm sure she just needs something to eat, hmm Liyana?" "Yes." Comes the small voice. I don't get the chance to thank him, rushing to the front door, to investigate.

Must Sbanisezwe make everything so goddamn difficult? Clearly these men don't want the coffee he's offering. They're here for business—

not to play his

silly games. He's amused, keeps repeating the word, "Please," like a silly child. "They want to take him to the police station." Thatego desperately regards me. "Let them." I say. Sometimes, Sba

nisezwe needs to have his fun. I have more pressing matters to attend to

—

Nqobizitha needs me more.

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Unrequited Desires : Eleven Temasiko

Bavaria House is heaven compared to the shabby building I lived in with Mancane, and three other people. There are showers here

—

four of them

—with endless running hot water, the toilets can be messy sometimes but I've learned that that's an individual thing, some people are naturally born to be

messy pigs. We have a large kitchen

—

and built-in stoves. The kitchen is almost always clean, and by the time I get back from work to cook, most

people have left to their individual rooms. Speaking of rooms, they're bigger

than the one I lived in previously

—

and I am living comfortably in the one I share with Nthabiseng. A week has passed now, and I have never been a fan of big change, preferring the comfortability of the familiar over the unknown risk

—

at least when I was

younger. I've been taking risks since I left Nelspruit for this place though,

without much of a choice. Heedi

ng to Mancane's advice, and applying for that

Call Centre Agent position was doing a good thing. Aside from the embarrassing fact that Nthabiseng has had to share her food with me, I think

I'm doing better than I ever did at Youssef's. My deceased mother f

inally came through for me

—

and turned into the most useful ancestor. July 23rd welcomes us with Friday and my first official payday

—

different

from all the paydays that came before. My money's flexing in MY bank account, for the bank workers to see and SBWL. An entire R2513.46! I've

never had so much money in my entire life and to have seen it reporting on my phone at midnight... the happiness I felt came close to the same one I had when my mother was still alive. I am rich

—

a bad, independent bitch who has

R2513.46 in her account to prove this. Poor doesn't exist in my vocabulary;

lary;

nope, I've changed the dictionary. "You're awfully cheery this morning." Nthabiseng notes, as she enters the

room, fluffy khaki towel wrapped around her body and a white shower-cap

covering her head. "What is it they say about anger revealing a person's true colours? The same thing applies to money,

right?" "Nthabi, come on." I don't mean to whine but I do.

Today, I'm wearing my

favourite underwear

—a Mr. Price gift from Lwandle, it's a seductive red

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shade. "I've showed you different shades of me from the beginning, but the

colour has always been the same. It won't suddenly be

different because of money."

She giggles, putting on her underwear beneath the towel

—
whether for my

comfort or hers, I'll never know, but it doesn't bother me. I
don't think

it should

—her body, her rules. My body, my rules. “Hey...” she seems to
have

something on her mind. I wait for her to continue, but she
grabs the Dawn

lotion. “It's like God knew He was giving you the wrong body so
to compensate,

He gave you a small dick,

hmm?”

WTF?!

My glare doesn't find her fast enough. Why is she even focused
on my private parts? “Nthabiseng!” I grit my teeth, offended,
not because of the length of this

thing trapped between my legs

—I don't care for it. It's the stupid questions

that trans people always get asked that pisses me off, personal questions that

any cisgender person wouldn't be comfortable with. "If I ask you about your

vagina, will it be fine? If I ask how small or big it is, or if its shaved, or if it farts or

—"I get the picture!" her squeaks interrupt me. "It was meant to be a compliment. I've been trying to read up on transgender people, to better

understand you, and having penises makes other women like you

uncomfortable. I'm just saying it must be a relief that yours isn't big to begin with." "You conveniently missed the part that tells you what to and not to say to us, huh?" honestly, I'm not even mad—

at least she tried to do research but taking

jabs at my private parts is not the way to go. "How big or small my

private

parts are won't take away my trans

-ness from me. What I have in between my

legs doesn't change how I feel and who I am. Even if my dick were bigger, I'd

still be a woman

—and having a penis is the least of my worries honestly, it's

not like I can ch

ange it.”“But you can!” her eyes light up. She puts on a pair of tight skinny jeans. “I told you I researched. There's surgery that you can get for down... there.”

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“I know about the surgery. I don't have the money for it—and it's something I'd have to

think hard about. Surgery is a big deal.” I would need a miracle to

afford gender reassignment surgery, and that is not something I have decided to stress myself with. My body has inconvenienced me most of my life, until I had to eventually accept

—
this is the body I was born in, these are the parts I was given,
not liking them will not grow me a vagina like I used to think as
a

child. It grew me boobs though, I didn't have to take any
hormones for it—they're all natural. Being chubby can be a
good thing. “

Thank you for trying to

research on this, but I'm—dwelling on my looks has always
depressed me. I'm just fine.” “Well, you must let me know if you
need more information. Public Health

institutions can even help you to transition

—
they can offer you psychological evaluation for free. Even the
pills you guys have to take to alter yourselves are free

—and I heard they shrink your dick, that's good, right? It'll be
nonexistent by then.” “Somandla! If I hear another jab about the
length of my penis. “Ngathi

uya

phapha.” “Even the surgery can be free—but it's considered
cosmetic surgery, and not really urgent so you can wait forever,

babes.” “This is why I didn’t want to know. Lift my hopes just to dash them again. Honestly, I’d have to think hard about surgery, Nthabiseng. I’ve read about the

pills and

—

let me just think about everything. These things have side-effects,

I’ll be fighting against what biology expects me to be—

and my body would

show me flames because of it.” “Kanti you don’t want to be a woman?” “I am a woman.” Its 06:48am, the right time to leave.

“I don’t need pills and

surgery to determine that

—although life will be easier. Maybe I won’t need to spend so much time on my makeup to hide the masculinity I’m not fond of.” “You barely look masculi

ne. Give yourself a break. God gives us different bodytypes

—

and sometimes women look more masculine than normal.

Just like

there are men with hips these days... like Pule.” She giggles to herself, pressing the ‘G’ button as we enter the empty lift. “God compensated with you, I’m

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telling you. He just forgot to give you pussy because Jesus had flu that day and He had to take care of his beloved son. Instructions to the factory workers in heaven were mixed up and they sent you here with a penis that stopped growing at age eight.”

In, out

—

breathe. One of these days, I will kill a bitch

. “Okay, borehole.” Let’s stoop to her level, shall we?

“That’s not what Paul said the other night.” Of course she’s not offended. “Should I let you in on what he really said or nah? Anyway, Bree or Plein?” she

asks about where to get taxis. Bree is always so packed

—

and the queue marshal always gives the nicer taxisto the ones with taxi cards. The rest of us, we gamble with our lives riding indelbitating metal that belongs in a scrap yard. But I am craving samosas fromBree, they go for R1 each and the Chilli flavour is my favourite. For them, I

guess I'll be gambling with my life—

and take the risk of dying without

spending the fortune in my bank account. “Bree.”

Her sm

ile drops, I don't even pity her, next time she mustn't ask. Since this job

at that fancy place, with all those slay-queens-in-the-making and the guys who

dress like they're auditioning for Mr. South Africa, I've had to step up mygame. Today, I'm wearing

a pair of my tightest black jeans with a long-sleevebrown polo-neck and have thrown on a black blazer on top of it. Its Friday so I have taken a break from the heels that make me walk like a baby giraffe andopted for Nike sneakers that I bought for R150 kwadunusa

—

the perks of knowing where to buy. Nthabiseng does my makeup lately, to improve her game, she watches from a YouTube channel that belongs to an influencer named Thatego. The man's an entrepreneur and just launched his own makeup line as well according to her, and he's done well to build his brand— and moved away from just being known as the guy engaged to a former renowned boxer. The irony in all this is that the fiancé is brothers with the guy that Nthabiseng and Rorisang are hoping to leech from. Talk about ambition! Moneyed guys don't even blink in the direction of ghettoized women— unless you're super pretty, like Rorisang. But she couldn't even get the man.

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At work, we get through Susan's regular morning meetings—

Kenny and I had the most sal

es for the week. To show appreciation, we're given R50
gift vouchers to spend at McDonald's, and me being a
shameless b

itch for food

readily accept the gift. Work is bearable when you remember
that you're not

there to make friends but to secure the bag. Haters can hate, as
long as they

don't bother me, I don't care. Not even these persistent gay
idiots who feel the

need to remind me that its people like me who make a joke out
of the

'community' and fuel the 'gay men act like women' narrative. I
don't have t

ime

to entertain such conversations, I'm always so busy collecting
clients to secure

the bag

—

and making Susie happy. Money makes her really happy, she even affords me a smile or four lately.

By 12:00pm, I've made two sales—

just thirty more minutes until lunch time.

The computer generates another lead for me, and the little bit of the client's

information pops up

—

name and number. A white woman. Kodwa Smakadze! With white people, they can either be very polite

—

get you that sale, or they could be the exact opposite and a nightmare! To say I hate calling them would be putting it mildly.

“What?” this is how the woman answers. “What, what?” I cock an eyebrow, though she can't see me, matching the snippy tone. “You need therapy, that's why I am calling.” “Who is this?” Good! Now I can give her my pitch, but she's making it impossible with the

annoying sighs and short-

tempered replies. “Ungatokhiphela kukhatsateka

kwakho kimi. Ngabe uvele washo kutsi emakhikhi agcwele umoya. Nxaa!

(Don't take your stress out your stress on me. You should've just said yourpockets are empty.)" She won't irritate me when I literally have money in my

bank account. Any other day but not this one. She tries to say something but I drop the bitch. It feels empowering when you hang up before they can.

By 15:00pm, we've knocked off. I've left the office with three sales, not bad considering we're not working our full hours.

Nthabiseng and I separate, she's

going to meet up with Rorisang

—and they're going to go home together. She

tells me about goi

ng out tomorrow, and begs me to come, I haven't been to

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clubs since forever but I do agree

—because we're going to the fancier places,

she says.

“Mancane,” I say when I’m inside the taxi, on the way back home, “you’re off

today, I know. Leave the baby wit

h Trisha or one of the baby daddies... I’m taking you out.” “Serious?” her Ndebele accent is always so thick. “You’re not messing with me.”

“No.” I giggle, resting my head against the window. We’re passing Victory Park

now. I should be home around 15:30

pm. “Do you need to dress nice for Carlton centre?” “You dress nice when you’re going out, it doesn’t matter the place.”

Not me having a smart friend. A smile stretches my lips, I find myself nodding

my head though she can’t see me. My minutes run out,

and to de-stress, I decide to listen to music. No, not kpop. I got introduced to maskandi when my dad and I returned to South Africa

—and though I don’t like it much, I do make

exceptions where Inkosi Yamagcokama is concerned because I love his music... and may or may not have a crush on him. It may have to do with those

traditional incisions on his face. 'Ukwenza Kuyashiyana' is on repeat on my

phone. I close my eyes

—

and allow the sexiest man to have walked South Africa to seduce me.*

"Mntwana!" Mancane

makes a marvelled expression, and gawks at me. "You've left us for just a week and this is how you look. You're so beautiful. Give me this coat."

Black people language

—

to tell you that they like something, they ask you to

give it to them. "Thank you, mamas." I give her smile, hugging her. "Where do you want to start?" "What's the budget?"

I shake my head. “Khululeka.” I wrap an arm around her as we manoeuvre our

way around Small street, through the plethora of fashion fanatics

—

headed for

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Carlton centre. “Namuhla, ngimi Indvuna yelitiko letemali. Tsatsa noma ngabe

yini oyifunako, imali aiys

iyo inkinga. (Today I’m the Minister of Finance. Take whatever you want, money’s not an issue.)” “Be careful.” She gives me a worried look. “Don’t let a few thousands blind you. Please use the money wisely.” “Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.” I roll my eyes.

In the end, we go to Spur

—

and buy meals that cost me less than four hundred

bucks. Then Mancane offers to accompany me in search of tomorrow's outfit.

Its 16:26pm, she should go home to her baby. I can manage by myself- and

that is code for I don't want to be ju

dged for living large. People always go on

and on about how cheap Small street is, but maybe they're blind because there's nothing cheap about a pair of jeans that cost R350. The next store lenter, the woman follows me like her prey. "Can I help you?" I don't like how

rude she sounds.

I return the pleated skirt to the rack and give her a fake smile.

"Sawubona,

unjani? Nami ngiyaphila. Ngifuna ukusitsenga sonkhe lesitolo lesi. (Hello, how

are you? I'm also fine. I want to buy this entire store.) Where's the manager?"

my cold glare hopefully conveys the message, I think it has because she leaves

me be. It's just the same, I don't have a size in stores like this.

This leaves me

with Mr. Price. I get a winter dress that stops just beneath my knees

—

they said it's body-hugging and I went with b

lack. I didn't want to risk looking like a

pumpkin with the velvety orange one.

Before I get home, I stop by Debonair's and reward myself with pizza for a day

well-spent. Spar is still open for alcohol, I buy myself the cheapest wine and a cheesecake

—

a rich b!tch has to live like one. It's loud when I enter my and

Nthabiseng's apartment—

some rap song playing. She and Rorisang are sitting

on Nthabiseng's bed, sharing Chicken Licken wings between the two of them. They're using her laptop. "Nentani?" I ask them, they're giggling about

something.

Rorisang lifts her eyes. "I found someone who can hook Nthabi with Sqalosenkosi. We're meeting again with this guy

tomorrow. He's an accountant that works for Sqalosenkosi's firm."

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"How did you do it?" I don't have

a bed yet, I'll buy a base from Youssef

tomorrow. The mattress is already there anyways. I remove my takkies and wiggle my toes.

"Social media. It's the only way since it doesn't look like Sqalo will be going on

any more dates with online matches. The account no longer exists."

I offer them glasses of wine, but the cake is mine, and glance at the laptop

screen. They're looking at pictures of a man who looks eerily similar to the

man I met a while back when waiting for Susan to induct us. Is it him? Has he grown his hair? That one had buzz cut hair

—

styled meticulously. This one has
a thicker hair, and he's wearing a grey shirt

-

that isn't hiding his beast of a

body-

and navy pants. It's obvious he's training, and looks so
deliciously

menacing while doing it that I find it hard to swallow.

"Imagine these arms around your throat," someone says. I
think it's

Nthabiseng, sounding just as parched

—good to know I'm not the only one affected. "You'd have to
make sure your insurance policies are in order."

That

makes me laugh, but I can't help but agree. "This is him?
Sgalosethu?" "His name is Sgalosenkosi." Rorisang corrects me
with a snort, I pray to every

deity out there to keep my thoughts pure but this picture is
tempting. This is a

man who'd break me in two and have me thank him for it. "And no, this is the

brother

—Sbanisezwe. Sqalosenkosi's pictures are few on the internet.

He's

not the famous one. But this helps because looking at

Sbanisezwe is like

looking at him."I should've paid more attention to t

he one that visited our offices that day.

Perhaps I'd been too excited about getting a job that I hadn't

properly appreciate God's finest creation—Eros, Cupid and

Adonis. They should've been named that, since there's three

photocopies walking around lookin

g like

THIS. "I wouldn't mind paying him to use me for his pleasure at

least once," I

mutter seriously.

"He's engaged, we watch videos of his partner all the time."

Nthabiseng is

judging, but she must loosen up and let me live out my fantasy.

I know about this partner

—
the light-skinned man with thick curls and an even thicker body with curves in all the right places. Nthabiseng was right about some men

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looking unbelievably feminine because that's what that man is—

and his beauty is as unrealistic as Rorisan

g's. "Then hook me up with the single one—

Sqalosethu." "Sqalosenkosi." Rorisang rolls her beady eyes and shuts her laptop. "He's Nthabiseng's—and off limits." I thought Nthabiseng had a man. He's from Cameroon and I've met him once, he's sweet. "Cha

maybe, nani ninesikhatsi sekudlala, kungenteka lomfokati

utsandza emadvodza." "We can't struggle with Zulu and then SiSwati as well." Rorisang says. "Maybe he's gay." Horror dims beady eyes, she shakes her head, refusing the possibility.

"How?" she shakes her head again. "Don't tell me... I mean that

would explain why he turned me down. Oh my god, he's gay—like the other two!" "Or bisexual." Nthabi squeezes Rorisang's shoulder. "Sbanisezwe isn't gay. He's been with numerous women. Let's move away from the mindset that every man who is into other men is gay. Maybe he's bisexual or pansexual. Maybe he has no labels and likes who he likes." "But he didn't like me. He's gay, I'm sure of it."

Egotistical much? Nthabi and I look at each other, snorting silently. In the end, she manages to convince her egotistic friend that maybe Sgalosethu is not gay. They make their plan, keep discussing it, while I decide to go to bed and rest enough for tomorrow.

I've never attended any club in Soweto before but I must say this place is lovely. There's an outdoor area to hang out, wide enough that no one is imposing on anyone else's personal space. People are smoking hubbly, and dancing on top of tables. It's so loud, the music makes my ears bleed. I'm not sure if Cassper's 'Siyathandana' qualifies to be called amapiano music but that's what's playing at the moment. I turn down advance
s of yet another club-

brat who thinks they stand a chance with me. A few thousands here and there

and men suddenly flock you as if you're selling free pussy.

Nthabiseng comes back with more alcohol, a man and his girlfriend, and her

loud drunk voice. "ISN'T THIS PLACE SO MUCH FUN?!" She just has to shout, as if my ears haven't suffered enough. "Mhmm." I nod my head. "Where's Rorisang?" "FETCHING ABONGILE!" Lord, I'm about to smack her mouth away from my ear. It's too loud and too hot. I don't need t

his inconvenience. I grab another Smirnoff and down it, making small talk with the lady at our table. Rorisang shows up seconds later, clinging to a tall man with a beard and well-

built frame. He's handsome. My eyes lock with the man's and I feel my cheeks

grow hot, as my heart skips two

beats. Damn! He really is gorgeous. "I'm baaaack!" Rorisang is just as loud. "Tema, this is Abosh! Baby meet my good friend Tema." Oh... I didn't know I'd been promoted to 'good friend' stage. We shake hands

with the guy, Abongile, his touch lingers

—
and he strokes the back of my hand.

Something warm twists my belly. “Nice to meet you,” I say. “You’re gorgeous.” LOL! He’s random. “Thank you.”

Nthabiseng mentions two girls that were making out in the bathroom.

Apparently one of the girl’s boyfriend has come to see her infidelity for

himself

—
and to embarrass her. Rorisang giggles loudly. Abongile keepstalking to me. He works for L&L Accounting,

it’s an Accounting practice owned by Sqalosenkosi Ngcobo. He’s one of the chief accountants and enjoys his job very much, the pay is really good and there’s room for growth because they’re branching out to other areas within South Africa. He’s thirty

-seven years old and unmarried with two children. Eventually he leaves for the dancefloor

—joined by Rorisang. They make a lovely sight together. It’s just weird how they

keep their eyes on me the entire time.

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I shake my head, creeped out, and down my remaining Smirnoff. Rorisang

comes back, and plops herself on my lap with a heavy squishyness. “Abongile

wants to spend the night with you. 3k for just a few hours of fun

—and he’ll help introduce Nthabi to Sqalo.”

What the hell?!

“No!” is she out of her mind, sh

e wants me to prostitute myself to help them?!

“Please...” she juts her bottom lip out. “Name your price—

a new phone

maybe?” There’s nothing wrong with my phone...

“I have a boyfriend.” He hasn’t called in days, last I heard from him, he was

going to

the Eastern Cape with the friend that’s getting married soon. “Oh please...” an eye roll, she flaps her lashes. “He’s probably fucking somerandom bitch. I’m telling you about a man who’s asking to spend a few hours with you, who’ll sponsor you—

this is o

ur chance for the big leagues.” I didn’t know that it was no longer ‘them’ but ‘us’ now. “Come on, Tema. People aren’t usually this lucky. R3000, THREE! Get your bag, girlie. Forget about boyfriends and all that, like Nthabi, and make money.” “Why doesn’t he want you?” we have to be realistic here, she’s the pretty

one...not me.

“He likes women like you.” Women like me... oh great, another fetishist! “NO!” the mere thought makes

me angry now. Anger flashes in her eyes but she nods her

head. “Fine!” I’m not sure who she’s raising her voice at, but it can’t be me. “Another drink?” a can of Smirnoff is

shoved into my face.

“Bathroom first.”

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“I’ll watch over the alcohol.” She replaces me, and occupies my chair, as I

barely acknowledge her

—

headed for the toilets.

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Unrequited Desires : Twelve Temasiko
My head hurts. It hurts real bad

—

and were it not for the comfortable

squishyness beneath me, I’d think I were back in Yeoville again,
bleeding from

the impact of a beer bottle at the back of my head. The pain is pretty similar, I have to clench my eyes tightly to push back the bad memories, and count

—

four, three, two, one...open. Uneasiness settles in the pit of my stomach. Where am I? The TV hanging on the wall captures my attention first, clearly expensive

—

like the rest of this room. It's larger than the one I share with Nthabiseng, with

grey walls, a long brown couch in one corner... and there's a door that probably leads to a bathroom. That's what I think. I attempt to recall the

previ

ous night's activities and I am mostly blank, but I was with Nthabiseng

and Rorisang, we went to a club in Soweto together. It was fun, and though I usually shy away from such places- to avoid past traumas- I had still gone. What happened? Where are the others?

"YOU'RE FINALLY AWAKE!" the door opens, and brings in a loud voice. Its

Rorisang. I remember she was just as loud yesterday. I quickly give her a once-over

—bare face, golden brown locs hang loosely on her shoulders, she's

wearing an oversized grey s

hirt and matching shorts. "I'll order breakfast. You need something spicy to cure the hangover." "Where am I?" I rub my temples, whimpering in agony. "What happened last night?" "LAST NIGHT?!" She can't be deaf to how loud she's being right now. My sku

ll

is being cracked open, I can't even bring myself to express my discomfort,

feeling too weak

—sluggish. Her giggles peak my curiosity, I wonder what's so funny. "Don't worry about that now...I prefer to show you so you don't say I

am lying. How are you fe

eling, any discomfort?" "Is she really blind to the purgatory I am trapped in? Of course, I'm not fine! My

fucking skull is being drilled into, and the rest of my body is just as worse

—

prickly sensations are spreading to the entirety of my bones, an uncomfortable heat in my rear. My eyes bulge, and I swallow broken glass.

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“What happened, Rorisang? Please tell me.” it feels like I had sex. I want to

vomit. Please no. No, no, no.

“Stay put, I’ll come back. By the way, this is my flat... I live with my girls.” She’s gone. Just like that she leaves! Irritation pricks at my skin, I pull the

covers back to get a look at my body

—my underwear is still on. But I don’t have my dress on. My bra is gone. It’s only my underwear that I have on. I don’t know who undre

ssed me or why but I am uneasy. You can tell when

you’ve had sex and it feels like it. I don’t remember consenting to anything.

Was it with that man...Abongile?

The door opens, Rorisang is back. She's carrying her phone this time. Where is

Nthabiseng? I

don't understand what's going on. "Nthabi left with some guy. You don't remember?" I've mused aloud, it's clear because she's responding to my question. "Both of you. Three of us actually. I've sent our men packing though, so it's just you, me and the girls." "Okay..." "So—" she rubs her hands together, giggling to herself happily. "babes, when I

tell you that you were on FIRE last night! All that talk about nywe nywe nywe I have a boyfriend kanti you know you were playing hard to get. Abongile and you were the highlight

of last night, you've got moves for days. For a fat girl, I have to give it to you and say I'm impressed. Dang, girl!"

What?! Confusion knits my brows, tension coiling in my belly, and I wrap the duvet tight around my belly. Suddenly I feel so naked.

"I didn't change my mind. I wasn't interested in that guy... it makes zero sense for me to change my mind out of the blue. I do have a boyfriend, I'm not a cheater." "Oh, girlie!" she pinches my left cheek, I don't swat her hand away fast

enough. "Alcohol reveals everyone's true colours. I am telling you that you were begging for Abongile's dick before he could even bring you here. See for yourself."

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I snatch the phone from her as soon as I hear the loud music, accompanied by too many voices. The camera blurs a bit before it focuses

—

locked on me and a few others around me. This Abongile guy has his hands on my waist, clearly

gripping me tightly, and grinding on me. I don't like how inebriated I look. I don't like how he raises my dress and touches my body. I don't like how

someone makes a comment about how soft and cellulite-y my body is in the

background. The same way I don't like how another takes jabs at my

unattractive build

—

about my legs knocking together, and the love handles. Usually, these are things that affect me, that I hate people commenting on, but

on this video I haven't a care in the world—

too out of it. I am very much sober now and it hurts more than the migraine threatening me with death.

Rorisang's clear and loud giggles in the background

are the final nail to the coffin. I throw the phone back at her, it smacks her thigh roughly and she moans in

pain but I don't care. "Why would you show me this?" Lord help me, I'm trying

so hard to keep my composure.

"Why not?" the airhead has the audacity to grin. "It was fun last night. All of us

had fun. By the way, I have your money with me. Abongile said to thank you for

—"SHUT UP!" I push her, dragging the duvet and collapse on the bed again,

covering myself. I can feel my heart rate pick up.

I don't think I am strong

enough to fight the panic welling up my throat, my hands are getting clammy and my body has turned cold. I am clothed in disgust and repulsed by my own

body that I ache to remove my inner being from it. "S
okay...you—it wasn't on

purpose. You didn't... I

-

I didn't want it. Hey...hey its...okay, it's okay."The silence is too loud. I wish Rorisang would say something, I know she's still here, the door hasn't opened or closed. Now would be the perfect time for her

to open her big m

outh or if she can't do that then she can just leave. She won't though. She won't and I'm tired of holding it in, if this is what she wants to see then fine. It's all fine. I curl in on myself, gripping the sheets for anchor,

making sure my fists covers my eyes, gasping harshly for air, uncontrolled and desperate. Tears seep through the fractured gaps of my eyelids. My

composure breaks and sobs rack my body. I can't stop crying. "Tema?" now she speaks.

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I can't bring myself to respond. I'm so mad at her, so very angry. How could she allow this to happen? To the extent that she even records it? Was I not worthy of being cared after? Clearly not. Clearly she waited for me to show the slightest weakness so that she could use it to her advantage. Where was not

has been in all this? Why didn't she take me home? "You're a bad friend." I sniffle. I don't care whether or not she can hear me. She humiliated me, in

front of everyone. I was called a friend but what sort of friendship is this?

"Me?!" I feel her plop down

on the bed. She tries to pull the covers back, I

tighten my grip. "Haibo, sis. What did I do? You told me you wanted nothing to

do with Abosh but changed your mind a few drinks later. I tried to pull you

away but you were too busy grinding on that man's

dick like your life

depended on it. Later, you came here and fucked. YOU! How is it my fault?" I don't remember any of these things. I don't think I want to. "Then we're friends when it suits you. I don't know about you but I look out for the ones I

care about

—

to the point that I prevent them from humiliating themselves and making silly mistakes. You knew I wanted nothing to do with that man

—

and

logic should've told you that I hadn't changed my mind...no matter how drunk I was." "So basically you're telling me to babysit a grown woman at a groove? I should forget about having my own fun and guard you the entire time. If you can't handle your alcohol consumption then stay away from it. It's that easy."

I do know how to handle my alcohol. I never drink more than I should. Throwing the covers off my body, I swipe at the tears on my face and attempt

to carefully scrutinize Rorisang. “Did you spike my drink then?
You were

desperate

—”“Don’t insult me wena!” she snaps, looking more than
offended. “Where did I

get the drugs to spike your drink? Accept that alcohol turns you
into a Jezebel

and stop trying to pin your fuckups on someone else. I don’t
even get what the problem is. You had sex, just sex! Your
boyfriend doesn’t have to know. I’ll bring you your 4k... he even
upped it by a thousand bucks. Abongile said you were on fire.
Hotplate was on six.”

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Her words make me feel worse

—

dejected. Tears well in my eyes again, I cry silently. No matter
how she tries to spin this, the fact remains that she was a

bad friend. I was naïve to believe that she'd look out for me, the same way that I'd do for her—doesn't matter how long we've known each other. Nothing

about last night was fun. I feel violated. This is no different from that idiot who pumped

me with drugs and sold me to his friends. It's no different. I didn't

want this. How could she not see that last night?

“For you to record it as well... you must really hate me.” “Ai, I don't know what you're talking about. I'll delete it, there!” I am not consoled. Home, that's where I want to go. I want to get home and

wash that man off my body

—though it feels like he's tarnished my very essence. I want to go home and sleep. That's all I can do. I've learned that

individuals like myself can never report rape

—

the ridicule I was subjected to all those years ago proved how pointless it is. We have to take it and keep it moving

—

scars and all. Another one added to my soul, it suffocates me
and

vows to end me. I can't allow it. I won't. Next time.

Rig

ht now, I want to be weak and cry. My soul is aching and I don't
have it in

me to soothe it better. I am too
weak. _____

_SgalosenkosiHome is different without Christophe around

—too quiet and melancholy. He's

the ever lively one

—radiant and positively bright. He's built beside

Nqobizitha, debunking the myth that only women make a
house a home

—through his stubbornness and strength. Home isn't the same
because in his

own way, he is home for everyone in this family. Even
Sibusisiwe gets along

with him. I've watched her aiming deathly glares at Nqobizitha
for the pastthree days... that's how long time has passed since
he chased Christophe out of

his own home, sending him back to his family without hesitation or regret. The sun has barely risen when I step out of the house, carrying a sleepy Liyana

in my arms, headed to the main house. “Thatego kaSbanisezwe.” He’s at the

rondavel that belongs to him and Sbanisezwe

—

still in light blue pyjamas and

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a messy crown of curls on his angled face. Red-rimmed eyes connect with mine, he yawns and drops the messy ball of newspaper he was carrying.

“What are you doing up so early?” he prefers to sleep in. It’s only 05:02am

now. With the mess around him, and the sparkling windows, he seems to have

been up for quite some time. “Just when did you wake up?” “Sqalo, hi!” the smile he gives me is blinding. “I, um, we woke up at 04:30. I’m just cleaning. Your house is...Sbani said I shouldn’t—

clean your house, I mean.

Mam' Busi asked me to. I have to work for this." He wiggles his right hand,

revealing the engagement ring.

"That's rubbish!" I snort. We have helpers for a reason. "If you want to clean

your house, I understand

—

privacy and all. But to go around doing labour

because you'r

e engaged to my brother is nonsense. What did Sbanisezwe say?"

"I don't mind." Thatego shakes his head. "I can't stand messy places anyway. And don't forget that its... its not like my family isn't extorting from yourfamily. Sbanisezwe will be paying lots of money for me."

I have a feeling that the extortion thing was Sibusisiwe's saying. Between her

insisting that Thatego be treated like any woman marrying into a traditional Zulu family- his gender aside- and his own family enforcing a similar ideology by insisting that Sbanisezwe pay lobola because Thatego is too feminine, the

rest of us are going to lose our minds. "Call Lindokuhle. Ask her to take over...this is not your job. You're not paid for this. You're family."

"No. I don't want to cause problems, a newbie like myself. I really, really don't

mind. Cleaning is not a gender-

assigned role. Mam' Busi thinks she's doing

something smart by assigning me duties that should be taught to everyone

—regardless of gender. I do this all the time in Joburg. Its not hard labour." "And you're sure?" I ask him. "Yeah. Its better than having to cook. I'm not the best cook, this is why Sbanisezwe's helping her in the kitchen now. I just need to finish this quickly so that I can eat."

“Don’t bother making a stop at my room.” I tell him and walk away at his

acknowledgment. The house is warm compared to the mild chill found

outside. It’s also loud, music coming from the direction of the kitchen, and hushed voices. “Sanibonani.” Khensani is in the kitchen with them, her eyes

brighten when she spots our daughter. I kiss her ch

ek. “How are you?” “Sleepy.” She mutters and outstretches her arms for our daughter but Liyanawhimpers and curls into me. “I swear she hates me these days. Do you see it? She doesn’t want her own mother.” “Later.” I dismiss her. She can’t say things

like that in the presence of our

daughter. “Where is Pitso? You guys are leaving today.” Liyana and I will

follow them back to Joburg a few days later, just before schools can reopen.

“I’m here, my man.” He materializes from thin air. A lazy smile. He re

moves his

hands from his pockets and extends his right one in greeting.
“Lili waka. Howdid you sleep?” “Fine,” comes the soft reply.
“Baba, I—want to watch a movie with Bab’ Sbani.” “I thought
you were hungry.” “No.” She gives me a tiny headshake.

A sigh leaves my lips. On the counter near the sink, Sbanisezwe
works onchopping some onions

—

too many of them

—

and blinks rapidly, water

streaming down his inflamed cheeks. I wonder if Nqobizitha
didn’t sleep

home, its happened for two days in a row now.

“Later.” I tell Pitso andKhensani. “Ndoda.” My shoulders bump
with Sbanisezwe’s. “My daughterwants to spend time with
you.”

He dabs at his wet eyes with his elbow, and then places
the knife on the

chopping board. “Take over,” is the instruction I am given once
he’s washedhis hands and taken Liyana from me. “Nqobizitha

will come through later...he's nursing a bad hangover. Call me when breakfast is ready—

or call me

when your friend tries to make contact with Thateho. Make sure that doesn't happen. It's

too early into the year for me to start collecting lives for Christmas.”

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“Pitso is with Khensani, ndoda. I'm sure Thatego is the last person he thinks about.” “I don't care.” Sbanisezwe rolls his eyes. He walks away, while I resume his

task of chopping onions. Sibusisiwe is making porridge and frying bacon. Lindokuhle is busy with the toaster. Khensani is asleep at the table. Pitso and I lock eyes, he smiles and shakes his head, rushing to help Sibusisiwe with the tomatoes. The sight of family warms my heart

—

albeit the bittersweet feeling

of it all. It's not complete without Nqobizitha and Christophe. My brother

should be in here

—

singing along loudly to Ntencane

—

and towering over

Chris' small frame, with the other cooking like he usually does—

and huffing playful annoyed breaths because Nqobizitha can barely keep his hands to

himself where Christophe is concerned. It shouldn't be quiet like this, with

only Sibusisiwe shouting different instructions. They need to talk

—and I've tried being patient with Nqobizitha but maybe he's not prepared to take the first step. The same way that Chris seems

reluctant to. Ego and pride kills the beauty of so many relationships

. I've had enough of their pettiness. They need to iron things out. There's children involved in this matter. There's an entire

teenager who horribly discovered that her father is her uncle's husband and I'm not sure if they've

communicated with her. Has Nqobizitha reached out? Is he still hoping that Chris will do all the talking and magically build him a relationship with his daughter?

By 11:00am, Nqobizitha shows face. He's wearing his eye glasses, holding

Lethulwazi in his arms. The little boy wiggles and manages to break free, he

rushes off to the other children. "I don't even feel sorry for you." I tell

Nqobizitha, handing him a cup of coffee.

The cold gaze aimed at me isn't enough to freeze or intimidate me. He sits on

the coffee table and takes a sip, groaning pitifully

—as if in pain. "As long as you don't lecture me, we're good." He's out of his mind. "Do we solve our problems by running off to shebeens now?" I question him with a snort, folding my arms. "Don't you have better

ways to deal with your problems? All those years training as a psychologist

and you couldn't rely on one technique to help you through this."

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"Isangoma asizelaphi." A snort. "Alcohol helps me think." "And what did you think?"

A shrug, clearly he has nothing to say. He downs his coffee again

—

silently.

"Listen, I've tried giving you space kodwa kucacile ukuthi you're not willing to

sit down with Chris and talk like adults about this issue. If it were fucking, we

both know that you'd have him trapped in your room—

banging the shit out of

him kodwa when its time to talk...lutho.”“What’s there to talk about? He betrayed me—

and chose to stand with his

sister over me. For months, he’s looked me in the eyes, watched me talk about

having girl children through our surrogate, knowing very well that I had one

out there. He’s let her visit our house, has felt nothing—

no guilt or anything

—as he watched me interact with her. So tell me what’s there to talk about?”“Lots of things,” I say, “you need to tell him this. You need to g

et his side of the story. Maybe he has valid reasons for not telling you. You need to apologize for your sexual violence

—

he was bleeding, Nqobizitha. You need to apologize for your words

—

stooping low enough to mention his dead sister, just hours after her burial, knowing what she meant to him- and how her death affected him,

knowing how she died... there's no justifying how badly you treated him that day." "Chris. Chris. Chris. What about me, Bafo?" he glares. "What about what I am going through? I don't know what to do, where to go from here, how to initiate a relationship with Lisakhanya. How do I explain things to her? She's now a teenager, you know how problematic those years are. Had Chris not kept this from me, I would've reached out sooner— while Zenande was still alive. All three of us would've sat her down and explained. What happens now?" "You do that without Zenande," I tell him firmly. The doubt in his eyes is disappointing. "This is why it's important for you and Chris to be civil with each other —and show a united front. She can't sense any hostility from either of you. This is why you and Christophe need to have a sit-down and talk. Put aside your anger for a while and put Lisakhanya first. This is a difficult time for her... she's lost her mother. She needs her father."

Nqobizitha sighs, and scrubs his face frantically. I place my hand on his shoulder to give him silent support. The sound of the front door closing can be heard from here, followed by footsteps. Sbanisezwe appears first, holding hands with Thatego. Behind them is Christophe

—

looking as horrible as his

husband. He is limping, it's clear he hasn't recovered, and wears a Brentwood

jersey I know belongs to Nqobizitha. I observe him as he keeps his distance, standing near the doorway

—

arms wrapped around his thin waist, he appears tinier than ever. He only dares a glance at Nqobizitha when my brother turns the other way.

"Um..." Thatego breaks the tense silence. "I'm not family, family yet...right? I should leave. I'll check on—" "Stay." I instruct him. "You may

as well, you've been family for years now. How are you, Christophe?" this is a stupid question. He's not okay, that's easy to tell. "I miss my children." His voice wobbles and he shoots daggers at Nqobizitha. "Phone calls are not enough. I want to touch

them and kiss them and bathe them and cook for them. I want to drive them around and read them bedtime

stories at night. I want to do what their Baba hasn't been doing for almost two months now... because he's always so busy." "This is nothing new." Nqobizitha snorts, addressing everyone. "This is what he always does." "Because he's always dismissing me!" Christophe throws his hands up in frustration. "I can't express how I feel without being told that I'm making everything about me. If I tell him I miss

him then I'm not supporting his dreams. If I ask us to wait on something then I'm being selfish—" "Explain why you kept my daughter from me. Do it, without making it about yourself

—

because all I can see is selfishness coming from you and your sister.

It's

a common trait within your family, isn't?" "Nqobizitha..." I cast him a glance. "be kind. Don't use your words to hurt him, you won't be able to take them back. This is your husband. He's been your family for over a decade now, don't treat him like this."

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"He may be my family but he's proved I'm not his. He chose his sister over me.

Lord knows what my daughter thinks of me

—

probably that I never loved her. She watched me love her brothers while she got...what did she get from Zenande? An abusive stepfather who traumatized not only her brothers but

her as well. How you expect me to be kind in light of this is beyond me, Bafo." "Chris," I turn my attention to him.

Nqobizitha is a stubborn goat at the moment. "I know keeping this a secret wasn't easy for

you. Why for so many
months?”

“I was waiting for—Zenny.” His voice cracks. He tugs on the sleeves of his jersey. “I was waiting. She told me to wait. I wasn’t thinking—

and I was still

processing so I didn’t rush her. She told me to wait. She... she told me.” “So you admit to pledging loyalty to her over me—

your husband. Me, the father of her child. You were willing to keep my child from me to keep your

sister happy. When it would’ve been so much better to tell me so that we

could figure things out together

—

as partners, a family. You were willing to

gamble with our marriage?” “I wasn’t thinking straight when I saw the papers, Nqoba. I was—

it feels

wrong that you have a child with my sister. I know it's not fair to think that

way because I knew from the beginning, both of you had your fun... but to have something that actually ties you to her... I was trying to process

everything." Nqobizitha's jaw clenches, he says nothing. "If you... we're not happy lately, are we? I'm not happy. You're not home—

and

we're... I thought long and hard about this. M

-Maybe I should just give you

space. This way I'm not making you angry and—" "Fine. You'll move out?" Chris' eyes widen, he swal

lows a ball of saliva

—

an ache pinching his features.

"Maybe you can... please do it. You're barely home as it is." "Just remember that you're not divorcing." Sbanisezwe speaks up for the first time. I didn't think he was listening, with the way his face

had been buried in

Thatego's neck for a long time—the smaller male sat atop his lap. “When my brother asked for your hand in marriage, he wasn't asking for you to divorce

him ten years later. Anyway, all three of us have to give our consent

—

even if he says

yes and I say no then you can't do it. You're married to me and Squalosenkosi as well.” I'm not sure about that. But I'm not in the mood to argue, not with someone

who talked his way out of his arrest just days ago. Chris licks his lips and gets teary-

eyed. “May I see my children...please?” he's

looking at Nqobizitha.

“When can I see my daughter?” Nqobizitha asks his own question. “I believe any time. I'm not sure... I'm staying at a BnB—not home.” “Must be nice—udala iinkinga bese uyabaleka.” But

Nqobizitha's already on
his feet, and Chris follows suit

—

they gravitate toward each other.

Maybe taking the time to separately calm down is for the best.
It's better than

being miserable together

—

and surrounding their children with the negative energy.

For now, it's best to keep out of it, and to focus on my own
issues.

Khensani and I had a talk hours earlier, my daughter will live
with me

—

for

now. At least I won't forget to fetch her from school. And it's
not like I'll be

raising her with no help. Sibus

isiwe didn't give me a choice but to take Sphehile with me to
Johannesburg, this is what I've decided to do. From their

few interactions, my daughter seems comfortable around her. Two hours go by and Chris is still trapped upstairs with the children and Nqobizitha. Khensani and Pitso are leaving. I lead them outdoors, to their car,

with Liyana clinging to my leg. She won't hug her mother—
and it upsets

Khensani but we've talked about this. It's not her fault that she's depressed but

that has caused a disconnect between her and Liyana. It will take time and

patience to rebuild what was crumbling. "It's a pity that you came here under all these unfortunate circumstances," I tell them. "But we were together—as a family." Pitso tucks his hands inside his pocket

etc.

He peers over my shoulder, I don't need to look behind me to know Thatego is

doing Lindokuhle's nails. We passed them on our way out. "I'll miss my daughter. Don't keep her from us." "Never." The agreement was that they'd spend the weekends with her—like I

used to. "You've been good to her—a remarkable father."

A few more polite words and then I offer some parting ones. Sbanisezwe appears from nowhere. Before this, I heard him asking Thatego to go inside the house. He has a smile on his face as he hugs Khensani, and then

shakes Pitso's hand. "My brother," his voice is too saccharine to be genuine, "what goes down and never comes back up again?"

Pitso seems just as lost as me. His response is a chuckle.

"Drive safe," Sbanisezwe continues smoothly, "arrive alive." "What was that about?" Khensani giggles. "He's still so random."

I look between her and Pitso, then over my shoulder to my brother who

disappears inside the rondavel like Thatego. "Random indeed."

Unrequited Desires : Thirteen Temasiko

"Hey, I'm back." "Tema—what the heck?!" Nthabiseng hurriedly comes at me, I take two back

-steps. Did she find out about the laxatives? “It looks like you’ve gone and spent your entire salary. Really?” Oh... so it’s not about her troublesome stomach? I shake my head, disposing of the many shopping bags on my newly acquired bed, and remove my sandals, letting out a tired breath from today’s daunting activities. It’s been a day and a half. “Chill. I didn’t do that.” I mean I don’t think I did, but it’s not like I’ve checked my bank balance as well —there’s enough in there to last me an eternity. “Mr. Price had a winter sale and I couldn’t resist. Take a look at some of the cute things I bought!”

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A doubtful look paints sharp, thin features. She wipes her hands on the navy dress she’s wearing, and then grabs one of the plastic bags. I flash a satisfied

smile when she retrieves a pair of colour-blocking joggers that will go

beautifully with my Nike sneakers. But Nthabiseng doesn't share the same excitement, not with her upside down smile.

"Did you check the sizes before buying this? I don't think size 32 will fit you, Temasiko. You're a size 40." So what? I've decided to go on a diet. Judging from the random glances I cast myself on the mirror, the diet is going pretty well. It's only been two days but I'm positive—as long as I continue monitoring my food intake. "I'm losing

weight

," I say, grabbing my leopard

-

print sunglasses to cover my eyes, "this is

why I bought the outfits. Fat will be a thing of the past, bay-

beh." The worrisome expression is discouraging, I was hoping that she'd be happy

for me

—but she's just as bad as Rorisang. It should've been obvious from the

way that she left without me that night, sleeping in the comfort of our room while I was being shagged by some accountant fucker whose money I tore into pieces

—

right in front of that stupid bi

tch Rorisang. “Tema—” h

er pause seems

calculated, with the way she scrutinizes me. “I am so worried about you.” “Some random guy fucked me raw because you left me. I’m lucky I didn’t get any nasty diseases. You’re not worried about me.”

Nthabiseng exhales softly, collapsing on the bed beside me without

permission, and intertwines our hands. “Is this why you’re doing this? You’re reacting out?” her gaze flickers to my plastic bags. If she dare think that I’ve bought her something then she has another thing coming. “This. All thi

s.

You’ve missed work this whole week, I didn’t know what to say to Susan. You’ve only returned home yesterday—and even then, you wouldn’t say where you were. What’s going

on?"What's going on is I needed a break to focus on myself. To feel alive again. I've

done exactly that and the week has been exceptionally good. I broke into

Lwandle's flat and that's where I was staying. When I left Rorisang's flat inMidrand, I couldn't bar

e to come back here so I went to Hillbrow. Myboyfriend may be a little surprised to find all of his food gone when he comesback from the Eastern Cape...but to atone for my bad behaviour, I left his

house perfectly spotless. He'll have to at least show gratitude for that, I wasn't

a complete pig.

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"Nothing happened. I went to my boyfriend's flat."Her response is a disbelieving face, one of complete surprise. "What did hehold you against your will there that you couldn't return home and missed

work for

five straight days?” “He wasn’t home. I was all alone.” “Doing what?”

My eyes roll to the back of my head. I am so over this interrogation! All I want to do is eat and polish the idea I have on generating more sales. They will

make up for what I’ve

missed this week

—and Susie will smile as if I hadn’t even missed work.

Nthabiseng forgets I’m one of the best sales agents at

work

—better than her, and more of an asset than she will ever be.

“It’s none of your business.” I get up, walking to the fridge to

grab my leftover bottle of wine. I bought hake at Pick n Pay. I

bought a lot of food. Food makes me happy.

Yes I’m dieting but today’s my cheat day. “I’ve known you to be

impulsive but not to this extent. Not to the extent that you’ve

gambled with your job.” “I didn’t gamble with anything.” If she’s

planning to ruin my good mood then she better try again.

Nothing can keep me down, not today. I’ve had the

most beautiful day. Even toenails of Satan sent to mess with

what I feel inside shan’t prosper. “If

you have nothing positive to say then rather shut your trap and

—

I

did the research on gender reassignment surgery. I think I want to do it.”

“Oh...kay. Talk about random changes. How far did you get?”“Not far. I have to find clinics here that deal wit

h things like that. Would you

mind listening to some of my pitches for clients? I’ve been polishing the way I approach them and I think this way I’ve come up with may even score me Susie’s managerial position.”“Whoa there...” her lips stretch into a beautiful grin. “Aren’t we aiming a little too high?”

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No. Noppity. Nope. “Hell no!” I giggle, taking a sip of my wine. “I am very much capable of being a manager at that place. I have so many ideas that they’d

literally fire Susie in 0.3 seconds. Its not a bad thing to believe in yourself... its especially important because no one else will. Not your father. Not your

auntie. Not the police. So... believe in yourself!” “Who hurt you?” “You. Rorisang. Everyone!” I shake my head. Why is she so damn serious?

I ask

her to help me with my ideas and she turns grim. “But live a little, will you?” “If you say so.” She snatches my glass from me—

and takes a sip of my wine. I

should’ve added the laxatives to the wine as well, clearly she recovered quickly from that first dosage. Revenge isn’t as sweet with this pretty beamshe’s giving me. The traitor!

“Temasiko!” she walks around me, heels making an annoying click sound, voice nauseatingly sweet, and occupies the chair across from me. “We meet

again, Sesi

.”Well duh! Wasn’t she the one who called me in earlier to give me a written

warning for the d

ays missed at work? I think it’s possible that I’ll be missing more because I’m kinda a little broke. I really don’t know what happened but my fortune in the bank isn’t a fortune anymore—magic made it disappear as heart-shockingly as it had appeared about

a week ago. If Lwandle doesn’t come back come Thursday then I don’t have any plans. The bastard is not taking my calls, I hate him for it.

“Hmm.” I give Susan a semblance of a smile—fake. Honestly, I’m not in the mood. I’ve been irritated since last night

and I will blame it on the insomnia

I’ve had for the past three days. “Do you need something? If not, I want to return to my job.” “That’s why I called you

actually.” She puts on her glasses and judges me dubiously. “How are you, Tema? I am asking because

you’re not the powerful upstart I know.” There’s a tone of mockery in the way she calls me girlie, I pretend not to hear it. “What’s wrong?”

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I press my hands into the handle of the chair and sigh. “Ingabe unayo yini vele

indzaba yekutsi angibukeki ngikahle noma loku ukwentiswa kukhonalotokuzuza? (Are you asking because you care or are you looking to benefit

something?)” “You’re one of the best we have here. I have to ask and offer you support when it looks like something’s wrong. You’ve not made one sale today and it’s almost lunch time... very unlike you.” “I can’t make a sale because I keep thinking

about that warning letter I got.”This is me trying my luck. I’m one of her best, aren’t I? Then why am I receiving warnings for a situation that couldn’t be helped... that won’t even happen again.

“Tough luck there.” She is still a thorn poking into my flat, jiggly behind. I

move a leg, and wince as my thighs rub together. Damn, the friction hurts like a bitch! Stupid me wore a long, pleated skirt but forgot to wear tights and now it’s uncomfortable

—but far better than summer. That’s when I die the most—between the sweat dripping in between my thighs from summer heat and

every clothing item being too hot to comfortably wear. “Are you okay? I can

organize a counselling session with Raveena and

—”“No thank you.” That one has an HR degree, I didn’t go to fancy schools or

universities but counselling is not the profession she got into. The counselling

she offers is just an opportunity to hear people’s pro

blems and gossip about them to the rest of the Maharajas when she gets home. Indians are big gossips, I know from Youssef.

“Alright.” She nods her head, then focuses on her laptop. Is this silent dismissal? “You’re free to go.”

Exactly at lunchtime. I exit her office, slowly making my way back upstairs while being considerate of my painful inner thighs. They brush against each other, singing Long Walk To Freedom. People are going downstairs and it’s practically empty when I reach the top, and aside from Senorita playing on the flat-screen TV, it’s quiet. I walk over to my desk, and open my bag, retrieving

my lunch

—

R2 skopas. Broke bitches like myself can only afford the air web breathe. I am contemplating just spending my entire lunchtime here and watching

kpop videos on YouTube. I think that’s what I’ll do.

“Wentani lapho?” a noise at the far back of the room has captured my attention. The culprit jumps. It's Nthabiseng. I don't know what she was

photographing on the screen

—

shop specials maybe.

“What are you doing here?” she doesn't respond to my question. “I'm going to watch Korean men hump the floor.” I tell her, putting my phone

on the charger

—it always dies so quickly. Logic didn't tell me to buy one when I was walking on the level of Motse

pe and the likes. “You?” “Just bored. It's cold outside.”

I totally get her. It's still winter after all

—

and the weather is colder than any woman turned off by her man not sponsoring her stomach to compensate for the pussy he receives on a silver platter with those fancy cabbages people pretend to like. Lettuce is just a fancy word for something that tastes like

crunchy water. Anyway, I truly don't get how our colleagues can stand being outside in this freezing weather. "Oh... ngabe sotiva uncono yini ny

alo

—

your

runny stomach?" she had bad diarrhea that started her on the way to work—and to ask the driver to stop on the way, to take a dump in an empty veld. I've

enjoyed every minute of it, and if only I could get close enough to Rorisang todo the same. They hurt me

—

both her and that money-hungry brat.

"I've decided not to eat anything. I'm just drinking this—" raising her hand, she shows me a Coke bottle. "Its supposed to work...according to Tintswalo." "That's better," I say—

and hide my amusement.

Sqalosenkosi

"And right here, this is your room." I inform Sphesihle, going to place her bags

inside the built-

in closets. “It was unoccupied before you but Ma’Tshima took care of the bedding again. Everything you see here is brand-new.” “Wow!” she further walks into her room, cautiously, with innocent bulging hazels

—

and parts her lips just to close them again. Fuze comes to stand beside me, wiggling her thin arm, and wrapping it around mine. “Wow,

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Sqalosenkosi! Kanti nihlala emcebini onje? It’s not enough ukuthi nakh

ileekhaya, nize niyabukisa...niphinde nenze kanje naseGoli! (Its not enough that

you’ve built homes back home, showing off, and you do it again inJohannesburg!)” “Awukahle ihaba, muntuza.” I shake my head. “I didn’t build any home in KZN, it’s all MaKhathide and

Bab' Ngcobo's hard work." "What about this house? You won't take credit for it as well?" she gives me a

flat look, and pads barefoot to the en-

suite bathroom. "I've seen this on TV—the long thing that sprinkles water. Showers. I didn't think you had it." "You're an embarrassment to us village girls," Fuze teases, shaking her head. "Don't misrepresent Mbongolwane, please. Keep us out of your ignorance.

Habe! Now people will think we know nothing about technology and the city

life." "Don't mind her." I shift out of Fuzelihle's embrace—and go to squeeze

Sphehile's shoulder. "This is the same girl who used to refer to prawns as orange cockroaches." "What are prawns?" "Orange cockroaches." Fuze and I say at the same time. She giggles, folding her

arms on her chest as she sits down on the dresser. "And this one is the last one to talk... he doesn't even eat those orange cockroaches. He gags at their sight."

Blame a man for preferring simple foods. Black rural people eat simple foods. My mother raised us on samp and beans. On chicken gizzards and necks. On tripe and Amasi

. This is the food I like...that I prefer. "Will you be okay with her?" I ask

Sphesihle.

"Yes." Arms fold around my waist. The heat of her body touches mine firmly,

smoky scen

t teasing my nostrils. "You should've seen the happiness on my mother's face when I woke up and prepared water this morning. Her pride.

None of us have ever left rural KZN for the better, yet here I am...because of

you. I don't know how to thank you."

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I

don't know how to receive her gratitude. It was

Ma

Sibusisiwe's idea that

Sphesihle followed me to Johannesburg after all

—

and she fought, until I had

no choice but to agree. This is how we find ourselves here.

“Don’t thank me—” “No. I should.” Hazel eyes

connect with mine

—unsettlingly familiar. “When should I come to you to ask about my household responsibilities?” “Fuze will fill you in.” “Ok. Thank you.” A kiss lands on my left cheek.

I shake my head, putting my hands inside my pockets, and meet Fu

zelihle’s

mysterious grin on my way out. Its Saturday, just after 02:00pm, we left KZN very early in the morning

—

me, my daughter, and Sbanisezwe came back with

Thatego. Nqobizitha remained behind along with Chris. It’s a few more days

until schools have to

open; I’m not sure if Christophe will return then but right now he and his husband are trying to rectify their affairs. At least I hope that’s what they’re doing—

talking without hurling hurtful words at each other is a great start. As for me, I am making up for all the times that my daughter and I felt

disconnected. There isn't a big change but she told me this morning that she didn't have any bad dreams last night.

"It's because I was in your arms, Baba.

Likuwe-ithemba said I must always sleep in your ar

ms," she'd said. I just nodded my head, and told her that I'd always be there for her. She was

happy. This morning, she was happy and smiling. She sat on my lap and told

me that she loves Bab' Sbani because he's a child. She wants him to move in so

that they can watch TV together all the time

—but we'd have to ask Thatego

for permission. I knock on her door before opening it. There she is, on her bed, looking small as ever

—

and under the blankets. Closer inspection reveals that

she's trembling, despite the

numerous covers on her body. And the quietwhimpers... is she having a bad dream?

“Liyana?” I shake her small body. “Kukhanya kwam’?”

Her whimpers rack her body.

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“Fuzelincane?” I try again, and this time I remove her small body from thecovers. She kicks and apologizes before she’s opening her eyes—

wide and

fearful. “You’re safe, I am here.” The words fall out of my mouth quickly. “Breathe, Ngcobo. Baba’s here...look at him. What’s wrong?” “I thought you... Baba don’t leave me. I thought you left me.” “Kodwa Fuze...” I squeeze her tight in my arms. “How could I ever leave you? You’re my little angel—Baba’s happiness. I would never leave you.” “Promise?” “I love you so much. You mean everything to me.” “You didn’t promise.” I laugh, can’t help it really. “I promise. We’ll be together forever and ever. You’re not allowed to grow old and get married. You’re going to grow up andtake care of me.”

Tiny hands dig into my cheeks. A teary-eyed gaze. The small face I adore is

facing me. "I will not leave you. Don't leave me." I won't. For as long as I live.

Living with someone who isn't my daughter will take a bit of getting used to,

but the change is... strangely good. Before Sphehile, my house was too cold.

Too quietly. Lonely. The walls seemed as fragile as the glass they're made of. The largeness of the house was intimidating. It wasn't extremely bad but I'd

be lying if I said it were good either

—

especially on days where Liyana would be in Tembisa with her mother. The silence was sad, aching for company

—

in the form of humans and sound. My day was long at work, exhausting, but the sounds of my daughter giggling

loudly about something, and Sphehile's voice

in the background... the tension

seeps out of my bones. I don't know how she's managed to form a closer relationship with my daughter in just over two weeks that she's been here but

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my favourite time of the day is to come back to this. I drop my briefcase on the couch in the living room and follow the noises to the kitchen.

My daughter sits on the stool, back turned to me, but with the way she's slumped over, I wouldn't be surprised if she were doing her homework.

Sphehile also has her back turned to me

—

cooking. I undo my tie, keeping the

silence as I observe her. Fuze took her shopping just a day after she'd arrived in Johannesburg, and my sister's daughter complained about how clueless the

other was. Her privilege blinds her to the fact that there are people in the

world who've yet to experience the wealth she grew up in.

Sphesihle returned home a different woman that day. The fake hair sewn to her head. The long lashes with enough force to turn a Windmill. The nails that were thankfully not too long. She dresses different now, like the short dress

she's wearing right now. I clear my throat to capture her attention. Liyana looks over shoulder. Sphesihle follows suit. A gorgeous smile. "Dinner will be ready in a few

—

chicken feet with curried cabbage and steamed bread."

She knows exactly what makes me happy. Further stepping into the kitchen, I greet my daughter first, distracting her

from her homework. My kiss lands on her forehead. "Fuze lami." She shies

away from another kiss I attempt to give her. It stings but I will not get mad at

her for it. "How was your day? How was school?" "I want to stay with aunt Sphesihle all day. I don't want to go to school tomorrow." Shaking my head, I tap her shoulder comfortingly. "That's not how it works,

Muntuza. School is important. Baba goes to school everyday and comes back

late but he doesn't complain."

"Because you hate fun." Liyana accuses, dropping her pencil onto her book. "That's why Bab' Sbani said you're the old man from KFC." "Finish your homework." I tell her, and turn to the adult. "Muntuza. How was

your

day?"

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"Awesome!" she graces me with a beautiful grin. "Freshen up, dinner's almost ready." She needn't ask me twice. This is what I do. When I come back, she's already

dishing out our food. We pray before feasting. I try not to entertain the thought th

at tells me we look like a family. The happiness on Liyana's face tells me it wasn't a bad idea that Sphehile came. A warm person was needed.

Someone warm and motherly. At 08:00pm, I put Liyana to bed. Sphehile was with me, she wants to learn how to tuck Liyana in for the night. Then we move to the living room to watch

TV together, like we have come to routinely do. "It's not so bad having you

around, Muntuza

." "Admit it, you love it!" she raises her feet on the couch and gives me hopeful

hazels. I close my eyes to push the image of Siyabonga to the back. I can feel

her hand digging into my thigh. "I love you, Sqalo. I love you and that won't suddenly change. I just want to prove my love to you." "I doubt anything will change." I lie, clearing my thr

oat

—

and forcing the

warmth on my cheeks back to where it came from. It's the eyes. It must be the eyes.

"I've seen you give me looks. In the morning, when I'm wearing my negligee, I

see you looking at my body. Your eyes have focused on my breasts more times

than I care to count. Admit it, you were wrong. I'm a woman now...you can see for yourself."

I open my eyes to glare at her. She gets close, too close. Her scent is sweeter now, flowery. The silk negligee

she's talking about, she's wearing it now—

an

d I wonder if she's not cold because this thing has strings holding it together. "You're doing it now again...looking at my breasts." Warm breath. She's too close. I cannot bring myself to move, it makes no sense. "It's okay. You can look. They're big because

se

I'm a grown woman. I haven't been with a man though—

and they sag

naturally. But they're big. You can... touch them."

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I force myself to shift my gaze from her hardened nipples. It feels... I can't

bring myself to look at her. My phone is ringing. I grab it from the coffee table.

Its Sbanisezwe. Why is he calling at 10:00pm? "Ngcobo." I say as soon as I

answer.

"Tell me about your accident again."

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Unrequited Desires : FourteenTemasiko

I've been subjected to involuntary dieting because a b

itch is young, fat and broke. The refunds I sought for the small-sized clothing I bought at Mr. Price are only enough to take me to and from work

—

but my deceased mother

forgot that I survive on food also, and didn't pass the message to the other Kunene ancestors to organize me enough for food as well. I'm suffering here.

Really suffering. Having to eat R5 hot chips all over again when I was no longer about that cholesterol life is no joke but here I am. My problems are many in life but the fact that I still have hot running water

means I've made it in life. I don't care.

The only reason I am spending a Saturday evening at home and not being

lousily chowed for a few bucks is because Lwandle is... I don't even know what's going on with him. It's 10:25pm. I am in the room I share with

Nthabiseng, waiting for her to come back from her date with the Ngcobobrother

—

Sqalosethu. At the expense of my asshole, the little twat scored herself a date, but now we have to wait and see if her seduction skills are as subpar as the unrealistic beauty who is ugly on the inside.

“What’s taking her so long?”

My eyes widen, I look around the room in horror, lifting my legs to bring to my

chest. “Do you hear that?” I speak loudly, although the question is aimed to myself. “I swear I heard something hissing—a snake! Oh, where could it be?!” “No need to be dramatic. I wasn’t the one who told you to fuc

k that man for

free. If you hadn’t torn his money to pieces because you’re a prideful

bitch

.”

the snake clicks her tongue, and rolls its large eyes.

God, I could just smack her! I swear the day she dies I’m standing out and

wearing bright yellow to her funeral and carrying dog poop to throw on her grave

—
to show what a piece of shit she was alive. Right now, I can do nothing

except wish for many things that I want my mother's ancestors to punish her

with. They can start by taking away her hairline. They can cause her to lose

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her expensive phone and I hope one of these Joburg opportunists snatch her wig one day, in Noord or Bree. I hope she trips and falls on that dodgy water near MTN

—
and smells like garbage for an entire week.

"I'm sorry, I don't entertain snakes. I'm not a snake

-charmer... but that one

should be coming back from her date real soon." "Mxm!"

Good. Let me eat my banana and chips in peace. Poverty gives me pregnancy cravings. I peel the banana and aim for the trash can to dispose of the banana

peel but it flies to Rorisang's cheek instead. Whelp, even bananas spot trash when they see it. "That was a mistake. The peel mistook you for a trash can." I,

unapologetically, mumble

—shoving half a banana into my mouth. "But I mean if the shoe fits..." "Are you looking for a fight, Tema? Tell me right now so that I can call my brother. Let's see how you'

ll deal with him

—man to man." "Tell him not to forget his makeup and thong for the fight. We may as well make money while we're at it. Fights like that are huge abroad, I'll even offer him a 10% cut."

I can tell that the blabbermouth still has more to say, but her snake-charmer of a friend beats her to it by opening the door. She was divinely gorgeous, I

won't lie—wearing those floral silky dresses that God's chosen women love to

wear lately. Her pair of see-through heels. The lace-front wig. And finally the summery makeup. Her entire look screamed rich and classy, a look my ratchet ass could never pull off. Rorisang is on her feet, grabbing her purse from her and dragging the poor girl to her bed. I may hate these two and their treatment of me

—

but I do not hate gossip. Pretending to be busy on my cracked phone, I tune my ears to their everyword. Nthabiseng is tired, judging by the heavy exhale, she removes her shoes

and climbs her tall bed. “You didn’t tell me you were sending me on a date

with a man

double his age! Aowa, I’ve never felt so stupid in my life. This man

tells you to what to eat, to do it slowly, to cut your meat this way and that way, to use your napkin. Even the look in his eyes and the tone of his voice

—

I was only a goddamn toddler to

him!”

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“Eish—no, no!” Rorisang’s face falls, she nibbles on her lower blue

-coloured lip, and sits Indian-

style on Nthabiseng's bed. "Did he at least show interest in doing this again?" "No." Nthabiseng frowns. The way she folds her arms together tells me

that

she's offended. "He said to block his number and that—" "It's not you, it's him!" this they say simultaneously. Rorisang's head collapses on Nthabiseng's shoulder. "What's wrong with this guy? Is he gay or something?"

I snort out a giggle, shifting to fully lie on my single bed, with my back turned

to them. I did say this guy was gay but they didn't believe me. I did say. Maybe Rorisang's ego hadn't been off the mark, because I don't understand what man

with eyes would deny these two. These ill-hearted devils are pretty. I wish I

had Nthabiseng's perfect thin curves. I wish Rorisang would borrow me her

unrealistically beautiful face for even just a day.

"He kept looking at his phone on the drive back here. And then he got a call

from someone calle

d Sphehlehle.” “That’s a unisex name. What was the call about?” “I don’t know!” Nthabiseng snaps. “He switched to a thirty

-three year old

though and was laughing about something. I think we should give up.” Sgalosethu, I love you though I’ve never met

you. The misery in their voices caters to my vengeful heart. After all the trouble they went to, selling me to that rapist dick, and having the audacity to brush it off as something insignificant, it fills me with so much temporary joy to know that they laboured in vain.

“That’s—are you sure?” Rorisang asks. Nthabiseng’s, “Hmm,” is super silent. “Okay. But...” the next minute Rorisang is eating ama

-shwamshwam, I cannot

hear a word she’s saying.

Talk about selfishness. With her talking like she has three dicks in her mouth, I am not able to hear a single thing. It's not as easy as porn artists make it seem

—

the multiple dick sucking. It's not the best because dicks smell like different meats

—some fresh, some not so much. They're still gossiping, hushed now

—with the occasional giggles. "Sleep tight, Tema!" that's Nthabiseng. I wish the opposite for her. I hope cockroaches have sex together on top of her mouth. I hope the cockroach missus uses the same mouth to pee in after allowing her husband to hit it. I hope cockroach sperm lands on her lips and that she licks on them. I hope a whole family of cockroaches build a community inside her mouth until it's overpopulated. The bloody traitor!

Throughout the years, I've learned the trick of being able to compartmentalize, to put what affects me negatively in a box and store away in the deepest closets, right at the very back. I didn't like the person I became

when I allowed my father to hurt me, how that one action encouraged all the other bad things that happened to me. Silly me was only seventeen years old, and looking back, there's so much I wish I'd stored away sooner

—

and kept it moving. This is what I have decided to do with that whole Rorisang incident. The little roach doesn't exist in my eyes but I do talk to her when necessary—and that's never. It's also the same with Nthabiseng, I talk to her out of necessity but she stopped being an acquaintance the day she left me in the care of her snake.

And if she's not careful, the same snake will come back to bite her C

-shaped butt one day.

Me, I'm focusing on my job. I've passed the first month of probation,

only barely exceeding their sales target for new agents but I did it

—

and now I just

have to push myself to do better. R3500 can't be picked on the streets, I don't

have the looks that will get any man to bless me with such a large sum of money, the s

ame way I don't have parents who'd sponsor a twenty

-five yearold with such money. This is why I work hard, always making sure that I haveat least two sales before lunch time; and another two when I get back

—

tohave my daily four come knock off time.

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I

call my team leader to inform her I've made a sale and she helps me record it.I've been here for just over 6 weeks but

computers and I aren't the biggest friends. I know how to use Microsoft Word and how to go to YouTube but I've made mistakes capturing p

revious sales so it's just better to call the teamleader. "Well done, Tema. She's on her second sale. Let's push, guys!" she announces as she leaves to go and capture my sale on the whiteboard. I shake my head, its five to lunch; it will take a miracle for anyone to get a sale

now. Its Friday, this morning I won a voucher for having the most sales. I've

already ordered my Big Mac and it should arrive any time soon. 12:27pm.

Three more minutes until lunch. I'm going to steal the company's time and go

to YouTube

—

but discreetly. I make the screen small and search for my favourite song :

I

'm Fine

by D.O.

—

he's a kpop singer. I only discovered him
through Baekhyun

—

and his voice makes me want to be soft and to fall in love with a man that comes straight out of the movies. And to build a family and bask in the sun, living the same soft life Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty and the other white Disney princesses got without having to work hard for it or turning into animals like Princess Tiana or Moana or Mulan. The song ends and I close the YouTube tab, grabbing my phone and playing the song there on repeat. Definitely soft. My order is waiting downstairs, along

with the orders of others. It's times like these that my dislike of Susan

decreases just slightly, because she has great timing, I was tired of living off R2 skopas and the random samosas that made me late at work. I grab a seat near the entrance of our building, away from the others, and turn

the volume all the way up. I may've forgotten to upgrade my phone but not my earphones. They cost R29.99 at Pep and that was a bargain, they're a light blue

colour. I dig into my food, enjoying the burger the most. My stomach seems grateful, it growls that way at least, I make a satisfied sound. It turns to one of disapproval as one of the girls I trained with joins me. Like why? I tried to make friends with the only person who welcomed me in this place and it turned sour quickly, proving that I am better off without them. What does this one want? Now I have to inconvenience D.O. and myself by pausing his honey voice for a squeakier one.

"Hello." I'm pained

. Anyone who disturbs me when I have my earphones on just wants me to suffer. "What's wrong?"

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"Did you hear?" she opens her lunchbox, and a half

-litre Fanta Orange. Clearly

she's invited herself over and isn't leaving any time soon.

"Randal discovered

so

me fraud going on in the workplace with sales and stuff. They're investigating and if you're caught then you're gone." Randal is the operations manager. He's also the IT guy. He's a lot of things around this place actually; we're a small company after all. But I don't get how what she said is my problem. Any sale I've ever made isn't fraudulent. "Okay...?" "You need to be careful." "Why? My sales are legit,

Sisi

. "The audacity. Is it so hard to believe that someone like myself can make her own sales? "I don't have time for fraudulent activity. Don't project your incompetence on me. If you can't make sales

without deceiving clients then

—"It's not just about that but since you won't listen, okay." She stands, and goes

to sit with her usual squad.

Good! Whatever's going on isn't my concern because I don't believe in gaining sales illegally. But I'll have to watch my desktop closely, and how do they lock

their screens again? I don't trust these people—all of them. Most of them don't like me. Even the one who claimed to do proved she didn't. And Nthabiseng is

always upstairs, doing who knows what. If she does something on my computer... I get up, holding my food in my arm, and walk back inside the building.

I find Nthabiseng there. She's on her phone with someone, giggling quietly.

Sqalosenkosi

The whole house is loud already

—

music and what sounds like a million dif

ferent voices. Sphehile's arm around my left arm tightens, she appears fearful and nothing like the talkative woman she was when Bab' Shange was driving us. She's never been here before, she doesn't know of the nearly

weekly rotational house visits from one family to the other. Its Saturday,



August 14th. Its 01:30pm. Siyabonga and Nhlakanipho are hosting everyone at their home. Because of those associated to Nhlakanipho, there are quite a few people more people than what other houses would usually have. His siblings from his father's side. Mateo is here. Qophumlando with his two lovers. Kuhlekonke. "You don't have to cling so tight." I tell Sphesihle. "You wanted to come here, remember?" "It doesn't mean I can't get overwhelmed by the beauty of everything around me. Your world is too much for me. So much money and glamour. Look at Nhlakanipho

—

his dress pants are laughing at poor me. The shirt is also doing it. Kanti niy'tholaphi imali, siyozama nathi." "Uyabheda wena." Our eyes connect; hers looking like sparkling topaz. "There, your doppelganger." I clear my throat, pointing to Siyabonga with my eyes. "Let's reintroduce you." "Ekse, what the hell are you doing here?!" Sbanisezwe gives me an offended look. His attention turns to Liyana who is on my other arm, and then Sphesihle. He smirks, and downs his beer.

“You all look like you’re having too much fun, so I’m here to change that.” I pull my arm from Sphehile’s hold, to give my brother a one

-

armed hug. “Be nice

to the person who will be helping you through those forsaken lobola

negotiations.” “Right.” He nods once, mischief dancing in eyes that are similar to mine. “Just don’t forget to remind them that he’s still mine—

with or without the money. I

own all his firsts...just in case they need the reminder. Don’t forget to remind

them I own the firsts...please

?” “Hamba ngoba usuthi amasimba.” I shove at him, and he only leaves once he’s grabbed my daughter and complimented Sphehile’s beauty—

all nonsexual.

He’s the type to stop and admire a flower. “Still nervous?” I ask Sphe. “Your brother is crazy.” She g

iggles, taking my arm again, and sliding her hand

down until our hands are joined. It's not uncomfortable. "Is this fine?"

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"I don't know you tell me."

"More than fine." We walk toward the others. "That boy is beautiful." She points at Qophumlando. "I think I like him." Funny she hasn't officially met him but Qophumlando's the ray of sunshine type. "I've never been around so many gay men. Ones with kids no less —and they say men can't be parents."

"I guess parenting is an individual thing." "It's still a

pleasure to see with my own eyes. Those two are happily married."

She points to Nhlakanipho and Siyabonga near the grill

—

and guts me

momentarily. “Your brother is engaged and he looks at his fiancé like he has found the meaning of life. Look at him... I’m jealous. Then Nqobizitha

—

where

is he?” “Working on his marriage.” I mutter dismissively. He and Christophe are spending time away from everyone and everything they know. “Are you done

talking so I can introduce you? Even to the chatterbox that you seem drawn

to.”

A blush colours her light skin, and I watch amusedly as the tips of her ears grow hot. Qophumlando seems to love her instantly, he compliments her

dress and then introduces her to Luvu and Ngcwele. I’ve never seen her look

so flustered

—

almost

too innocent... if I didn’t know the kind of woman she could be at home. I mean she’s sweet, I love the relationship she is

building with my daughter. I love that she knows what to say and when. When I'm exhausted and I come home, she's already at the door

waiting, taking my briefcase from me and loosening my tie. I only watch the TV with her to make her happy. And she listens to me ramble about my favourite books to make me happy.

She hadn't been wrong that I'd come to enjoy her company. And maybe it's

time to admit this to Ma

Sibusisiwe as well, but I'll never hear the end of it. As far as the other things, the... touches and the looks she's given me—I don't think I can give in. She's a beautiful woman, yes, and I am weak enough to

admit that there have been times that my mind has entertained the thought of having her beneath me, tracing the outline of her soft-looking body and having something warm coiled around my dick on nights that the need arises- but I

don't have the courage to. She reminds me too much of

the man walking

toward me- and igniting something with Sphe could mean opening a world of

fantasies about... him, that I've worked hard to keep suppressed. "Hey." He hugs me –

smelling more masculine than usual, like his husband

–

and offers me a tiny

smile as he pulls back. "I'm really glad you're here. We didn't know you'd bring someone." "I couldn't I

ea

ve her behind, she stays with me now." "I know." Siyabonga licks his lips, fingers drumming against his left thigh. His

ring glints and blinds me

a little. "I'm really—

I mean we, Nhlakanipho and I,

we're glad you here. You haven't been with us for so long. I'm also happy that you brought Sphe with you, she's a good woman."

“We don’t have anything between the two of us.” I don’t know why I feel the need to say this.

Siyabonga laughs heartily, amused. “I know. It wouldn’t be a bad idea, still.

Niyafanelana. I swear you looked like a proper family when you walked in. I was ex

pecting an engagement announcement.” “Uyaphapha, Ngane.” “I’d be happy for you if it ever happened. You deserve all the happiness in the

world for how considerate you are of others. I also think she could bring out the young boy hiding behind the 75 ye

ar old personality you have.” First Sbanisezwe. Now him. “We can’t all be little kids in grown bodies. Who will tuck in your type and read them bedtime stories?” “Mxm!” My arm is playfully punched. “I’m really glad you’re here, Sgalosenkosi.” “Next time, I can host and you can visit.” “Sounds like a plan.”

Nhlakanipho comes to hand me a beer and tells me to relax. I do as instructed, occupying one of the sun-

loungers next to Thatego. I’m not sure if he’s

sleeping because the sunglasses are hiding his eyes. My phone beeps inside my pocket. I ignore it, as Sbanisezwe rejoins me

—

lifting Thatego as if he weighs nothing at all- even with the recent weight gain- to steal his chair and

then placing him atop him. “Ow!” “I’ll fuck myself up for hurting you next time.” Sbanisezwe says, kissing a spot on Thatego’s shoulder. I’ve been doing my level best to ignore the hickeys on the man’s exposed neck. “Go inside the house. I don’t want to argue with the sun for giving you sunburn.”

Thatego rolls his eyes

—

the sunglasses fell off just seconds ago

—

a smile

dancing on his lips. “Find better ways to get rid of me next time, Husby. First grade remarks won’t cut it. You’re lucky I’m so in love with you.” A kiss—languid and soft. “Let me go back inside. I don’t want

you to fight with the sun

if it gives me sunburn. I love you so much.” Sbanisezwe follows the younger man’s retreating back and sighs, grinning lazily.

“Damn, I wish I could get him pregnant!” He’s an idiot. They’d have an entire preschool running around this place. “He’d be pregnant every year...khohlwa.” “And so? It would be an honour to facilitate the process of breeding him.” I want to punch his childish smirk away. “I want you to do a few things. Don’t task me why.”

My brows raise in

suspicion. “Nothing illegal, ngiyakwazi.”

“I’ve found Liyana’s new therapist.” He looks at me—face blank. “Fire the Indian woman, she’s useless. If she’s going to Khensani’s house, I will take her.” “Why?” something nasty twists my stomach. “It’s what I wrote in my diary.” He replies calmly. “I’m a sicko, remember? I can’t remember anything from the previous day except what’s written in my diary.”

I can't explain the look on his face but it makes me uneasy. "Do you... suspect something? What's going on?"

"Suspect what?" he cocks an eyebrow. I swallow, it feels like I've swallowed stones. "Is something wrong with Khensani's house? Maybe Pitso—" "Dedela igazi, Bafoza!" He interrupts me with his empty chuckles. "Nothing's

wrong in that household. Nothing at all. I want them to take some time and heal. I want you to do the same. This is why I want Liyana around me a lot.

She's comfortable with me. My Nkanyezi is coming sometime next week...they'll be the best of friends."

A call interrupts me before

I can reply. It's a number I don't recognize—

an office or call centre

number. "Ngcobo." "Mr. Ngcobo? This is Zethu—" she's from the bank. "We're calling to confirm

transactions on your account. Before I do this, please confirm your date of birth for the

safety of your account." "December 16th, 88." "Thank you." Her voice is still so polite. Then she starts to confirm some of the

transactions with me. A few I recognize until she gets to online transactions amounting to R50 000. Anger courses through me, I did not buy anything amounting to such high

amounts. Women's clothing?! "Fix this!" I snap, ashamed that she has to stutter. It's not her fault but weren't they supposed to call before approving the transaction? What the hell is my limit? "How did this happen?" I listen to her explain through the stuttering. "Someone's spent R50 000 on women's clothing using my card," I tell Sbanisezwe as soon as the call ends, rubbing my

forehead in frustration.

"Maybe it's for charity." He gets up, unbothered, and

chuckles. "Drink worra a the 2000s say. It won't dent your bank account. On the bright side, someone's looking hotter out there because of your act of kindness."

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"I don't know what he sees in your childish ass!" I snap at his retreating back. He stops, looking over his shoulder, and smirks.

"I was his first. His

inevitable

—in every lifetime.”

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Unrequited Desires : Fifteen Squalosenkosi

It's been a long day of attending back

-to-back meetings here in Johannesburg, and working around tight schedules to organize an emergency trip back to

Mbongolwane, because Bab' Ngcobo is too old to be single

-handedly running every family business, particularly the taxi business. There are issues with a taxi owner who insists on collecting passengers after cut-off time, when the final bus leaves for Eshowe in the morning. Naturally, this has caused tension with the other owners, whose first solution is to sort matters the only way

they know how, but Bab' Ngcobo has managed to calm the violent tension, if

only for a little while

—

and wants me to go back home and play mediator.

I agreed, of course, because he shouldn't have to deal with this. He shouldn't

have to leave Durban, and that white man of his, to attend to such matters, not at his age. He deserves to live the relaxing life that men his age are, and not stressing.

There's also the issue of R50 000 missing from my account, that I would've

tried to let go off, had it been spent unselfishly and on something worthwhile,

because I don't understand who in their right mind spends so much on mere

clothes. The bank has provided the online merchant from where the clothes were bought, but they can do nothing to find the culprits

—

at least that's what

they told me

—

so I have decided to take matters in my own hands, and to worktogether with the authorities.

“Whoever it was, they work at a restaurant, trust me.”

Nqobizitha had told me,

when I informed what ha

ppened. He’s been through a similar experience. “This is why you should watch them carefully when they grab your card, and make sure they utilize the speed-point machine in front of you, to ensure your

card details are not being compromised.” I’ve retrac

ed my transactions, inspecting my bank statement, and one of thefinal times I used my card at a restaurant was on that forsaken date Abongile sent me on with a woman he claimed to have met at a networking event. His marketing skills convinced and I went,

the woman wasn’t all that impressive, but she hadn’t been bad either –

and had a lovely personality. I just wasn’t

interested, she behaved too much like a child, with no table manners

—

and talked a lot too. I told her to block my number as soon as we dropped her off at her flat.

I don't want to suspect her, because she was not the waitress here, so I have

decided to leave everything to the authorities. Robbing someone of R50 000

doesn't seem like a thing that she'd be able to pull off, not with how innocent

she seemed

—

almost annoyingly so. My phone vibrates, I make it a point now to check it, in case someone is spoiling themselves with my hard-

earned cash. It's a message from

Sbanisezwe, reminding me that my daughter is spending the night at his and Th

atego's. I send him a message, to acknowledge this, and drop it on the

passenger seat beside me. It's Thatego who fetches Liyana from school sometimes, when Sbanisezwe has made the arrangement for her to spend the night at their house. His Nkanyezi is here, and she gets along well with my daughter.

I close my eyes right after, trying to relax, as Bab' Shange drives me home.

Relaxation is a strange concept to me though, ever since that accident, maybe even before that

—

way before, to the life Sbanisezwe and I were living in KwaMashu, with our mother and her lover. In here, all alone, I can feel a bead of sweat forming along my throbbing temple, as an ache presses down on my

chest. "Calm down," I whisper the words to myself. "Nothing bad will happen."

My pho

ne is ringing. It's Sphesihle. "Muntuza?" "Sawubona." Her flowery tone drifts into my ear. "I tried calling earlier but you didn't answer so I assumed you were very busy today?" "I forgot to return your call, I'm sorry." It was a long day, a busy one. I am

being attacked by a migraine, a bad one that has chosen to throb on the left side of my head.

“Don’t be. You don’t sound well, what’s wrong?” “Headache.” I clench my teeth.

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“Sgalosenkosi.” I don’t think I imagine the concern in her voice.

“Have you eaten? I wouldn’t be surprised if you didn’t. Did you even pause for a water

break? Migraines can be caused by the most simplistic things, things that are

preventable.”

She sounds like my mother, after we left KwaMashu, and moved to Nelspruit. She sounds like my mother before her cancer, how s

he’d fuss and worry the

same way over Sbanisezwe. I never really got to experience that, I was the

good son, the one who didn't need constant checking up on,
because I was

unproblematic

–

and mature for my age. Right now, Sphesihle sounds like
my mother and a strange flutter forms in my belly. I can feel
a lazy smile pulling at

the corners of my pursed lips. “Do you care?” I can't help
asking. “Haibo! What sort of question is this?” she huffs, I know
if I were close to her she'd be pushing at me –

and then pulling me back in a second later, to hug

and apologize to me. “Of course I care! How many minutes
until you're home? Let me grab some medicine, you're lucky the
food's ready. Are you with Liyana?” “No.” I shake my head.

“Sbanisezwe's Nkanyezi is her new best friend.” “That's good.

Children her age are supposed to spend time with her age

-mates,

it will assist their development and improve their

communication skills. She's too introverted for her own good.” I

smile at the observation. “You seem to know her well.” “I love

children. It's in me to notice these things. I hope to have four of

mine one day.” “You’ll get them.” A silent beat. Her sigh echoes on the line. “How long until you’re home?” “Ten minutes.”

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“Okay. Do you want me to keep you company? I’ve noticed how being in cars

makes you anxious, you clam up and your body goes rigid

—

as if you’re terrified. Maybe I can stay on the line with you so that it’s not as bad.”

The offer surprises me, in a good way, as a smile forms on my lips and stays

there. “Sphesihle...” her name falls off my tongue, gratefully, “how shall I ever repay you?” “I think the real question here, is how you’d live without me. I am telling you

right now that aside from our beautiful angel, I am the best thing that has

happened to you.”

“I was thinking...” We’re in the living room, me having been subjected to the television

-watching thing that Sphehile loves so much, she removes her head from my shoulder and bites her lower lip. My eyes follow the action, unbidden, lingering for a

few seconds before I am looking her in the eyes again. They’re not any better –

hazel like the ones I’ve been trying for years to get over.

“Yes?” “I love staying with you.” “Me too.” I admit, I didn’t think it would be possible but it is. She makes the silence bearable. “I love having you around, my daughter as well.” “Thank you.” She grabs my hand and sets it on her lap, making me touch the warmth of her soft and freckled skin. “You know I’m the

first born back home, right? The only girl child, and a lot of responsibility falls on me

–

to lead by

example for the younger ones. This is partly why I’m a virgin, and also because I am saving myself for someone who truly deserves it, someone like...” “Don’t, Sphe.” I know what she wants to say, and I attempt to take back my

hand but she holds it tight, pulling

—

an almost playful grin painting her gentle features.

“I’m not there, Sgalosenkosi. Please hear me out.” Seriousness steals her

playfulness, she

gives me a pleading look. “I was saying that I’m the first born back home, expected to lead by example, and I can’t tell you how happy my

mother was when she learned that I was coming here

—

to live with you no

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less! She feels like our ancestors are finally good for something, that God has heard her prayers. I feel that way too. Sometimes I cry thinking about you and

what you're doing. Thank you so much. For this, I want to thank you."

I groan quietly, feeling awkward. She never misses the opportunity to tell me this, it makes me feel strange.

Its MaSibusisiwe she should thank, I always tell

her this. "I would've done it for anyone." "Somehow, I find that hard to believe."

I shrug my shoulders.

A giggle. Sphehile squeezes my hand. "I was wondering

, Mapholoba, if I could maybe do a part-time course at any college, just to have something to add onto

my matric. When you and Liyana are not home, there isn't much to do around

here, while I could be using that time more productively. This is what I want

to discuss with you. What do you think?" It's not a bad idea, its brilliant actually. It pleases me that she desires to

further her education, she has so much potential and could do so much with

her life. "That you're not just beauty." I tease. "So you admit I am beautiful?" she smirks. "You are beautiful." It's not a crime

to admit this. "Have you given thought on what you want to study, where and how much it will cost?" "My matric results can only send me to college." She makes an embarrassed face, I hate it. "It was tough getting an educa

tion while juggling my home life

and being a mother to the rest of my siblings. I didn't get enough time to study, and it's a miracle I passed. A simple college will do, I will be very grateful. I

want to study something practical like sewing. Fashion is sort of my passion." "There are schools that cater to that specifically," I inform her, "let me find my

spare laptop and we can look around the net, find something you love

—

and a

school. Prices. All that."

Her eyes water with unshed tears. I think she

's going to cry one minute, but it

never happens, and she lunges at me instead. Her hug is tight, she is on my lap,

legs on either side of my waist. Her lips press to the inside of my neck as her scent assaults me

—

strong, seductive. It makes me dizzy, as the air seems to crackle between us

—

an electricity. Scorching. It's palpable. "Thank you." She pulls back to say, minty breath ghosting my lips. "Sgalosenkosi..." her voice takes on a whisper. She plants herself firmly on my lap, doesn't move. "Stop

looki

ng at me like that."

What is she talking about?

I'm bullshitting, feigning ignorance to the spark I can feel between us, drawing us together. I clasp her waist, and gently graze her sides. "Like what?"

"Like..." she grabs my hand and brings it to her

lips, I am too entranced to stopher. Little sparks ignite on the tips of my fingers as she kisses each one,

keeping her seductive gaze on me. "You..." she redirects my hand to her collarbones, driving it lower, until it's just above her left breast. Her b

reathing

is wild, ragged. "Want to..." Lower again, and this time my fingers touch her

through the fabric of her maroon silky negligee, grazing her nipple

—

its

already standing at attention. "Fuck me silly." "I don't." I challenge. "You don't." She gr

inds down on me, and the sensation ignites something deadly in my groin. Every bone in my body comes alive, as the muscles clenchtensely

—

longingly. "Don't close your eyes, please." "I don't.

She plays with the strings of her negligee, and with her gaze still on me, allows the first one to fall at her shoulders. And then the second one. Her hands shield her chest area

—

almost teasingly

—

before she's revealing herself to me. Her breasts. They're so womanly, feminine. A bit bigger, fuller, and slightly droopy. I don't stop her when she guides my hand to touch one of them, they're soft beneath my touch —

salivating. "Tell me no." Her voice is a whisper.

"No." I tell her, and connect our lips. She moans, granting me the opportunity

to slide my tongue in her hot mouth

—

to properly explore her. I flip us around

so that she's laying on the couch, and lift her negligee, bringing it to her waist. "You're a virgin." I remind her. "You're worthy."

***For a slightly full-figured woman, Sphesihle weighs nothing at all in my arms, as I move us toward my bedroom. Her arms are tight around my neck, legs even tighter around my waist, as she grinds her waist against mine. I can sense her

—

all of her, and her heady scent that makes me hungry with desire. I grip the door handle, letting us inside, before standing her on her feet. She looks at me, skin blushing beautifully, and eyes clouded with lust. The intention is clear in her eyes. A step forward. She closes the space between us, until I can feel her pointy nipples against my chest, and her wild breathing.

"Sgalosenkosi." She says my name —

reverently. Like a hymn or prayer. Her touch is electric, the sparks ignite from the tips of my fingers throughout my entire body. "Please love me." "Sphesihle." A groan rumbles from deep inside my throat. "I—" "Please, I'm all yours."

My body is in control as I nod my head, firmly folding an arm at her waist, drawing her close to devour her lips. A greedy, almost insatiable hunger blooms in my stomach, forcing me to ravish her

—

and explore all of her. Clothes fly, lips continue to move, as my hands roam over her heated skin. Stripped of her negligee, I step back to get a good look of her body. Clad in just a black lacy panty that contrasts her light skin, I take the time to admire how womanly she looks

—

from the thickness of her stretch-marked thighs to the little belly she has on her, and those full breasts that are begging me to bury my face in them. With

the eye contact forged, I lead her to my bed. “You’re so beautiful.” I

confess, looking into hazel eyes.

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“Tell me something I don’t know.” She giggles, and slowly lifts my hand to kiss, before she’s stepping away from me —

and sensually falling back on my bed,decorating it. Her legs are close together.I climb on the bed, moving on top of her, and nudge her legs apart with myknee. Wetness touches the skin of my kneecap, and my dick becomes a littlemore excited at the discovery. I bring my lips down to meet hers passionately,as she tugs on me to get closer

—

almost desperately. My boxers are removed,and my cock springs out to greet her, rubbing against the fabric of her lace panties, and jerking at the sensation of her wetness. “Are you sure about this?”I have to ask, though I’ll die if she changes her mind.

“I love you,” she murmurs. “I want it to be with you.”

My hand finds its way into her hair, as my lips crash down on her again, to kiss her as if the world is ending. I make sure to keep my embraces gentle,pressing my fingers into her throbbing clit through the lacy fabric, whilemoving my lips to latch on her pulse point

—

kissing, licking and biting. One ofmy hands find her left breast, covering its full expanse as I remove herunderwear with the other. My name slips past her lips, she drags her hands

down my back, moaning softly. “Then let me be with you. Right here.”

I drag my mouth to her breasts, to suck on them, and explore their thickmeatiness. She shudders beneath my touch, trembling with need as my lips drag down to her belly, further down until I am in between her thighs. She smells heavenly down there, and I firmly keep her legs apart when she tries to

clamp them together. “Sgalosenkosi...” “I’m right here, with you.” I remind her.

“I know, you just—” I peer up at her, notice the

way she seems flustered. “You don’t need to go down... there. What if—” “What this...?” tongue flicks out to tease her clit, and I feel it quivering on my

tongue

—

keeping my gaze on her. She moans, body arching up only to fall back down again. My name is her mantra. My tongue makes love to her, slowly, teasingly

—
until chorused pleas are dripping off her tongue. “I should stop.”

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She nods her head, I dip my tongue again and she grips the back of my head in a death grip, keeping me where she wants me.

“No...no, please no!” very vocal,

her hips are thrusting up

—

faster and urgent. I’m here to serve, I swirl my tongue inside

—

giving her exactly what she wants, and keep her right on the

edge. "NO!" "I want to make you come with something else." I
mutte

r, and kiss her so that she is tasting herself on my tongue. Her
hands roam my chest, as I grab my cock to guide around her
glistening exterior

—

in a circular motion, and then

up and down, her pussy lips trembling around my mushroomed
head. "Please

do it.

" Her voice is a whimpered whisper. "Please, please I love
you. Love me too." I don't need to be asked twice, as my dick
finds her tight opening —

and teasingly works its way inside her. A deep groan comes
from the depth of my throat, as my eyes shut closed almost
immediately. FUCK! I take a ragged breath, willing myself to
calm down but holy mother of... so fucking tight! Her walls are
spasming deliciously around me

—

so enticingly hot and... I can't breathe. "Kodwa ungenzani, nganeyomuntu?" I will shoot

my load in less than 3 seconds. It feels like it. Sphesihle is not sharing my sentiments in the pleasure department, her moans are actually sobs. Her hands press into my chest

—

as if fighting to push me

away. "It hurts," she cries. "It will be okay soon. Relax your body and focus on me."

Her head nod is frantic.

"We're going to go slow as a love song, Sphesihle." I inform her, and thrust

once

—

and then again. My cock is a painful explosive inside her, expanding and throbbing. With slow and even strokes, I shove my length halfway inside her and pull out again. She screams my name

—

in pain and pleasure. The walls of her wet warmth suck me in, greedily, deeper and deeper. Her eyes train on mine, hooded with lust, she licks her full lips

—

and bites on them with soft purring sounds when I give her thrusts that cause her body to tense up. Her nails carve into the back of my skin, and she starts to make

sounds as if she's enjo

ying this far too much. My lips are on hers a moment, and then her big jiggling breasts the next

—

my weakness. "You're making me

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feel so good, Ndoda yami. It's so big inside me, there's no space for myself. I love this so much."

It will never compare to the heaven I am feeling. How the fuck will I last?

"So gentle with me." She continues, caressing the back of my neck. "Yes, yes please. Just like that... ow, daddy." My wild eyes

find hers. "Say that again." "Daddy. Daddy. Myeni wami. I love you."

I pull my dick out of her to tap on her glistening pinkness

—

and then shove my

aching cock back inside, feeling how drenched she is. "I love your body, Sphesihle." I admit, slamming into her deep and making her wince slightly but moan at the same time.

"Everything about you is so perfect, Ngane." "I'm a baby now?" she giggles.

I shut down the dark thought, and move into her hard and fast, to push her to her climax as quickly as possible. She grabs the edge of the bed, pulling herself into me, matching my thrusts with her own. Her swollen breasts shake with her movements, her nipples hard and stimulated. Her moans are seductive screams, my name her prayer.

"Show me, look at me and show me, Sphesihle." I command her, rubbing her

clit vigorously while slamming into her, determined to push her over the edge.

"Tell me again." "I—love you." Tears run down her inflamed cheeks as her eyes close and her

mouth flies open, she bucks her hips and spasms around my cock, digging her fingers into my skin as her orgasm unleashes on her, and yanks herself into me, as I continue rubbing her clit continuously

—

until her liquid is splashing against my pelvis. “What’s—happening?” She tries to push me away, stops and grips her boobs tightly instead, screaming at the top of her lungs.

“It feels good, Sthandwa sam?”

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“Kakhulu!” she shouts, panting, crying — quivering like the walls of a failing building. Her moist tightness clenches around me in an anchoring grip, her cries seem to last forever, her orgasm. I fuck her through it, my thumb circling her clit, pushing her to the limit

—

until

I'm planting my seed inside her, and collapsing on her soft body the nextsecond. She hugs me tight and cries. "Have I hurt you?" I'm worried. "Thank you." Her voice trembles. "I loved this and I want to do it again, please."

My face moves from hiding inside her neck, deviating to her soft boobs, theyreally are my favourite. I take turns sucking on them, before finally moving toher forehead

—

and then her lips.

"Khululeka," I whisper the words for heralone.

"Ngisazok'phinda."

Temasiko

Nthabiseng has pulled a Temasiko at work. I mean she's pulled a me becauseshe hasn't been there in over a week, and yet I always find her home, living

her best life. She is moneyed nowadays, with all the clothes that are in ourhouse, not to mention the shoes. I asked her

where the sudden wealth came from and she mentioned Paul hitting the jackpot while playing Super-Bet. And this is how she finds herself living the life of a slay queen who owns new Brazilian weavers and goes out every single day.

Shame, it must be nice being God's favourite –

some of us truly can't relate.

I mean how else can you explain how karma works for some people? This bloody universe, instead of punishing them for what they put me through, decides that no, this little rat and her snake of her friend are better rewarded. And so instead of Nthabiseng having her wigs snatched in Noord, she buys more. What type of Nigerian witchcraft is this?

I don'

t know much except for the fact that I need it as well.

"Gal—" this is what I've been promoted to this past few days, money makes someone really happy. The wide leg or the flare pants?"

This is not what I have come back from work for. My fat ass is exhausted, people were signing hearing letters left, right and centre for the fraud that has been taking place at work, and that left a lot of us innocent ones with plenty of calls to make

—

to push for sales. My ears were ringing when I left work, but it was worth it. It was worth it because I made ten sales. That had never happened before but I dialled lots of clients, and that exposed me to more

buyers. This one, looking at me, had her name called as well but her ass wasn't at work. I think she's doing it o

n purpose. She knew.

"They look the same to me." I confess. "You're hopeless."

Nthabiseng sighs out. "I'll go with number two. How was work today?" Is she fishing for information? I didn't want to tell her because I don't want to

hurt her, not like s

he did me. On the other hand, if I don't tell her, and she meets that surprise waiting for her at work... she may hate me forever. "People were signing suspension letters. The ones that were making illegal sales." "Yho!" her expression falls. "How many?"

“About seven.” I’ve included her shady ass to the list. “Okay –

and what will happen now?”

Sigh.

If she went to work, she’d know these things, because she would’ve received that warning as well. “They’re going to attend a hearing next week, they’ve

outsourced someone who works in HR and

—

people were crying and

apologizing.” “Susan? What did she say?” She was seething, a raging fire. “You don’t want to know. Trust me.” “Oh, shit! I just hope they don’t make arrests.”

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Of course she hopes for this. I shrug my shoulders, and watch her continue to

get ready for her night before she's leaving. Paul is downstairs and she'll

spend some quality time with him. Lucky her, to have such a loving guy. As forme and my unwanted ass, I decide to indulge myself by watching Nthabiseng's

old-fashioned TV. These TVs are the die-hards, and have been passed down from one generation to the other. Its 08:00pm, so I watch Generations The

Legacy, because we're broke bitches who can't afford DSTV... not even OVHD.

My phone rings mid-

show. It's a number I know very well, I feel myself grow irritated. "Temasiko." I snap. "Baby—" "Don't you dare, Lwandle!" God, he frustrates me so much. His phone has been off for a long time, I tired calling and he wouldn't answer. It feels like I'm

dating myself here, and all that big talk about loving me was a sham. A

complete lie! "You've had your phone switched off—" "I know." He jumps into my mouth, I hate when he does this. Its condescending, as if I am not worthy to be h

heard, to reveal my grievances. “I know all of that baby and I apologize.”

“No, Lwandle.” He sounds too dismissive. I hate that where was a time I needed him the most and he wasn’t there. He didn’t avail himself. It was like

being all alone again, with no

one to talk to, to cry to. “Bengikudzinga kepha

mahlalekhukhwini wakho abecishiywe, ungatfolakali emoyeni (I needed you

but your phone was off).” I went through the most and

he wasn’t there, I couldn’t fall back on him to discuss my pain.

“For weeks, you didn’t answer. It’s fine if you’ve moved one just tell me.”

“Seems to me that you’re projecting,” kindness makes way for anger, “you’ve moved on, haven’t you? Now you’re making silly excuses to break up with me. Because you’re not giving me a chance to explain how my sister’s son

accidentally threw it inside the water and how your number was saved on my phone instead of the sim card, so this is why it took so long to find your

number and call you to let you know.”“You must think I’m a naïve stupid!” I hiss at him. “Do you really expect me to believe that? You have money and you couldn’t buy a new phone?”

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“Its not about the phone, goddammit!” he raises his voice, like a psycho. “Its about how your numbers were saved on my phone, this one, so I had to wait to get it back.”

“Really?”“Yes, really.” His voice becomes a smooth drawl. “I’m sorry, Sthandwa sami.”“Ngiyakucolela.” I mutter weakly.

“Good. Tell me about your day?”

By the end of the call, I am in high spirits. I did say that Lwandle makes me

laugh so much, I can’t help but to... fall for him. The R1

200 he deposited in my bank account is my real smile-keeper though and it's as if the figures are seducing me because I blush every time I look at the message of some money being deposited into my account. I'm too lazy to go out and buy myself a

McFeast

but this is what I'll be doing tomorrow at work.

A knock comes at my door just as I am contemplating on changing, and removing my makeup, to prepare for work tomorrow. Its quite persistent and

I suspect the kid from next door who doesn't know how to knock. I open the door, ready to teach him a thing or two on manners, but am met with two police officers instead. My peaked curiosity is momentarily distracted by the much taller man that stands behind them, towering. Sqaalosethu. I just know it. Nthabiseng went on a date with him and now she did something.

"Nthabiseng Moloto?" one of the cops asks me. "No." A deep rumble. The giant behind them answers before I can do it. Our eyes lock

–
and I swear impatience is written on his face. Pushing
myuncomfortable staring of his classic gorgeousness

–
like a Hollywood filmactor

–
away, I am able to recognize just how he looks like he feels
greatly

inconvenienced by my presence, and being here. “Do you know
where she is?”

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“Do you know how to greet?” I am not about
to be intimidated by this man. Dashing looks aside, the way his
jaw tightens and those darkening eyes bedamned.

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Unrequited Desires : SixteenSgalosenkosi

“Do you know how to greet?”

For a millisecond, I don't think the question is directed to me,
perhaps I'd been

staring at the woman too long

–

distracted. I came here expecting another young woman, much
slimmer than this, with russet brown skin and eyes that appear
innocent. Instead, I meet the opposite of her. This woman is
much chubbier, draped in white silk that pops against the deep
bronze of her skin, giving me a sardonic beam that strangely
seems to befit her. Quelling the instinct to snap back at her for
being disrespectful, because she is

right, we're in her space –

imposing on it

–

and should've remembered basic manners. I clear my throat,
bowing apologetically. “Siyaxolisa. Sawubona. Kunjani,

Nkosazane?” “That’s better.” Her smile really is beautiful, I am even afforded a show of her

teeth

—

small and imperfect; they’re not the straight white ones people are obsessed with. The gap between them only adds to her charm. “Yes. Nthabiseng’s my roomie and bestest

friend.”

I cut my eyes at her, somehow finding that hard to believe. Her and that

woman seem worlds apart. There’s also a sarcastic note in the way she says this. “Where is she now?” I ask. The wheels are turning in her head, I can tell. “She’ll be back soon,” this she says after a short silence. “You can wait for her if you want to.” “How long?” I don’t have time, Sphehile is waiting in the car outside. “Just a few minutes.” I sigh, wondering if I shouldn’t just let this go. R50 000 is a lot of

money, yes,

but it's still too little for me to be spending my precious time on, waiting for someone who wouldn't even be able to pay half of it back. "No problem." I

have to step in at least, to give Nthabiseng a lecture about the dangers of stealing

—

a

nd how much of an idiot she was for using her direct address. I've

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found her because of this. "I'll take it from here." I tell the two police officers, my intention wasn't to get her arrested, also these men have far important things to deal with. I'd rather not waste their time on a stupid criminal. They nod their heads, reminding me to contact them if I need further assistance. Their personal numbers. I guess we can contribute this to the perks of being moneyed.

"Please get in," the young woman instru

cts me softly.

It's uncomfortable having to step inside, these kinds of short doors were not

made for individuals like myself, and I have to bend my head and shoulders awkwardly to get in. Amused giggles capture my ears

—

a mellifluous sound
that doesn't

irritate me as much as it should. "Why are you laughing?" "Secret." I shake my head, getting a good look of my surroundings. It's a room this

place, a small one that not one room in my house is the size of, and I have to wonder how two people can comfortably occupy such a small place. Instead of spending my money on something more worthwhile, a new and bigger place

for instance, Nthabiseng decided she'd utilize it on high-end fashion, forgoing comfort for luxury.

"I see." "Sorry about this mess. I swear I'm not usually like this but I am going through

some things, well

I was before my boyfriend sent me R1 200.” The young woman rambles, picking up a messy pile of clothing from one of the beds

—

the smaller one. She goes to dispose of it in the washing basket, and passes me again to grab another pile, only this time she pauses to look me in the eyes.

“Nice face.” And then she’s off on her way as if nothing’s happened.

Strange creature, this one. Confusion remains on my face as I scan for a chair that I can sit on but nothing.

Surely she’s not expecting that I sit on her bed? That’s a personal boundary one shouldn’t cross. My hands go to hide inside my pocket, I wait like a deer

caught in the headlights, as she moves around

—

and bends over to grab

something on the far edge of her bed, the silky dress she has on
lifting to

reveal the many stretch marks and blemishes on her thighs. “I
told them they wouldn’t be able to seduce you. That you were
possibly gay and that—” My eyes bulge, I hit my chest as I start
coughing. “Heh?”

She giggles, standing in front of me, holding a small mess of
clothes in her

arms, face skyward to look up at me. She’s not the shortest
woman I’ve met, but she’s short enough that I can see on top of
her head –

the soft-dread style

that women love. She’s too close, clearly personal space is a
forei

gn concept to her, and smiles as if she has found the sun in
my eyes. Her smile creeps me out

a bit. “I mean it’s possible, right? There’s already two out of
three.” “That is none of your business!” I snap, irritated,
because this question is

irrelevant.

Sbanisezwe used to get it so much as a boxer that he’d walk out
of

any promotion if they asked him this. Its not about being ashamed about oursexualities but the reasoning behind the questions that are irritating. Howsome of them seem laced with homophobia.

“Jeez!” her eyes widen, she seems ready to return the harsh tone, but stops inher path and bats her lashes at me. “Actually, I’m sorry. It’s none of mybusiness and I should know better. Forgive me, please.”There’s something about the vulnerabil
ity in her eyes that forces me to accept
the apology. “Apology accepted.”

I am blindsided by the hug she gives me, with her mess of clothes creating abarrier between us. She smells like peaches and vanilla, her body isunbelievably soft and warm. I am suffocated. Not enough to pull away, as I

awkwardly pat her back. “There, there.”“You smell nice,” she mumbles, it’s a surprise I hear her –

with how her face is

squished into my chest, “and your arms feel good. But you hit like a man, my

shoulder hurts.

” A soft whine.

I... am flabbergasted. This is not what I came here for

—

some woman I've just met burying her body into mine, as if it's nothing at all. "This is getting uncomfortable, Sisi." I push her away gently, she regards me with a playful pout. "Where should I sit?"

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"My bed," she mumbles as if it's the most obvious thing. "You need to sit a 45 degree angle though, and be intelligent about the way you're sitting because

one mistake and I may have to return to the mattress again. Would you like anything to drink? Anything but coffee, tea and juice

—

those belong to

Nthabiseng."

That leaves me with water then, but there is no kitchen in this place and I

wonder where she's going to get the water. I didn't notice any kitchens around this place and it won't do if she has to buy water for me. "I am good," I tell her, distracted by the bright pink fabric that's landed on my shoe. "Don't!"

Too late. In my hand is a lace panty that I quickly try to rid myself of, but she was rushing at me and the lacy fabric narrowly misses her face to cling to the bountiful curls on her head. I am embarrassed, rubbing my hands on my pants frantically, as she huffs a breath, and goes to throw it in the laundry bin as well.

"I washed it," she says, "all those clothes are clean." "You keep your clothes on the bed?" the neat

-freak in me is not amused.

"Why?" "I don't need to explain myself to you." She comes to sit beside me, polite

enough to keep distance this time

—

pity my surprise is non-

evident. "I'm sorry about my underwear though."

Her giggles are not embarrassed, she seems carefree. “So you’re Squalosethu?”

Irritation prickles my skin, at the casual manner in which she miscalls me. But her smile truly is carefree, relaxed

—

and she talks as if we’re friends, as if we haven’t just met.

“Squalo

-

SENKOSI.” I correct her. “Has Nthabiseng told you about me?” “Please you’re all they talk about —

her and Rorisang. I think Nthabiseng had forgotten that she has a boyfriend for a good minute because you were driving her insane. I can see why

—” brown eyes roam the entirety of my face. “You’re truly gorgeous.”

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I don’t know how many times she’ll say this while I’m here but it’s getting awkward. It’s not that I don’t get compliments for my looks, but I’m usually

mistaken for Sbanisezwe

–

because of obvious reasons

–

so it has become weird that this woman knows exactly who I am and thinks I am good-looking,

as Sqalosenkosi, and not Sbanisezwe. “You as well.”

She laughs jubilantly, and nods her head. The sound is too loud that it begins to feel fo

rced or fake. I don’t know if she believes me. “My name is TemasikoDlamini.” She extends her hand.

“Nice to meet you.” Its small and chubby in my hand –

the softness of it

inviting. “Sqalosenkosi Ngcobo.” “I know who you are. The bigshot who silly old

Nthabiseng managed to rob. I

mean that’s why you were here with the cops, right? R50 000, is it? She was

discussing something with someone... maybe the boyfriend.
You know about

him?" A soft sound of amusement accompanies her headshake.
"I don't know if

I

should call you blind or just plain ignorant and naïve." Her
words insult me, I can't help glaring at her –

as that annoyance that haddied creeps up again. How dare she
say this about me, as if she knows me

personally, and the path I've walked. Her sard

onic grin reveals her censure,

and makes me feel like a scolded child. "Not commenting on
issues you haveno knowledge of will do you a world of
good." "True. But I know what happened here and I need to give
you a lecture about

the dangers of going out with women you barely know and
being blinded bytheir beauty that they rob you so simply. Like
what the hell is wrong withyou?! How could you be
so careless?! These Joburg women are not about themarriage
life or whatever you thought you saw in Nthabiseng. Here we
fuckand leave. Well not me, I fuck and stay

–

crappy orgasms and all, but do you
get my point?”

I shake my head, she said too many things

–

a brain like mine can never process the words of fast-
paced talkers. “No.” I don’t bother lying to her. “You’re telling
me my words of advice were for nothing, you took
absolutely nothing from everything I said.”

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Frustration hits me hard, I rub my nose.

“Yes.” “Mxm!” she rolls her eyes, as she nears me to look into
my eyes –

and this personal space thing is a foreign concept to her once
more. I shuffle back,

surprised, wondering if she’s planning something. In the few
minutes that I’ve been here, she’s

insulted me, dropped her panties on my feet and hugged me.

“So what will it take for me to also rob you of R50 000?” Glad to see she’s not taking this matter seriously. “A dream.” “Ha!” I watch her stand, as she goes to the fridge, she comes back with water

and a small white takeaway box. “Hold this.” I don’t get the chance to protest,

the box is already in my hands

—

cool to touch. She grabs some forks from a drawer, and a dishcloth hanging from a pale red bucket. “Here.” The one fork is for me. “If my

cake doesn’t convince you to allow me to rob you then I don’t know.”

I choke on my saliva.

“What’s wrong?” bulging eyes connect with mine, personal space a foreign concept as her hand helps me rub my chest. “Eish! You men all think with your

dicks. I

didn't mean it that way!" "Water."

"Here," the bottle is held to my lips. Her eyes are on me – and for a split second I am intimidated. Not a good feeling to have in the presence of another person.

Especially not the one responsible for it. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

She is a blabbermouth.

I attempt to fix my face. "Like what?" I have no idea what she's on about now. "Like I'm worthy of robbing you of 50k."

Fuck! She plays too much, too immature. Any other person and I

—

the lie is forced back immediately. I have more patience than the standard human, this

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is why I can entertain the likes of this one. Though I admit there's a charm to

the way she says stupid things and then laughs to herself. I keep staring at her.

She sighs, and places the bottle on the bed beside her. I frown, food doesn't

belong on the bed.

"Eat."

I grab the fork, as she opens the box, revealing what looks like red velvet cake.

"Nice, right?" "Not bad." "I forget you're one of the rich ones."

She quips, digging in as well. The silence doesn't remain between us for long before she's speaking again. "Hook me up with people I can steal 50k from. If not you then I'm sure there's someone

like you out there

—

ohh lile." "Also, there are times —

rare but still there

—

that God creates his beloved children and gives them shit instead of a brain. So every time they think of

something, its shitty.”“Ha!” she narrows her eyes. “Why would He

do you like that? This is why you
lost all that money.”

I take a deep breath, and let it out slowly. Personal space is forgotten. She hugs

my arm, squeezing her body into it. “I’m just joking!” her voice is a quietwhisper. “Don’t be so sensitive, Sqalosethu.”“Tema—”“Siko. Temasiko.”

Ah... a childish smile forms on my lips.

“Tema.”“Eish, that is not my name.”

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My left brow stands at attention, I keep my eyes on her, feeling
childishly

happy that I’ve found her weakness. “Don’t call me Sqalosethu.
Don’t ask me questions about R50 000.”“But—”“Will that be a
problem...Tema?”

Her jaw falls, she should pick it up.

“Careful, we can’t have flies moving in and out of you as they please, Tema.” I give her a stern look. “You’re not a moving truck, shut your trap.”

Her mouth closes immediately, covered by her chubby hands.

“How long until Nthabiseng gets back?” She removes her hand from her mouth and shrugs. “Maybe tomorrow morning, if not late into the afternoon.”

What?!

All the warmth leaves me, making room for something cold.

“Maybe this is some sort of misunderstanding. I thought you said she’s coming

back soon.” “Soon is subjective. It may be five minutes for you, and five hours for me.” I feel my hand tighten around the fork I’m holding. Now I’m greatly annoyed,

feeling an oncoming migraine. I drop the fork in the box and stand, fixing my pants.

“Thank you for wasting my time.” A guilty look visits her plump face. “Will you at least pay me R50 000 to show your genuine appreciation?”

Nx! What a childish mess.

“No!” I snap sternly, looking down on her with nothing else but the aim of intimidation. She only looks away a few seconds later, but there’s a secret smile on her lips. It drives me insane.

“Tell her I will be harsh next time –

and

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that she’ll be surprised

by the person I become when angered. I am not one to

be messed with.” “Sure thing, Daddy.” The playfulness is

back. She’s batting her lashes. I sigh, shaking my head as I

prepare to head out. “Have yourself a great night.” “What will make it better

is you

—” “No.” My tone is firm, I head for the door. “But you don’t—

” “I do.” My hand grips the door handle. “Okay, so you do. But I

just—” “Won’t be going out on any date with me to rob me of R50 000. Have a great

night, may your ancestors visit

t to gift you a new brain.” “Hey!” she clings to the edge of the door. “Take that back.” “Sleep tight.” I turn my back to her. “I love you!” she shouts after me. “Will that convince you? I love you, I said. Come back, let’s fall in love and make babies... I can’t make babies but –

its

very rude to walk away from someone when they’re still talking, Sqalosethu!”

I pause in the hallway. “Goodnight, Tema. I’ll call you in the morning.” She makes a confused face. “You don’t have my number.” “Good. It will never happen.” I disappear from her view, just in time to get the

elevator. A childish smile pulls at my lips. I tap my cheeks to get rid of the warmth there, schooling my features as I step out on the ground floor. I thank the young security guard and open the entrance door, jumping the street to

get to the black BMW X7 parked there. “Thank you, Bab’ Shange.” I tell him, as he begins to drive off and raises the partition screen. Sphesihle’s lovely

perfume seduces my nose.

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“Ndoda yami.” She

gets closer, one of her hands pressing in between my legs.

“What took you so long? I missed you.”

My focus shifts to her, as I look into her eyes. Hazel. She is the most beautiful creature that is walking the face of the earth, and maybe I view her differently now

—

as a fully grown woman. I pull her on my lap and wrap an arm around her, my other hand moving to grip her inner left thigh

—

getting closer and closer to the opening in her dress. I press my middle finger on her underwear, to get to her vagina, and spread it open briefly, before circling around it with my thumb and pressing onto her swollen clit. It never takes long to feel her drench up. With the eye connection forged, I bring my thumb to press on her lower lip until she is opening her mouth and sucking on it. My lips make love to her

breasts, though the fabric of her shirt, as I kiss her engorged nipples. "I've missed you too," I confess, returning my fingers to her wet and warm heat.

She releases a breathy sigh, thrusting into my finger.

"I—um... the pills. You're

still going with me, right? The birth control

—""I remember," I interrupt her, raising my hand to fondle her breasts. She helps

me by working on the buttons of her light shirt, dragging one part of her the shirt to the side to reveal one of my favourite parts of her body. I cup her breast in my hand, feeling the fullness

—

and kiss a spot just above it. "Of course, we're going together." "Thank you, my love. I don't want to fall pregnant yet."

I don't want her to either. She'

s just registered at a school for fashion design. I

suggested that she start getting driving lessons and she agreed.
There's so

much she has to achieve first, so much to attain

—

and a life to live, before she can start thinking about having babies.

“But

I hope to have your babies one day

—

and to build a family. I love you so much.” “When the time is right.”

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“Are you hungry?” her voice is throaty, she has been massaging the back of my head. “Not for my breasts though. For food, what do you want to eat?

I know

it's late but I don't mind making you something when we get home. You shouldn't go to bed hungry.” “Then let me have you,”

I say. My hands are impatient, tearing through herlacy underwear. “Lie down and let me eat my dinner.”

A blush colours

her cheeks. “Yebo, Baba.” Seductive, against my ear.

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Unrequited Desires : SeventeenTemasiko

The problem with making short-sighted decisions is that nine times out of

then they come back to bite you in the ass. I wish I could say I don't have

experience in this, but just a few weeks ago, I bought all those stupid clothes I

didn't need at Mr. Price and brought them home. There wasn't

a single itemthat was my size! All of them would barely fit

through my legs, because of howsmall in size they were, but

silly me has bought them because the idea ofdieting and losing

weight in mere days felt logical at the time. Like it was something I could do. Obviously not. Nthabiseng sports a sad whenever I leave for work in the mornings

—

like a toddler being left behind as their parent goes to scrape for a few cents

—

and somehow manages to appear even sadder when I come back from work. At first, I thought it was loneliness but the longer I think about it, and with how

there's barely any food left for her in the fridge, I'm assuming that the high has

died down and made space for reality to set in. Nothing good lasts forever after all, certainly the good that came effortlessly. This is why Bruno Mars said

'Easy come, easy go.'

I share a room with a broke bitch.

Maybe this is my mother's karma for her because wow! It's payday, but the sour smile on her face tells me she didn't get paid. I wouldn't be surprised. You

commit fraud in a company you work for and still expect them to reward you

with a salary come month end? I don't think it works that way.

"Here this is for you," I mutter softly, placing the McDonald's bag on her bed. She doesn't des

erve anything that comes from me but I remember her

kindness when I came here. Sometimes I think she's the type to crumble under

peer pressure, and that Rorisang is a rotten apple in her life that spoils her sweet character... because I fail to connect the character of the woman I met and got acquainted with, to the woman who would sell me to men simply to

score a date that didn't give her anything worthwhile... except for the

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expensive clothes that are also so useless now because she cannot eat designer brands.

"You shouldn't have, I'm good."

Has she seen how her lips look like the Arizona desert cracks?

Even lip balm

won't do her good. She looks like me when I'd go days surviving off water only—

and really, I ought to be the size of the smallest sewing needle now for all the

food I've gone without in my years of being in Johannesburg, but my mom won't allow it. She prefers Tema the pig much more. "I shouldn't have," I agree with Nthabiseng, collapsing on my bed, and sipping

on the orange juice. McDon

ald's has the best orange juice, hands down! None compares to it. The same goes for their fries. "And you're not good. You look like you've painted your lips with cement for makeup." "I forgot to put on my lip balm." She is defensive.

I still maintain

it wouldn't have helped her with anything. My trap remains shut except for the times that I open it to eat. We're watching the TV, some

lifestyle program about celebrities

—

a televised gossip magazine. They're

talking about Sbanisezwe, and how he has been chosen as one of the global ambassadors of some jewellery powerhouse. Bvlgari or some shit like that. Him and that surrealistically beautiful fiancé of his. They look powerful

together, that one couple that you can't help looking at.

It just creeps me out how eerily identical Sbanisezwe is to the man who visited all those weeks ago. Maybe not the mannerisms, because Sgalosenkosi

–

he told me to call him this

–

was far more uptight and too damn serious; and yet there's a petty childishness with this one.

He flirts too much with his fiancé

and he overshares. He's not uptight. I like him... but Sgalosam left an impression, he's my favourite.

I liked that he was grumpy, I liked the way he held himself and how black

would've better suited his overall mood –

because he's like a grey

thunderstorm. Not the seductive white shirt that clung to his bulging muscles and the formfitting navy pants that shaped another bulge at the front. Almost three weeks later, and I can still remember his smell

—

and how it seemed to stay in the room all through the night and next morning. It was heady and

200

masculine and strong. It gave off the same aura he did

—

and worked perfectly well with his deep-set eyes. I think I may've developed a crush on him from that little encounter. An

and it's a pity that I will never see him again. "Can I borrow your phone? I need to make a phone call and I don't have airtime." Nthabiseng asks me this question when I get up to use the

bathroom. I mentally roll my eyes, hating how she's become my burden now –

and borrows my phone quite often

–

but throw the phone at her nonetheless.

Tomorrow, I'm going to buy myself a new phone. Working your ass off –

even when customers are entitled shits

–

pays. I've earned an extra R2 000 to my

basic salary. This means I have R5 500 in my bank account. I would spend it

with Mancane and buy her something nice that isn't just food but she's gone to

Zimbabwe for at least two months. Youssef has found her temporary replacement.

"I have free minutes." I mutter. "Thanks."

Whatever.

After I've taken care of my bu

ness, I go to rinse my hands, and glance at myself on the mirror. Since creating boundaries with Nthabiseng's shady ass, I've been trying to teach myself how to do makeup. I downloaded the videos at work, the ones from Thatego's YouTube, but I can't achieve the desired effect.

Maybe it's because he uses naturally beautiful dark-skinned models. The ones who can sometimes get away with being deeper shades of brown because they have perfect small faces and pouty lips and small noses. Those ones who don't even need makeup to begin with.

"Yuck!" I whisper the word. Tomorrow, I'll buy more expensive makeup products. I need to invest in the way I want to look. This isn't it. I turn my back

to the mirror for betraying me

—

and not granting me the illusion of unrealistic beauty, walking out of the bathroom for the room I share with Nthabiseng.

She's finished eating her food, my phone is sitting comfortably on my bed. "Done?" "Yeah. Thanks."

201

I nod my head, grabbing it. She's deleted the number of whoever she wa

s

calling, like usual. Its stupid if you ask me... as if I'd bother calling her

dialled

numbers. Maybe she's cheating on Paul... last I heard, he wasn't pleased that she wasn't working anymore.

Nthabiseng is becoming increasingly difficult to live with. Silly me

understands her perfectly well because unemployment can bring out anyone's

inner monster but this one went knocked on the door and went inside blindly,

and now it's sad because she can't seem to find a job. Maybe it's my impatience because I can't

take it anymore. She eats my food, thoughtlessly eating lots of it and knowing perfectly well that I still go to work

—

and need a lunchbox.

We've argued about this, and she was mad, and told me to move out if I was

unhappy staying with her. I think I

will, I've begun looking around for a new

place to stay but flats in Joburg are expensive as heck! My entire salary would

go into making sure I have a roof over my head. It sucks. I don't make enough money for this. It's me who needs these therapy services

they offer at work.

I wonder what kind of mood she's in as I step off the taxi on Joubert street. It

still looks like the afternoon although the time has just gone over 06:00pm.

But it's Spring and night takes longer now. I'm craving hot wings so I bypass

my flat for the Chicken Licken in Park Station. I order sit-in to enjoy them in peace, without the likes of my roommate disturbing my peace and my ability to enjoy what I know tastes really good. Rorisang is with her when I enter the flat, nearly

forty-five minutes later. I roll my eyes, greeting them as I go to place my bag on the washing basket. Shoes removed, I decide to relax for a little while, to watch the TV and clear my mind while I contemp

late on what to cook for tomorrow's lunch. At 08:00pm, I move to the kitchen, knowing it will be mostly empty. Its not that I don't get

along with anyone on my floor but these people are gossips and they judge alot

—

what you wear, what you cook. They're messy gossips that I don't enjoy

surrounding myself with. My earphones are connected to my brand-new phone. The music sounds better when everything has been upgraded, and I swear my dance moves have

improved as well. EXO's

Lucky

One

is blasting in my ears, accelerating my mood to over 100

—

this is the song I listen to when I want to feel good. I'm in my zone... until someone is tapping on my shoulder. I jump, it irks me when someone touches my shoulder

—

the feeling is an uncomfortable one.

"Hello... how can I help you?" it's two police officers. Are they here for Nthabiseng again? Lord did she buy clothes again... I've seen no change from

her.

"How are you, ma'am?" The shorter of the two asks. "I'm fine," I say, "the person you're looking for is in

room

—”“We spoke to the young women... it’s you we’re here for.”
The other one says, he’s the one with the unfriendly
aura. “Okay?” “We’d like to take you into the police station to
ask a few questions...” “What questions? For what? I didn’t do
anything.” The unfriendly one scoffs, and if he weren’t a man
of authority I would’ve

snapped at him... but I know better. Things never end well with
these ones,

especially for someone like me. They’re tell me I’m a suspect in
a case of

fraudulent activity and my thoughts immediately go to work

—

but that’s not

what this is about. A pensioner has been robbed of her pension,
and she received a message from my number telling her to
deposit money to an account belongs to a certain Mr. Okafor.

I can’t say no.

The food that I was still cooking remains on the stoves in
the kitchen, I have to go back inside and grab my jacket.

Nthabiseng looks

worried. Rorisang... she couldn't be bothered. It doesn't take long to arrive at the police station, and then I'm being q

uestioned on things I have no

knowledge of. "My roommate has used my phone a couple of times," I explain

and I am cursing myself to hell and back for being so stupid. So damn stupid!

This must be her. It must be! "I'm working, I have no reason to steal fro

m

pensioners."

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"It won't matter—" "Yes, it will! I'm no criminal." I snap.

The shorter one sighs, and calls the intimidating one. They're talking, I don't

know what about. But they come back and somehow my femininity is

questioned. “A man like you won’t survive in prison... with all those sexuallystarved men, who’re always looking for new shiny toys.”

I want to ask how they know I’m not a woman but it’s obvious and why theyquestion my womanhood. Those girls did this. They must’ve. “I know. This iswhy I don’t provoke anyone or do anything illegal. I work hard to—”“Work hard now,” the short one says,

he’s been overly kind and I hadn’t expected this from him. The intimidating called him... was it Pitso? I think hewas called Pitso.

“I don’t understand.”“What will you do to keep yourself from going to prison? You scrub my back, I scrub yours.”“I

don’t have enough money in my bank account.” I have saved enough for my

job

—

to travel to and from work.

“We don’t want your money.” Ah... of course. Silly me. It’s pointless to say no, I know better than anyone. But it still feels like a betrayal to nod my head. The bastards are greedy, one of them makes fun of my penis. It feels me with panic how I can smell them, and taste the saltiness of the one shoving into my mouth... while feeling the stinging anguish of the one shoving roughly into me. If I close my eyes, then I can pretend I’m not here. I can pretend I’m in Mpumalanga with Jerry

Mahlangu

—

and he showers me with all the love in the world, because I’m better than his wife... beautiful. And those stupid boys at school are blind for making fun of a treasure like me. He loves me and will be with me forever.***

I am limping, badly. There's a searing heat attacking my back that makes me want to cry; not because I am a sissy who's scared of pain but because of the story behind the pain. There's

d
ry slime sticking to my thigh

—

and I feel disgusting. I take the stairs, not wanting to be around people. I smell and

they'll see... they'll see... they'll know.

Nthabiseng is wide awake, and so is Rorisang. I ignore them and head straight for my toiletry bag.

“Are you okay? What happened back there?”

I search my suitcase for a fresh pair of clothes.

“Tema?” someone touches me. I smack their cheek and the suspect screams loudly. “DON'T EVER TOUCH ME!” it's

Nthabiseng. I always try my best, I do my

best not to put my hands on people

—

cisgender women especially, because given the opportunity, they can

be just as vindictive as their counterparts. One wrong move and I'm ending up in a jail cell with men, being brutalized daily. I've read about this, I've read about transgender women who find themselves trapped in male prisons. I've read about their brutalization and how they're stripped of human dignity. I've done my best to prevent it. It's no use. "Why did you hit her?!" Rorisang comes to her friend's aid and pushes me.

I have to take a breath to calm myself. If I allow my anger to get the best of me then I could be in trouble again, I could go back to that police station and...

"Why?" dejection visits me, I feel like crying. But I can't do it in front of them, I can't give them that satisfaction. "Why do you hate me?" "Tema..." Nthabiseng snuffles. "We didn't think... I didn't know they'd press

charges. We just took a chance and

—"You could've gotten any number from the street!" I shout. "But you chose mine because you hate me. This is not the first time you've proved this and I'm a goddamn fool for trusting you. It ends today, I'm moving out." She doesn't reply. I hadn't expected her to.

I walk out of the room, moving shakily on wobbly legs and make it to the

bathroom in time before my legs fail me. I'm not even sure if it's because of the

physical pain I am in at this point. All I know is that everything hurts and my stomach feels worse

—

maybe from being bent over a metal desk for an extended period of time. Maybe it's this strong urge to vomit I feel. My hands

clutch the toilet in an anchoring grip, as this stupid hair they were pulling on falls like a curtain around me. My face is buried inside the toilet bowl. I can't

stop gagging and vomiting.

"Shit...shit!" my face feels hot and I can't stop gagging. Even though the acidic

taste on my tongue, I can still taste the saltiness overpowering it. Everything hurts. It feels like I spend forever vomiting before the urge to wash my dirty body gets stronger and more unbearable. I flush the toilet and wipe my face before going to

the showers. The water is still hot, I bend my head and allow it to

drench my body. "No, no, no. Please don't," I

whisper the words to myself

because the memories are coming back and I think I'm crying. I am crying. I can't stop. "Tema?!"

My heart is clenching painfully. My hands are trembling, my throat feels constricted and lumpy. I try not to make a sound so that she will leave me alone, and clamp on my trembling bottom lip. Sure my eyes have betrayed him

—

the tears are like an overflowing river now but I refuse to let out a sound for her satisfaction. I will not. By the time I am done, she has left the bathroom. I do not feel better. I am sticky and it feels like all those years ago. In a few days, I know I will be able to

push this to the back of my mind... but right now I'm not strong enough. My

changing clothes are with me, I dress up quickly and exit the showers. Ignoring them, I grab my suitcase to leave.

"Tema?"

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“Let her go.” Rorisang says.

She should. She does. Taxis to Hillbrow are available near Universal Church.

Lwandle should be home, he’s not working today –

since he returned from the

Eastern Cape. I’ll spend the rest of the month staying with him, while looking

for something new. I did

n’t report at work, I know there’ll be a warning waiting for me.

“After robot!” I yell, and get off just outside Lwandle’s flat a

second later. The security guard greets me and I go upstairs. It takes three knocks on the door for someone to open.

“Um, hi!” it’s a woman... around my age. “How may I

help you?” I’m sure this is the sister. “Hello!” This is awkward, I

don’t have the energy for it. “My name is Temasiko. I am

looking for Lwandle.” “Baby, who’s at the—” he appears from

behind her. The lady i

s frowning, and

glancing at my suitcase. “Temasiko? What are you doing here?” his voice is cold and unfriendly. “Sthandwa sam, go back inside. This is the—” “Ngubani lo, Lwandle?” the woman asks. “He was fucking me!” I blurt out, and then feel somethin

g explosive land

behind my right eye the next second. A scream tumbles from my mouth. I can’t believe it! He punched me, the bastard put his hands on me. “Lwandle—” he’s

dragging me by my hair. My scalp is going to be ripped off at this point

—

between tho

se cops and him. “Why did you hit me?” “Hey, tsek!” a slap lands on my cheek. “Listen to me, you will not ruin what meand my wife share. I love that woman, she’s the mother of my kids.

Respect

yourself... who do you think you are showing up to my house unannounced?”

My head starts to spin, I don't know if it's because of him nudging my forehead with his middle finger or if it's because I am processing the information. "No. You're not married." I deny, shaking my head. "You're my boyfriend." "That's rubbish and you know it." He snorts. "I was just experimenting, Tema.

Do you seriously think someone like you qualifies to be a girlfriend? Wake up,

you're a MAN! You're mentally ill wena, this is why I never took you seriously."

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"That's not true." "It is!" he snaps. "Look, you were just fun on the side. Not something I took

seriously... I mean imagine me taking you home to meet my parents. My wife stays in the rural areas, you were nothing more than something to do because

there was nothing to do. That's all." A lump forms in my throat.

"I never asked to meet your family. I didn't want to

know them. I was fine with us the way we were but you- you said you love me and

—" "Because that's what you wanted to hear. You're so desperate for love,

Temasiko. Dee

p down, it's because you know you're unlovable. I mean look at you... this is why you ignored all the signs. I had you where I wanted you and you allowed it because you know no rational man will ever want to be with you. No future lies here

—

no progress.

You're just a good fuck... otherwise, you can't even bear children."

My lips tremble, I want to say something but the words are stuck in my throat.

He's right, I know. I'm not stupid. What sane woman doesn't question the kind

of behaviour he

showed? Was I really that desperate? "Um... okay." I don't know what to say. "I—does she know about me? That you'd leave the children with me to mother."

"Mother who? You're just a man playing dress up." Of course, he won't answer my questions. She doesn't know about me. Why

would she? I was just something to fuck when he was bored.
And foolishly, I allowed him. Even when the signs were there, I
allowed him

—

because I was

so desperate for... what? Companionship? Love? I don't know
what I was chasing... I know but I won't admit it. "Thank you for
your time." I say. I won't

break down in front of him. I refuse. He will not see any other
version of me but the strong woman he knows.

He says nothing. I walk away, there's an uncomfortable tension
in my belly

a

nd my chest feels too tight. I want to cry but don't want to
bring myself

attention. My eye is closing and the throbbing sensation behind
it is giving me a migraine. It's swelling up. I decide to withdraw
money from the garage

across the street, the only thing of importance right now is accommodation.

There's a shady hotel in Joubert Park that charges R45.00 a night per person.

The man coming from the ATM looks at me weirdly. Yes, I've been roughed up

but who cares? I go to use the ATM but he comes back and says he forgot his receipt. I am not in the mood and snap at him.

After I punch in my pin-code,

the ATM starts to act up. There's no one around me to assist, and the cancel button won't bring my card back. Barely minutes later, my phone reports to

say that R2 500 has been withdrawn from my account. How is that possible? Hopelessness visits me

—

and I collapse on the floor this time. I don't know what to do. I feel like crying but I don't. A lady comes to ask me if I'm fine,

and that's when I break down. The river overflows and I can't stop crying –

for last night, for this morning... for everything. She tells me to visit the bank. By 03:30pm, I find myself in the Park Station food courts with a suitcase

sitting next to me. Youssef wouldn't allow me to temporarily move back in

with him, as another lady occupies the space with Trisha. It feels like I'm

seventeen all over again, with no plan and nowhere else to go. My stomach is growling. The hours keep ticking by. My phone has died and I have no idea where to go. My heart bleeds and I cry

–

but the tears are internal. At

07:45pm, I've accepted my fate... I'm back to sleeping on the cold benches of

Park Station again. I have to hold my bag tight against me, no matter how uncomfortable it is. People steal

here and if you're not careful then... it's heavy, the bag. I close my

eyes and try to get some sleep. My chest is tight with a lancing pain, I pray to God to help me compartmentalize. May He give me a plan for tomorrow? May

He give me strength. I've used it all up today

—

and I can do nothing but cry myself to sleep.

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Unrequited Desires : Eighteen Temasiko

I have survived my first night at Park Station. My suitcase has made it as well, and stayed safe in my arms. I sit up

—

achy limbs and all

—

because there's a cold morning breeze that has forced me awake. It's the early hours of the morning, and still dark outside. If I had to guess I would say it was around 04:00am. I open my suitcase to retrieve another

jacket to add onto three other ones that are already covering my body. My head hurts like a bitch, the pain comes from deep inside my brain, and sears my scalp with an unbearable stinging.

‘Take a breath’ I command myself, and inhale deeply only to exhale a second later. It doesn’t work, it still feels like someone is slicing into my head with a scorching knife. I’ve been trying not to focus on the angry

pain in my belly but

it’s becoming unbearable, too, and maybe the hunger is adding to it. I shouldn’t have left with those police offers without eating my food, I should’ve demanded that I eat my food at least. It’s all the same, adhering to their every

co

mand didn’t help me in the end –

in no way. I find myself here instead

–

hungry and homeless.

“Suster...” through my functional eye, I take notice of the dirtied tall man standing in front of me with a charger in his hands. “I’m selling—” “Angina mali!” I snap, holding my suitcase protectively to me. “Haisuka! Uzenza ngcono ngento engekho.”

My energy levels are too low to respond to him. I may even cry if I attempt to.

This is why I bear his swearing, until he decides that he's said enough and walks away. It's the hunger, I blame it for his stinking attitude. The same

hunger I feel, as different scents of food assault me and poke fun at my empty stomach. People are in their different containers, fixing their fake smiles and different sorts of breakfast for the worthy ones, the ones with money.

Me, I don't even have a 10c on me. Let alone R5 t

o buy their black coffee. I spot the man that was here not too long ago, buying bread and coffee from

210

container 29

—

and feel like punching his face for being rude when he at least had something. The selfish asshole! Anyway, congratulate me

–

I am officially jobless! Great news, right? With no money, no place to stay, getting to those offices in Randburg forms the least of my worries. There's a warning waiting for me back there, I know, but I can't even fly on a broom to go sign it.

Perhaps this is ka

rma for making fun of Sqalosenkosi all those weeks ago. Maybe he praises a living God and all

that good stuff. Maybe it's his ancestors. Maybe they overpowered my mother

in the afterlife and paid me back for making fun of their beloved son. Or it could be

Nthabiseng's. Or maybe Rorisang's. They always seem to get away

with being shitty humans, and some of us pay for minding our own business.

Maybe it's the universe –

and it has some personal grudge against me. By 07:00am, I swear I feel like death. My stomach is growling, angered, demanding that it be catered to. I grab my suitcase, wheel it outside, and walk

around. I don't know where I'm going, it's just aimless wandering, and it feels

like the entire world has thrown its problems on my shoulders and told me to carry it. Maybe this is why it feels so wearisome to walk, and why my

shoulders are so heavy. There's a fruit trolley ahead, near Noord, and many

are gathered around it

—

buying apples and bananas. I stand with them for a few seconds, as they snap at the young Malawian boy to work faster. He must be new, judging by how skittish he is

—

and can't be

older than 16 years old. I grab a few fruit myself, and blend in with the crowd

discreetly, to hide what I've taken in my jeans —

and then walk off. Of course

guilt eats at me but right now it has to take a backseat. They don't count their

stock, some of it rots and they have to dispose of it... I was doing the boy and his boss a favour.

I've come up with a plan to sell my phone at one of the Indian shops,

only to be

grossly disappointed because they're not willing to pay even half of the price I

got it for. This is a brand-new Samsung! It cost me R2 199 to buy and for them

to want to pay me a mere R450 for it is the biggest insult. I don't care how

desperate I am... maybe I will have to really swallow my pride and come back

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but there's two bananas and an apple digesting in my belly so I choose to walk

away. A job finds me at 02:16pm... more like I find it. Starting tomorrow, my life as the lady who stands at the robot the whole day, handing out fake sangoma flyers begins

—

again. They've increased their payment rate now, and pay R170 per week. I don't know how I will be surviving off that with needs –

accommodation, hygiene and food. Still I accept because I don't have the option not to.

I return to Park Station and... think. There's nothing I can do but think. About

Nthabiseng. Rorisang. About Lwandle. My heart tightens something nasty at the thought of him, and tears brim in my eyes. I... everything he said was true. It was true because I purposefully turned a blind eye to all the warning signs that were staring at me in the face. Was I so desperate for his affection? Maybe I liked that he addressed me the way I wanted him to, that he saw me

–

and did

not judge me. I was so desperate for his affection that I... never again. Never

again. I hope that woman questions him, and I pray that she leaves him, because he

will continue to do this. I hope she leaves him because he's not a good father,

just like h

e was never a good boyfriend. He buys affection. That's the only

thing he knows how to. He bought me and I allowed him. Just like he buys his

children and doesn't really love them. I know because he would dump me with

them. I know because if any of them we

re ever trans, he wouldn't accept them, he would pretend until he couldn't –

just like he did with me.

My hunger won't let me sleep when night falls. I tried my best, told myself that at least I'd be working tomorrow, but it's not possible. This is

how I find myself standing outside Spar at 07:30pm

–

devising a plan. My phone is in my left hand, and my suitcase in my right. People keep passing me and I am embarrassed. I take a deep breath, and stop the man who'd just gotten his parking ticket from the parking machine. He's a white man. "Hello, Sir. Excuse me."

"What is it?" he looks sceptical. "I need your help, please. You see I just came from Mpumalanga this morning, and I was stupid enough to ask someone for directions. The person took

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advantage of that and I was robbed of all the money on me, including one of my phones." This isn't a complete lie, I was robbed. "This one has died and I

just need at least R20 so that I can charge my phone at one of those charging stations not far from here. Please

“I can’t really meet his eyes, this was embarrassing, to stoop down to this level.

Where I have to ask for assistance because my pride has been stripped off me. He gives me R5. It makes me feel even shittier. Why did I do that? My stomach clenches tightly in discomfort, I would bash my head against the wall if I could.

Still, R5 won’t take me far –

and though I promised myself to never rely on anyone for anything, to never ask them for anything... my mouth will not eat

my pride. Pride won’t fill eat my

stomach with food. This is why I stand again, and wait for the next person who looks approachable

–

and a bit moneyed. My saviour comes

–

and I smell him before I can actually see his face, through the expensive cologne. I turn quickly and collide with

chest. He doesn't move, but I grip my eye because he's just poked my bruise as it was minding its own—

and now I'm paying for it. "Watch where you're going, will you?" I snap

softly, wincing in agony

—

functioning eye now also closed. "Just because I

need

your help, it doesn't mean that you have to bring me pain."

The man grips my arm and I try to shrug off his touch.

"Don't touch me!" I don't want any form of touch —

none of it. He lets go

immediately. "Thank you. I was just asking for help because I

was supposed to be catching a flight to Cape Town this evening

but my Uber driver was

—"

Him! My trap shuts closed and I close my functional eye again, praying that the

earth swallows me. Why didn't he stop me? I was a rambling mess and he's

just looking at

me. "Really?" I am offended. "What's wrong with you?" His lips are twitching, and he gives me a onceover. "Please don't stop on my account." "Sqalosenkosi!" I frown. "Sbanisezwe." His smile is intimidating –

and I don't know how he does it,

because

it looks so damn childish. It's different from that serious one from all those weeks ago. "Cape Town, you were saying."

213

"Never mind." I have a feeling he can tell I am lying. "Please give me R15." There. I've swallowed my pride again. It strangely doesn't

feel embarrassing

with this one, maybe because I now know he's not that one I
had a mini crush

on

—

even if he does have his face.

The man, Sbanisezwe, gives me a strange smile. Seconds pass
by, he's looking at me, and it's starting to creep me out. He

bends his head so that we're eye

level, smiling childishly, it feels like he can see right through me

—

and I don't know what he can see... what he's even looking for.
"Are you the Eve to his Adam? The Delilah to his Samson?" He
tilts his head, and smiles

wider

—

a

Cheshire cat grin. There's a phone in his hand, he doesn't take
his eyes off me as he puts it to his ear. "Cikicane?"

I should leave. Rich people are selfish with their money.

“Three minutes. Don’t hang up, I want to hear your voice all the way here.” Okay. He’s weird. There’s a phone call going on, his head is bent and his eyes

are on me the entire time. I am beginning to suspect that this Cikicane person is his fiancé

–

their conversation points to it. He, Sbanisezwe, was going to buy something for Cikicane, for an upset belly. Even though his creepy gaze is on me, and mostly imprisons me, I still manage to force myself out of the trance

he’s put me in –

and backtrack. My behind touches another wall... do walls materialize out of nowhere now?

“Sbanisezwe, why are you calling me?”

That voice. I turn around faster than I had before and hit my face with the wall. Ow! Pain explodes behind my injured eye and I feel like crying. What is it with these

two? “Do you get a kick out of hurting me?!” I snap. “Eh...” the familiar voice –

different from that teasing and lighter one from before

—
betrays notes of confusion. “You’re... Tema —

Temasiko?”

It offends me how he seems to have forgotten my name. How he had to take a few good seconds to remember. It offends me even more that he has the balls

to grace me that beautiful smile of his... warm; before he’s frowning. His hand

214

reaches out and it’s like his scent surrounds me all of a sudden. As masculine

as it was that first day we met. “Don’t poke it,” I whine like a child. He’s

hurting me.

“What happened?” his touch is gentle—

and warm. I hate it with every fibre of my being.

“The lady was robbed by her Uber driver before she could fly to Cape Town...

wearing several mismatched hoodies and ruffled loose

leggings.” The sarcasm drips of Sbanisezwe’s smooth tongue. He didn’t buy my story from the

moment I told it. Sgalosenkosi snorts, peering over his shoulder, only to focus on me a second later. He bends his head, just as the giant before him had done. His eyes are worried

—

and I’d feel special. But there’s something warm and inviting about him. I think he’s the type that cares a lot about people, it doesn’t matter who you are. “Tell me, so I can help you.”

My stomach growls.

“I’m hungry.” I whisper.

I’ve never been more embarrassed in my life. “Okay.” His voice is soft. It affects me and forces me to look down, I choose to blame it on the embarrassment

—

and not the deep-

set eyes. “What do you want to eat?” I’d eat his dick at this point. “What can you afford?”

He laughs heartily. His laughter is kind and warm. Everything about him screams kind and warm

—

everything. That’s just the aura he has. “This entire place and the people who work in it.” Only he can say this and not make it sound arrogant

—

purely humble.

“Now tell me, what do you want to eat?”

Everything. I want a warm place to sleep in and I want to rid myself of the

dirtiness clinging to me. “Chicken Licken.” “Okay. We’ll go.” Finally he stands tall again, and I am left staring at his chest.

My eyes

don't stay there long as they flip to the beautiful man next to this

215

giant's brother. It's the fiancé. Sbanisezwe's fiancé. I would notice him from

anywhere, with how much Nthabiseng obsesses over him. He has a beautiful build; the curvaceous Beyoncé build with thick thighs and the tiniest waist, with skin so light he looks like he has coloured genes in him

—

more notable with his bare face. This knee-high, body-hugging dress he has on seems to cost

more than my life. He's scrutinizing me, the same way I am

doing him. Sgalosenkosi introduces us. The beautiful man, Thatego, greets softly. He

seems like the delicate type. I think he's judging the way I am dressed though and frowns in disapproval. "It's nice to meet you." I don't care, I just want food. Sba

nisezwe and his fiancé part with us, they

were at Buffalo Bill's with Squalosenkosi for a casual
meetup. They enter the

Spar and Squalosenkosi insists on wheeling my suitcase. We
enter the ChickenLicken, it smells really good

—

and takes away my own body odour away from
me... if only temporarily. "What are you eating?" "The one with
two pieces and chips." I don't want him to think I'm a pig who
wants to be fed by him.

"Alright. Wait for me, I'll pay."

I do as he says and pretend to notice the eyes on me. Yes, I look
a mess. Who the fuck cares?! My hands are trembling, I am
feeling weak. My vision blurs for

a second or three before it's really focusing on Squalosenkosi,
standing taller

than everyone around him. Would you believe it if I said he had
to bend his head again as we entered this store

—

with its tall doors? He's ridiculously tall,

resembles a huge tree walking around. Our eyes connect briefly and I pretend to have been looking somewhere else.

It's Wednesday, he's wearing a black shirt that clings to and shows off his muscular build. The pants are also formfitting, they proudly bulge on his nether regions

—

showing off. His hands are in his pockets and I focus on the expensive watch hugging his wrist. Though I can't hear it, I know his phone

has rung because he grabs it from inside his pocket and puts it against his ear. A smile lights up his face, he looks like Eros this very moment, as he rubs his lower lip and wets it.

216

WTF?!

I gulp and look away. He's very, very good

-

looking and there's no de

nying

that. There's also no point in thirsting over a man like him when my thoughts

should be focused on finding ways to trick him into giving me enough money that can sustain me

—

and probably give me a chance to go beg for my job in Randburg.

"Let's go." He gives me the plastic bag. "Thank you." My suitcase is taken from me. He didn't acknowledge my show of gratitude and walks in front of me. Arrogant bastard! I follow like a good, little girl

—

as we ride the escalators and take the small flight of steps, passing the Fastpost and exiting. We pass a number of parked cars until we stop at the fanciest one in this

place. It's big and black. That sounds... wrong. This is an SUV. "Get in." He has

opened the door for me

—

backseat. I do as he says, and he follows behind me.

There's an elderly man

in front, in charge of driving. Wow! Talk about wealth.

So rich that you don't have to drive yourself around. "Bab' Shange –

the hotel,

please."

My eyes widen. What does he mean the hotel? Am I going to be fucked for twopieces of chicken and chips... actually the plastic is heavy and I suspect he gotmore pieces but still

–

what the heck?! There's a black screen that raises, andseparates me and him from the elderly man. "I am transgender," I blurt out, to

prevent him from doing this... whatever he has

in mind. Men don't like

transwomen. Hopefully, even for this one, I am not his target market.

"Okay." He is so nonchalant, and types away on his face –

a sinful expression on his face. I puff out a breath and gaze outside. His windows are tinted but you can see when you're inside. I wonder which hotel he's taking me to. If he's going to fuck me then I hope he's paid for the entire night at least, and I hope he gives me money. He doesn't look like the overly freaky type, I hope he doesn't prove me wrong and surprises me with a few hard punches. I close my eyes and mentally prepare myself. Hopefully, he'll let me bath first and clean myself, because I smell horrible.

217

"Here. Turn left and you'll find the bedroom." He gives me my suitcase. "Thank you." I feel compelled to say this although I am about to be fucked for it. He's not leaving, he nods his head and keeps his gaze on me. Its intensity burns into me all the way to the bedroom. I enter the bedroom and take everything in

—

the classic beauty. This place screams money. Nearly everything is white and I am scared to mess any of it up. I wheel my suitcase to the bathroom, and decide to change out of my dirty clothing there. The bathtub is egg-

shaped. There's fancy bath salts. I pour

everything in the hot water and scrub my body again and again

—

until my skin feels raw. Quelling any negative emotions as I step out, frustration smacks me

across the cheek when I enter an empty bedroom. I've just spent close to an

hour in the bathroom.

What's taking

him so long? Does this man want to fuck or not? I lotion my body to smell good for him and wait again. My patience wears thin ten minutes in and I exit the bedroom

—

still butt-naked

—

for the living room. Maybe that's where he wants to fuck. "Hey!" I ca

ll out.

"Hey, I was—what the hell?!" he shouts and quickly stands to his feet, backing

away. His eyes are on my body, they bulge

—

and then he's spinning around quickly. "Temasiko?"

"Don't tell me you're offended!" I snap, he's offending me.

"Yes, I don't have the ideal body but it shouldn't matter when the hole is what you're trying to get into." "What?!" He shakes

his head, faces skyward, still refusing to face me. "When are we fucking so I can get this over with!" my snippy tone is quiet

now—

and

a bit humble. I don't want to seem ungrateful. If he forces me out of the hotel room at this hour then I am thoroughly fucked...

I may as well die. "If my body's too disgusting—"

218

“There’s nothing disgusting about your body!” His rebuking tone is harsh, I

flinch. “Get dressed. I wasn’t helping you to fuck you.” He’s irritated. “Yeah well, I’m not a charity case.” Its annoying that he wants to do this... outof what, the goodness of heart? “Tell me what to do to pay you back. Even a blowjob will do!” “NO!” The sound reverberates in the hotel room. “Get dressed. Right now!”

“Why not? Do you have a girlfriend?”

“Yes!” Impatient now. “And I’m wasting my precious time here with you, when you could just follow simple instructions. I don’t want to fuck you, not

everyone is out to take advantage of you. Sometimes, you need to swallow your pride and accept help

—
as you had done when you admitted to being hungry. Don't act up now. Get dressed right now!" "I will pay you back. I found a new job and I will collect enough to pay you back." "Okay. Now go get dressed...please." He won't look at me, but his voice is pleading.

"What did you want to say?" I ask him.

"Get dressed!"

He won't let it go. He's so damn stubborn! I wiggle my shoulders and go back inside the bedroom, making sure to bang the door. Nx!

219

Unrequited Desires : Nineteen Sqaalosenkosi

My deflating dick pulls out of her throbbing warmth, glistening with traces of her orgasm, creaminess coating the head, sticky slickness stretching between the head of my cock and her

swollen vagina. Her legs are still trembling, hands pushing at my pelvis, to drive me away; soft whimpers falling off her rosy lips, cheeks tinted a blushing roseate. “Squalosenkosi, wait...”

My lips latch onto her left nipple, one of my hands moving to her other breast, groping the softness, and my dick tw

itches against her. “I want you again,” I

demand softly, pressing my body into hers. She has to understand, she has to

understand the things that her body does to me... how everything about her seems. “For this, Sphesihle,” I circle my mushroom head around h

er pussy lips,

spreading her open, “I would spend my whole life on my fucking knees.” There’s always a deep desire inside me, almost... animalistic. A deep desire to

know how much her body can take, to let those sensations control her, to have her exposed and bare

—

feeling and not resisting.

“Sphesihle...” I cajole, kissing along the corners of her mouth, imprinting my

desire for her into her skin. My lips persuade her into a kiss,
my tongue taking

advantage of her gentle moans. "Talk to me." "I love you," her
voice is breathless against my li

ps.

"I want you to look at the sight we make together, Sphehleh." I
tell her,

wrapping my arms around her middle to lift her body, turning
us around so

that she's looking at the floor

-

length mirror on the wall. I'm behind her,

caressing along her belly, to her warmth. Our eyes meet on
the mirror, and for a moment I see beyond the thoroughly-

fucked face... deeper.

I study the beauty of her eyes, her face, and it feels like I know
every mole on her face. Wrapping my arm around her throat,
my other hand caresses her cheek, sliding my fingers in her hair.
Her eyes close immediately, she leans her head against my
hand. I take a second to cherish her, sighing deeply as my grip

turns into a fist. My knee nudges her legs apart, bending her over slightly,

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and sliding my growing erection along her pussy lips in a back and forth manner.

“I’m going to take you again now.” The plea leaves my mouth.

“I want you to keep your eyes on the mirror.” She nods her head, and reaches behind her to

grip my thighs for anchor as I slide in slowly again. A groan tumbles from deep

inside my chest. “All mine,” the words escape. Her walls grip me to the point of

strangulation, scorching heat extending to my veins, my dick pulsing inside her wetness. With my eyes fixed on hers,

imprisoning her, I begin to thrust into her pussy, moaning

deeply, pushing deeper and harder. My arm tightens around

her neck as her hands move to grip there, for anchor, her body shaking

—

her breasts shaking hard with her movements, her nipples hard and stimulated. The sight entrances me, forces me to my one of my hands from her waist to fold an arm around the bouncing tits, her engorged nipples poking into my skin.

“Don’t look away, Sphesihle!” I grunt in her ear, forcing her eyes to snap open,

bottom lip bitten in what looks like painful pleasure.

“S

-

Sorry, Daddy...” a breathless moan. It turns into screams seconds later, my name chorused by her glistening lips. “Don’t st

-

stop, please, I’m sorry.” She’s still looking at the mirror, and grips the bedsheets w

hen I push out, and slam back in again. She pushes back against me, taking more of my length as I move my hand to rub her clit continuously. Her walls clench around me in a chokehold, her slickness smearing my erection, drenching me in pleasure. And she s

tarts to shudder again, repetitious, "Fuck me, fuck me!" leaving her

lips. I pull her back in when she attempts to crawl away, gripping her waist, and penetrating her faster, rougher. My thumb moves back to her clit, viciously teasing the swollen button, and she jolts, eyes closing and mouth hanging open in sobs. Her climax comes to her in crashing waves

—

a laughing, crying mess; excessive liquid gushing out of her. My lips press to her neck, my rhythm stuttering, as my orgasm hits me with the force of a tidal wave. I groan, keeping her spasming body in place, riding out my orgasm. We fall together, side by side, and she shifts away from me

—

221

panting. "If I don't keep the distance between us then I'm scared you'll break my vagina." "Uyashisa, Muntuza." "Don't call me that!" her protest is weak. "I'm a grown woman, your woman." "You are," I say. "And you're my man, who makes me orgasm and squirt... without fail. Everytime."

My lips curl up in amusement, I drag her to me, chuckling when she tries to make her escape again. Daylight is breaking through the darkness, teasing my bedroom in light, Liyana will be waking soon, and rushing into the my room without knocking. We need to change the bedsheets and shower. Sphesihle

doesn't complain as I drag her out of bed, to remove the bedding.

"Stop it, this is my job." She snatches the bedding from me, and hits me with it on the chest. I am momentarily distracted by her womanly body

—

the slightly

shaven privates, up and up, until I'm looking at her big bosom.

"Will you stop looking at me?" she hides her body, appearing shy all of a sudden. "You're a pleasure to look at,

Sphesihle." "Ngyabonga." Her smile lights up the entire room.

"Why don't you go ahead and start the shower, I'll join you after I finish making the bed."

I nod my head, headed to the bathroom. The water is slightly cool on my skin, I bow my head and let it drench my skin. My eyes close and I am assaulted by

the image of... Temasiko, a reminder that I have to see her today, to check in.

Did she sleep well? Was she uncomfortable for some reason? Has she eaten?

Then questions are endless... but

I care. I always care.

She looked rough last night, and smelled worse. Like someone who hadn't

showered in days, or had spent her entire time roasting herself under the Joburg sun. Not to mention the numerous mismatched tops she had on, as if someone fighting against the cold. I remember the crinkled leggings, and I

222

wasn't aware that they could be like that. Her face was muddy and the

swollen, black eye had made things worse. It was a shock to see her like that. Many questions ran through my mind. What happened to her that caused her to be like that? Did she get in a fight with... I don't even remember her roommate's name. If so, what was so bad that she

had to turn to the streets

—

with no place to stay or plan for the next day. It was... painful to see her like that. Maybe because I've seen her wild and carefree side, the loud side that I wouldn't be able to stomach with anyone else... that was bearable that night because it felt like she was the type that

was ignorant to everything but herself, and what she felt, and who she was.

"Ucabangani engaka?" a soft voice calls out behind me, coming with music. I sigh, turning in Sphehlehle's embrace, amused by how short she is. The top of her head doesn't even reach my chest, it must be a struggle having to look

up

at me all the time. Her nipples are poking into my skin, and perhaps it wasn't a

good idea that we shower together. I always want her. My body comes alive at her touch, so badly, that I ache to bury myself inside her whenever I see her. It's become a need.

"I'll leave you alone with Liyana for a while, there's someone I have to meet." "Oh..." her smile falters, she's searching my eyes. "Anyone I know?" "You don't know anyone I am acquainted to, Sphesihle." I remind her, raising an eyebrow. "Except for my family, maybe." "How long will you take?" "Not long, I hope. But that Temasiko is unpredictable, and I've found myself

spending much longer time periods with her than my original plans. The first time she did it by tricking me into thinking her roommate would return soon. Last night she did it by insisting I have sex with her to repay me for my

'kindness' and when I didn't, I was compelled to eat dinner with her –

all this while she complained that I got her an extra six pieces of meat, complete with

rolls and a cold beverage, while she hadn't asked

for it. Then I was accused of

trying to make her fat. She's a walking mess.

“I’m not sure,” I murmur honestly, pressing my thumb to her lower lip. She

bites my thumb playfully, and returns my amused beam. Her eyes speak of obscene innocence.

“And you don’t want Liyana and I to accompany you?”

No. I will not expose them to strangers.

“Cha. I need you here, being a good little wife, and preparing food for everyone. I’ve never hosted my family before, things must be perfect.” “I don’t know whether t

o be offended or smitten that you called me your little

wife. And don’t you dare push that patriarchal agenda on me, I do everything I do for you because... I love you and it makes me happy to please you.” “I know.” I pinch her cheek. “It was a

simple joke. There’s not much I expect from you, Sphe... your worth in my eyes is not determined by what you

do around the house. Or what you do for me. I enjoy your company. I like that

you’re so... maternal with my daughter. She hasn’t had that in so long.”

Sphe

his grin is breathtakingly beautiful, hazel eyes light up –
and again, it

feels like I can see beyond, beyond... him. “I enjoy her company, too. But she’s very quiet.” “Losing—” “I’m sorry, I know—” “It’s fine,” I say. It’s not. “Please make my house a home... for when my siblings come here. I’ll come to help you soon.”

Her response is to stand on her tiptoes and tilt her head back, looking up at me for a kiss. I give her what she wants, scooping her up in my embrace, and pushing her against the wall. I want to taste her again. She takes my cock, and wraps her hand around it, to tease her clit with it before I take control and push inside her wet flesh. I push her up against the wall, moving sensually slow, in time with the song playing. Is it Keith Sweat? ‘Right And A Wrong Way’, I think, and snort to myself... how fitting.

My hand cups her breast, as she grinds down on me, rocking back and forth. The water has turned cold, but it feels like acid on my skin. I close my eyes and bury my face inside her neck, to plant my lips on her pulse point. It's too wild... like my heart. "Give it to me, Daddy." She keeps throatily moaning, as I thrust into her... too intense, the sexual attraction between us. It's carnal. I press my lips onto her mouth, and whisper, "Cum for me."

***Liyana sent me off with the instruction to bring her favourite chocolate from the candy store. Sphesihle gave me a kiss, and told me to buy her Greek salad dressing from the store. I shall do both on my way back home, or maybe before that, as a thought crossed my mind that maybe Temasiko would appreciate getting her own food as well. I ring the doorbell, even though I have a spare key-card to the hotel room, but

I don't want to find her naked... as I saw her last night. She thought I was disgusted by her body but that wasn't it. Any normal person would be shocked at seeing someone else's nakedness, a stranger to top it all off. This is why I looked away, it felt wrong to look at her... no matter

how beautiful her build. I

was not blind to it... perhaps I share the same tastes as Nqobizitha when it comes to women. Sphesihle isn't small herself. "Oh, it's you!" I blink my eyes, looking down at Temasiko, relieved to note that she's dressed today. A leather skirt adorned with pink hearts, it has a slit on her left thigh that trails up about four or five inches; and has it paired with a black see-through top, but her breasts are hidden by a black bra. She looks beautiful, nothing like the Temasiko I met last night...except for her swollen eye. "Sawubona, Temasiko."

I quell the anger I feel on her behalf.

"Sawubona, unjani?" "Ngyaphila. Unjani wena?"

225

"I'm also very good. Thank you."

Okay, very tame today. Maybe her craziness has shifts

–

and d

oesn't start until the afternoon. It's only 09:43am now. Next time, I'll set an alarm for 12:00pm before visiting, I prefer the loud, crazy side. Not this one she's giving me –

mysterious, a bit intimidating. Is she... ogling me? I don't know what else to

mak

e of... eyes on my chest, down and down, the front of my pants... an

audible swallow. She meets my eyes again.

"I don't mind standing here the whole day, we can just look at each other like

this

—

and whoever wins allows the other to rob them of R50 000."

"Don't make fun of me!" is snapped amusedly. "Uyafuna ukungena?" "Cha." I put my hands in my pockets and shrug my shoulders. "I'm just here to

stare at your lovely face until

—"Aha!" Her eyes look victorious, but I think she feels bashful about something. "You think I'm lovely?" Isn't it obvious? She

hasn't done anything to make me believe otherwise...even when she begs to rob me of my money. "Why not?"

My arm is punched soft

ly. "Ngena." I follow behind her to the living room. It's a mess, with her clothes thrown all over the place, and my nose scrunches up in distaste. We'll have to teach her

how to be clean

—

in every sense of the word. I don't even know where to sit,

as I

look around. "How did you sleep?" "Kahle kakhulu," she turns her back to, and goes around picking up every clothing item. I am hit with *déjà vu* almost immediately. "Please forgive me for

the mess. I wanted to do my washing, but the lady said they had people who

can do that for me, it felt weird and I asked if I couldn't just do it myself, and she told me she'd fetch me so I was picking out clothes to wash and...wait—"her eyes widen... is that sadness in there? It's gone too quickly. "You should've

called me

to say you want me out so that I wouldn't have gone through
and create this mess.”

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I raise my hands in surrender. “I didn't get your number last night,” I explain as she plops down on the couch and begins to fold her clothes. She's angry, I can tell. “I'm not here to chase you out, Temasiko.” “Don't... don't feel sorry for me!” her brittle tone snaps. “I'm just saying, if you prepared me then I wouldn't have gone and created this mess. Now you're frowning because you're a clean person—” her eyes scrutinize me. “—

and

you've caught me being messy again. Let me quickly pack my things and

then

—” “Where will you go?” I cock an eyebrow. “To the streets. All you cis het men hate us in the daylight but you're the first ones lining up to pay for our services at

night. Drop me off at Hillbrow, I don't think that fake sangoma will let me have my job... I didn't go in today, and it was supposed to be my first day. Eish... or maybe you should drop me off at Park Station, it's safer that side. I don't want to lose my beloved

things, I bought these clothes with my hard-earned cash. Maybe I can convince that man who

is in charge of the toilets to keep my bag for me while I make a plan to... yeah, I'll have to fuck a guy or two for a while, it doesn't matter. Nothing new. Listen,

c

ould you borrow me R150? I'll pay you back, I promise, I just don't want to

have to sell my phone at the Indian shops, they want to pay me much less

—”“Enough, Temasiko.” She talks too fast, looking delirious as she does it, and hasn't stopped folding her clothes. “I'm not here to chase you out. This room is my brother's private suite, Thatego and him agreed to you using it for a while. I just want to talk, to check in.”“Oh!” delirium makes way for relief... and those unshed tears –

gone again.

“Well, why didn’t you say that?” I was trying to but she’s a parrot. “Because you’re a budgerigar.” “A what?” her face breaks into a grin –

beautiful. “Is that French for beautiful or something? You look like the type that knows French.”

227

Bewilderment visits me, I shake my head. What the hell gave her the idea that I know French? Sbanisezwe is the linguist, the one who prefers the finer

things in life. I’m the simple one. Nqobizitha is mostly me, but he is a man full of surprises. “You’re a

beautiful parrot, Temasiko.” I deadpan. “Wow!” her mouth makes an ‘o’ shape. She gets into my space, searching my eyes

–

and breaks into that characteristic grin of hers again, all small teeth. “A

beautiful parrot, huh? Thank you, definitely original from all the other

compliments."There's something bitter about the way she says this, but I won't pry further,we don't know each other like that. "How are you feeling, Temasiko? Have you eaten? How did you sleep?" "Fine." Attitude.

Is she back to bei

ng angry again? I don't understand what I've done.

"Just fine? Did you eat?" "Don't ask me weird questions, they're annoying. Take my word for it, I'm fine.Is that all you're here for?" "Well no," I don't know why she's angry. "I want you to tell me

what

happened, please... if you don't mind." "I was stupid enough to repeat past mistakes and I found myself in a lot of shit.My boyfriend's married and I have to thank my deceased mother for meeting you again. What else do you want to know?" "Are you angry?" "About what?" she snorts. "Allow someone that much power over me... ngeke.I've moved on from everything, and now I'm here. Thank you for... saving me." I can feel her distaste dripping off her tongue at that final wording. "If you

allow me to rob you

of R50 000, then I'll be more than happy to pay you back." "Where are you working?" I ignore her little joke.

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"Nowhere now." "What are your qualifications?" She folds her arms, and regards me coldly. "If this is your way of asking, yes, I

am

stupid and don't have matric. But I learned to use the internet on the

computer a while back. I know where to find Microsoft Word and how to type

a CV. I did all that without matric."

"That is impressive," I hum quietly. "So when can you pass by my office

s for an interview? We have a computer room for the indulgence of our workers. Your main duties will be to assist the accountants in doing their jobs efficiently by

making sure their workspace is clean and orderly. I'm sure they'd be grateful

to have someo

ne like yourself assisting them." "You're giving me a job?"

"No. You're helping me do mine." "How, you're HR?" "I'm whatever you want me to be... at work. HR? If that's what you want me to be then yes. How soon can you start?"

She shakes her head, standing, and mumbles quietly to herself. A myriad of emotions mask her face

—

anger, anxiety, happiness... maybe? "I thought you said I had to attend an interview." "To determine when you're ready to start working." Her shoulders wiggle, there's no smile

on her face, just pure frustration. I have never met anyone whose moods change like the weather. She folds her arms

on her chest, her nipple peeks out of the bra. My eyes bulge. “What is it?” my eyes point to her chest area. “Oh...” she moves past the issue smoothly. “And then can I pay you back for what you did for me last night? For all this...because I’m not a charity case, Squalosethu—”

“Senkosi.”

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A smile pulls at her lips. “Can’t you make an exception? I like it better when you’re Squalosethu.”

Squalose

thu is one of Nhlakanipho’s deceased brothers. “On Monday, be ready at 07:00am sharp, my driver will fetch you...

Tema.” She puffs a ball of air. “I’ll pay you back when I get paid, and I’ll move out of this hotel. You don’t have to feel sorry for me, or think that I’m at your mercy because of all this you’re doing for me, I’ve been looking out for myself for a long time. There’s nothing sad about me or my life. I would’ve taken my life otherwise. Do you understand?”

She really does talk fast. I shake my head.

A pause, it's not uncomfortable. She stands in front of me. "Get up."

I do as she says.

She's too close, I bend my head to look into her eyes –

searching. What is she feeling now? A huge breath. She takes another step closer, I backtrack. She takes another one, and is in my space. She smells heavenly, like the bath-salts

of the hotel. Her functional eye is shifty. "I will only say this once..." her arms

are around my back, her face burrows in my chest, also too short. "Ngyabonga."

She's said it twice before.

***Chaotic noise is guaranteed before I can even open the front door. Loud music competes with the loud voices. I shake my head, looking at my company.

"Don't mind the noise, we're a big family." "There's, like, three of you?"

"Nqobizitha, Sbanisezwe and myself." I confirm. "Isn't it freaky that you have two photocopies of yourself walking around?"

I shake my head, guiding Temasiko into the back, where all the others are. Like usual when I am in the presence of this woman

, I've run late, and

Sphesihle turns to face me

—

and her beam falls. She walks towards us.

“Sthandwa sami, you're back.” Her gaze turns to Temasiko. “Is this something important that you had to do?” “Yes.” My eyes narrow on her. “This is Temasiko. S

banisezwe and Thatego met

her last night. I've invited her to the cookout because she was bored at the

hotel and

—” “We're just strangers, not even acquaintances.” Temasiko interrupts, giving Sphesihle a small smile. “He told me last night you're his girlfriend.” I choke on my saliva, I had only said that to get this woman's nakedness out of

my sight.

“I am,” Sphehile is blushing, “I am sorry if I came across as rude, I just—” “Were insecure, I get it!” The blush deepens, though I don’t think it’s all that good now. I drag Sphehile to the side, wanting to kiss her, until I remember that no one knows

about us...the development. “You’re beautiful,” I tell her, honest. “Thank you.” She squeezes my hand. “Did you buy the Greek salad dressing?” “On the kitchen counter. There’s a little gift for you in there as well.” She loves snowballs. “Take my daughter with you so she can get her chocolate.”

Themoko rolls her eyes at me for leaving her on her own. Sbanisezwe

remembers her, and calls her Delilah... or Eve sometimes. Thatego is kind as

he had been last night. Siyabonga and Nhlakanipho are here. They

’re kind as well. Siyabonga wants to talk aside. “Long time.” He gives me a hug. “You’re a doctor. I run my own business.” “I know,” he sighs, “so how’s it going? I noticed you’re close with Sphehile—” there’s a sweet note in his voice. “I wouldn’t blame you if you’ve fallen for her,

she's a sweet woman, and

MaSibusisiwe would be proud of you for building a

family with someone like her." I rub behind my neck, bashful.

"Its... it's not love. Her body was attractive at first, but I wasn't only drawn to it. My

house is warm because of her. It's so unexpected, I don't think I had that with... Khensani."

"And what about her?" his eyes point to Temasiko. "She's a loud mouth like Chris, maybe worse.

What's her story?" "It's a long one."

He nods in understanding.

"I think she has a crush on you."

"Maybe..." I think so. "Manje? Don't you think it's unfair to Sphehile to—"

"Temasiko will remain an acquaintance... not even that, a stranger," I echo her words from earlier. "I'm just helping her find her feet in life. This is who I am... to anybody, you know

this." A sigh. "Maybe I'm just so excited to see you with Sphesihle. I'm

sorry." "What's the latest with you?" "I want a baby." He's blunt. I choke on my spit. "But Nhlakanipho wants to wait so we're waiting." "He's right. Enjoy your marriage first... just the two of you."

Siyabonga seems to disagree with me, and states

his points. He forgets I'm not his husband, and that he shouldn't be trying to convince me. I let him go

eventually, pleased when Nqobizitha appears with Christophe in tow, the

shorter male is behind him, appearing nervous. They're taking things a day a

ti

me. They're even... holding hands. Chris looks so tiny next to my baby

brother.

"Oh, to be you!"

I peer over my shoulder, to Sbanisezwe, and roll my eyes as I retrieve a cold

beer. “Ukhuluma ngani ke wena?” “Delilah on the right... Hestia on the left –

t

he choices are endless.” He chuckles, a secret laugh, piercing gaze boring into my soul. “To be you, Sgalosenkosi... what am I saying? I have everything and more in Thateho.” “I’m happy for you.” I admit, he’s come far. “You are.” He, cockily

g

rins. “Not

like me though... what I’d give to be the flies of this house one of these days.” “What are you on about?” “Funerals.” He sighs lazily, and snatches my beer from me. “The date has been set, before my wedding, trust me... I’ll make you proud.” “What do you mean?” “That the right thing to do is to protect those you hold dear to your heart –

and to eliminate anything that gets in the way of their happiness.” A pat on my shoulder. “Donald Duck suits for the funeral. White for the weddings.”

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Unrequited Desires : TwentyTemasiko

They all hate me, I just don't know if I should be surprised at this point, but I

do have a bone to pick with my mother. Do I have isicitho I know nothing about or something? This is what I am beginning to think, be

cause I can't

explain how individuals of such a large corporation could hate silly old me

who doesn't even own a matric certificate. I mean everyone from the cleaning

staff supervisors to some of the cleaners to the bloody co-receptionist.

“Where did she

come from?" some were asking. "Isn't this nepotism or something, at least with Fuzelihle, she went to school for her job... this one just materialized from the ghetto with no qualifications!" the lady from the

cleaning company was complaining before I could open the door to the

canteen. "She'll be getting paid from the company's payroll – and not the

cleaning company because she wasn't employed by them." The HR lady was

saying, with attitude, to the cleaning staff.

I've only been here four hours and news o

f my appointment have spread like

wildfire. I haven't signed any contract, but Sgalosenkosi spoke to the HR

woman who maintained her bright beam until he was answering an important call. The mask was worn off then, as she assessed me from top to bottom

–

d

is pleased. Maybe I should've dressed more elegantly for a place like this. My

T-strap heels, Mr. Price pencil skirt and white blouse. The only good thing I have going for me right now is the wig I bought with my salary. This place is too elegant for people like me. It is a low-rise, four storey building, made of tinted blue glass that allow you to see the happenings of the world outside

—

that is just as glamorous. There are security guards here, and you need an employee card to gain access inside the building. I didn't have one

so the security gave me one for visitors. I was looked like the poorest bitch on earth. And maybe I am, but I am a poor bitch who lives in a five-star hotel and orders room service, they better start treating me right. Squalosenko

si disappeared off to do his business. Whatever it is. Me, I've spent

most of my morning being inducted and shown around the place

—

the third

floor that I'll be working on. Where the canteen is. Where the bathrooms are.

Where the storage room is. Where the equipment room is. The leisure room

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that cleaning staff can also utilize. The computer lab that Sgalosenkosi told me about

—

cleaners have access to this room as well. And finally areas that are off-limits.

I would be excited if I didn't know that most

people are not pleased with my being here, because it gets tiring

—

going everywhere and having individuals

hate you for nothing. Because it's not sensible, what they're hating me for. I am going to be a mere cleaner, you don't need special qualifications

to be able to mop the floor. Accounting will not teach me how to wipe the mirrors or

how to rinse their coffee cups that I'm in charge of washing and returning to

their workstations.

By 12:30pm, I haven't done anything special. They're going to begin training me tomorrow, once I get my uniform, because I was an unexpected addition.

Sqalosenkosi comes to fetch me, he's walking with a beautiful tall woman,

with warm ochre skin, and a walk as expensive as the way she looks. The woman has her arm wrapped around his bicep

—

and they look really good together, like a power couple of some sorts. Is he cheating on the plain beauty back home?

"Tema." There's something about the way he says my name, not complete, that makes

me blush

—

but thank God for my dark skin. It sounds nice coming from him, and I think I can make an exception, the same way he has made an exception

for me, and allows me to call him 'Sqalosethu'. Well, he hasn't given me permission to... but he doesn't firmly deny me either. "Sqalosenkosi."

I respect him enough to use his real name in the presence of others. Also, I don't like how it suddenly feels like he's too close, and how my heart jumps

—

in fear. Not bad, no. Just...intimidating. "Hello." I turn my attention to the woman, because his aura is too heavy than I can bear at the

moment. "My name is Temasiko." "Fuzelihle Ngcobo." The lady smells expensive, she speaks expensive, she is expensive. "I'm so happy to meet you! This bear here is my uncle, I work for him. He's super uptight but you'll get used to him."

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Well, she's a ray of sunshine –

my kind of girl. I didn't know Sqalosenkosi is

her uncle, he seems very close in age to her. As for him being uptight, I attest. Before we left the hotel yesterday, he showed me how to properly fold my clothes because I was

doing it wrong. He was irritated that I didn't have a

sorting system when it came to the colour of my clothing. Maybe he has that neat-

freak disorder. I am too stupid to remember what it is. "He is." I agree with Fuzelihle, tiny grin teasing my lips. "I'm

slowly getting used to him. I

hope he's pleased with the way I am dressed today?" I forgot to ask this

morning, I was nearly late.

He gives me a once over, and seems pleased. Me, I'm fighting for air, because he's looking into my eyes and I'm scared that he'll see that I don't feel like myself today. That he's... scaring me for whatever reason. My heart keeps

lurching, butterflies having a field day in my belly.

“You look good.”

His smile will send me to an early grave. I swallow. God. What is wrong with

me today?! Deep breath... his eyes are

deep-

set. “Thank you.” I feel very, very soft. I’m not the masculine woman my features make me seem I am, that’s not how I feel today, with his attention on me. I don’t know if that’s a good or bad thing. “So...” Fuzeli

hle is looking at us,

smiling brightly. “Lunch...?” “Right.” Sgalosenkosi clears his throat. “Right this way.”

He walks ahead of me and Fuzeli hle. I have a feeling he likes being in control a

lot. It explains why he’s so uptight. Nthabiseng said he told her... Nthabiseng! “I, um, after this can we please talk?” I ask him as we use the escalators. I’ve just... my mind has brought something to the forefront. Nervousness grips my

belly. Sgalosenkosi studies me, he nods his head. Even his steps are precise on the

floor, as if he's counting them, or creating a rhythm of some sort. Posture straight, powerful. He's very broad and tall and big... and he walks like it too. My heart acts funny again, although I'm just looking at his back. It's not fair

that he should affect me like this. Not this man who was robbed of R50 000 by some dumb girl from Plein street. Ugh!
Ugh!

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We're eating at a restaurant that's a fifteen minute drive from his offices. It's

an Italian restaurant, and Fuzelihle suggested it. Squalosenkosi is frowning, he was hoping to drive to Randburg to buy iskobho from some lady at the taxi

rank. I would've preferred to go with him, because I am not used to this food

in front of me. Prawn cocktail with Italian mixed leaves and homemade

focaccia bread. It's

my fault for telling this girl to order for me. Clearly I shouldn't have attempted to impress her. She's eating a bloody pizza but because it had a fancy name, I thought she was ordering weird cockroacheslike me. Ugh! Ugh!The man with us is amused, he can see right through me. It makes meuncomfortable, as I shift in my seat, embarrassed. He makes me agitatedsometimes, like yesterday, when he was asking all those questions about my wellbeing. I don't like that, I didn't want him to. Because contrary to what he believes, I've been looking out for myself since I was a teenager – and I do not need him to play my knight in shining armour. "Its very nice," I say, wanting to gag at the taste of what I am eating. "More then?" a crack of a smile. Bastard!"Maybe next time," I say.

Sqalosenkosi shakes his head. He really can see right through me, itsdisconcerting, and irritates me to the point that I feel like snapping at him.

Really snapping at him. He's making me angry. I won't behave ghetto in front

of

the white people though. They already think we're monkeys withbehavioural issues. "How's your day going so far?" the question is meant for

me.

Does he ever stop with these kinds of questions? They're so weird. "Fine. I'll

begin training tomorrow. They d

on't have my uniform now."He hums quietly at my response. He's not eating, just watching me and

Fuzelihle go at it. And then he drives to Randburg to get the food that hewanted. I feel betrayed! He let me feast on those horrendous things knowing

very well that he was going to get the real food on our way back to work. "Useyour words next time." His eyes are on mine, boring into my soul, amusementdancing on his lips. "Tell me what you want, boldly, and I shall give it to you."

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“Your dick.” I mur

mur just for him, to irritate him

—

and maybe shock him.

Fuzelihle is sitting upfront, she didn't hear. I don't expect him to laugh but he does, loud and carefree, until I start to feel

embarrassed. Small. A mere ant next to an elephant. What, am I that

unappealing in his eyes? This is why he turned away from me that night. He's

such an asshole.

“Sadly for you, it belongs to Sphesihle.”

Mxm.

Right... the girlfriend. I like her, even I did feel like she was intimidated by my

presence

–

and behaved shad

y because of that. She's all humble and sweet, a good wife. I wonder why he hasn't married her because she plays the role of a

wife

–

catering to their needs. It was the same with that Thatego, and I hadn't expected it from him... perhaps because of how glamorous he usually is

–

in the media, and to have seen that side of him was weird. At least he is engaged.

Sphesihle isn't... I wonder how long they've been together. Not a long time if she's still trying to impress potential in

-laws.

It's almost 01:30pm whe

n we make it back to the office. We take the elevator

this time, and my heart nearly jumps out of my throat when I spot him...Abongile. His eyes are just as wide, he looks like he's just seen a ghost. I won't

allow myself to be hurt by his presence. The side of my body leans into Squalosenkosi, until I am touching him, and taking his warmth, until his cologne is making me heady. He looks down at me, questioning. The lift beeps on the third floor, Abongile and all the others step out, I must too. My hand is gr

ipped. "You said you want to talk."

I did. The fourth is intimidating. It's not like the first three floors. There are minimal offices and three boardrooms. He tips his head in greeting to the lady who is at the reception desk, and tells her to halt any calls directed to him for a while.

His office is big, glamorous, and there's pictures of his family on the walls...none of Sphesihle. Yes, I checked. "Talk."

“I—” my mouth refuses to continue. He’s looking at me, all penetrating gaze and... I can’t do it. He’ll think I’m weak and he won’t stop with his questions. I’m already helpless in his eyes. I see it in all those stupid questions about my wellbeing. I can’t afford to come across as helpless in his eyes, he will pity me and... I would rather keep my pride.

How embarrassing it would be to come

across as a naïve Swati girl who got drugged and raped. No, I can’t do it. I won’t. “I think I am going to like working here very much. I’ll pay you back for all you’re doing for me, I promise. Do you have a notepad? I

want us to go over every cost incurred, so that I can

—” “Are you serious?” he gives me a face as if I’ve just insulted him.

What else does he want me to say? He should know how much I hate handouts

by now. Haven’t I told him time and time again? “Yes, I’m serious!” I snap. He grabs his phone, the office phone, and dials a number. “Sara?” the deep

-set

gaze remains on me, I feel naked. “How long until my next meeting?” a nod. “Call Bab’ Shange, I’m leaving now.” He hangs up.

Without another word, he looks at me, and then walks out.

Sphesihle

I would like you to start touching yourself.” He orders softly, grabbing one of

the chairs in the room to sit in the middle of the room. The mirror reflects my practically naked body, only left in the black lace thong that he bought me. I lick my lips, and nod my head, shakily trailing my hand down my stomach,

until I’m so close to touching my throbbing wetness. He shakes his head. “Not there.” I pull my fingers from my drenched panty, whining quietly. “Cup your breasts,” he pleads, and I do as he says, my thumb strays over my nipple. “How does it feel?”

Too good. My entire body is filled with indecent longing, dripping wet and throbbing. I feel high, actually high, from the barest physical sensation. He is watching me intensely, with the concentration he does his books, as if wanting to discover new pages to my body, to learn and discover more

—

ever so calm as he does it, as if I were not a desperate, panting woman in front of him. My

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hands continue fondling my breasts, and I moan quietly at how sensitive they are

—

how tight and hot, my nipples hard and peaked. “Please,” I moan. There’s a burning desire in his eyes. “You’re doing very well,” he hums, and it feels like he’s touching me. My skin shivers slightly, and goosebumps break

out on my skin. The familiar sensation of the beginning of an orgasm coiled behind my clit as I pinch and tug my nipples. Growing bolder under his stare, I

drop my head back with a loud moan. “Don’t come.” My eyes snap open, and I straighten, my fingers stilling. “You’re now permitted to touch what’s mine, Sphehleh.”

I nod gratefully, and stroke two fingers down my slit, through the black lace, a quiet hiss falling deliciously off my lips, with my

tongue darting out to wet them, as my hips lift up. All of me feels on fire, too sensitive, and I grow hot at the undisguised appreciation in his eyes while he watches my hands on my body. My stomach flutters with nervous butterflies. I let my fingertips circle my clit, and a shaky breath stutters across my lips. It's hot and heavy under my hand, and I cup myself, letting my fingers slip between the folds of my vagina. The sound of him standing makes me snap my eyes open again, my lungs seizing, and my limbs quivering. I bite my bottom lip, unable to prevent my lustful moans as he towers over me, and imprisons me with his stare

—

increasing my desire tenfold, it feels like electric current. His maddeningly neutral expression gives nothing away, but the hunger is still very much clear in his eyes. His right hand touches mine, stopping me from touching myself

through my underwear. "Take those off." His voice is soft and deep, the tone

firm

—

a plea that sounds very much like a command. My body shivers as I move to do what I am told, watching him follow my every movement, and he takes the black lace from me, puts it to

his nose and groans, before putting it in his pockets. A step closer, he runs his hand up my calf, raising goosebumps on my skin, and I moan at the authoritative touch. His

hand is there... finger circling my dampness. “Da

-Da

ddy!” a ragged breath tears out of me, and I attempt to press my thighs together but he’s demanding,

spreading my legs further apart. I want him, with everything in me, there is a perverse thrill shooting through me, and I shiver. I want him so badly, my body is trembling

—

desperate,

clawing sexual need presenting itself on my pounding clit.

“Don’t stop.” He

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orders, and moves to sit on his chair again. “Look at that mirror and continue touching yourself. I want you to see what you do to me.” His voice br

okers noroom for argument.Liquid desire courses through every throbbing cell on my body. My eyes are

on the mirror, on my body, and I don't know how... but every insecurity falls

away. I look at myself, my fingers spreading me open as I fuck myself

—

and

have never felt sexier... owned. Tears well in my eyes. "Don't stop." Hecommands softly. "Wider...faster." I stroke myself, letting my fingers wander

further, to dip inside before tracing upward again, coated in the evidence ofmy over overwhelming desire.My body weeps for his touch, for his cock, for fulfillment.I smooth the silky wetness over my clitoris, into the short, neatly trimmedstrip of hair on my mound. Wordlessly, Sqalosenkosi continues to watch merub my clit in slow circles. Being like this for him, my legs open, my pussyexposed and gleaming wet while he sits there fully dressed, makes it hotter.He can see right through me, and smirks knowingly. I continue to pleasuremyself, pushing into my hole faster and harder. A long moan trespasses as mythighs start to tremble, a delicious tangle working its way along my back.My orgasm wounds tight around me, and my hips

piston up without permission. I move one of my hands to cup my breasts and squeeze tight. A second later, I feel my it crashing down on me like harsh waves. My internal muscles clench painfully, I can't stop fucking myself –

and remove my hands

from inside my hole tap on my throbbing clit repeatedly. “Oh god...oh god.” I

chorus.

“Stop.” No, I want to cry. “Please...please, Sqalo.” I can hear his footsteps but I can't bring myself to open my eyes. His fingers are on my wetness, he caresses my clit and I grip the bedsheets for anchor.

“Don't run from it, Sphesihle.” I try but the throbbing is uncontrollable, and every nerve ending is vibrating, it feels like I will have a seizure. I scramble back, and he grabs me by my ass and pulls me back to him, his face in between my legs. He grips my thighs and keeps them apart, pressing his tongue into my

241

pussy, and laps up my juices. I cry out loud

—
in oversensitivity, quivering, and
try to push him away but he's too strong. "Da

-
Daddy, please wait. Argh!" I jolt of the bed, the hairs on my skin
standing, as if I've touched static. He is prodding his
tongue inside, fucking me again, building up another orgasm.
My toes curl together, as my grip tightens on the bedsheets. His
sinful tongue thrusts inside, circling, and moving

—
firm and long, pushing and pushing, until my legs are vibrating
again, I am on the edge again

—
and whimper. "Squalosenkosi. Please, please,
Please, PLEEAAAASSSSEEEEE..."

And then, so suddenly, my pussy spasms with a flood of
wetness.

Good girl."

I breathe hard, placing my hands on my sensitive vagina, to shield it from him. There

's dark amusement in his eyes. He makes me feel bare, and it scares me. My stomach rolls with a tension that has nothing with the orgasm he's just given me. I think I'm going to cry.

"Thank you." I look away after I say the

words. He pushes my hands away

, to kiss me...there –

softly, gratefully.

I'm dragged up, and he uses his pocket square to clean me, only to insert it inside his breast pocket a second later. His eyes are dark and hungry. I don't

think I have it in me to give him sex right after orgasming twice in a span of

less than five minutes, and it's a good thing that he's going to work. "You're so kinky," I manage to get out once it feels like I am not dying. He has my black lace in his pants pockets, and now he's cleaned me up using the pocket square

square

that he's taking to work. "I love you."

He lifts me, and I say against his body, too limp. My breast, big as it is, still feels small in his large hand. I grip the back of his hand, jolting in oversensitivity, as

he sucks on it to his heart's conten

t. It feels really good, I caress the back of his head and moan his name, as he moves to the other one and fondles it before

sucking, his hands squeezing my ass possessively. "I will think about you the

whole day. Your scent. Your body. How beautiful you a

re." My chest tightens, I afford him a smile. "You better."

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He strokes my cheek, making me look into his eyes, and I feel my heart shrivel

in fear. Not bad, just his... aura. My hands are digging into his biceps for dear life and... I am scared of him. Reverence, that's what they call it. He's different.

Soft-

spoken but firm. Orderly. And there's a moment between us right now, the infinitely soft gaze that makes me think maybe he's falling for me as I have fallen for him... that gives me hope. It's in the way

he touches me like treasure

—

forbidden and invaluable. "Wangishalazela ke manje, kwenzenjani, MaGcwensa?" He rarely calls me this, by my surname. I'm always 'Muntuza' in his eyes —

after everything we've done. I stopped being a baby the day he took my

virginity, the day I gave him such a gift

—

my biggest treasure, no more.

"Lutho." I sigh, placing my hands on his chest. "Usebenze kahle." 'And maybe come home early today', I don't voice this out loud. Sometimes, he comes

home late

—

not late, late... beca

use he makes it in time for dinner, but a few

minutes later than I usually expect him. I'm trying hard to not
make anything

of it. To push my insecurities aside.

"I will. I've been well

-

fed this morning, like all the other mornings." The

scorching gaze he nails me with makes me shiver and blush. I
look at his chest.

"Enjoy your day also." I'll try.

He gives me a soft kiss

—

two, three. I put on my satin gown and follow him

outside of our bedroom, to accompany him, as he visits Liyana's
bedroom to bid her farewell. She's already awake, and he
carries her to the kitchen for me,

where I can make her bre

akfast. Sgalosenkosi usually doesn't eat breakfast, unless we're talking about my body. Another kiss for his daughter, and then me, and he's leaving. He promises to call, he always does. If I'm at home and not at the fashion school, then he

orders me lunch,

and has it dropped off here. He's picked up the little things about me; what foods I like on which day, my favourite drink and he knows my favourite snacks. He sends them here, without fail, for no reason at all.

Sometimes, I think he loves me too... and

that maybe he hasn't noticed.

243

Liyana and I spend time together, before she goes to school, and she tells me

about Sbanisezwe's daughter. Nkanyezi, the girl's name is, has gone back to America and Liyana misses her. She's sweet, and reminds her of Likuwe

-ithemba. I console her by reminding her to cling to the memories they made together, and how they will create even more when Nkanyezi comes back. At

06:58am, Bab' Shange comes to collect her, to take her to school. She gives me

a hug, and I kiss her forehead before sending her off. With the house quiet, I take the time to thoroughly clean the place

—

a job that

isn't hard at all, because it's never messy. Sgalosenkosi is a neat

-freak, I have learned this, and always make sure to leave the house spotless. By 09:00am, I

have bathed and done everything around the house. I'll look at the homework I was given later. Calling my mother takes priority. She's always happy to hear from me. "How is life in that strange world, ngane yami?"

She asks me this question

all the time. "You get to used it, Mah." I inform her,

amused. Johannesburg was too fast-paced for me when I first got here, and

poverty back home hadn't exposed me to much, it was embarrassing how little

of the city life I knew. Sgalosenkosi has patiently taught me all I need to know.

He doesn't ridicule me or make me feel small for not knowing certain things; like the foods Thatego likes to eat... or the different alcohol that Nhlakaniphois fond of. I've learned a lot from him. "How is everyone back home?"

I sent

money for Nhloso's school trip...did he tell you? I don't want you to take from your grant money." "He was complaining about clothes. They're too old, and he won't be the clown of his school by going to Durban with old, torn clothes."

Ha! So spoiled. I never even had the opportunity to go to those school trips because Mah was always using the money for something around the house.

There's about R15 000 in my bank account, I can send him an additional R1

000. The rest I am saving for home renovation

s and emergencies, I don't want

to find myself in a position where I have to constantly ask Sgalosenkosi for money. He pays me enough for my duties around the house, and he gave me

an additional R10 000 this month. "I'll send the money, but tell him to

rem

ember that we're not like other families, and that he shouldn't compare our home life to the who's who of Mbongolwane.

We're not rich, Mah."

244

"INkosi ikubusise ngane yami." There's a beautiful smile in her voice. "Are you

still taking care of yourself in

Johannesburg? Don't lose yourself there. I hope the boys are not playing you there." "Ngiziphethe kahle, Mah." I swallow a nervous lump. "Ungamithi, please. You know our situation back home." "I won't," I say, this I can promise. "But I'm a grown

woman, Mah. Soon, I'll be 25 years old. Don't you think I can decide who to give my virginity to? And

that

—"I know. But Dunge's son has been asking for your hand in marriage for a long

time now and they come from a well-off family. His father is induna.

They're

going

—"I love someone else," I confess, "and I think he loves me too. Mah, Nsindiso and I were in those childish relationships that everyone has when they're

young. Those ones that mean nothing. We drifted apart, I am okay with that. People evolve,

they grow. I'm not Sphesihle who was 15 years old, having a crush on the 17 year old boy wanted by everyone. The one I love, he's here, I am happy here." "Sgalosenkosi?" A breath, I nod my head, though she can't see me. "Yebo." "Have you slept with him?" "Yebo." The line goes quiet. I check the phone, and she's hung up on me. Guilt riddles

me, and I try to call her back, the phone is off. The panic that envelopes me makes my chest tight, and forces tears to

spring in my eyes. My hands are trembling as I dial a familiar number. It's answered on the second ring.

"Makoti?" "Mah..." I struggle to collect myself, so that she won't hear the tremble in my voice. "My mother fo

und out, she-

she knows I am no longer a virgin. She's

245

angry, Mah, and she hung up on me. Please talk to her, she's sickly and what if something happens to her because of this... I can't lose her. Who will take care

of my siblings? How will I do it when I am

here? I'll have to go back home and Sqaalosenkosi will forget about me. He'll find someone else, the woman—" "Calm down!" MaSibusisiwe snaps, I flinch. "I will talk to her. How is that Dunge boy better than Sqaalosenkosi anyway? He's just a boy who walks

a

round the village thinking he's important because of his father's status. My mother's son has built an empire, he went to school,

and has every right to brag about what he has but doesn't because he's so humble. Leave your

mother to me, how dare she disrespect you by wanting you to end up with

boys who still smell like their mother's pussy? Sqalosenkosi has made a woman out of you, his woman." "But... he never says he loves me. It's breaking me, Mah. I—he's taking everything from me and it feels like I'm only

given a portion back in return. I

have fallen in love with him and I am scared."

"Don't be a coward, Sphehleh!" she snaps again, and makes my chest tight with pain, I can't stop the tears from trespassing.

"You remind him of who he can't have, someone he's in love with already, and you have that to your advantage. Work with what you have and stop making excuses... you'll do

whatever it takes for him to fall in love with you. Fall pregnant for that matter, as long as you become a Ngcobo wife. I chose you because you have a

connection already, he is fond of you." "I

-

I can't fall pregnant right now, Mah—"He will have to marry you then. I will make sure of it. Do this, and you'll live comfortably

—"This is not about his wealth or status." Maybe in the beginning, when I simply had a crush on him, but I am in love with him now. I love every little thing about him. How he has this pure relationship with his daughter, and makes sure to pray for her every night when we tuck her in. How he always remembers t

o not only ask God to bless Liyana, but me as well. I love that he's

always looking forward to my cooking, and finding out about my day. He helps me do the dishes. He loves to hug me from behind, and tell me about a book

he's read. I fell in love with him.

"I truly love him, Mah. But it's taxing, every

time I give him all of me and tell him I love him, just to be met with silence...maybe I should ask him.”“Don’t you dare!” she screams into the line. “If you don’t want to break down, don’t you dare. What pr

eventative measures are you taking to not fall

pregnant?”“The pills,” I say, “injections—”“Ditch them.” I am interrupted harshly. “Trust me. If you love him, have his

children. That man is without any biological children.

That disrespectful

Shangane went and had babies for another man, Liyana isn’t really his. He

deserves his own offspring. Have his children, that is the biggest thing you can

do for him, it’s time. You’ve been doing this for long enough.”I... don’t know. Two and a half months doesn’t seem that long to me.”“Start behaving like a wife, Sphesihle. Bring him lunch at work. Lay yo

ur claim,

so that everyone that side knows he’s a taken man. No one will do it for you. Those Johannesburg hussies will try to steal him away from you instead.”“But I want things for myself,” I argue. “I’m studying and in the process of

obtaining

—”“Weeeh!” A scoff. “Those things won’t suddenly vanish. Your biological clock, on the other hand, is ticking. Your beauty won’t remain with you forever. Look, I can’t keep convincing you. You need to meet me halfway. Have his babies. He will marry you. You said you love him, right?” “I do.” “Then do what’s right—and stop being such a coward.”

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Unrequited Desires : Twenty-one Sgalosenkosi

“Sanibonani. Am I interrupting anything?”

Temasiko and I glance behind us, to find Sphehile standing at the entryway of my office, looking beautiful as ever in a long, yellow dress that is free flowing, the top part is almost like a bra

—

and something nasty coils in my stomach at the clever display of my property being shown. Her smile falters, as I approach, and she backtracks.

“Not at all,” I murmur, looking at the watch on my wrist to check the time. 12:30pm already? “Time flies by really fast.” My legs bend to her level, a bit

uncomfortable, as I wrap my arms around her, encasing her voluptuous body

—

and h

er attractive scent touches my nose. “Temasiko... she’s asked for personal computer lessons during her free time, and I agreed to help her.” “Oh.” Sphesihle peers behind me, to look at Temasiko. “I hope you do well. He’s teaching me at home, it’s not as easy as he makes it seem. But I have to learn for fashion school.” “It’s quite simple for me so far actually. But I’ve just begun, and we’re d

ifferent.

We don’t all grasp information the same.” “Ngiyezwa.” “Hey.” I call for Sphesihle’s attention, demanding. “You’re not here for me?” She rolls her eyes, giggling. “I don’t know many people here, of course I am

here for you. It’s lunch time, I brought you food. You talked about craving chicken feet and steamed bread when you left this morning, I know you meant

for dinner but I thought I'd bring it to you now instead." Lately, she brings me lunch a lot at work. I don't know what's changed, and

I

appreciate it but I feel like there's no need. It's taken some getting used to, I think I am slowly. Her food is a specialty after all, all of her food. "Njengoba ukubukisa ngokudla kwami emphakathini...kwenzenjani?" I caress her cheek,

beaming as she leans into my touch, and my hand trails to touch her left breast

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slightly, my eyebrow raising. "Uzoba umafazi onjani obukisa ngokudlakwendoda yakhe?" "Stop it." Her voice is soft. "You can't say things like that."

Confusion knits my brows, she looks upset.

"I can't joke with you now?" "Which part?"

“Your body is not my property, Sphesihle.” I tell her firmly, raising my hand to her cheek again, to make her look into my eyes. “It’s not. I mean I like you covered, and for my viewing pleasure, that’s just my

flaw

–

as a man. It doesn’t

mean I am not fine with you wearing what makes you comfortable. I always

want you comfortable, and secure, and happy.” “I wear this to be attractive for you.” “Thank you.” I chuckle, bending again to press my lips on hers –

swift. She’s changed her hair, it was the fake brown one, now it’s braids. “You’ve changed your hair, you look so beautiful... and your nails. How did you get all of this done so quickly? I thought this thing takes about a week to finish.” “Ha, Ngcobo!” she shakes her head, scrunching her face in distaste –

and looks

even more beautiful. “It takes a few hours, yes, but only if one person is doing your hair. I had three women working on my head, and another one was doing my nails. That ego referred me, I didn’t know that he makes it to Park Station of all places... there’s shacks in Plein—” “Is it safe?” I ask, with a frown. “Yes.” An eye roll. “They’re far more affordable. R800 for the thin twist like this. R350 for the nails.” “So I owe you about R2 000.” “No!” my arm is punched. “I took from my own money, I don’t want you to pay for this. Do you like what you see?”

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“I

would show you how much if we were alone,” I tell her, my arm gripping

her waist tightly. Her eyes search mine

—

and the innocence makes me groan low in my throat. The air crackles between us. A tension. An attraction.

“Woza. Let me feed you, you’re hungry, I can tell.”

My lips purse in amusement at her breathlessness, but I allow her to drag me

to where Temasiko is busy on a spare laptop I keep at work.

“Are you hungry?” I look at her. “Sphehile is the best cook in the world, top class. I told

her she should look into the culinary field but she prefers fashion instead.

Maybe she can pursue that after this, a woman of many talents.” “I don’t mind,” Temasiko’s grin is beautiful. “If that’s okay with her? I don’t

want to

—” “Fine.” Sphehile says too quickly. “I—uh,” trembling hands pull the whitecloth covering the picnic basket. “I hope you can stand chilli.” “Eish!” Temasiko makes an incredulous face, I find myself laughing at her. “Uhlekani wena?”

Our gazes hold. My stomach curls tightly at the amused grin she gives me

—

absolutely pretty.

She looks more at ease lately, aside from the random mood swings, that I can’t

control or find the root cause of. Right now, she seems to be shining brighter than the sun, in her uniform

–

a silent stare battle ignited between us.

“Sthandwa sami?”

My eyes find Sphehlehle, she looks upset. I pull her on my lap, the scents of food teasing my nose, and wrap my arms around her appreciatively. Everything about her is warm. I am still getting used to being cared for like this.

“Ngyabonga, MaGcwensa.” “Like Mtshengiseni?”

Sphehlehle snorts.

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I pinch her side, reminding her to be kind. Back home, she hates it when

everyone asks her if she’s related to the late maskandi artist because of her surname. This is why she preferred being called MaNsibande, but that’s her mother’s surname –

and she's a

Gcwensa, in every sense. "No. Like Sphehile Gcwensa, daughter of Ntandokanina Nsibande and Khumbulani Gcwensa." I

inform Temasiko.

She giggles. "I couldn't resist, I'm sorry. It's just that... my father is a huge

maskandi fan! When I was young, he would play Mtshengiseni and Mqumena a lot, so he thought those fan-wars that their followers had were ridiculous.

But then he'd say that's what makes maskandi nice to begin with, the back and

forth between artists and followers. Now it's Mthandeni and Khuzani, r

ight?"

My lips break into a wide smile. Finally! A woman who enjoys maskandi, like

me and my brothers. Sphehile likes... soul and RnB, and the afro

-jazz music. I

can stand some of it, but most of the time, I don't know the artists she plays at home.

"Yes, yes!" I nod my head, readjusting Sphehile on my lap. "Inkosi Yamagcokama still makes better music... without resorting to insulting anyone. Personally, I think he's criminally underrated." "Yebo." Temasiko sighs, and accepts the plate that Sphehile slides to her. "I think so too. He's honestly one of the few maskandi artists I can listen to. I don't really like the genre but play anything by Inkosi Yamagcokama and I will fall in love with you forever." The glint in her eyes makes me smile.

"I'll keep that in mind." She puffs a ball of air, the sishebo clearly hotter than she expected. It's nothing

for me, the flavours burst in my tongue, satisfying my practically empty

stomach. "What's your favourite song by him?" "Ukwenza kuyashiyana." "No way!"

it's always funny to witness Temasiko get excited about something. She claps her hands together, looking carefree, the sight entrances me. "That's my favourite song by him, too! This... this is fate!"

“You think?” I shake my head. “Ihamba yodwa leyandoda. He’s untouchable.” “I may not know much about maskandi, but I agree.” She sighs, and leans back, turning her attention to the woman on my lap. “This is delicious. I thought I

could cook, kodwa ngeke, maybe I should drop by your house and let you give me

cooking classes.”

Sphehile is tense in my arms, I pinch her side again, to initiate eye contact.

“Kwenzenjani, Gcwenso?” “Lutho.” A head shake, her gaze finds Temasiko. “I don’t own a house, so I can’t help you.” “You’re living with me now,” I tell her, “you do. She can come over, and... you haven’t made much friends here. I’m sure you and Temasiko can—” “I don’t make friends.” Temasiko cuts in, snippy. The mood swings are back, just like that. “But we can be two p

people who talk together, and maybe hang

out once in a while. I don’t mind that.” “Umm...” “When can we begin meetups? I’ve been dying to return to your home again, with how warm it is. You two are a pair of some neat-

freaks.” She’s smiling

now, like she

hadn’t been frowning just seconds before. I shake my head. “I don’t know...” “What if I offer to do all the cooking when I’m there? That’ll give you a break, won’t it? Just give me a few pointers, for the next fucker who decides to playme.” There’s no thing humorous

about what she’s said, but she’s laughing and her eyes are shining

—

there’s a second’s sadness behind them, gone too soon. “Temasiko, there’s nothing funny about what you’ve said.” A frown makes my nose scrunch. “Nothing at all.” “I know.” She bats her lashes, still smiling. “I’m not going to apologize for poking fun at myself, even if it offends you.”

Sphehile clears her throat, massaging my left shoulder. "I have to leave soon. Do you need anything?" "It's the impossible." She lends me a glimmering smile. "I'm not feeling well anyways." "What is it?" I look at her worriedly, she cups my cheeks, rolls her eyes, and gives me a look that tells me to calm down. Impossible. "Don't give me that look." "It's just a headache. I'll be fine, I promise." "Then you should've stayed home if you're not feeling well." "I had to bring you lunch." "Not at the expense of your health." I frown in disapproval. "There's plenty of restaurants here, I could've just ordered a takeaway." "Like that one we went to, and you and your niece made me eat cockroaches for lunch?" Temasiko snorts, she still hasn't

let that go. I wasn't at fault, it was her who asked Fuze to order for her.

"Have you had water?" I ignore Temasiko, sometimes it's for my sanity. Sitting

Sphehile on the chair I was occupying, I head to the small cabinet in my office, to grab water and

some pills. "Eat." I order, because she can't take pills on an empty stomach, and I can't be sure if she has eaten. "And then take these."

A sigh, she does my bidding. My eyes move to Temasiko, and she acts strange, quickly averting her gaze.

“What’s

wrong?”

“Nothing. Did you know that he’s going to be in KwaMai

-

Mai this weekend?” “Inkosi Yamagcokama?” my brow raises.

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“Yeah. I am still a broke bitch at the moment, but the next time he stops by, I’ll be there. My bank wouldn’t pay me back my money

. The one I was robbed off a few weeks back, apparently I compromised my card details. How the hell did I do that? All I did was punch in my pin and then the stupid ATM started acting funny. Mxm, bloody banks!” I’d offer her money, but she offends me eve

ry time I try to help her. It gets on

my nerves, how prideful she is, even over the simplest things.
“Let’s go meet him then. I haven’t been there in a while.” “Huh?!” Her mouth hangs open. “The flies will fly in, shut your trap.” I remind her.

Comically, she puts her hands on her mouth.

Laughter tickles my throat, I shake my head, opening Sphesihle’s water bottle

for her

—

and place my blazer on her shoulders. She’s shivering, this is what

she gets for wearing string dresses on a gloomy day.

“Really? You’d do that for silly, old me?” the eyelash batting again. “Yes, Temasiko.” She plays too much. “Send me the details, and I’ll fetch you at the hotel. Don’t embarrass yourself in front of that man.” “He’s my crush, well... second one now,” her

sigh is resigned, “before he was my first. Anyway, yes, I’ll go.” “Who’s your first crush?” I have to know. “Some guy.” Her

eyes waver. “I’ll send you everything on WhatsApp.” “Not after 08:00pm.” I remind her, sternly. “That was a mistake!” she whines like a child. “It wasn’t a WhatsApp, it was a phone call and it was stupid, I just wanted to

—

never mind. Noted. No calls after 08:00pm. It’s your personal time with family.”

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I nod my head. Sphehile has to leave eventually, and has packed everything away. I carry the basket for her, leading her to the exit. In the parking lot, I open the Bentley and place the basket on the seat. Greeting Bab’ Shange, I close the door, and turn my attention to the woman leaning slightly against the car. She doesn’t

look well, a bit sick. “Ufike ulale mawufika endlini. I’ll bring dinner.” She smiles. “If you say so.” I check the time, it’s almost

01:30pm. "Sengihembe, Gcwenso." "Usebenze kahle, ngyakuthanda."

My lips find hers in a soft kiss, she reciprocates

. "Uhambe kahle, munt'weNkosi. Rest."

Her smile is teary, she steps into the car without another word.***

"Are you feeling better?" I ask, as she grabs the plates to dish the food I

ordered at Spur

—

it's her favourite, I was hoping it'd brighten her mood but she still looks gloomy, eyes all swollen

—

as if she'd been crying. "Yes." A whisper. "Don't lie to me, Sphesihle!" I snap, and she jumps, watching me with wideeyes. "I'm sorry for raising my voice." "You didn't." She shakes her head. "I'm just not used to this... did anything happen at work?" "Cha." What gives her that idea? "I can tell that you're

not yourself.

Something's wrong, I want you to tell me what it is." "Do you really?" "Of course, I care about you."

255

Was there ever any doubt?

She sighs, and grabs the glasses. "If you want to know then I will tell you. Maybe I'll be setting myself

up for heartbreak but it feels like I can't breathe and you're... you're hurting me, Sqaalosenkosi. I don't know how you can be so blind to it."

The footsteps rushing down the hallway halt any further form of communication between us, but the words stick with me

—

like a nasty bruise

that won't go away. Liyana is better these days, not quite there, but she talks

more. It's spending time with Sbanisezwe that has done a great deal of good. Also, she has another therapist, a young woman who is infinitely patient and kind to her.

“Baba.” Liyana giggles. “I want to visit Bab’ Sbani tomorrow, to watch movies.” “It’s a school night,” I remind her absently, my gaze travelling to Sphesihle, she won’t meet mine. My blood runs cold, I wish more than anything to drag her

away from this dinner, to talk. But my daughter is here, and she deserves the

best of me. “Wait for Friday.” “But he can take me to school,” she argues softly. “He’s taken me to school before, hasn’t he?”

“No.” I assert. She sighs, and plays with her food. “But I miss him, Baba. Or are you afraid that you’ll miss me when I’m gone?”

My lips crack into a thin smile at the accusation found in her voice. Her smile

is sulky, she narrows her small eyes on me. “Yes, that’s it.

I am a jealous man, I

don’t want you away from me for too long. My heart can’t take it.” “Oh, Baba!” she giggles. “I love you, I’m not going anywhere. I’m big and strong now, Bab’ Sbani told me. I love you, Baba.”

I grab her little hand, to kiss her knu

ckles repeatedly. “I love you to, Kukhanyakwam’.”

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“And I love you, auntie Sphesihle.” She turns her attention to an alarmingly silent Sphesihle. “You take care of me and you help Baba tuck me in at night.

You give me food in the morning, and you fetch me at school. This means you

love me like I love you, right?”

“Of course, I love you.” “Family!” Liyana giggles happily. “I will draw you instead of mommy in the picture. You’ll help me?” “Ah, Liyana...” “It’s a school project. I have to draw my family.” “I

-

I, excuse me.” Sphesihle stands, and disappears down the hallway. “What’s wrong, Baba?” Liyana turns to look at me with wide eyes. “Did I do something wrong?” “No, Fuzelincane.” I grab her, and help her to wash her hands. “Auntie Sphe is not fe

eling well today. She'll be fine, I will check on her. Let's help you to bedfirst." "If she's not well then I can sleep with her and—" "No." I turn her down. "Baba will take care of her. You have school tomorrow."

A trembling sigh, she nods her head, and wraps her tiny arms around my neck.

With her permission, I help her into her pyjamas, and tuck her in. "What story do you want me to read to you today?" "We're not finished with The Chronicles of Narnia."

Right. I nod my head.

The door opens, just as I begin reading. Sphehile appears, she's wearing her gown, a hesitant smile on her face. "Have you started?"

I shake my head.

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She sits beside me, on the bed, and her fingers crawl onto my thigh and settle there

as I begin reading, and only stop when Liyana's eyes start to get droopy.

Then I pray for her, and her mother, and Sphehile

–

and the rest of my family.

“Sleep tight. I love you, don’t forget that.” “I love you too, Baba.”

Sphehile plants a kiss on her forehead, and issues her goodnights as well.

“Sphehile,” I call out, as she enters the bedroom, “sesingakhuluma manje?”

She takes a breath, grabbing the chair in the bedroom, and sits down. I situate myself at the foot of the bed. Her posture is tense, droopy. “I don’t know where to begin.” “The beginning.” “What are we doing, Sqaalosenkosi?” The question itself isn’t complex, but it has caught me off

-guard. I stare at her, dumbfounded, and she meets my eyes squarely

–

expectantly. “What do you

mean, Sphehile?” this is a stupid question, of course –

cowardice. I know what she means. The same thing that Khensani meant all those years ago.

Only, she's not Khensani. "This? Us!" her voice raises slightly. "Senzani? I want to know what this is. Surely, you're not blind to the fact that I am in love with you. I tell you all the

damn time, all the time! You see it in the way I give myself to you, my actions, not just my w

ords... and what do I get in return? I only get half of you, not even that... not that if you—" "I am not in love with you, Sphehlehle." I admit.

Her eyes widen, filled with rage and hurt, and nod to herself. A tension travels to my stomach, as she starts

to cry. And then, just as suddenly, she's

rushing to the bathroom and locking herself inside.

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I rub my face tiredly, but don't dare close my eyes for fear of meeting the look of pure dejection I'd spotted on her face, just before she ran away. This feels

like Khensani all over again

—

the accusation :What will it take for you to love me?

Nothing. She's perfect the way she is, as Khensani had been. But she's so, so different from Khensani.

Delicate. Too kind, and gives more than she should. I am not in love with her, yes, but I... I was learning to love her. To see beyond

Siyabonga when looking at her. To see her for who she is

—

ever kindhearted, warm Sphehlehle. I was fond of her long before I saw her as a woman. She has the qualities I find attractive, her values are rooted in the idea of family, and she... cares. A lot.

I am learning to love her, to see beyond Siyabonga. Taking a steadying breath, I head to the bathroom, and knock on it.

"Sphehlehle?" I call out, she's crying inside. I can hear her from here.

"MaGcwensa, please open the door." There's a second's pause

—

a loud snuffle.

“Please... please, Mama.”

The sound of the toilet flushing captures my ears. A second later, and the door opens. She looks at me, eyes red and swollen, and then at her feet. I gather in

my arms and hug her close. “You’re so important to me, Sphesihle.” “I am not even in your office pictures. Everyone is there... even Thatego. I’m –

I’m not. You don’t love me, Sgalosenkosi, I’m just your dick-wetter, and maid.

That’s all I am.” “Cha. Akulona iqiniso lelo,” I deny firmly. “But you have to be fair, Sphesihl

e,

we haven’t been doing for long enough that I can go around putting pictures of you in my office, with my family. We’re getting to know each other.”

259

“It didn’t take you long to decide that you want to know my vagina forever.”

The way she says this ma

kes me chuckle, it's the wrong time, she fights out of my arms but I hold her firmly. "That is true, but you have to understand that...before you, I didn't have this with Khensani. You're the only one, Sphehlehle," I admit, "you're the only one who my body r

esponds to. It was unexpected, and I

—most of the time, I can't control myself around you." "And what about your heart?"

"You have a place there that belongs to just you." I make her look in my eyes. "I am not in love with you, not yet. But... I am willing

to try, with you. You're a good woman, and you're good for me, I am willing to try for you." Her nose scrunches up, and she looks like she'll cry again. "Please don't hate me, Sphehlehle." I press my lips onto her forehead, kissing away her pain. "Shwele, Sthandwa sami." "Don't hurt me, Sqalosenkosi." I nod my head, carrying her in my arms. "I'll do my best not to. And should this end in hurt, I will do my best to the one on the receiving end. I promise to try, Sphehlehle Gcwensa, this is my solemn v

ow to you.”“Good, because I am in love with you.”My mouth feels like sandpaper as I admit, “I will learn to love you too.”The storm in her eyes won’t go away.All I can do is hug her, and to try my best, as I have promised her. “Nxese,

MaGcwensa

. Ngyaxolisa, ngixolele, Mama.”“Make love to me.”

I pull away, to look into her eyes, and she is serious. My lips attach to hers

—

inapology, in worship; and I move to do her bidding.

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Unrequited Desires : Twenty-twoTemasiko

“What’s the time?”

My eyes snap up to incredulously glance at him, because there’s no way he’s serious, not with a bloody Michael Kors watch attached to his wrist... but he is. The glasses always look so hot on him, though he doesn’t like them much,

and I am kind of obsessed with the faces he makes when intently focused on something, his work, the way his brows bunch together as his pupils move at a fast pace, as if to grasp the information quicker and efficiently. I can feel myself smiling stupidly, and force the warm sensation in my belly to go away. This crush is going to

be the death of me! Why me? I've never wronged anyone in my life, I'm always good and I mind my own damn business kodwa buka manje. I don't deserve this at all. My beloved mother must explain herself, for setting me up like this.

"Temasiko?"

Crap! He

's looking at me, and sometimes looking into his eyes takes my breath away—

literally. His eyes are not intense, not like that dark-skinned friend of his

married to the doctor, because there's a warmth in these brown ones —

that invites you in and forces you into vulnerability. More dangerous, his eyes are more dangerous.

"Huh?" I sound too breathless.

A frown knits his brows, as his tongue darts out to lick his lips, and my eyes follow the movement, I clear my throat, and my thighs press together uncom-

fortably. "It's 12:30pm."

And so what?

261

"MaGcwensa is not feeling well, I have to go home to check on her." He's already

on his feet, grabbing his suit-jacket, and sliding it on, I watch him shut his

laptop and take his phone and keys from the drawer. "Do

I leave you here to continue what you were doing? Perhaps you need more time to practice. Tell

me now so that the delivery guy knows where to deliver your lunch." He got me lunch? He got me lunch...

Eish, but what's wrong with this guy? He's not exactly making it easy for my

overweight arse to stop thinking about him without blushing or gaining these

stupid butterflies in my belly. He's taken. By a beautiful soft
-spoken woman with impressive curves and the most flawless
warm brown skin, she looks at him like he holds her sun, and
that nothing else will ever matter again. When they walk side by
side, holding hands and talking, they make heads turn.

"You shouldn't have," I tell him, my mood dampening a
little

—

in jealousy,

perhaps. Who wouldn't be jealous? I think it's natural, no
matter how undeserving of love you feel, to sometimes wish for
what others have... the

unattainable. This is why people go out of their way to ill-wish
those in happy relationships, this is how we convince ourselves
that the love is not true

sometimes. And maybe I'd say it wasn't, if I didn't know the
man. I've spent too much time with him to know
that what you see is what you

get with him. His snorts brings ba

ck my bearings. He's making a face, the same one he made that
day he left me in his office after I'd proposed we go through

costs incurred by him since we've known each other. I think he suffers from mood swings... and I'll do my best to find their root cause

e.

"Ngyabonga." I have to humble myself and thank him for the food. For being

kind. For his sincerity. For being so non-expectant. For giving selflessly. For knowing when to talk. And when to shut up. For being my sanity in this place. And in general. I

stand, he's already on his way out, and grip his wrist to put my arms around him tightly. He makes a surprised sound, but reciprocates, and his legs are bending, knocking against my thighs. I giggle giddily

—

did I just rhyme

—

and roll my eyes as we pull

apart. "At this point, your tallness is a curse. Imagine bending everywhere you go."

262

“I still see plenty of the things that you midgets cannot,” he says, pinching my cheek. I swat his hand away, he’s looking at me as if he finds me adorable. I’m

not ador

able, I’m sexy. “What did you get me?” I ignore his little quip, though I should’ve probably

taken the chance to poke fun at him

—

because those moments are rare and far between. This is a lie.

“Your favourite.” What is he talking about? I don’t have

any favourite foods... though I do like Chicken Licken a lot, but too much of their wings upsets my belly. There’s also Debonair’s. I love McDonald’s. I love their McFlurry. What else? I love food, most kinds of food, and I don’t mind getting a job where my

sole responsibility is to eat all the delicious foods I want to eat without weight gain consequences. I should ask this giant of mine if he knows of such a position.

Even if its not there, I am sure he'd make one for me –

that's how much I trusthe's down

for me.

“The one you cussed me out for, and accused me of wanting to make you fat

with. To keep the accusations at a minimum, I have decided to order half ofeverything I ordered the last time. Please enjoy your lunch, take a break from

the laptop, don't hurt your eyes. I'll see you later, I have a sickly girlfriendwaiting on me back home.”

I force myself to smile. Damn him! Damn this gorgeous smile of his. Damnthese confusing looks he gives me. Damn his kindness, it could trick anyoneinto thinking

he's in love with them. I don't want to fall, never that. Idiot! I

hate him so much he makes me smile, smile so damn much! He has no ideahow many times a day he crosses my mind, how the world seems earthy andwarm with him around.

There's something wron

g with me lately. Like all the other times.

He leaves a few minutes later, I'm so pathetic I almost clung to his arm to beg

him to stay with me and watch me shove food down my throat. Yeses! I need prayers and holy water to chase away this temptation. I need this spirit of

Jezebel whipped out of me... Delilah, Sbanisezwe likes to call me –

and

communicate with me as if we're meeting for the first time. Sgalosenkosi told

263

me he can't retain any new memories, and is trapped in the past, three years

ago to be exact. Antero-something, something amnesia. My food comes less than five minutes after Sgalosenkosi has left. The receptionist gives me the stinky eye, as she brings my food in. Whatever, of

course this cleaner is a bad bitch who walks with the top dogs...

it feels wrong

to call the man I have a crush on a dog, he's the exception
when it comes to

men being those animals

–

a man, man is what he is. A man, man gets you

Chicken Licken and Debonair's and your favourite Liquifruit –

that he's

somehow memorized be

cause he's not a dog but a man, man. The food is good, too
good. I've finished all four pieces with the two rolls, and now I'm
facing the twelve slices of pizza like an enemy. My
attention alternates between the delicious food, the laptop
screen, and this... picture of

Sphesihle. Two days now t

hat it's been here. She looks beautiful, taken when she clearly
wasn't looking, at some carnival. Her side profile game is on
point.

I take the picture and turn it upside down. It feels wrong to
have her watching

me like this, as if judging. Yes, I'm in her man's office, eating food that he sponsored but so what? She gets the heart, dick and bed every night, doesn't

she? Squalosenkosi is not back by the time I have to go back to work. I make sure to clean his office, even the nonexistent dust particles,

he's a neat

-

freak and I'll

he damned if he snaps at me for missing an invisible spot on his desk. I also

don't like it when he shouts at me, or when we argue over trivial matters, and

I respect him enough to respect his space and his requirements for the careroutine of said space.

It's time to be everyone's maid again. Sigh! I start on the left wing, to collect

the coffee mugs of the staff

—

some thank me, some don't even bother. I would do them like I did that little bimbo Nthabiseng but there's cameras

everywhere here and I don't want to be accused of poisoning the workers'

food. Not during my first month here, and so close to payday nogaal. At 03:00pm, I move to the kitchen to give it one final clean for the day. Only an hour and thirty more minutes

to go until I have to go home. "Leave your cup inside the sink, I'll—" my body grows cold. What the actual fuck?! "Ufunani?"

264

"Hey, girlie," the idiot says, I can tell he can't even remember my name. Like rapists ever do. As long as they're fucking you, and stealing from you. That's all that matters to them. "Let's talk, please?" "No!" I snap, gripping the butter knife tightly. My hand is trembling, I can feel

my blood grow cold

—

in fear, maybe. I don't like feeling this way. I'm better than this.
"Leave! Get out. Don't talk to me, leave!" He doesn't listen. But
of course! This is the same jerk who fucked an unconscious
woman and thought he could pay away his sin. He's too close,
and

murmuring something quietly, and his scent hits me

—

so strong, and disgusting. It takes me back to that
morning, how I felt

—

so helpless and weak. He took the power away from me, and
added another scar to the many others staining my soul.

"Abongile, I said don't—" the knife in my hand connects with
his cheek, grazes

his

skin until he's screaming. It didn't cut deep enough, I should've
used a butcher knife instead, to teach him a lesson, one that
he'd never forget. So that

the next time he even thought of raping a defenseless woman
then

—

“Temasiko!” oh, great. My supervisor is here. The knife in my hand is incriminating, and Abongile is a pathetic weakling who is screaming like a little bitch. He’s just exaggerating, I didn’t even cut him deep enough, there’s barely a pool of blood on the floor. “What’s going on?” “Report this crazy bitch, she just stabbed me!” The little bitch screams.

“AND HE—” ‘He raped me!’ I want to scream, to let everyone looking at me like a mad woman know, because he’s not innocent. He deserves to die. He took a part of me that I’ll never get back. My chest tightens with pain. I’m not going to cry in front of these idiots. “He deserved it, I told him to stay away from me!” I snap. “So you stab him instead of reporting him to me for harassment?” I don’t like the look she gives me, the bitch. “Ar

e our workers even safe with you? I

—listen, I’ll need you to remove that uniform and—” “Fuck you!” I sneer, raising my brow at her. “You have no idea what he’s done to me.”

“This girl is a liar and a danger to society!” this coward can now speak. “What are you going to do about this? If it hadn’t been a butter knife that she stabbed me with, then I would’ve suffered serious damage. I may’ve even lost my life.” “This is a dismissal, Temasiko.” “You didn’t hire me!” I remind this middle

-

aged devil. “Where’s Squalosenkosi, he’s the one that—” “Mr. Ngcobo is in meetings, and it’s childish of you to throw tantrums and

expect him to clean up after a grown woman like yourself. Change out of that

uniform, you’re dismissed with immediate effect as per—”

I smack the bitch beside me

—

again and again. If I’m losing my job then he has to pay for it. It doesn’t feel like I’ve dealt with him enough when I am dragged away from him by one of the security men. I change out of my uniform as instructed and leave it in the locker. Usually,

Sqalosenkosi takes me to and from work. But its only 03:32pm now, and I am not allowed to stay and wait for him. I have to grab a taxi back to the hotel. My chest is still tight as I get in, and I have a headache, my eyes are also droopy with unwashed tears. I close my eyes and rest on my bag, trying to calm the sudden car-sickness that bombards me. Home comes twenty minutes later, I get off the taxi and walk the short

distance to the hotel, ignoring the surprised glances on the guards' faces,

taking the lift to my floor. I just want to sleep. My head hurts and I wish my

mother were here to soothe it better, or even my... father, to buy me sweets

and tell m

e that he'd take my pain away if he could. But he was a damn liar, and maybe it's because of him that my life is like this.

I collapse on the bed without changing out of my clothes and hug the pillow tight. The tears are tempting but I really, really don't want to give them that satisfaction. Instead, I exhale a burdened breath and let everything sink in. I've

just lost another job. I am unemployed. One of the few places I enjoyed being

in, and it has slipped through my fingers... just like that. My rapist continues to work in that organization, and I... the stupid victim, have lost my job.

266

Truly, my father's words are following me everywhere. He has cursed me. It's

the only explanation, this is what he wanted after all. The thought makes me breathe thr

ough a gaping wound, that hasn't really

healed, no matter how much I convince myself it has. The wound is fresh and gaping and red. It is the same wound that forces the first sob out of my throat,

and it feels like I am doing exactly what he wants... my fath

er. I am weak before him again, crying. Crying until I fall asleep.

There's a knock on my door. It's dark outside. I am disoriented, and have a pounding headache attacking

my left side

—

it hurts like a bitch and I want to cry but suspect that that will make things worse somehow. The knock again. I climb out of bed, putting on my slippers and head to the front door.

Oh...

“Hello.” Even with my blurry vision, Sgalosenkosi still looks so good. I have no idea how he does it. “What are you doing here?” I didn’t even bother to check the time but it’s dark outside. “Temasiko.” There’s a frown on his face, unamused. I’ve never s

een him like

this before. He cuts his eyes at me, searching my eyes. “You stabbed my employee?” “I—” my mouth opens, and then closes less than a second later. I don’t want to do this. He’s not my father, he can’t force me to talk when I don’t want to. An

d

how dare he, how dare he accuse me of... of whatever he’s accusing me of! He doesn’t know the full story. How dare he take Abongile’s side!? How dare he make me think he’s good

when he's just like them... all the other dogs of this world!

"Leave me alone!" I

snap, wanting to shut the door in his face.

"No, no!" He doesn't raise his voice, but it feels like he has somehow. "What the hell is wrong with you, Temasiko? Don't you understand the seriousness of what you've done...how badly it could end for you? That

man could press charges and

—"

267

"THEN LET HIM!" I scream as he shuts the door behind him. He's following me, right to the living room, to the bedroom. It's a mess, I was running late and couldn't clean everything in time this morning. He's frowning. "Yes,

I am a pig! Go ahead

—

say it, say it! That's what you want to say, right? Because you're so

much better than me

—”“You stabbed a man, I don’t give two fucks about the state of your bedroom this moment. Tell me why! After everything you’ve been through,

you’d

think

—”I chuckle, humourlessly. “Shut the fuck up!” he irritates the hell out of me. I don’t care for his concern, I don’t! He has no idea what I’ve been through –

and

to make silly assumptions just because we’ve hung out together... “You know

noth

ing about me, Sqaalosenkosi, nothing!”

“I know that you’ve just sabotaged everything for yourself. And that Abongile

could

—”“Oh please! What’s new, what’s new?” I snort, throwing my hands up in frustration, in resignation. “Your stupid law is not for pe

ople like me anyways.

Its against me! I don't care how nice it sounds on paper. This is why bastardslike that... that STUPID, CONNIVING son of a bitch can get away with... with

using people against their will. This is why your law will choose his side eventh

ough I was the one he was killing, and taking away from. He's gotten awaywith using my body without permission, like all those before him. There's no

sabotage here, Sqalosenkosi. I never win, never ever. And this was bound to

happen."

His mouth hangs op

en... and isn't it funny?This is the same man that's always preaching about flies swarming in my mouth.

He's speechless now. Like he didn't waltz in here thinking he'd be that one

debate student in high school.

“Temasiko.” Soft. Quiet. I don’t like the way he’s looking at me... the pity in his eyes. This is exactly what I’d feared, why I never wanted to say anything. Me

268

and my big mouth! He feels sorry for me. I’m a weakling in his eyes and he can see past what I’ve given him... now he can see. “Maybe you should leave, Sgalosenkosi.” “I’m so sorry.” He sounds so sincere. I don’t care for it. I don’t care for any words at the moment, or his presence.

My chest hurts, it is scorching and it hurts. A cough is crawling to my throat,

and I can’t stop it. It forces some tears out of my eyes, I wipe them away

quickly, but they won

’t stop –

and it’s embarrassing. I’m embarrassing myself in front of him.

“I’m not weak, Sgalosenkosi, I am not.” I murmur as he

gets closer, and backtrack because I don't want him anywhere near me. "Don't touch me!"

His hand freezes halfway. Why is he stopping?

Isn't it supposed to go the other way? Woman tells me to stop, but man doesn't and uses his power to assert his dominance. To prove that he is the

man, the head

—

and that what the woman says doesn't matter. "Temasiko..." his voice cajoles, softly. "Do you want me to touch you?" "No!" where in the hell did he get that idea from? His eyes are warm and welcoming, they force you into vulnerability. "No... yes." My face touches his chest, and he hugs me warmly. There's no disgust or urge

to pull a

way. His arms feel good, really good. I just don't know why I can't stop crying. I can't stop, even when he asks me if it's okay to take me to bed. We settle, and he embraces me from behind. I sob until I don't have it in me anymore, hiccupping. "Stay here, let me get you water." I don't want him to leave, and wrap his arm tighter around my middle. "No?" still so soft.

I shake my head.

269

He sighs, and plays with my hand. The time now, it reads...

07:37pm. He's

usually long home by this time, his girlfriend must be worried sick. I wonder if

he called her before dropping by, if he informed her that he'd be stopping here first. She looks like the insecure type, unnecessarily, she's so beautiful. She's

crazy if she thinks this man would ever leave her for a girl like me.

"Talk... please." I don't want to, but I am very docile at the moment, so I tell him everything.

About Rorisang. About Nthabiseng. How they met Abongile, and sold me to him with hopes of getting him.

"Is this why we found you at Park Station that night? They chased you out when I wasn't willing—" "No." I whisper, clearing my dry throat. "They were robbing pensioners and I got arrested for it... the police let me go after I paid them with sex. That's wh

at

they wanted. Then I left Nthabiseng's because she'd hurt me one too many times, only to... that's how I found myself at Park Station." "Leave Abongile Mbatha to me," he says quietly, there's dark promise to his

words

—

it makes me shiver, "leave all of them to me. Do you know these

cops?" "No." I don't even remember their names. "They took me to John Forster Police Station." "I have a contact there. Let me—tomorrow, I'll go with you." "I don't want to go." My stomach flips just thinking about. "Please... I don't want to, I don't want to relive the memories. I know their faces, I can give you a description but please don't send me back. The other one was short and... I'll give you the descriptions." "Good. Now, I suggest that you see a therapist. I'll pay, and no you don't have

a

say

—

and will not pay me back.”

270

It was only a matter of time before he started acting like all the other malespecies.

“Fine.” “Thank you.” His squeezes my hand, breath seeping into the back of my neck,

sending shivers d

own my spine. I can feel... him pressing into me, and I know

its innocent but I can still feel him

—

and it hurts, the yearning. “You can alwaysstalk to me, Temasiko, without having to feel that you’re going to lose something if you do. Whatever you tell me

won't change how I view you, it's not even important anyways...
what matters is how you view yourself, and I

have made an observation

—”“Don't psychoanalyze me. If you want to be there for me
then be there, but don't try to figure me out.”

“Why?”

Because it feels like he can see right through me sometimes.

Because if I

encourage this behaviour then he'll just one up me easily. “I like
being mysterious.”

His chuckles are pressing into my neck.

“Is that so?” “Tis so.” I murmur, turning in his arms. Right now, I
feel calmer –

safe. Sane.

“Thank you.” I thank him a lot, this one.

His eyes search mine, my face is too close to his, but he makes
no move to shift

away. “What for?” “Being you.”

A crack of a bright smile. I want to kiss him. Dear God, I want to kiss him

—

desperately. He runs his hand down my cheek, caressing. “Anytime, Nonkani.” I hold my breath as his minty one caresses my lips, so close until... he’s already standing. “Don’t be late for work tomorrow. Clean this mess, you will infinitely

271

better. We’re finding you a competent therapist, and I want to know about these policemen.” It’s hard to swallow with the lumps in my throat, I can only nod my head. “Good.” He checks the time, and curses loudly.

A phone materializes in his

hand and he’s

dialling

a number. “Sphesihle, Sthandwa sami...”

I turn my back to him, and nurse my bruised ego. I only close my eyes when my bedroom door closes silently.

Unrequited Desires : Twenty-threeSphesihle

I feign sleep as the front door opens, keeping my breathing deceptively steady, my trembling fingers clinging to the throw pillow, as his footsteps sound

—

a

rhythmic quietness. “Wazenza olele emini kangaka kwenzenjani?” his deep

baritone touches my temple, lips ghosting my ear, and goosebumps extend to my arms, as I shiver deliciously. Its 08:05pm.

He’s late. Again.

It takes everything within me to not allow myself to push him away, and snap at him for doing this again, spending an entire hour and thirty minutes away, doing whatever; with that chubby girl. My mother would be disappointed in

me, if I pushed him away and allowed myself to get emotional.
It's not my

place to question him, as the head of this house, as long as he
fulfils his homely duties

—

that is to lead and to take care of his family.

“Sphehlehle...” he calls my name, caressing my cheek gently —

and the touch

speaks of tender care. “Sawubona, Muhleza. Sawubona Munt’
weNkosi.” “I’ve missed you.” I murmur, wrapping my arms
around him. “Liyana missed

you. She was sad when you

—”

He shuts me up with a kiss to my lips. And he holds me with
one arm, as he unbuttons his pants with the other

—

and his throbbing erection meets my clit.

“I’ve missed you too —

and this.” His finger presses along my vagina, encircling,

and I have so many questions,

but he's fighting through any resistance and breaking me in. His eyes are dark, and his jaws bunch up, almost... angrily.

I cling to him, my robe hanging off my shoulder, as my legs spread for him, my heat welcoming him

—

the discomfort fading to silence. My hands work on his shirt, unbuttoning, as he starts to pump into me, rocking his pelvis hard, and his thumb stroking my clit persistently. His eyes are closed, and his pumps are erratic, so fast that I can barely keep up.

273

An intense angle right in my g-spot makes me gasp his name, as my body

loosens to his will. "Yes..." I drag my hands down rippling muscle. "Like that..." "You're mine." "Yes. Yours." There's a fire burning in my belly —

growing bigger and bigger, a raging internal inferno. It burns me from the inside out, making me come with a scream, yanking him deep inside me as I come all over his dick. Skin on skin, I

dump my arousal all over his erection, soaking him down to his balls.

“Sgalosenkosi.” His name is heavy on my tongue –

a prayer.H

e’s stroking my breasts, pressing into me, practically folding me in half as he

sets a punishing pace. My tits jiggle against his chest, as he leans down to kiss me, all the while fucking me harder than he ever has, pounding and digging

–

searching. My toes curl together, as I arch off the couch, only to be pressed down again. Another tingle races down my spine as his bottom front rubs against my sensitive clit. The sensations come from everywhere, his hands fondling my breasts, his front creating friction with my clit, and his sensuous thrusts that have me spilling again as he gives his own final pumps, then shoving juices completely inside me, a guttural groan accompanying his seed claiming my depths, his forehead pressing against mine. The sensation still feels so strange to me, but I welcome it, and do my best to recover, my face buried in his chest, nose touching his shirt.

“You smell different.” I point out, scrunching my nose, and push his body away

from mine

–

but he's a wall. Whatever post

-coital bliss I was experiencing is slowly being replaced by
bitterness and suspicion. His white shirt is smudged

lightly, with brown, and I don't wear makeup –

this is not mine. I push him away again, ignoring the confused
look he gives me, and wince in pain as his dick gradually slips
out of me. I wrap the satin gown tight around me,

ashamed. "You –

You have makeup on your shirt, and you smell different!"

"Are you accusing me of something?" his voice is silent.

He never raises his damn voice!

“What am I supposed to say, Sgalosenkosi? You’ve arrived home late, I had to call you to ask of your whereabouts. And you were with her, right? The chubby cleaning girl. You’re an hour and thirty minutes late. You made your daughter and I worried over nothing... while you were busy entertaining some, some... sleazy slut who—” “I would think twice before continuing down that route if I were you, Sphehile.” “Or what will you do?!” my mother’s teachings are running away, they’ve never helped her in any way anyways. Baba would still beat the crap out of her

—

submissive and all. And if this one thinks he can do the same thing that my father used to do to my mother, then he has another thing coming. “Tell me, Sgalosenkosi, because I know the direction to the police station. If you put your hands on

—” “Go to bed. Clearly sleep

-deprivation is planting nonsense in your head. First

you insult Temasiko. Now, you're
doing the same thing to me by insinuating
that I'd dare hit you. Are you out of your mind?"

His words are connected to the violent tremors in my body, I
grab my doek, tempted to smack him with it

—

but fear stops me. The intimidation. His face speaks
of controlled anger and hurt

—

too much hurt. I don't know why, because he's the one hurting
me. I only love him, and it feels like, like he can't

see it

—

no matter what I do.

The thought just intensifies my anger, and I don't want to cry,
certainly not

over a man but angry tears are brimming in my eyes, causing
my chest to beat

faster. MaSibusisiwe would call me a weakling for this but I don't care, I don't care! She wouldn't be able to take this as well. The second

-guessing, not knowing where you stand, a

man who's hardly present. He's just used my

body like some cheap whore, matters only worsened by his cum trickling from my throbbing vagina to my thighs. I pull one part of the gown in between my thighs, and my pride has taken several knocks. I force myself to take a calming breath.

"No phone calls after 07:00pm. Dinner at 06:45pm –

all of us, as a family.

Everyone must be home by 06:30pm. Liyana's bedtime is at 08:00pm." I

275

remind him, coldly, as his eyes meet mine. "These are your rules,

Sqalosenkosi.

I came into your life, and part of your expectations were that...

you expect me to let you lead, right? To give you your place as a man, and to

respect you.” He doesn’t say anything. Typical! “Have I done otherwise?” I query, tears rushing out traitorou

sly, backtracking

as he stands. “You’re breaking your own rules, Squalosenkosi, and I don’t know

what type of message you think that sends to me and your daughter. Today,

you’ve even missed her bedtime, and she asked about you. But you’d rather

you were with that other woman, right? I should take it and be grateful,

because at least you’re coming home to me and you’re helping poor little

Sphesihle from the village who looks the way she does today because of you.

This is what you’re trying to tell me, angithi?”

“I’m not a cheater, Sphesihle.” His voice is quiet, and he’s standing right in

front of me

—

smelling flowery. It's not his scent. His scent is masculine and earthy and warm. I feel like gagging. "Do you not trust me?" I don't. I have every right not

to, men cheat. It doesn't matter how good they are, they cheat. It's even worse when they've gotten what they wanted from you, you become easily disposable as they find their next shiny toy. This one has used me, and now he looks for the next shiny toy in that cleaning lady.

"All I wanted from you was straightforwardness, but you've been circling

around the truth, and making

—"
"What is your question? Ask now, and I shall respond honestly."
"You're cheating on me. You took my virginity and now you're

cheating on

me."

That hurt expression makes a comeback, but he schools his expression

quickly. “No. I am not cheating on you. An altercation took place at work, and I

had to check in on Temasiko, because she is directly involved. She was emotional, and I innocently asked to hug her, to help her feel better. This is why I smell like her, and this is why I have makeup on my shirt. It was an

innocent hug, nothing to it.” He explains softly. “As for your virginity, listen... I

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am honoured that it is me who brok

e it, Sphesihle. It’s a gift I will forever be

grateful for, but you have to stop acting like it was something I compelled

—”“I know that I gave it to you!” I snap, my chest tightening.

“But... but what

should I say when you come back home smelling like another woman? When

I'm not sure where I stand with you, and if you're truly in love with me. Like I didn't have to speak out first before you started doing a few things

—

being my boyfriend. Responding to confessions about my love. The pictures in your office. Now I have to address the issue of you coming home late, and watch you improve on it. Because I have to teach you how to be a boyfriend, and now, how to be a father to your daughter who went to bed upset because you weren't home to tuck her in." "I am sorry." I don't want his sorries. Not this soon, he's supposed to allow me to vent and scream my frustration, and to express my hurt. He shouldn't be apologizing this early. It only makes me angrier.

"I just wonder if you'd be okay with me hugging random men to console them for whatever hardships they're going through," I say.

I find the answer in his silence. And maybe I should be happy

—

his eyes speak of a dark, raging fire. His aura is a detonator, waiting to explode. All it will take is painting an even nastier

picture in his mind to set him off. He's jealous. His narrowed eyes are angry,

and the sour expression on his face tells tales of jealousy, the angry vein on his neck pleading for mercy.

"You wouldn't." My nose crinkles in displeasure, lower lip trembling. "You wouldn't. You wouldn't be happy, you'd be angry. If I went out, and subjected

you to the things I p

ut up with... do you love me?"

He swallows a lump, fists shaking, bare chest rising and falling in a controlled

rhythm. "I am learning to." The lumps form in my own throat, and it's my turn to swallow –

only they feel like rock. Of course I know this but his words make me emotional, and I am

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stomping off into the bedroom, angry. I collapse on the bed and cry silently. My chest hurts real bad. If I could, I would call my mother for advice but her

condition is getting worse, and she's still so angry at me.

Qalokuhle told me not to bother, that she snaps at them over the simplest things, and makes an example out of me when she tells my younger sister to not fall victim to the ways of the city when she goes to further her education. Qalokuhle is 16 years old, doing matric this year, and far more intelligent than

I could ever be... but I had to take care of them, and play deputy parent. There

was never enough time to study, with the sacrifices I had to make, especially when my father died. He was a horrible husband but a loving father.

The door swings open, and his quiet footsteps capture my ears. He's headed to the bathroom, takes a few minutes there, and then he's walking toward the

walk-

in closet. He doesn't take long, comes back, and the bed dips on his side

. This is not his room, this is my room. I want to scream at him, and tell him to

leave. I don't want him near me tonight. But I know I'll miss him. My emotions are all over the place lately. There's

suspicions I am having, that I fear confirming, because

e they can't be possible. I tried, I tried to gather up the courage to do MaSibusisiwe's bidding –

but I

couldn't go through with it. The mere thought of pregnancy scares me, I am not yet ready, and I have dreams. This is why I've made sure to commit to

us

ing the birth control pills, but I've forgotten to use them as per instructions

at times, and my body feels funny.

It all started this Monday, at Sqaalosenkosi's office.

I thought I had a headache because of the new hairstyle I had on, maybe the ladies

had pulled too hard, but that's not it. Headaches attack me, and I feel drained most of the time. My body feels off. I am sick. I am emotional. I don't like to cry, but I still did it over Sqaalosenkosi.

Twice now, he's made me cry. I sniffle, as he folds an arm around my middle and flips me so that I'm looking at him. His eyes are on mine, a second, and then he's moving to press his lips

on my forehead

—

soft. “Gcwenso,” It’s the way that only he calls me this
that produces butte

rflies in my belly, justfor him. My heart jumps to my throat, and
a wave of tingles spread over my

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body, unbidden. His eyes are intense on mine, but too soft, and
it takes

everything in me to force the eye contact. I really shouldn’t, it’s
a bad idea,

bec

ause I am in love with him... but he’s not in love with me. My
eyes water

again, I close them, and try to turn away from him but his hold
is firm on mywaist.

“Ngyaxolisa, nkosazane.” His breath is on my lips —

coffee, addicting. “You weren’t wrong, about the rules I’ve set in place, and how I was breaking them. I only went to Temasiko because... I care a great deal about her, and I want to take care of her and ensure that she’s always safe and happy and protected,

the same things I want for you. Something terrible happened at work, and I

had to check in on her. I didn’t mean to stay away from home for as long as I did. I don’t mean to defy you or to disrespect you. I am sorry I made you feel

that way. And when morning comes, I will apologize to my daughter to

o.” “Thank you.” My mind chooses to focus on the apology. I will not think about

that woman, and his need to care for her.

“Am I forgiven?”

I jut out my bottom lip, scrunching my nose as I pretend to be deep in thought.

“Only if you adhere to a few requests of mine. I don’t, I don’t mind your friendship with that girl, Sgalosenkosi. Just don’t let it

affect our personal life,our home life. Liyana and I don't deserve that. We deserve all of you. The same way I give you all of me. 06:30pm home time is 06:30pm home time... unlessLiyana isn't home, and you're hanging out with your brothers. I—"Understood. For everything." He wants to squash this conversation, I can tell.He's not the fighting type, who entertains the back and forth of arguments."How w as the rest of your day, MaGcwensa? You looked better when I came back."Better enough for you to dip your dick inside me." I roll my eyes, as he brings me to his chest. He smells like fresh soap and water. The scent is pleasing tomy nostrils. I sniff more of him and sigh contently. He pulls me back, slightly, and searches my eyes. "What's going on with you,Sphesihle?"

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The question makes me sigh, I feel like crying again as I shrug my shoulders, "Idon't know, 'm sick."

He hugs me tight, releasin

g his own sigh. "If your condition doesn't improve come morning, I'm taking you to the doctor." Like hell he will. I am scared. I don't want to go. Mah will disown me, I've

disappointed her enough. An ex-

virgin, who slept with a man she doesn't

approve o

f. A fornicator, who had sex outside of marriage. And now, possibly...pregnant. To make matters worse, it's only been four months. MaNsibande

would kill me, murder me with her bare hands! Shame would be associated with her name.

"Are you sleeping?" "No," I whisper, "but I'm sleepy." Sgalosenkosi bends his head to kiss my lips. "Sleep tight." "Ngyakuthanda." "I love you too."

The words are like salt rubbing into my wounds

—

stinging.

He's not in love with me.

Sgalosenkosi

MaGcwensa assured me that she was feeling better before I left this morning

—

as if I hadn't heard her rush to the bathroom just minutes before I woke up, and she was vomiting in there. I have my suspicions, but my mind's convinced me that my gut feeling is wrong, and that something else could be the issue.

Women don't vomit from... from pregnancy only after all. Sphesihle can't be pregnant, it's too soon. She's on her pill, and we... she cannot be pregnant.

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Her body hasn't changed, maybe her boobs seem a bit bigger and she's put on

a little weight, nothing too noticeable, but I know these are the side effects of the pills. Khensani gained weight because of them. She would vomit too

sometimes. Maybe it's the same for MaGcwensa, and we need to visit the

doct

or's to find her an alternative birthing control plan. For now, I've taken her word, because she was insistent that she was fine.

This

is why I left her home, reminding her about the classes she had today

—

and

that she needn't bring me lunch at work. He

r eyes cut at me suspiciously when

I said that, and the insecurities were displayed in her smile. She doesn't trust

me. For some reason, she feels insecure where Temasiko is concerned. Yes, the woman is beautiful. Any man with eyes can see that. She walks with

her head held high, and doesn't bow down to anyone, or compress herself to cater to those unhappy with her personality, she's herself and loud and carefree and is genuinely happy sometimes. She's so damn beautiful. And the

slightest thing about her captures my attention.

I hadn't lied when I told Sphehile that I ache to care for her the same way I do for the woman living with me. It's what I had done last night, and it hadn't felt

wrong to have been there for her like that, to have comforted her

—

with her permission. It was an honour.

The problem when I began noticing more than I should've. How close we were

and the warmth of her body. Her flowery scent, mixed with sweat. The problem began when I started seeing beyond the blotchy skin and ruined makeup, because her eyes were too wide as our faces were almost touching, and her breath was ghosting my lips and the look in her eyes was connected to

every erogenous zone in my body. That's where the problem started. "Hey!"

I look down at her short frame, hands hanging limply on my sides, as she hugs

me tightly. She's a hugger, and usually I don't mind... but today I do. "Morning. I thought I'd have to drag you out of bed again."

I can't bring myself to snub

her, to draw the line between friendship and professionalism.

“No!” she giggles, and pulls away, bouncing on her small feet.

There’s the

wide-

eyed gaze that’s a weakness. The same one Sphehile has. I

want to say

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it’s a female thing but Thatego’s eyes are like this as well

. But not Khensani.

“My man told me last night that he’d be handling a few fuckers for me, and I couldn’t wait for morning. Karma is knocking on some doors and I’m ready for it!”

I chuckle, scrutinizing her properly. She looks more energized

—

gorgeous as ever in another one of her sheer crop tops that she pairs with bras. And jeans that cling to her skin today, showing off her body. Her hair is in a straight-

back. She’s wearing different earrings from the ones she usually puts on, and

the lipstick is red today; different from the usual pink.

“You’re so ready for this,” I tease, “new earrings and lipstick. What else?” “Don’t do that!” she rebukes me quietly, slapping my arm, and looks away. “Don’t notice the little things. Anything but the little things.” “Your face looks nice.” “This puffy thing?” she rolls her eyes, and giggles again. Maybe I’m still souptight because I missed the joke. “Konje you’re Mr. Too Serious.”

“I don’t have a thing for self

-

deprecating jokes,” I admit with a frown. For m

e, it feels like this is her way of making fun of herself before someone else can get the opportunity to. A classic case of trying to retain power over your looks.

“I don’t have a thing for uptight men who refuse to laugh with me.” “Tough luck.”

She rolls her eyes, drags me inside the room and sits me down forcefully,

before coming back with bottled water and a bowl of fruit salad. “Is this submissive enough for you?” her voice is teasing.

“Maybe I should’ve brought

everything on a tray, and also brought a bowl of water and a dish-

towel.”“Ugcwele indlala ekhanda wena, yingakho ubheda ekseni kangaka.” I snort. Sphehile doesn’t even do that at home. I put a stop to it on the second day, there’s a tap in the kitchen for a reason –

and my dining room is open plan for convenience.

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“Sorry, Daddy!”

I choke on my saliva. Temasiko is long gone, her chuckles remain behind, as I shake my head and

dig in. My belly is already filled, I ate at home, but I’ve learned to always take a

few bites of the food offered to you, no matter how full you are.

“Thank you!” she comes to sit

next to me, carrying her bag. Her eyes are on mine, and it feels like she can see right through me

—
intimidating. “For lastnight. It felt good to cry in your arms. I...

I —

I like that I can be we-weak with you, Sgalosenkosi, and that you still look at me

the same. I... thank you.” “I like to be there for you,” I admit. She grips my hand, squeezing. “Why?” I don’t know. I’m drawn to her, and I can’t explain it. Most of the time, she

drives me insane and I need breaks from her craziness, but I like her the way

she is. I wouldn’t want any version of her but this one. “I just like to help people.” Her face falls, I can’t read the emotion in her eyes. “So I guess I should tell you about the cops before we go to work. You said you’d be fine going there o

n

your own because you have a contact.” “Yes, Pitso, he is—

” “Pitso.” She repeats after me, tasting the name on her tongue.

“Pitso. Pitso?”

I nod my head.

“Just my fucking luck!” her voice trembles, face contorting in rage and hurt. “The same fucke

r with the friendly smile to deceive everyone? The short onewho thought he did me a favour by not arresting me, and so for repayment, I

had to suck his dick in my mouth and have it shoved up my ass?”

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The blood drains from my body, a part of me knows I haven't heard her right. Tension grips me by the throat, forcing my body into a frozen state. “What did you say?” my voice is too quiet. “Wh

-What kind of people do you associate with, Sgalosenkosi, because two of

my rapists know you directly?”

Unrequited Desires : Twenty-four Temasiko

He's dragged me to a house in Pretoria, Silver Lakes Estate, this place is called. I haven't seen one person in sight, not one animal, not one piece of paper, I haven't even seen dust particles, that's how bad i

t is. He gets my door for me,

as I thank Bab' Shange for the lift, putting my phone inside my brown

handbag. He rolls his eyes.

"You've corrupted my driver," there's a small frown on his handsome features,

brows pulling together, a characteristic scrunch

of the nose, "with the Chinese rubbish you have him listen to."

I smooth down my skirt, my chubby legs that always seem too short next to

such a giant rubbing together uncomfortably, as I follow behind him. "Its not

Chinese. This is k-

pop, there's a dif

ference. You liked EXO that one time I

played them for you,” I remind him accusingly, as we leave the spacious, fancy garage through a polished black that reflects my outfit, and enter...

Whoa. This is some Property24 shit. Is this his house? A second one perhaps. I know he lives in Saxonwold. I know

he owns a successful corporation but wow, I must've underestimated his financial status because he's waaay richer than the ten millions I thought he

was worth. This house is just as classy as that one in Sax

onwold, and there's so much white and gold and black. We pass two weird sculptures on our way to... I don't know where he's taking me, but I can hear music, playing quietly. “That's just one song and—” “Two,” I correct smugly, careful with my footsteps, I don't want to offend sparkling marble floors, nor the walls. “Tempo and Love Shot. You loved both.”

He scratches his beard, that has grown thick over the past weeks, and the way

he looks so sexy, I can imagine it on my... never mind. Will never happen.

Taken man. Argh! Mxm. I huff a breath as he considers me weirdly, and leads

me inside a kitchen that belongs to world renowned chefs, it must. This is where the music is coming from, that corny Bruno Mars song that everyone loves so much. There are people inside. Thatego and Sbanisezwe.

I should've known. This house must belong to them. They seem so comfortable, Sbanisezwe is cooking and I can smell uphuthu.

He's half

-naked,

strong back turned to us... and I drool, naturally. The navy knitted shorts

outline long, strong legs. He has a large birthmark

—

a dark shade of brown like a puddle over warm russet skin.

“Ndukenhle—” “Uzobhebheka, Thateho, ebesuyakhala.”

I choke on my saliva.

“Sbanisezwe!” Sgalosenkosi warns quietly, but something tells me he's used to

this version of his brother.

Sbanisezwe turns around, doesn't seem fazed as his gaze travels from his

fiancé to his brother to me

–

and stays on me. “Nkosazane,” his smile is c

ool,

but I can see the wheels turning in his head, he doesn't remember me, “sugar or not? Thateho says no sugar, he's like Nqobizitha and Christophe.” Err... “This is Temasiko.” Thatego speaks up, softly, everything about him is soft and

it feels like he

's an egg that you shouldn't break –

and maybe the bare face

makes him seem even more delicate. “She's Sgalosenkosi's employee. You've met her a few times, and I forgot to show you her picture this morning, I didn't know they were coming. But she's never been to our home, it's the first time today. You're quite familiar with each other.”

Sbani approaches his fiancé, predatorily, and wraps his arms around the much

smaller man. "Delilah." His tone is amused, matter

-of-

fact. "That is who you are, right?"

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My response is halted by footsteps in the hallway, and Thatego quickly jumping off the stool, away from the island, for the fancy gas cooktop, much to the amusement of his fiancé. He opens the large pot, and starts using the fork to stir what I know is uphuthu.

"Still not done yet?" a woman's voice joins us –

cold and authoritative. She shows face less than a second later, a pudgy, middle-aged woman with the

face of an American sergeant and a walk to match. She's wearing old school

glasses that remind me

of my high school teacher Ms. Moshe. "It's been hours, I didn't realize I had left Mbongolwane to be starved in

Joburg." "Ma Sibusisiwe." Sqalosenkosi has found his voice

again, he's surprised. "I didn't know you were coming this side." "Ubuzokwenzani?"

she cuts her eyes at my handsome boss, a vicious once-over that she extends to me. "And who are you, little girl...or boy? I can't tell with

the

—"

"That's enough, Mam'ncane." Sgalosenkosi comes to my aid, sparing me from

breathing the fire on the tip of my tongue

—

though my body is tense. What?

Didn't I use enough makeup today? She's—

"that is an offensive question." "How is it rude? She barely has breasts, and there's something about her face that's a cross between both. I don't want to call her a woman

only to find that

it's a man like Thatego, who likes to act like a woman. If it's a woman then there's no harm done. But... hhayi, something is off about her." "I am a woman, a transwoman." Sgalosenkosi gives me a look I can't decipher. He scrubs his face. "Oh, the confused men... like Fuze." And with a roll of the eyes, she dismisses me. "What are you doing here? Ugqilaza uSphesihle endlini yakho? Ngizwile

ethi akazizwa kahle. Why are you he

re and not home?" "She's fine. I checked in just a few seconds ago, and she told me she's sleeping. There's a list of food she wants sent to her, it's on the way to our house as we speak. She'll be fine."

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"Our house?" The woman's eyes narrow. "Is somet

hing going on between you

two? Finally. I've always said that she's a lovely young woman, at least you're

not deaf to my advices. It turned out bad the first time, when I told you not to marry that other disrespectful girl. You ought to marry a Zulu woman, there

won't be issues with submission."

Sbanisezwe responds by laughing loudly.

“And Tswana boys like your brother is doing.” The woman continues. “But we

have enough gays to last us a lifetime kwaNgcobo. Please do me a favour and break the curse. Yo

u’ve done well with Sphesihle.” “Bafo, I need to talk to you.” Sgalosenkosi directs this to his amused brother. He ignores... I don’t know who this woman is. The sister? She’s old enough to be their mother! Just how old were the parents when they started and stopped

having babies? “Temasiko, I need you to stay here with Thatego for a while.” His eyes tell me I don’t have a choice.

My meaty hand is squeezed as he walks out with his brother. The female sergeant barks out an order for Thatego to try and be quick, walking out of the kitchen without another worthy glance at me. Damn! The cold shoulder makes

me feel otherwise, perhaps it’s because this expensive house is already intimidating me, and now the classic rich woman thinks she’s better than me. “Grab a seat. Don’t mind her.”

I do as instructed, joining the curvaceous man

—

I will never look at his build and not be jealous

—

at the kitchen island. I wish Nthabiseng and her little rat could see me right now, living life with their favourite celebrit

y. “Who is she?” “Technically, their aunt. But they call her MaSibusisiwe or Sisi because... it’s along story.” He must realize I am not family, and has no right to divulge anything to me. I don’t mind. “She’s their aunt. My mother

-in-law, she likes to ca

ll herself.” “She’s so kind.”

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That ego surveys me with a disbelieving smile, I school my features

—

don't want to be accused of being disrespectful toward elders.
"No. She's not. I've known her a long time, there's no kind bone
in her body... unless you'r

e

Zithobile. That man's her baby. I mean she's kind to me too,
now that this lobola thing is being finalized. But it's not always
the case." "I didn't know men could be lobola

-

ed. We learn everyday, huh?" "Family." He grabs his phone, and
unlocks it. There's a picture of him and a young girl on display.

"I'm tired of RnB. Nigerian music, okay?" he makes the
decision and plays a Nigerian song.

"My mother wants lobola. Traditional weddings. The whole
thing. That's why." "I see." A classy nod. Yes, the man's nod is
classy. He exudes the same aura, he's the

type that laughs stylishly; not like us who resemble hyenas
fucking.

"Don't mind her

about your facial features. They do look androgynous, but so do
mine and

—““You look like a woman.” I don’t want him to make me feel better. Money buys you a lot of beauty. Even with his bare face, his skin is gorgeous and well cared for, there’s product s that he can buy to beautify himself. Hell, he can even getsurgery to modify his face. Something that broke bitches like myself cannot afford to do. I don’t have that privilege. “Your body is shaped like a woman’s.Nothing at all about you is masculine.”

“My voice.”He deepened it. I chuckle, nodding along. “Your voice.”“My point is her daughter is trans as well. Fuze. She’s just... insensitive. Youknow how black parents are, my mom is the same way.”She called her daughter a confused man. That’s what my father... he never even gave me a chance. He chose his friend over me. That son of a bitchJabulani Mahlangu.

“Can you teach me how to do proper makeup?” I ask Thatego.
He’s

transferring the uphuthu from the pot to a wide bowl and
shakes it a bit

efore leaving it near the sink. “To hide my masculine features.
Maybe makemy cheeks and nose less rounder.” “You’re really, I
don’t see anything masculine about you.” He tries to
persuademe, but I don’t believe him. He should see me without
makeup, thi

s is why I

only remove it when I’m a quarter away to sleep. “Seriously.
Genes. I look

more like my mom than I do my money-

hungry father.” A deep breath, he exhales. “Sure, I can teach
you about makeup. You didn’t blend your foundation well by
the way.”

O

h... I make a face. If he sees this, he doesn’t show it. “The colour
of your face and neck need to be the same. That’s why your
foundation should always be blended into your

neck. Nothing looks worse than having your face look one colour and your neck another. Pro-tip: Blend in a little bit of your foundation into your ears as

well. They may be barely visible, but they still can't be a different skin tone." He unlocks his phone and shows me a few of his pictures. "I'm not sure how long you're staying but I'll show you what I mean." I don't know how long I'm staying too. Sgalosenkosi was angry when he found out about Pitso, but I'm glad he believed me, I told him what happened –

and

he was angry, even apologized for something that wasn't his fault. Then he returned into a mute as Bab' S

hange drove us here, and he said he had to speak

with his brother. He called Nhlakanipho as well. That's the guy with a heavy aura. When we talk about intimidation, that one doesn't even need to do anything, a stare alone just... I wonder how the doctor husband

and deals with

him. But I don't know them well enough. The doctor didn't seem interested in

knowing me.

“So you actually wanted to be a makeup artist?” I peer at Thatego, the genuine look of interest on his face, it makes me shy. It’s

all so stupid, bu

t... no one’s every really asked me about my career interests, aside from Sqalosenkosi. I wasn’t shy to tell him, and he’s helping me find a night school to finish my matric. “I like fashion,

modelling

, clothes,” I tell him, “and makeup. Anything that has to

do with beauty, I love.”

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“Oh, almost like Sphehlehle. Chris is working with her, because he runs a

modelling

agency, and has contacts with a few bigshots. If you don't mind, then I'd tell him about you. The only fashion I'm interested in... I'm working on my own lingerie brand... but I want it to be all

-inclusive. Mostly, I want it to cater to men like myself

—

who love to feel pretty. I don't want to wear thongs that squash my balls.”

I choke on my saliva. Again.

A giggle sounds in the kitchen. “I didn't

even offer you something to drink or

eat, and now you're choking, this must be a sign. I'm so sorry.”

He gets up,

finds two glasses; and juice from the fridge. He grabs some food in there as

well, and warms it in the microwave. “You're a transwoman, I'm s

ure you

know what it's like.” I do. It's even worse when you're a chubby girl like me. Lingerie companies seem to think chubby women

don't like to feel sexy, they think we're expired and deserve
granny undies. Like, I'm already fat, I don't need to feel
uglier

than I am already. It's the same thing with clothes. I would ask
That ego where

buys his clothes, but the dress he has on looks like it costs more
than my life,

and he's not even chubby –

a good size 36, sometimes 38 maybe

. It's the hips. "I do. Th

e sexy underwear feels weird on my body, but we pay prices to
look

beautiful, right?"

An eye roll, he places the kebabs in front of me and pours me a
glass of juice.

"That shouldn't even be a thing. I'm still working on everything
but this is

what I have

so far... hey, maybe you can be my muse for the chubbier
women.

Transwomen. I want to cater for them as well. I still have to find someone for

thicker men like me.”LOL. He can’t use himself?“MaSibusisiwe would kill me!” he’s read my mind or I’ve said that out loud.

“That or Sbanisezwe will have a heart attack. I sent him the designs, and this is what he said...” he shows me the phone. This is the fiancé’s phone that initially assumed was his... some trust they have in each other. “He likes the thongs wit

h the butterfly attachments. This panty is his least favourite.”

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I don’t blame him. Why buy a panty that cuts out that butt area when you could just buy a thong instead? Or is it for convenience for when you’re taking a dump? “Where do your balls and dick go?” I ask, when he shows a similar design but now the front part is cut off.

“Someone’s mouth.” My mind goes to... bad idea. Bad idea. My cheeks feel inflamed as Thatego

giggles. I roll my eyes, taking a sip of the juice and enjoy the expensive life.

“Very funny.” “You’ll need to give me your number before you leave, so I can tell Chris about you... Zithobile.” So far, he’s the kindest one I’ve met. That Zithobile kept to himself and his husband mostly. And the bitchy doctor. They’re besties or something. “He won’t mind?” I ask, I’ve dealt with enough bitchy people. I don’t need rich ones thinking they’re better than me because of their money.

“I don’t think so. He’s dealing with some personal issues and work keeps him busy. He’s already working

with Sphehile, like I said.”

Right. Sgalosenkosi’s girlfriend. My heart twinges, and it’s so pathetic. I’m not usually this affected by a guy, and I should’ve learned my lesson with Lwandle, but Sgalosenkosi has managed to work his way inside my heart without permission. It’s more than

like now, what I feel for him. Not quite love but just as intense.
He looks at me

like a Picasso painting, and I wish he'd stop. It's not like he's
explicitly told me he likes me back. I don't think he does. I asked
him w

hy he was helping me and his response was that he likes
helping people. I hate him.

"Then I will," I nervously tell Thatego. We don't grow in our
comfort zones,

right? Sometimes a step in the right direction takes just that

—

a step. Bold.

"Thank you for helping me."

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"It's nothing. You're like family now, right? Squalosenkosi seems
to like having you around, and I don't want you to feel like an
outcast." The way his eyes are distant... he's lived this. "When
did you know? That something was off... I nev

er really asked Fuzelihle,

we're not really close." "Forever!" I sigh. "I'm still waiting for my vagina to grow and my deceased mother won't pull through, babes. I don't know... when I was young, I just

always assumed that you could choose your gender once you reached a certain age

—

and that you'd remain with or grow the parts that you feel resonate with your chosen gender. This is why I thought my dad chose to be a man. And this is why I wanted to be a girl, like all the beautiful girls in my village, but

my vagina wouldn't grow. I kept hoping and by the time I was a teenager, I realized how stupid I was. But it still didn't work when I forced

myself to act manly or do the things my father enjoyed. I felt like a woman. I wanted to be beautiful like Rose and her squad. I wanted lighter skin, slim hips and thighs and beauty marks on my face. I wanted to be wooed by the

guys at school, and I just wanted to be you know like other girls. God didn't

want that for me, and he gave me nothing that I wanted. Except my mother's attitude."

"Rough!" Thatego regards me empathetically. I want to tell him I don't need it, but he's too pretty for me to chide. That's the thing about these beautiful ones,

they get away with everything. I wanted to look exactly like him. He

's all light skin and soft facial features. He's long curly hair and curvaceous body. He

smells and looks expensive. He looks way younger than his age. He has it all,

and it's times like this that I hate God... because how does he do a stellar job

with one person, and fuck up the next person? What makes Him think that we

don't all want to look like Thatego? "At least I have a functioning brain," I say. This was always my go

-to when the boys at school would make fun of me for my weight and the way I looked. P

ointless, of course, I wasn't much smarter than them. "You're blind if you don't see how gorgeous you are."

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I shrug my shoulders, I don't need his pity. "The lingerie business will be yourwhat... third business?"

"Yeah!" a proud smile forms on succulent lips. "I should be at the office today...interior design. But MaSibusisiwe was coming... and I'm married before I am a business person.

"

"That sounds like bullshit."

"I know." He gives me a beautiful beam. "But I don't mind. I've worked so hard, and it feels like I can enjoy this phase of my life. Life's too short to not focus on

the things that make you overwhelmingly happy. Sbanisezwe does. Our

marriage, though it's not finalized yet, does. Being home, just the two of us...

sometimes with the preschool from our combined families and our daughter

does. Work comes second place."

Perks of being filthy rich.

"New role model alert!" "I'm the last person to look up to." He buries his face in his hands. "Try

Christoph

e or Siyabonga."

I'm ready to protest, but the two photocopies make an appearance again.

Sqalosenkosi smiles brightly as soon as our eyes connect.

Butterflies erupt in my belly. I want to look down but his gaze imprisons me.

"I don't think I'll make it in time for dinner tonight." Sbanisezwe announces,

lifting Thatego off the stool like he weighs nothing, and the smaller man

doesn't even make a sound. Apparently he's used to this.

"Maybe I can have the other dinner instead..." "MaSibusisiwe will complain

about my cooking." Thatego whines like a child. "Delilah will help you." Matter

-of-factly, the tall bastard says this. His eyes

dare me to refuse him, I am ready to... but the words won't settle on my tongue. It must be Sgalosenkosi's overwhelming presence behind me. "It is the only way, trust me. We already have a baker on the left. You're the cook."

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Thatego rolls his eyes, as I make a confused face. "Don't mind him. He's messing with you. You don't need to cook anything." "Cook." An instruction. "Please." "You don't have to."

Sqalosenkosi says what Thatego has said, and squeezes my shoulder. "I'll fetch you later... before 04:30pm."

Sqalosenkosi

When Sbanisezwe and I were growing up, I watched him dip his toes into the world of crime

—

petty at first, and then growing more serious with Nhlambuluko's crew. My mother didn't know this, and I tried to save him, but he was his own person... convinced that I was trying to take Samkelo's role and play his father. Things didn't change until we left KwaMashu.

My brother is a learned criminal

—

a former one. This is why I came to him about Pitso. He knows something about him because he tried to convince me to leave everything to him, that something is written in his diaries

—

that I couldn't access. That's not important though, what's important is that he reluctantly agreed to me tagging along.

I have a few questions for Pitso. I'm angered on Khensani's behalf for what the

man has been doing behind her back. I trusted him, and the kindhearted mask he put on his face. The actions that always seemed so genuine. And Sbanisezwe was giving me a lecture about always seeing the good in people, with everything that we have seen growing up.

Maybe it's a

defence mechanism that is completely different from his own. Nhlakanipho is already waiting for us outside an Italian restaurant in Hatfield when we step out of the car, in his usual all-black attire. He sighs, removing his

wedding ring. "Did you have to rope me into this mess,

Madoda

? I've had to

postpone a scene with Sh

andu because of this. He's not talking to me because I told him my guys were driving him back to Mpumalanga. You know I don't like to have him around when I've killed someone."

“Whoa.” I look at him, and notice that he’s having some silent conversation

w

ith my brother. “Who mentioned deaths? I just want all of them to be taught

a lesson

—

maybe scars that will always serve as a reminder.” “We’re changing the suits. I’m thinking floral on the fabric... for every scream they’ll make.” Sbanisezwe starts to b

ounce up and down like a little child,

rubbing his hands together. There’s no humanity left in his eyes, just hunger. Nhlakanipho snorts. “This girl is really important to you, hmm? To kill for her... do you like her? Siyabonga mentioned Sphehile a while back.”

I rub my nose in irritation, clearly Siyabonga still has a bucket of a mouth.

Mbongolwane’s very own Daily Sun. “Temasiko’s a lovely, young woman, Bafo. Who wouldn’t like her? Sphehile’s my—

”“Future.” Sbanisezwe breaks into a childish grin. “Its just the same, you’ve met both twice before. I saw it in my dreams... the same way I’ve met Thateho –

again and again.”“I... let’s not get ahead of ourselves, Sbanisezwe. Sphehile is... beautiful, soft

-

spoken, kindhearted, warm... so very warm. She’s everything a man would

want in a wife and

—”“Possesses all the qualities of a good mother,” again Sbanisezwe interrupts

me. I s

igh in annoyance. “A woman like her is worthy of four souls. On the other hand, Delilah... I say again Sqaalosenkosi, let me into your house. Even if as a fly.”“My men are in there,” Nhlakanipho comes to my aid. He’s clearly in a snippy mood today. “I’m not sure how much Sbanisezwe has told you, Bafo, but brace yourself. I’ve been collecting the evidence, because your brother needs daily reminders of progress on everything... that man in there is not who you

thought he was. And some of the things you learn might... maybe you should bruise him a little and then let us do the rest of the work.” Uneasiness bruises my gut. “What are you talking about?” “He doesn’t want me to protect him, as he protected me like a father from birth.” He’s serious now –

Sbanisezwe

. “He wants to remove the rose-coloured

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glass from in front of his eyes. Let him. A man breaks and a woman helps him

rebuild again. Two women. He’ll be fine.” “Sbanisezwe—” “Just know it’s not your fault. Not mine. Not Khensani’s. Not... your daughter’s.

Go wild, Sqalosenkosi, show him that even the most kindhearted animal

becomes a lion when pushed to the limits.”

Unrequited Desires : Twenty-five Sgalosenkosi

The room we enter is bright, the lighting is, but the walls are made of black brick and the

there are shackles attached to the walls. There's a St. Andrew's cross on one corner of the room, and there's all sorts of equipment laid out on a tall metal table. It looks like Nhlakanipho's BDSM crap that he enjoys so much...

except there are about five men chained to metal chairs with us.

They've been awake for a while now, that much is clear to tell. But they're gagged with... ball gags for the three men I don't recognize. The other two –

Pitso and Abongile

–

they seem to be choking on their gags, my gaze turns to

Nhlakanipho in question but he shrugs. "It was your brother's idea." "It's a dildo penis mouth gag!" Sbanisezwe rolls his eyes childishly. "They're

already into cock sucking, are they not? Seems like the perfect way to go for

me... for this one, especially.” The childish falls away swiftly, making way for anger. “This one with the curious eyes, that are here and there at the same

time. He ogles my world and wishes he could taint it. To take away its colour and prettiness. I would deal with him personally,

did I not know that you’ll want to kill him yourself, Bafo.” They’re still not making much sense to me. I don’t want to kill anyone, I don’t

want deaths on my conscience. The last time I did that, I was helping Nhlakanipho avenge his family, because Lwandle and his squad had all deserved it. They were rapists, they were murderers. Pitso is a rapist, I agree. The same goes for Abongile. And I acknowledge that their actions have crushed Temasiko, and stolen a piece of her that she will never get back

but murder... murder is too much. Khensani was just telling me that she’s been feeling better, because Pitso is there, and has been supporting

her

—

a constant. He... they said he's not the man I thought he was. He's a rapist. He's wanted Thatego.

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"Here!" Nhlakanipho throws something at me. "Put that on. I like my jobs clean and straightforward... but your brother likes to play with his meat. This could take a while, a messy while. Make sure you're covered up."

I feel compelled to do his bidding, and put on the overall. Sbanisezwe is already playing music; to warm up, he said. Gospel music of all genres. I want to punch his face in, and remove that hunger in his eyes, the energetic nature

—

killing someone isn't something to be

excited about. "I have questions," I tell them. "For Pitso. I want to know why." "Because men think with dicks!" Sbanisezwe

snorts. “Because he’s fucked up in the end. Because he’s a bad man, Sgalosenkosi. Because God created good...

and inspired the devi

I to create bad. Isn’t that how the story goes?” Nhlakanipho shifts his feet, snatching the gag out of Pitso’s mouth. The

policeman takes a breath, saliva drooling out of the corners of his mouth as he fights through a coughing fit. His eyes are wide and fearful. The smell permeates the air, his helpless palpable, and it is an empowering scent. Now he knows. Now he knows what Temasiko felt like.

“Sgalosenkosi!” my name is harshly said, as he struggles against his restraints. “What is going on here? Is this some kind of joke... you’ve kidnapped me from my workplace to pull this childish prank on me?” Sbanisezwe starts to laugh as if he’s heard the funniest joke ever. The fucker

still thinks this is a joke. He finds it hard to believe that his sins have caught up

with him, and that judgment day has come... God’s appointed have come to ensure that everyone pays their dues, Ndoda.” “What the fuck are you talking—”

A shrill scream sinks into black walls. Sbanisezwe has punched the son of a bitch right on the mouth, so hard that

he's bleeding, but for some reason I can't bring myself to stop or chide him. He deserves it, Pitso deserves this. "Don't take me for a fool!" my brother snaps, he's angry. He never gets angry. He grabs Pitso by the neck, and squeeze

s until

the man's face resembles the blood trickling down his mouth. "Tell him,

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Nhlakanipho. He wanted to come, and remove his rose-tinted glass, so tell

him." "Do you remember anything about your accident?"

The question captures me off-guard. I blink my eyes, taken aback, my eyes

flicker to Nhlakanipho and then Sbanisezwe, before they settle on Pitso. He's

still moaning in pain, struggling with the restraints, like the others with him.

There's officer Buthelezi, a friend of his, clearly he was the other one involved in the rape of Temasiko.

“A white car, it sped past me and then came back and I tried to—” “You!” Sbanisezwe interrupts me, ripping the ball gag off another man –

younger than anyone in this room. “Say it!” “I

-I wa-

was just paid to do a job,” the man stammers, and his eyes are pointing to Pitso. “I had to distract the man and he told me to sho

ot him if he managed

to avoid the accident, but he didn’t and the car crashed.” “Hey, man, this boy is lying!” Pitso shouts, the rattling sound of the handcuffs is louder than everything else in this room. “He’s lying. Why would I do such a thing!?”

“He

didn’t bring up names.” Nhlakanipho points out with a sigh.

“But since you’re incriminating yourself, you can explain how you thought you’d enjoy my brother’s insurance payout with his ex

-
wife and your new baby.” My body’s first instinct is to freeze,
and it’s as if the world around me follows
suit. Suddenly, everything becomes too silent, nothing more
than an annoying buzz. Pitso is talking, and talking

—
denying. “You did it,” I state, without a nounce of doubt in my
body. It’s the look in his eyes, th

e way they waver and

dilate... he’s done this. “Tell me I am lying.” “You’re—”

My fist connects with his mouth. The sound of something
cracking against my knuckles reaches my ears, and it just fuels
me. I repeat the action, punching

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the lies out of his mouth until his screams are the only sound
penetrating the buzzing in my ears.

“Fuck!” he groans, spitting blood to the floor. “Fuck! Fuck!” “WHY!” I roar, a raw sense of blinding rage overcoming me, as the pictures

come back vivid. My daughters in that car. Likuwe-ithemba in the car.

“Because!” Pitso shouts back. “You’re just going to kill me anyway, right?” “Damn right.” Sbanisezwe sneers. “If he won’t do it, then I will. It will not be nice, brace yourself...the worst is coming.” “I don’t get it,

Pitso

—” “Eh baba, you don’t have to!” he has the audacity to snap at me, the willpower. His mouth wasn’t punched enough, not enough damage was created. “I don’t owe you a fucking thing! You’re a fucking prick, and I wanted to get rid of you

and your litt

le mosquitos... who gives a fuck? There is no greater reason,

Sqalosenkosi, I wanted to kill you because I wanted to. I wanted your

daughters dead because I wanted them dead!” “And he succeeded with Likuwe

-

ithemba. But this man isn't who you think he

is, a

s I've said." Nhlakanipho mutters, quietly. "This man is a serial rapist. Ask

many of his foreign victims

—

the innocent men and women he and his friend here would incarcerate for not having relevant citizenship documentation. He hides behind that uniform

to do his dirty deeds." "Not to mention the punches Khensani has suffered at his hands." My gaze snaps to Sbanisezwe at the revelation, I shake my head, that's not true. Khensani would've told me. I know her, she's a strong woman. A strong, assertive woman who stands her ground and I know she would've left Pitso at

the first abusive contact. S

he's said this numerous times, about the women we'd read about in such relationships. She wouldn't have stayed. "That's not true, Bafo." I refute my brother.

“It is, and you know it!” he snaps, glaring at me. “Look at him, Sgalosenkosi, he

is a monster

! There’s no room for good, not one ounce, and he has manipulated Khensani... just like he’s done with Liyana. This is how he got to her, this is how he convinced her that... FUCK!” A head shake. “Don’t make me

say it, Sgalosenkosi, connect the dots on your own

n. Liyana’s your daughter, reevaluate her behaviour these past few months and connect the dots.” My head starts to spin. He’s said too many things, and I need time to process information bit by bit; I’ve always been this way. He’s said so many things but

my mind is on my daughter. He said to analyze her behaviour and to connect

the dots. She’s... better. At home, she seems happier –

and I’ve blamed that on her finally having a maternal figure in her life. One who’s present. I’ve blamed

it on Sbanisezwe, for

being a good father to her when I wasn’t able to be one

for her. When there was distance between us and it felt as if she was slipping through my fingers.

Previously, she was... detached. Always living everything up to me to decide.

Not her bubbly, talkative self. A shell. She mentioned her deceased sister a lot,

mentioning conversations they'd have. Escape to my room, Likuwe

-ithembawould tell her. Escape the monster in her closet. She wet the bed and shewould escape to my room and she would

—

My eyes widen, as tension snatches my air and pins me against the wall,

rendering me immobile. I can't move. My heartbeat is quickening.

No. Please God, no.

"Pitso—" his name tastes like dirty sand on my tongue — heavy.

"She's a sweet, little thing." He has a smirk on his face, eyes resigned. "I washer first kiss, do you know that? She's a better kisser than her mother, I taught

her. She was so lonely when Likuwe-ithemba died, so sad and lost, because of her selfish parents

–

and I stepped in to take care of her. Her light when all she knew was darkness.”

Someone snorts, and Sbanisezwe punches him again, but Nhlakanipho stops him

–

and tells him to keep his cool.

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“I earned her trust, Sgalosenkosi, that’s how I did it. I earned her trust, as her

other daddy,

and she knows that I wouldn’t hurt her... not like you have. Not like Khensani has with her bad parenting. I was always there for her, a guiding hand, teaching her everything she needs to know.

Her first blowjob? Phew, she aced it like a pro! Handjob? Those hands are small and squeeze for a reason. Don't get me started on her little puss—"

Sbanisezwe kicks the chair, it goes tumbling down and lands with a harsh thud on the ground.

Pitso is chuckling, so freely, loudly. "If you hadn't taken her when you d

id, I

would've fucked her! I was going to fuck that tight, little hole and—" "Shut up! Shut the fuck up!" Sbanisezwe keeps shouting. He's stomping down on Pitso. "Kill him, kill him, Sgalosenkosi! Sgalosenkosi!"

I don't think, just allow the rage to flow through my veins. Sbanisezwe has managed to snatch him out of the chair, I don't know how. But he throws Pitso's bloodied face at me. I nail a punch on his face for every

moment that Liyana felt scared and alone. He screams, it urges me on

—

even as he falls to the ground. I kick him in the side, and when he curls up to protect himself, I continue kicking viciously wherever I can reach.

“Get the glass butt

-

plug!” Sbanisezwe shouts. “Get the wax! A few punches

a

ren’t going to do it. Make him feel it, Bafo. Make it hurt. Make him beg for you to take his life. He won’t regret what he’s done, but he will meet his useless ancestors a coward! Make him pay!”

Someone does as my brother says, and I start to rip off Pit

so’s clothing, without much protest from him. There’s a penis

-shaped glass in boiling water that seems to be mixed with

oil. Sbanisezwe throws the water at him, and the smell of

boiling flesh drifts to my nose, I hold back a gag. Pitso

is screaming.

“Shove

it down his ass!” I grab the glass, don’t think, and push through the resistance to shove it down

his ass. An anguished moan, he tries to crawl away when I pour the wax on his skin

–

and can't catch his breath. His side, his ribs, his arms –

it's like he

's one

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massive bruise. My body is working, all of my body working together to bring him one form of pain or another

–

everywhere. Anything I can get my hands on, I use. The floggers. The whips. The cane

–

the thickest one. It connects with his skin, breaking into blue and purple to smudge his skin red. The son of a bitch has curled in on himself, whimpering,

crying softly. It's not enough. Never enough.

My mind is on Likuwe-ithemba. On Khensani. On Liyana.

She's cried for help so many times. So many times.

I've failed her.

I am a terrible father, and I have failed her. My anger at myself comes out in the form of punches on a cowering body. It comes out as kicks and screams. It bashes itself on a disfigured face. It pelts into broken skin. And comes back in the form of blood spattering on my hands, on my face, on the overall. It flows through my veins

—

a violent scorching.

"Stab him in the head, that's where the problem is."

I grab the knife from Sbanisezwe, would do anything he tells me right this moment. And my hand is trembling, as I look into barely functional eyes and a swollen face. Bruised lips and purple cheeks. I imagine I see the plea in his eyes, as I raise my hand and push it down, fuelled by the rage and hurt and disbelief. Fuelled by the spirit to avenge my daughters and their mother.

The knife doesn't come back easily, as it clings to Pitso's head. It doesn't come back easily, it comes back with red tissue. I don't care. Sbanisezwe is my

driving force, he is in my ear, and this feels right. This is the right thing to do.

I've failed my

family, but they will never have to suffer again. They will never live in fear again. This is the least I can do for them.

"He's dead, Sqalosenkosi." He's not. He's not dead.

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"Stop it, Ndoda!" Nhlakanipho shouts this time, and pulls me away. "He's d

ead.

You've done the right thing, your family is safe now. I am so sorry."

I try to speak but my voice clogs up.

My world has come to a tragic end. How... how could I have been so blind? So selfishly in my own head that I wasn't noticing that my daughter

was

suffering? That her mother was suffering a similar fate? I've failed them, both of them... so much. "Squalosenkosi?" There's a veil of anguish in my eyes. I take a huge breath, blinking it away, and

focus on the voice calling my name. Nhlakanipho.

"I know you're hurting. But we have a job to finish." He pats my shoulder, and squeezes. "Abongile takes advantage of drunk women as you know. The police

officer

—"Leave Abongile to me. Kill the others, an eye for an eye." "Now that's what I am talking about!" Sbanisezwe bounces back and forth like a child. "Go wild, Bafo! Live a little!" I don't have the energy for him. Abongile is my next target. There's fear in his eyes, one that I know hadn't been there when he took advantage of Temasiko.

I shake

my head when he starts to beg before the beating can even start. "I'm doing you a favour, Ndoda." I remind him, grabbing him by the collar. "This way, you can resist temptation. If it's not there to begin with because you're dead." "She asked for it." "Just like you've asked me to free you of your perversion," I tell him, and aim a

punch on his mouth. This one I toy with, allowing him a free chance before

really giving it to him. He's bleeding, on the ground, as Nhlakanipho pushes

me away, a belt in his hands.

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"Enough foreplay!" he snaps, wrapping the belt around Abongile's neck and squeezing. "I have to get home." The grip tightens and tightens, and Abongile

is turning purple as squirms and struggles, nails digging at the skin of his neck until he is drawing bl

ood. Until his eyes are rolling, and he's too tired to fight. Nhlakanipho lets his limp body go with a rough push. He's dead. He sits on the man's body, removes his gloves, and takes out a cigar. His men help him with

the lighter, he draws in and out, plac

ing a sigh on his tongue. "Three minutes, Sbanisezwe."

My brother is dancing, no longer to a gospel song, as he toys with one of the final bodies. I choose to focus on how relaxed

Nhlakanipho seems sitting on top of a deadbody, and nothing else. If I think about the other things then I will

—

“Don’t think about it,” Nhlakanipho instructs me. His eyes are on mine, deep. “There’s nothing you could’ve done, because that sick bastard wasn’t supposed to touch your daughter in the first place. He wasn’t supposed to

betray your and your ex-

wife’s trust. He’s at fault here, not you.”

His words cut deep into a fresh wound. I fight for air as I force myself to

remain upright. If I sit down then I will, I will... “Your advice isn’t really

helping about not thinkin

g about it then.” A snort is what I receive in response. “I’m not good at this advising thing.” “Really not.” He stands, and goes to push Sbanisezwe away from a mangled body. “Its time

to go. I have an important call at 08:00pm. My men will take care of the

bodies.”

Sbanisezwe looks bummed, genuinely disappointed, as he changes out of the

overall. "Dinner anyone?" Nhlakanipho rolls his eyes. "Your brother always a big appetite after killingsomeone."

My eyebrows knit together. Have they done this before?

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"Do I want to know?" "No." Sbanisezwe shakes his head, as we take the stairs, entering Nhlakanipho's back office, and exiting for the restaurant. "You don't." I don't question him, and follow both outside. Our cars are waiting there. Nhlakanipho's behind mine. "I'm so sorry," he considers me again, leaning against his car, "I wish I knew what to say. I don't know if it gets easier but I've learned to live with the fact that I couldn't protect my own family

. That Thandolwenkosi died because she spoke up against her rapists. You'll have so many questions and too few answers, Sqalosenkosi. Take it one day a time... it is really, really not your fault."

The words dig a little deeper into my wound. Still, I find myself nodding my head, accepting a hug from him that seems to last forever. He keeps apologizing, and it's doing something to me. But I hold it together, even as we get in the car, and Sbanisezwe makes a phone call to Thatego. I look at the time, it's 07:18pm.

I am late... but more than anything, I cannot go home and look my daughter in the eyes. I've failed her. I cannot look her in the eyes after everything I have allowed her to go through. Sphehile has called, and left messages. I ignore all of them, and switch my phone off.

Temasiko

The front door sounds, and with it footsteps that sound closer and closer by the second. It's 08:05pm. Sgalosenkosi told me he'd be fetching me at 04:30pm

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but that was a lie. They appear, and while nothing seems out of the ordinary

with his brother, there's something... off with him. I can't put my finger on it, but he's not the Squalosenkosi that left here earlier. "Sphehile called," Thatego announces softly, "I told her that you were with your brother. She's worried sick, your phone is off." Squalosenkosi doesn't even spare him a glance, very telling about the state he's in. "Grab your bag, we're leaving." The instruction is cold, and normally I'd call him out on this behaviour –

that he never has to begin with

–

but something about him is off and scary at the moment. I find myself doing his bidding. "Thank you... for today." I tell

Thatego, it was fun hanging out with him

–

and I've learned.

Sbanisezwe is already carrying him over his shoulder and walking away with him.

I sigh, rolling my eyes as I follow Squalosenkosi outside, where Bab' Shange is

waiting for us. The ride to the hotel is quiet, I stopped trying to talk when my boss kept acting like a moody asshole. But he follows me inside when we get there, and follows me all the way inside my room.

We sit on the couch, and it's awkward. There's an unwelcomed tension, I want to ask what the issue is. "Squalosenkosi—"

His lips are on mine, and my eyes widen. What the fuck! I am kissing him back, just as passionate, as he gets in between my legs, forcing me on my back. My body roars with a burning fire

—

trembling. Finally!

Everything is screaming, and I... wait. "Please stop." I push him away, as he

tenses on top of me, and moves to sit beside me

quietly. "What's wrong?"

This is not him. He scrubs his face, and shrugs his shoulders, looking at me

—

all red-rimmed eyes and lost expression.

“You have a girlfriend,” I accusingly remind him.

“I know,” he nods his head. “Something happened and you’re trying to use me as an escape.” He’s still looking at me, doesn’t deny it. My heart cracks, though I’d known. I exhale shakily, fixing my skirt, my dick is throbbing and begging me to continue. “Then it’s a bad idea.” “Bad idea,” he echoes my words.

“And we’re not going to do this.” “Yes,” his jaw clenches. He’s too close suddenly, as tension makes way for something else, something that calls out directly to my throbbing erection. He touches my cheek, and sears my lungs, I can’t breathe. I can’t breathe. “Sqaalosenkosi...” “Let me have you.” His lips are on mine again, I don’t deny him this time and he presses me downward, snatching my soul. His touch is made of stars and every glimmering light. “This means nothing.” A reminder to myself more than him. I’m the one with a crush here.

He says nothing, and rips my skirt. I moan his name as he attacks my neck, and bask in the reality of every impossible dream I have ever had.

309

Unrequited Desires : Twenty-five

—

Explicit Squalosenkosi

Temasiko's body is far more beautiful than I remember – soft and enticingly imperfect. Lines of stretch marks spread from her belly to her thighs, that are darker than the rest of her body. The size of her penis throws me off a bit, though I've seen it once before, but she's still so beautiful and enticing and looks obscenely innocent and pure. Mine to taint.

"Stop ogling my body, and get on with it already." Her voice is whiny, she puts

her hands on my chest, caressing

—

almost... lovingly. "Have you changed your mind? Maybe you don't like what you see and—"

My lips connect with hers again, and I force the image of Sphehile to the back of my brain, along with the voice that keeps screaming at me to stop. I push her beautiful face away, forget the natural scent of her rosy body, and shun the sacred violets in her eyes. For tonight.

"Will you be with me, Temasiko?" I whisper the words against her lips, quiet, looking into her eyes. "I need you to help me." "Use me, you mean." Guilt bruises my gut, but I don't deny it. There's no telling if I'll be feeling the

same way come morning. I just need her to help me handle the pain, to think of anything but my daughter and how I have

—

"Kiss me." It's her who takes initiative this time, and presses her lips on mine, wrapping

her warm legs around me. My left hand finds her breast

—

too small in my hand but still so perfect, and I roll my thumb around her nipple, stimulating it. Her moans are breathy, heavy

against my ear and connect directly to my throbbing cock, making it twitch and leak against her.

310

I've thought of her like this at least once before. Her hands bound, and me pounding away, taking her body again and again.

"I want to suck your dick." She's already manhandling me, shifting me on my back and getting in between

my legs, she takes my erection into her hand and starts to stroke, as I hiss in pleasure, my head falling backward, pelvis thrusting into her fisted hand.

"Fuck!" Something warmer soon follows, as she circles the head of my cock

and starts to suck, before diving down and taking me as deeply as she can. Her movements are fast and skilled

—

a hum here, that sends vibration throughout my body; and a tightening of the lips that makes my body tight with pleasure.

Then she pulls away too soon, murmuring that if I'm going to cum then it will be inside her. "Condoms," I murmur. "Condoms. Nonnegotiable." She smiles and kisses me again, as I shift us so that she's under me, and I kiss her again –

trailing kisses to the entirety of her body, as my fingers press against her lips and she opens her willing mouth to suck on them; and soaks them. My eyes remain on her, as my fingers travel to her hole and jam inside her body, a strangled sob escapes her

–

tension

curling around her. "Shit." "Gentle?" "Please..."

My fingers stayed still in her, as deep as they can go, until my knuckles are pressing in as well, and I kiss her lips again as I search for her pleasure button. My cock grinds against hers, as her nipples harden and her eyes close for a brief moment, deep breath leaving her. The next kisses are slow, as I take my time playing with her body, discovering her pleasure spots, because I want this to last and to make it enjoyable for both of us, to make her as wet as possible before burying myself deep inside her.

"Please, I'm ready." I don't need her to tell me twice.

311

My hands are shaking, mind screaming, as I grab the head
of my covered cock

to guide inside her slowly slid through her slickness. There's
resistance, like

there had been with Sphehlehle, less tighter but just as
exceptional. And it feels

like breaking her in. "Temasiko..." a groan jumps to my throat,
my heart

pounding viciously. Her hole is squeezing my the head of my
cock to the point

of strangulation. "You feel so good." "I know," her voice
is teasing, breathless

—

pained. There's unshed tears in hereyes, she takes a breath. "It
feels like you're ripping me in two."

She has no idea how badly I want to.

"Please let me move," I beg, pushing further in —

fighting. My body istrembling, and

it feels like I will burst any second. “Temasiko...” “Do i—”

My dick pushes inside, halfway, and she releases a breathless moan. I pull it out, my cockhead rubbing against her wet hole as it twitches against me, her dick jerking against her belly. Her mouth is open in a breathless moan, as she stimulates her swollen nipples. I slowly push the head in again, and watch in awe as her tiny hole stretches wider again, to accommodate my erection. Her hand finds my pelvis

—

a silent plea. Slow. Gentle.

“It hurts.” A breathless giggle. “But I want this. I want this.” She’s said this so many times.

I kiss her lips as I drag her to me, pulling her legs over my shoulders, gently

pushing into her tightness. “I want to throw caution to the wind and have my

way wi

th you, Temasiko.” I confess, thrusting in slowly. “Uyashisa, munt’weNkosi.”

Her heart is pounding against mine, as she kisses me back, and moans when I push further in. A grunt leaves me as her

tight warm flesh clamps down on me, at her tight warmth flesh and pushed further looking in her eyes as her as

I slide in and out of her wetness. “Oh God!” she moans, her breathing getting

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heavier, my forehead on hers

—

eyes connected. She’s so beautiful. I don’t have the words but she’s beautiful. Beautiful. Beautiful.

“Temasiko.”

Her arms wrap around me, as I begin to move faster inside her, her breathing becoming too ragged as she moans my name. I test my limits, giving her more

and more of my dick, as she taps on my pelvis but I don’t want slow. “Please, Temasiko...” my control is

not the best, not at the moment. And she allows me to go wild,
as I thrust back and forth

—

pounding deeper inside her, full force, craving to have her feel
this for days, to remember me. Her back arches into me,
headboard banging against the wall, as her moans grow louder
and louder. Her body rocks up and down viciously, as I press
her further down, warm thighs surrounding my shoulders, my
speed increasing. This is not lovemaking. Its fucking

—

hard. I slam into her and she cries out

—

loud! Her hole is twitching as my dick pumps into her

—

in and out. She's trembling,

hands on her erection, stroking viciously, as I drag her closer by
her thighs and aim for her p-

spot. She doesn't hold in her moans, as I wildly thrust into

her, chasing my own bliss

–

focusing on nothing but. My lips connect with her breast, her nipple

–

and they're not big enough. But I work with them, because her body is perfect and she doesn't need to change a single thing. Her body is

bouncing up and down in rhythm with my thrusts.

“Waze wamnandi, nganeyomuntu.” I groan in her ear –

ramming roughly into

her. “Umnandi, Sthandwa sami, wenza ngani?”

She convulses against me as I pull my dick out to smack against her wet hole before pushing into her roughly again as she backtracks, making me pull her back in

–

again and again. “I'm cumming!” she shouts. “Yes, I am. Fuck... ohfuck... Sqalosenkosi! You're making me feel so g

-

good.” Her eyes are closed as

I drill into her. And she chants my name, hazy eyes focused on me as she spills

into her stomach and my chest. “That’s it... that’s it. Keep going. God, I love you!”

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Her words are heard and unheard. I’m too enticed by the sight of her much

smaller body under me

—

how delicately thick it is. The fast breathe that show on her chest. The bruising on her body. How she tries to clamp her thigh together as I pound away, chasing my own orgasm. Her hole strangles me to

the point of death, and I can’t hold it in any more.

I slide out quickly, ripping off the condom to stoke myself to completion, on her quivering body

—

and coat her chest and face with my cum. Her giggles are

breathless moans, she's on her knees and sucking me off again,
my hands

buried deep inside her hair as I push into her warmth

—

ignoring the gagging. Then her lips are on
mine again, deep, and I don't think I've had enough of her.

My mind is on her warmth, how tight it was. I want it for myself
forever

—

selfishly. "Don't do this with anyone else," I warn her, my hand
caressing her throat, and then squeezing lightly, "please." "Only
you. I've thought about you, touching me like this. My body is
yours." Her words shouldn't make me smile, but they do. They
do as I press a kiss on

her lips and flip her on her back

—

pressing her down by her chest and having her ass in my
full view. There's a connection there, as I run my hand along
her

back, and she croaks my name

—

a soft cry. My right hand grips her soft butt and I caress it, feeling it jiggle against my touch as I tease her twitching flesh with the head of my cock, adding a little pressure, and lean down to cover her body with mine, wrapping an arm

around her throat to drag her up. She grips my forearm. There's the

connection again

—

an intense electricity. "Mine," I whisper, my hand moving to cup her erection. Her nod is frantic.

"Say it." "Yours." A breathless whimper. "Yours. Yours. Only yours." The words should make me happy, but I am insatiable. "When I'm finished with you, you'll barely be able to stand me not being inside you," I promise

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darkly, as she flinches, tightening her grip on my arm, as I push my dick inside her tight warmth again.

315

Unrequited Desires : Twenty-six Temasiko

My body feels strange

—

a good strange, one I've never ever experienced

before. Not even with that prick Jabulani Mahlang

u. Men are selfish, they don't

want us to have nice things, this is why they take all the orgasms for themselves and leave us with lousy ones. Men are Jabulani Mahlangu, men are

Lwandle Kasana. Bastards, they've kept me from mindblowing fun times for

far t

oo long, and why didn't I meet this one beside me sooner? It's... weird, having someone so much bigger than me in bed.

I have been trying to convince myself to turn over and look at him, but my

back feels broken and I am feeling pain in areas I didn't know I could, my toes for example and my nipples are too sensitive. My breathing is fast and quietly ragged

–

panicky; yet Squalosenkosi's is the exact opposite –

and so completely

calm. He slept about an hour ago, I think. It's still dark outside, about 04:0

0am. He slept an hour ago because he was blowing my back out for most of the night

–

on the bed, he followed me to the bathroom when I went to take a piss

and he fucked me there, there's the balcony and the chair in front of the

mirror. It was gentle, rough, and in-between. I enjoyed every moment of it, every single orgasm that he gave me, that I gave him

–

a mutual transaction. From my peripheral, Sgalosenkosi is sleeping soundly on his stomach, breaths deep and even, naked back strong and smooth, moving in time with his

breathing. He's too tempting to not properly scrutinize, this is why I force

myself on my side

–

and moan in anguish. Everything twinges

–

every limb, every muscle, every part of me

–

mostly in a good way. There's an ache, a deep

ache, a

and I have to suppress a gasp as I let out a soft whimper that...Sgalosenkosi is moving on the bed. I think he's waking up, but he isn't. He's moving, not too much, just jerky movements and jumbled words.

Ntwenhle, he says, and something about protection.

Then it's Sbanisezwe, and

something about him washing his school uniform. This is cute, an amused smile pulls at my lips, I want to kiss him. He says a lot of things, and I think

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he's trapped in time –

maybe his childhood days. There's Liyana, and he start

s

to get weird here because his movements become... panicky?

I jerk back too quickly and howl quietly as a scorching flame attacks my back.

He's sitting up on the bed and... how did he become so drenched in a short

amount of time? His breathing is fast, and

I don't know whether the tears on

his face have been caused by his sweat or if he was crying? I mean he did

sound like he was crying but... I don't know. "Hey." I sit on my knees, and shuffle closer to him. He doesn't try to push me away as I place a hand

on his shoulder, he's a living volcano. My hand burns at the contact, all of me, and I want to blame it on the dark gaze he's giving me –

tortured. What's wrong? "You were dreaming."

Silence. Okay. Awkward.

"About last night—" Okay again. We're just going to get back right into the sex without a word.

Another escape, huh? His lips are on mine, a desperation to the way he devours me

–

passionate, assertive. I am receptive because it feels great

–

the skin on skin and lips on mine. My body loses all inhibition, like last night, at the press of bulging muscle against my soft body, every fibre of my being purely focused on

his hands touching me, teasing me, speaking words of tender care and thoughtfulness. He presses two of his fingers inside me, and I tense briefly at the pain, letting my body loose when his kisses deepen and it feels like the world is ending

—

intense electricity exchanging between the two of us. He circles his fingers inside me, stretching me, and my ears are tuned to the squelching sound of his cum inside me, as those thick digits move round and round, making me moan breathlessly, gripping the bed sheets for anchor. Fuck! My legs tremble, as need washes over me again

—

sudden and ravenous.

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My arms wrap around him as he presses into my body gently, just an inch and teases me with movements. My body tightens in sweet agony, as my legs meet his waist, folding around him tight with every press

—

and his cock is thick and long and pulsing inside me, pumping deep, ruining my insides. It hurts so good

—
a gentle soreness that I have no accurate words to describe.

I think he's right there with me, as he really starts to move, fast, hard, and

large, slamming into me over and over again. I whimper his name, closing my eyes as I remember every word he uttered during our sexual encounters, when he had me behind him, the bend of his arm tight around my neck, his teeth tugging at my earlobe, Zulu accent thick and voice low as he murmured that this is what I was made for, that I belonged under him at all times.

He's not vocal now, just thrusting into me with all the strength that resides in

him, his movements causing me to gasp in pleasurable pain, as the headboard

bangs against the wall forcefully. He's pushing and pushing until I am on the

top of the hill again, my body trapped under him, and I can't catch my breath, can't do anything but whine and moan and whimper and try to roll my hips

against him. My erection stimulated by his flexing abs, by the sparse hair there, a sweet tingle making me more sensitive

with every press into my body, my hole clamping on his dick, my eyes rolling to the back of my head and my toes curling with the onslaught of a sweet orgasm. His orgasm splashes deep inside me, and he continues moving as if nothing has happened, dark eyes piercing deep into my soul. My heart is jumping inside my throat, as he holds me tight

–

by a hand at the back of my neck, and slams hard into me, wetness soaking into my skin. This is it, the actual offloading, its not rough as I'd expected –

just deep and intense. I cling to him

and help him carry whatever is troubling him, he's done this and much more

for me. I want to be there for him, to help him, and allow him to be vulnerable.

My back is numb by the time he's

done. An hour later? Maybe. Lilac teasingly

pokes at the windows, and he's lying on top of me, face buried in my neck,

breaths hard and loud. Seconds later, he pulls away, and rests beside me. His arm finds mine, as he pulls me on his chest, and kisses my forehead. It

shouldn't make me feel soft, but it does, and I feel butterflies erupting in my

belly. Bad idea. I know what this was. It will probably never happen again.

There's Sphehlehle, the girlfriend.

318

I don't feel guilty for doing what I did with h

im. But I do feel bad for her. She

has one shitty boyfriend. Has he done this with other women, too? I should've

insisted that we continue using protection. Men are all the same, all they do is

think with their dicks. That's all they do. What if he's infec

ted or something? Now is not the time to be panicking about this, but I am, and push away to

look at him. He's staring at the ceiling, eyes closed, but I know he's not

sleeping.

"Are you clean?" I have to know. "Yes."

Straightforward. Okay.

"I am, too."

No response.

If he's going to continue being moody after spending so many hours tearing into my ass then he may as well leave, I don't need him extending the badmoods to me. I've just experienced the best orgasms

of my life, too many of

them in a span of a few hours, and I'd ask him to leave his dick behind if it were possible, because I need it, but he needs to leave. I don't need bad vibes. "I have to shower." I don't stop him when he pulls away, and heads to

the bathroom, and the sound of running water captures my ears. Me, I stay in bed, and try to catch up

on some much needed sleep. When he's gone, I'll run myself a hot bath and afford myself a much needed soak. Strangely, I'm not hungry, it must be all

that cum inside my belly. Corny. I snort quietly to myself and force sleep on myself.***

"Temasiko." He's in front of me, dressed in last night's clothes, and there's light in the room now. How long have I been sleeping, and why hasn't he left yet?

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"Hey." My lips stretch into a smile. "You're leaving?" A frown, it looks so gorgeous. "We need to talk." Nonnegotiable, his tone. Is this the part where he tells me that this was a mistake and that it shouldn't have happened? Maybe he'll tell me he likes us better as friends and doesn't want to compromise what he has with Sphesihle. He'll attempt to stroke my ego, and tell me that I'm an amazing woman and blah, blah, blah. "Please."

I mentally roll my eyes, and sit up with the pace of a tortoise, masking my pain to not give him that satisfaction. Sex is supposed to go with pain here and

there... or whatever EL James said with that fucker Christian Grey. An

uncomfortable sensation of his cum playing inside my ass pulls my face into a disturbed frown, as I scrunch my nose, pulling my legs to my chest and resting my head on them. I shield myself with my arms, and openly gaze at him.

He's sitting on the chair, returning my open stare, unblinking. If he's trying to intimidate me then it's not going to work. The only thing he'll get is a blush because I can't look at him the same, he exceeded every fantasy I've ever had –

and for that I am very thankful. I was beginning to think that orgasms were

fabricated myths. "Thank you," I speak first, since he's just staring

at me like an interesting piece of furniture.

"Hmm." "Do you regret it?" I don't mean to ask this, but I can't help but wonder. "Last night?" "No."

Straightforward again.

"Me too." He nods his head, scrubs his face many times, before glancing at me. "I regret

the circumstances this has happened under, but I would be lying if I said

curiosity hasn't crossed my mind at least once. Not just sexually, my only

regret is using your body as
an escape, but... you're an amazing woman,
Temasiko. Your personality, everything little thing about you is
—”

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“Perfect, and you hope I will find the man who will treat me better. You're sorry last night happened, but you have a girlfriend and what else?” “I'm going through some things.” “Okay and?”

“And...” another face scrub, he'll rub it raw if he doesn't ease up, “I don't regret spending my time with you, to be truthful, I think it would've happened eventually... maybe under different circumstances. Wi

th Sphesihle in the

picture. I'm a man on my knees in your presence, Temasiko. Everything you do captures my attention, you bewitch me.”

Heart-attack moment. I nibble on my lower lip anxiously, searching for the truth of his words in earthy brown eyes.

It's there, I know him well enough to know he doesn't lie.

But why now? He had to wait until he dicked me down for him to admit this to

himself. I don't know why he keeps looking at me expectantly. What does he

want me to say?

"You have a girlfriend." "She's an amazing woman, just like you." "You cheated on her." A flicker of emotion, regret sweeps his face. "I know." Okay, isn't he going to elaborate? Tell me what his thought process was? He should've been able to go to her and he should've leaned on her shoulder. I'm

not experienced in relationships, but I know this, he was supposed to find everything he sought in her. Their love was supposed to be strong enough for them to help him with whatever fucked up situation he ran into. Love is supposed to be like that.

"Then what happens, Sgalosenkosi? I don't regret sleeping with you, this wasn't just for you but for me as

well, and I enjoyed every minute of it. But I'm

321

not blind to the fact that you have a girlfriend, and you're here telling me all these things and I'm not sure what is supposed to happen. I expected a 'hey, I had a great time but this won't happen again' situation. What are you saying?" "Isn't it obvious, Temasiko?"

I like it better when I am Tema. Only for him.

"No, it's not, Squalosethu." He doesn't show irritation or laugh, but his eyes are smiling reservedly.

Something happened, and his aura is too heavy for me, too burdensome. I

would look away to take a breath if he weren't imprisoning me with just a

look.

"When I get home, there are things I will discuss with Sphehlehle. It will not be

easy, but I prefer to be honest. She will know what happened, and though

she's very important to me, I will not stop her from leaving if she so desires...

because she deserves to know the truth. If she stays, then we will work on our relationship

—

new as it is. I am not in love with her, but I do feel... something

i

n her presence.” “Good for you. I wish you nothing but success in your future endeavours.” His eyes narrow, I know he’s heard my cheekiness. “Last night you said you love me, and that you were mine.”

My cheeks grow warm but thank God for my dark skin. I said a lot of things I

didn’t mean last night. I said a lot of things I did mean. He just, he doesn’t need to know that. “I didn’t mean it. I was in the moment.” “I like it when you lie, Temasiko.” There’s no amusement in his face, just

rebuking seri

ousness. “I like it better when you betray yourself, and you tell me everything I need to know without a single word. As you did last night,

with the sounds you were making.”

Asshole!

“And so?”

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“I can’t promise that this won’t happen again.” His voice is silent. “Because I am a selfish bastard, and I want you all to myself. The same way I want the woman I left back home all to myself.”

I laugh humourlessly, his words offend me, because all men are the same. And

his honesty won’t make him admirable in my eyes. “Must be nice being you, picking and choosing who gets to wet your dick today. If you’re not feeling beef then you’re going for the chicken.” “Who’s the beef and who’s the chicken?” “Fuck you!” “You did.”

I did, and the way he behaved, I just know that none of his girlies have had him taste how good woman-on-top can feel.

But I rode the fuck out of him, bouncing on him like that fucker Jabulani Mahlangu taught me, and it was a

pleasure seeing him lose his shit. “I don’t want to be your side, Sgalosenkosi,

my advice is make sure you don’t tell Sphehile about this and continue on with your life. I’m sorry for what happened, whatever happened, but thank you for the orgasms.” “Temasiko—” “I’ll see you out,” I murmur, wrapping the beddi

ng around my body

protectively, “I know you respect my decisions, please don’t switch up on me out of the blue.” I’m standing in front of him, he won’t move from the chair, and buries his face

in my flabby belly. Fuck him. And his issues. Fuck him for being such a crappy boyfriend, and for being selfish, and for having premium dick and top-tier sexing skills, and for being attentive during sex, and for always ensuring that I come first. Fuck him honestly. My hands hold him in place, as something wet soaks the flimsy item covering

me. His arms are tight around mine. I feel his pain, but I don’t know how to be strong for him because I’ve never learned. He’s the firm but kind one, I’m the

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one he holds when I need to break down. He's cool
-headed and calm, and tames my fire without dimming it

—

and makes me vulnerable. What makes him think he can be
vulnerable with me?

"Yini, Sgalosenkosi?" He's silent, and hugs me forever before
retrieving his arms. "I just, I don't want to go home." "You don't
have to

tell her a single thing," I remind him. Another face scrub, he's
irritated, restless. "I do." He stands, and... I allow him to kiss me.
Fuck! What am I doing? "I'll call you." I don't expect him to. "You
don't have to," I say, as the doorbell goes off. There's someone
at the door. "This was a one time thing. We both had a great
time, we're done." He doesn't respond, following me to the
front instead, and I open the door. Dark eyes gaze at me,
seeming deceptively lost. A gorgeous smile.

"Morning, Temasiko." I'm not Delilah the temptress today. "My
beautiful fiancé jogged

my memory, I was with my brother last night apparently. And then he left with you. Maybe he forgot the direction to his woman and child along the way.”

I choke on my saliva.

“Delilah.” A childish blink. “You look rejuvenated this fine morning. Allow me to steal him away from you for today. You have the rest of your life to spend with him anyways, right?”

“Eh...” “One day, I’ll tell you a little story about two hearts who belonged to one.”

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“I’ll call you, Temasiko.” The selfish bastard pipes in, grabbing my hand. Has he no shame? His brother is here! “Please think about what I said. Ungaphisaningomnotho wami, sokhuluma, bengingadlali.”

WTF? Sbanisezwe chuckles loudly, clearly enjoying this, as I wrap the bedding tight

er around my body and hope for the earth to swallow me.

“No, Sgalosenkosi!” I snap. Just a few –

a lot... lot –

rounds of sex, and he’s suddenly lost his mind. “When did you decide this? You’re not thinking straight.” He’s already walking with his brother,

who is patting him on the back.

‘Well done!’ the touch screams.

Ugh, I could just scream in frustration!

Sgalosenkosi

There’s a song playing in the car, one of the Korean ones Temasiko loves so much. D.O. is the artist’s name.

I

’m fine

is the name of the song. I know because she never shuts up about him, and insists that I watch his videos with her

when she's in my office

, as she tells me about how people speculate about a relationship he has with one of his bandmates.

It shouldn't matter, she likes to say. Gay doesn't make him any less spectacular singer, but he's not and people have a weird obsession of seeing

relationships with any men who display the slightest form of affection because

they're not used to things like that because they've been taught that males

innocently loving each other as friends is gay. Skinship, she says, is big in Korea. And for them to hug and even share beds together is as normal as two girls doing it together. I know this because when she speaks, I listen.

"How do you know this song?" I ask Sbanisezwe, he hasn't said anything since

he congratulated me on a job well done as we left the hotel. I thought he liked

Sphesihle. He does, he told me this. Just like he likes Temasiko. Ying and yang, he called them.

“Your girlfriend forced Thateho to listen to it, and it’s all he’s playing at home. I’m not complaining, it’s a lovely song.”

I rol

I my eyes, and clench my fists together. He told me he’s driving me to Nqobizitha’s first, before he can take me home, because I need to talk to him. I have suspicions that they want to psychoanalyze me. “Will you tell—”

“No, you will.”

He has a bad tendency of reading my mind sometimes.

“You haven’t done wrong, this is not something that hasn’t happened a million times before. Maybe this time it can end well, huh?” My gaze snaps to him. “What do you mean?” “Love is complicated like Algebra. You love Algebra.” “Angikuzwa mina mawukhuluma engathi uyancengwa.” “You’ll solve algebra. I hear we killed people last night, there’s funerals to

attend, donations to the affected families to be made. Losing a child is a big

deal."Like he cares, there's a careless smile in his voice."Don't tell Sphesihle, not yet."I groan, digging into my palms. "I have to, I won't be able to live with the guilt otherwise. I can't not be able to... look my

-my daughter in the eyes and then her

—"Mother?" he peers over at me and chuckles loudly. "You're falling for her, even if you deny it. One day, it will smack you across the face in the form of... a planet. Pure and breezy. Earth. Fruitful."

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"That's... I am not in love with her." "You're not."

I sigh.

"Last time it was her whose love there wasn't a song for. Her first. This time... is it Delilah? I think so."

Nqobizitha is waiting at the front door, cuddling a barely noticeable Chris, who appears nervous but is smiling. I

hope he doesn't think I hold it against him that he kept Zenande's secret. Their issues, not mine. If they've worked things out, then I am happy for them.

"Munt' kabhuti." I offer him a smile.

The nervousness makes way for bright innocence. His eyes gleam as he looks

up at me. "I made one of your favourites." There's a lot. "Thank you." He responds by turning in my younger brother's arms, as Nqobizitha lifts him

one-

armed and kisses him deeply. It doesn't bother me anymore. At least they don't fuck in front of me like Sbanisezwe has done with Thatego. He turns

back to me, and hugs me quick

ly before he's scampering off funnily. Nqobizitha rubs the back of his neck bashfully. "13 years is a lot of time to just throw in the towel. He's fucked up, badly, but he realizes that and we're reworking on our marriage. We love each other." "That's good. You have twin girls on the way." "Yeah, she's five months pregnant now –

the surrogate. Her pregnancy is going

well.” “I’m proud of you.”

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“Don’t embarrass me, Bafo.” Nqobizitha shakes his head, as we follow him

inside the house. Sbanisezwe announces that he’ll be seeing Lethulwazi and

João. I follow Nqobizitha to the living room, as Chris comes back with cooldrinks. Nqobizitha grabs him by his wrist and sits him on his lap to devour

him again, as I roll my eyes. “Sorry for that.” “Liar.” I scoff

.

He shrugs, and gives me a onceover. “How are you feeling?” “You know.” “Yes. I am sorry for being so preoccupied with my own issues, that I never had

the time to talk to Liyana about everything. The one thing I had hoped

wouldn’t have happened did and I am so sorry to you and her and Khensani.” “I failed to protect her,” I say, “and the bastard... he said he did the despicable

to my daughter because he felt like it. He owes me so many answers, and that was all he came up with.” “Its reason enough,

Bafo.” Nqobizitha states firmly. “What other reason would justify paedophilic behaviour? I know it’s in—” “I don’t mean it like that,” I say, “maybe if he told me how he won her trust and where else I was failing my daughter then I would’ve known where

to

—” “It’s the same thing, Sgalosenkosi. Nothing, absolutely nothing justifies Pitso’s

actions, and you thinking that you blaming yourself on what you should and

shouldn’t have done won’t change the fact that we had a crappy human being

in our hands, a fucked up who did fucked up things. This is not on you or Khensani or your daughter. This is on him. Do not adopt any guilt that you do

not deserve. Pitso was supposed to be a decent human being, he wasn’t.” “I don’t know how to face my daughter,” I admit, “I am

scared. She was

suffering and I was so blind.” “We’re humans, sometimes I come back from work and I’m so tired that the only thing I’m focused on is myself and de

-

stressing. You’re not going to be a

perfect parent. Its unfortunate that this happened, but the only thing you can



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do is work on healing and focus on the future. Sbanisezwe gave me the name

of Liyana’s therapist, I will connect you with her. If your daughter’s

comfortable, then you and Khensani can sit in with her and

—”

“Khensani can’t know this... it will destroy her.” Nqobizitha gives me a doubtful look, but nods his head. “How are you feeling...truly?”

My daughter rushes to me as soon as I set foot in the living room. She’s

giggling and carefree, as I backtrack

—

scared. But her little arms cling to my leg and she begs me to lift her. I don’t think I can, my mind is on Pitso and—

“Love her, Sgalosenkosi.”

Sbanisezwe has been saying a lot of things that leave me with no say. I do as

he says and squeeze Liyana tight. She doesn’t flinch and buries her face in my

neck. Her touch speaks of love. “I’m so sorry,” I inform her quietly. “Oh Baba, I’m not mad at you!” she kisses my cheek. “I love you so much, and I miss you when you’re away.” “I am sorry, so sorry.” “Promise not to leave the whole night again?”

“Promise.”

She pulls back, cups my cheeks, as she searches my eyes

–

and I force myself

to keep the contact. “Okay. Bab’ Sbani is taking me out. Let me go, please.”

I am reluctant as I set her free, and watch her skip into Sbani sezwe’s arms

happily. With a look of trust and gratitude, I nod my head at him, before heading to the bedroom. Sphehlehle is sitting on the bed, and stands immediately our eyes connect, ambling into the walk-in closet. I reluctantly

follow her. “Sphehlehle...”

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“My mother has died. A

-

A heart attack. Last night, around... 09:00pm, was it?

It was raining in Mbongolwane, and muddy, so my siblings had to sleep with

her dead body and... I didn't get the chance to look her in the eyes and

apologize. To tell her that she was right, and that this man she warned me against, is exactly who she thought he was

—

a bad idea.”

The wind is knocked out of my sails, I open my mouth to say something but I

don't have the words. “I'm going back home. There's nothing for me here. An

-A

nd I'm sorry to Liyanabecause I love her, but I can't do this, Sgalosenkosi. My siblings need me, love isn't worth it. Just as you were learning to love me, I will learn to love Nsindiso... I did love him once.”

“Induna’s son?” a frown pulls at my face. “No. You’re going to do no such thing. Your siblings are coming here to live with us and we’ll be—” “I wasn’t asking, Sqalosenkosi!” she snaps, grabbing another suitcase, and

stashing her clothes inside. Her clothes fall on the floor, and I move to help her pick them up, but she snatches them from me. I reach the suitcase as well, and

snatch the clothes to return them where they were.

“Sqalosenkosi...” her voice

is shaking.

“No!” I snap, the mere thought angers me. “If you want us to go home to plan

for a f

uneral service then say so. I’ll have us flying out to KZN in the next—” “I’m leaving.”

“No.” I shake my head, and fight down the guilt, remembering Sbanisezwe’s words. “You’re not going anywhere. I want you here with me.” “So that you can stay out th

e whole night? Switch your phone off and make me insecure, have me calling your family members like a clingy

—“I’m sorry.” I mean this. “For everything. Please forgive me. That I wasn’t there for you when you needed me. Please forgive me.” “I’m so tired, Sqalosenkosi.”

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She starts to break down, and cries. Her sobs are loud, punching harder than her fists connecting with my chest. “You don’t deserve my love.”

I close my eyes, and meet Temasiko smiling brightly at me. Definitely don’t.

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Unrequited Desires : Twenty-sevenSqalosenkosi

My daughter has to be in my presence all the time, this is what it feels like

after Pitso, unless she is with my brothers. But I couldn't leave her back in

Johannesburg while I came down to Mbongolwane to support Sphehile, so I took the decision to have her come with me while we undergo the procedure of funeral preparations. An inconvenience for her when it comes to her

schooling, but I need her in my sight, to ensure that she's safe and that

anything that

shouldn't be happening is not happening.

Sphehile is like Nhlakanipho in many ways where family is concerned, maybe not so much, because the latter has found a family in his siblings. His paternal siblings. Nhlakanipho has made bonds with all his brothers, and created a

bond with Onikakonke and her twin boys. They're already two years old, and

when he does allow himself to talk about them, he becomes a father that wants nothing to hurt them. A strict father who only breaks his rules for them. On the other

hand, Sphehile doesn't really have anyone. When her father

died, she took his responsibilities as the firstborn child at home, and became a deputy parent to all her siblings. In many ways, she became a mother because her own mother was always going to Eshowe, to hustle for her family. It's Sphesihle who took care of her siblings

—

adding other responsibilities on top of the ones she had as a girl child. I watch her with great admiration as she talks on the phone with distant family, no tremble in her

voice, notifying them of her mother's departure. Bab'Shange is driving us to my family home, and she hasn't allowed herself to process this, going straight to business, because responsibility begs her to. If

she won't do it, then who will? "I'm not sure

about calling MaDlamini."

Is she talking to me? For most of our flight, and drive down here, I was ignored

—

understandably.

There's no way to make her understand right now that it's not her I had an

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issue with, that certain discoveries forced me to stay away, and that being in the same proximity as her and my daughter is bruising me emotionally. I slept

with another woman, and betrayed her trust, but I can't bring myself to call it

a mistake. There are stages that lead to falling in bed with another person, varying stages

that get you there, with your dick shoved deep into another being's soul. And

those stages are there to afford you the chance to back off, and exercise self-control, but I ignored them last night. I ignored every voice and took the decision to proceed with a seed that had planted itself in my mind at least once before.

I know this well enough to acknowledge that it wasn't a mistake.

Like I told Temasiko, it was going to happen. Maybe under different conditions, but it was going to happen, with Sphesihle in the picture.

Unfortunately her mother has died and it's like Sbanisezwe knew this would happen because he told me not to tell her, and he was right. She's going through the stages of grief and she doesn't know that yet, what she's doing now, the numerous calls to different people about this and that... there's a time when all of it will overwhelm her and she'll crash – emotionally.

I clear my throat, force myself to look in her eyes. “Why not?” She shakes her head, looking outside the window, and then me a second later.

“If it were up to me, my siblings and I would be the only ones burying my mother. Relatives are useless, Sgalosenkosi, they don't love us. They've shown

us through their actions for so long. My mother struggled, but she has a sister in Durban, living with her rich husband. She begged her own sister to allow me to live with them in Durban so I could further my studies but Mamkhulu

Samukelisiwe wouldn't hear it. Perhaps I'd be a nurse by now, perhaps my life

wouldn't have turned out like this... and I'd be in love with someone else." "Maybe the wise thing is to focus on the most important issue, and that is ensuring that your mother gets the best send off." A sigh. "You didn't explain your whereabouts."

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"I will, Sphehile, when the time is right. Focus on this right now, we have all the time in the world to discuss our relationship." "It feels like I am alone in said relationship." "You're not." I assure, readjusting a sleeping

Liyana in my arms, to squeeze

Sphehile's thigh. "I promise you." Her face pulls into a frown, she's on her phone again, calling MaDlamini.

Liyana and I stepped off at home, and Bab' Shange has driven Sphehile to her

family home not far from here

. I don't want to surprise her siblings with my presence, I don't want them to question the nature of our relationship when I am quite certain that she hasn't told them about us. Maybe I can ask her to

meet up later to find out how everything is going, and to assist her where I can. My daughter is sleeping soundly in my rondavel

–

safe. And I call Sbanisezweto to inform him, because he had to bring her back so that she could come herewith me. He and Nqobizitha will come home for the funeral sometime into the week.

Temasiko's number is known by head, but my thumb still drifts over it as I contemplate whether or not to call. It's 07:13pm, and I would've called earlier, but I didn't want to do it in Sphesihle's presence. She doesn't deserve that. Not

with what has happened to her mother.

"Hello?" I don't know why I didn't expect her to respond. "Temasiko." A smile forms on the corners of my mouth –

unforced. "Kunjani?" "Besides needing dick in my life, I'd say I'm doing pretty fine." Anyone else and I'd be choking on saliva, but I've known this woman for awhile now, and know to expect anything from her. It doesn't make her any less

enchanting, any less intriguing, everything about her is beguiling

—
and I

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meant every word I said earlier. Effortlessly, she captures my attention and brings me to my knees.

“Should I have a silicone of my dick made, to cater to your needs when I’m not with you?”

Her giggles are loud and carefree. A little grin pulls at my own lips, and I can just imagine her

—
bright and beautiful. Unreserved in her laughter and personality.

“I didn’t say your dick, Squalosethu. Don’t blow your own horn.” “Why? You prefer to do it instead? Your lips felt—” “I know. I’ve been taught all I need to know.”

Her words

make me frown, and it's a good thing we're not face to face because I can't mask my irritation. If her intention was to plant all forms of nasty thoughts in my head, then she's succeeded. "What's the point of telling me this?" "Hmm?" "I didn't ask whether or not you were taught, Temasiko. I don't understand why you felt the need to tell me that." Loud giggles echo in my ear, as I rub my nose in annoyance. "I'm going to enjoy this!" breathless. "Yes, I was taught, Squalosenkosi. By some lousy jerk

who wanted the pleasure all for himself, and never paid me back for getting on my knees for him and spreading my legs —" "Temasiko!" I snap. "Stop it... please." "Just how good am I?" she's enjoying this —

the little devil. "You should feel

flattered and honou

red that you're the only one who's made me orgasm, Squalosenkosi, and you didn't have to teach me a single thing. Just like I didn't

have to teach you and we just relied on

—" "Chemistry."

The line goes silent a second.

“Um... yeah.” She clears her throat. “I’m taking it you took my advice and you didn’t –

you didn’t tell Sphehile about us, right? I mean you’re talking to me

and

—”“She lost her mother.”“That is the worst thing that can happen to someone. Is it okay if

I send my

condolences through you? Or maybe not, she’s insecure and—
”“I’d rather we didn’t talk about her, to avoid any clash in communication.

Misunderstandings. How are you? Have you eaten? Did you clean your room? Go out and smell the air, do someth

ing outdoors?”“The driver you sent, he fetched me and I went to Eastgate for lunch.” She sighs, there’s a shuffling sound in the background. “I ate at Piatto.”“What did you eat?”

She lists the food she ate and tells me she tried out the prawns again, when

she ordered the baby chicken that went with them. There's sirloin that she indulged on as well, and pork ribs. "I spent most of the money you sent me on food and clothes, like a good little prostitute." "Temasiko, you ought to know by now that I don't appreciate your self

-

deprecating jokes," I remind her, "I respect any requirements you have from me. Respect me, and understand that I don't like it when you make shady jokes about yourself... no matter how lighthearted." She huffs a breath. "Only because you asked so nicely, Daddy." My semi twitches appreciatively, as the phone tightens in my hold. "Don't call me that... please." "Why?" teasing, her tone. "I thought you liked it. Remember, when you were

pressing me against glass walls and

—"

ay she shakes her ass is a crime, it's the wrong time to recall any sexual encounters. "I remember." "Bad convo for someone who's trying to support his girlfriend whose mother has passed on?" "Very bad." "I'm sorry for thinking about how wet you made me then, and how I enjoy it very much when you cum and continue fucking me as if you didn't. It's the bad time." She's doing this on purpose, I groan low in my throat. "I mean it, Sgalosenkosi." I'm not sure, I stare up at the starry sky and sigh. "Tell me about the rest of your day, so you've eaten. What else? I hope you made your bed and that—" "I am not Sbanisezwe, baby." Did she hear herself? "And I'm not Ntwenhleeither."

My body tenses involuntarily, and my mind races with questions of how she

knew my mother's name. Just what is she implying? "Who's Ntwenhle!?" I don't mean for the question to come out biting. "Whoa, down boy." The surprise is evident in her voice. "In your dreams, you

mentioned Ntwenhle. And you were talking about Sbanisezwe and how he had

to wash his uniform." I don't remember. Most of the time, I prefer not to remember. "Good or bad, the dream? Did I hurt you?" "No." Her voice wavers. "Are you fucked up, Sgalosenkosi?"

This is why you

came to me last night, right? You have issues, maybe you haven't dealt with

them

—

a tragic past or something like that. I know how you men are with past

trauma. Well, let me tell you that I have my own issues and I'm not going to

nurse a grown man

—”

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“I didn't ask you to, Temasiko.” Irritation prickles my skin, extending to the tone of my voice. “Stop giving yourself responsibilities that were not assigned to you in the first place.” “You did last night.” “I hadn't come to you about my mother.” “Ntwenhle is your mother?” “What issues do you have?” “I don't want to talk about it.” “I also don't want to talk about it.” “Good.” “Good,” I echo. She sighs into the line. “When

can I have my job back? That's where we were supposed to go yesterday."

"When I come back to Johannesburg." "I see." "I still want you, that hasn't changed. You said you love me, didn't you?" "Will you please stop saying that!?" She sounds panicky. "You're giving me anxiety, I can't love you, I don't even know you that well! The only thing I'm in love with here is your dick." "So you love me for my body?" the words sting. "You're using me?"

"It was mutual. I can't love you, Sgalosenkosi, you have a girlfriend. Maybe I'm

not experienced in re

lationships but I know this never ends well. You're going

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to hurt me somehow and I don't want to have to hate you. I don't want to compromise our friendship." "It was compromised when you allowed me balls deep inside you, Temasiko. There's

no going back from that.”“Yeah, well—”“I want you, please.” I plead politely. “Don’t make any hasty decisions until I

come back, and we have another sit down, face-to-face. In the meantime, keep

your legs closed for me... just for me, please.”“You really think saying please for everything helps your case, huh?”“My mother taught me to always ask nicely.”“That sounds wrong,” she giggles, “I shouldn’t even touch myself to thoughts of you? Nothing at all.”“Did you touch yourself when I left?”“Maybe.” A breathless moan. “I have to go, b

aby. Thatego is taking me to a club

in Rosebank.”

Has she really not noticed this term of endearment thing?

“Thatego? Is Sbanisezwe tagging along?”“He’s the bodyguard.”

As expected.

“Take care of yourself, Temasiko. Make your bed before you leave

e. Put your

dirty clothes in the laundry basket. Clean your room. Don’t flirt with men, tell Sbanisezwe if they give you the look and tell him

I've given him permission to punch their faces in. Take care of yourself, please, and have fun." "There's that please again, Mr. Control Freak. Order and order

—

and then add

please. I am single and ready to mingle, this is what I'll do. Bye, baby."

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The phone tightens in my hand. I choose not to focus on the tightening in my chest. Sphehile should be alone by now, and maybe it's not a bad idea to call

and find out how she's doing.

Funeral preparations will never not be emotionally draining, I am not even an active participant in the planning process, but I am exhausted emotionally.

There's something about the death of a person that does that, that claws away

at your emotional wellbeing and leaves you empty.

I've tried to be there for Sphehile as best as possible. Her mother didn't have

a funeral policy nor a burial society, so everything must come out of her eldest

daughter's own pocket, but Sphehile hasn't been working for me lo

ng enough

and burials are expensive. Despite her insistence that that she didn't need

financial assistance, I still chip in, and contribute towards funeral arrangements. For most of the week, I follow her around one place or the other. We buy the goat needed to bring her home, the day before the funeral, buy the cattle. MaSibusisiwe is here, she is the most active member in helping Sphehile, and donates from her own money. She organizes the women who will help clean

Sphehile's mother's body. Her family

is quite useless, none of them are insightful. Saturday comes, her body is laid to rest, without any hiccups. It always follows as soon as the deceased has been buried. Families fighting for wealth that is not due to them, everybody wants what rightfully belongs to the rightful heirs.

Bab' Gcwensa's younger brother wants the RDP house that belongs to Sphehile and her siblings. The idiot forgets that the house is in MaNsibande's

name. MaSibusisiwe deals with matters efficiently again, sending the man off with a few punches caused by one of the men who drive our taxis. Sbanisezwe had been involved as well, he thrives off violence. All things considered, the funeral is drama-free compared to the stunt

Zenande's side pulled months ago, with the revelation t

hat Lisakhanya is his

daughter. She has since stayed with Zithobile's father, right here in

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Mbongolwane, but I know Nqobizitha wants her to come live with them in Johannesburg. Something that can always happen in the future. I find Nzuzenhle playing with a small toy car near the toilet, and rub his head

gently, he's six years old –

youngest of the Gcwensa siblings. "UphiuMaGcwensa?"

The toilet door opens, and out comes the woman I am looking for. She gives

me a small smile that doesn't reach her eyes,

as she goes to rinse her hands

and mouth at the tap. "Sawubona." "Still sick?" "Nothing serious." Her eyes waver, and I am finding it hard to believe any word that comes out of her mouth. "Just an upset stomach." "Vomiting?"

Her cheeks redden, but s

he nods her head, rubbing her belly. "My stomach was runny as well. I think my stomach wasn't very receptive of the food." I pull her in my arms, and hug her tight. "Phephisa, Muhleza." "Yeah. I'm hungry, it's like I didn't eat at all. Pizza, this is what I really want." The words make me beam like a little child, she hasn't had an appetite in so

long, I was beginning to worry. It's uncomfortable to bend my legs, but I do, to press my lips on hers softly. She complains about tasting like vomit but reciprocates

—

and maybe Sbanisezwe was right about... I don't know
but fireworks explode behind my eyelids. She's heady and
warm, I want to lie on

her and lose myself in her

—

not sexually. Just comfortable silence.

“Let's go then.” “My siblings—” “We'll bring them something.
They'll be okay with my family, Sbanisezwe will protect them if
the need arises. Don't forget MaSibusisiwe, your number
one fan.”

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A lighthearted punch, she drapes an

arm around mine. “Feed me then.” Bab' Shange has left to be
with his family. I don't drive. MaSibusisiwe barks

out an order, like usual, and one of our workers comes to our
aid. I only leave once Sbanisezwe promises to always ensure
that Liyana is in his line of sight,

because she didn't want to come with us.

Sphehile is resting on my shoulder, breathing softly, as if to
regulate it. Her eyes are closed, colour drained from her light-

skinned features. “Long drives make me weak,” she divulges with a whimper, burying her face in my neck, “I feel like vomiting.” The windows are already open, but clearly they’re not doing much for her. She’s tried water and eating chewing gum. “Almost there.” I drag her on my lap and wrap my arms around her. “Stay with me, I’m right here.”

An exhale that tastes of watermelon, she folds her arms around my neck and

presses her forehead on mine. “Please don’t leave me. You’re all I have now, please don’t hurt me. You care for me, don’t you?” “I do.” “Then you’ll show me

with your actions, right? You’re not going to leave and—you’re not going to continue poking at my insecurities with your inconsiderate actions.”

I open my mouth, to close it a second later. A groan comes from deep inside my throat, as I stroke her cheek, looking into her eyes. They welcome me

—

open and tender and unsure. “You’re so important to me, MaGcwensa, and I care for you deeply. I feel... safe with you —

home.”“Promise... promise not to hurt me.”I can’t make that promise, she doesn’t know that I’ve hurt her already. That I will most likely continue to, because I want her and another woman. Because I am selfish, and though I know what I feel for her hasn’t become the intense love that others speak of, it’s still deep enough for me – and means a lot to me.

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There’s a pull to her I cannot explain, more than sexual, but it’s her warmth that I love the most. Her warmth and the qualities of hearth and home. She’s everything I never truly had growing up, and in my marriage with Khensani, it’s so unexpected but welcomed. Selfishly, I want to keep her in my life.

“Hurt is part of life, Sphehlehle. I can try and do my best to ensure that you’re not hurting, but I probably will. I have.”

She bites her bottom lip, searching my eyes briefly. I will not reveal a thing, not yet, her hurt is visible on her face

–

and it’s not just my words that have

caused this. She has lost her mother. She has met family members who only came for the sake of showing face, and left immediately after. She has just become a mother to two teenagers and a preadolescent. No father, no mother, no aunt or uncle.

She’s right, I’m all the support she has now. “I should probably thank you for being honest.” I don’t know what to say. We’ve arrived at the mall. I drag her out of the car, holding her hand in mine –

steady and supportive. “Awushoke ukuthi ufuna ukuyiqedelaphi imali yaminamhlanje. Ngoba phela ngilawulwa nguwe, Gcwenso.” “Weeeh!” she giggles, clinging to my arm –

infinitely better out of the blue, it

appears. “You like me spending your money, even when I don’t want to.” “You deserve it and more.” “I deserve your heart,” she asserts cheekily, dragging me inside a PicknPaystore, “I want sweets. The sour bears. After this we’re going to Debonair’s and I want hot wings from KFC

—” “Yaphela kanjalo ke imali kwaNgcobo, Somandla.” “Thenga wena, unganaki okunye.”

I pull her in for a kiss, and roll my eyes.

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***MaSibusisiwe is waiting outside the house, resembling a bouncer, as I extend my hand to Sphehile who steps out of the car. She hands over the many

plastic bags to me, I narrow my eyes at her playfully, carrying everything... but

its snatched from me a second later by the same young man who was driving us.

“We need to talk.” MaSibusisiwe commands, headed to the RDP house without

another word. Sphe and I share a glance, I drag her inside the house silently. She sits beside me, on the reed mat, with MaSibusisiwe sitting across the room. Judgment

flickers from me to Sphe intimidatingly. "MaSibusisiwe," I give her a smile, "kwenzenjani?" "Nywezenjani yamasimba!" she snaps. "It's been two days since the funeral, I want to know the way forward. What's going to happen now?" "MaGcwensa and her siblings are going to move in with me." "That's good. So when are we sending a letter to the money

-hungry uncle to

inform him of your plans to take their daughter's hand in marriage."

I choke on my saliva.

"Mah?" "What you're not going to do is pull that rubbish that Sbanisezwe pulled with his boy. You're not going to chow this young woman without consequences." "It's not even six months that we began this, MaSibusisiwe. We're getting to

know

—"What do you want to know?" she regards me coldly.

"Sphe, ask him what

he wants to know so that you can give him the information now. If you have questions of your own, I suggest you ask him, to get this out of the way

–

and proceed with preparations of notifying your family that you're a taken woman, soon to be married."

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"I, uh, Mah..." "Khuluma, ntombazane!" "I don't know."
Sphesihle shrugs innocently. "I am in love with him, Mah. Yebo, ngiyavuma, kodwa ngifuna naye angithande ngoba kusuka enhlizweni yakhe, h

hayi ngoba ephoqelwa yimina." "Ukhulelwe nje wena, manje uzohlaza umndeni wakho."

My eyes bulge, body going rigid, as silence befalls us.

"That's not true." MaSibusisiwe refutes Sphesihle's denial with laughter. "Lalela

ntombazanyana, I know

what I am talking about. We didn't need pregnancy tests to show us who was pregnant and who wasn't back in the day. You're expecting, and I'll be damned if I allow you and your boyfriend to turn my mother's grandchildren into illegitimate bastards."

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Unrequited Desires : Twenty-eight Sphesihle

I find myself outside struggling for breath, my heartbeat running wild as if wanting to get away, and I wish I could follow it. The sun is burning into my

limbs, make me nauseous, or is it this... this... I grip my belly

—

anxious. I knew. I knew, and yet I was hoping my suspicions were not true. MaSibusisiwe has dashed all my hopes, she knows these things, and I may as well trash those pregnancy tests I bought. I was going to use them tonight. Arms encircle my waist and pull me into a hard body. My panic recedes,

slightly, and I exhale shakily. “Sqalosenkosi...” I can’t be pregnant. I don’t want

to be pregnant. I am only 25 years old, and I want to achieve so many things, to be a role model for my siblings. Chris offered me a part-time internship, to follow him around when I am not at school, to dip my toes into the world of fashion. I was going to tell Sqalosenkosi this on the same day he stayed away from home, the same day I learned of my mother’s passing.

He turns me in his arms, pierces my soul with a darkened gaze

—

there’s so much hope in his eyes. Does he really want this? A child. We’re not ready! It’s

been four months, almost five. People plan these things, logical people, they

don’t just allow pregnancies be

cause babies bring complications. The same

complications that we’re going to have now. MaSibusisiwe wants marriage, is

forcing it, and I learned with my own parents how that never really workswell.I want him to fall in love with me on his own terms.I want him to see me

–

Sphesihle Gcwensa. And love me for who I am, and decide to marry me because he’s seen me –

all of me. I want him to see me like

I see him, when he’s sleeping and vulnerable at night –

asking Sbanisezwe to polish his school shoes or begging his mother not to cry. Sometimes he wakes up and walks out into the patio, in the wee hours of the morning, I find him there half-naked, unable to sleep. He hugs me, and tells me he’s happy to have

me in his life

–

and that I take care of him. I feel safe, he likes to say.

His hands cupping my cheeks, and forcing eye contact brings me out of my thoughts, he doesn't stop until he's less than an inch away from my face, breath touching mine

—

steady. "Muhleza."

I love it so much when I am this.

"You're pregnant?" A bitter chuckle slips from my mouth, I shrug my shoulders stiffly. "I guess."

He embraces me the next second, tightly, and I want to push him away and

scream that this is not what I want. It's too soon, it's too soon! I want to study

and to chase my dreams, and have more time with him, without the

distraction of a baby. I don't want

external factors influencing what he feels

for me. I can't do it. I can't do it.

My body is weak in his arms, its everything about him that is affecting me

—

the steady beat of his heart, his even breathing, and the way he smells. “Thankyou.” He sounds

sincere, he never lies, I trust him. “You’ve made me thehappiest man alive today.”

I wish I could share his joy.My face is in his hands the next minute, and the moment is so perfect, his eyes

are too soft but serious. “Thank you, truly, I just feel t

he need to be honest toyou about something that has been on my mind when you excused yourself

back there.”

Okay. What is it?

“I’m listening,” I croak, emotional, there’s so much I am not happy about. “Do you want marriage, Sphesihle?” his eyes are s

earching mine, boring deep

into my soul, twisting my insides nervously. “Never mind what MaSibusisiwesaid, I will handle her, I want to hear from you because... because I have done this before and I’ll tell you right now that its not worth it if we’re not d

oing it

for the right reasons.” “And what reasons are those, Sqa losenkosi?”

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“Mutual love.” “You don’t love me, it’s just the same then.” I don’t mean to sound bitter and accusing, it just hurts. “To answer your question, no I don’t want marriage,

Sqa

lo senkosi. Not when we’d be doing it because I am carrying your child,

who you will shower with all the love in the world while learning to love me! I

don’t want this, I just want to finish school and make something out of myself,

to be a role model to my

siblings and show them that's it's possible. Especially Qalokuhle, she's just a young girl and she looks up to me –

and this is why I

didn't follow through with MaSibusisiwe's stupid plan to allow you to get me pregnant!"

He tenses against me, and seems lost somewhere, processing every piece of information slowly. This is what he always tells me, he likes to digest every

word so that he can respond as required. "Sphehile," the kindness is gone, he

slowly lets me go

–

and my heart cracks, breath quickening. I feel nauseous again. "Uthini?"

My attempts at subduing any arising panic are futile, it reveals itself in the

form of tears, I shake my head. "To which part?" "MaSibusisiwe aside, we're coming back to that." He has processed my words, and come to

a conclusion, it isn't making him happy. I can see with the

expression on his face

—

hurt, is it? Anger. “I know that... that this is shocking, but, I would be lying if I said I weren’t... ultimately, I am happy because a child is a blessing from God.” “Or so they say!” I snap, and glare at him. “I don’t want... please, I don’t want a child, Squalosenkosi. It’s too soon. I am in love with you, sometimes blindly, but

not enough to bring a child into this world. What makes you think we’re ready? You’re barely even home, you’re not even in love with me —

and four

months is too soon.” “What is the issue, the fact that I am not in love with you yet or—” “All of it!” I scream, flinching as he grips my arm —

warning.

“Siyakhulumisana angithi? Ngicela wehlisa u

moya ukhulume nami

ngalenhlonipho engikunika yona.” “Fuck you, Sgalosenkosi.” I whisper harshly, wiping my tears with my freehand, my brother is entering our homestead with his friends. I don’t want him to see me upset, he’s protective... and reminds me of this jerk. “I don’t want to

give you, babies. I want to focus on my future, to be big like you, and run my own business. I want your love and then the other things will follow. Why

would I want a child with a man who doesn’t love me? Are you insane?”

H

is face transitions, darkened gaze burning as he hides it from me, and it’s as if he’s counting in his head to control his temper, I still feel it in the way his

hand ever slowly tightens around my arm.

“You’re hurting me,” I tell him.

He gradually set

s me free. “I am sorry.”

I nod my head, blinking my eyes rapidly, taking another deep breath. One of

many lately. I can never breathe around him. He doesn't get it. "So what do you propose, Sphesihle, an abortion?" He's against it, I can see on his f

ace. I heard it in the way his voice caught in his

throat, the emotion. I am hurting him, just like he's done me a million times over. "If I say yes?" "Then I have no say, it's your body. I just don't see myself continuing any form

of relationship with s

omeone who would've murdered my unborn child." "Fine!" I snap, but nothing is fine. Nothing at all. "Tell me h

-how much I

—

owe

you for everything you've done for me. Do I still have my job or should I look elsewhere? If it's the latter then you can go bac

k to Johannesburg without me, I will stay here with my siblings. Qalokuhle is old enough, she can care for the

boys while I take over my mom's job at the market in Eshowe."

No response. His face is contorted with rage and hurt.

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He has it so much better than me. Me who is in love with
someone who isn't in
love with me. Unrequited love is the worst. I am merely a single
line of a lyric
in his life, and yet he's every song for me. He has i
t far better, far better. I am pregnant and unloved. My dreams
have come to a startling halt, and I
should've been careful with the pills. I should've overcome my
fear of needles
and gone with the injection instead.
He's walking away. There's sounds al
I around me

—

of my brother's chickens and Nzuzenhle with his friends, he
really likes Liyana. MaSibusisiwe still hasn't left, I can hear her
voice from here. All these sounds, and none is greater than
those of

Sqalosenkosi's quiet footsteps.

Good riddance.

I turn my back him, too. I'm done, too.

I stomp back into the house, to the room that belonged to my mother,

MaSibusisiwe is instructing one of their workers to pack my and my siblings' belongings. "Yekela, Mah." I mutter. "Its not happening. We're

not getting

married." "Uthini?" she's just as intimidating when she says this.

"That's rubbish. We all

agreed that

—"Nothing, Mah!" I croak, my patience wearing thin. She needs to leave this place so that I can cry properly. "We agreed on nothing. There's no marriage, I don't want a stupid loveless marriage. I don't even want this child and I am getting rid of it! Leave me and my siblings alone, I will work hard for them." "Sphehile Gcwensa." Her eyes narrow. "This is what you do to me, after

every

thing I have done for you." "HE DOESN'T LOVE ME!"

Christ, does she need me to spell this out for her?

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Panic climbs to my throat, and it hurts when I cough, she's making me

emotional. I miss my mother. I want her to tell me that she warned me and hug me until I feel better.

"He doesn't love me, Mah. Four months, I've been with him for four months and... nothing! Unrequited love, do you have any idea how badly it hurts? How it... rips my soul, and tears my very being? I don't want to have his child." "Why because he won't love you?"

I shrug my shoulders.

Her chuckles bruise me, and make me feel small. "You're lucky I love you, little girl, I won't squash you. Tread carefully, please. Stop being such a weakling, you're carrying a Ngcobo heir, he doesn't need to adopt your weakness. Sleep, hormones are making you emotional, we'll talk in the morning, and will continue to talk until you're in the right frame of mind."

I fold an arm around my waist as she leaves, like Sqalosenkosi,
and force steady breaths

upon myself. It's hard to breathe. The tears won't stop,
no

matter how hard I try to force them away.

Temasiko

Thatego came back earlier today, from Mbongolwane, two
days after

Sphehile's mother's funeral. He called me to tell me, and said
he

wanted us to hang out at the same club we went to last time,
the one in Rosebank. I think

he's the successful lonely type that has too much free time
sometimes, or he doesn't do friends because why else would he
always want to be in my

company?

I don't e

ven make a quarter of what he does per month. But broke girls
like things, and they go out with successful
influencers/slash business-queens who can teach them a thing
or two about makeup, and what

makes a successful business person. There's also the fact that he pays so I'm

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not really bothered. Alcohol tastes better when its paid for by someone else. I

won't even get started on food. Sgalosenkosi is still trapped in Mbongolwane with his girlfriend. I don't want to say I miss him but I do. He hasn't cal

led, and its stupid that I was hoping he

would, it's not like I couldn't pick my phone and do that on my end. He just...he's already wormed his way into my heart, so very sneaky, and every beat

knows his name. I even turn into a poetic sap because of him.

I just really, really like him. The sex only made things worse because he's all I

think about now. I even make my bed and tidy my room because his voice is in my head, ordering me around. It makes me feel better, like he always tells me, lighter. I really like him, and it's stupid because he has Sphehile, he's not

willing to let her go, he told me that morning. And yet, he wants me to.

The idea doesn't make me angry, I don't know why, maybe I've been hurt so many times that I just don't care anymore.

Maybe relationships are better

when you're not the main person in them. He hasn't withheld the truth from

me after all, like that fucking prick Lwandle Kasana, and has been honest. He wants me, but he also wants to keep the girlfriend.

I don't mind. It's crazy, but I don't. The only thing I am concerned with is how he treats me, and so far, he hasn't faltered. He's always honest and upfront. A 'this is the situation, what have you decided?' person. I have decided that I am

in love with h

is dick so very much that I don't mind if it's the only piece of him

I get. I have decided that I will not allow myself to fall in love with him.

My mind sneers at me, reminds me that...

The fucker! So what if he makes my heart flutter? So what if I look at the pictures of us

together, taken at the office, I forced him to take them. I'm the creepy stalker

who takes pictures of men without their knowledge because I have such

pictures as well. My only regret is that we didn't record our sexual encounters

b

ecause I'd be revisiting them like crazy. But so what that I really, really miss

him?

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I should call him, perhaps later tonight, when I've drunk too much alcohol and

can blame any embarrassing confessions I may make on being intoxicated. Yes, this is what

I'll do. For now, I prepare for my date with Thatego. He's spoken to Chris for me, and the reserved man, he called me to say we'd meet up when he comes back from Mbongolwane. I don't know why he made me nervous, maybe it's because he

keeps to the husband a lot, but he was kind over the phone.

The conversation

didn't feel forced at all. It's all thanks to Thatego, of course, I don't deserve his kindness. No wonder

his fiancé is obsessed with him, and worship the ground he walks on. I would too.

We've reached warm nights, so I don't have to worry about bringing jackets or

wearing long-sleeves and long clothing items. My favourite leather miniskirt with the slit and pink hearts all over black sits on the bed. I will pair it with a see-through black blouse and black bra. Platform boots to complete the outfit, and silver hoops to accessorize. Time pulls a Usain Bolt when you have appointments, and I only get ten minutes to shower before coming out to quickly cater to my skincare needs and then put on my clothes. Being friends with celebrities is nice, they gift you expensive Gucci perfume and glamorize you for the people. My makeup is nearly perfect, I practice every day, even just at home

–

and I am getting better.

“A bad hun!” I wink at myself, in love

with the way I look. Not bad, porky, not bad at all. My phone is in my hand, I send a message to Thatego, asking of his whereabouts. My phone rings less than a second later.

“Waiting for you downstairs.” He tells me, and hangs up.

I roll my eyes, half-amused.

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The lift must sense I am in a hurry because I am in the foyer very quickly. Thatego looks over his shoulder as I approach him, and turns to fully face me, he looks so beautiful. He always looks so beautiful. Skinny jeans and a white shirt that

he’s tucked in to display his tiny waist and thick curves, this is what he’s wearing today –

and pairs everything with leopard print red-bottoms. He always wears heels, unless he’s home.

“The men will eat you alive today.” “No thanks, cannibals are generally not my type.”

He pulls out of my hug with a giggle, pushing stray hairs of his Peruvian weave

to the back, and shakes his head. “Because you prefer Sqalo instead?”

My heart flips. Fuck!

This is the problem with couples who love each other so much that they don't

bother keeping secrets from each other and gossip together.

They discuss me and Sqalosenkosi over wine apparently, when Sbanisezwe is cooking because Thatego is terrible and has sent him to the toilet numerous times.

“Maybe.” My lips purse in amusement.

We get in the car, that is being driven by Thatego

—

a black Range Rover. It smells new, an upgrade he got as a wedding gift from his fiancé just five days ago. So with

his kind of soft life. It's easy to tell that this one is spoiled. He's the type that's escorted to the toilet when he has to take a shit,

I just know. “I just hope Sqalo will be honest with Sphehlehle soon about this whole thing.

It's none of my business, of course, but I am close with her too

—

and I don't want to be caught in between. It happened before with Siyabonga.” “Who was cheating on who?” Thatego briefly faces me, and rolls his eyes, increasing the volume. “This is our wedding song

—

Sbanisezwe and I.

Teeks : Through It All

.”That's nice, but I didn't ask.

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“You really won't tell me?” “Siyabonga is many things but not a cheater. The same goes for Nhlakanipho. They have... weird kinks, but that's the only shady thing about them. There's

no

cheating. They've been in love since they were teenagers."

All of them, these couples, they seem to have began relationships since their

teenage days. I'm not used to many people like that, and for me its beautiful,

not many people can say that. It must take hard work to choose one person over and over again

—

through the years. They must have moments where they want to leave sometimes.

"Lucky them." "You'll find love, too. The first time Sbanisezwe proposed, I had gone to church

the week before and the pastor called the youth to give them the blessing of

marriage, I believe that's how it happened. It happened again because, it's along story. But you'll find someone, come to church with me this Sunday."

A trigger, anything about church.

“I think I’ll pass.” He giggles as if he expected my response. “No problem. I’ll pray for you though, and maybe God can give you someone.”

I want Sqaalosenkosi. Will He give me a taken man?

“As long as I am getting dicked down, I am good.”

Thatego shakes his head, he locks the car, and I follow him inside the club.

“There’s Ndumiso, Sbanisezwe said to keep close to him. He’s our bodyguard for today.”

Of course,

he is. Sbanisezwe wouldn’t let Thatego out of his sight if he could, whatever’s back in Mbongolwane must be important for him to entrust Thatego’s care with another man. I’ve only talked with this Ndumiso once

before, when he came here with his pregnant wife. Yes, pregnant. People just love things sometimes.

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It’s loud here, super loud. I sit down at the VIP section with Thatego, glancing at the sea of half-naked writhing bodies, the

floor beneath my feet sending vibrations up my legsjolting my spine

. I'm having fun though, as I had the last time, and a few drinks, I feel good enough to dance.

Thatego pulls me to him, and sways our bodies. "Don't breathe in my face, you little slut!" he giggles, throwing his head back.

"I'm taken, marrying the love

of

my life in less than three weeks. The traditional weddings."

Oh yes.

"Am I still invited?" "Why not?" he turns around and sways his hips, clinging to a pole bar. "Have you ever tried pole dancing?"

Is he trying to be funny?

"Its not so bad," he divulges, "I learned in Cuba. We have one in our bedroom."

He talks about Sbanisezwe a lot. It must be nice, being so thoroughly lovedthat you feel the need to mention your significant other any chance you get. Itmust be nice.I squint, blinded by the flashing strobe lights that send an array of rainbows

and shapes over Thatego's light skin, he looks magical as he teases the pole

with his moves. More alcohol in my system, and I start shaking my very fat and jiggle but still

flat ass to WAP. If this song doesn't turn you into a slut then I don't know, I truly don't. I twerk on Ndumiso, he doesn't seem to mind, it's not like it means

anything anyway, judging by his loud laughter. Then a sappy song come

s on. Jhene Aiko or shit like that. Now's the perfect

time to drunk-

dial Squalosenkosi, my mind tells me, and I have to agree. Now's

the perfect time to yell at him for being so effortlessly perfect that I think I am

so very close to being in love with him.

That I'm at the door knocking, and all it

will take is a repetition of sexual activities or simply lying in bed with him, his arms embracing me. Except, I turn around too quickly and bump into the walls of Jericho. They smell like my boyfriend that is not my boyfriend. The masculine scent that makes my knees weak. "Move out of the way, I need to call my boyfriend!" I

snap-slur at the wall. Being drunk feels really good, when your head is swimming and your knees are getting weak and

—

"Temasiko."

Oh fuck!

He's looking at me, disapproving, and is this some sort of magical shit? Just

because I am in love with him, he materializes out of thin air?

"Baby?" he's my baby. He cried, and I hugged him and carried his pain with

me. I always want to be there fo

r him, just like he's always there for me. He's here right now.
"Where did you come from?" I giggle. He grips my arm, "Let me
take you home." Hell no! We're having fun here with Thatego.
Where is he anyways? The light

-skinned bitch! He told me he was going to call his fiancé
somewhere quiet.

"Nooo." I am a petulant child. He should stay here with me, and
watch me

predatorily, like Sbanisezwe does with Thatego. He should
stay and let me

twerk on him. I can twerk. "Let's stay here, please." "No,
Temasiko." Stern. The hold tightens. "I need you

with me... please." There's that 'please' again, laced with
command. He's dragging me away, I can't do much with the
alcohol in my system. Shouting at him makes no difference, it's
like he hasn't heard me at all. I struggle to keep up, he's walking
too

fast. I weakly push at him when we reach

the car. Bab' Shange isn't driving us, it's someone younger.

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The ride is silent, I snooze in the car because I am tired. It's hard being a part

-

time twerkist. I wonder distantly if Thatego went home as well, if he'

s safe.

"Temasiko!" He's now dragging me towards my room, and pulls me inside before closing

the door behind him. The lights switch on, I am being pulled towards the

bedroom. "Are you planning to strangle me?" snoozing in the car has sobered

me up a little.

No response. He's unbuttoning his shirt, looking so fucking sexy and methodical. Did he come all the way from Mbongolwane for sex? I don't think it will be mindblowing at the moment, I am so fucking tired. "Baby?" "Take off your clothes... please."

I only remove my blouse and collapse on the bed, wearing my skirt and bra.

He doesn't seem to mind, only in his underwear as well, and joins me –

getting

in between my fat thighs. He's erect, head of his cock pressing against my

entrance. He will hurt me if he takes me without preparation. I had back and

butt problems for days the last time. "No sex. I'm drunk."

He respects my wishes, and just lies on top of me. The bare minimum, being a decent human being, and my heart falters. I wrap my arms around him, and

kiss the top of his head. This big baby of mine. "I've missed you. My life is a mess."

Not again. What happened now?

I don't know how to comfort him with words, I am not good with advices. The

only thing I can give him right now, is this. The hugs and kisses.

"What's wrong?"

He sighs, and folds an arm around my waist

–

tight.

“She wants to kill my child.”

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Unrequited Desires : Twenty-nine Temasiko

My phone is ringing, for a second I thought I had stupidly set an alarm for

something, but its Thatego calling. I don't whether to kill him or not for calling

so early, its dark outside, 04:16am to be precise. What is so important that it

couldn't wait unt

il black people time? I take a breath, my lips pressed against

the tip of Sqalosenkosi's ear as I answer. “I have the worst headache!”

Really, bitch? You have a man and everything, and this is why you call me.

Now I really want to murder him but he's helping me so much, and I really,

really like him. "Thateho..." "Don't call me that, only Sbanisezwe calls me that." He snuffles, I think the alcohol hasn't completely left his system. "I only spent 15 minutes on the line with him, I come back and you're gone."

Is this fucker hearing himself? Fifteen minutes is a long time to wait for someone, especially at a club, and this is why Sgalosenkosi materialized from

thin air a second later. He's sleeping on top of me right now –

all long, muscular limbs pressing me down, breaking my back. We fell asleep like this, maybe three hours ago? I breathe him in, feeling bad when he moves an inch, murmuring something in his sleep

–

an instruction to Sbanisezwe. Is he always trapped in the past when he dreams?

"It was long enough for me to leave," I quip with a roll of the eyes, "but clearly we're both safe so no harm done, right?"

“Ndumiso said you left with Sqalosenkosi. I didn’t know he was back.” “We didn’t have sex.” I heard that accusation in his voice. “We just

shared the

same bed, but nothing happened. Do you need anything else, babes?” “Hey, I called you!” he giggles, not offended at least.

“No. No, nothing else. I just wanted to check in and ensure you’re safe, I was scared to call last night, in

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case I int

errupted something. I’m glad you’re safe, I really just wanted to find out you’re doing fine. I should go, and nurse my

headache.” “No problem. I’ll see you when I see you.” “Maybe lunch on Sunday?” “As long as he’s paying, if he wants us to go to the fancy restaurants where they

make fancy foods that cost an arm and leg. Otherwise, we can go to KFC and I

can buy him something with the money Sqalosenkosi sent me, I’ve spent most of it so there’s really

not much left. "I'll take you out. McDonald's okay?" "As long as its takeaways. We can come back to mine, and hang out, in the pool and twerk in pink thongs." I laugh when he says this. "Why not?" "Let me leave you and that cheater then. Greet him f

or me, tell him I said to

spoil you silly. Bye, gal."

I throw the phone beside me as the giant on top of me moves, and pulls his

face from inside my neck. "Who was that?"

Really? No

Morning, Temasiko? How was your night? I'm sorry I broke your back by

sleeping on top of you all night.

And,

To compensate for this, I will take you out and shower you with gifts because you deserve it.

I'm joking about his money though, it's nice to spe

nd and I will not be apologetic about how he so willingly spends on me and transfers money into

my bank account, no sir, I'm not about that independent girls spend their own

money life. I love his money, almost as much as I can admit I love him. I think I

love him, but not to be in this messy situation he has with his girlfriend. I'm

good with that.

"Thatego."

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"He knows." This is matter

-of-

fact. He still won't leave my body. I've heard

people say we chubby women are warm and comfortable, and I am sure this one is mistaking me for his own personal pillow.

The bastard.

"He does. Sbanisezwe's his fiancé." That's explanation enough, he knows his brother more than me. I take a

breath as he shifts and lies beside me, pulling me on his chest for a cuddling

session. Its still dark outside, I'm not usually awake this early even when I was

working, I woke up at 06:15am, and did juggled doing everything in 45minutes, so that I would be ready for 07:00am.

"I see. I am not angry, that's truly the least of my problems." "Do you want to sleep again? When we wake up, I promise to try and come upwith sensible advice that will please you." He chuckles, its genuine, I'm happy that I can make him laugh at leas

t. I fold anarm around him, pressing my lips to his cheek, and his beard tickles me in all

the delicious ways. "I didn't come here needing advice, Temasiko. I camebecause... it feels like I can talk to you without you trying to figure everything

out on my behalf. With no judgment. It feels like I can vent to you, I feel

comfortable with you." "And you don't have that with your girlfriend?" "I mean she's there. But we haven't known each other that long... just four

months

—

as more than friends, I mean. But I've known her a long time." I see... but he's known me for about three, almost four months as well. What makes him think he can be comfortable with sharing some aspects of his life with me that he can't share with Sphesihle? This is what I don't get, love says you find all you need in this one partner. That you're supposed to be compatible, and have your every need be fulfilled by this one person. It puzzles me that their love isn't even intense to survive little old me. That one can even have a wandering eye in relationships. That fucker Lwandle Kasana.

I hope cockroaches have crawled up his ass wherever he is. I hope his wife cheats on him with another man, and fucks him on their bed, and I hope she gets pregnant with kids that will look exactly like the side, and I hope Lwandle is too weak to leave her, and painfully stays in a relationship where his wife was being fucked on their matrimonial bed.

“But she’s supposed to be your everything, Sgalosenkosi. If you can’t go to her

about matters, then w

hat’s the point?” “The point is that she’s not always going to understand my every facet, and

that is okay. I am not drawn to her because of what parts of me she gets, I am

drawn to her because she’s... homely. The feeling of warmth and home and

security. This is why I am drawn to her, this is why I was happy when I

learned that she was pregnant, because I thought that was something she’d want too.” He’s said a mouthful. “And what do I do for you?” Silence. He’s staring at the ceiling, breathing regulated, eyes closed. “You

weaken me, maybe this is why Sbanisezwe calls you Delilah.

Any

incompatibilities I have with Sphehlehle, I don't have with you... and viceversa."I don't mean to laugh but I do. He's right about the incompatibilities, I don't

think

there's a single thing Sphehlehle and I have in common... Okay, maybe we're hopping on the same dick, and maybe we're drawn to the same gent, but that's about it. I don't know what she likes or what makes her tick, and I don't want to. She's not the type I

like to befriend.

"Must be nice being you, hmm? You have the best of both worlds."He doesn't reply. Again, this doesn't bother me. I don't know if it should. I just don't want him involving him in drama that has to do with Sphehlehle, I don't want to talk to her, or to have her contact me about her man's infidelity. This is why I prefer

to bounce on his dick, and keep it moving, without having him wanting to tie

me down into a relationship that will only hurt me in the end. I don't want to

find myself asking for more than I should, or questioning my worth because of his actions.

I've done that with Lwandle. I've done it with my father. I've done it with Jabulani Mahlangu. I've done it with every man I trusted and I don't want to do it ever again. All men do is hurt you, that's all they do. I don't want

Sqalosenkosi to hurt me, if we get into a full-fledged relationship, I know he

will. I'd much rather enjoy his dick on the side, and enjoy his money. "All I know is I can't let you go, Temasiko." As if to prove his point, he holds tightens around me. "You're important to me." He's said this about Sphesih

le as well.

"Do you tell this to every woman you meet? Maybe you have lines reserved just for us, ones you're certain will work. You've said this about Sphesihle, too, and I want to know who between the two of us is really important to you." "You both

are, for different reasons, it should be obvious. I told you, there are

practical incompatibilities with her that I don't have with you, and there are

incompatibilities with you that

—”“What are those?” I ask sharply. “I’ll let you know next time.” “I want to know now.” I demand, pinching his side. Another chuckle, hearty. “You’re so damn stubborn.” Is he... I don’t know whether or not this is what he means when he says we’re incompatible. I’m not stubborn, I just don’t like to put up with bullshit –

and I

speak my mind a lot. If I don’t then people will climb all over my head, and they will get away with thinking they can just do whatever to me. They’ll think it’s okay to hurt me. “I’m not looking for a relationship, Sgalosenkosi, I don’t want to

be your

girlfriend. Not because I don’t like you, but because I don’t want you to hurt

me. Chances are you're going to get back with Sphehile, and she's endgame, right? The wife that you'll marry and have kids with. I know she doesn't want

that now, but I

think she's bluffing, that girl really loves you, I've seen it –

and

you're not just going to let her go." He doesn't confirm or deny anything. "This is why," I straddle his waist, he needs to see the seriousness in my eyes. "Look at me," I don't know why he's turning his face away, hands serving as a pillow to his bossy head, "I like you." It's very close to love now, most likely love. "You make my

belly flutter and I love the way you make me feel

–

confident in my own skin, happy, motivated... you look at me like you think I

can do anything in the world

—"You can." I know. I'm going to finish my matric. I will convince Zithobile Ngcobo to let

me work for him

—
even for free, so that I can gain knowledge about the fashion world, and how business is run. I've already convinced Thatego to put

me on one of his makeup tutorial videos, and he agreed. I will step into the world of fashion, and cater for gorgeous plus-size bitches like myself. I will do

all this because of... this one, looking up at me with petulant rage in his eyes. He's helped me. "That's obvious," my tone is teasing, and I stroke his beard when he rolls his eyes, "but it's all thanks to you. There's still so much to do, Sgalosenkosi, but...thank you. We make a great team, you and I, don't we?"

Again, no reply.

"But I still can't date you, please. You're the last person I want to hate, I don't

want the good feelings I have around you to turn into something else. You

want sex? Sure, anytime. You're not using me, I enjoy it as well. Bend me over and fuck me until I can't walk straight, anywhere you want, as long as I get my orgasms too. Just not... I don't want a proper relationship." "I should respect your wishes."

I nod my head.

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“And gamble with my heart instead.” Not fair, sir. I’m already in love with you. “Okay.” He’s not okay with this at all, the look on his face says everything. I don’t get

how he can be hurt so simply

by me denying him a relationship when he’s still

planning to pursue Sphesihle, the mother of unborn child, his girlfriend. He

wants her too. I’m telling him to keep her, I don’t mind at all.

Not one littlebit... I don’t. Truly. The only thing I ask to share

with her is his penis, that’s all. “Thank you,” I say and lean down to press a kiss on his lips. My breathless

smile touches his lips as he flips us. His hands are the devil on my thighs. They

trail further up, sliding my too short skirt upward. “Sex, now?” “Sex now.”

My libido welcomes the idea wholeheartedly, as warmth embraces my body, carnal warmth that only he has been successful in taming. He wants me now, but I want music, I want to enjoy this. "What?" I giggle, he's rolling his eyes. "Do I have to compete with

Chinese men in bed now?" "This is Kai, he's Korean." I correct him. "Mmmh was made for sex, this is a sex song. I give you permission to sex me good now."

A pause from where his hand was crawling up my thigh, he observes me like

I've lost my mind, and

then he laughs. That genuine laughter that will be the death of me. He ages decades years younger, and it feels wrong to say he becomes a little boy when he laughs but he does. There are different types of laughs he has, and sometimes they resemble boyish

giggles... so unlike him.

He shakes his head, breathless with laughter, giving me a look that seems to

dig into my soul. I want to look away, he's making me uncomfortable. Is that...awe in his eyes? I'm no damn celebrity. Please stop, I want to beg.

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"Kodwa wathatha iskhathi sakhe ngawe umDali, nganeyabantu," he breathes, "ave umuhle MaDlamini."

MaDlamini?

That's it, I'm a gone girl. I giggle like a good, little bitch. "Thank you." Only he can say this, and make me believe him. It's not even about male validation, it never is with him, it's about who he is as a person

—

so very honest that it's hard not to believe a word that comes out of his mouth. If he says I am beautiful, then I believe him. His unrealistically handsome face is bathed in intensity, he leans down to kiss me, and I eagerly reciprocate, tasting him

—

absorbing every pleasure that comes with him asserting his dominance like this. He leads and I follow. The foreplay makes

me fall harder for him. He takes his time, discovering my new spots, seeking out sounds that I only want to make for him. My legs are pushed apart, he runs a hand on my erection that is straining against my lace thong, making me hiss at the

sensation. "I think we'll keep this." His lips are kissing me... there, thr

ough the red lace, and I moan his name.

He's used my blouse to restrain me, to have me at his mercy, because I was

moving too much. This has been his fantasy, he tells me, kissing my belly, licking my navel, large hands still caressing my breasts, flicking my nipples.

"Sqaalosenkosi," I squirm frantically, moaning softly, "I—" "Let me take care of you."

His lips touch my erection through the lace thong, kissing and licking, as his hands gently move down, pulling it aside to my entrance. It's uncomfortable when he pushes in a finger that I know is saliva-

coated. But he's distracting me with kisses and nibbles, and I am wet for him, begging for more. He doesn't

waste time, hooking my legs over his shoulders, and pushing the thong aside again, spreading my asscheeks to expose my twitching hole.

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A

nd then he's pressing in slowly. It hurts, of course, as he stretches to

impossible lengths inside me

—

growing fatter and fatter, pushing in slowly

until it feels like he's touching places he shouldn't be touching.

"I missed this."

I would be lying if I

said I didn't feel the same.

The only thing I can do is beg him to start slow, and breathe through the discomfort as he starts to thrust inside me in slow but sure thrusts. His attention is on my breasts

—
one and then the other. A nibble. He sucks on them, rolling my nipples and squeezing the entirety of my boobs. I breathe raggedly, unable to do a single thing with my hands bound, and raised to be trapped against the wall. I want to touch him so bad, it's maddening. Whimpers leave my lips as he increases the pace of his thrusting, keeping a fast and hard pace, pressing me deeper into the bed, folding me in half, his other hand gripping my jiggling butt-

cheek. His forehead is on mine, and he's staring deep into my soul while

thrusting into my very being.

There's the connection.

I whimper and close my eyes, tongue darting out to lick my swollen lips.

Please... oh, please.

"Daddy." The word is forbidden, but it slips past. It must be the way he's

abusing my prostate, hard and fast and punishing. The feel of his thumb

against my licking slit that is trapped by red lace. "Like that." His whole dick is

filling me, leaving no space for me at all. I struggle for air.

He's pumping, creating wonders with his dick that I start swearing explicitly.

Its frust

rating, I can't touch him. My legs are trembling, and my stomach is indelicious knots. "Don't do this with anyone else," he reminds me hoarsely, hesounds like he's pain, "please, Temasiko. This is my home, I will take care of it.Promise me."

I would promise him babies if he asked me to. My mouth is slack, I am a

drooling puppy, struggling to find words. The head of his cock is... shit! My

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eyes water, I am so close to begging him to set my hands free, I want to touchhim. He is grunting, groaning, enjoying the feel of my wet flesh hugging hisdick

—

and he's in so deep. "Elakho lonke," I promise him, "just keep doingwhat you're doing... please." "Still so honest, Temasiko."

His hand wraps on my back, he flips me onto my belly, and slides in again. A vulnerable moan escapes me, I close my eyes tight, as the sensations intensify

and I push my ass back up on him, as he grips my butt and tears me apart. It's too fast, the way he's moving. Fast and hard and... I moan, stars dancing in my

vision, I sob his name. He grips my ass so hard, I know his fingers are imprinting on my skin. His

hand is squeezing my erection, to deny me my orgasm. "Not yet." He murmurs

hotly in my ear, and my

eyes water in frustration. "Let me drive you insane."

He already is. How can he not notice? His pelvis smacks against my ass, and the clapping sound resonates in the room

—

over and over again. He continues fucking me like he hadn't just come

seconds ago.

Sphesihle

I found him outside, playing with Nzuzenhle and his little toy cars, for a

hopeful second I had hoped it was... him –

Sqalosenkosi. But the minute our

eyes clashed, I knew it wasn't him, and I somehow knew it wasn't Nqobizithaas well... because their auras are a different kind of intimidating. Sbanisezwe's intimidation is childish and lighthearted. He's no different from Nzuzenhle. He's followed me back inside the house, and a bitter part of me wants him to leave, like I told MaSibusisiw

e earlier as well. I'm not interested in her little schemes, they've helped me with nothing, her beloved brother isn't in love with me. He didn't even come back this morning, he didn't try. I know he doesn't love me, but I thought he'd come back and that we'd talk... about what

I am not sure.

“I’m sorry we only have the Fusion juice,” I tell Sbanisezwe, slightly

embarrassed. Most of the food that we bought went to everyone who had

attended the funeral, I haven’t gotten the chance to go to Eshowe to restock.

“But I have MaGabela’s scones and—” “I’m not a picky eater, your home is my home. We’re family after all.”

I beg to differ. The smile on his face is dangerously mysterious. He tracks my every movement, as if not wanting to let me out of his sight, and that silly smile

remains on his face. It’s not unsettling, maybe a little uncomfortable. I place

the plate of scones in front of him, and the Fusion juice that is in the jug, and one of our fancy glasses. He drinks the juice first, with a look of sati

sfaction I don’t think I can trust, he’s rich and he’s enjoying R8 juice? Even Qalokuhle doesn’t like this juice, she likes to say it has an aftertaste.

“Thank you, MaGcwensa. I was starving before I came here.”

They have helpers at home.

“Not a big deal.” A nod, his eyes remain on me, as he presses his cheek to his hand. “So how are you feeling... mfazi kaSqalosenkosi?” “I am not his wife.” I frown in displeasure, playing with the ends of my jersey...it belongs to Sqalosenkosi. “We decided that we were not ready for a marriage... and a child.” “Children.” “Huh?” I blink my eyes. “There’s more than one in there.” He states matter

-of-

factly. “And you’re not really going to get an abortion, are you?”

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“I am!” I snap. If he’s here to try and convince me not to then he must save his energy. And what is this talk about more than one child? “I am not having a child with a man who doesn’t love me.” “He does.” “No, he doesn’t.” “He did. He does. He will.” Still so confident... and does he ever stop smiling so childishly? He’s really like Nzuzenhle. “I mean once upon a time, he was so deeply in love with you. It’s only fair that he falls again, for you, for... he does.” “And you know this how?” “God knew I didn’t want to be ruled so he made me a god.” He chuckles to himself. “Dreams, Sphehlehle. I lose my memory, and suddenly I am dreaming

of all these things. Thateho has had them before, about me and him. Do you

believe in fate or do you think we create our destiny?"

He's so random. "I don't know." I never think about these things. "I think its both. I think we all know each other because our lives are supposedto entwine, and I think it's up to us to create the destiny we want thereafter.I've chosen to make Thateho my destiny –

my beginning, my end. How about

you?" "I don't know,

Sbanisezwe," I huff in frustration, "I don't even know whatyou're talking about. Why you're here." "You left my brother." I don't deny it. "Good." The smile widens now, its conniving, and his eyes are gleamingbrightly. "You did the right thing. You're no weakling after all, Sphesihle, butyou are weak... like Thateho, I love that quality."

He's insulted me and his fiancé. "Ditch Sgalosenkosi. Your brother has told me he's staying behind because it's too late into the year for him to start schooling in Johannesburg. Qalokuhle is moving to the school hostels because she's in matric anyway, right?"

I nod my head.

"Then you and Nzuzenhle will move in with me and Thateho... just a few weeks, so I can give the fuckers in Hyde Park an eviction notice."

Is he saying... "I don't understand," I murmur shakily, "you want my brother and I to move in with you and your fiancé." "We leave tomorrow morning." Nonnegotiable, his voice. "I want to show you something, Sphehile, how you're powerful more than ima

ginable. I just need

you to trust me." "No." He rolls his eyes childishly, as if he had expected the response. "A little game then? I want to take you out... come on. But before that, let me guess how many children you're carrying. We'll go to the doctor right now, to confirm. If

I am right, you're coming with me to Johannesburg." "All you Ngcobos think you can just order us around, because you're wealthy and we're supposed to do everything you tell us to." "Yes." A silly beam, he bats his lashes. "Don't go back to my brother. You want school, don't

you? Your own business. Success." "I do." "Then my brother's children are not going to get in the way of that. All four of them. You're going to chase your dreams, and succeed because you have two to your advantage."

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"Four children?" I cackle, he's just made me feel better. "Don't be ridiculous! People don't go around conceiving four babies!" "Oh stop with the drama," another childish eye roll, "there's more to come." A smirk. "My family, we're a large family. So what do you say? The doctor's? I'll

buy you pizza afterwards."

I am reluctant, though I am hungry

—

and the pizza sounds heavenly.

“Even if what you said is true, I will not go back to Johannesburg with you.” Another childish roll of the eyes. His smile sings ‘victory’, I don’t know w

hybecause I mean every word I have said.***The doctor with us is a woman, a black woman

—

and I can’t help but be

comforted. She shares the same surname as my mother and has made me feel comfortable. The question on whether or not I am pregnant was long solved by MaSibusisiwe. Dr. Nsibande confirming that was nothing new, but the

shock hasn’t left... nor has the bitterness. There’s one baby in there and—

“All right, I’m going to take measurements of the sac in a little while and—oh...that’s plural actua

lly. So there are two sacs, one of them smaller than the

other but I see heartbeats in both of them. Twins, Mkhaya." My eyes snap to Sbanisezwe, shocked, but he's smiling and looking at the

screen

—

fascinated. I bite my bottom lip, fearful... two. Two babies. I don't know what the hell I'll do with two babies! I knew, about the pregnancy, the

confirmation was yesterday but

it's still... Dr. Nsibande is pointing to the

screen, and I distantly hear Sbanisezwe asking questions. The doctor politely replies, and then pauses

—

all widened gaze. A pin-drop

moment. Worry envelopes me suddenly. What's wrong? She's looking at the

scr

een, moving this cold thing on top of my belly and... a headshake. "Look at the screen,

Mkhaya

.” She tells me, smiling so wide the next second. “I want to show you something spectacular... spontaneous conception of

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quadruplets is rare, MaGcwensa. Estimates show the odds at 1 in 70 000

pregnancies. And...what I'm seeing here, there are two other sacs, here. They are right...here's one and there's the other one. With heartbeats too.”

Understanding dawns on me a little too late, Sbanisezwe already has the widest

grin on his face. “I'm keeping the boys for myself!” I've never seen him like this... this happy. It's like seeing Squalosenkosi through him. I... I am in shock. Overwhelmed. I didn't believe him, part of me still doesn't

but Dr. Nsibande keeps pointing at the screen and explaining too many things.

“Pregnancies like yours are considered high risk be—” “We’ll deal with the specialists in Johannesburg,

Dokotela

.” Sbanisezwe cuts

in, his eyes are staring deep into my soul. The smile is still there

—

sunny.

“Right, Sphesihle?”

I don’t find my voice, shocked, but I find myself nodding blindly.

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Unrequited Desires : ThirtySgalosenkosi

My rib takes another rough kick that forces out a groan from my lips, I grab

Liyana’s little foot and push her leg away from me, only to have her entire face

on mine a second later, she drools on my mouth, as I take a tired breath. Just fifteen more minutes,

I remind myself, and then I'll wake her and get her ready for school.

She's taken to spending her nights with me, though it has nothing to do with another case of... abuse. My stomach flips at the mere thought, that a grown

man could look at my child, and not see her innocence, that a grown man did

so many despicable acts and shattered my daughter's childhood.

Sbanisezwe and Nqobizitha say not to blame myself, of course, but it is hard

not to. There's a guilt that claws at me when I am alone, and eats

me up,

chasing away any light inside. The same light that isn't here, at home, with

Sphehile gone. Liyana is talkative, but she asks so many questions and

complains about wanting Sphehile to come back home. The woman's been

more of a mother than Khensani ever was to my daughter

–

but I will never blame my ex-wife for the hardships that she was going through, loving a man

who couldn't love her back... and worse, falling pregnant for a man that was

supposed to be nothing more than a quick fuck. Life continues

without Sphehile, but I would be lying if I said I haven't been

tempted to go after her, to try and convince her to come back home. Liyana and I need her. Unexpectedly, she came into my life and played the role of

someone I've never had in my life –

for me, for my daughter. And selfishly, I want her back because of this

–

for me, for my daughter.

I want Liyana to be well cared for. Pitso may've taken a piece of her innocence but I hope we can salvage and protect what's

remaining of it. I don't want her to grow up too soon. I don't want her to be too responsible because I am not around. I don't want

her to be what Sphesihle is for her siblings, and what I was for my mother and Sbanisezwe. It's important to me that she remain a child, and that she enjoys her childhood.

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It's important that she feels the pure love of a mother

—

warm and secure. She had that with Sphesihle. I saw it all the time. That woman is in love with my daughter unconditionally and intentionally. She takes care of Liyana, treats her very much like a child, making sure my daughter is spoiled

—

and is never worried. This is what I think. This is the woman Sphesihle was here, at home.

She's gone now, and I want to go after her more than anything in the world, but I am scared to find out if she's gone through

with the abortion or not. It's been four, five days? She hasn't called, nor sent any messages, I don't expect

her to. I should be doing that, I did two days ago, after I left Temasiko, but my calls went unanswered. The first three times you call a person and the phone goes unanswered should tell you everything you need to know. I

got the message, and I have decided to back off... for now. Maybe she's decided to keep our child, I don't know. I have no possible way of finding out. I've tried not to think hard about it, and have chosen to focus on

not feeling when the thoughts do visit me. Most times, I focus on my daughter,

present, lying imperfectly on top of me. I haven't been there for her like I should've been, and I am trying to make up for the trauma I have subjected

her to

—

through my negligence and carelessness.

I've atten

ded one therapy session with her, well not with her present, but the

woman is the same one that talks to her. She's a black woman,
speaks perfect

isiZulu, and though my daughter is multilingual

–

fluent in isiZulu, English and Xitsonga

–

she's more comfortable

able in my home language, something that adds

to her comfortability. Her therapist is warm and patient and
kind. It's no wonder that they've made progress. I've just
started, to find a way to bridge

communication and trust issues between Liyana and I, and time
will tell if things will work out for the best, although things do
look good. A shift on my side kicks me out of my thoughts, and I
blink my eyes, turning

sideways to find Liyana's big, brown eyes blinking back at me
innocently. In

this instant, she reminds me of her twin sister, and unknowingly
applies

pressure on a wound that hasn't died. I wonder what gender Sphesihle is

carrying. Personally, I would love another girl child. I have experience with

them, they're not half as problematic as boy child

ren. Lethulwazi and João are

the source of Chris and Nqobizitha's many headaches.

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"Kukhanya kwam'," I greet my little angel, wiping away the drool she has left on my mouth, and press my hand on her little cheek, "sawubona, Njabuloyami. Ulale kahle?"

I dreamt of you and Likuwe-

ithemba and me, Baba." Her voice is light and happy. "And mam' Khensani."

Sometimes, she calls Khensani this.

"Good dream?" "You bought us a dog. Remember, you promised to buy us a puppy? Likuwe

-ithemba said to remind you.

We want a puppy.” “She said this in your dream?” “Hmm.” A big nod. I wonder if it should be a concern that she’s dreaming about her deceased sister. Previously, she’d talk about her a lot as well, all those talks about a monster in her closet, and I was an idiot... the biggest one for not

understanding what she meant, that this was her way of crying out for help.

“Do you want to cry, Baba?” “No.” I clear my throat, sitting up and dragging her on my lap... until I remember. “Is this okay? Do you feel comfortable with me holding you like this?” I don’t want her to think it’s okay for people to just touch her without

permission, me included. I want her to know the importance of asking for permission and just as important, the importance of consent. This is what I failed to do earlier. Her therapist told me, she gave me tools that would help me and Liyana

understand consent better. Giving out instructions like, “Give Gogo a hug,” are

not helpful, because they tell her that she has no right to give or decline her consent. Even innocent things like tickling her after she has said stop are not

good. Innocent secrets are not a good idea. And the stupid names Khensani and I had made for her private parts. This is why I have kept to asking her for permission, even over the things that may seem unnecessary, like her needing her school shoes to be tied

—

and

respecting her when she answers no. I've learned to stop when she's tired of being tickled, and voices this out. There's no room for secret. Her vagina is a

vagina, not flower or treasure. This is what I have learned, and this is how

we're proceeding going forward. Her sigh is accompanied by a big beam. "Yes. I feel safe when you touch me,

Baba. Likuwe-

ithemba said you'll always protect me."

I would kill for her.

"That's true, Kukhanya kwam'. Baba is always here for you, an

d you can tell him anything in the world, because he loves you and always wants to protect

you. I don't want you to ever forget that, you can tell me anything in the world,

and I will never get angry at you or shout at you. I promise you, okay? I love you,

always." "Will you make me food?"

I nod my head, my heart dancing in gratitude as she wraps her small arms around me, and grants me permission to carry her. She wants toast with eggs

and sausages for breakfast. It doesn't take long to make, but she complains

about it being too dry. "Auntie Sphesihle makes it better, Baba. When is she coming back home?" "Soon."

Her face morphs into displeasure, the toast is pushed away, at least she ate the

eggs and sausage. "This is what you always say. I don't like your food, I like

auntie Sphesihle's food."

Is she out to bruise my ego? I crouch in front of her, bruised by the teary-

eyed expression she's giving me,

the last thing I want is for her to revert back into a quiet shell

—

and I don't

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want distance between us. We've been working hard to reconnect, I feel close to her now. "Ngyaxolisa, Ndlovukazi kaBaba. She'll be back soon, I promise, I miss her too." "Then tell her that so that she can come home soon. It always works with you, it will work with her." It's not that easy. She said a mouthful that day, it's not only fear that i

s holding

me back from going back to Mbongolwane to fix things, it's her admitting that

MaSibusisiwe wanted her to intentionally fall pregnant

—

and I know its

because she's obsessed with the idea of having a Ngcobo heir who will not be produced by 'computers' and 'science', she likes to say. Because Nqobizitha's twin girls haven't been conceived the 'natural' way. Even worse, they're girls –

both of them. He seems like he was destined to be a biological dad-girl,

because of Lisakhanya's gender as well.

T

his has not pleased MaSibusisiwe, and though she hasn't explicitly stated her true feelings to Nqobizitha, this is how she feels. She wants boy heirs. There's

already too many women in our family according to her, what with MaKhathide birthing thirteen females. We need more male children, to push forward the Ngcobo legacy, MaSibusisiwe likes to say. Nqobizitha is a biological girl-

dad. Sbanisezwe's only son –

that he told us about a year too late

–

died. He only has Nkanyezi now, and she lives in the States with her

mother. He and Thatego haven't discussed children, but I know they will have

more. And me, I only have a daughter, that MaSibusisiwe likes to remind me

isn't really mine.

I know for a fact that she wanted Sphehile pregnant because of this, and I am

tempted to return to Mbongolwane because of this, but I don't want to go there and discover that it was in vain, that the baby is no more. I don't want to resent Sphehile for what she would've done, it's her body after all –

and all this seems okay un

til you're in the similar situation. I don't want to think

about her killing my child. The choice still lies with her. Liyana is ready by 06:50am

–

in her uniform and bag on her shoulders. She

hugs me, just as Bab' Shange enters through the backdoor, t

o announce his

arrival. "Have a great day at school."

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“I will, you too, Ba—I almost forgot my homework!” she runs past me, toward her room. She’s back a second later. “Oh Baba, you’re so forgetful. I almost left my homework.” “I’m so—” “Auntie Sphesihle wouldn’t have forgotten. Please, I miss her. I want her back.” “Soon, Liyana.” “I don’t like that word anymore, Baba.”

I sigh, following her energetic body with my eyes, before going back into my room to get ready for work. The emptiness smacks me across the cheek with startling realization

—

again. I am alone

—

again. My house is no longer a home, too cold and empty. It feels strange to have to do things around the house, deciding what suit to wear, which watch, tie, cufflinks

—

all these things were

decided by Sphehile. I don't know when, but I woke up one day and she was

taking care of me, telling me about her plans for the day as she buttoned my shirt, asking me about the dinner menu as she helped me with my tie. The house was warm because o

f her. Not so silent. If she weren't talking then she'd be playing her RnB music. Sometimes the afro

-

soul I didn't like very much, but wouldn't mind hearing now. Her scent is gone –

the sweet flowery smell of her fabric softener. I miss her, this I can admit to myself, and wish she were here with me right now. This house is not the same without her. And it

feels like she's taken a piece of me with her that only she can bring back. It's strange... the longing to have beside me, with me, in my life. I miss her... very much.

Her number is ingrained in my brain, and I want to call, to try and make

amends but I don't like to be forceful. It never ends well.

Making women uncomfortable is something I do my best to always avoid, because I've seen

the fear it causes through my own mother. For me, no means no. Sphehile not responding to my phone calls was all the no I needed.

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It doesn't matter that I think she's being unfair. It doesn't matter that I miss her. It doesn't matter that my daughter and I need her. It doesn't matter that she's possibly killed my child – and denied me the chance of knowing them, to

hold them in my arms and thank my ancestors for them. It doesn't matter that she's stolen a piece of me, my happiness. It doesn't matter, it shouldn't matter.

Bab' Shange is back by the time I have prepared for my own morning. He

greet me, and searches my eyes, asks me if I am okay. I simply nod my head, getting inside the car, and exhaling quietly as he begins to drive off. When the partition screen raises, I close my eyes and lean back against the car. My phone rings not long after, maybe ten minutes, it's Temasiko. A silent smile

slowly pulls at my lips, she doesn't usually call me, especially in the mornings, the extra hour of sleep must've put her in a good

mood of sorts. “Temasiko.” “Moorning!” she is too loud. This is the Temasiko I know, and love. Her voice is enough to temporarily crush my bitter mood, as always. “I was expecting you to call me like usual, but you didn’t.” Her tone is accus

ing.

“I’m sorry.” I have no desire to explain myself. It must tire her to hear me speak of Sphesihle, she’s confessed her feelings for me –

maybe they’re not intense, like how I find myself feeling for her... the connection, but she likes

me. That is enough to make me not want to hurt her by bringing up Sphesihle.

“How did you sleep?” “Perfect! I didn’t have anyone crushing me with their weight,” she quips, breathing into the line softly, “and I was able to use the bathroom without

being followed there, b

ecause someone doesn’t want to sleep in an empty bed even for a few seconds.”

I manage a quiet chuckle

—
genuine.

“Is it a crime to always want to be around you, Temasiko? I love being in your presence, more than you’ll ever know.” “I love being in your presence too.”

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Good. My smile broadens a little, the negativity from earlier is almost

completely disappearing. The pain is a dull ache. “Have you made your bed?

Have you eaten? Did you

—” “Yes, daddy.” A huffed breath, a giggle follows it. “I’m not a child, Sgalosenkosi,

I know what I need to do when I wake up. Stop trying to baby me.” I can’t help it. Its instinctual, the need to take care —

and this feeling I have of

always wanting to protect her. She's been hurt one too many times, hasn't

she?

Where's the crime in wanting to shield her from anymore hurt? From wanting to ensure that she's always happy and healthy and protected. I like her vulnerable with me, treated like a 'handle with care' package because she is.

"You're meeting one of the women who could be your potential therapist today at 03:30pm," I remind her. It's important that she do this, and though it feels like I have too much on my plate, I haven't forgotten the promises I made to her.

"You're not coming with me?" her voice is firm, I can hear the slight tremor hidden under nonchalance. "You don't have to." "I'm sorry, I—" "It was stupid of me to ask anyway," still the nonchalance, but now she also sounds embarrassed, "I'm a big girl, Sqaalosenkosi,

and I don't need a man to hold my hand. You know that, right? I've been doing this life thing on my own for far too long, I'm

not scared, I just thought you'd be honoured to go with me... it's fine that you can't though. Like I said, I don't really need you

there." "You know I'd be there for you if it were possible, Tema."

The line is silent a second, pregnant with tension.

"Don't flatter yourself, Sqaalosethu, I just told you that it's not like I needed you there. Maybe you would've wanted to tag along

, just to know that your money

isn't going to waste...that's all."

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"I see right through you, Tema. You don't need to do all this, the unnecessary dramatics, I promise I will be there for you next time... even today. I lo—you'll

carry me in your heart, I mean

. That's what the corny people say in romance novels, right? It's still true, I'll be with you... uyezwa angithi, MaDlamini?" Silence. It lasts just for a second, she sighs into the line. "Don't call me that, I don't want to fall in love you."

The words are lighthearted, but they still sting.

“And what’s so wrong with you falling in love with me?” “Uthathiwe.” Maybe I imagine the bitterness in her tone. “You’re still coming to fetch me now, right? I can’t wait to see the looks of those fuckers at work

when they see me there again! They just took Abongile’s side, just like that!” I

definitely imagined it.

“Do you love your job?” “Cleaning after those fuckers? Hell no! But there’s nothing wrong with being a cleaner, I’ve had worse jobs, so no I don’t

hate what I do...its that I do it for your snobby employees that I hate. They act like they’re just as rich as you.” Laughter climbs to my throat. “Don’t be afraid to tell them off if they give you crap. We’re all supposed to respect each other, job positions aside, at the end of the day respect is a basic human right.” “Tell that to those fuckers! I’m surprised they’r

e not making my transness an

issue. I’m yet to experience someone aiming transphobic remarks toward me.” That’s because I spoke with HR. We had a

long talk, and they know they will suffer my wrath should they disclose Temasiko's transgender identity with
outher explicitly stating they do it. She told me about her previous job, how they
discriminated against her, and it's something I will not stand for in my own
company. I want her happy and healthy and protected
—
always. Always.
“That's good.”

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“One less issue on my shoulders,” there's a smile in her voice. She talks and
talks, I listen. I always do. I love her voice when its loud. I love it when its quiet. I love it when it cracks during sex, and deepens. I love it when it moans and whimpers and sobs.
I love it when its happy. I don't like it much when it's

sad, because it should always be happy. She talks, and talks, and tells me

someone's at her door. She talks and pauses. "Baby!" I let her call me this, but it's not really befitting for a man like

myself, a grownman. Baby should be reserved for those crappy white boys that Fuzelihle likes to date, who prove that fuckboys exist in all races because they usually fetishize her, using her for their pleasure and dump her shortly after. She never learns

. Right now, she's heartbroken because it's happened again. I will

take her out on Sunday, to put her mind off things.

"Indoda iyathakazelwa, MaDlamini." I pinch her butt, and then grope her to feel her in my hands. She's beautifully thick, tastes as

good as she looks.

"Hlukana nalomsangano ka

-

baby."

Her giggles are pressed to my lips, she wraps her arms around me as I raise

her to properly devour. “Mapholoba?” “Kwaze kwangcono, Somandla.” “You’re dramatic!” she rolls her eyes, “do you have time

to come in? Let me

grab my bag.” I follow her inside the hotel room, complimenting her on the dress she’s wearing, it looks new, I’ve never seen it on her before. She loves butterflies, because this one has butterflies as well. It’s short, different from

the long, flowy ones that Sphehile loves, the ones held together by thin strings.

“I made breakfast. You can dish up.” “I don’t eat in the mornings.” “I’ll pass.”

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“Then let me dish up for Bab’ Shange. I’m sure he will appreciate it,” she says, coming back with her bag that she sits on the couch beside me. “How was your night?” “It wasn’t all that eventful, I dreamt about her and Sphehile –

a reprieve from my famil

y’s time in KwaMashu. Maybe it’s because I think about her and Sphehile too much that I’ve found them visiting my dreams as well.

“Fine.” I respond, watching her move around the kitchen, packing a lunchbox for Bab’ Shange.

We leave five minutes later, after she has cleaned the kitchen. She was right

about Bab’ Shange being grateful for the lunchbox, the smile on his face says it all. Temasiko sits on my lap, once we’re granted privacy, and I caress her lap...

my hand slithering under her short dress, to caress her.

A moan slips past her lips. “You’re not going to make me wet before I get to work, you’re not going to do it.” Softly, she punches my arm. “How’s your daughter? The therapy.” “She’s happy,” I explain, looking into her eyes, “and it’s going well. I

went with

her recently as you know.” “I’m really glad.”

I lean back, wrapping my arms around her full figure, her exhale touching my

cheeks. “I’m supposed to meet Chris soon, in three days, about possibly working for him. Do you have any pointers?”

I know nothing about fashion. That ego and Christophe buy clothes. Yes, for all

three of us. Sometimes Nqobizitha, because he lives with a fashionista. They're like... personal stylists. The only thing I do is give them a budget and they will

go all out with t

he suits and other things. "Be yourself," I tell Tema. "That's simple." She puffs out a ball of air. "He told me I wouldn't be needing matric to work with him, that's nice. But I still want to get my matric, its

important to me, because I was only a few months from writing my prelims

—

and maybe I'm not the smartest person in the world but I know I would've walked away with a 'D' at least." "You never did tell me why your matric was never finished."

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Her body goes tense in my arms. "It's a long story.

I will tell you one day when

I am calm, and sure I won't bawl my eyes out. I don't want you to feel sorry for me, and how sad my life is." "We all have sad stories somehow... Tema." Curiosity colours her gorgeous face, she searches my eyes. "Even you?" "Everyone in this world." She rolls her eyes. "Is that why you dream at night? If you're not telling Sbanisezwe to do something, you're chasing him out of the house –

and angry.

If you're not doing that then you're protecting Ntwenhle, or you're reading in your sleep. That's cool! Animal Farm. It's your favourite book, right?"

I can feel an oncoming migraine.

"I don't want to talk about it, please."

My eyes are closed, I grip my temples, and attempt to chase the headache away. Ntwenhle Mzimela is looking back at me, a beautiful angel

–

my mother,

a queen. I love her with everything in me. I miss her every day. "Hey..." Temasiko's voice is quiet. "What's wrong?" "Nothing," I grit my teeth, burying my face in her chest –

and soak her dress

with my wet eyes. It's the headache. "I'm just tired." "Sleep then. I'm right here, I will take care of you."

Her lips attach to my forehead, she holds me tighter. I want to tell her to stop, that it's Sphesihle who normally does this. And that I prefer to take care of

her... but it feels like

I can be like this with her. Her arms are warm around my shoulders, and my face is buried in between her breasts. She smells heavenly. Sleep begs me to welcome it, but headaches make me anxious, and send me in a state of unnecessary panic during meetings. Fuze has worked hard to acquire this business deal for the company. It was hard to convince a pair of

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old geezers to let us handle their accounts. Ciniso Dlamini and Jabulani

Mahlangu... I cannot afford to appear unprofessional in their eyes.

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Unrequited Desires : Thirty-one Temasiko

They were surprised to see me back at work, every idiot that took that rapist's side, I can't say it wasn't amusing to watch their faces morph in confusion, others anger masked by fake kindness. The way they behave, you'd s

wear I am

bouncing on Sgalosenkosi's dick, seriously! I mean I am, but I didn't sleep my

way into a damn cleaning job, I was desperate but this man I have fallen in

love with isn't the type to take advantage of a woman's bad situation ... and who wouldn't bounce on such a guy's dick?

It's been... how many days has it been? Over a week, I think. I haven't seen Abongile Mbatha around, I won't ask too, because the only person I speak to here is the man whose dick I bounce on. There's Bab'

Shange, but he comes and goes, and never speaks unless spoken to. This

means that I spend most of my time in Squalosenkosi's office or the computerlab, that's meant for the external employees who're not directly employed by the company, cleaners like myself

—

but I was employed by the man whose dick I dance on... before I could dance on it.

Anyway, its 10:30am. I work really hard, and have done all that is required of

me by this time, which means I can spend some time in Squalosenkosi's office or the computer lab. I go with the latter because I don't want to encounter that

bitchy receptionist of his, she always has the nastiest attitude, only worsened

when Squalosenkosi isn't in the office... like today. He mentioned being

swarmed with back to back meetings. I did get a message from him though, telling me that I am missed, and to take care of myself. It's weird and a bit overwhelming to have someone so obsessed with ensuring that I am in good health

—

in every manner. I'm slowly getting used to the 'have you eaten?' texts that are accompanied with food deliveries outside my door. The 'wake up and

don't forget to make your bed' reminders in the mornings. The 'Is this the cream you talked about for your thighs' messages, for that damn friction that makes it painful to properly walk sometimes.

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This man listens, he goes out of his way to do things that I do not expect from

him, and is so considerate that it feels like he's too good to be true sometimes.

He is too good to be true, he has a pregnant girlfriend who wants nothing to do with him, that I am certain he loves back. Confusing. He looks at me like he admires me, and he has admitted this. His touches speak words of intimacy and sacredness, like he knows what I feel, and feels it too. His eyes are the stars I used to find so enchantingly beautiful back home in Swaziland, and his presence gives me a calm that I only

ever found with my mother. This is why I love it when he feels vulnerable with me too, and admits that I make him weak, this is why he confuses me sometimes.

I don't want to dare think that he's fallen in love with me, not so soon,

but when he stares at me speechlessly, and caresses my cheek, or when I am on his chest and he has his arms around me

—

making me the softest woman in the world, it just feels like he, maybe, sort of returns what I feel for him. It

feels like he'll admit i

t, with the way he gazes upon me, and asks me to take

care of myself. I don't know, of course, he's kindhearted and maybe I am

protecting on him. Maybe I want all hell to break loose, and for him to love me back.

Funny, because I don't think I'd be able to date him... even if Sphehile weren't a factor. Deep down, I don't think I'd have the balls. His love and care is a weird one, overwhelming and scary, and I just know that I'd mess up somehow and cause him to leave. Or maybe he'd mess up, revealing facets

of himself that were hiding, and causing me to hate him in the process. All I know is that maybe things would end somehow. This has not stopped me from wanting him, a lot more than I should. I miss

him when he's not with me, and a bitch wants to beg him

to spend the nights sometimes. But he has a daughter, a family before me, and this is what I was

scared of... the yearning of something that can't possibly be. Wanting more than he's given me. I'm an idiot. A big fucking idiot.

At 11:00am, I decide to resp

ond to that message he sent me. I didn't want to come across as desperate so I had to wait things out a little... it's not like I've returned on my read receipts anyway, so he can't get offended. He doesn't reply,

I would get offended but his WhatsApp last seen was the 10:30am that he sent me a message.

Bab' Shange comes to fetch me around lunch time to take me to the woman

who is being interviewed to play my therapist, I know its not an interview butshe must tell me how to avoid being fucked over by those around me in thefuture. Its only fair since everyone I have known and trusted has hurt mebefore. Therapists are supposed to make one feel better and give them all theanswers to improve their lives, are they not?Black woman, 39 years old, married with

two children. I don't like her. It feelslike we come from two different worlds, I gather this in the way we don't

receive exchanged information the same. She asks about my upbringing, I tellher about my time in Motshane, living with my parents and how I moved backhere with my father.

She's an annoying interrogator who asks how I felt about my mother'spassing, like it isn't obvious that losing a parent can emotionally bruise you.My mother was my best friend, and she knew I didn't like being a boy, she

knew I pretended around my father, but she always thought its something I'dgrow out of... and she waited until she died.I'm not in the mood to talk about my father, I make this known, but this lady is

ever persistent and sly in her way of asking questions. “He’s around,” I flatly tell her, when she asks me of his whereabouts, “hopefully being suffocated by cockroach sperm, and struggling for breath.”

She chokes on her saliva. LOL! My lips twitch amusedly, I watch her grab a bottle of water to gulp down

hurriedly. “You have a weird obsession with cockroaches.” “I hate them. They’re as unnecessary as some humans in this world, and to

think they would survive a nuclear disaster, it’s

obvious that they’re just like every fucker that has ever wronged me and gotten away with it.” A sigh, she scribbles on that fancy notepad of hers. I’ve always thought these things were only used in TVs, but she’s the classic therapist –

and even dresses

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like one, matching her boring outfit with equally boring eye glasses. “Is this how you feel about your father?”

Lord, why does she keep bringing up fucking Ciniso Dlamini? I hate that man with every particle in my body. Part of me has always wondered if

he's still alive or if he ever died. I've always been torn about wanting him alive and

wanting him dead. I want him dead because of the pain he put me through, and the scars he left beyond what is external, the physical. I want him dead because he was the first man I loved who so carelessly hurt me. I wanted him dead because my life was a mess, and sometimes I'd cry myself to sleep knowing he existed in a

world where I was suffering.

I've hoped he's still alive. I want him alive now, because things are

falling into place in my life

—

and because every painful word he uttered that night is proving to be useless. I will be finishing my matric, and I have a stable job, I am making something out of my pathetic life and I am not a useless demon. My mother is not turning in her grave, and she knew I needed someone on my side so she sent me someone

who makes me feel so comfortable, as she had. Someone caring, and tender.

I am cared for, by a man who doesn't want to see me sad or frown, who tells

me I should always be smiling and happy and healthy and protected. This

same man who's helped me so much, and is assisting me to chase my dreams. I want my father to see the woman he thought wouldn't make it in life, I want

him to feel saddened and angry because this young woman is finally achieving her dreams, finally. I hope he and Jabulani Mahlangu are poor bastards wherever they are.

Hopefully, they're fucking each other in some shack and barely surviving.

Hopefully, its Ciniso Dlamini getting dicked down so that he can stop being so sex-starved. Hopefully.

"He's not worth my time, doll." I grumble quietly, folding my arms on my chest. Dr. Mabasa cocks an eyebrow, and then scribbles on her cute notepad...twat! "Like I said, hopefully he's choking on cockroach sp

erm. He needs to

suck a dick or two."

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Another choke of the saliva, I roll my eyes.

“Was your relationship with him always like this?”

Like what? Ugly. Nasty? Not worth the effort. Mediocre? Shit!

“Fucker was pretending until my mother died,” I say,

though it’s not the complete truth, I’d rather not get into a rather touchy subject. “Am I here to

talk about me or him? Why oh why, Dr. Mabasa, is Ciniso Dlamini stealing my

spotlight?” I bat my lashes. She gives me a onceover that makes me uncomfortable. “Nice try, Temasiko, let’s not try to deflect... okay?” It’s my turn to give her a onceover, only I roll my eyes so hard, it gives me sex

flashbacks to Sqalosenkosi. Now this, I prefer to think about.

Dr. Mabasa here

cannot order me around, I don't take kindly to being commanded.

***Sgalosenkosi comes back long after majority of the staff has left the office, and he looks winded, irritated, loosening his tie as soon as steps foot inside his office. Its 05:00pm, I was waiting for him, he was supposed to be back hereabout 30 minutes ago. He smells like whiskey, not too much, but the taste touches my tongue as he slips in tongue in mine

—

seductively invasive, and needy. "Long day?" I ask him. "There should be a rule

—

anyone over the age of 60 years should not be allowed to run their own business, I don't care, fuck it." It's the 'fuck it' that makes me laugh, this is the same man who doesn't swear much... even in bed. Some old fart must've really upset him for him to look this way, his aura seeps out his exhaustion. I let him rest his head on my lap, stroking his cheek, his eyes are closed and he seems pained for some reason. That earlier migraine, perhaps?

“Who?” I ask him, amused.

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“A pair of old

idiots who think they can drag me around by the nose because they’re older than me. Who told these fuckers they could continue running their business? The 56 year old is better. It’s that 62 year old bastard who

thinks he knows everything that I wanted to

punch in the face.” Whoa. Beating up senior citizens now? This is not him, he’s not the violent type. “What did he do?” I query, as my thumb drags across his lips. “Aside from wasting my time with stupid questions, he called me aside after

the meeting

to request that I come with Fuze next time, because it’s her that he truly enjoyed liaising with.” Oh... “It’s the way he said this that pisses me off. I think he wants her... sexually.

Part of me feels like this is the only reason he took us on. If he thinks we need his income then he has another thing coming, we already

—“Calm down.” His migraine won’t leave if he gets himself worked up like this. “Rest, ba—I mean, Mapholoba.” I remember what he said earlier, and perhaps

I want to see him smile, becau

se I just did what he’d so nicely asked of me in the morning.

“Don’t look at me like that.” “Like what?” Like you love me. Like I’m a prized painting that you don’t want to let out of

your sight. Like I am your stars, sun and moon. Like I am important to you. Like you love me, love me, love me.

“Just stop.” My belly unfurls with warmth, spreading too my chu

bby cheeks,

and the tips of my ears. He’s moved to lie on his side, burying his face in my

flabby belly, his lips touching me there. A child in my arms is what he is. The warmth is becoming unbearable, I want to push him away a second for a breather, but my hands will not comply. My chest is filled with addicting warmth, like the American Christmas movies that feature marshmallows in hot chocolate, and fireplaces during a snowy winter. This man whose head rests on my lap inspires these feelings, and the

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a

doration I feel for him makes me breathless. I think he's my favourite human

being in the whole wide world.

"My daughter is spending the night at Nqobizitha's. I had to ask him to collect

her from school since this meeting I had ran past my office hours.

"

He wants me to go home with him.

"I am not spending the night at yours." Maybe I don't know how to do this side

thing right, but I refuse to disrespect Sphesihle like that. It leaves a bitter taste in my mouth, the mere idea of invading their home. T

hey may've not dated that long, but... the girl is sweet. A little insecure, but sweet. She'd lose her

marbles if she found out I slept

—

“I wasn’t going to take you to my house. It belongs to Sphesihle, doesn’t it? The

bedroom, and what she has built during

her stay there.” I knew this but he didn’t have to tell me. Now a lancing pain makes my chest

tight with discomfort. My vision blurs a little. WTF!?!

“Then go home, because I’m also going to the hotel, and I don’t want you to come with me.”

His face moves out of hiding. Upset. Yeah, whatever. It’s not hard being him, imagine falling for someone who has feelings for another. Unrequited love, but

not quite, because sometimes he’s so good, it feels like he loves me. I think he

loves me. But I think he

loves Sphesihle as well. Clearly, he’s upset by her leaving, and maybe he’ll pursue her. “I want to spend time with you, please.” Must he use ‘please’ to get his way? This word is kryptonite to a person like

me, I am nodding my head, as his big head leaves my big thighs and his big hand entwined with my big hand, dragging me off the couch. I sigh as he pulls me into his side, and we head out.

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We stop to order food at McDonald's. Then Debonair's because indoda must

never starve his woman. It's 07:00pm when we reach the hotel, and this one breaks his own rules by calling Nqobizitha at such a late hour, but it's

important to him because he needs to speak to his daughter. They're really

close, he loves her so much, this much is clear in his eyes. With that look in his

eyes, I want to give him my own babies... but Sphesihle is possibly already

doing that. Unfair.

It feels like we're a real couple when we decide to shower together before dinner. We've brushed our teeth together, and I was corny like

Beyoncé in the Halo music video, but Zulu men are rarely romantic, Sqaalosenkosi was not amused when I threw toothpaste suds at him. His romance shines particularly in sexing, as he pins me against the wall, eyes dangerously animalistic and persuasive as he

pounds into me in time with Joe's 'The Love Scene.'

I can't feel my legs by the time he's done with me. He carries me back into the

bedroom, and I worry about being too heavy because this man has leg

problems, he's never told me what happened but he walk

s around with a cane sometimes. He lathers my body, and drags me naked to the couch where we

eat our dinner. It feels like we're a couple. It feels like we're in love and married, and that soon we'll have a pet and then later, babies. I'm in trouble, I r

realize, as the thoughts fill my brain.

"How did therapy go?" We're in bed now, both of us don't care much for the TV, it's only 09:30pm, way too early but we have work tomorrow. I snuggle into Sqaalosenkosi's side,

and bask in the feeling of security and being loved, content. “The lady talks toomuch.”“Ngempela?” his laughter is reverberating, I pinch his side, and then trail myhands downwards, to caress his gorgeous penis. “Khuzeka mawungafuningikuphinde,” he sounds breathless, arms tightening around me. “Who talkedmore, you or her?”I wasn’t paying attention.“She just asks too many questions, it’s annoying.”

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“That’s her job, Sthandwa sami, to ask you relevant questions that will

determine her best solution into helping you heal. Otherwise, therapy is just

useless. Do you like her or do you want to see the other lady?”

Her privilege aside, I think me and her developed a little relationship. Shemade me open up without meaning to, and she allows me to call mencockroaches. I love her for that

. “No. I want to keep her.” “Kulungile, I will ask Nemisa to cancel with the other woman.” He refers to his bitchy receptionist. “Do you want to tell me what happened, how everything went?” I’m not ready to. I’m not ready to discuss my father, and that stupid idiot

Jabulani Mahlangu. I wasn’t even ready to tell Dr. Mabasa about them. But she knows I hate my father and hope that he’s choked on cockroach sperm wherever he is. Knowing my luck with karma, the man’s probably enjoying his life, sipping on cham

pagne in a thong and twerking in Dubai... fucker. He’s not gay, of course, but sometimes I wish he’d become the one thing he despised so much.

“I’m not ready, Sgalosethu.” His hand is caressing my breast, I know now that

he prefers bigger breasts over fat

asses, but I ain’t got none –

and maybe this

is what he needs Sphehile for. “She asked about my father.” “Your... father? Awukaze ungitshela ngaye, ukephi

yena?" "I don't know." I shrug my shoulders, whimpering as he pinches my nipple and rolls it around. "Hopefully, having cockroaches releasing their sperm on his dirty mouth." "Weeeh." He's unfazed. I love that he's used to me now, and doesn't try to

change or f

ilter me. "What did he do to fuck up so badly that you want cockroaches having sex on his mouth?" "Picked his friend over me." It still hurts, I don't want to talk about this.

"We're still on for Saturday, right?" the last time we were supposed to go to

Kwa Mai-

Mai for Inkosi Yamagcokama, but the singer had cancelled, so we're going

this Saturday. He promised to take me.

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"Of course. I like to see you happy." "You make me happy." The mouth is stupid because it has no brain, and doesn't think, this is why it's embarrassing me like this. "I mean—" "I am happy around you too, Temasiko, you make me happy." "And

Sphehile.” “This is not about her, it’s about you and what I feel for you. Let’s not include

her in matters that she has nothing to do with. If I say you make me happy then

—” “I should believe you because you mean it.” “Injalo, nganeyakwethu.” Mxm. I feel like rolling my eyes so I do. The topic switches, we’re discussing me again, and my plans. “Will you teach me how to drive?” earlier, I

was

looking up driving schools for my learner’s license. “Uh... drive?” he sounds reluctant, and rigid. “Maybe you can’t.” I hadn’t thought of this, he always Bab’ Shange driving him around. He’s rich, maybe he doesn’t feel the need to learn. “You’re al

ways

driven around after all.” “Cha.” Still so tense.

“Ngyakwazi.” “Teach me then?” “Drive...?” I hadn’t stuttered the first time, but it feels like he doesn’t want to. He sounds so reluctant, unwilling. “It’s okay if you can’t. But I want to make

mistakes with

you, this is why I thought you’d be the perfect person to teach me. If I am

stupid and

—”

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“You’re not stupid, Temasiko.”

Must he always be so serious? So uptight?

“You’re loosening up this Saturday.” My voice is nonnegotiable.

“I can’t ev

en

make a simple joke about myself.” It wasn’t exactly a joke. “Please give me time to think about teaching you how to drive. I haven’t done it in a long time.” “No problem.” I yawn, my heavy eyes watering, I think I am ready to sleep now. “I’m sleepy.” “Sleep then.” “Kiss?” you give them sex, and they have you begging for simple kisses

afterwards. Men! His lips are on mine

—

sweet and gentle. He steals my breath

away and makes my chest tight with emotion. "Love you," I whisper without

thought. A

moment's pause.

I can feel it getting awkward, and my heart is pumping hard against my

chest... but his arms are getting impossibly tight around me, and my guard drops again. "Love you too," his lips are touching my forehead.

The rest of the week is really sweet, between getting paid and spending time

with Sgalosenkosi, I really have no complaints. We haven't talked about the 'love you' issue, but things haven't been awkward between us because of it, I won't ask to avoid confrontations. Chris couldn't meet

with me on Wednesday, his son told him last minute about costume shopping for a play that they're having at his school. This is why we're meeting today, at Thatego's, funny enough. He said it was Sbanisezwe's idea, because 'I'm family now' and shouldn't

be subjected to formal meetings like a stranger. He, Siyabonga and Thatego are having a little get-together as friends.

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I'm a little nervous as I ring the doorbell. These people are all moneyed, and intelligent, they have it all. Siyabonga didn't seem like the snobby type but he's a bitch, without beating around the bush. The door doesn't open, and I wonder

if its possible to enter the house through the garage, because this is what I

usually do. I had to take an Uber to get here. Bab' Shange was taking too long

to fetch me from the hotel. I am wearing my most expensive dress, it was R750 at H&M, and I bought it with Squalos

enkosi's money. It's a short, black dress with butterflies on it. Sbanisezwe's childish smile greets me when the door opens. Jesus, he's creepy sometimes! It's strange looking at a different version of Squalos enkosi. "My brother's infinity." His eyes are piercing into my soul. "Clearly Squalos enkosi is doing a great job, you're forever glowing. How are you this fine afternoon?" Oh yes, it's just gone after 12:00pm. "Hey. I'm good...

wena?" "Elated now that you're here. Come inside, Nkosazane, my home is

yours as

well. The same way that the home you share with my brother is mine, right?" "Err..." I smile awkwardly.

His hands are in his pockets, he walks with a nonchalance that reminds me of his older brother, the subtle arrogance must be a thing in this family. There are voices coming from down the kitchen

—

loud and cheery. He leads me

inside, there is Zithobile Ngcobo on Siyabonga's lap, sipping on Bernini.

Thatego is in a swimsuit

—

pink one that he bought me as well, that makes my balls feel as if t

hey're being sliced into. He makes it look gorgeous though. "Cikicane," Sbanisezwe goes to join him, as Chris greets me sweetly. Siyabonga waves his hand. The Ngcobo sibling has his hand planted firmly on his fiancé's butt, leading him toward me. "Where is Delilah's best friend?" "Best friend?" Thatego gives Sbanisezwe a smile. "Sphe—"

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“I think I won’t be eating anything at all if these babies keep giving menausea!” a voice complains from behind me. “There she is!” Sbanisezwe interrupts, moving past me to grab... her. Myaccusing glare is on Thatego, but he won’t meet my eyes. “Ladies, I believeyou’ve met before.” Sbani is an idiot, there’s something devilish and conniving about his smile.

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Unrequited Desires : Thirty-twoSphesihle

My face morphs into a displeased frown as Sbanisezwe introduces me to the

woman I’ve had the displeasure of meeting countless times in Sqalosenkosi’soffice. It’s not that I hate her, I don’t, but her loudness is

off-putting, not to mention how she seems to lack boundaries. She was always there when I wasvisiting his office, sometimes sitting alone, in front of a laptop, typing away as

if she owned the place... and I don't like her. Its not hate, but she's definitely

not the t

ype I'd befriend.

She looks expensive, in split thigh wide jeans and a top that looks like a bra, pairing it with black chunky heels and a cute leather bag

—

YSL, is it? Her makeup is on point, and the hair on her head looks brand-new, like her nails and the way she smells. Pretty. Everything about her is pretty and she is worth

a million bucks! It must be Squalosenkosi's money, how nice, I remember her from her poorer days, when she'd come into our home looking like a charity

case.

"Hey, gal!" very loud, I think her smile is fake, part of me isn't in the mood to entertain it. "Looking fabulous. Where did you get this skirt?" My floral skirt... does she want to steal my style? Maybe it's hard for her to win Squalosenkosi over, and she needs pointers, so that she can leech off of him more, build on top of what I left behind. I don't hate her. I just don't like her. She's not the kindest girl I've met, and rubs me off the

wrong way. "I don't remember. Small street? I'll look for the receipt so

that I can ch

eck the store name." "No problem. Hopefully, they have it shorter. I don't want to look like a granny!" her eyes are bright and cheery. "This is why I prefer short, or tight jeans. Nothing long." I'm sure the granny part was a quip at me. "Gotcha! My

mom taught me to stick to longer items of clothing, short ones hint at prostitution, and hoe tendencies."

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Her response is a subtle frown, I think she's trying to figure out whether or

not that was a jab at her. If she thinks it was, then she should reevaluate herself, and just why she would associate herself with prostitution, maybe this

is the life she lived before Squalosenkosi. As for the hoeness, I've seen her prove

it time and time again with the way she behaves around
Sgalosenkosi

—

all those hugs

he'd give him, how she never bothered to discourage him from
spending all his time with her, forgetting the woman and child
he left back home. Sbanisezwe breaks the staring, that only felt
tense because of the way she was looking at me, with quiet
laughter. His eyes are childish and giddy. He bends

his head, getting into Ms. Loud Speaker's face to look into her
eyes, before he's shifting the same attention to me, smiling.
"Yin yang," he whispers, "how do they say it these days...
besties!" He's confusing,

I don't know whether he does this intentionally. And I am mad
at him and Thatego for not telling me that Ms. Loud Speaker
was coming, I

would've excused myself and went out on a solo date at Solo
Restaurant in Sandton. The drive would've been worth it. Now
I'm stuck with a loud woman

who is smiling falsely at me.

“I have to go,” Sbanisezwe again interrupts our tense staring session, “this was nice and all. Take care of my gorgeous fiancé, don’t stress him, he’s getting married in less than two weeks.” Thatego’s cheeks are warm, he smiles. “Take care of our dear Hestia, Delilah. You’re a team, powerful together, trust me. Will that be hard of you to do?” he aims this question to Ms. Loud Speaker, I never truly bothered to learn her name, but I know there’s a ‘Tema’ in there. “Who’s Hestia?” the lady asks, dumbfounded, smiling.

“Enjoy!” Sbanisezwe ignores the question, grabbing Thatego’s hand, “I need you before I go,” he tells the curvaceous man, dragging him towards the stairs. “They’re going to have sex, aren’t they?”

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My gaze stops following the retreating two, to focus on Ms. Loud Speaker

—

Tema, the teasing smile playing on her lips. “That’s a forward question to ask, very intrusive. My mother taught me to always

respect the privacy of others.” She rolls her eyes. “And you don’t have

your own thoughts and opinions

outside of what your mother has taught you?” “I come from a structured home, where I was taught to listen to the elderly, and obey them. Clearly we’re not the same, this is why you find it okay to—” “Lelax, gal!” her voice is teasing, another annoying roll of the eyes. “It was an innocent question, I’m not planning to do anything with the information. They look like they’re going to have sex, so what? It’s not a crime.” Mxm. She really doesn’t get it.

I turn my back to her, heading back to collapse on the long couch I was occupying, and release a slow breath, to ease the nausea. Being pregnant is not my favourite thing in the world, nausea has me by the tits, it randomly comes and goes

—

and I always want to eat pizza. Sbanisezwe comes home with them

often, sometimes Thatego, they’ve made living with them quite easy. I can

even forget to miss Sqalosenkosi, and to love him, and just be happy.

“Sanibonani.” Tema, the loudspeaker, greets again. “Hey, babes!” Chris smiles warmly at her, shifting out of Siyabonga’s lap, headed to the fridge. “It feels like we’ve been waiting forever, but I’m happy you’re here. Looking gorgeous, your dress is so pretty, it suits you.” “I ordered it from Shein.” “I’d totally buy it if I were into dresses, but they’re not my thing.” Mellifluous giggles. “So what are you drinking?” “Brutal Fruit!” Chris’ face moves out of the freezer, his attention is on the loudspeaker, he’s beaming brightly... the traitor. He gave me such a smile just minutes ago, and asked me of the wellbeing of my babies, excitedly telling me that he couldn’t

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wait to meet them, and that he and Nqobizitha were expecting twin girls. Now

he’s smiling foolishly with this girl who lacks boundaries and is forever loud. “My favourite!” he grabs two bottles, coming back to us. “I hope you can

handle your alcohol, Siyabonga was so funny last year, he

—““Its none of her business, haibo!” Siyabonga interjects with the biggest frown, glancing at Tema, who so annoyingly chose to perch herself next to me. “Wedon’t even know this girl and you’re discussing our private lives like this.”

Chri

s giggles, walking like a duck, he is slowly getting drunk.

“What’s so private about you being drunk, Siyabonga? You couldn’t handle your alcohol, and were a nuisance to your husband, that’s it!” Siyabonga huffs an irritated breath, pushing Chris’ face a

way from him, as the

other man joins him after he’s handed over one of the alcohol beverages to

Tema. The loudspeaker is untrained on manners, opens the bottle with her

teeth, and puts the lid inside the bottle. “I heard this trick helps to prevent you

fro

m getting drunk quicker, you should try it next time.” Bambi eyes widen, Chris is searching for his own lid. “Really? I didn’t know

this. I

—shit! Why bewungasho ngingekalahli isvalo?”“Sorry, babes.”

He waves Tema off, and places the bottle on the ta

ble, he didn't even touch it. “Its fine, I better stop drinking, baby daddy won't be pleased. I'm workinghard to be a 'yebo, Baba' husby lately, because that's what he deserves. He's a

good man, he takes care of me and our children. Did I tell you that I love him?

We're having twin girls.”Siyabonga and I look at each other, there's a suppressed look of boredom onhis face. Clearly he's seen this version of Chris countrless times, and it boreshim now. I've seen it for the past half hour, how Nqobizitha'

s name comes up

unnecessarily, and topics about how he's dearly missed. “We're just waiting for Thatego then we'll start,” Chris says this, after a burp,looking at Tema. “I'm sorry we couldn't meet up, João told me about costume

shopping the last minute, I had to go because Nqobizitha was working. He

works hard, but he's home more often now, and we're a family again! Did I tell you that I love him so much? He's so perfect, I can't believe it's been thirteen years already."

Siyabonga and I share a look again.

Tema giggles, she's enjoying this. "That's nice. Love and marriage. Children. Definitely not for me though, I just want to make money."

Instinctively, a snort escapes my mouth, I do my best to mask it with a cough.

Is it a surprise that she's said this? Even the way she looks, Sgalosenkosi's money must be so nice, and he's too damn blind to see that he has a gold digger in his hands.

"Setanele, right?" Siyabonga is sitting up, pushing Chris away from gently, with a tired sigh. His eyes are boring into the unperturbed loudspeaker's soul. "You look nice." "Temasiko, actually." A not too polite correction, the girl really is a bitch. "Thank you. I like your watch." It's a Rolex.

Siyabonga cuts his eyes at her, and I am glad I am not the only one who sees her for the loud, gold-

digger she is. "My husband got it for me as a gift last year. Perks of being married for love, and wanting c

children.” This is definitely a quip for earlier. “What do you do for a living? If you don’t mind me asking since we’re all getting to know you here.” “I’m a cleaner.” “Okay. Is that all you aspire to be? No plans for the future maybe.” “Of course not,” she jeers, the loudspeaker, placing the empty bottle on the table, “I am working on getting my matric right—” “You don’t even own a matric certificate?”

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“Hey!” an inebriated Chris giggles. “Hey, stop it! You’re not looking down on

her for not owning

a matric certificate, are you? She’s—” “I’m just wondering how she’s planning to get all this money she wants to make when she’s just confessed that she doesn’t have an education to back

her up. It will be hard to live that life without proper education

.” “Not hard at all actually.” Tema smiles, looking at Siyabonga.

“Nothing’s hard about staying in a five star hotel that I’m not paying for. Ordering all the food

in the world, that I am not paying for. Wearing expensive clothes that I am not paying for. Owning designer bag and perfumes that I am not paying for.

Education didn't get me all that." "I wonder who's poor son is being taken advantage of." Loud laughter, she doesn't reply. Not that Thatego provides her the opportunity to, he's back, wearin

g a long shirt instead of the swimsuit he was

on. The loudspeaker was right about him having sex, he's walking funny, but the smile on his face is too damn wide.

"Sorry for that." "Limp. Limp!" Chris stands shaky legs, to go and wrap his arms around

That

ego. I've noticed that he's super clingy when drunk. "What's for lunch? I am starving!" "Should I ask Sbani to—" "No. We're not braaing meat, I want beef curry and mini steamed bread.

Where are your muffin pans? Siyabonga mixes the flour better than me,

Nhlakanipho taught him well, so he'll do it. Sphehile you're working on the salads. Tema as well. Thatego, you're not touching anything, I don't want to have a personal relationship with the toilet for three days."

They exaggerate this a lot.

Thatego knows how to cook, but he's the snobby type, and makes food that no

normal black person eats daily. The expensive and strange food that you find

in the restaurants he's had me visit before. I mean I like going there, but it's

hard to fit in a world of glamorous people who prioritize looking stylish everyday, without pause.

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The heels. High-end fashion. The manner in which these people speaking, twanging their words that I struggle to hear them sometimes, and the

unnecessary use of big words... I can't deal. Maybe it's because I didn't

experience much in Mbongolwane, but part of me just feels like this who I am. I am not overly glamorous or concerned about things most women my age are concerned about. Thatego says I am boring because of this.

Siyabonga loves me for it. I think I've grown close more with him than I have the others, especially because he's fascinated by

my pregnancy, and the fact that I am expecting four babies. He told me he wants his own babies but

Nhlakanipho isn't ready, and wants them to enjoy their marriage first, we talk a lot over the phone and he's become a big brother. It feels good to have

someone look out for me.

And it's not like Thatego and Chris don't. They do, Chris calls me often, to find out how I am doing, when I'm not working with him at his home or in his

Parktown offices. Thatego brings me food, we watch movies together, spend time in the pool

—

and he's teaching me about his lifestyle. I enjoy spending time with him, but I enjoy Siyabonga's company more. "Can you pass me the dressing?" I ask Thatego.

“I didn’t think you’d know how to make this.” Tema giggles, I feel her

unwanted presence behind me, looking over my shoulder to the Greek salad I

am making. “This looks delicious.” “My mother taught me.”

Our eyes meet, and hold.

“I should’ve known.”

Little bitch. She shifts away, and continues with her own salad.

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Sbanisezwe’s on his phone when he shows face again, and he looks it’s one of the rare times that he appears angry... upset. I watch silently as he puts his

phone back inside his pocket, to wrap his arms ar

ound Thatego’s in a hug. A second, he pulls back. “Pitso’s dead,” he announces.

Pin-drop moment. I think someone drops a clinking object.

“What?” that’s Siyabonga, I don’t imagine the shock in his voice. Pitso is the policeman, Khensani’s man, he’s been to Mbongolwane quite a few times. I didn’t know him well, of course, and Sgalosenkosi would never really discuss his ex-wife with me. I know close to nothing about the relationship he had with that woman. I’m not concerned to, if I am being honest. “Khensani’s Pitso?” Chris slurs, he doesn’t sound at all affected. “I thought he was still missing, now he’s dead. How does a grown man go missing and die?” “Questions only the dead man himself can answer,” Sbani says. “Eish, Khensani’s going to be devastated. Has she been informed? I’m assuming yes if you know this. I’ll have to call her as well, I don’t even know what I’ll say. Her life is a tragedy lately, it feels like there’s no room for happiness.” “Tell me about it!” Siyabonga looks at Chris. “I

don’t like the woman but I have to admit I feel sorry for her.” Chris nods his head. “Maybe she needs to go with you to church, Thatego, and bath in the holy blood of Jesus.”

Siyabonga and Temasiko erupt in laughter. I purse my lips, partly amused.

If Chris was trying to be serious there then he's failed dismally, the delivery just... I don't laugh because although I'm no Christian, I believe in God.

"Idiot!" Thatego hisses, folding his arms on top of the ones that are already on his body. "I pray for everyone of you when I'm at church. It's because of my

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prayers that we're all happy, and with the men we love... this is what I believe. God listens to my prayers, and I'll pray for Khensani too." "Include me in your prayers!" Tema looks at him, pleading...it seems playful. "I need exclusive dick!" "Not possible." Sbanisezwe looks at her, his eyes are alight with mischievousness. "Thateho, take care of yourself. I have to leave now, don't

get hurt, things happen and

—"I should stay safe for you. Promise! Do the same, and come back home in one

piec

e. I love you in a place where there's no space or time." Sbanisezwe smiles wide, childishly, and bright. He

acknowledges Thatego's plea with a salute, pulling on the younger's hand to drag him toward the exit

in the kitchen that leads to the garage. Its overwhelming to be around people who love each other like they do, I find myself feeling bitter at Sqaalosenkosi,

for everything that he couldn't give me. Thatego comes back a second later. He's holding a packet of Maynard's sweets in his hands. "Niks mapha!" his voice is sweet, he looks in love. "Tell me now if you're sure about me not helping out. I don't mind sitting on the couch and watching TV." "Like hell you will!"

Siyabonga snorts. "Get your fat ass here and help me." "Sooo..." music is playing,

Nigerian music. Wizkid. Thatego loves him so much.

"Tema..." "That's my name," the loudspeaker looks at Chris, who had called her name, "need help with anything?" "Thatego's already told me that you're into fashion and beauty. Sphehlehle's the same, she's into designing clothes and she can sew. You're into modeling as well, right?" "It doesn't have—"

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“You are,” a dreamy sigh, “my husband helped me kickstart my modeling career. I was only 18 years old, and he was 20... he took MaKhathide’s money,

and was

grounded because of this. I’d also lose my marbles if my son spent

R10

000 on... whatever. But my husband didn’t care. He’s always been so

supportive. I love him so much, you know that? Find a man who supports your

dreams and isn’t intimidated by your success. I love my man!” Lord, if I hear one more sappy tune about Chris loving Nqobizitha... “That’s nice.” Chris collapses on the stool at the breakfast bar, and nods absently. “It is. I love him.” A palm against his cheek, he sighs. “I am working on a fa

shion magazine, you know like how we have Vogue and the likes. I need interns, and Sphesihle has already agreed. Thatego said I should bring you on board as

well. You will be paid, of course, but not that much since we’re starting out.”

My stomach drops.

He's offering Ms. Loud Speaker a job? I would have to deal with this woman every day for hours on end? Worse, she'll be an intern like me, and what if

everything we do turns into a competition? I admit she knows about fashion, and looks beautiful right now

, but it doesn't mean she has to work in the damn industry... for Chris of all people. "Yes, please!" the loudspeaker says. "I want it. I don't even care if I don't get

paid for it, as long as I get to do this and gain experience.

Fashion magazine? What would

we be doing? Do you speak with designers? Models? Yho, I'm so excited!" I don't feel the same way. Tema annoys me to the core.

"Yeah. It's the fashion industry, you deal with people who're in the industry,

and you gain contacts that way. Obviously, we will be speaking with designers

and the likes..." Suddenly the job isn't so appealing. Ms. Loud Speaker is taking the fun out of

it. I continue making the salads silently, occasionally stealing glares at Chris for being such a traitor. I thought he liked me. This isn't even about that, I just

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don't like Tema enough to work with her, and it's going to be hard because this is the same woman whose presence I couldn't stand every time I visited

Sqalosenkosi at work.

We're having lunch outside, enjoying the sun, and watching the birds gather at a spot not far from the house. Tema has been talking nonstop about the job, and how she came to Johannesburg to make money. Siyabonga keeps cutting his eyes at her, judging her from top to bottom.

"You need to focus on getting your matric. Then you can think about making money, it's not just going to come to you. Education—" "Isn't for everyone." I don't think I imagine the attitude in her voice. "This is

what I am doing already, it just seems like you have a problem with me. So

what if I'm into money? Show me a person who isn't." "But you don't have it," I speak up with a raised brow, "even now, you're looking expensive but we know where the money comes from." "Where?" her eyes are challenging. "You know." I won't play into her childish games. "Girls like you are common, the ones who like men to take care of them." "Hey!" Thatego speaks up, looking between the three of us. "What's wrong kanti? It seems people are fighting unknown battles, let's not do this now

. We

all need money, I don't see why we're arguing about it." "I just find it distasteful for women to use men for money. It's happened

before, and God forbid it happen again because some men are too kind for their own good."

He knows, Siyabonga knows.

They're getting into it with Tema, a debate sparked about money. I watch the

chaos with a little grin on my face, because this gold-

digger deserves it. I don't know what Sgalosenkosi sees in her, I don't understand the—

A loud clap rings in my ear.

410

“Temasiko, no!” Thatego is the one screaming.

How did it turn violent so quickly? So what if Siyabonga suggested that the gold-

digger looks the way she does because of someone’s money? That is the truth, isn’t? She wouldn’t

even be here if it weren’t for Squalosenkosi. And it’s clear to see that it’s all about the money with her, she doesn’t try to hide it with how flashy she looks.

“If you ever call me a bitch again—” “That’s what you are, and I see right through you. Wha

t are you even doing

here, being disrespectful? Do you think we’re stupid? That we don’t know that all this money on you belongs to Sphesihle’s

boyfriend?” “Siyabonga!” Chris stands, to hold his best friend back. “Stop this madness. Temasiko isn’t dating

Sqalosenkosi, so what if she looks expensive? She has a job —”

Chris cuts himself, just as I sense a presence behind me

—

the familiar cologne.

Nausea grips me by the throat suddenly, I can’t bring myself to look behind

me. What is he doing here, and how

long has he been...

“Sqalosenkosi? You didn’t get my message? I was going to take an Uber back to the hotel so you should’ve just continued with your meeting.” “What did I say? What did I say?” Siyabonga

bellows, throwing his hands up in

clear frustration. Silence.

Temasiko’s expression says it all. “I can’t do this!” she shouts quietly, and sits

down

—
unperturbed, sipping on another bottle of Brutal Fruit.

“Sphesihle...”

Our eyes meet, and I feel scorching anger rising in my throat.
Just like

Temasiko, everything is written in his eyes as well. Did he...
move on? Why so simply? So quickly. I thought... I don't know.
But pain is pressing down on my

411

chest, Sbanisezwe should've warned me, this is not something I was ready for.

“Sqalosenkosi...” “I think we need to give them privacy.”
Thatego announces.

Chris is already on his feet, stumbling away. Siyabonga is
defiant, he only takes orders from Nhlakanipho.

“Ngane...” “What have you done, Sqalosenkosi?”

A long look stays on me, knocking the wind out of my sails
before I am spared, and it's turned to Temasiko. Is that hurt on
her face? So much for pretending to be tough. She seems to
snap out of it as Sqalosenkosi drags Siyabonga by the arm, a

distant away from us, underneath the large, green trees.

He gets into

the smaller man's space, seems to be chiding

him quietly.

Of course they appear close, he cares for Siyabonga, and though it's his sideprofile that's showing, you can feel the deep bond between the two. It forces me to look away around the same time that Temasiko does, she's blinking

rapidly, a small frown on her face.

Aha... now she knows.

Pain slowly shows itself on her face, mirroring exactly how I feel.

412

Unrequited Desires : Thirty-three Sgalosenkosi

Grumbled complaints were being muttered by him as I dragged him away from that chaotic nonsense that was happening back there, I am largely

irritated by what I walked into, and that Siyabonga's wet mouth is still soustrained. He is looking up at me now, too close, chest heaving, gaze defiant...

breathtakingly beautiful. But not today, not today.

"Wenzani?" my hand tightens around his arm, I search his eyes –

for...something. Jealousy isn't there, I shouldn't have expected to find it in the

first place

–

his world begins and ends with Nhlakanipho

–

but I had to make

sure. "Ufuna isbhaxu?"

His laughter is dragon-fire, the steam chimes out of his nostrils and taints the

tips of his ears with red, all of him trembling. "I'm not scared of you, Sqalosenkosi..."

My brow raises in question.

“Vele!” he bares his teeth, shaking his head. “How much did you hear and why is it my fault? I am just looking out for you!” “Looking out for me?” his words twist my lips into an angered smile, making my body tense. “Did I ask you to do that? Why must you

always have such a

wet mouth, Siyabonga!? Ugenaphi wena ezindabeni zami?” “She is using you!” comes his emotional cry, body flushing in red. “This has happened before with Khensani, hasn’t it? You married that girl, and all she

did was use you while b

ouncing on another guy’s dick. You were lonely for

years, Sqalosenkosi, trapped in some loveless marriage

—

and now you’re going to make the same mistake again. Only this one is worse, she doesn’t

even have an education

—” “Ibambe lapho, ngizombiza akuphinde.” “I’m not scared of that little tramp!”

413

“Kwenzenjani, Ngane?” I pull him in close, searching his eyes again –

ininitely golden brown under the sunlight. My heart jumps to my throat, they still have

the power to beguile me...just not like before. This is Siyabonga, and not

Sphehile. He is not warmth or home or security. It's just Siyabonga, with a wet

mouth. “You know I'm always here for you, right? No one will ever steal me away from you. I love you, so much, as your big brother.” He wiggles his shoulders in frustration. “I don't want people to

use you,

Sqalosenkosi. You're too kind for your own good, and I don't know why you always see the good in people when they've hurt you before.”

Is he talking about himself? Falling in love with him was unintentional, never approaching him was intention

al, and confessing couldn't be helped. It's not his fault that he never

reciprocated, that all of it was unrequited love

—

the worst thing that can happen to you is to fall in love with someone who does not feel the same way. That, unrequited love, is the worst thing in the world. Siyabonga has touched me

—

numerous times, without ever touching me.

“And what makes you think Temasiko is using me?” “She’s flashy with your money.” “How?” I cock an inquisitive brow. “Look at her!” he peers beside me, past me, to where the others are. “Look at how expensive she looks with your money! She didn’t even bother to hide it, and was so showy, in front of the woman you’ve impregnated with four

babies! The same Sphesihle you du

mped because she wasn’t good enough, right?” I need time to process every bit of information, I don’t want to say something wrong, and Siyabonga has said a mouthful. It’s strange that he thinks Temasiko

looks flashy when he's wearing a Rolex watch that I know Nhlakaniphobought him. Perhaps his education makes him the exception? It grants him the privilege to be showy because at least he spent 7+ years in school, training to

414

be a doctor. Anyone else cannot show off about their luxury, because they

don't ha

ve the education to back it up.

"Give me a minute, please." His eyes are on me expectantly, I need time to

break down his words, to reply correctly. He spoke about Temasiko beingshowy in front of the woman I have impregnated with four babies. Thatmeans

... my first response is to backtrack a step, only to freeze a second later

as realization slowly dawns on me.

My head doesn't snap behind me fast enough. Sphehlehle sits on the pool

lounge chair, looking anywhere but this direction, and even with the distance,

I still find her... entrancing, a pull I don't have with Siyabonga nor Temasikoforged. She's still pregnant, according to Siyabonga, with not one but four of

my babies. Four babies. How is that possible? My jaw goes slack, and I am fixed on the sight of her. Nothing about her looks out of the ordinary, I came in here and was smacked across the cheek by her presence, and I was going to question her after this,

but... she's still pregnant! Instinct begs me to go over to her, and... go on my

knees and thank her. Instinct begs me to go over, and lift her in my arms, and

thank her. Instinct begs me to go over, and kiss her... in thanks.

My heart is exploding with something overwhelming, something intense that

very much feels like love... but I don't want to b

e to hopeful. Our last

encounter wasn't the best, she had wanted to kill my child... my children. "You don't deserve her." Quietly, behind me. I don't want to shift my attention away from Sphesihle, but I am compelled to,

as hazel eyes regard me with judging flames that lick at my skin.

"Angizwanga?" "I wish she finds someone else, and marries them. Let her build a family with

someone who will appreciate her, not some scum

—"

415

"Watch your mouth, Siyabonga!" I hiss quietly, clasp his arm once more. "D

o you need me to remind you of your place? Respect me, and use your

words kindly. Otherwise, I won't hesitate to teach you if you need a lesson." Another wiggle of the shoulders. "It's true, and you know it! Why did you bring

her here if you were just goi

ng to find someone else? That, that... she loves money! I don't care that she does but to do it in front of the girl you

impregnated and dumped? How is that fair to Sphesihle? What do you see in

this girl, ugh!"In many ways, she's like him... to an extent.

Unfiltered. Stubborn. She needs to

be cared for the same way that Siyabonga had to be cared for.

Maybe that's

what drew me to her in the first place. The same way that Siyabonga was

visible in Sphesihle. But she's her own person, beautiful and intelligent,

and funny and loud. I love every little thing about her, she is everything Sphesihle is not. Just as I love every little thing about Sphesihle, she is everything Temasiko is not. Different, both of them.

"None of your business." I grip Siyabonga's shoulders, forcing eye contact. "Listen to me carefully because I do not want to repeat myself. What I do with

my money is none of your business. Who I spend it on, is none of your business. My relationships are not to be the topic of your discussion. Mind your own business, focus on your marriage, for your sanity. I am a grown man,

do not treat me like a child, I don't need your protection." He's still so angry, doesn't reply.

I put my arms around him in a hug

. "I appreciate you looking out for me, Ngane. But I never tell you about my personal life for a reason, you're too

emotional and your mouth is still so untrained. You know nothing about the

kind of relationship I had with Khensani for a reason." "You were in love with me."

I choke on my saliva at his bluntness, pulling back to offer him a small smile.

"Thankfully, I am no longer." I hadn't realized, but it's true, and I hadn't

stopped to notice how breathing is easier these days, how I am doing justth

at... in his presence. "But you will always be my baby brother, not

Nqobizitha or Sbanisezwe, and I am always here for you. Just don't budge into my affairs, I really don't want to find myself correcting you physically."

Another wiggle of the shoulders, his

eyes water, a frustrated exhale. "But I like

Sphesihle better for you. She truly loves you, and we all know her, we grew up

in the same village. I wouldn't have to worry about you being taken care of, because look at her, Sqaalosenkosi... look at her."

I am. My hypnotic state is broken by a flash of black in my vision. Of course. Nhlakanipho is here, in usual black that blends in his skin, bowing to the others, as Chris drunkenly points to our direction. Our gazes clash with

Siyabonga's husband, a second

, before he flashes the man in my company an irritated look. He removes his tie as he gets closer, and rolls it in his hand. A

subtle nod is what he gives me, before he's focusing on Siyabonga. "Kneel." I look between the two, Siyabonga defiant.

"Baby, I

was just

—”“Kneel now.” Silence. There’s a tension between the two, before Siyabonga is going on his knees, and speeding them apart

—

hands behind his head.

“Open up.” Immediately he does this, the rolled tie is shoved inside his mouth.

Nhlakanipho

turns his attention to me. “Chris drunk

-dialled me, I was on my

way back with Nqobizitha and Sbanisezwe. Asibonge, Ndoda, I’ll take it from here.” I want to ask if Siyabonga is okay with all this, but clearly he is if he’s kneeling

on the ground with a tie stuffed inside his mouth of his own freewill. They have a weird kinky relationship going on where Siyabonga is collared, and is

Nhlakanipho’s submissive. The weird BDSM crap they’re into is all consensual.

Nodding my head, I leave them there, and head back to the others.

Chris is sitting on Nqobizitha's lap, face buried in his neck, with my younger brother's arms protectively surrounding him. They look lost in their own world, blind to everything else around them. "Bafo," I greet, only to have my attention stolen by Sphehile who gets up, headed back inside the house.

417

Temasiko is not with them as well. I make my way inside, the only voices I find in the kitchen belong to Thatego and Sbanisezwe, the former sitting on the breakfast bar with his arms loosely

wrapped around my photocopy's "Thatego—" "She left a while ago," he seems to read my mind, looking at me briefly, "she took an Uber. I told her to wait for you but she didn't want to."

Acknowledging his words with a repeated scrub of the face, I let my eyes

wander to my troublesome brother. "Wena, awusasho ukuthi unoSphehile

emzini wakho? Ukhohlake

le kodwa.” “Kanti lutho, munt’ omdala. Ngisiza wena mina.” “Usiza mina amasimba!” I hiss quietly, throwing him a glare that doesn’t affect him. “What the fuck do you think you’re doing?” “Language.” He uses my favourite word against me, grinning lazily. “Sphehile

is in her room, third door upstairs. Now as you can see, I was busy with...

soulmate. Fiancé. Let me defile him before he marries a certain bastard in less

than two weeks.” He’s damn right about him being a bastard. “Fuck you!” I snap. “Correction, I fuck Thateho.” “Shut up!” the other man laughs

heartily, as he peers over his shoulder

—

all

warmth and happiness. His cheeks are full and red. “Just come out with the

truth, please. Sort this out because I love both these women, and whether you

think it’s the truth or not, part of Sphehile’s unnecessary hate toward

Temasiko is because she's in love with you. And maybe she doesn't know that you're already fucking her, but she can sense it. We know these things." "Don't turn into another Siyabonga, Morake."

418

"Ngcobo. Thatego Ngcobo." He corrects me firmly, a little smile pulling at his lips. "I've never been a Morake."

Of course, the issues with his father.

I nod my head, accepting the correction because he is family, and clearly he's

sure about this. Leaving them in the kitchen, my footsteps feel heavy as I take

the stairs, headed to Sphesihle's room. A strange nausea climbs to my throat

outside the door, it makes my belly churn uncomfortably. I knock on her door

—
once, twice. It doesn't open for some good seconds, and my clenched hand

prepares to rap on the door again, but it opens before I can do it. Hazel eyes widen, hauntingly similar to the angry ones I encountered just a

few minutes ago but not quite. "Sphesihle, please..." I plead as she attempts to close the door in my face. "MaGcwensa—" "Go away!" she snaps. "I will, I promise." My foot is what keeps the door from closing. "Asikhulumisane, Gcwenso, kancane nje."

A lip bite, the conflict is clear on her face

—
oval features contorted in a grimace that hints at rage and hurt. It twists my stomach in uncomfortable

knots, shame crashing down on me suddenly, I don't want to see her sad. She

should always be happy, and healthy, and protected.

"I don't want to see you. I want nothing to do with you."

The words sting, but I cannot blame her.

“You look so beautiful.” The words are unintentional, she’s so pretty. Skirts

and dresses are always her thi

ng, doesn’t matter the length or shape, she makes them what they are. “May I come in please?”

Her response is a frown, but the door slowly opens. The smell of fabric softener teases my nostrils immediately

—

bright, sunny. It is sudden, and feels me with longing, as my body fights to keep the tension it

once held... but it’s nearly impossible. Everything about this room smells

419

heavenly, like home, and the orderly cleanliness brings me to my knees in

weakness. I have missed her, it doesn’t make much sense b

ecause Temasiko

makes me happy, I may even...

Life has been miserable without Sphehleh. Home is no longer the same, her

absence is felt, not just by me but my daughter as well. In her own way, she's

brought me closer to my daughter, and there was a sense of family structure

that we didn't have before she arrived. I... miss her. It's just... she makes me

nervous sometimes, overwhelms me with her love that I find myself desperately aching for more of it, while simultaneously wanting to shun it. But I miss her.

"Talk." "May I sit down first?"

She shrugs her shoulders, comes to sit beside me on the bed. A bit

uncomfortable for two reasons. One : she's too close. Two : I don't like to sit on beds, but she has no chairs, I don't know why.

Her hands are on her lap, she smells good, I want to bury myself inside her

and bask in her warmth and comfort... if only for a little while. Inhaling

sharply, I scrub my face again, and properly gaze at her beautiful face. She

won't meet my eyes, staring at her lap. "You're still pregnant," I state.

A pregnant

pause, her hands clench into fists, she nods her head.

"Yes." "Thank you." "I wasn't doing it for you!" there's attitude in her voice, hazel eyes narrowing. "Don't you dare think this about you. It isn't." "Whatever your reasons were, thank you for not killing our children."

The anguished expression she pays me back with guts me, clearly she's suffering, and it's my fault. My hand extends to touch her, but her body jerks

away before I can do it, she shakes her head

—

all pinched face and teary-eyed.

"Don't touch me. You lost that right when you—"

“When I what? You left me, Sphesihle.” “And you didn’t even—fight!” her voice cracks, she exhales heavily. “I am pregnant with your baby and I was—scared, because I didn’t plan on getting pregnant now, and I wanted to wait so that I could make my siblings proud, but it happened and you just left me. I would be home right now, trying to make ends meet while you continued with your life... and -and your new girlfriend.” I pause to process her words, I don’t want to say something wrong.

“I am sorry.” This feels like a good place to start, the most important. “Forgive me for hurting you, please. It wasn’t my intention, I don’t like to see you upset. All I truly want for you is your happiness.”

She snuffles, shaking her head.

Anxiety curls around me, as my own hands clench into fists on my lap. “I wanted to go after you, Sphesihle, but I also didn’t

want to overwhelm or scare you. I respect your no's... and I heard them clearly in your actions. When I was calling

you, and you weren't answering." "Because I didn't want to talk to you, but you didn't have to stay away!"

My brows knit together in confusion. What does she mean exactly? Stay away but not really? My mother always said I was too boring in relationships, too

quick to let go, and never eager to fight... but, I've seen it with her just how bad fighting is. I've seen it with Samkelo, and how he wouldn't respect her no's. I've seen the pain inflicted, and how... my heart pounds against my chest.

It always does at the thought of that man, I vowed to never become him. If it

means letting go too soon, then... "I didn't know that, Sphehile." This is the honest truth. Had she told me to stay away but not really, then I would've –

somehow. "I don't really know how relationships work, for me no means no. I'm not used to begging and pleading.

Even now, I feel uncomfortable being in your space like this because it feels

like I've compelled you somehow."

421

"Then you have no business dating women." "I'll learn," I inform her quietly, "teach me everything I need to know, and I promise to pass with flying colours." A snort. "You need to learn everything with me, huh? It's not so simple like Siyabonga." My gaze snaps to her in... how did she know? "I know. My eyes are his eyes, maybe that's how you went through with sleeping with me. If I didn't have any slight feature that resembles him you wouldn't have gone with me. Tell me I'm lying." "Before, yes. Now, you're... you. You're you, and what we sha

re is far more

important to me than what I felt for Siyabonga. Believe me, please." The words feel inadequate, but I'm not sure if she will allow me to show her through my actions. "Just... teach me, please Sphesihle."

A nibble of the lip, she shakes her h

ead. "I'll think about it. Lucky you has the

best of both worlds, while I think about it, your other woman can teach you on

her side. You are sleeping with her, aren't you? I saw the expression on both your faces, she's enjoying your dick and your money."

Another pause, she must hate me for how many of them I take

—

but it's

important to process information, to never say something wrong, while navigating honesty in there as well.

"I was going to tell you, but your mother passed on, and then we found out

you were pregnant but you weren't happy and we broke up. I cheated on you, I am sorry, it... it happened at the wrong time, after I discovered some things. She... Temasiko... I couldn't face my daughter, I did want to come home to you but my daughter... so I went

to her and I

—

we slept together.”She doesn’t say anything, doesn’t move.“I am sorry for hurting you.”“All you keep doing is apologizing.”

422

“Because I messed up.”“Do you love her?”

My heart falters, body going into a mini panic state, as she finally, finally looks at me. Her eyes are piercing my soul, and I am weak in her presence. The urge

to touch her is strong, I desperately want to. “I... I, she’s an amazing woman

and she makes me

happy. I... I—don’t make me say it.”Aren’t my actions enough... for both of them? What’s this obsession with explicitly voicing out the words? Words don’t matter. Actions do.

She inhales sharply.

“You’re just—” a pause, her voice is cracking and croaky with emotion. “a little boy, Sgalosenkosi. You’re just a little boy, and you think you’re okay but you’re

fucked up in the head. Maybe more than Sbanisezwe, since you were so

focused on him and your mother that you've neglected yourself. And now you're—

her

e, and you're not doing a very good job in loving right." "That's not true," I deny, frowning.

How did we get here? I was supposed to apologize, and explain the situation of

Temasiko to her, maybe ask her to come back home because we're lost

without her. Then we were supposed to discuss my children.

"It's true, and you know it!" she snaps coldly. "I don't want anything to do with you... right now. What's her name, Temasiko? Go to her, take it out on her, I

am not going to be your rehabilitation centre. I tried and look where that got

me." "Sphehlehle—" "I will not abort, I promise. Just leave me alone." "Is this the part where you mean what you're saying but not really?"

She rolls her eyes, and the tears slip past. I'm already too close, wiping the

maway for her

—

like I would do with Ntwenhle. Don't cry, don't cry. My arms are tight around her, and her presence is greatly overwhelming.

'Please come back home' I want to plead, to force her. "You're such an idiot, and I hope our

boys are nothing like

you." I'm a safe bet... compared to my brothers. And boys... were having boys? My stomach flips anxiously. How did she know

this? Just how far along is she? I clear my throat, as she crawls onto my lap, my

nose buried inside her neck. "Boys?" "Three of them, your brother said, and one girl. Identical twi

n boys, fraternal

girl and boy." "Sbanisezwe?" A nod. "He's a god now. He dreams."

Her tone is teasing, lighthearted. Laughter climbs to my throat, as she pinches my side. “Do you trust him?”

“I do.”

I want to enquire about the chances of her coming back home, but my tongue

is heavy, so I bask in the silence. She’s shifting, and dragging me with her in bed. My shoes are off, discomfort still there because I’m an uptight bastard who doesn’t like to sleep in bed with formal clothing on, but her head

is on my chest. My fingers graze her silken arm, making a detour to her breast

—

to caress softly

—

before finding her belly.

“Am I fucked up?” her words are a broken record in my mind. “You are.” “I’ll speak to my brother.” Nqobizitha is the psychologist here, he’ll know what to do. “And get help, I promise.”

Silence again.

424

It's completely dark in the room. My arm is numb, and Sphehile is breathing quietly against my chest, we must've fallen asleep. I gently pull away from her,

and grab my phone

on the side table to check the time. 07:45pm. Fuck!

That's nearly three hours of sleep. My thoughts go to Temasiko.

There's no message or missed call from her but... I know her. "Sphehile..." I wake her gently. She's missed dinner, it can't be good for the babies. Maybe she should come back home, and I'll take care of her. "Wake up, you need to eat."

She keeps up a protest for a few minutes before waking up, to follow me down

the stairs. There's TV noise, Thatego is watching the TV. He smiles as soon as

we

appear. “Sbanisezwe went to buy pizza for the pregnant missus. But we’re actually having Italian pasta with meatballs. I cooked!” “I have to leave.” Thatego nods his head, turning back to the TV. I grip Sphesihle’s arm. “Please take care of yourself. I’ll see you again tomorrow?” “No.” “No... yes?” is that what she means. “Hmm.”

I shake my head in disbelief, pulling her by the arm, to embrace her. She

doesn’t fight me, and buries her face in my chest. My hand squeezes her side, and then I let her go. “Take care of yourself, please.” Sbanisezwe’s car is driving in, as I am getting in my own car. He’s holding two

large pizza boxes and some Maynard

’s sweets on top of them. There’s a dangerous smile on his face. “Bafo,” his eyes are alight with mischief, “pass

this message on to your other woman. I want her out of my hotel room, Thateho and I will need it soon, but she can move into the house in Hyde Park.

I’ve evicted those fuckers who were staying there.”

He doesn't give me the opportunity to reply, disappearing inside the house. A

snort escapes me, as I get into my car and drive off.

My thoughts are on

Temasiko now, and how I should've called, or sent a message, or... something.

She pretends to not care about a lot of things, but I know she does. Siyabongameessed up, when he said all those things, and my silence has probably

worsened things. Maybe she thinks I took his side. Maybe she thinks she's allalone again. "Fuck!" the word is a quiet whisper.

The night-guard prevents me from going to her room, telling me that she leftnot too long ago, dressed in a short skirt and bra. She was going out. Anger

lances through me at the revelation, and I try her cell but she's not answering,

my last resort is Thatego, they seem to have a good relationship. He lists all

the places they go to, and drops the call with a, "Good luck!" I suppress a snort, my irritation won't be misdirected. It takes driving to three different clubs for me to find her in one. It's in

Rosebank. An LGBTQ friendly club. The only reason I find her is because she has all the attention on her, dancing on top of a table with another guy, twerking on him actually. She appears lost and happy. My eyes remain on her, and maybe my gaze is burning her because our eyes clash just seconds later. Through the red strobe lights, her displeasure appears.

She only jumps off the table when the song ends. And then she's walking away.

Fuck. Fuck!

"Temasiko!" I shout, rushing after her. "Hey. Hey!" "Don't yell at me, you're not my father!" her snap is slurred. Is she drunk? "Just leave me alone. I told you we're not dating, didn't I? So I can go out and have fun with my friends." Definitely drunk. She doesn't like to make friends. "Let's talk, please."

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A huff. "What will it change? We're not dating, you have a girlfriend and family. I don't care. All I want is your money. Just give me your money. I don't want your heart, keep it, just don't take mine as well. I—I can't love you."

My chest tight

tens. "I know." "Then why are you following me? What do you want!" "You."

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Unrequited Desires : Thirty-four Sgalosenkosi

She hasn't slept for more than three hours when the mattress shifts as her weight lifts off the bed, it's still so dark outside but the door to the bathroom has opened and... she's gagging uncontrollably. I find her on her knees,

hugging the toilet bowl as if

she's just made a new best friend. Our eyes meet

briefly, then she goes back to ejecting all the alcohol in her system. Eons later, she flushes the toilet and rests her head on the toilet seat,

breathing deeply and raggedly. "Water?" comes my question,

as I head over to the sink, opening the upper cabinet to retrieve a glass that I rinse and fill with

water. "Here."

A knuckle-

clenching hold on the toilet seat, it feels like she's convincing herself to step away from her place of comfort, she exhales loudly, and steps away, accepting the cup from me with trembling hands. Three, four gulps and a rinse later, she sets the cup beside her, gripping her belly, the back of her head smacking the wall. Deep, slow breaths... her eyes snap open and meet mine. "I'm pregnant," her words are a little incoherent, there's a bitter grin on her face, "it's your babies. Six of them! What's in your sperm? Are you ready for ten babies? I know you're probably ecstatic." "Temasiko—" "But I won't raise them with you. I don't like you very much, and I don't want our babies to know you." She's never really been the best comedian, her jokes are terrible, this one is worse because she's not laughing at it. If I didn't know she couldn't

b

biologically get pregnant, perhaps my stupidity would've indulged her, but she's not pregnant... and her words are a dagger piercing my soul. "Tema—"

“I don’t even know how you knew the password, but now you’re inside my house, and I don’t know how to get

you out.” “I’m sorry.”

An eye roll, she stands to her feet, trudging to the sink to rinse her face. I

follow her, wrapping my arms around her when she’s done, with my nose

skimming inside her neck that smells like her favourite Dior cologne and sweat.

“What are you sorry for?” “Many things. The... rubbish Siyabonga put you through, I wasn’t there to

protect

—” “I don’t need your protection.” Hissed, quietly. “I know.” A nod of acknowledgment from me, “Ngiyakwazi lokho, but it still won’t stop me from

protecting or defending you when I feel it necessary.

Siyabonga was wrong, I hate that he spoke to you that way, I’m proud that you retaliated... maybe not the way I usually prefer, but that clap you gave him will

make him think twice before shitting on you

u next time.”

Our eyes meet on the mirror

—

hold. The electricity flows from me to her, and vice versa

—

natural, unforced. An

elegant connection that is effortless. ‘Hey, don’t look away!’ I want to command, but she’s turning in my arms less than a second later, glancing into my soul.

“Why did you leave?” “Are you—gay or bisexual?”

The questions come around the same time, and where my eyes widen as I choke on my own saliva, Temasiko looks perfectly calm and inquisitive. Still that look that is piercing the depths of my soul. What is she looking for?

“I don’t subscribe to labels, Tema

. But my preferences do not lean towards men,

I bed and prefer women.” “I don’t believe you.”

Okay... am I supposed to prove something to her? "Where is this question coming from?" "I—

saw you. The way you held and looked at that little shit that thought he

could get away with disrespecting me, I saw you and I can't explain what I saw but it was something, and your little girlfriend must've seen it too because she had this smug grin on her face that screamed 'see... see, you'll never be him!'

and this is

confusing, because I'd rather be the one thing I hate —

a bloody cockroach

—

than to be that perfect doctor with his stupid fat ass that's the size of Khloe Kardashian's! Maybe that's what makes him think he's better than me."

She is ranting, fired up, eyes glowing.

I've seen it when she tells me about her ex

-boyfriend Lwandle Kasana, and how she has this weird fixation with cockroaches, always wishing her enemies torture in the form of cockroaches one way or the other. But her words,

Ineeded time to take them in slowly, and my first instinct is to laugh at what

she has said. “Who the hell is Khloe Kardashian?” Her eyes meet mine, disbelieving. “Really?”

Yes, really. Who is she, and what is she famous for

—

a big behind?

“She’s a bad bitch who deserves better... like me.”

I feel like this is a shot at me somehow, the bullets in her eyes are all targeting me, wanting me dead. My grip loosens around her a fraction, as she bites her lower lip, hands pressing against my bare chest

—

warm. “You do dese

rve

better, the world actually. And you shouldn’t be apologetic for going after what you know you deserve, even when there’s loudspeakers all around you shouting that you’re too loud or flashy or ambitious.” “Are you calling your little boyfriend a loudspeaker?” she giggles, but its

humourless.

430

My response is to frown, I grip her face when she attempts to look away, my

mind back on the many things she said earlier. “Siyabonga... a boyfriend?” “I saw the way you were looking at him. And I saw the way you, you... touched him.” “How did I look at him? How did I touch him?” She sighs, tapping on my arm, I get the message and back off. She’s going back

to the bedroom, I follow her there, find her going through the closet, she pulls

out a jacket and puts it on. “I’m—hungry.” “Let me cook for you then,” I offer. My daughter ha

s grown to despise my food,

now that she’s had a taste of ‘real food’ from Sphehlehle, but I can cook, my mother taught me and Sbanisezwe, this is why we’re good at it. At Temasiko’s nod of approval, I drag her by her arm to the kitchen. “You didn’t answer

my

question,” I remind her, rinsing the pots with soap and water.

A tap against the breakfast bar, I can feel her burning gaze following my every

movement. “Like you’re in love with him, Sqalo!” a whispered shout. “You

were so close, and you were comfort

ing him when... that little cockroach was

so disrespectful, he called me a money-hungry bitch, and all you did was hug him for it. You looked at him like

—”“One of the most important people in my life because he is. We have a history,

I was there for him during his dark times

—

and I care deeply for him. Once

upon a time I felt deeply for him, it was unexpected... the feelings I had, because I’m not attracted to men, but I—don’t know how it happened, it just

did. Once upon a time I fell in love with someone w

ho couldn't love me back. Unrequited love, Tema, looking back...
I'm glad he didn't, because I wouldn't be right here with you,
like this." "02:00am, cooking for me in some hotel?" "With you
watching me like a hawk, hopefully knowing that you can
always

be vulnerable with me

—

and talk to me about anything in the world without feeling
inadequate or judged because I would never make you feel that
way on
purpose."

431

Our eyes meet, she drops her to glance at her phone, scrolling
and scrolling.

Then she's pla

ying music, the usual Chinese-Korean songs, this one is a little
depressing. "Jonghyun wrote this song, Lee Hi's

Breathe

, talking about helping

someone who's finding it hard to breathe, and how he'll carry them... like he didn't need to be carried himself." "Depressing." "Sometimes, it feels like you're my Jonghyun, always carrying me, telling me it's okay to run out of breath and that you're here always." "I am," I affirm, moving from behind the counter to get to her, "you don't have to doubt that. I am always here for you, through it all." A headshake, "You're dangerous because I don't feel alone with you. Not as lonely. Not as... inadequate, unremarkable. It's disgusting because you're a man, and —ugh!" Laughter falls on the tip of my tongue. "Ugh?" "Ugh!" she confirms, her hands on my waist. "Ugh, because I had written off your kind completely. After Lwandle, I was done, there was a pattern there with all the people who've hurt me... and most of the time it's men. I realized all those dreams of marrying a prince and having babies were stupid because your species are actually cockroaches, useless and good for nothing, but then you barge into

—”“There was a door, and I knocked.” She punches my arm.
“You see? I can’t even tell my story without being interrupted,
all you men are the same.” A breathless giggle. “You’re
everything

I daydreamed of as a little girl

—

ever kind and present and thoughtful and so very honest, but
you come

with all these complications. I don’t like that boy who’s the
apple of your eye very much. I can’t even settle for taking your
money in peace without being reminded that I am a gold-
digger. What else am

I supposed to dig for if your heart’s already been... c

aptured by someone

else?”

Perhaps she's gotten used to my bad tendency of not immediately replying to process information, because she's meeting my eyes squarely now, hands still resting on my waist. Is she... I know she's said it before, mostly during sex

but... "You're in love with me." "I wish I could give you babies, and wear a white dress, then we'd dance in the rain together

–

and nothing else would matter." "Isn't it impractical to dance around in the rain in a white dress?"

"Just as impractical as the possibility of giving you babies. But I'd do it still –

in

a heartbeat!" she starts to laugh –

uncontrollably.

"Hey..." "I'm getting ahead of myself, aren't I?" still the laughter. "The same way I was

when I was worried about your family and friends liking me. It shouldn't bother me, I don't know why it does. Even if they hate me, it's not like we're getting married or spending the rest of our lives together. I'm so pathetic, I don't know how I could allow this." "Allow what?" "I—I shouldn't have allowed myself to fall. Look at me now, throwing tantrums by dancing on tables."

I spare myself some seconds by going to check on the food, it's coming along great, just a few more minutes. Grabbing some plates, I set them on the table, and retrieve the juice as well. Late dinner is set, she helps me carry everything back inside the living room. The TV remains off, I set her on my lap once she's done eating.

My fingers touch whatever part of her body they can reach. "You're so

amazing, Temasiko, you have no idea. I wish you knew, and viewed yourself the way I see you. You drive me crazy, with your stubborn nature and how

you're so beautifully yourself. I... I don't think it's a crime to fall in love with me. I'm not perfect, but it's not a crime.

There's always worse things out there."

433

“Your friend marrying that cockroach Siyabonga.”

I choke on my saliva. She giggles, and nods to herself

—

pleased.

“He’s stubborn just like you, I think you might share quite a few things uncommon.” “I doubt it.” A thoughtful frown. “Maybe I’m loud and others can’t stand how I don’t compress myself to make them comfortable, but I don’t look down on

others. My stupid

father started his own business when he came here, I wasn’t starving, I went to a proper school in Nelspruit and never went without... but I didn’t look down on others because they had worse than me, even when life humbled me when I moved here.” “Then you’re both stubborn.” “I—this, who I am, is all that I have.” Her eyes are on me —

intent. “And I am

not going to shrink myself to make your family comfortable. If it means losing you

—
though I would like it very much if I didn't have to —

it will still be fine

with me. I will cry about it and move on.”“Fair enough. But you're not losing me, unless you reach a stage that makes you feel that you want to leave. My family have no expectations for you, Tema.

You're perfect the way you are.”“Good.”

Her

eyes are bright with sadness, she's smiling, arms folded around my shoulders. “So you're... in love with me.”“So I want to have your babies.”There's a teasing smile painting her full lips. I caress her cheek, shifting us so that she's beneath me, my hand is on her thigh

—

caressing. “Perhaps in another lifetime, you have the ability to, and we grow old together.”“Maybe Sphehile is the side there.”

434

I shake my head. “I—

feel for you deeply, Tema. You and I share a connection

that I don’t share with her... different. As it stands right now, you’re not a side in my eyes. You qualify to be a girlfriend just as much as she does. But you’d rather you didn’t have that so this

—

whatever it is

—

and I respect that. But I

almost don’t remember what life was like before you, to be honest, I’d rather I didn’t.” “Uyasishayashaya kodwa.” “Why?” I raise an eyebrow. “Why is so hard to believe that I can feel so much

for two different without there being a negative connotation to it? I love my daughter, Sphehile is carrying four of my babies, I love them already although

I haven’t met them yet. It certainly hasn’t erased that fact that I love my

daughter so much. Love is limitless until it comes to romantic relationships? Why? Why can you have multiple friends and love them but

—“You don’t go around shoving your dick down your friends.” “So the issue is sex?” “No.” She shakes her head. “Not for me. I got your dick knowing it already belonged to someone else. As long as you’re honest with me, that’s all I want.” “Manje lento yokushayashaya ibuyaphi?” “You can’t blame me, Sqalosenkosi, I was raised to believe

that love is

monogamous. That everything you’re looking for you’ll find in this one partner, and that after you’ve met this one person, you’ll get married to them and have babies and live happily ever after.” “Is there such a thing –

happily ever after?

“I feel happy with you.”

She makes me happy too. Content. On fire. Invincible. Untouchable. Perfectly

calm. Crazy. So very crazy. “But do you believe in happily ever after?” “I’m not a child.”

Laughter tickles me. “Living your life always expecting the worst is a

miserable way to live, I don’t like that. But you should always leave room for disappointment... lately, I don’t believe in the ‘this one person’ theory. It’s impossible to cater to a person’s every need –

and I know I don’t fulfill you in

e

very way.” “Only because I don’t have your dick all to myself,” she quips –

all bright eyes

and pure grin. “And maybe your heart. If I could want it then I would, because it’s the kind of heart I fuck with.”

“You have it, it’s yours.” “Sphehle—” “Isn’t up for discussion. This isn’t about her, but us, and you want my heart...take it. Don’t overthink this, Tema.” A sigh. “I can’t believe I fell in love with a man who doesn’t know who the Kardashians are, you’re so out of touch it pains me.”

I pinch her thigh, pressing my lips to hers in a domineering kiss

—

and breathe

all I feel for her into her soul. ‘Don’t dou

bt me, this

—

us.’ The words are silent on her seductive lips. ‘It’s love isn’t?’ “Deal with it. I... am in love with a psychopathic woman who dances on tables and has an eager hand. I fear for my life as it is.” “Did you just—”

I shut her up with a kiss, feeling sunny lips shine against mine.

Temasiko

My back hurts. No, I didn’t have sex. Sgalosenkosi wouldn’t allow it because I wasn’t sober enough apparently, which is funny because we had quite the talk

last night and I was coherent enough to process his every word. He still

wouldn’t allow it, and negotiated to sleep on top of me instead, so this is why

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my back is sore. He left late this morning, after we had breakfast, to see his

daughter who spent the night at Nqobizitha's. I didn't mind because Liyana's his daughter, I don't want to compete with a little girl, she deserves to have her father present in her life

—

and enjoy him.

The same way I did mine, until he became a fucker. But I won't think about

him, I spoke about him enough in my session with Dr. Mabasa just an hour ago. She must have a crush on him, with the way she likes to bring him up

—

and it's so annoying, I always want to pull my hair out. My back isn't the only thing that hurts, my feet do as well. I went and spoiled

myself wi

th Squalosenkosi's money, because I am not going to let the likes of

Siyabonga and that little wimp Sphehile tell me what to do with my man-in-

progress's money. Yeah, he's my man

-in-progress, not yet mine but mine. I feel infinitely better, and my stomach

is just as content, now I'm just waiting for

him to come back to he can guide me on this driving thing.

He said he hasn't touched a steering wheel in years, but he would do it for me.

I feel like a special little bitch. This is what I meant when I said he had the

heart that I like to fuck with. I meant that he's understanding about things, like me quitting my job without serving any notice, because I'd much rather work

for Chris and take a step forward into bettering my life and making my dreams a reality. We spoke again this morning with Chris, and I am starting next week.

It's already Thursday, it feels like this week is moving at a snail's pace. What I bought with Squalosenkosi's money are new clothes for my new job. I

bought heels that I struggle to walk in. I did my hair and nails, I wanted to try

out massage parlours but next time. I had a solo date in Eastgate. I've brought back with me Squalosenkosi's takeaway. I'm a very thoughtful girlfriend

-in-progress. I bought him a new tie as well. Because I

love him... and he loves me

too. He told me, I heard him. I should be happy. I am happy. Ecstatic actually. But it's scary to think about as

well, I don't want to think as per his advice but I don't know where we go from here. He has Sphesihle as well, and he speaks like he's against monogamy. As if

he wants both

of us. He does. We're different, he said, and he's drawn to us for

different reasons. He also told me to trust and focus on what he feels for me, and to not let Sphesihle force doubts. Two truths can exist at the same time.

437

I am trying to focus on my truth, the one I share with him.

I'm on my second wine glass when the door opens, and he walks in. He's not alone, there's... Jesus, is his gaze always so dark? I don't like how he intimidates me... the little bitch is behind him. "MaDlamini..." Sgalosenkosi

weak

ens my knees with this. "Nice hair... and nails. Make sure they don't snatch this when you're going out, I've heard stories." "This is a weave, not a wig." I tell him, smiling at his stupidity.

His response is to pull me in for a kiss. I melt. We only stop because the intimidating one is clearing his throat. His little twatis on his knees, hands bound his back, looking up at me with anger in his eyes.

Okay... what's going on? Nhlakanipho gives me a blank gaze. "Siyabonga has something he'd like to say to

you.” My attention shifts to the kneeling man, he doesn’t look happy, exhaling silently. “I—am sorry. Yesterday, I shouldn’t have said all those things to you.” He doesn’t look very apologetic, I want to cackle at the sight of him like this.

Who knew he had this side to him? Why did they tie him up and why is there a dog-collar on his throat? This is weird as hell.

“Thank you.” I direct this to Nhlakanipho. “I appreciate your efforts to mend the situation. On my side, I refuse his apology, he doesn’t

mean it

—

and though

I don’t care much for his unneeded opinions of me, I still don’t want him to think he can get away with treating me like shit. So I don’t accept his apology. I’d be happy if we stayed away from each other.” “Fair enough.” His man doesn’t look mad at all.

“That’s all he came here to do, he’s heard and he won’t be bothering you.” Good... I nod my head.

Nhlakanipho crouches in front of him, and hooks something onto the collar

—

leash.

438

WTF?

“Come, Pet.” Cold.

Siyabonga is on

all fours, being pulled out of the room by the leash, and... hell

no! Weird. Sgalosenkosi is frowning, appearing just as displeased, for a second

I wonder if... he’s not in love with him, he said. He never lies. I believe him. “What was that?”

“They’re kinky.”

I shake my head, there’s no way in hell I’d allow myself to be dragged around by a leash like an animal. Never ever.

“Wow!” “Wow indeed,” my hand is tugged, I perch myself on his lap, “I have news. You’re moving out next week. Sbanisezwe wants to utilize the suite, but he’s found you another residence

in his Hyde Park house.”“Okay.”“You’re not upset? This is an inconvenience.”It’s his brother’s hotel suite, I enjoyed it, and I know I will enjoy Hyde Park as

well. This is why I shake my head. M

y lips touch his jaw. “No. It was nice here.I’m sure I’ll enjoy Hyde Park. I’ve spent your money again, and I got you something nice.”His reply is to bury his face in my belly.

“You’re attending Thatego’s bachelorparty on Saturday,”

non-negotiable, his voice.

“Okay.”“I’ve sent you money, buy him and yourself something nice.”

This is the part where I should say no, right?Hell no.

“I won’t disappoint you.”

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He chuckles, pressing a kiss to my belly. “Its time for your lessons.”“Thank you,” I say. For everything.

Unrequited Desires : Thirty-five Sphesihle

He called to say he wants to spend the day together

—

as friends, I had to remind him because I meant what I said about not wanting to be his rehabilitation centre, it feels like part of why I am here is because I cared too

much, when he had all those dreams and I'd tell him everything would be fine.

All those nights we spent in the patio, his face buried in my boobs, with his arms around me. No more, MaSibusisiwe will have to kill me before I allow it to happen again. But we can still hangout, and Sbanisezwe spoke to me, he told me not to deny his brothers access to the babies because they need to bond. He said the babies needed to feel loved and cared for before they can even be delivered, and that I should fight with Sgalosenkosi and cause a disconnect between us. I have decided to take his advice, I want my babies to experience the love my father extended to me and my siblings, possibly one that's better because

Sgalosenkosi is not a violent man.

This is why I am here, with him, spending time together because it's important

do this bonding thing, and for the babies to feel warmth and security and love

before they arrive. He's going to be my best friend, for the sake of our unborn children.

Our gazes clash on the mirror for the nth time, but he doesn't have the

manners to pretend that he was looking elsewhere or on his phone. He has it with him, I heard it ringing, but he took it out to place on silent I assume, before he went back to the rude staring.

"Your hands are beautiful, this colour always suits your nails." I almost miss Ngozi's pleasing compliment, and reluctantly divert all the attention to her, she's the amazing nail technician who makes sure my nails

are always so gorgeous. Ever kindhearted and talkative, I met her through

Thatego. "Thank you," I reply politely, the Igbo lessons she gives me during these sessions forgotten, the Nigerian language isn't as easy as she makes it out to be. "It's all because

of you.”

441

“Mcheew!” an exaggerated curl of her upper lip, she waves me off and peers

beside me, to the man sitting on one of the chairs

—

his gaze burning the back

of my head. “Your man is very fine ooo.” “He’s not—” “My friend, please.” She giggles

loudly, giving me a look that makes me

uncomfortable. “Unless he’s gay, no man will willingly come to hair salon for a woman he doesn’t love. Just to sit here and stare at you all day? It’s been three

hours

—

and he hasn’t moved an inch.” “That’s a lie, h

e did move once.

“The only time he moved was to get you food and now he’s back here again, sitting through the torture of loud women yapping away, because he’s here for you.” He had to do that because he cares for the babies. This is why he’s always reminding me to please eat and drink water. Two mornings in a row now, his messages greet me

–

‘take care of yourself’, ‘have you eaten?’, ‘should I bring food over?’ –

and I don’t

want to be affected by the way he seems to care, this is who he is naturally but still, it gets... hard.

Our eyes are connecting on the mirror again, and he really is intent on not looking away, on being caught staring

–

unapologetically. My cheeks grow

warm, I’m the one who looks away again, to focus on Ngozi’s annoyingly prying observation... what is she searching for? “He’s

always been like this,” I tell her. She doesn’t believe me, it doesn’t matter because we’re done! The French manicure is always my go-to, sometimes just a standard manicure, nothing fancy. My head is throbbing though, these women pull my hair too hard and I don’t think Grandpa will help remedy this headache I have. Is it even safe to drink when I am pregnant? I’m not sure, but I know

if I ask Sqalosenkosi, he’ll most likely know... the ex-wife gave him twin daughters after all.

“Waze wamuhle, Nkosazane.” He’s already on his feet, pulling me to him with

an arm at the small of my back

—

gentle but firm.

I blink my eyes, nibbling on my lower lip absently. Today, I decided to take a break from twisted braids and went with straight-back instead, its pushed my forehead to the forefront. "Ngyabonga." "And this thing doesn't hurt?" there's a frown knitting his brows, I want to reach out and iron it away with my thumbs.

"No," I lie, because then I won't hear the end of it, "I'm a woman, I'm so used to things like this."

"Right... women."

Laughter dances on my tongue, slipping past parted lips just seconds later, as the very tall giant in front of me shakes his head. He joins our hands, while I bid farewell to the ladies, rolling my eyes at Ngozi who is giving me a very smug expression. So what if we're holding hands? Friends do that all the time.

Just as they also instruct their female friends to be careful when approaching the stairs, his arm is around my waist now, all of this is unnecessary but I let him do his thing. We step into the scorching heat, and the loudness seems ten times louder than it had been in the salon. Joburg is a very busy city, this is

what I have learnt, and people are always bumping into each other here

—

or having their items stolen from them. The thieves here are next-level, one minute someone is

selling you bags you don't need, and the next thing your phone is m

issing.

Sqalosenkosi's arm is around my shoulders now, protectively, he's taking the route that will lead us back to Park Station.

"Wait..." my voice is somehow clear, amidst all the noise in these streets. "I promised to buy Maria clothes for

her babies.

There's a Pep around here somewhere, and groceries. That's partly why I'm in town actually." "Pep?" a slow frown reveals

itself on his face. "Nothing more—" "There's nothing wrong with it!" I snap, glaring at him. "My mother raised my

siblings and I on

those clothes and we turned out just fine. If you didn't let glitz and glamour go to your head then you'd know that most of their clothes are quality, and very beautiful, she will appreciate them."

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He has the grace to look apologetic at least.

“You’re right, I am so sorry.” “I am, you are.” My giggles match his boyish ones. We pass the many vendors,

jumping dirty waters and smelling garbage that has been disposed carelessly on the streets, and there’s a Pep store. “Grab two baskets,” I instruct the man

in my company.

He fulfils my bidding, following me to the baby section. Maria’s baby is three months old, I will buy the little girl sizes bigger than her age because she’s a

very chubby baby, well

I taken care of despite her mother’s financial struggles.

Sqalosenkosi is right behind me as I grab the pink onesie to inspect, its furry,

and so very cute... but I don’t think it will work for summer. “Who is Maria?” he queries, as I drop a purple

-starred skirt inside the basket. The size is 6-12 months, all the smaller sizes have been finished.

“A woman I met in Joubert Park.” My heart stops beating for a second as I

recall our first meeting, she was sitting on a thin cloth that separated her from the cold ground, breastfeeding her baby, and selling mere razors and combs for R1 to any passer-

by. “She sells there.” “Joubert Park?” my arm is gripped gently, as widened eyes regard me with concern, his teeth gritted.

“Qhaqha lento esekhanda ngoba ibophe no

mqondo! What the hell would you be doing in Joubert Park? Do you want to give me a heart attack? If anything ever happened

—” “I went with Siyabonga,” I interject, snatching my arm from him. What an asshole! “Don’t offend me and my hairstyle. I went with

him, and his father

owns a shebeen that side, it’s safe during the day time. I went with him to buy

kotas on

—” “Foot?” “Yes! It’s a walking distance, I can’t imagine asking him to drive us one minute

to get to the fast food shop. We walked and nothing happened to us because

it's safe during the day.”

444

Disbelieving, the expression he gives me. But he holds his tongue, scanning the

clothes again instead. Good. “You’re not going back there now that you’re

pregnant with my babies. Your newfound stubborn nature will take a pause

where my children are concerned.”

Mxm! Nx!

“Yebo, Baba.”

He cuts his eyes at me, probably knows this is a quip, and his lips are twitching

—

from the urge to scowl or smile I have no idea. His attention is on the clothesthe next

second, and the look on his face is... bright. Almost seems like childish awe. Looking at baby clothes will give you baby fever like nothing else. He's holding a pink dress in his hand, held together by sparkling buttons. "Kuhlelokhu." "Ngiy' thathe?"

"Eh hene." He puts it inside the basket. "How are my babies? Maybe they're hungry now." "Not really, they're making me queasy." I grab rompers, identical, and place them inside the second basket. "It's supposed to get better in the second

t

trimester apparently. That's too long, five weeks away. I want to stop feeling like crap now. I don't like nausea or using the toilet often. I'm getting fat, the pizza is going to my thighs and belly." "You're beguilingly gorgeous, every part of your body

is so perfect." Stern eyes are on me, unwavering. "For your nausea, we can pass by the Spar in Park Station to get you something for it. Gingery foods or something sour."

I nod my head because I was going to request that we make a stop there anyways, to buy food for Maria, maybe formula for the baby as well. I pay for

everything, using my own money, despite Squalosenkosi's plea to let him do it. He does buy me Jelly Tots though, two packets, 'they're your favourite', he says as he hands them over.

445

At Park Station, he pays for all the nausea remedies that he buys me. I pay for

Maria's grocery, it should be enough to last her at least one month, if not two. There's no baby formula in this store, and I request that Squalosenkosi make a

stop at the PicknPay in The Bridge so that I can buy formula for little Omega.

It's 01:00pm when we arrive inside her building, her boyfriend sells fruits and vegetables. And she's home because I told her I'd come. Squalosenkosi plays

with her baby while I help her put everything in the cupboards and their tiny refrigerator. A grateful smile pulls on her lips, she hugs me tight, and at least I

have one person with me who doesn't speak English with a twang, who's just

as imperfect as me when it comes to the language. Squalosenkosi and his brothers have Zulu accents when speaking English, but they don't make mistakes, they know it well. Thatego twangs, just like Chris. Siyabonga has the Zulu accent as well. Temasiko's is... phew! That's all I can

say. I heard her with Thatego a few days back. I want new clothes, so we head to my favourite boutique next, one Thatego introduced me to. I want new, looser skirts

—

and maybe a dress or two. Squalosenkosi is with me, I guess he was serious about spending the day

together. He's my personal

basket and accommodates every clothing piece I

take on his arm. There's comfortable leather couches here, but he's following

me inside the dressing room, and sits on the wooden bench.

"Don't look at my body," I start softly, as I unbutton my cropped blo

use,

“there’s too much—going on, and I don’t want you to look at me.” “Please let me look.” I don’t want to agree, but he’s giving me a look. And the way he’s made this

request makes my insides warm, his eyes are bright and soft

—

made of every good thing

that exists in the world and I... shit! I don’t ever swear. My response is let

the white blouse fall off my shoulder

—

one and then the other. My pencil skirt is next, and I am almost completely naked

—

in just my matching bra and lace thong. That’s when he introduced me to the thongs, I like them.

“Take off your bra, please.”

He has his own way of commanding, that he masks with 'please'. Nonetheless, the bra detaches from my body as well. Now it's me, him, and the floor

-length mirror that reveals my changing body.

Nothing prominent but my breasts are

fuller than usual...tender. My belly isn't showing yet, but the flatness there exists no longer, and it looks like I've gained a small pudge overnight. I feel like crying. It's only going to get worse from here on, I ha

ve four babies inside

my belly, all of them growing, and I won't have space to breathe because they'll have taken over.

His scent greets me, more intense now that I can sense him behind me

—

touching but not quite. We're looking at each other through the mirror, and...

his hands are on me, tentatively, as they crawl to my front and rest on my belly. Absolute silence. Comforta

ble. "Thank you."

He always says this. I just nod my head.

“Do you think we’ll be amazing parents?” For me, I don’t know, maybe as the babies grow older, because I have experience with my siblings. So does he... with Sbanisezwe. All I know is I don’t

want to be embarrassed to tell them I love them, and that I will always protect them. I want them to always hear the words

, ‘I love you, and I am extremely proud of you’,

all the damn time. I want to chase my dreams and inspire them to be better versions of themselves without being an imposing parent.

I want a father like Sqalosenkosi, who I’ve seen with Liyana.

He’s a beautiful father to her, and what they share is deep. He’s going to be the best father because I’ve seen him in action. He’s not a viole

nt person, and I know our

babies won’t be subjected to the trauma of an abusive parent.

“Maybe,” I say finally, shrugging my shoulders, “you’re already an outstanding father to your daughter.” He nods his head... is

that relief on his face? “I promised you I’d get help, I will.

Nqobizitha was preoccupied with work, but we’re meeting tomorrow.”

447

Of course, at Sbanisezwe's bachelor party. "I am glad it's you, Sphehile. I wouldn't anyone else but you.

Unothandonempatho, uyis'busiso empilweni yami... noma ngabe ungakuthembi lokho."

My heart pounds against my ribcage, I buy time by grabbing the nearest dress

on the rack, to put on. He's still looking at me when it slithers gently down my

body

—

loosely clinging to my curves. It's a sheath maxi dress made of whitesatin, V-shaped on the chest area, with a long slit that reaches my thigh. Its

beautiful, I want it for one of Thatego's traditional weddings but... there's a subtle frown on the giant's face. "Bad?" I query. "Very bad. I like these better when they're just for my eyes."

Mxm.

“You’re not my boyfriend.” He acts strange, and scrubs his beard. This time his eyes do waver, I’d seen them do the same at Spar and a few times when the ladies were doing my hair.

What’s wrong? “Is everything okay?” “Yeah, I just... feel sick –

nauseous.” Is this him inheriting my pregnancy

symptoms because by all means, he can keep them. “My stomach is lurching, I don’t know why.” “Pregnancy alert!”

He chuckles, rolling his eyes. His arms embrace me, face burrowing inside my neck

–

a sigh. It feels like he’s putting me apart and piecing me back to his will.

“MaGcwensa, you’re making me sick.”

Its this cologne Thatego gave me, I told him the smell is too sweet. Maybe its

my fault for going overboard with it. I shouldn't have, I'm going to give myself a headache here. "Ngyaxolisa." "I feel really sick. What did you do?"

448

"It's the perfume." "Then it's weakening," a confession. I won't use it so carelessly next time. He holds me as if he doesn't want to let go, but I don't want the touches to deceive me –

even those lips pressed

against my pulse point. He's really touching me, and it's so quiet here, I can feel the unsteady rhythm of his heartbeat touching my back. There's sparks

coursing through me, a fire

–

connection. I feel it when his eyes lift to meet mine.

He's digg

ing deep into my soul, maybe on purpose because his gaze makes me

complacent, I don't stop him when he turns me around. "Mama wezinganezami."

I roll my eyes, and then I laugh.

"Does this make you happy? Do you love this?"

Us, together, like this? Of

course I do, his company is enjoyable. He's not loud or out there, he's reserved and keeps to himself. "Hmm." "We'll do it again." I am very complacent, and don't complain as he turns me around. "Again, and again. Just don't make me feel sick." "It's the perfume." He doesn't look very convinced, and I think I see what he means when he talks

about being sick. His

eyes are wavering a lot, I can't explain the distant

expression on his face. Still his arms grip me for anchor, he balances himself.

It's Thatego's bachelor party. But he didn't like that term so he called it a 'Princess Party'. LOL. I helped him plan

last minute details of it, but it's Chris who was heavily involved in overseeing everything because the parties

Thatego plans are 'too white' and boring. The meat always looks boiled, andthere's never seasoning apparently. I don't know, he makes quite del
iciouswhite people meals at home.

449

There are too many women here, understandable since it's not a bachelor

party but a princess one. Chris is here, but Siyabonga is spending his time withNhlakanipho and the brothers. He did come in, stayed for a few minutes, andleft because everything was too feminine for him. Chris lives for the genderambiguity and diversity, he said men can like pink.This is the main theme of the party.I am a bit out of my comfort zone here, in pink lingerie, sitting next to a loudgirl who has complained about her boyfriend since this party began. She

stabbed his penis because she found him bouncing on their friend's dick –

and

clearly there's no use for it so she decided to help him. Her main issue isn't the

cheating but the f

act that he did it with another guy. I don't understand why when she says her boyfriend was honest to her about being bisexual.

It's even more confusing to understand why she is attending a gay man's party

when most of her words are homophobic. This is w

hy I don't like friends, and

prefer to stay home. Friends are never truly friends. Temasiko recuses me by

shouting incoherently while struggling on a pole that she isn't far from

breaking.

Yes, the weasel is here. For some reason, she's become important

in these

people's lives –

and I am subjected to the torture of seeing her face, or hearing about her at least once a day. Again, I don't hate her. But she's so loud, so very

loud and out there that it turns me off her completely. Her lingerie consists of

ilk booty shorts and a bra that's useless because she doesn't have breasts. MaSibusisiwe said she was born a man, and she's like Fuzelihle. A

transwoman is what she is.

I've heard about them, my mother's extended family members had a girl who

called herself a boy and insisted that she was Ntethelelo instead of Thenjiwe. Temasiko is exactly the same, only she is a man who wants to be a woman.

And Sgalosenkosi has slept with her, he's slept with her knowing very well

that she has the same parts as him, and

clearly he wasn't bothered by it because she's... I think they're still sleeping together. Does it hurt? Not as much as I expected. Maybe it's because I know there's already so much gay in their household that this doesn't surprise me at all.

The same Sqalosenkosi was attracted to Siyabonga after all. Why should it be a surprise that he likes yet another man? Only this one pretends to be a

woman... which isn't

off-putting

like her loudness. It's fine if she wants to be a

woman, I heard you can get surgery for these things lately.

"Dance with me!" Thatego giggles loudly, he's drunk, and drags me up. "How was your outing with your future husband?" "Don't be a... hoe, Thati!" I snap softly. "You know damn well that man is sleeping with that girl who's actually a man." "Hey!" my arm is smacked lightly. "Don't say that, it's transphobic. If she identifies as a woman then she's a woman. Your opinions of her shouldn't matter, respect her." I snort, my movements awkward. "The same way she's doing me by sleeping with the father of my unborn children." "Well she doesn't owe you loyalty. Her crime is falling for the same man that you've fallen for... but it's your man who's guilty for pursuing her knowing that he had you." "Mxm." I push him away gently. This only makes him giggle louder, he's carefree. "It's up to you, Sphesihle,

whether or not you want to do this. To continue with Sgalosenkosi. Relationship dynamics are not the same, do not let monogamists fool you into

thinking that's the only way to relationship. Just because the idea of multiple partners makes someone uncomfortable, it doesn't mean their way of

relationship-

ping is the right way." "Huh!" I don't know what the hell he's talking about. "Sgalosenkosi feels something for you. That's obvious. He feels something for the girl you view as a rival.

That's also obvious. Now what are you going to do about that?" "Sip champagne!" I don't want

to think about this right now.

451

"Hell no!" Thatego shakes his head. "You're expecting our babies. Don't touch alcohol, you're not supposed to do it." I didn't mean it of course. Thatego lets me go so that he can demonstrate how

to use the pole. Chris is with me, clapping childishly. He talks about Nqobizitha

a lot. A lot. Too much. He's clinging to me, and he really does become a needy

little thing when drunk. By 02:00am, people are going to their hotel rooms. I stay with Chris and Thatego, because the former is vomiting badly and the latter is collapsed on

the bed with none other than Temasiko. "Call my husband and tell him I am—" a gag cuts the midget short. "dying. I don't feel well. Tell him I really love him and our babies. He doesn't have permission to move on, please tell him."

Oh, Jehovah!

Is he... he's crying and gagging!

I did not sign up for this, Siyabonga is the bestie, he knows how to handle a drunk Chris. Maybe Thatego as well, I should call him. Chris is retching again

when I head out to find Thatego, and I follow his giggles to the... of course he'd be here, and they'

d be doing this. I am not sitting on that couch again. At least

he wasn't completely naked when riding Sbanisezwe's dick. Chris has collapsed on the floor, in the toilet. He's sleeping peacefully but

someone needs to help me situate him in a more comfortable place. Thatego is

having sex with his fiancé who shouldn't be here. My last resort is the transwoman. She was sleeping with Thatego in the bedroom. I don't bother to

knock and open the door.

"OMG!" she shouts, and attempts to cover herself, dropping her phone that

darkens almost immediately. "What the hell? Knock!" She's trying to cover herself but it's too late. Is everyone really trying to have

sex in this hotel room? Maybe I should just go and join Chris on the floor of the

bathroom. "SIES!" I don't bother to hide my disgust. "Fuck you! Get out, get out!" she's covered now, meeting my eyes squarely.

452

I only do it because I am traumatized. It was the size of

... WOW

!

453

Unrequited Desires : Thirty-six Squalosenkosi

I have a pounding headache that has nothing to do with alcohol, it began

around 06:30am, and hasn't stopped since, pounding louder than the voices

around me

—

vicious. A particularly hoarse shout, that resembles something like screeching tires causes me to hiss in pain, it belongs to Temasiko. My eyes

are forced open by it. "Silence!" I don't raise my voice, don't need to, as the

noise finally simmers down. Phew.

"She started it." Temasiko sounds petulant, a whiny child.

Usually I'd be

endeared but not this instant, not this morni

ng. I've had a long night with Nqobizitha's partying stint, and Sbanisezwe's questionable friends that he

sneakily left in my care while he came here to sleep comfortably with Thatego, leaving me all alone because Nhlakanipho and Siyabonga bailed when the going got tough.

"How? You woke up this morning feeling moody and put your hands on me!"

Sphehile reminds her, just as angered.

"You call a little slap putting hands on you?" A snort rolls out of Temasiko's tongue. "Honey, I would've mopped the floor

with you if you

—"
"She's pregnant," I remind Temasiko, frowning, my eyes narrowed on her, "What do you mean you would've mopped the floor with her when she's clearly pregnant, Temasiko? This is not something you're hearing for the first time so I'm surprised that you even d

ared to act violently knowing perfectly

the dangers your actions could've done. Uyasangana Temasiko, this must be the only excusable reason why you'd put your hands on a pregnant woman."

Widened eyes regard me, a round jaw falling slack, plumpy lips part in clear

disbelief. My eyes cut at her, angered. Did she think I'd take her side? Where she's put her hands on the mother of my children? Where anything could've happened, and the same children could've been taken away in a split second –
by a wrong move, an accidental fall.

454

“Nqobizitha told me you were complaining about a headache so I made this for you.” Chris shows face, he looks quite worse for wear, wearing my brother's jersey that looks like an oversized dress on him and the jeans he was

wearing la

st night. “Drink all of it,” comes the gentle order, “I made it for your brother too, he's recovering well. My headache's completely gone.”

“Which brother?” there's two of them here. One called amusedly to tell me

Temasiko was going John Cena on Sphehile, and that I had to hurry because

he wasn't sure if holding her back was worth it, but he didn't want his little

boys harmed. The other one was in the car with me as we came here, and

acted like a little boy as soon as he saw Chris, hugging the younger's

kinny

body tightly and telling him that his head was sore. They're slowly getting to

that place, where nothing else matters but the two of them.

"My husband." He still giggles like a little child, placing the mug with a weird

concoction on the coffee tab

le. "He's resting in the room now. Anyway, I want you to drink this, it's a bit spicy but you'll feel ten times better. I'm going to get

started on breakfast, hopefully this meeting with the wives will be done by the

time everything is ready, him?"

I choke on my saliva. Temasiko rolls her eyes, and starts to laugh her ass off! Her skirt is raising, revealing tempting thighs. Our eyes connect, she tries to stifle her laughter but fails miserably. “As long as lobola goes to me, I’m good. Do you promise ba

by

daddy?” “He’s not your baby daddy.” “Yes, he is.” She doesn’t look at Sphesihle although her reply is directed to her. “You’re the first wife only because you were pregnant first. Though I think I deserve that spot because I’m carrying sextuplets. But you were the first girlfriend, right, and

—” “Sex—ini?”

“Six babies.”

455

“And you couldn’t just say that?” Sphesihle snorts, gaze flickering between Temasiko and me. “There’s no need for the fancy words. Worse because you don’t even twang like Thatego or Chris.” The way she says this makes me the muscles in my face tighten. “And what’s so wrong about her knowing the

word? Sphehile..." I cut my eyes at her, she squirms in her seat, "do we pay attention to how people speak now? Kanti

nokuvala umlomo kuye

kusize mangabe kuthi phalaza amasimba ngawo." "Oh

-

kay!" Chris giggles loudly, pulling at the ends of Nqobizitha's jersey. "I'll make breakfast. Don't be too hard on them, hmm? Emotions are just high, as you heard Temasiko, they're both pregnant! That's ten babies you'll be having, dada. Eleven with Liyana. She's going to be ecstatic!"

It's Temasiko who giggles again, hand covering her mouth.

Looking at her now,

it's almost hard to believe that this is the same woman who has admitted to slapping Sphehile. She hasn't explain how it happened, or why. "Temasiko," I start firmly, "care to tell me what happened?" "Why do you want her to start first!?"

Sphehile is a preadolescent woman, accusing hazels find me.

"Why!? She hit me, this morning she woke up and I

guess she was angry that I disturbed her masturbating session and the horniness ma

de her a disgusting devil who felt it right to smack me.”Temasiko, masturbating? I mean its not like it hasn’t happened before. Was

she using that footage she asked me to send her once? I

—

“You said sies...right after you saw my privates, you said sies and it didn’t sitwell with me. There’s a lot that didn’t sit well with me last nigh. How you

invaded my privacy for one. How you stayed watching me for longer than

three seconds. And the faces you made. I don’t even know what shocked you,you’ve seen OUR man’s dick before –

waaay bigger, and I know you found

nothing disgusting about cock. So what’s good?”

Sphehlehle is coughing and patting her chest, looking to me for protection but I

won’t do it. With everything that Temasiko has said, I want to know just

what

were Sphehleh's intentions as well. Is she transphobic? This after she's met Fuzelihle and they got along like a house on fire? It doesn't sit well with me,

456

and the mere idea angers me, I inch forward eagerly awaiting her reply while rubbing on my bottom lip.

"Sphehleh?" Her eyes are widened in...fear? "That's not true!" She stomps her foot, turning to give me an expression that begs me to believe her. "I said that because she was busy having sex. Almost

everyone in this hotel suite was having se

x and I was disgusted! There's

nothing special about her or her 1cm dick! If she thinks what I said had anything to do with that then she must work on her self-esteem. It's not my

fault, haibo!" "Are you transphobic, Sphehleh?"

The same disbelieving ex

pression finds me. "Haa, Sqalosenkosi, how can you

accuse me of

—”“Answer the damn question.” She flinches, I hadn’t even raised my voice, and makes herself small on the couch, smacking an arm across her belly. “No. That would be ridiculous. At

home, t

here’s a girl who thinks she’s a boy. I don’t understand it but I respect

her wishes because that is who she says she is. And now here, this one says

insists she’s a woman although her private parts say otherwise and I don’t

care for it. At least she looks

like a woman a little bit, even if she doesn’t have a vagina or breasts... but to each their own.”

My lips twist into an offended frown, I stand on my feet, to pace back and forth

—

hands on the sides of my waist. Fcuking shit! “You’re transphobic,

Sphesi

hle.” My displeasure cannot be masked. “And now I am worried not only about Temasiko but Fuzelihle as well, because I can’t help but wonder what you’ve said to her. If you’ve triggered any past trauma with your ignorance!” “That’s not true,” her voice is quiet.

“You’re calling me a liar?”

457

A gulp is her reply, she shakes her head. “I haven’t done anything wrong, that’s all I’m saying!” Quietly, she shouts. “What I’ve said isn’t anything outside of the truth. Fuzelihle is different because she’s done surgery, she told me. How is

Ntethelelo a

man when he doesn’t even have a goddamn penis? How is she a woman when she has a penis!? Her 1cm doesn’t exclude her from your kind, she’s still a man! But I still call her ‘her’ so I don’t know how that’s transphobic.”

That rant nearly broke my ears, I

scrub my beard in frustration. Temasiko’s

hands are twitching, I give her a look that reminds her that she better keep them to herself. I am still coming to her. Her violent nature is not going to work, not if we want things to work

–

us, this... dynamic. I don't want her to

get comfortable with abusive behaviour. First it was Siyabonga, now it is Sphesihle. Is she planning to go through my entire family? Anyone who wrongs her?

“She is not a man, Sphesihle. If someone tells you which gender they identify

wi

th then you respect them, and don't try to put in your two cents about why they're not what they say they are because they're not you –

and you're not them. You haven't spent one day in Temasiko's body, you know nothing about

her. You do not misgender her.

You don't get to tell her to tell her that she

looks like a woman

—

that is transphobic. You're not going to gaslight her by telling her it's not about the penis that you then proceed to poke fun at because the size is not up to your standards. You're not going to be a vile woman, if it means I have to personally bring you to order then I will do it, until you acknowledge your own issues that are enforcing your nastiness. Are we clear?"

A nibble of the lower lip.

"I say this because... because I know you.

You

—grew up right in front of me." "Wow!" Temasiko giggles like she finds something funny. "Khuzeka," I tell her. She pretends to zip her lips, but she's still giggling.

“Mind your genitals next time,” this I direct to Sphesihle, who has the audac

ity

to look ashamed at least, “and tell me if you need to be schooled on trans

-issues. Fuzelihle will personally visit you and tell you everything you need to know, something that you can also find on the internet, but she can come.

Genitals don’t determine one’s gender, move away from that mentality. Physicality means nothing. It wouldn’t matter if Temasiko looked more

masculine than

—“I think I do,” Temasiko softly interjects, “actually I wanted to discuss

feminizing hormone therapy with you. The process and all that. Maybe I can start on the injections, time is not on my side, and the changes could possibly

take longer with age. I’m 25 years old now, I don’t want to wait until it feels too late.” “Temasiko—”

“Sorry for talking about this now, it felt right because you’re addressing the childish twat. But I’ll zip my mouth again, Daddy, and you can chide her forme...okay? Continue.”

Words lost, I rub my face in exhaustion, as her words make me question my

sanity. She’s giggling again, happily, no fcu

ks given

—

lucky her. “Sometimes keeping your trap shut is not a bad idea,” my voice teases her, and I look at Sphesihle again, “I have decided that you’re going to see a therapist too,

MaGcwensa, who will help you work on yourself before our children get here.

We’ll talk about it in detail when we’re alone, but you’re doing this... please.” “That means you don’t have a choice,” Temasiko pipes in, “the please is always a command.” “I know that!”

They look at each other

—

one angry and the other mildly amused. It feels like they will start bickering again, my dissipating headache will not bear it. A

second more and Sphesihle's lips are twitching. Is this what Sbanisezwe

meant when he said they would get along? I cannot truly see it, not truly.

"Please apologize to Temasiko for disrespecting her and for the transphobic remarks," I ask Sphesihle.

459

"She smacked me!" "We will address that, for now, I am dealing with you and how you've wronged her. Apologize, please." "Is it truly an apology if she's being compelled by you, Ndoda yethu?"

Temasiko grins childishly. This is her revenge.

"Ngyaxolisa!" Sphesihle snaps. "Now what will—" "She has explained herself, Temasiko, her reasons for saying lies to you – and

though they didn't sit well with you, I still don't think that's enough reason to put your hands on her... the fact that you went to

bed and woke up in the morning and decided

—”“That I was still angry, and that I’m not the type to let things slide so I dealt with her the only way I know she’d get the message.” I shake my head, trailing to her, and crouching so that we’re eye

-level

. “Hey.” I grip her cheek, to prevent her from looking away.

“Violence is never the

solution, it never ends well

—

and you know that perfectly well. Temasiko, I

can’t spend my time worrying which member of my family is going to feel

your violent wrath next

. Yes, I know you don’t go around hitting people without ‘reason’ but it’s still wrong. This is abusive behaviour, I don’t like to associate with abusive behaviour... especially violence.

Before you were angry, what were you feeling? What’s this emotion that

pushed you to anger

and violence?” “Shame.” Her voice doesn’t waver, I appreciate her honesty. “Why would you feel ashamed?”

“I—don’t want to talk about it.” Emotional, her voice becomes.
She bites on

her bottom lip, gaze distant and filled with unsh

ed sadness. “Maybe just me—and you. Not here.” “No
problem.” I stroke her cheek, as her eyes close and she leans
into my touch. “Please apologize to Sphehile for putting your
hands on her in the

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meantime. Putting your hands on a pregnant woman is an all-
time low. I don’t expect you to stoop that low, anything
could’ve happened. You could’ve hurt her or my babies.”

“She’s exaggerating, it wasn’t even that hard.” “It doesn’t
matter, MaDlamini.” An exhale, she rolls her eyes. “I’m sorry!”
something

is muttered under her

breath but I don't catch it. "Sphehleh..." I rise again, peering over my shoulder to the... her face is pinched tight in... she looks like she'll cry any second. "I'll be back," I tell Temasiko, but she's already on her feet, nearing me.

A soft kiss lands on my lips

—

intoxicating.

"Tell her to get used to it, I'm not going anywhere. I love you just as much if not more, and I am not going to disappear just because she can't stand the

thought of us sharing you. We are sharing you, right?

"We're taking a break." "Then she can't get mad at me for not being on a break with you too. Maybe the day we're sister-wives, I can pledge allegiance, but tough luck for now.

Hey, don't have us marry you on the same day. That's just tacky!" "Temas

iko

—"Just kidding. Go assure her fragility." Her lips are on mine a second, and then gone. She's headed to the kitchen, where Chris was preparing breakfast.

Temasiko

Dating someone like Sgalosenkosi is only annoying because of the other person in his life. Life would be so much better if God had sent someone like Thatego for me to share him with instead. Someone open-minded, and ever-kind, and unproblematic. It would be better than having insecure Sphesihle

who glares daggers at me whenever we're in close proximity.

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Silly girl, like I owe her any loyalty.

Her man came onto me, and though I thought it would just remain sexual, he's too good in the other areas to not be promoted to boyfriend status. He's everything I've ever wanted in a man, and I don't have reason to break things

off with him or to deny myself the opportunity to be loved intentionally and wholeheartedly. Yes, wholeheartedly

—

even with Sphesihle in the picture. The same way a mother can give her wholehearted love to more than one other children,

and be sincere and pure in the way she loves them. Love is not about belonging to this one person; that is ownership, the moment you want to own a person, and demand that they belong to you and no one else. But

Sqalosenkosi is mine, I have ownership of him, and he is Sphehile's. I only

truly mind

because...Sphehile. I'd rather I shared him with Thatego.

But Thatego is marrying the love of his life in less than 24 hours

—

again.

I've never been to the North West before but we were there three days ago, it

was beyond amazing. It was for the Tswana traditional wedding, and it

spanned from the afternoon until late into the night. Thatego's mother's advice for her beloved son was a bit dodgy though, she's definitely the type to

sell her children for moolah. The ones who tell you to bekezel for every crap

your man puts you through because they can't afford to give back lobola.

Luckily, Thatego knows his self-

worth, though it's really subjective this self

-

worth thing. Like morals. And I can't impose my idea of what I think self

-worth is on him and v

ice versa. This is why it's important to mind your own

business until explicitly told to oversee or manage the businesses of others.

Today is Sunday, we're in KZN, Mbongolwane to be exact. This is where

Sbanisezwe and his

—

no, only Nqobizitha grew up here, I remember Thategotelling me. Sbanisezwe and Sqalosenkosi grew up in different places, I just

don't know why and I never bothered to ask. But we're in Mbongolwane,

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Thatego is being recognized as a Ngcobo by Sbanisezwe's ancestor tomorrow, and I've be

en gasping in awe at the beauty of this place.

The Ngcobo homestead could very well compete with Jacob Zuma's Nkandla

home. I am not exaggerating, these people are so moneyed and it shows. Many

of them are educated also, I have met so many people I don't know and

haven't bothered memorizing their names because they're their own country. There's Tswana speakers that aren't related to Thatego. There's Xhosa speakers married into the family. There's a Pedi woman. There were two

Xitsonga men. I even spoke to Swati women, girlfriends to the younger ones. This is an entire country.

But almost everyone I have met is so welcoming, and though I haven't seen

Sqalosenkosi anywhere, I am still having a great time. Its past midnight,

maybe he's sleeping, he's not an

owl. My footsteps feel a little crooked as I exit the main house for the rondavel that belongs to Thatego and his man, carrying three ice-cream tubs and a large box of pizza for the demanding pregnant

princess of the Ngcobo family. I wouldn't have agreed but I had to use the

toilet and the one in Thatego's house was being utilized by one of his sisters. "Aliens!" I scream when two blaring lights slowly approach me, accompanied

by weird crunching sounds against sand.

"Lutho." A voice snorts from behind me

e

—

matching the dark night. It belongs to a man that is about two or three inches taller than me, whose skin blends in

with the night, it looks exactly like Nhlakanipho's but this one has incisions on

his face

—

umgcabo, that's what they call it right? "You'd know if you didn't walk like the inebriated chickens my brother steals from KaMadonsela." That's... he's insulting me! The audacity of this man with his dark eyes and beard that was almost successful in connecting. He's not smiling, and so I don't

know whether or not to grin. The owner of the alien lights interrupts us

anyway. "Sthelosamangwane!" "Mhlengi!" the man bristles. "Ntsika, how many times must I tell you that my name is Mhlengi?" "Uyanya!" the other man, Ntsika, snorts. "You went by Sthelosamangwane in

primary school and during your short stint in high school. Angikho lapho,

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Ndoda, come help me with these chairs. I still have to go back and collect

more! Imagine. You'd swear the president's son is getting married." The man, Mhlengi, doesn't even spare me another glance before he's going to help the other man. He takes the

smell of sweaty armpits with him. He's clearly someone who works under the sun a lot, maybe that's why he has

such

dark skin or maybe he's just like that. The lights flicker on, giving me the

opportunity to take notice of ripped dirty jeans

—

definitely works outdoors a lot. I walk away awkwardly when he, Mhlengi, and Ntsika waltz past me with chairs that seem to weigh nothing at all to them.

"She stayed away for so long on purpose!" Sphesihle's annoying voice greets me as soon as I enter. Eish, I have suffered with this girl. "Now my pizza is all

cold and

—"I'll warm it for you, babe." Thatego offers, but o

ffers the box to Gontse.

"Please bring bowls for the ice

-

cream as well. Don't forget the spoons." "I didn't mean to take long," I plop down next to Thatego, "I just met Mhlengi outside

and we were talking.”“Mhlengi?” Fuzelihle is sipping on her fourth

bottle of Bernini, she drinks it

like water... umjolo is an extreme sport. “Who’s that?”“The workers.”“Oh!” her wave is dismissive. “There’s too many of them. Make sure they don’t steal anything, that’s the last thing I want. I don’t want to fire people.”My lips press together to hide my amusement, I won’t tell her that this man’s

brother steals inebriated chickens. How does a chicken become inebriated

anyway? It doesn’t matter. I’m just certain they won’t be able to steal an entire cow. There’s cows here. I wonder if they’ve counted their chickens. I won’t ask. There’s too many of them, I’m sure two or three missing won’t make a difference.

“Chris isn’t anywhere to be found.”

Thathego waves me off this time. “He’s cooking. I did tell you that MaS

ibusisiwe

treats us like wives here, didn’t I? But he’s her favourite.” He sounds a bitpained. “It doesn’t matter anyway, I’ve grown tough skin over the years andSbanisezwe protects me when I can’t do it myself.”“I can’t imagine myself having her for

an in-

law!” I confess, the woman

irritates me, that encounter I last had with her.

“Good.” –

Sphesihle.

“She’s become worse as a mother!” Fuzelihle giggles, I think she’s drunk. “Just

because she left my father, I have to be forever thankful. But I love her so

much, for choosing me when that bastard couldn’t do it.”“Parents are such

fuck-

ups!” I admit wit

h a squeeze of her shoulder.

“Especially fathers, they just always have to do something wrong.” “Like pitch up when you finally have money, and promise people fake events using your name to scam people. I thought Coloureds behaved decently.” A

huff, That

ego bites his bottom lip. “I’m glad I was never a Bond...sies!”

He continues to complain about his father, a Coloured man who pitched up too late, and only stops ranting when the female sergeant barges into his house to tell him that the adults are waiting to advise him. By adults, she means the women. We’re not allowed to go with him, not that I’d want to.

Sqalosenkosi messages me

—

finally! He wants to talk. Okay... is this code for

sex? Somehow I doubt it, he respects the other girlfriend too much. But I still

make an excuse to leave the others, and make my way outside. There’s a silent commotion, it’s that Mhlengi guy. He’s speaking with a boy that’s just a

teenager

–

about sixteen maybe. What, is it the brother who steals the chickens? Their side profiles are the same as well as the dark skin. Their heights are almost the same. The younger one seems to be carrying two chickens in his

arms but they look...asleep? How is that possible? I don't know, I don't care. I

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know poverty when I see it. This is why I turn a blind eye, Fuzelihle bedamned.

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Unrequited Desires : Thirty-seven Temasiko

Fuzelihle woke up fuming about a missing sheep and two chickens. She

doesn't know how it happened and it was so busy last night –

with women cooking and those young girls dancing and
the men who were busy committing cow massacres

—

that no one saw a single thing. The only reason they found out
of this thievery behaviour is because one of the herd
boys noticed this. I was suffering from a migraine to really care
about her complaints about

village people being ungrateful, and honestly, it's not like
they're going to go

without because of three stolen livestock. People are hungry
out there and they have to eat something, if the Ngcobos are
too slow in the security

department then opportunists shouldn't be blamed, especially
hungry

opportunists. Good job, Mhlengi and little brother!

Wherever they are, I hope they're going to feast on delicious
meat. But I barely

remember what that man looked like, he was the same age as
me maybe

—

and the bulk of muscle in his body hinted at someone who does hard labour, the way he carried about twenty chairs like they weighed nothing was proof

enough. It's a pity that I don't remember much of his face, just that he didn't

seem like the type that smiled a lot

—

and he sounded short-tempered.

I don't know why he's crossing my mind. Maybe I just admire the little brother that I didn't even get a clear picture of.

It doesn't matter though, because there's a traditional wedding to attend. I

barely slept last night, about one to two hours maybe, because everyone was

so loud and weddings have a way of drugging everyone with euphoria, don't they? That ego's sisters were super giggly about their brother getting married, he's waited so long apparently, and has survived so much with Sbanisezwe. But they wouldn't elaborate

. They were dancing to Tswana songs here, all kinds of provocative moves that

had me nodding in approval. It's a pity my oh so lovely sister

-
wife wasn't

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around when the girls started dishing out all kinds of sex tricks. Sgalosenkositold me to fetch her for him because she needed to rest, away from all the noise of the others, and the main house was going to provide such solitude.

Like a good, little wife this is what I did and this is why I'm waking up with a

pounding migraine, with pains on my stomach from all the foot-punches Gomolemo sent to my belly when we were sleeping. The talkative seductress

sleeps like she's faking death in the presence of an armed killer. "What time is this whole thing starting again?" Gontse asks, scratching her

scalp thro

ugh the pantyhose covering her head. She's still walking around in

her g-string and bare boobies

-

comfortably. They didn't mind about me being a transwoman, though they seem to think I'm a feminine gay man just like Thatego, and I didn't bother to correct

them. "They mentioned something about ancestors here, I'm surprised Mme hasn't flipped." "Money talks, Ausi!" Gontse giggles freely, she's making the bed. "Tema, I hope you haven't finished all the hot water." "Of course not," I say, sitting on the va

nity in front of the large dresser to work

on my makeup, "the hot water just finishes quickly on its own." "Tema!" Gontse smacks the back of my head with a towel. It's true. I only spent 10 minutes there, and it feels like I haven't showered

thoroughly

because Mbongolwane's sun likes to make me sweat like Sgalosenkosi does but it's fine, these are things we can't change. My makeup is

mostly natural, no heavy or bright colours, and for my lips I use plenty of Vaseline. This is also fine. Its 07:11am an

d I am out of the rondavel. It's already busy outside, most of these people didn't sleep, this I am sure of because we kept hearing noises –

from the cars that were going in and out to the maskandi music to the loudlaughter that we were embraced by all night long.

There's a lady in black bum

-shorts and matching sports bra walking toward one of the cars with a cigarette trapped in between her lips. All eyes turn to her

–

most judging but she's clearly the 'YOLO' type. We were introduced

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yesterday but I've

forgotten her name, and she's clearly forgotten mine. I

mean she just waltzed past me without so much as a nod of acknowledgment.

“Yewena, Nontethelelo!” oh boy, it’s the sergeant! She’s still wearing a pink

fluffy gown with yellow duck sleepers and those glasses that make her looklike an inkabi. I hold my breath when our eyes clash

—

and her face pullstogether like that famous Nigerian woman who plays a witch in all her movies.

“Yah, ntombazane

-mfana, Chris needs you inside the house. What are you still looking me for!?” Is she talking to me... she’s talking to me. “My name is not—” “Ey, ngimdala wena, mahn! Go inside, my son needs your assistance. You didn’t think this was some sort of vacation, did you? Ayigubhe! You’re notgoing to spoil my beloved boy’s wedding.”

Who is the beloved boy

—

Sbanisezwe or Thatego?

“Usase la? I swe

ar if Thatego cries because this day has gone south because of your slowness... weeh, ngiyokushuka amasende ngane yami.

Chris needs

you! Are you deaf

—”I leave the distasteful midget on her own. Rhaa! I didn’t come all the way from

Joburg to be disrespected by some authoritarian Ngcobo politician. I have to dodge a lot of people as soon as I enter the main house, there are kids rushing down the revolving staircase, giggling loudly. Liyana is in the tribe as well, wearing traditional Zulu attire. Her hair looks like the colourful one ShoMadjozi likes to plait.

“Tema!” loud. She seems excited. Yes, we’ve been introduced before... all those weeks ago when I attended their

family braai. She recognizes me as a family friend, because this is what Sgalosenkosi

introduced me as. “Hey, Rain.” I tease, as her arms attempt to

hug my full-

figure tight. Silly, silly girl. “Looking beautiful. What are we celebrating?”

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She reveals her missing teeth as she beams up at me

—

a bright sun. “Bab’Sbani’s wedding! He’s marrying bhut’
Thatego an... an... they’re going to be a family! But Nkanyezi’s
sad because Bab’ Sbani will forget her if

-if he gets

married and I’m sad too, that means she won’t visit me
’nymore!” Mara Somandla...

Am I expected to play therapist to a bunch of six year olds?
What do you even to say to her kind? The girl looking at me with
the most clear eyes must be

Nkanyezi. Everything about her is so beautiful, there’s little
hairs that are

barely noticeable covering parts of her face.

“Your daddy loves you,” I assure her awkwardly. Hopefully I’m
not fucking up here, I can only truly vouch for Sqalosenkosi as a
father because I’ve seen him in action. But his brothers love just
as hard... from the few encounters I’ve seen of them around

children. “Thatago loves you. You’re going to have TWO amazing daddies, isn’t that exciting?” Slowly a smile appears on the little girl’s face –

and the dimples! I should ask Sbanisezwe if I can steal his daughter for myself.

“I guess.” “Good. Now run along and do whatever your kind does.” I push back her thick, bouncy curls. “You’re both beautiful young girls.” The arrogant brats don’t even thank me as they make a dash past me. I roll my

eyes, offended. Chris is in the kitchen, eyes red-

rims and swollen, he’s clearly exhausted. I feel so sorry for him, I should’ve come here to check on

him when Thatago said he was cooking. The three year old little boy is

clinging to his leg, João, he’s the needy one... I saw this at the braai

Sqalosenk

osi was hosting. “Go to Baba,” Chris sounds desperate, “he’ll watch The Gingerbread Man with you.” “I want you,” the little one whines.

Chris exhales, raises his eyes to meet mine, and he grins sunnily. Oh wow! He ages ten years younger, literally look

s like a glowing teenage boy... those

perks of having a small body and youthful face that belongs to supermodels.

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“Save me, please.” A giddy whisper. “Nqobizitha introduced him to these YouTube cartoons, and The Gingerbread Man is his favourite. I’m being fo

rced to watch them with him because this is usually our schedule at home. But

we’re not in Joburg and there’s so much to be done.” “How should I help?” Bambi eyes give me a once over. “Maybe you shouldn’t have dressed in these

clothes so soon. You and S

phesihle are... you’re like family now. This means

glamour takes a step back and we work together. All the others can look good

but we have to make sure Thatego's dream wedding is everything he's ever imagined it to be. I want everything to go well."

Thatego did say this. He said they become slaves when they come here, and

now I see it. Haibo, I've put on my makeup and fixed my weave because I

thought this is like the SAFTAs or something? The traditional music awards are SAFTAs, right? Do they still air tho

se things on TV? I don't know, I don't

care. The point is I look like a proper Zulu bride and now Chris is expecting me

to sweat behind... what exactly?

Pots? I thought the cooking was covered most of last night. What else is there to do here? Lots of things according to Chris. Maybe I can just be in charge of

the social department, I'll make everyone here feel at home.

But this thing of

sweating behind 50-litre pots is not it. Why am I expected to play bride for a

man who hasn't married me? We still need t

o make sure that Sphehile gets the position of first wife! Sigh.

“My nails are too long,” I say. Chris rolls his eyes. “MaSibusisiwe will eat you alive one of these days.” A huff

filled with lighthearted attitude, he picks up his son and the little one wraps

his tiny arms around Chris. “Look after this pot, it’s MaSibusisiwe’s favourite porridge. I’ll be back with Sbanisezwe, you’re going to accompany him to town.”

Is he even allowed to leave?

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“But he’s getting married!” I shout the reminder.

Ch

ris is at the doorway. “He is. He will!” he gives a breathless giggle. “Watch the pot. If I’m not back in time, just switch off the cooktop.” “And what are your men doing in all this!?” I have to know. It’s not fair that

they should work hard, and be forced to conform to heteronormative practices simply because they take dick up their asses.

“Nqobizitha was bathing our son –

Lethulwazi. He's s
till going back to help the
other men, that's his job –

all the heavy stuff. I don't mind cooking because it's my area of
expertise. No one's being forced to do what they don't want
to around here, we're a family, that means we help each other."

He should tell Thatego that.

"I see." "Yeah!" his eyes are penetrating, I can't believe I'm
being intimidated by an entire elf. A cute one though, so it's
fine. "Never assume, Tema. You're just making an ass out of you
but never me!"

Bloody elf!

He's giggl

ing happily as he walks away.

My lips stretch of their own accord. It's hard to believe that I
hadn't been sure

about Chris is the beginning, though Thatego later made me
understand that

the very short man was going through personal issues. There's
somet

hing

intentionally loveable about Chris, his positive aura and the way
he's always

smiling

–

even when he's not. His soul feels light and carefree, and it's
so easy

to be in his presence.

I like him a lot. I love the family he's built with his husband. T

hey seem so

relaxed and happy most of the time that you can't help wanting
to experiencetheir lives at least once. They're candy and
colourful roses –

rainbows. Verycouple relationship goals.

Five minutes later someone makes an appearance but it's not Chris and definitely not Sbanisezwe. The pregnant missus waltzes in, wearing an oversized jersey I just know belongs to Sqalosenkosi, that she's paired with black pyjama pants and flip-flops that are also too big, they belong to Sqalosenkosi as well. I'm assuming they shared the bed.

"Long night?" I ask her as she sits on the stool. "No, we didn't have sex you goddamn pervert!" she snaps quietly, glaring at me through her long lashes. "What the hell is wrong with you?" "Of course you didn't have sex, you probably spent the night preaching about how your mother says never to do it when someone else is getting married." "Morals—" "Are subjective. Don't push your holy agendas on me. Lord knows I'd be waking up with a sore body that has nothing to do with Gomolemo's foot

punches because my thighs would've been burning from how hard I rode ourman's dick... on behalf of you as well. Teamwork, you know?"The devilish glare she gives me! I'm surprised I'm not one with my ancestors

right this instant.

"Relax, babes!" I laugh softly. For someone who acts like she's better than me

ten times out of ten, she certainly gets her feelings hurt

easily. "I'm justkidding. It was a terrible joke, of course, but it's not like we're really not intothe same person." "And what of that?" she drains the juice that I'd placed in front of her. Is shenot worried that I might poison her? I've read about

bitter sister-wives before.

"I don't need to hear about your sex life with Sqalosenkosi." "Will you stop looking at me like I have some sort of disease or something?" "The babies are allergic to you." Her face is completely serious, she's blinking

those long fake hairs attached to her eyes rapidly, and I am tempted to pull

her to me by them but Sqalosenkosi's voice is in my head.

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“The little imps!” I snort, turning off the cooktop as per Chris’ instruction –

five

minutes have come and gone. “The ones

in my belly are quite fond of your

babies actually.”

A frown, she slides her glass to me and cocks an eyebrow. Yes, Ms. Pregnant

wants another glassful of orange juice and I’m here to serve.

“You can’t get pregnant, stop saying that!” “Oh but I can... o

nce I get surgery and get my own custom-made, platinum

vagina that will ooze sparkling fluids when I orgasm.” Perfectly

shaped brows pull into a frown. “Unamanga wena,” she

contests

matter-of-

factly, “Fuzelihle would’ve long fallen pregnant by now. She

told me

you’re not able to get pregnant... sometimes sex isn’t even

enjoyable.” My smile drops a little, I read upon that but I’d

hoped it wasn't really true. It depends on the type of meds you're given, of course, whether through pills or an injection...
but

others do lose their sexual appetite. Taking feminizing hormone therapy is like going through puberty all over again, as you go through all the motions attached with your changing body

—

and I don't want

to cry like a little bitch once I get on these things.

"Zinkanyezi zikabafo!" Sbanisezwe makes his long overdue appearance. He's

smiling too damn wide, childishly, not yet dressed for his wedding with those grey sweatpants and black t-

shirt. "I say the morning is particularly splendid today, wouldn't you?"

Of course it is. The sun is already shining brightly and the birds were chirping. Clearly their ancestors have approved of this day, and have decided to bless it.

“Two worlds are colliding to create one big green planet that will forever

remain fruitful

–

in this lifetime, and the next one.”

He must be talking about himself and Thatego.

“Sometimes all you need to be is direct,” I quip, handing him a glass of orange juice as well. Maybe this is me taking Chris’ advice to be more helpful around

this place. But it feels so wrong.

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“Sometimes you have to read between the lines, and allow yourself to explore

what you’re given.” He places a fidgety hand against his cheek, eyes on Sphesihle. “Kunjani, Mama? Wakhazimula ek’seni kangaka kwenzenjani? Ngathi uyingelosi.” “Don’t sweet

-
talk me.” Sphesihle rolls her eyes. “How does it feel to be a married man? Are you planning to

—”“Kahle, MaGcwensa,” Sbanisezwe rubs his eyes, it’s like he didn’t sleep much as well, “let me enjoy Thateho all to myself first. There’s plenty of time to make babies.”

I giggle loudly.

“I see.” Sphesihle leaves the stool, headed to the sink. “I have to go back upstairs, I’d told Sqalosenkosi I was coming here to drink water.” The smug expression she gives me... girl! Really? “Tell him to massage your feet. I noticed they’re swollen. Thank God I can’t get pregnant for

that very

reason!” She frowns. “I thought you said you’re pregnant with six delinquents.” And then she’s leaving.

Bitch!

“You’re getting along like a house on fire. Top

-

tier chemistry, I tell you!”

Sbanisezwe breaks the silence, forcing me to turn m

y attention to him. He's grinning childishly, carelessly, and doesn't give me time to question him as he drags me by my arm, leading me to the front where all the cars are parked.

"Chris told you you're going to Eshowe with me, right?"

I nod my head, bu

cling in my seatbelt. "Why are we going there?" "To get Sphehile's pizza."

Oh fuck no!

475

Really, Ndoda, really? I want to smack his plastered Cheshire grin away but he turns the music on

—

that corny Bruno Mars song. That ego loves it just as much. Ugh! "This could've

been a one-

man job," I complain, connecting my phone so that we can play my music and not his, "and Sgalosenkosi could've gone, not you.

It's your wedding day, your priority should be your fiancé." "My priority is family." He doesn't skip a beat, and nods his head to the song playing in the car. "I love this song –

Korean RnB, hmm?" "SHINee –

Replay.

"I give him the song title. "So why did you feel it necessary to drag me to this family priority outing of yours?" He shakes his head. "I realize now that it's Sphehile I should've gone with instead."

Oh-

kay! I am not offended. I swear I am not. "Really?" I can't mask my

annoyance, and that flicker of hurt.

"Yes, really. You're clearly at peace, Temasiko." He glances at me, and then the road a second later. "Sphehile needs the reassurance here." Is he talking about... "What has Sgalosenkosi told you?" "Nothing useful." He snorts, fingers tapping on the steering wheel. "Clearly you've grown, Tema, and seldom need reassurance... you trust in it when you do. You're not constantly crying." "Hmm?" "Once upon a time, a lifetime ago, it was not your so

ul that my brother was introduced to, but a different one

—

that connects with you as well. And he lost himself when he lost that soul, but you were there

—

bright and loud. His other puzzle.” I chortle, can’t really help it. “Serious, mprofethi?”

He s

mirks, doesn’t reply.

Good, I'm finding it hard to believe the crap he's just spewed. We're at a Debonair's, he orders three large boxes and hands over the slipover to me. He's also fetching Qophumlando and his boyfriends, they're being driven here by Luvo's brother who isn't into alcohol as hard as them. I've collected all three boxes and wait on Sbanisezwe now. It's annoying

because he took the car with him. Five minutes in and he tells me to come

outside. Finally! He's standing with a much shorter and chubbier—

“Temasiko! What are you doing here?” Sbanisezwe's brows arch in surpris

e. Did he really not do this intentionally?

He's the prophet in his clique after all! And he should explain to me why

goddamn Lwandle Kasana is staring his stinky eyes at me! The bloody

cockroach who... calm down, Tema. “You guys know each other?” the tall

giant can't mask his surprise. "This is the fucker I hoped was suffocating on cockroach sperm!" I hiss, multitasking with these stupid pizza boxes on my left arm and my right hand fisting into Sbanisezwe's t

-

shirt. "What is he doing here, Ngcobo?" "This is Luvu's brother. Lwandle Kasana."

"I know who he is!" I snap. The worthless fucker is ogling me, I think he's... shocked –

somehow. I know that lusty gaze in his eyes, it used to make me feel attractive in the past but

now I hate it. "Temasiko..." breathless. He's a man on his knees.

477

Unrequited Desires : Thirty-eight Temasiko

The drive back to Mbongolwane was long as fuck! Not because I knew Lwandle was in the car behind us, but because the fake prophet in the car with me kept singing gospel songs about forgiveness, a jab at me no doubt. This,

after I told him what Lwandle put me through. But I didn't have time for him.

Getting back here was far more important to me, and then telling Chris that

he'd have to miss me on that family teamwork issue he was on about because I

had karma to serve people. I have a boyfriend now, yes I do; and when I hate people, he has to adopt the

same bitterness toward them on my behalf. I know

Sqalosenkosi isn't petty, ofcourse, but he has to be petty today because he's my boyfriend. That's what I

said when telling him about Lwandle, his thoughts were more focused on the

fact that there's someone else who's seen me naked than the revenge I wanted

dished back at Lwandle. Men. Men. Men.

Anyway, they've slaughtered two cows here and... I don't even know what was

happening b

ut Thatego was crying by the time everything was finalized.

He's a

soft-hearted, very soft-spoken wimp and he looks so very beautiful in

traditional Zulu attire. Obviously, he wouldn't be caught dead in ibheshu, he

likes to be pretty and girly and all squishy. A squishy married girlie who has all the eyes solely focused on him.

I haven't talked to him yet because MaSibusisiwe is an authoritarian whose seems to want the poor guy all to herself, and I don't know what they're

talking about but the look on her face is serious. That ego keeps smiling and

nodding his head, I don't think he cares much about her at the moment, he's

too in love with love and keeps stealing glances at his husband. Husband!

They're really married. Its beautiful to see. "Temasiko..." "What is it?" I don't miss a beat, the adulterous bitch has been giving me the

eyes since we met, and has been consistent throughout this wedding process.

"Asikhulume."

478

I really should've followed Sqaalosenkosi but Sphehile was acting like a needy

little tramp-

online, and they're inside the house because Ms. Peggler's nausea

was acting up and basically she has Sqaalosenkosi wrapped around her pinkyfinger.

"What do you want, Lwandle?" I've lost my super powers. My glare is

supposed to be sending this man to the deepest pits of hell. Why does he look so good

—

and smell just as delicious? He was supposed to be suffering for all

the crap he's put me through. "I—" he cuts himself short when two little girls dash in between us, giggling

happily, but dirty in

g his jeans in the process. Not enough, it's going to take more than just a pair of preadolescents dirtying his jeans to appease me.

"Asikhulume, Dali, aside." This is a very public spot we're standing in, but I didn't want to miss the

action, I wanted to experience all the love first hand

—

every emotion behind muttered words of commitment and promises to love and protect. I was standing here because I was still waiting to congratulate Thatego on marrying the love of his life but MaSibusisiwe nc nc. Lwandle grabs my hand, entwines it with his, and drags me away from the crowd. There are too many hidden corners in this place, I let him lead me to one such place, where the big Piki-tup bins are, and truly he sees me as garbage for him to think this is the on

ly place I'm worthy of being taken to. I

scrunch my nose in distaste, snatching my arm from him, and wait

—

expectantly.

“Temasiko...” his pupils are dilated, he licks his lips as he gives me a onceover,

and I notice that his wedding band is off

–

how con

venient. “You look so gorgeous! I can hardly believe this is you.” I

take offense to that, though I get where he’s coming from.

Sometimes,

sometimes the journey is hell but only because its preparing us for heaven. That is just the way the world works fo

r most of us, isn’t? Things can never

just come easily, smoothly; there always has to be sweat and tears in there.

Lwandle revealing his true colours that night wouldn’t have sent my broke ass

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to Park Station and I wouldn’t have met Sbanisezwe, I wouldn’t have met Sgalosenkosi again.

“Why?” I bat my lashes, inspecting my manicure. “You thought my life was over after you sent me packing with a bruise to my eye?”

He flinches, removing his hands from his pockets, and attempts to touch me. Fuck him! I backtrack, glaring. The audacity he has. Sies!

“Tema—” “Don’t call me that!” he’s so irritating. “Only my boyfriend and close friends call me that. You’re just a stranger who’s dragged me away from celebrating my closest friend’s wedding with his man. Get on with it, what am I doing here?” “Boyfriend?” the shocked expression on his face. His beautiful face squeezes together nastily, like he’s swallowed lemons. “You

have a boyfriend?” “I am desirable, Lwandle, you weren’t going to be the last person I dated.”

He scoffs. Yes, the denier of orgasms scoffs at me. The way he glares makes me

flinch, a second, but I collect myself. He’s still looking at me, more like a

n

assessment and I don't know what he wants to see exactly. Yes, I changed into something else. Something more risqué but that won't steal Thatego's

spotlight. I fixed my makeup again and I look like a proper woman. Our last encounter he told me I was a man.

"Who is this boyfriend?" he looks around me. "What does he do for a living?"

You should be careful, you know how fragile you are and how gullible. This

person's probably using for a quick

fuck

."

My expression hardens, as I draw my bottom lip in between my teeth. I won't cry, I hadn't cried then, the tears had only visited because I had lost the only money I had. But I hadn't cried when dragged by my hair because he didn't want me to tell his wife the truth. I hadn't cried when he called me names and

told me how unlovable I was. When he told me that he was just experimenting

with me, I hadn't cried. Even when he called me a mentally ill person who couldn't even bear children.

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"Like you did?" I enquire. "At least I was truthful about it." He is unap

ologetic, folding his arms on his

chest. "Where is this boyfriend?" "None of your business." He lets out condescending laughter. "Still so stubborn, Temasiko. It won't belong before this boyfriend also bails because of your stinking attitude. I don't what it's for when we know perfectly well how low of a self

-esteem you have, and how men always just want a quick

—"

Fuck

?" I raise my brow. "At least this one can actually make me orgasm, most

of the time multiple times in one round. So even if he were

using me, then he'd

be using me good and proper. I do feel sorry for your wife though, it must suck being used to orgasming when in the rurals, and then having to come here to deal with your lousy ass huffing and puffing on top of her like an asthmatic dog

!”

The angry scowl he gives me! A vein pops out, he nears me with intention. I stand my ground, not in the least bit intimidated

—

a little boy is what this one is. A little boy with self-esteem issues who goes around throwing tantrums because there are issues he hasn't worked through. Or maybe he's just a little boy with a nasty attitude. Sometimes that's all people are —

a bunch of narcissistic, bitter nasties.

“What did you say?” “I hope your wife is getting it good right now. From someone whose dick isn't big uselessly, because you're proof that big doesn't always mean better. Disgusting piece of shit!” “A few strokes from some idiot and now you think that—” “I am loveable.” I

interject, digging into his soul, to address the little boy there.

“You said I wasn’t the last time we met, remember? You said I was sodesperate for love, didn’t you?”

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“It was the truth.” “Your truth, maybe you’re the one desperate for love –

and thi

s is why you’re reacting out. You’re a bully, Lwandle, and looking at you now, I forgive myself

for thinking the issue was me. I forgive myself for allowing your words to get

to me. I forgive myself for believing you.” “Okay, Dr

P

hil.” “You can keep acting out, I don’t care. I know who I am now, maybe not

completely but I know who I am and what I deserve. Maybe it took another

man to get me to realize that, but still, he’s an angel. He’s made me realize that

the greatest gift I could ever give myself is to love me for me.

And that life will

still will continue perfectly well without him, because although he's impacting

me greatly, I am still whole without him. I am still whole with all my

imperfections and insecurities and all the crap that he's helping me

workthrough. I love myself and I am loveable, Lwandle. My lack of a womb and child-bearing abilities does not make me any less

lovable. Because I can't give him children, it doesn't mean that there's no future within me. That's what you said, right? But you're right, I was desperate

then, I was so insecure that I felt I deserved the crappy version of yourself you gave me in that joke of a relationship I had with you but I know better now. Thank you for letting me go. Thank you for being such a fuck-up,

I wouldn't be Squalosenkosi if it weren't for you." "Squalosenkosi..." he tastes the name on his tongue, eyes darting around as the wheels turn in his head "Squalosenkosi, Squalosenkosi... the boxer's brother!" "He loves me, unapologetically, I don't have to

worry about women pitching

up unexpectedly because he's honest. A girlfriend is a girlfriend... not a sister who is getting married in the Eastern Cape." "I thought you said you weren't bitter, but looking at you now—" "You'll see what you want to because you're an egotistical prick who is finding it hard to believe that there is life after you." "Do you blame me?"

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No, I don't. He's a narcissist, I was lucky to escape him, I do feel sorry for his wife though... having to deal with this douchebag must be an extreme sport. "No. I'm just glad I escaped you. I'm grateful for growth I've seen since I left

you. Do you know w

hat it feels like to have a good man, Lwandle? It's the best

thing in the world, when you know your position in his life and he inspires you to be a better version of yourself without shoving money in your face to make up for being a little boy. I hope your wife finds such a man in the rurals, and I

hope she leaves your ass as soon as she realizes that she can do better. You're a crappy little bitch, Lwandle." His chest is

heaving, I'm waiting for any physical correcting attempts so that I

can deal with him but he disappoints me by simply clicking his tongue. Oh

well... I smack a little bitch. Hard! Then I smack him again.

"Tema—" a 'shut

the fuck

up!' punch lands on his mouth. He screams. Good! This is for that

punch he gave me that day. And just because I can, I knee his groin. Hewheezes.

"Next time—" "Temasiko?" I whirl around quickly. He's just standing in front of me with a—

he looks

ready to chide me. The dark expression says everything. "He started it," I sound petulant but I don't care, my bottom lip juts out. "I always listen to you,

daddy, and

—"

He sighs.

“So you’re the boyfriend?” Lwandle is still wheezing. “Excuse us.” Sgalosenkosi tells him, dragging me away by the hand. The loudness around us soothes my previous anger, filling me with calm. “Kodwa

Temasiko

—“I don’t want to hear it,” I interrupt him softly –
apologetically

–

he hates this.

“You don’t know half of what that man’s put me through. I will always hate him for making me think I wasn’t worthy of being loved just because I

struggle

with loving myself sometimes.”

483

The man I am in love with peers down at me, suddenly he doesn’t look ready

to rebuke me, as he leads me back inside the house. Too many people occupy this place as well, women dishing up food for the guests. I follow him up the

stairs, to an elegant bedroom. He closes the door and locks it. Then he's

trailing toward me, I backtrack for some reason, taken aback by the foreign fire in dark pupils.

My back touches the wall, accompanied by a hitch in my voice. He's sm

iling now

—

lazily, boyishly

—

and caressing my cheek. I lean into the touch, wanting to close my eyes but his burning gaze tells me not to. "I love you," so simply, he says the words, "you frustrate me with your psychopathic tendencies."

I laugh, althou

gh I very much feel like crying. "You better keep loving me when I begin HRT and start becoming emotional for no reason. That's where I'll probably be going real psycho on you." He

laughs, heartily, all soft eyes; and I don't doubt that he loves me. It's

right there in his eyes

–

clear as day, and sure as tomorrow is guaranteed. He saved me, there's no shame in admitting that, I'm here because of him –

the

unwavering kindness and support. He's always there, telling me I can do

anything in the world, reminding me that I am worthy

–

of everything.

“Meh.” He shrugs his shoulders. “If I can handle Sphesihle's pregnancy emotions then I can handle you going through puberty all over again.” “How did you—” “Fuze. I've been there for her since the beginning.” “You're such a catch, Ndoda yethu!” my arms wrap around him. “Sphesihle and I truly know we deserve the finer things in life, huh?”

His eyes widen comically, and then his forehead is touching my shoulder, his body shakes in fits of silent laughter. I let

him have his moment, then press my lips to his in a soft kiss that quickly turns demanding as soon as he controls it. His big hands are on my thighs, gripping behind to pull me up, I fold them at his

waist. He's pressing me to the wall and his lips taste of sin.

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"Ah." I moan as he attacks my lips next. "I—love you." My voice cracks, but the

words feel good to admit. This is a mutual thing. He loves me too. I know it; I feel it now, as his hands fumble with my skirt.

"I don't like these skirts." He reminds me amidst passionate lip-locking and

nibbles to my lower lip. "They display private property that should be for my eyes only."

And he talks about me being a psychopath!

"Get over it, Munt' wam." My fingers dig into his shoulders, as I feel him

pressing against my barely stretched hole

–

it's going to hurt. "At the end of the day, you're the only one enjoying the benefits of this private property."

He releases a breathy chuckle and then starts to push through the resistance. Holy fuck! Tears blur my vision a little.

"Argh!" I cry out hoarsely. "You didn't prepare me enough." "I want it to hurt," he confesses. "Punishment?" He doesn't reply, letting out a pained sound as well –

and he's t

old me that

sometimes it hurts him when I squeeze too tight. He's fighting through every resistance and moves with a gentleness that lasts a few minutes before he's

speeding up

–

pounding me hard against the wall. I move my hand to stroke myself in time with his relentless pace, my toes curling against my sandals.

“Just like that,” I encourage, “you’re making me feel so good. It feels good.” My face is in his hands, he’s kissing me with all the love that lives inside him. I

forget about the pain, and work on chasing my orgasm, as he works on his aswell. He changes the angle just a fraction

—

and there it is. My eyes roll to the back in pleasure when he aims for my p-spot relentlessly. The promise to tend to my itch reveals itself in fast pistons inside my ass. My body quivers, I yank him to me again, kissing him deeply. His hands grope my ass and he’s smacking... my asscheeks jiggle, he repeats the process... I moan his name, so very close to the edge... his breathing is hot in my ear,

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that’s all it takes...

fuck

! “Pull

out,” I beg, “don’t cum in me.” I can’t get

pregnant, but its uncomfortable to walk with cum in your ass.

“I—can’t.” He sounds like a dying wolf. “Its too late.”

The fuck

! Its not, he’s not—

“Argh!” his warmth sears my insides. I push at his chest roughly, but he’s still moving, riding his wave. “Idiot! Now I’m going to walk around with cumtrapped in my ass.” “Bathroom’s in the hallway,” this he says when he’s recovered. A hiss parts my swollen lips, he’s pulling out gently. “I’m sorry.”

Mxm. Nx!

“And its not like you haven’t messed up my shirt, Temasiko.”

He can easily slip on a new one. My legs are trembling as he places me on my

feet, he makes a face like he’s in pain and I am worried. Is he knee troubling

him? This is why its important to

not pick fat women up. “Are you okay, Munt’wam?” “Fine.” I don’t believe him. “Tell Sphehshle that I’m spending the night with you tonight. I want to take care of you.”

His eyes are suggestive.

I shake my head, smacking his chest. “Not everything is about sex. Sies!”

He chuckles, offers to go with me to the bathroom a second later but I turn

him down, I don’t want to be fucked there also. After I’ve cleaned myself, I go

back to join the others, and enjoy the festivities. Sphesihle meets my eyes, gives me a onceover and rolls those big hazel orbs to hell and back. I humour

her with my best smile. “Hey, bestie!” I mouth sweetly.

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She glares, headed toward the house. I wouldn’t be surprised if she’s going to

nap again, she sleeps a lot and tires easi

ly. “Here, a drink for your lover boy.” Sbanisezwe comes to give me a glass of whiskey. His eyes point in Lwandle’s direction.

“Take it.” There’s a threatening smile on his face.

He gets married and becomes a bully all of a sudden.

“Whatever you say.” I do his bidding. Lwandle attempts to talk to me but I am not interested. I finally get a moment with Thatego. He is tired, that’s easy to

tell, but he makes it look beautiful. There

is a beautiful beam that refuses to leave his gorgeous face.

“Thatego Ngcobo.” I pinch his slightly chubby cheek, he’s two sizes smaller than me. “Hey...” his watery eyes worry me, “don’t cry.” “I’m not sad. I’m really happy!” his expressions change like

the weather. The light-skinned, Tswana-

Coloured wimp. “Ma Sibusisiwe gave me some pot sets as a gift. And a cleaning set. And cheap lingerie from Mr. Price. There’s fishnet

stockings and a wig. Her advice was to be a prostitute in my marriage, that way my h

usband will never leave me.” “Hmm?” “I need to sell him sex.” “Sound advice,” I nod in approval, laughing when she shoves at my shoulder, “it’s true. Sex gets you everywhere in life.” His eyes are full of joyous laughter. “Congratulations, girlie. You deserve everything good, you’re ever kind and I hope you’re happy all the days of your life. Sbanisezwe better take good care of you.” “I want a baby,” he blurts out, “a boy this time. We have a daughter.”

Shame. Sbanisezwe is just looking to have him all to himself for a while. He

told me. But I'm sure they'll work something out, they love each other. "Enjoy

marriage first. Enjoy work and

—""Sbanisezwe will agree. He gives me everything I want."Hmkay. "Lucky you."

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We spend a few more minutes talking, and then MaSibusisiwe drags him away

again to introduce him to a woman she went to high school with. She's had a

few bottles and is clearly overly excited today. Old thing. Sgalosenkosi and Imake eye contact a few times but everyone is busy here. And there is Fuzelihle

with... sigh.I want to go and tell her that Lwandle is not worth it. She's stupidly giggly inthe man's presence. He's just going to fuck her and forget about her. The onlything that prevents me from going over is Chris coming at me with a bright

grin on his face. He's not drunk but he's clingy. "You're working for me on Wednesday!" he reminds me. "Excited is an understatement." "Good. Good!" he is breathless, toying with the ring on his finger. "I'm a great boss, you won't regret it. Don't get into a scuffle with Sphesihle, please, especially now that you're going to be living together in—" "Say what now?" "Hyde Park." His voice is dreamy. "I thought you knew this already."

No, no. What I knew is that I was going to be living alone in Hyde Park. Now

this gorgeous man here smiling stupidly at his husband is telling me that I'll be

living with Sphesihle. Sphesihle Gcwensa? Tha

t one... who thinks she's better

than me? Sister-

wife? Yhuuu, I haven't suffered in the life... clearly. "Pray I don't kill her with my bare hands by the end of the week." "Oh stop it!" he waves me off. "You're going to be the bestest frenemies and I

am here

for it. Let me go to my husband. I love you, okay?"

Heh?

My smile is wide. “You too,” I say. Why am I so embarrassed? “MaDlamini,” my baby is here, “you’re looking extremely lonely on your own.”

488

“Is Sphehile still resting?” I search his eyes. “And why didn’t you tell me we’re moving in together?”

This is news to him too, the expression he gives me says it all. I sigh, deciding

to let it go. His arms are around me, I am nervous. People don’t really know about us, and I don’t care, but surely it’s

disrespectful to be like this in public.

There’s too many people minding their own business to be minding our business though. But I’m still tense in his arms, I don’t know why when I saw

him holding Sphehile exactly like this earlier.

“There’s a Taylor

Swift song I want to play for you when I take care of you

tonight,” I divulge, placing a hand over the one resting on my belly. “Who’s that? Is it a sex song?”

Mxm.

“Not everything is about sex, you addict!” I snort out a laugh. “Its about you

and the peace you bring me. When we get married, I think I want to play it. Taylor Swift

—

Peace.” His arm tightens around mine. “You’re proposing?” “Future proposal.” I giggle happily. “I truly believe that we’ll still be like this in the future. Happy. In love. It’s okay if we won’t, I’ll be sad, but very grateful for the memories and all I’ve learned about love from you. I know better than to settle

for less than what I deserve now.” “And what do you deserve?” “Someone who’ll be brave enough to love me even when I can’t love myself. Who won’t put me down because of that. I deserve love because all humans deserve love. I deserve love and money.” He laughs in response. “You do.” “Sbanisezwe told me I am at peace. I think I am, it’s funny, but I’ve never been

more content

—

happy. Help Sphehile be like that too. So what we can all get along.”

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“Temasiko—” “I don’t doubt that you love me, Sqa
osenkosi. Heck, I feel it now. I feel it all the
time actually. And it’s for this reason that I don’t mind a lot of
things, Sphehile isn’t a factor in my eyes. She’s not the deal
-breaker here. If she wants to leave, on well. If she chooses to
stay, oh well

I. I’m just happy that you treat me right and that you love me.
That’s all I really want from you.” “And for me to accept your
proposal.” “And to give me babies.” He chuckles again, sitting
me on his lap against the car that he’s perched on. “How
many?” “A billion!” “An entire country, huh?” I nod my head.
“Your family’s already a country anyway.” He’s laughing again. I
make him laugh a lot. I’m a comedic girlfriend, that’s a

good thing. Very important this thing of making a man who gives you gooddick, heart and money, laugh. Ten out of ten in the girlfriend department for me. "You're crazy." "In

love with you." "That was so cringe."

Mxm.

"You're so lucky I am in love with you." There's a commotion ahead that prevents him from replying. Fuzelihle looks angered, she's complaining about something. Drama queen... or not so much.

People are sepa

rating, escaping someone. Lwandle's jeans are damp and suspiciously brown. People are squeezing their noses and did he...

“Looks like your man’s shit himself.” Sgalosenkosi is unbothered. “He’s become a literal piece of shit!” maybe its wrong but I start

to laugh

loudly. Oh my god! “Sbanisezwe gave me whiskey that—” “I gave him. Fuze just toyed him long enough, he has too much of an ego to admit he needs the toilet in the presence of a beautiful woman. Violence isn’t the solution to everything.”

Nonchala

nt, but I hear the amusement in his voice.

“I love you!” I giggle happily, proud of him. “You’re welcome.”

491

Unrequited Desires : Thirty-nine Sphesihle

“Bonginkosi asked me to the matric dance.” Huh? Who’s that? “Which boy is that, Qalokuhle?” she’s always talking about different boys asking her out, apparently she’s the most sought after girl at school and she likes to remind me that she’s ‘walking in my footsteps’ but I only ever had one

boyfriend in school, it

wasn't even serious. "Uphi uLungisani?" "I dumped his ass, he was a lousy boyfriend!" This girl, she's only 16 years old! My mother must be turning in her grave at the mention of every new boyfriend. Besides, school should be Qalo's only focus, she's only a few weeks away from completing her matric. But she's

always been loud and careless, enjoying the childhood that I never really had.

"What did he do?" I'm sure it's about money. It's always about money with her,

and she forgets that most village boys

don't have much, that not everyone is

like Sgalosenkosi Ngcobo and his family.

"He said he was taking me out on a date, uyangizwa Masisi?"

I roll my eyes, but still nod my head, forcing myself to breathe through a

nauseated breath. It's 08:48pm, I can't afford to get sick, tomorrow's my first day at work and I don't want to suffer through sleepless nights. "Yes," I,

belatedly, reply

—

she can't see me. I forget that sometimes. "Good, because I don't want you to fall in love with boys who do this, okay?" I can hear her disgruntled sigh. "He told me to accompany him to Mphundumane, and that's obviously code for 'date' so I agreed, Masisi. An

hour and thirty minutes under the scorching sun and we got there, but he was

going to Senzo's house to borrow a ch

arger and we had to walk back home again, on empty stomachs, and he wanted a kiss from me after the pain he put

me through! He didn't even buy me a packet of R1 chips for all my efforts. Nx! Abafana, Masisi, badelela kabi!"

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"You wouldn't have appreciated

those R1 chips nje. Kuyafana." I remind her

with fits of amused giggles smoothly sliding out of my tongue. I know her,

she's very materialistic for a person who grew up without. "I mean—" her snort touches my ear, she gives no fucks. "Yazi Masisi, angek

e

ngidlale abafana baseMbongolwane, naye uBonginkosi ngimtshelile. We're going to Eshowe this weekend, he's taking me to Spur and interviewing for a prospective date with me." "Weeeh!" I shake my head. "Just don't ask too much when you have nothing

yours

elf, Qalo. That boy's a student like you. If you don't have a R100 in your pockets, chances are this Bonginkosi doesn't have it as well." "A serious man always makes a plan." "You're 16," I remind her, disturbed, "just make sure that most of your focus is on the your books and that you allocate most of your time to studying. You

promised Mah at least 5 distinctions, Qalo." "Don't stress me, please." She whines in my ear. "With Mah gone, I was beginning to relax and now you're pressuring me. I don't want to lose the fun in my schooling because I need to make it, because you're a disappointment who didn't get the best results and slept with a

rich man for money.”“Qalo!” her words make my chest tight with pain, I slowly sit up. “Who do you think

—”“Hey, Mah used to say this not me. I’m just saying I don’t want to go back to

that time where it was a constant reminder that I had to replace you in the

department of making a parent proud. Don’t be like her, I love her but I’d belying if I said it wasn’t a relief to no longer hear the words of righting yourmistakes.”Oh... her words still don’t make me feel any better. I swallo

w a lump in my

throat, blinking back the tears. “I don’t mean to pressurize you, I just want you

to do well. Just because we come from a less-privileged background, it does

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not mean that the rest of our lives have to turn out that way. Not in this dayand

age, where education opens many new doors.” “That’s a lie and you know it, Masisi.” She scoffs in my ear, I can almost see her rolling her big, round eyes. “Education doesn’t open any new doors. People

graduate just to stay home, unemployment is rife, and those in power only empower themselves and those close to them.

Connections open doors now,

you’re starting a new job tomorrow because you were well

-

connected.” I forget she’s in the debate club at school, and that she’s a budding politician –

or maybe an economist. She enjoys the latter better than the former. My

mother would be so proud of her, she’s worked hard to be consistent at school, and she talks back a lot... nothing at all like some of us who were

taught to always respect the elderly

–

wrong or right.

“That is true. It’s those same connections that will help fund your education at UKZN, I’m working hard for our family.” “I’d

just use Bhuti Sqalosenkosi's money instead, working hard to pay my

tuition when you have a boyfriend who can do it for free seems like self-

punishment. Why would you do that to yourself?"

Haisuka!

"It's rewarding for me, when I spend money on the things that I love –

makeup, hair and new clothing

–

knowing that I've worked hard for it. It's fulfilling,

Qalo, to be able to afford the things you love with money coming from your

own pocket."

"Ish dade!" she teases. "Thank you for the allowance money you sent. I am going to buy food on Saturday. Don't worry about my dress money, it's being taken care of." "By whom?" I cock a suspicious brow. "We Qalo, I hope you're not making some poor

boy spend his family's grant money on buying you a dress that you'll most likely wear once."

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"Bhut' Squalosenkosi is going to buy it for me. And he promised that he'd speak

to Thatego Morake

—wait, I read on Drum Magazine that he's Ngcobo now— anyway, there's a chance he might come down here to do my makeup!" I am not happy, there's a searing feeling on my cheeks as I feel my face bunch

up in displeasure. What the hell is Squalosenkosi doing talking to my siblings? First it was Nhloso, I called him earlier, and he told me that Squalosenkosi was going home next weekend and he volunteered to teach him how to drive.

Nhloso's favourite teacher wouldn't allow him to come to Johannesburg with

me becau

se it's almost the end of the school year, and he lives with her instead... she told me Sqalosenkosi sent them R5000 grocery money. And now

its Qalokuhle with the dress.

"Turn him down!" I snap, pushing down the growing anger.

"We don't accept

handouts. How much is your

—"No, you're not going to pay for a designer dress. Yehlisa umoya, uphefumule,

dade

—

getting worked up won't be good for the babies. I hate Life Scienc

es

but I know this." "Mxm!" Qalokuhle pays me back with a happy giggle. "I have to get back to studying, Masisi. Please don't forget to greet our babies for me, and tell all of them that I can't wait to meet them." She's bribing me with her sweet words, and I fall victim. "We love you too, Qalo. Rest when you need to." "Sap!" she snorts and disconnects the call.

I drop it on the bed beside me and contemplate watching the TV in the living

room but I don't like the television, maybe because Mah always insisted on watching childish shows that I ended up losing interest. We had electricity a bit late than everyone else in our neighbourhood, and we only could watch the

TV when my mother came back from selling in town. I just don't have any

interest in it.

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Another thing I never had much interest in was food. Have you ever lived in so much poverty that you began training your tummy to feel full even when

you've had nothing to eat? Maybe you'd drink water to deceive it into thinking you're supplying it with much needed food.

That's how it was for me, at home, because we couldn't afford to eat too many times a day and have things run

out before Mah could make more money to replace utilized maize meal.

I've never been one to care too much for food, but I

am a starving pig ten times out of ten lately. I eat, and still feel hungry. Sometimes I am full but hungry. It makes no sense, but I blame everything on the babies. The babies that live

inside me and... I am trying real hard to not cling onto the idea of ha

ving all of them too tightly. Expecting multiples is high risk, and when Sbanisezwe and I had finished with the doctor in Eshowe, we were told about something called vanishing twin

syndrome and how one or more could just... die. She explained why but I

wasn

't interested at that point, I didn't want the babies to die. I'm so very

close to hitting 9 weeks, where the chances of that happening decrease exponentially. My bladder is acting up, I never ignore it for fear of any negative effects this might have, a

nd heed to nature's call regularly. I wash my hands and decide

that I am hungry. The last time I ate anything was at Steers with Sgalosenkosi

and Liyana. She's missed me and she wanted me to go back home with them but it's not a good idea. I don't like tha

t I am so in love with Sgalosenkosi; I

don't like that most of the time, I can't help caring for him and his daughter. I don't like that I become too much of a giver around him. I don't like that at all. I don't like him.

This is why I am here, in Hyde P

ark, and I am grateful that I haven't yet run

into Temasiko. She was in this house yesterday, when Sbanisezwe dropped

me off, and he only said we're roomies before driving off because he and Thatego had a honeymoon to enjoy. They're on their way to Japan a

s we

speak. Temasiko didn't seem surprised to see me, she smiled mockingly and

kept it moving.

I don't think she likes me very much, it's obvious in the fake manner she

handles herself around me. The wolf-in-

sheep's

-clothing expressions she gives me in th

e presence of those she's won over. Unfortunately, I cannot pretend. I

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don't try to hide behind fake smiles and pleasantries when I don't like

someone. I thought we could get along but I saw that day she thought she was better than me over mere computer lessons that we wouldn't get along.

She had to further prove this by sleeping with Sgalosenkosi, knowing perfectly

well that he had a girlfriend. And now she's in a relationship with him. It's not so much about her gender identity that I care about, it's more

about her calling herself a woman and then proceeding to stab another woman in the

back. And I say this without dismissing Sgalosenkosi's role in all this... but men are men. They'd sleep with a bloody cockroach if it were possible. But Temasiko... she lacked boundaries from day

one. And wouldn't respect me, even in Squalosenkosi's presence. I'm not there. I just don't like her. I hate that we have to live together. I hate that we have to work together. I hate that we have to be in each other's faces 24/7 with minimal breaks. Even married couples aren't subjected to this kind of torture. I hate

that she's still up, taking up space in the kitchen that I want to use. Her eyes meet mine and she gives me that infamous fake smile.

"Hey, baby!" Baby? I've become baby now? "Don't call me that!" I snap, wrinkling my nose in annoyance. "I am not your

baby. I am not your girlfriend. Stop it, it's disgusting." She giggles like I've told her the best joke, I am tempted to smack that silly grin on her face away. Her body-wash is strong and pleasing to the nose but I

won't tell her that. "Sorry then. I'm making zucchini and mushroom pasta. Are you hungry?" "Do you think I came to the kitchen to just gaze at your fake ass?" Another round of loud laughter. "That's a yes?"

I keep my lips shut, and perch my fat ass on the stool, watching her move around

nd the kitchen. There's a loud confidence about her that I find greatly annoying, it almost borders on arrogance, and I wonder how the others can't

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see it. She's the type that's always here and there –

offering unsolicited advices that no one cares about.

“How are your babies?” “Fine,” I mutter, accepting the glass of water that she offers me, “why are you asking?”

She shrugs her shoulders; at the cooktop now, working on stirring something

on a large, round pan. “I've just been reminded how much I used to love

children and it won't hurt getting to know yours since they're going to be in my life forever.” The words make me snort, I shoot her with glares that don't send her falling back on the ground.

Dammit! “You're very sure of yourself. That you'll

be here

forever. What if Squalosenkosi doesn't want you

tomorrow?” “His loss.” This is what I am talking about, that

annoying arrogance. “After all he's done for you. The money

he's spent on you? Ukhohlakele kodwa." "You said what if he left me, it would've been his choice. As for his money, he should think twice before dumping me, I guess. I won't stop using it until we break up." "At least you admit to being a gold

-

digger." "Thank you." She smiles sweetly. "Wasn't a compliment!" I hiss, banging my fist on the table quietly. "It was a compliment for my honesty." A beam colours her plump lips. "Don't

stress yourself with me, babes, focus on yourself and your journey with

Sqalosenkosi. Clearly I'm the gold

-digger in this situationship, wena just

ensure you're securing the bag for us."

Will it be okay to throw the remainder of this water on her smug face and then blame it on pregnancy hormones later? Why did Sbanisezwe even think that

this would be a good idea?

Couldn't his ancestors show him that this is a recipe for disaster? I won't survive two days with this parrot, how am I supposed to survive... who knows how long we're even going to live here?" "Are you crying?" she sounds incredulous. "I was just joking, I

don't mean to make you cry. Haibo, so they're serious about pregnant women!? You guys just become emotional over everything!"

Why is she so close?

"Don't touch me!" I snap. Has she no idea how much her presence irritates the

fuck out of me? This is Sb

anisezwe's fault! "I want to go home."

"Huh?" and just like that she laughs again. "This is home. Our home! I mean I don't like you either but you have to admit this is some cool shit. Who knew that we'd live in such an elegant house?" "Can you focus on

the cooking, please? And giving me my food once its done. I

didn't come here for small talk." Temasiko laughs. She laughs for everything. "One thing about me, I laugh

before smacking a tramp-

oline." "Hello jail time!" I match her laughter.

A headshake, she nibbles on her lower lip and goes back to making the late

night dinner. She's a talker, like all the politicians when they want the public votes, and mentions being overjoyed about starting work tomorrow. She's picked out her outfit and she can't wait to show Chris what she's all about.

I half-listen, worried that I might not do so well compared to this one. Clearly

she's lived, this is why she's so unnecessarily loud, and what if Chris likes her as an intern more than me? I heard we'd be getting assignments, what if she

performs them far

more beautifully than me? What if Chris doesn't choose me

in the end, what if he offers her employment and opportunities?

A lot of 'what

-

ifs' cross my mind but I've been doing my best to not focus on them. I am very careful lately, I don't want to cause myself any unnecessary stress and impact my pregnancy negatively somehow. My focus remains on

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the food when she's dished up for me, and I get two servings before heading to my room again. There's a missed call on my phone.

Sqalosenkosi. Earlier irrita

tion prickles my skin, I don't feel like calling him back but I still dial his number. It rings once and goes through, "MaGcwensa," he greets first,

sounding sleep-

roughened, "is everything okay?"

What, has he become a prophet too? Does he know that I resent him for

budging into my family's affairs? Does he know what we don't need him

playing hero nor daddy? The bastard!

“Just peachy,” I mutter, turning on my side. “What did I do wrong so I can fix it?” “I don’t know! He’s done a lot of things wrong.”

“Nothing.” I shake my head. There’s a second’s pause. I know he doesn’t believe me. I’m just angry at him for my siblings, and that anger is just a pile on top of the angry package. “Let me see your face,” this is a desperate plea, I hear it in his voice.

He sees my face in less than two seconds. He’s in his study, glasses on, and was obviously working. It’s almost 09:35pm, why isn’t he asleep? I am tempted to turn away from this look he’s giving me –

inexplicable. His eyes are always soft lately. ‘Let me take care of you’ they scream, but I don’t think I can allow it, lest I fool myself into thinking he’s in love with me. “Waze wamuhle ebusuku kangaka.” There’s a smile in his voice. “Kwenzenjani, MaGcwensa? Khona esikubangayo mhlampe?”

I fidget with my satin gown, he raises an eyebrow and this time it feels like he

really does know that something's wrong, it's like he's become a prophet like his brother and can see through me with just a gaze. "Why are you contacting my siblings without my permission? They don't know you like that, but you're skipping me and arranging meetings with them because why exactly?"

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He has the grace to look apologetic at least. "I'm sorry, I didn't—" "This is how little girls get taken advantage of, Sgalosenkosi, because 33 year

old men deem it right to speak with young girls more than half their age.

Qalokuhle is only 16 years old, and now she's talking about you paying for her

matric dresses, something

ing I didn't even know about. There's Nhloso who you're going to help with—" "Don't insult me, Sphesihle!" he never raises his voice, but I still flinch. "Look, I'm sorry that you've been

disappointed by men before, including myself, but I don't view your

siblings as anything else but family. The same way I help my own family members, is the same way I was hoping to help yours." "Why? You're feeling bad for making me pregnant when you knew I wasn't

what you really wanted? And that you were going to go ahead and find

someone else because I'm not enough of a woman for you." "Sphehile..." I don't like the way his voice is quiet, regretful, apologetic... it makes me want

to cry, to be weak all over again but I refuse it. Not in front of him. This is my fault

, right? I'm the one who wanted him. But I didn't get him, not really. He just moved on from Siyabonga to... her. So much for Sbanisezwe telling me

that I was powerful beyond imaginable.

"It's not a crime to not be enough for someone. Thinking you can be th

at

—

one complete thing for someone is a flawed way of thinking.
Why would I want to

burden you with such a task?" "The problem with you is you
always know what to say." "I try my best to be honest. I wasn't
lying, I've never expected you to be

enough

for me. That is... it makes no sense at all. I just accept the facets
of you that you show me, no matter how imperfect. I don't need
you to be enough for anything." "But you're still with her."

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"Because she's not you, and you're not her. You're both very
different women that I am drawn to for different reasons and
with whom I share different

chemistry with.... Didn't you, I thought you said I could continue
with her." "I did. I mean it. I think I did. Maybe it's the pregnancy
that's causing me to be

emotio

nal. "It doesn't matter. Do what makes you happy."

He seems ready to push and push but today is not one of those
days where I appreciate the pushing. We talk about the babies

instead, he wants to talk to them and so I silently listen to every word. So much love comes from him. He

promises to better himself for them, tells them that he's seeing a therapist so that he doesn't pass any generational traumas onto them. He speaks about a

lot of things

—

all good and positive.

“Did you know—

my therapist said to me today, he said that we often date people that feel familiar, whoever in your family left an impact

—

good or bad

—

you are likely to marry someone who behaves similarly.” Okay. I don't know what this has to do with me. I'm in the process of attendin

g

my own therapy sessions, I just didn't like the man he sent me to. Men are

always biased. I prefer a woman, she will know where I am coming from with my issues

—

and get why men are such assholes!

“Maybe I saw Siyabonga in you in the beginning, maybe I used you for it. But

maybe I saw past that because you remind me of Ntwenhle and how

everything about you is calm. You're like her but different, in the way that you

were taking care of me and my daughter.

“And I'm supposed to be flattered?” is he out of his mind!? This makes things worse, way worse! The only reason he's kept me around is because he's seen

yet another person in me

—

and I'm fulfilling roles that his mother never fully

catered to. I am offended, upset! I no longer want to speak to him.

“No.” He shakes his head. “But I just got thinking, MaGcwensa. That session helped me think through so many things, and I am glad you’re in my life.” “Okay.” I shrug my shoulders.

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“And... looking at you now, I know you said I shouldn’t rush you and... may

-maybe Sbanisezwe was right. Because looking at you now, I —are you sleepy?”

I nod my head. Its getting late, I start my new job tomorrow. He requests to watch over me while I sleep, my battery will be dead in the

morning, but I allow it. I’m almost there, teetering on the edge of

consciousness and unconsciousness when he speaks again softly.

“May I take you out this Saturday?” “Like a date?” “A date.” He is uncharacteristically unsure of himself. “Please.” “But we’re not together,” I remind him. “A date that is not a date then,” persistently, he says this. I blink my eyes at him, note the little discomfort, it must’ve taken a lot for him to defy his own rules, “please.” “Okay.” I nod my head.

The pleased beam he gives me! So goddamn childish... like he’s won the lottery. “You won’t regret it, MaGcwensa,” he promises, all soft eyes. “Sleep now, let me take care of you.”

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Unrequited Desires : FortyTemasiko

Sqalosenkosi called me very early this morning to remind me that today is my first day at work, and to wish me a good day that I am beyond sure I will have.

Its 07:00am, I’m wearing a new dress, new heels and new hair. My makeup

looks perfect

—

thank you, Thatego for the tips

—

and I feel good. NCT Dream's 'Hot Sauce' is already making my day better, but finding Sphesihle cooking in the kitchen makes everything ten times better.

"Morning!" I chirp, lowering the volume on my phone, as I lazily flounce over

to the stool at the breakfast bar. "I didn't know you'd be awake. What are you making?"

Silence, she has her back turned to me, and the cooking fumes rise above her. I

wonder if she's bathed already, if yes then it's going to inconvenience her

going to

work smelling like... whatever she's making. "Food." The one-word reply comes some seconds later.

"Okay. You've bathed?" "To smell like cheesy garlic chicken?" she sweeps a disinterested gaze at me, and then goes back to cooking. "I used a lot of onions,

if you don't like onion then tough luck." I bat my lashes, cheesing hard though she's returned to her cooking, and allow my cheek to keep my palm company. "Onions, cheese, garlic and chicken –

how does that work?" "Because I made it," her tone is beautifully snippy.

"Well, I can't wait to taste it." Something tells me that I make the better cook

here, strange because she grew up in the rural areas with her parents. Girl

children are abused in rural areas, they're in charge of all the hard labour.

Ma

ybe it's the same for this one, it could explain the unnecessary bitterness. "How did you sleep?"

“Fine.” She slides a plateful of meticulously decorated food at me –

wow! This looks five-star ish.

“I didn’t know you could make food like this, I don’t know what I expected but it’s not this. Then again, you surprised me with the Greek salad last time,” I confess with a giggle, “it smells really good.”

She nods her head, strolls to the fridge to grab a bottle of juice, and shifts to

occupy one of the chairs at the round table. Maybe she doesn’t want to take

risks with her pregnancy and fears falling.

There’s a textbook on the table, a

laptop in front of her, she slides on her glasses and starts eating

–

multitasks

that with reading the thick fashion textbook. Sometimes I forget she’s a student, and now she has an internship with Chris. Someone didn’t I

eave

Mbongolwane to play... clearly. "I'll take care of the dishes," I offer when she grabs my plate to take to the sink, "you still have to bath, right? I promise to not miss a spot. Even the dustparticles will be gone." She's a neat

-freak, like Sqalosenkosi. A shrug of the shoulders, and she disappears. I put on some gloves and an apron, getting to it. True to my word, I make sure to clean any traces of dustparticles also

—

and leave everything spotless. Its 08:00am now, but Chrisopens shop at 09:00a

m; we're safe. "Bambi, Bambi, Bambi..." I sing, scrolling

through my Facebook. Its so fucking boring, I have less than 100 friends,

because I don't get this thing of having a billion friends you don't know. What

purpose are they fulfilling?

"Sphehleh!" I call out when Bab' Shange hits the hooter. Surely she should be done by now, it's been over an hour. "I don't want to be late because of you." Only ten minutes later, does she appear, looking... wow! Breathtaking, I have

to admit

–

the white suit-dress hugs her curvaceous frame, clinging to her hour-

glass body, reaching just one inch above her knees. She's paired her red

lipstick with the red ankle-

strap heels she has on. Damn! She's gorgeous, no

wonder Sgalosenkosi is in love with her.

"Looking beautiful, bestie!"

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"I know." She gives me a once-over, lips twitching, and I swear there's a silent approval in her eyes. It makes me smile. "Bye." A waltz past me, her perfume

smells like red roses. Beautiful little bitch!

We get in the car, Bab' Shange seem

s drawn to Sphesihle, something about his

daughter who's studying and all that, but he doesn't show bias or favouritism,

and speaks when spoken to. He tells us about being held up in traffic by policemen who bust two women in possession of drugs, and goes on to tell us that he appreciates that we work hard for our money.

“People are desperate, Baba.” I remind him, putting my phone back inside my purse. “I would do it, too, if I felt it was the only way to get out of a tough situation.”

His eyes are judging me, but he holds his tongue.

We’re here. I step out, grabbing my handbag and Sphesihle follows after me. The office isn’t the most impressive, its surrounded by other office buildings

and reminds me of that forsaken call centre place I used to work at, its just this place is bigger

—

and I’m lying, this place is impressive. There’s even a balcony here, there are chairs and tables I can see from here, its clearly a hangout spot.

We don’t have to wait outside until Chris comes in to open shop here, as we

enter through sliding doors to be welcomed by a white woman with cherry-

red hair behind a large, sparkling mahogany table. "Hello, my name is Roseanna," she greets –

all fake smile

s, "you are?" Sphesihle and I look at each other. There's a competition here, about who

should speak first, but this beautiful bitch rolls her golden-brown eyes at me

and puffs out an irritated breath of air. "The new interns," she replies, "Chris

Ngcobo

didn't tell you?" "Chris Ngcobo?" the lady scratches her scalp –

almost irritatingly. "Mr. Ngcobo, you mean?" "Yes," this time I speak up.

“Let me check, he did mention something about—oh yes!” she punches some

buttons on her computer again, and giv

es us that fake beam again. “I’ll let him know you’re here. Please situate yourselves over there.”

We do her bidding, shifting to occupy the vacant lounge-

chairs. “Don’t look so nervous,” I assure Sphesihle beside me, “he’s going to love us. He doesn’t h

ave

a choice, we’re family now apparently.” Cold glare from hell sends teasing shivers down my spine, her smile doesn’t hide her annoyance. If anything, I must admit I like that she’s so truthful, and

never bothers with fake pleasantries

—

unless she’s b

ored and decides to

humour me. But she’s been consistent in her dislike of me, I strangely find it

funny.

“Thanks for the advice, Mah.” “Mah?” I gag and pat my chest dramatically. “Girl, we’re the same age!” I mean

I think we are, she could be younger.

She doesn’t look older than 25 though. “I doubt it,” comes the bored quip.

Chris interrupts anything else I was going to say, his voice is really bright and

loud for a Wednesday morning, he’s walking with a taller guy who seems just

as flamboyant as h

im. “Morning, mon bebes!” his smile is gorgeous, matching how he looks, clearly he’s worked in the fashion industry. “Lovely morning, isn’t it?” “Morn—” “Thank you, Roseanna!” he happily interrupts me, smiling at the receptionist. “Sorry for that. You both look very beautiful, there’s no need to be all formal here though. We’re creatives, aren’t we?”

Okay. High heels are being ditched tomorrow! Thank you so much, dearest boss.

“Noted.” Sphesihle’s adenoidal voice confirms, she plays with her laptop bag in

front of her. Out of the two of us, she came here expecting too much I guess.

What’s the laptop for? “But I like to dress like this.” “As long as you’re doing you.” Chris loo

ks between both of us, hands moving to

his pockets. “This is Msizi, Miss M actually. Call him Miss M, that’s what he prefers.”

Then he shouldn’t have given us that first name. I hold in my laugh, greeting

the man with dramatic makeup politely. Chris lea

ves us in Miss M’s care, because he has to go home. He works from home a lot, his son’s waiting there for him and the nanny.

The perks of being a rich boss who can afford to stay home.

“Your work stations,” Miss M points us

to our tables that are next to e

ach other, “there’s drawers for you to place your belongings into. I’ll call maintenance for your keys, I forgot about that.”

Hmk.

We're inducted for about an hour, and introduced to the different departments, and though we're not really here for modeling experience, we'll still be working closely with the ladies in charge there. Maybe I'll enquire how much it would cost me to get lessons once all this is done. In the meantime, we have an assignment to work on, to put together an outfit that we feel would belong on the front page of a fashion magazine

—

the theme is golden fantasy. What the fuck is golden fantasy?

I thought we were just going to put cute outfits together, and that they'd ask us to sketch a design or two but nope... okay, they're telling us to put together an outfit but still, I don't know what the heck golden fantasy. It's busy here, the

costume room, people are grabbing this and that, and Miss M declines everything they show him. He seems like a bitchy character.

"What do you think of this?" I ask the unknown lady beside me, showing her a

pair of spiky heels that have bits of gold on them. Her disgusted grimace tells me all I need to know. "Belongs in the dumpster, so 2013," she still informs me.

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Then what is it doing here?

I don't ask, and ditch put the heels where I found them. There are two models

here, for Sphehile and I to dress. At least someone has worked on their

makeup already. Let me find something that will match this gentleman's

makeup. A distance away, Sphehile keeps putting different clothes against

her model's body and will frown in disapproval. She's fully concentrated,

and

—

"You're taking too long," Miss M cuts through my thoughts, he sounds sobored. "This shouldn't have taken you more than two

minutes. It's a simple task, I don't know why you're acting like I've told you to put together something more complicated. I should've

made the theme sparkling air

instead."

Heh? This man is out to confuse us. What is sparkling air? Golden fantasy seems so much better, at least we know to work with golden colours. Where would we begin with sparkling air?

I'm done before Sphehile, and now the attention is on her. From here, I can

see her hands trembling, she's so nervous. Calm down, girl! I want to go over

and help her, but this was an individual task and I think Miss M is trying to make sense of our individual styles. Nearly an eternity later and Sphehile is done. Her outfit is completely different from mine. A sheer top paired with Irish-

style skirt and pants and heels is what she's dressed the man in. It's different, with the black collar on his neck and the miniature purse that accessories his waist. I wouldn't have thought of this, I

love the look, but I still like what I've come up with better. I had Prince in mind when I chose this vintage suit for my model. And you can't really ever go

wrong with platform boots.

"You're dismissed for now. I'll call you." Miss M snaps, h

is eyes are expectant.

Sphehile and I walk out. "What a bitch," I confide in her, letting out a breath, I

was sweating back there and this is how he repays us?

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"I know." Wait... did she just agree with me? She's gone, now sitting at her orderly desk. I'm sure she feels stupid for bringing her laptop bag now, we have desktops here after all. I don't know what she's doing on her desktop, I don't care. But two women come to sit with us, they're going to train us on how to use the systems. "Meeting!" a

deep voice shrieks, around 12:30pm. It's Miss M, he claps his hands to capture our attention. "Lucy, what are you busy with there?" "I'm talking to Mokgadi about the models needed—" "Can wait," is the snapped reply, "get your ass here."

The woman drops her call, scampers her ass to join all of us. The first few minutes of the meeting have nothing to do with me and Sphehile, the man is addressing the old employees and complains about one

thing or the other. "We're going to have another run

-

through,"

he tells them,

"Chris declined everything, except... Ronaldo's busy with you— what's your name?" he shifts a condescending gaze to Sphehile.

"Me?" she clears her throat, fidgeting with her dress that is perfectly fine. "My

name is Sphehile. Sphehile Gcwe

nsa." "Clap hands for her, please." He sounds demanding, but I don't imagine the smile in there. We clap, though we don't know why. "Everyone was pleased

with what you came up with, Chris especially. Clearly you knew what you

were doing."

The look of shock on
her face! I think she's going to cry, we'll blame it on the
pregnancy.

"Um... thank you!"

510

Miss M rolls his eyes, he doesn't care. "Not yet, sweetheart.
Not yet. Don't let

the nod of approval go to your head. But well done! Chris wants
to feature your design in the magazine, it would be front page
had we not decided that

it's him who needs to grace it first –

as the owner. Good job!" "Thank—" "It's lunch. See you again in
an hour," Miss M rudely cuts in. He's already

walking away, and being followed by dozens as he does so

–

about one requestor the other.

“Bestie!” I hop over to Sphesihle excitedly. “Well done! Your first day and you’re already slaying, huh?” “I guess.” She shrugs her shoulders. “Really,” I affirm, gripping her shoulder to squeeze, “you did good. It’s not a design I would’ve even thought of or done but you nailed it. I’m happy for you. Well done!”

She smiles

—

just a twitch of the lips.

Sqalosenkosi

I spoke to Temasiko about this beforehand, to not cause any awkwardness, and clearly she has no problem with the relationship I have with Sphesihle because she gave her go-ahead, even suggesting that I could fetch MaGcwensa

here instead of having Bab’ Shan

ge drop her off at my house, this way they can both get used to this

—

the arrangement. She, Temasiko, opens the door and stands on her tiptoes to press a quick kiss

on my lips. “Hey, I love you.” “Hey, I love you too.” A pleased giggle, she nods her head, allowing me inside. “She was getting ready in her room, wouldn’t let me help her choose what to wear. I don’t think

511

she trusts my fashion choices ever since Miss M told her that her design was

going to be featured on Chris’ magazine. It’s all good.” “I’m sure they love your designs as well,” I tell her. “Even if he did, he won’t say.” Temasiko snorts out a laugh. “The others say

Sphehile was lucky to even get the compliment, that man is very complicated.

He must’ve really loved what she came up with.” “Her win is your win also.” “Because we’re a team.” She agrees with me. “Though

she doesn’t know that. At least it’s bearable to live with her, I don’t have to stress about the house being clean, she’s very neat. Go to her.”

I press a kiss to plump lips

—

a goodbye. Tema moves in the direction of the kitchen.

Sphesihle's room was

given to me by Temasiko, I knock on her door and wait. It opens about three seconds later, golden-

brown eyes blink at me. "You're early." No, she's late. "Am I?" I play along, raising my brow. She smacks her teeth, opening the door to let me in. She's

already dressed;

wearing a satin white strapless dress with those tall heels that I don't like very much. She's changed her hair, the straight

-back still looked good but the fake hair suits her as well.

"Your hair looks beautiful, you look beautiful."

She was applying lip-gloss on her lips, her eyes find mine on the mirror

—

and

she gives me a timid smile. “Ngyabonga. I changed it this morning.” “I would’ve gone with you if you told me. I enjoyed going with you the lasttime.”

512

“Next time then.” She stands, grabbing her purse. “I think I’m ready.” Her curves remain intact, I thought she’d be showing by now. She’s eight

weeks and some days pregn

ant, her next appointment is next week, we’re going together.

“Uyakhazimula, umuhle MaGcwensa.” “I know,” her voice is teasing. “Please.” I hold my hand out.

She accepts, entwines them, and we head out. Temasiko is still in the kitchen, I assume, per

haps on purpose. Bab’ Shange is waiting patiently, I get

Sphe’s door and get in after her. The privacy screen raises,

giving us privacy. “How was your day?” I query. “I spent it at the

salon.” “You should allow me to tip them for a job well done

one of

these days. Each

time, they improve on their last job. You're enchantingly beautiful, Sphesihle –

in and out."She nods her head, placing her hand on her belly, letting out a soft breath. "I

thought the morning in morning sickness meant just that but I have been

deceived. It's so irritating."

I wrap an arm around her, pulling her in to comfort, and press my lips to her

temple. She sighs, and leans in. "If I could, I would take your discomfort for

myself. Tell me what I can do to make the journey easier for you, and I will do

it."No response, her breathing is silent. Maybe she's resting. I let her be,

continuing to hold her tight

–

yet gentle. Her scent is heady, everything about her right now

–

her head on my shoulder, and hand on my thigh

–

makes me

smile; contentment visits me and stays. There's no where else I'd rather be, but here, with her... my heartbeat and solace. A bright light. "We're home," I tell her.

513

She stirs, and takes a few seconds to compose herself before allowing me to help her out of the car. Grabbing her purse, I lead her through the front door and ask if she needs to use the bathroom or to do anything inside first but she

shakes her head. We take the back exit, where one of Chris' friends helped me

to organize this whole thing. I know nothing about decorating, but I helped personally because I wanted to do this for the mother of my children.

"Sgalosenkosi..." "You don't like to watch the TV but you've watched Peter Pan as a teenage girl

and it was your favourite movie. You love the idea of Neverland, a magical place that you find your solace in.”

She turns around, takes in the sight of our backyard

—

the brightly-coloured lanterns leading the path to the picnic setting under the large tree on which fairy lights hang and twinkle

—

and grins a bright shocked smile, almond-shaped eyes blinking rapidly, watery. “You—listened and remembered that?” “I listen, Sphe

sible

—

your words are impossible to ignore.” “I thought you hated picnics, because of the bugs.” A teasing giggle slides out of her mouth, she snuffles, and takes in her surroundings again. “I love this so much. Thank you.” “I personally helped,” I confess, “the lanterns, they were my job to do.” “Good job!” she smiles, lone

tear streaming down her eye. I'm not fast enough, she's already wiped it away; but she does allow me to lead

her to our eating area. I help her situate herself on the white sheet, and sit

beside her. There's pizza here, I made to cook her favourite meal –

chicken

dumpling curry. I've noticed she eats a lot of chicken wrapped in cheese and garlic with lots of onions. There's ice

-

cream and the orange juice she can't get

enough of.

I want her to eat to her heart's content. "Thank you." A grateful beam, she accepts the plate from me. "Everything looks delicious."

“You’re welcome.” I dig into my own food. “How’s school going? Are you managing with your new job as well?” “Yeah. I’m writing soon.” “I can help you to study,” I offer, draining my glass of water.

The look she gives me is of pure disbelief, perfect face pulling into a hesitant frown-

smile. “You know nothing about fashion, Sgalosenkosi.” “I know that you make it b

eautiful. Anything you wear looks gorgeous on you,

and because of this, I have decided that helping you study won’t be a bad idea.” A head shake, she picks at the chicken dumplings curry. “Did you make this?” “Yebo.” “You have an unhealthy relationship with salty foods. It still tastes good.”

I rub the back of my neck bashfully, deciding not to tell her that Liyana

complains about this often. She misses her, like I do. “I tried.” “I can tell,” she grins.

Throughout dinner, I look at her

—

every little thing. How she takes the

moment to savour anything that she's truly enjoying. She doesn't hold back,

and will look at me strangely before going back to it.

"This was very fulfilling." I nod my head. "How do you feel about talking?"

An unsure expression crosses her face, but she nods her head

—

hesitant, and

then sure. "About what?" "You, me, us." I shrug my shoulders.

"How are you feeling? Today, right now? Yesterday? This morning."

515

"Good." Her smile doesn't

reach her eyes.

"May I hug you?" Sometimes, it's not good to bombard her —

by chance, if she needs to breathe and her space. But she nods this time, and I pull her on my lap to embrace her tight.

I memorize the feel of her against my arms, breathe her be

autiful scent in, and there's that funny sensation again... my stomach rolls in waves. I thought she was making me sick at one point. "I'm so sorry, Sphehile." My lips touch her ear in a whisper. "What for?" "Everything that has led us here, like this, taking your innocence. That you feel alone, when I am right here always, outside your door and pleading with you to

—"What? You're not—" "I am. It just didn't come to me the way I'd expected but I am," I readjust her, making her look in my eyes

—

to connect, deeper. "I'm just sorry that it was you who had to fall first, I know how it feels

—

unrequited love, how it drains the life out of you and leaves you hollow. Few times can you do anything about

it. I'm sorry for putting you through the same thing I went through." "But I—can't force you to love me, Sgalosenkosi." "True," I tell her, "you didn't need to, you don't need to. For any con

tribution I

may've added to your insecurities, I am sorry. For the disappointment and hurting you, I apologize. You're an amazing woman, beautiful and strong and ever caring, I know this because I know you. You're still all these things with or without me.

I just want you to know." "Okay." "Yes, and I am grateful for the way that you impact me and desire me to grow. I wouldn't be getting therapy if it weren't for you, I always thought my brother needed because he was the traumatized one... I was taking ca

re of him like

usual, and neglecting my own wellbeing like usual. You pointed this out, it's all because of you. Ngyabonga, MaGcwensa, you're a beautiful heart."

516

"I always want what's best for you." "It's you." I confess, grabbing her hand, to place an envelope. "This is for you." She is curious as she opens it, and blinks her eyes, grinning tearfully. "Really? This isn't primary school. 'May we start over? Tick yes

or no’,” her emotional voice croaks. “What about Temasiko?” “What I feel for you is v

ery different from what I feel for her. We share a connection, you and I, that has nothing at all to do with her

–

steady, calm and

familiar.” “Familiar? I am not your mother.” “You’re not. You’re Sphesihle Gcwensa –

beautiful, in every sense of the word.

Wise. Caring. Driven. I’d be the luckiest man in the world to call you mine.” “And if I say yes, what happens?” “Then—” I fumble with my pants pocket. There. “Kuningi engikuhlosile ngawe, Gcwenso, ngicela nje ungethembe

–

it doesn’t have to be now.

I want my

actions to speak for me.” I open my palm and show her the pendant in my hand, connecting a platinum ring. “I know we’re both not ready for marriage,

but this is my promise to you

–

this my heart, right here, and I am giving it to you. Keep it with you everywhere you go, and whenever your insecurities knock on your door to tell you that I am not in love with you, let this remind you that I do. I am Sgalosenkosi Ngcobo, my word is my truth. I believe you

know that.” She’s trembling, tearing up. I set her down, and move to the back. “May I, Sphesihle?”

At her nod, the chain touches her skin and my promise to her is sealed with

the fastening of the chain. “It’s cold.” She snuffles. “I promise to hold you and be there for you –

through your best and your worst. I promise to catch you

–

time and time again. I promise to love you

517

through your pain, as you work on yourself. I’m not going anywhere –

even if

you just want me as a friend.”“Thank you.”

I sit down beside her again, pulling her down with me a second later, we gaze at the stars together

—

her i

n my embrace. “You’re amazing with me. You’re amazing without me. You’re amazing without the approval of the world. Nothing will take that away from you, amazing woman.”“Start afresh, you said?”“Please.”“What’s your name then, strange man who goes

around hugging women you

don’t know.”“Sgalosenkosi Ngcobo. What about you, beautiful woman who fits perfectly in my arms.”“Sphesihle Gcwensa.”“You’re a beautiful gift indeed.”She giggles. “Corny, mister. You should know I am pregnant, and deci

de wisely

if you want to continue getting to know a pregnant woman.”“Seeing that I have fallen in love with the pregnant woman, for who she is,

then I have fallen in love with her children as well

—

and they're mine too." "Good." She folds her arms tight around me, and breathes into my neck.

"You're going to have to convince this pregnant woman through more of these dates, and she will make her decision. But you're on the right track." "I am in love with you, MaGcwensa." A nervous shift, "Thank—you," comes the emotional croak.

518

Unrequited Desires : Forty-one Sphesihle

"Once the handbrake is disengaged, this is when you can now start to move

the car. Foot on the brake pedal, put the car in drive

—

and if you take a look at the screen up here, it says D for drive; then when you release the brake pedal

the car will move forward.”“Okay.” I nod my head, absorbing the piece of information. “Maybe I can try again?”

His eyes bulge at

me, he shakes his head, rooted to the driver’s seat with no intention of moving. I don’t know why he looks so fearful when I tried to drive without him in the car that first round, but the car wouldn’t move, and I’m not sure if I’ll ever learn how to drive.

e.

“Maybe next time, MaGcwensa, you’re supposed to go back inside the house for lunch now. It’s 12:00pm.”

I am not hungry, my nausea is acting up and I feel inflamed, even with the aircon. But still I give in, rolling my eyes when Sgalosenkosi comes to the other side to get my door for me. His hand is in mine as we walk back to the house, like those old white couples on the TV who frequent the park together.

I’m just always exhausted yet not sleepy, I’m always hungry but not for food and I’m always so ve

ry hot.

The food’s already been prepared by some well

-known chef he hired, funny he

didn't do this last night when he made me eat salty curry. I can still appreciate

his efforts, but Sbanisezwe is the better cook between the two of them which is quite funny because Sqalosenkosi says he was the father between the two of

them; sometimes dads aren't the best cooks out there, he proves this without

trying.

"This looks good," I compliment as he helps me to my seat – so unnecessary, I

am not a whale. I don't even look pregnant yet, I just feel it.

"The platter. I don't mind finishing it on my own."

"I prefer ujeqe with mutton curry instead."

519

My eyes narrow at him, searching, I hope he isn't hinting at me cooking for him. I don't mind to take care of him, but I'm not even a girlfriend at this point–

we're just talking, with promises of exploring more in the future; and this is

what I want, strangely, because maybe its not a bad idea to focus on myself

and my career and these babies I'm going to have. I told him to focus on hishealing also, from his past; clearly its working for him

—

he talks often about the lessons he's taken from therapy.

He worries a lot about generational trauma, and the effect it could have on thebabies if not attended to. I guess this is why he stresses the importance of meseeing a therapist I feel comfortable with so much. He told me about anexperiment conducted on adult rats in which they conditioned them to be afraid of the smell of cherries, and those adult rats' offspring were also afraidof the smell of cherries, this went on for two generations... although theydidn't see their ancestral rats experience this fear, this means that this wasn't a learned behaviour

—

and that it was passed on.

I don't want who I am now to affect my offspring, and my offspring's offspring. He doesn't want that either –

and likes to curse himself to hell and back for not seeing the importance of therapy. I don't think he's to blame though, it's not even a black people issue

–

most of us have just been conditioned to deal with issues our own way, that there's no need for therapy as long as we don't have

any diagnosed issue

–

bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder or any other diagnosis that alters our mental health somehow. Of course, I didn't learn this myself; it's that male therapist I didn't connect with so much that said all this.

“You're becoming braver these days, you're even overcoming your fear of driving. It's a big improvement,” I tell him, soothing myself with a cool glass of

lemonade.

“Its partly helping,” he admits, gaze locked directly on mine, “I just haven’t

been brave enough to actually drive. When I was giving

—

maybe I can drive you home this time. It will be my first time behind the wheel; doing it myself

instead of giving lessons.” “What, you’re a driving instructor now? You go around giving driving lessons?” my voice teases him; I know he’s promised

to teach my brother

—

520

and though I still have my reservations, I have decided to be less uptight about the issue.

“I...” he hesitates, rubbing his lower lip in a back and forth manner –

thoughtful, “Temasiko. The first time, she asked for lessons, and I sh

owed her

how a car works, but we didn’t leave the hotel’s garage, I wasn’t ready to actually start driving.” I’m not successful in hiding my frown. “When was this?” “It doesn’t matter.” He

ankles to the refrigerator, grabbing bottled water and leans ag

ainst the breakfast bar, intently inspecting my facial features. “I don’t want this to turn into a competition, Sphesihle, it’s been overdone. I don’t want you to look at Temasiko and think she’s one

-upped you somehow, because

there is no such thing. There’s no competition here, I hope you know this.” “It’s not like we’re actually dating.” I remind him, resisting the temptation to

get jealous

–

it's not healthy. "A fresh means everything starts over, and we're getting to know each other... maybe with the exception that, there's this ring

sitting on my chest reminding me that

—"One day, if we both still have mutual love and respect and desire for each other, then we'll get married. You'll be my wife and I shall be your husband. Equals." "Temasiko—" "Isn't

that all concerned with what I share with you, maybe it's hard to believe but it's the truth. She is open to the idea of trying this; of me and you. She doesn't hate or view you as competition, Sphesihle, you're a beautiful woman and she's not blind to that."

I roll my eyes.

He lets out a chuckle, closing the bottle and tossing it in the air.

"The only reason you're not my girlfriend now is because I respect your wishes to start this as slow as you want it; your pace. Maybe this is not for you, you'll

discover, and will want out

—

I want you, but I'd still understand. Relationships

521

don't necessarily mean forever anyways, people grow apart sometimes and they leave. It's not for me to hold it against them when they do." "You're so not romantic. Men fight for women, you don't just let them go like that. I swear you should be dating men instead." Another round of laughter, it ends with a soft snort. "The only man I've ever

been attracted to was Siyabonga but thank you for

the advice." "You're welcome." It's his turn to do the eye roll, but his don't roll correctly. I laugh, he shakes his head. "I think we should talk this time, to avoid previous mistakes. Back then, I

was

—to put it plainly, you seduced me." "Like you

weren't an adult who could turn me down." "I tried but... you're a beautiful woman. The first one I was drawn to, because of

Siyabonga's—eyes. It changed along the way but it's the truth.
The point is, I

hurt you somehow, because of miscommunication. You wanted
a relationship,

I wasn't there –

and falling in love with you didn't happen simply because
you were in love with me. I became a Siyabonga and you were
me." "We should make a movie," I sass, with another roll of the
eyes. "Unrequited Desires, we'll call it." "We'll start with a book
first, that way we make revenue from both," comes my
clever suggestion.

Sqalosenkosi shakes his head, and starts to laugh. It's funny
now, maybe I can even laugh about it, but it wasn't funny back
then. Being away

from him is doing me good, I can function without him

–

it just goes to show that he's not

the entire world, and that life continues. That girlfriend of his makes things better somehow, with her annoying loudness. She makes delicious food but she's very dirty and doesn't clean up after herself.

522

"I think we should talk about... expectations – what we require from each other, should the relationship progress. I think we should talk about parenting views, I don't believe in corporal punishment—" "Me too, I don't want my children thinking beating someone up equates to love. Maybe this is why my mother stayed with my father, because her own parents were strict and taught her that whoever loves you will correct you –

and maybe that's true, but they don't have to

beat you to show that love. Maybe my father learned it through his own beatings that his father gave him,

and he believed that beating my mother meant showing her love.” “Maybe...” there’s a gorgeous frown on his face, he scrubs his beard. “Maybe...but I’ll never forgive Samkelo for what he put Ntwenhle through. I’ll never forgive him for traumatizing my brother.” “And you,” I say, he forgets himself a lot, “you were just as traumatized. To

make matters worse, your mother worked often to avoid him

–

and this is why

you have mommy issues.” He snorts out a laugh. “I don’t have mommy issues.” “You do. I remind you of her, Siyabonga’s not the only reason you’re drawn to me. I feel safe, you’ve said this. I feel like peace, you’ve said this. I feel like home, you’ve also said this.” “You do.” A head nod, he comes to join me at the breakfast table

le

–

and grips

my hand gently. “But you’re also you, just you –

Sphesihle Gcwensa; and I love

you." My lips twitch, but the smile won't reveal itself. I don't like to think that what I've been through has made me cold somehow, but I'm not comfortable

returning his affections

—

not yet. Not when this is a do-

over, and we're getting to know each other. I'm not setting myself up for heartbreak like I did last time, I know better now.

"Ngyabonga," this is all I can give him. Is that... disappointment in his e

yes?

523

It's gone, he's smiling a beautiful grin that doesn't reach his eyes. I've made

him sad somehow, not my intention

—

but I'm not ready. He of all people should understand. This isn't
payback, I don't do that, I just move. "About our talk—" "Not
now," I plead, grabbing my plates to take to the sink, "let's
fetch Liyana and have a picnic. I'm still hungry." His eyes are
shocked but he's not judging. "I have four babies in me," my
reminder is bitter. Why can't men fall pregnant? Or why
couldn't h

e inherit the symptoms on my behalf.

"Liyana is already out with Nqobizitha and co. They're at the
zoo, I doubt she'll

be okay with being interrupted for a picnic when she could be
taking pictures

with elephants."

Disappointment slowly sinks in, I find myself nodding.

"We're still going out, just the two of us. Remember that
bookstore on—" "As long as you read to me." It's the only way,
otherwise I'm not going and will fake a headache so he can
take me home. At least I'll have decent food there,

not salty curry that I loved more than I can explain. The smile on
his face would convince the sun to leave the sky for him. It
rivals

all the other smiles that have come before it. He's a beautiful man –

both inside and out. Caring. Honest. I appreciate his honesty just as much as I hate it.

“Thank you for

never selling me fake dreams,” I remark absently, “now that I think about it, you were doing me a favour. I am never embarrassing myself

with that desperation again, I'm just so embarrassed.” “We all need love, there's nothing embarrassing about it. I'm

not ashamed that

I was once in love with Siyabonga. I'm not ashamed that it took me years to

move on

–

there's a good I saw in him that wouldn't let me. It's the beautiful

524

parts of a person that we're drawn to and can't help loving,
there's no shame

in se

eing the good in someone else." "When you put it that way...
are you indirectly stroking your own ego here?" He laughs.

Genuine. I'm happy I make him laugh. He seems so at ease,
I see the

peace he talks about and the calmness

—

exchanging between both of us. Perhaps our love is just that

—

calm, like coming home. "No, MaGcwensa. That's your
perspective. But that's the beauty of humanity, our differences
and how

we co-exist with all these

—" "We don't co

-exist out of choice. I would be in Venus if I could
but I'm stuck here with you lot." "Abantu besifazane nokuba

-

complicated." He's still laughing, grabbing my
hand to help me to my feet

—

and he puts a hand at the small of my back to
move me to a silent song. "The bookshop?" "Date," I confirm
quietly,

my head resting on his chest. The bookstore doubles up as
a coffeehouse

—

and if anything, I love that we're both interested in books. "I'm
choosing the book." "Not Danielle Steel." "Mirror Image,
please." My ears are deaf sometimes. "I've just said not Danielle
Steel." "The author of Vicious Cycle then —

Cheryl Zikhali, under South African best-sellers. If not her then
Delight Mikateko Ngobeni, another best-
seller." "Better."

I match the smile in his voice, still swaying to the non-existent
bea

t. "Much, much better."

***The whole house is loud with Chinese

—

no wait, she likes to say its Korean

—

music, but really it all sounds like unintelligible noise. I know
this song, I may

525

even like it

—

Love Shot. I only know the title because Temasiko will
continuously sing, "It's the love shot, na na na," that's all she
knows. The smell of food drifts over the entire house, and
Sgalosenkosi's hand tightens on my waist. He's here, he drove
me home —

and he was sweating. But I was with him, assuring him that he
was doing great, we ma

de it home safely. I'm so proud of him.

"Maybe you shouldn't touch me. What if Temasiko—" "Will be fine. We can't keep tiptoeing around each other," there's a finality in his voice that brooks no room for argument, "I love you. I love her. It's not

going to change suddenly. After we have our talk, I want all three of us to have a sit down to discuss the way forward. It may sound boring but what I learned from my previous relationship is that communication is important. Honest communication. That means

no hiding, so that we're all on the same page. Your yes should be your yes. Your no should be your no."

Is he poking my past bears?

So what if I wasn't answering his calls? Like I told him, he didn't have to stay away. He's failing dismally when it comes

to the topic of learning about

women. But I still love him for him, that hasn't changed.

"Mxm." His chuckles grab Temasiko's attention. "You're back!" Must she always be so loud? She rivals the song that she's blasting full volume. No, I'm not exagg

erating! Sqalosenkosi says something, while I keep my trapshut. My hand is touching my necklace though, fingers tentatively playing with

the ring, it's something I've caught myself doing countless times. A small smile

pulls at my lips.

"Sphesihle!"

Why is she always so loud!? I cock a brow in question.

"You look well

-

rested, I'm happy." She's always smiling, like the goddamn sun. The brightness prickles my skin. "Are you hungry?"

526

Isn't it obvious? Her food's really good, though I'll never tell her because I

won't hear the end of it. Like when I agreed with her earlier this week and she

thought that made us friends somehow. I mean we do sit together a lot, even

during lunch, because we're the new ones and people treat us as such. This is why she's b

ecome bearable.

"Did you make my chicken recipe?" "If you want, I can make it." Her kindness is annoying. It makes her more bearable, I don't want her to think we're going to be the bestest of friends just because we're literally

sharing everything. Two halves that make a perfect soul for Sgalosenkosi, Sbanisezwe had said on his weddi

ng day. I still don't believe him. "Put in plenty of onions, add the chilli sauce and BBQ spice." She rolls her eyes. "I'll only do it because you take care of the dishes and they've been waiting on you since last night."

Little tramp-oline! She know

s damn well I can't stand the sight of a dirty dish and has done this on purpose. It's not even about being her maid, I just don't like a dirty place. Let me get started on those dishes now. "Ave unesidina nganeyabantu."

Sgalosenkosi pinches my side, pre

ssing a kiss to my temple. I'm not going to melt, there's dirty dishes to take care of because his damn girlfriend is such a pig! I gently remove his hand from my waist, and throw my bag at him, ignoring the befuddled expression.

"See, Ngcobo, we make a mean team." The loudmouth mutters with notes of amusement in her voice. "Let me make Ndlunkulu's beloved cheesy garlic chicken with lots of onions."

My glare doesn't affect her. Sgalosenkosi clears his throat. "I have to fetch my daughter soon, excuse m

e

while I go and... this bag."

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"No kiss or nothing?" Temasiko asks. "Come with me." I don't protest, I prefer it that way. Just because I know they're together, doesn't mean I am comfortable with the idea of them kissing in front of me –

for many reasons

ns. It's about respect and boundaries, the same ones he afforded me by not taking Temasiko to his house. It's our home, he said, and

he respects what I built there with him. Temasiko hops back into the kitchen three minutes later, clearly there was no time for sex. Sgalosenkosi is right behind her, he pulls me into a long embrace

and reminds me of the doctor's appointment, he'll take me. He wants to go shopping for the babies but it's too soon. I've heard about buying clothes too

soon. A kiss touches my temple

—

lingering. His hand rests above my breasts, long fingers touching my necklace.

"I love you." "Thank you." He sighs, but he's not angry, I can see it in his eyes. "I deserve that. It's fine, I'll wait." A final press on the lips to my forehead, and he sets me free. "Greet Bab' Shange!" Temasiko shouts after him.

Oh!

"I drove here." He's standing at the doorway, smiling softly. "First it was you who gave me bravery to even sit at the front of a vehicle. Now she's inspired my bravery to drive again." "I'm

jealous!” Temasiko puts like a child. “I want to see you do it next time as

well. You still have to tel

I me why you’re scared to.”He hasn’t told her?“I will, I promise.”

528

“Good! I’m proud of you and I love you.”“I love you too.”“Us two?” Temasiko really thinks she’s a comedian. Her giggles are loud and

carefree. This is the same person who said she was jealous just seconds ago.

“Okay. Have a safe trip.”

He nods, leaves a second later.

Temasiko skips over to me, eyes alight with curiosity. “So???” bright smile, loud energy. “Did you have fun? How was your date? Did he get you this –

nice! It

looks expensive.”“Yes. Good. Yes.”“Huh?”“Your questions,” is my reply, I go back to the dishes.“Oh bestie,” she sighs, “I’m glad you had a great time. That’s what yes meant, right?”

I shrug my shoulders.

She tells me about her night even though I didn’t ask, but it was quite eventful

and she spent it with Fuzelihle. They were talking about starting her

transition process. She’s going to keep her penis because she’s scared of

getting bottom surgery, but she wants to get started on the hormone therapy

that will enhance the way she looks. “I have her—”“Do you know where Fuze went after spending the night with you?” that’s Sqaalosenkosi interrupting us. I thought he left already. But he’s here and he’s...something’s happened. There’s a big frown on his face, and his vein is pulsing.

I backtrack, sending his anger.

“Some friends called her. There was a party in

—I don’t know.” Temasiko looks at me. “What’s wrong?”

“Her mother called to say they found her badly bruised body in Hillbrow!” hesnaps. “HOW!? How did it happen, Tema?” “I don’t know!” she returns, she’s getting angry. I remove my gloves as she

turns off the cooktop. Sqalosenkosi is leaving again, we follow, he doesn’t stopus. “I—it’s not my fault, Sqalo. I wouldn’t stop a grown woman from leaving tojoin her friends.” He shakes his head, he’s driving now –

unfearful. “Call Nqobizitha, tell him I’mnot fetching my daughter. I... can’t believe I have to do this again.”

What?

“Call Sbanisezwe and tell him to cut his honeymoon short.”

Tema and I look at each other. “Thatego,” she mouths at me.

Great! This means I have to call Chris then.

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Unrequited Desires : Forty-two Squalosenkosi

Fuzelihle is the victim of what we believe is a hate crime, but there are too many blank holes, like how she ended up in Hillbrow in the first place. What we know is that someone beat her up badly, bruising her head and ribs, causing blunt impact injuries

to different parts of her body. She hasn't regained her consciousness but her condition hasn't worsened according to her team of doctors.

There's a waiting room here –

comfortable, with lounge-chairs and a rehabilitation room.

Temasiko and Sphehile were cooped up in there while I went to enquire with the doctors. It was MaSibusisiwe who spoke the loudest

though, angered, because she doesn't understand how something like this

could happen to her youngest baby

–

and she has sworn to deal with the perpetrators. Her footsteps are quick, loud and annoyingly piercing my eardrums as she rushes to catch up to me. She's been asking me questions I don't hold the answers to. Fuzelihle is my responsibility in Johannesburg, mine to take care of

—

and I have failed her horribly. These were the words that greeted me, that are still following me as the doors to the waiting room slide open.

"How is she?" Temasiko is on her feet, pulling down her short leather pants when MaSibusisiwe appears beside me; walking fast. "Oh... Sawubona, Mah." "Sphesihle, what are you doing here?" MaSibusisiwe ignores her, glaring at Sphesihle. "You're still pregnant, aren't you?" Sphesihle clears her throat, ironing out her dress, she nods her head. "Of

course, I am still carrying my babies.

"Tsk, tsk!" a harsh bristle, MaSibusisiwe dumps her handbag on the nearest bench and removes her black glasses. "Then what are you doing here? You do

realize that

—"

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“I am pregnant. Nothing is going to happen to my babies. Thank you for

showing conc

ern, but I think it’s better to focus on your beloved daughter atthe moment. What’s going on?”

I scrub my face as her beautiful hazels find me, inquisitive, worried. Withoutthought, I pull her into my arms and cling to her. Her soft exhale touches myc

hest, warm breath sinking into my skin. “She’s stable. But her injuries arebad. Whoever did this clearly wanted to get rid of her, she’s lucky to be alive.”“Is she awake?” Temasiko queries, she has the look of guilt on her face –

won’t

properly meet my gaze.Fuck!

It’s my fault, she probably thinks she should’ve done something differently –

but she was right. Its not out of the ordinary for Fuze to hang out with herfriends. I have met some of them

—

young, bubbly women who are just a career-driven

. But she's done so well for herself compared to most of them,
at

just twenty-

three years, it's not even about her working for me. She's
worked

her ass off to prove herself to me, and to every higher-up.

"No!" MaSibusisiwe snaps, collapsing on the bench, her hands
are trembling. "No, my son

-daughter is not

—"MaSibusisiwe," it's impolite to disturb her but I do, placing
my hand on her shoulder to squeeze in support, "she's not your
son. Don't you think it's time you fully accept that she's a
woman?" "How!?" Emotion clogs her voice, anger makes her
entire being tremble. "How is she a woman when the reason
she's in that hospital bed is because someone

saw her for what she is

—

and attacked her for it. I do

n't care what you say, I know this... I read, Sgalosenkosi, there's too many of these cases and I am not naïve to the fact that this identity thing would've caught up with Fuze eventually." "You're making it sound like it's her fault." Temasiko points out,

the face she makes

—

a quivering bottom lip and slit eyes

—

is one of a woman whose

emotions are on the verge of spilling. "What is wrong with you parents? I

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know you're old

-fashioned, but surely your daughter should come first in whatever you do." "Don't irritate me, ntombazane!" snapped, quietly. "Who do you think was

paying for Mcebisi Zungu

's hospital bills? Who do you think took care of everything so that Mcebisi could be the Fuzelihle that you know now?" "And that condones your transphobic comments!?" "Temasiko," I begin quietly, pulling her to my side, "don't raise your at my—" "Oh please, Sqalosenkosi!" she snatches her arm from my grip, daring me to...

something. I know this is a sensitive matter, she knows better than anyone how hard it is to survive in a world that constantly seeks to break you down

for who you are, but Fuzelihle is MaSibusisiwe's daughter – and it may not seem like it but she does love her daughter.

"This—" an emotional croak, "this is what annoys me! Tell her, tell her

its not just words. A few girl-boy comments and snide remarks could lead to a hospital bed! Her daughter is lying on some bed, unconscious, because of

those words. People aren't the same, Sqalosenkosi, the more hate you plant

into their brains because of ignorant comments is the more you encourage

them to hate us, to the point of wanting to get rid of us! I don't know how she can still have the balls to be so transphobic

knowing very well that it's the same transphobia that's led her to the state she's in. She's a horrible mother!"

It happens too quickly

—

one minute Temasiko's chest is heaving with motion; the only audible sound; and the next there's a resounding thwack that stings my ears.

"Mah!" Sphesihle gasps, she's shielding MaSibusisiwe. It's not her who needs protecting, I push Temasiko behind me; but I'd seen the

way she touched her cheek

—

wide-

eyed. "MaSibusisiwe," disbelief reveals itself in tremors, I clear my throat, forcing the anger down, "did you just put your hands on Temasiko?" "Hey wena, ungazong'buza umbhedo!" she shouts quietly, clearly irritated, and she attempts to push Sphesihle out of the way. "Didn't you hear this little...

what is she a girl-

boy, right? You're shielding her for disrespecting me, your
blood family

–

an elder,

as if you didn't hear a word she said! What is she even
doing here, Squalosenkosi, I get Sphesihle

–

she's your wife and mother of your children... but this one? This
is the filth you bring into our family? This badly

brought-up animal who lacks basic manners

and fails to respect her elders." "Respect comes two ways!"

Temasiko snaps behind me, loud enough. "And you're lucky that
he's holding me back because I wouldn't hesitate to show you
just how much I respect you, old hag!" "Do you see, do you!?"

Get rid of her, Squalosenkosi, my mother is turning in her grave
over this rubbish you've brought into this family! First it was
that disrespectful girl and now this...? You're such a
disappointment kodwa, the

future patriarch of this fa

mily and you can't even handle your affairs. Look at this mess, look at her. Is this what you're really going to bring into our family? This...this is the best you've come up with? Your brothers have married proper spouses, unproblematic, I've never encounte

red problems with those

boys because they know their place... and this is your best? Sphesihle, nganeyami, hhayi I give up." Her words sting, they poke places that shouldn't exist –

vulnerable places. I

don't indulge her though, chasing after Temasiko instead.

"Do you see, Sphesihle, he even chases after her like a confused puppy! He's

just

—"

Her voice drifts out as the door bangs behind me, Temasiko is moving too fast.

"Hey, hey!" my hand tightens around her wrist as soon as I reach her, and pull

her inside the nearest door that opens

–

the equipment room. “Temasiko—” “Let me go!” she smacks my hand, pushing at me. “I don’t even know who said I’d want to marry you!” My lungs take a knock, choking my airway. How can she say this? I wasn’t the

one wh

o said all those things. Surely she should know by now that I don’t care

what MaSibusisiwe thinks of her. Pain forces me to blink rapidly, I let her go.

She doesn’t move, folds her arms on her chest –

emotional.

“I am sorry,” I mutter.

“I don’t care!” Her hands raise in frustration, she’s breathing heavily. “Nowonder Fuzelihle never tells any of you anything! Do you think I’d want to

associate with a bunch of transphobes? People who will hate people like me!?

No, miss me on the bullshit!”

Again, she bruises me with her words. Is she really painting all of us with the

same brush? I’ve let her into my family, the ones who do matter, the ones whocare. She’s always seemed happy around Chris and Nqobizitha. She’s always

seemed just as happy around Thatego and Sbanisezwe. Why the sudden

change? She’s never told me anything about any of them showing hostility

towards her because of her gender.

“That’s unfair, Temasiko.” My voice trembles –

in disbelief, in anger. I can’t

believe I have to do this while Fuze

lihle is fighting for her life. “For you to paint us all with the same brush when you’ve known my brothers and their spouses long enough to know that not one transphobic bone resides in their

bodies, unless... have any of them ever said something to you?”

Her silence tells me all I need to know.

“Then you’re being irrational right now.” “You just...you don’t know how it’s like.” Her voice is a whisper, she shakes her head.

“You don’t know what it’s like to be a walking statistic. To have the

same people who hate you for being who you are take advantage of you, rape

you, dehumanize you, kill you. I won’t apologize for what I said to Fuze’s

mother, Sgalosenkosi, she has no idea how powerful words are. These murders, the brutalization

—

it starts like this. Fuz

elihle’s mother should know better, her comments were insensitive; and I’m not going to entertain her crap just because she’s old and that’s her way of showing love.

Fuck

that love!” “Why are you so angry?” I search her eyes; there’s more than meets the eye to

this issue, I know her

—

in and out.

“Your stupid aunt—” “Don’t.” My hands grip her shoulders, pressing softly in an effort to calm her down, she’s evading my gaze —

won’t reveal herself to me. “MaDlamini...”

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“You don’t give your children tough love, Sqalo. I don’t care what they’ve done, you just don’t. You don’t choose the world over them because bad things then happen to them.” “Let me hug you,” I plead.

She sighs and guides my hands to her waist, her face smashing against my

chest. “I’m so sorry for calling her stupid.” “Please respect her,” I say, “I k

now that maybe our upbringing is not the same

and that we don't share the same values, but my mother taught me to respect the elderly. You won't win with MaSibusisiwe, silence is better –

it shuts her

down and says a lot without actual harm being done.” “Noted.”

My lips meet hers in a soft kiss, and then escapes my hold to sag her back against the wall. Her hands rest on her waist, she licks her lips. Brown eyes look distant and emotional as her unfocused pupils water.

“What did you mean when you said no wonder Fuze never tells us anything?”

She looks at me, and then drops her gaze.

“Temasiko...” I don't want to lose my patience but if she knows anything about how that little girl could've ended up dumped on some empty street in a place

riddled with

crime and drugs then she should tell me. “If you know anything about

—“I don’t,” she defends and rubs her brow in a back and forth manner, “I promise you. She wasn’t talking about you, she loves you and she just meant...talk to her. It’s not my place to

say anything.”“Then why bring it up to begin with?”“I don’t know.” She shrugs her shoulders. “I don’t want her to feel alone, she’s not my friend but we talk.”

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“And you’re sure about knowing nothing about this assault? Did she mention any boyfriends or something like that?”“She broke up with some white guy and hooked up with another one.

They’re

more open-

minded apparently, black’s not her favourite colour...that’s what she likes to say.”“Weeeh.”“What, I don’t think it’s wrong to say. Black men have this bad tendency of

making black women feel unsafe. They always choose themselves, even when

they don't have to. I can't count the number of time that I've
bee

n by a male of

my own skin colour... you'd swear your type is paid to." "I
see..." "Yeah. Maybe this guy she had a thing with decided that
he didn't want to break up and beat her up." "Do you know this
guy?" "He's white."

I suppress an eye-roll.

"You're no longer angry?"

She nods her head.

"Are you promising me that you're not going to go John Cena
on my old sister

-

aunt. She's stronger than she looks, trust me." "Tell her to stay
away from me." "Noted." I nod my head.

A sigh, I grasp her hand and lead her outside. MaSibusisiwe is
no longer in the waiting room, Sphehile sits there with many
bottles of water and a packet of

chips. Her brows furrow, she looks between me and Temasiko.

"You're okay."

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“Obviously.” Temasiko

collapsed beside her, and grabs a bottle of water.

“Where did the she

-

devil disappear off to?” “Who’s that?” Sphesihle cocks her brow. “Your mother

-in-

law.” “Oh...” unbothered, she drains her own water bottle, “the doctor called her

about something. I

have to go home to rest, I am not feeling well.” “What’s wrong?”

Sphesihle hesitates, frowning at the question that Temasiko has just asked

her... a soft breath “Dizziness.” “Can you drive us home, Sgalosethu?” That forsaken name, I haven’t heard it

in a while.

“Let me bud Fuze goodbye,” I say.

Fuzelihle regained her consciousness this morning, nearly a week after she was admitted into the hospital, but I am yet to see her today. Work has kept me busy, so has my daughter, I spend as much time as possible with her

–

and have organized picnic dates with her mother so that she can back on her feet

again. I don't want Khensani to wallow in sadness, I don't want her to feel like

she cannot rely on me when we were together for the better part of a decade. We talk, a lot now, about the past and our daughter. She wants me to take her to Mbongolwane to visit Likuwe-

ithemba's resting place, she's missed our little girl... so have I, but I always make sure to visit her more than once when

I am home to remind

her that's she's not forgotten –

and that her Baba loves her very much, still.

Right now, I have managed to escape work to attend Sphehile's appointment

with her OB. My hand rests in hers anxiously, Dr. Langa has been talking nonstop, and pointing to the screen

—

has already pointed out baby A and B.

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It's the identical twins that she's showing us now, they share the same

placenta but separate sacs.

"Head, heart, arm—" "Wow!" Sphesihle giggles, squeezing my hand to the point of pain. "I—can't believe this!"

Neither can I.

Mostly, I've been silent —

and it's her who has been asking questions,

conversing happily with the kind-hearted and knowledgeable young woman

but I'm so present, too aware of everything happen; and I can feel the beat of

my heart slowing a little

—

in grateful awe. I am going to be a father again. To not one but four babies; honoured is putting it mildly. I owe Sphesihle so much for this beautiful gift she's given me. The sound of my baby's heartbeat captures my ears —

beautiful, like similar sounds that had come before.

“That's baby C —

and her heartrate is at 163 beats per minute, right on the dot.

That's completely normal, fantastic...” she glances at us, grinning all perfect teeth, “let me take her other measurements.” “Her?” there's a smile in Sphesihle's voice. “It... it!” Dr. Langa lets out laughter, shaking her head, zoning in back on the screen. “I'm sorry, its just so hard to—” “Gotcha. My boyfriend's brother says that its three boys and one girl. I believe

him

because he guessed there being four babies correctly, he's our own personal prophet, right Love?"

Love?

She's behaving weird, smiling sweetly at me –

nothing out of the ordinary; but

last I knew I didn't qualify to be a boyfriend yet. She was still teasing me for

the position, because Qalokuhle says it's important to test men or something along those lines... I think she meant this as a joke

–

hopefully.

539

"Do you think they can make smaller copies of this? I want to get another

necklace to carry the babies

with me alongside their father." "That ego will probably know. He can even take you," I tell her, removing my

hand from her grip to get her door for her. She gets in, and mutters her

gratitude softly. “Let’s feed you first, and then we’ll go to the hospital.” “Pizza!”

My lips twitch in amusement, she said this so childishly and it makes my belly flutter warmly. Glinting hazels remain on me as she decides to play her music.

Beyoncé. The woman’s her favourite artist. Bab’ Shange isn’t subjected to th

is

torture today, lucky him. “Kodwa, Sthandwa sami, awusazami ngisho InkosiYamagcokama.” “When you’re with Temasiko, not me!” her giggles are breathless. She looks healthier, there’s a glow to her that almost feels... forbidden to look at. A

literal angel. Absolutely breathtakingly beguiling.

“How did you like your first therapy session with MaShezi?” she went yesterday, just before she went to work... the perks of working for Chris, he

indulges his workers as long as they get their jobs done.

“We were getting to know each other. I... ngiyamthanda. I have homework to

submit the next time I see her

—

what I hope to get out of therapy. My expectations and all that; and what contribution I will be bringing into ensure that I get the best out of this whole thin

g.” “Hmm.”

She increases the volume,

“You’re as smooth as Tennessee whiskey

.

You’re as

sweet as strawberry wine.

You’re as warm as a glass of brandy

. And honey, I

stay stoned on your love all the time,” comes her mellifluous voice. “I’ve never seen a

village girl into country music.” “Me! I like all kinds of music.”

540

“You.” I nod my head. She continues humming to the song, and sighs softly when it ends... just in time because we’re at a Debonairs. I get her the Chick

-In Lunch Combo, two meals that

she promises she will finish by herself. I don’t doubt her abilities, she’s proved me countless times.

It’s 03:00pm when we finally arrive at the hospital.

“Hey!” I can’t mask the surprise in my voice, Temasiko is here.

“What are you doing here?” “Kiss

-
kiss!”

Her lips join mine in a fleeting kiss, she then turns her attention to Sphehlehle, giving her a once-over. They seem to get along these days, although Sphehlehle always denies it when I enquire

—
but she enjoys Temasiko’s company. Absently, she’ll tell me about Temasiko’s Korean music and how good it is, and how she’s become a fan of k

-dramas because of her. They watched it together once. Just once, she swears.

“Sphe, let me tell you that you were desperately missed at work!” Temasiko divulges, grabbing Sphehlehle’s wrist. “Miss M becomes a little bitch when you’re not there, you know that. You’re his favourite.” “Because I know how to do my job,” Sphehlehle quips.

“You do!” Temasiko’s smile is warm. “He didn’t like my first two designs. Outdated lackluster, he called it.” The smile makes way for an offended pout. “I had to go with plaid then, I thought we left that look in 2015 with KaiSoo.” “KaiSoo?” Sphehlehle blinks

her eyes. "Don't worry about them. How did your appointment go? The babies are

growing beautifully, I hope. Did you guys bring back pictures with you? I hear babies look like aliens or prawns in the beginning stages. How true is that?

"She's like a little child, I rub my nose as laughter climbs to my throat.

Sphesihle says something, snapped, but shows her the sonograms of the

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babies. Temasiko fawns over the pictures, they're arguing quietly –

bickering

if we're being accurate. I don't pay them much mind as Sbanisezwe makes his appearance, looking far better than I last saw him... it took him and Thatego a while to come back from Japan; complications with their flight. My baby brother is glowing now

–

all childish smiles and arroga

nt bounces to his steps. "Ndoda emadodeni!" he

gives me a one-

armed hug, lingering. I've missed him too. "You psycho!" I chuckle. "Looking good. It took you long enough to come back home. How was Japan?" "A sexual fantasy."

The smirk on his face is off-putting

, the punk, I'd rather not know about his sexual encounters with Thatego... no matter how many times I've been subjected to them. "Good for you," I say with a roll of the eyes, "I hope you're

well-

rested. You're needed here now, your cousin was fou

nd bruised on a

street in Hillbrow." "Don't worry your head, Bafo. The big dogs will handle this one, and serverevence justly... but I need to speak to Fuze first, to make sure." "We were just about to see her."

Sbanisezwe nods his head, bowing his head at Sphesihle and Temasiko. His

grin is that of a Cheshire cat's... it won't go away. There's a silver band on his

ring-

finger that wasn't there when he left South Africa. He tells me that he and

Thatego decided to elope when they were in Tokyo, but promises that thewhite wedding is still taking place

—

merely as a celebration of their love.

"You... stay outside." "Me?" Temasiko is taken aback. "Why? I had nothing to do with Fuzelihle's—" "Its in your best interests

to.” Sbanisezwe remains deceptively calm, playing with the ring on his finger. “I just want to protect you.”

542

There's a light argument that Temasiko wins because Sbanisezwe won't tell her why he doesn't want her inside Fuze's hospital room with us. My

cousin looks really bad lying helplessly on some hospital bed, all bruised up, a

bandage covering her head. She doesn't cry when she sees us. Her smile is bright. "Hey, guys!" her vocal chords are still hoarse. "What are you doing here?" Isn't it obvious

?

"Fuze..." I don't touch her. It's Sbanisezwe who is too close, pressing his lips to her forehead. His eyes are closed, face pinched in clear anger. "What happened?"

"I—it's the old bastard," she clears her throat, Sbanisezwe is watching her

carefully

—

a

s if not to miss a single thing, "he—

I found him at the club that the girls and I were in. I am stupid, I don't know why I left with him."

Her words threaten to ignite a familiar angry flame within me. Has she gone back to sleeping around with men old en

ough to be her father? "Fuze..." "I didn't sleep with him. He— forced me. I was going to tell the police, maybe he knew because he beat me up for it. He forced himself on me and he beat me

up. He thought I'd die but I...didn't." "Who?" I ask. "I'll tell you," Sbanisezwe pipes in quickly, "don't—"

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Unrequited Desires : Forty-three Temasiko

I know I'm making the journey back home overwhelmingly awkward with my emotional silence but I can't help it, Fuzelihle shocked me back there; like

Sbanisezwe. Sqalosenkosi has been asking whether or not I am fine but my mouth refuses to produce any words, so its Sphehile who tries to fill in the silence with her singing. Her voice is mellifluous, nothing at all like the masculine tone found in mine... its irritating, I can't wait to start on HRT;

hopefully it will get rid of this deepness I find unattractive. Sphehile exhales softly, shifts her focus away from the windows and gazes at

Sqalosenkosi and then me; muttering quietly, "I'm not in the mood to cook tonight."

"I've got it!" I don't mean to snap, I'm angry... its aimed at the wrong people. "Its fine, I'll cook." "I don't trust you to not give me food poisoning with your moods today," she scoffs, and narrows her eyes at me on the rearview mirror, "even a blind person would see that you're in a bad mood." "What are you going to do about it?"

She shrugs her shoulders, focuses on the passing life again.

This time, Sqalosenkosi's eyes connect with mine on the rearview mirror, searching; the same way they had at the hospital. I wouldn't tell him anything,

ashamed for some reason; the same shame I am feeling right now. My skin feels all creepy-crawly and disgusting. The urge to detach myself from it is bad

but it's not possible, I know because I tried all those years ago and it wouldn't

work. Eventually, I just learned how to compartmentalize. Now Fuzelihle has met this fucker, and she mentioned my father.

Where did she meet them? How? Why? Anger heats my fat cheeks, I don't

know why I keep running into people that have hurt me in the past because of

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Sqalosenkosi's family... him. Sbanisezwe knew who t

hey were, he told me to

stay away. I didn't listen and now—

“We’re here.” He’s already out of the car; gets Sphehile’s door first and then mine. We enter

the kitchen through the garage door, and Sphehile immediately excuses

herself. They must’ve discussed this before... I wasn’t listening, absent, when

they were conversing in the car. But with the way she immediately left, unbothered, part of me suspects they discussed it and for some strange reason Sphehile was okay with it. Maybe she like me now.

Maybe she’s changed her mind about this entanglement we find ourselves in. “Temasiko...” Sgalosenkosi calls out, leaning against the island with his arms folded to his chest. He’s still so lost –

gorgeous brown eyes inquisitive.

Sbanisezwe didn’t tell him about those fcukers, I know this for sure. “Temasiko—” “What!?”

His eyes

are ever kind and understanding, always so unchanging... its frustrating when you’re mad at the world and you have the likes of this one –

the ever patient kind. Maybe one day he won't be so understanding. He's not at fault here, I don't know why him merely

looking at me is making me so angry. I want to punch the walls or something.

"Ngyaxolisa." I deflate for what feels like the thousandth time.

"You're not at fault. I'm just... shocked. The last I expected to hear when I went to the

hospital is that Fuzelihl

e was hurt by..." I can't say it. Bitter memories are

knocking on my door, begging to be unleashed.

"This has to do with Jabulani Mahlangu and Ciniso Dlamini, right?" it isn't a question, the way he says this. "Now, Jabulani

Mahlangu will be dealt with

acc

ordingly because he's hurt my family... but I have to know how you know this man, Temasiko. Ciniso Dlamini is easy to figure

out... your father perhaps?

You never talk about him like you do your mother. You never mention this

man at all.” “I have my reasons.”

It's not good enough, my response. He wants to unlock my chains and bolts as he always does, to reach my core and bring me to my knees. The mere thought tangles me, my chest tightens with a lancinating pain, I desperately want to push it

away but it's not p

ossible. The memories have been knocking viciously since we left the hospital.

“Temasiko.”

I really detest his cajoling tone

—

how patient it is. My bottom lip feels my anxious wrath, as I fold my arms on my chest

—

defensive. “Jabulani Mahlangu... how do you know him?” “He's a reputable businessman whose accounts we're handling.

Fuzelihle is

the one who scored us the contract. His business partner is Ciniso Dlamini,

and I am... are you by chance related to that man? A father perhaps.”

I do know fucking

Ciniso Dlamini! I don't like to call that man my father; he's just a sperm donor, maybe he was never my father, maybe he just tolerated

me while his beloved wife was still alive... maybe this is why it was so simple

for him to switch up, for him to go with Jabulani Mahlangu instead.

“Are they fucking now?” I'm curious to know. Any man who chooses his friend

over his own child must be getting A-

grade pussy from the friend. “Is my father twerking in thongs?

Does Jabulani Mahlangu make him limp? Don't be

fool

ed by his scrawny body, he's actually very strong in bed. Its true what theysay about thin men and big dicks.”

The look on his face changes quickly, contorting to one of flaming anger

—

it

burns me and forces my feet to backtrack. But he's gripping my arm

in a gentlehold that feels too tight, anger darkens his pupils, it surrounds and weakens

me. "Temasiko..." gritted teeth, his jaw tightens. "You're telling me that you've slept with this man?"

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Yes, I've slept with him! Numerous times! Yes, he made me feel special. Yes, I was seventeen years old and he was in his early fifties. Yes, he was my boyfriend! Yes, he took my virginity! Yes, yes, yes! My messy emotions reveal themselves again, I have no right to be angry at him but I am. He's asking

unnecessary questions, painting himself to be a saint when his boss is the very same bastard that slept with me, that used me!

“Plenty of times!” I scream, my eyes water. Why? Stupid, stupid! “Almost

everyday, Sqaalosenkosi, he would fuck me when my dad was home and he

wouldn't even notice a single thing! He never questioned the bruises and the

limps or the swollen lips or

—”“Can

you stop!” this time he raises his voice. He's shaking his head, tight griptrembling around my thick arm. “I don't want to hear about your fucking past

encounters with other men! How old were you when this happened? That son-of-a-bitch is four decades ol

der than you... or even more! What's going on here, Temasiko?

Surely it wasn't consensual, tell me, because this fucker

just hurt my cousin and he's not who I thought he was...

clearly.”“I don't want to talk about it.”“Temasiko—”“No!” I

snap. It takes

some effort, but I manage to break free from his vice grip eventually. The more he gives me a confused expression, the more he angers

me. "Don't look at me like that! I'm not the one who brought that man into our

lives! What is with you and bringing every demon from my past into my life

anyways?"

He shakes his head, doing a double-take, as if confused.

"Leave me, please. I want to sleep, I'm not feeling well." For a second, he looks ready to argue, but disappoints me by nodding. He's

leaving the kitchen,

not the house, I know he's going to Sphehile's room. My heart is bruised again, just a little, as I allow my shoulders to droop in defeat,

before deciding to call it a night. I've changed my mind about cooking,

Sphehile will have to order pizza or something.

I'm not in the mood, I have

lost my appetite.

547

The only thing I want to do is shower. That creepy-crawly sensation is back,

spreading throughout the entirety of my body. There's a strong scent

torturing my nostrils

—

familiar. Arthur Ford. I used to love it back then; the

bullying at school didn't seem so bad because of it, marking every inch of my

body just before I left his place to reach the first bell, with a lopsided gait, cumsquelching inside my hole, and R50 in my grey school pants. Now

, I don't love it so much. Now I feel disgusting. Now the shower isn't helping at all. I am not feeling too good. There's too much attacking me all at

once that all I want to do is scream. I want to scream my lungs out, release every black emotion attacking me. Out of nowhere, the urge to cry attacks me

—

tempting, too strong.

I try, I really do... the first sob defies me anyway.

I am coughing, but its accompanied by wetness to my cheeks that havenothing to do with that useless shower I just took. Wretched sobs escape me, I have no idea how to stop them. Comfort, it's what

I need. But I told Sqalosenkosi to leave me alone, didn't want him near me but

I crave his comfort, his lulling scent. He left his jersey in my room the last time, I charge to my closet and snatch it out to wear, and then struggle to the bed

and collapse on it. Sqalosenkosi's scent envelops me, I am wrapped up in it.

My erratic heartbeat lulls, my body sagging deeper into the mattress from the sudden exhaustion. I hug my pillows, bullying my lower lip to stifle my sobs,

and close my eyes... the quiet in my mind sneaks in slowly. It makes me happy,

even for a little while, as I close my eyes and focus on nothing else.

'His car is waiting outside the school gates, as usual, I rush inside

and close the

door behind me. "Hey, daddy," I greet chirpily. The face he gives me isn't a pleased one, it makes my heart shrivel up in fear, I shrug my shoulders to find out what he's on about. But he says nothing, and starts the car, we're driving to his house. I know it's to have sex... my father is

busy home today, the last time he nearly caught us and I was in trouble with

Jabulani. I couldn't sit straight for days, it wasn't a good punishment, not when

I had Life Orientation and everyone was making fun of me at school.

548

I leave my bag in the car, and follow him inside the house. My jealousy threatens to rear its ugly head at the pictures on the wall of his deceased wife

but that's my position now. Jabulani says he'll marry me one day. I am going to be his wife, and we will have children. I'm not sure about children

yet but I do see the marriage.

"Are we having sex?" my question comes out happy. Maybe afterward, I can tell him about my History test that I passed. It's my favourite subject. No response. In fact Jabulani's aura frightens me. There's a dangerous energy to it

—

—and that's never a good thing. It usually means that I will be on the

receiving end of a

—

"Daddy, what's wrong?" I question worriedly, backtracking as Jabulani's large frame stalks towards me. His eyes are red, he hasn't said a word but his face

says it all. The first punch sends me spiralling backwards. I fall to the ground, wailing in

pain. For a while I don't hear anything besides the ringing in my ears until a

large entangles in my hair, gripping enough to root out a few hairs. I meet terrifying dark eyes, filled with promises of a monstrous wrath that I find

myself trembling. And even though I know it's futile, begin begging for mercy although I've done nothing wrong. "Please, Daddy please. I

-

I didn't do

anything w-wrong. I

—promise."

"Who's that girl you were walking with?"

For a brief second, I scan my brain quickly, retracing everything that

happened after school. Nontobeko. Is that who Jabulani is talking about? She's just a girl! Its because of her that I aced that test. "A girl from

school, we got assigned together for a History assignment. I

—

swear. I cry out, opening and closing my trembling lips silently.

It won't work. Jabulani's not listening. He never does.

And with just the two of us here...it's going to be a long afternoon.

I cover my face, and fold in on myself. The first kick connects with my abdomen, and I let out a sob, cursing my stupidity. Jabulani always tells me to steer away from others and I've found a way to mess up—like usual. So

549

fucking stupid. I pushed him to do this. I'm a fuck up. A stupid fuck up. "I'm—sorry. I'm—sorry. I'm—sorry." It's the only way I'll get him to stop.' My eyes snap wide open. I don't sit up; but I was dreaming, I am sure of it. My head hurts, it feels like that... grey bastard's boot has connected with my head. The cold that sinks into my skin is unwelcomed, it extends to my heart as well, making it shrivel up like it would all those years ago. My eyelids are heavy with tears that should've stopped long ago.

Did I cry in my sleep again? It used to happen a lot when I was younger, when I came here to start afresh.

But I grew strong, and I'll be damned if I let Jabulani fucking Mahlangu get to me. I release a slow breath, attempt to move but there's an arm holding me in

place firmly

—

a familiar scent that lulled me to sleep just hours before. A soft press of lips lands on my forehead, Squalosenkosi tickles my belly, I get the

message and turn to face him. "Hey." His smile is soft, the silver moon reflects

it in the blue lighting of my room.

"Hey." I flap my lashes. My...boyfriend, he sighs, his hand going to the back of my neck before travelling lower down my spine.

"You're wearing my jersey?" it slithers under

the knitter, as he rubs my back in circles.

"Yeah, sorry," I whisper, my head tucked under his chin.

A kis

s touches my messy hair. "Its okay. What's mine is yours...besides, you're so stubborn. Can't stay away from my clothes," it's said amusedly, deep voice gentle as ever.

Another kiss forces me out of hiding, it's placed on my forehead. I move closer

to Sgalosenkosi, my hand going to his chest, I breathe him in, wanting to be

consumed by the him completely. I've never felt safer, never felt more

protected. From the world. From his past. From Jabulani. And my father.

"I had a bad dream," I confess quietly, eyes wet. "A bad m
-
memory."

Sgalosenkosi stiffens briefly, releasing a heavy exhale. "You did?"

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I nod my head, my trembling hand finding his beard in the darkness. “I was seventeen,” the confession slips on my tongue traitorously, I don’t know why I

am cry

ing, “when I lost my virginity, I was seventeen. He was fifty

-five, a

widower who was also my... f

-

father’s best friend.” The hold around me tightens, my...

Sqalosenkosi makes a strained sound that comes from deep in his throat. “Jabulani Mahlangu?” “I was—stupid back then.” And suddenly I wish I were my father, I wish I could grab a belt and use its buckle to beat the crap out of me. “People aren’t attracted to fat people, Sqalosenkosi, there’s a type of fat they’re attracted to –

a curvaceous fat like Sph

esihle. Firm fat. Clean, clear thighs. I’m the opposite of that, it was worse in high school. Of course the boys there weren’t gay,

but even if they were, they wouldn't have spared me a second glance. There's

nothing remarkable about me, Jabulani knew that and he used it to his

advantage." "Death is not enough for such an asshole." Even my laughs are weak, my chest is too sore and it feels like I can't breathe...no matter how hard I try. "I was his punching bag because he's not gay but I

was still too beautiful. He supported me when I told him about my gender, but

he's just like Lwandle. The only thing I was really good for was violent fucks

and blowjobs that bruised my throat. I was only good for his punches and

kicks because he loved me and didn't want

to see me with anyone else. We

were going to get married, he told me." "He's a paedophile, Temasiko." "I know now." I nod my head. "I—didn't then. My father just took his side. He found us and he beat me and took his friend's side. I came here, and he

cursed me; this is why-

this is why all those men raped me. It's my father's fault. Everything that's happened is his fault." "I am so sorry, Temasiko." Sorry means nothing. It's good for nothing. My chest hurts, it's so sore and exhausted. There are multiple voices in my head, yelling. Worthless whxre.

551

Unlovable slxt. Dirty bxtch. I try to push everything away by clenching myeyes tight and exhaling quiet

ly. "Then there were more guys... when thingswere rough here. I didn't have a place to stay but the 39 year old man whose wife was back home offered me a place to stay, and I helped him with rentwhen he came with his customers. R30 for a blow job. R50 for

anal. I wasn'tbeing beat up on the streets anymore, I wasn't cold... but I was dying on the

inside. I felt so tired at only seventeen, but it felt like I-I had lived a thousand

lifetimes. I was so tired. I'm just so tired." "Then let me hold you, and ease

you off your heavy load.”

He is.

“Why are you he

-here? Sphesihle

—”“Would rather I take care of you, and sent me here.”“I...
you’ve seen him? What does he look like? Is it possible to—

”“No!” the tone is sharp, resentful. “He’s probably dying as we
speak.” I am not going to ask. Part of me feels relieved, but a
greater part of me feels...

robbed somehow. Like I should see Jabulani Mahlangu and give
him all the

‘fuck yous’ in the world. Now that I know he’s out there. “What
about him... Ciniso?” Sgalosenkosi’s silence says enough. “I
think—”“No!” still so sharp. “He’s hurt you as well, right? He
chose that son of a bitch over you.”

He did. He did worse than any atrocity Jabulani has ever
subjected me to. Hewas the first man to break my trust.

552

“Jabulani Mahlangu. Ciniso Dlamini’s partner.” “Dammit!” Sbanisezwe punches the air, his gaze is... different. I watch him move his eyes from Fuze to... why is he looking at Temasiko? “I warned you to stay outside!” Temasiko’s eyes are wide, she backtracks, and then she’s turning her back on us and pushing the door and rushing out as if the devil himself is chasing her.

553

Unrequited Desires : Forty-four Sphesihle Living with a moody person has never been a thing at home, even my father with all

his violent behaviour toward my mother was never really problematic; when he was happy, he was really happy and the walls of our home would be filled with joyous laughter. When money was tight, then his frustration would reveal itself in the form of abuse toward my beloved mother... but the moods, I don't think he was moody.

This is why I am so annoyed living with a moody person right now. This is why I hate having to walk on

eggshells around people I don't even like that

much. I think a part of me was beginning to be really accepting of her,

Temasiko, but she's turned into a moody, sour bitch and I don't want to live

with her anymore. She snaps at simple questions, she makes me cook food

that she won't eat, and she's always trapped in her room. It doesn't make much sense, I am the pregnant one here. We're supposed to be

the moody ones, who want nothing to do with people but Temasiko has chosen to adopt all the hormonal imbalance

on my behalf. It's the only logical

explanation I have for the moodiness. Right now, her Korean music is blasting loudly in her room, and the door is closed

—

an invisible 'Do Not Enter' sign hanging on the doorknob. She's like

those teenagers in the American teenage films. So damn petulant.

It's Saturday. We're not working today, and are supposed to be spending time at Thatego and Sbanisezwe's. Their weekly family braais on the weekends;

last weekend Chris and Nqobizitha were hosting, the week before they it was Siyabonga and Nhlakanipho

—

but we had to travel to their house in Mpumalanga, because Siyabonga was too lazy to come here. The company is always so good, I especially love spending time with him, we share a lot in common and he's like an ol

der sibling. Today is one of those rare days where I have decided to put on a pair of pants

—

leggings, they work well with the black vest I have on and the sneakers. Redlipstick and a biker jacket hangs on my handbag, just in case the weatherswitches up on me later. My belly has a slight concave now, I am very close to

554

12 weeks of pregnancy and the nausea I felt in the earlier stages has stopped throwing tantrums, it takes only one glass of lemonade to chase it away completely. I put on some cologne, and remove my

phone from the charger, there's a message from Qalokuhle. Later, I will reply to it; she's probably asking for money anyway. She's very high

-maintenance for a girl whose only riches consist of her SASSA grant that she never fails to remind me she rightfully deserves

—

and more, because girls like her deserve to be paid for just existing.

Its Nzuzenhle's temporary parents I reply to; on my way out of the bedroom; to confirm that we'll speak later with my little brother. We speak almost every day, I don't want him to think he has been abandoned, children have wild imaginations and he's only 6 years old. Only two more months and then he's going to move here, with me, and we'll be a family.

Putting my phone inside my bag, I focus on the door in front of me; rapping my knuckles against it twice. The music on the other side is still so loud, I

don't think Temasiko will... never mind, she has. Why does she look so ugly?

No makeup. Plump face. Dry streaks of saliva on the corner of her mouth. Has she even bathed yet?

"Umubi." "Did I ask you?" she rolls her eyes, and attempts to close the door in my face. "What are you doing here?"

My lips press into a thin line, irritation prickles my skin, and causes my eyes to

twitch in annoyance. Argh! "Its Saturday, Temasiko, there's your bestie and his hubby's braai to attend." "Bestie... bestie?" "That's ego." "Oh! He's a good friend, my bestest one, but I don't think he qualifies to be a bestie."

555

Clearly, her brain has downgraded because what she said makes no sense to

me. A bestest friend who isn't a best friend. How does that work? I don't care actually. Bab' Shange will be here soon; we don't have to make him wait

around, maybe he has a girlfriend that he wants to spend time with. He smiles a lot lately.

"Go shower. You smell like packet of Cheese Doritos!" I scrunch my nose, and force my way inside her room. Gosh, it's such a mess! How does she function

in a place like this? Depression threatens to swallow me from the lack of light.

"Don't look at me, get to it!" "I am only going because I know your neat

-

freak ass won't be able to resist

cleaning my room. Me, being so good-natured and thoughtful, will give you

space and allow you to do your thing. You're welcome to take care of my laundry as well."

My frown doe

sn't affect her at all. Mxm. "I am not your maid." "Sister

-

wife." I don't get the chance to reply, she's already disappeared off to the bathroom.

A quiet exhale lands on my tongue, as I shake my head, placing my things on

the messy dresser. At least she doesn't moody like the other days. Even weeks.

It started shortly after that altercation with MaSibusisiwe at the hospital, about three weeks ago.

The room is spotless by the time Temasiko returns, I've picked out her clothes

and placed them on the bed. It was one of the few remaining clean ones, and she really needs to start taking better care of herself; living like a pig is not a

look to be proud of. The windows are open, and there's air and light seeping

through the once darkened room.

“Thanks, Mah!” she giggles, eyeing the leopard print on the bed.

My skull hurts from the loudness of her voice; just minutes ago, I had to lower

the volume to the Korean music, and now it’s her. “You’re too loud!” I snap,

rolling my eyes.

556

“You’re too serious! Lalisa, love me. Lalisa, love me!” she sings, grabbing her

underwear

—

a

red lacy thong to slide on under her towel. I didn’t take her for the shy type but then again, maybe she thinks I’ll laugh at her tiny penis. “It’s rude to stare.” “We’re both girls, aren’t we?” I challenge, with a cock of the brow. “Okay.” She shrugs h

er shoulders, and drops the towel. My eyes bulge, I choke on my saliva! It's weird to see a woman like her wearing a thong, I don't know what I expected but... there's a little bulge. Her boobies are practically nonexistent, it's just fat. Her body is too soft, all cellulite-y. "What do you use for your thighs?"

Hmm?

"I don't know what you're talking about." "You mean to tell me that you don't have black thighs. Kiwi?" I shake my head. "Of course not." "Hmm. Lucky you! Stretch marks then?"

Who does

n't have stretch marks? Even thin women have stretch marks. I have

them on my shoulders, a few on my belly, and behind my legs. Nodding my

head, I answer her question with an unbothered, "Yes." Can't complain about

things you cannot change after all.

"Do you believe in any of those products they advertise?

The ones about reducing stretch marks." I don't know.

Personally, I never bother with any products. Some things

cannot be changed, my body is perfect the way it is. Even with this concave belly I am spotting, I still think that I look perfectly beautiful, but that may

change with my belly growth. “No. Why would I?”

“Right. Your body’s annoyingly perfect.”

Okay.

557

Bab’ Shange arrives just as she’s putting on her heels. I think they’re unnecessary for an outing that’s indoors but what do I know? “Did Squalosenkosi tell you I am mad at him?”

No. Why would he?

We’re in the car now, making the long drive to Pretori

a. The privacy screen is raised, so that whatever Temasiko tells me are for my ears. I peer over at her,

and wonder if Squalosenkosi is the reason she’s been so moody and not

MaSibusisiwe as I had initially assumed.

“What business do I have in your affairs with Sgalosenkosi?” “Nothing. I’m just wondering.” “Well, we don’t talk about you.” “Hadn’t we all agreed on this? I want nothing to do with their relationship, as long as it’s not affecting me personally. But it’s nice being Sgalosenkosi, having the best of both worlds

–

a kiss here, and another one there. Love all around him. If he’s having a hard time with Temasiko then I am there – a safe place;

and if it’s me he has a problem with then Temasiko is there also. “That’s good.”

I have a feeling she wants to say more but holds back. Her eyes are strangely vulnerable, and her mouth opens only to shut closed a second later. Maybe she

realizes we’re not used to each other like that, I mean I wouldn’t even know what to say to her. She’s not my friend. We’re at Silver Lakes, it doesn’t matter. Temasiko follows behind me, the heels

are still giving her trouble. I huff an annoyed breath when she nearly tumbles,

and has to grip my shoulder for balance. This! This is why you don't wear these things when you'

re not used to them. Me and her are like family now apparently, this is why we barge into the house like we own it. Noise again.

558

Much more bearable this time because its RnB. My favourite. A child skids past us, giggling about something

—

João. He's si

x years old and his hyperactive self proves that. So much energy! Temasiko gives me a soft chuckle, as we enter

the kitchen, where we heard some voices. It's just Thatego singing, he's

glowing

—

all sparkling skin and glinting eyes. His mole seems to stretch into a tiny oval-

shaped black when his lips raise into a stunning smile. "Hey! Your man's on his way. Did he tell you that he invited Khensani?" Nope! I don't know if I should be bothered, because I feel sorry for her more than anything. She's been th

rough a lot. Losing Likuwe-ithemba. Her unborn

child. A while back she lost her fiancé. Life hasn't been kind to her. I don't know if she has friends or if she's mostly a loner like me –

and attached to the one that she found here.

"Temasiko's frown tells me no." I spare Tema a glance, and it's there... just not too obvious. What's wrong? "Anyway, I hope you will be nice because she's family." Thatego's beautiful

beam broadens, he heads to the fridge to grab a one-

litre of orange juice. "My husband's out in the patio, with Nqobizitha and Nhlakanipho. They're going to

prepare the meat soon. Chris and Siyabonga were fighting out swimming

trunks in one of the spare bedrooms. What do you guys want to do?" "Help you," I offer, clearly he was readying himself to make salads, "let me wash my hands." Temasiko sighs. "Let me

greet the others first.” I worriedly watch after her, until she’s disappeared. Thatego’s singing voice distracts me, he’s clearly the type that excels at most things –

design, fashion and makeup, and now singing. He giggles when I tell him that, delicately covering his face with his hands

–

and Sbanisezwe’s love and dedication glints

on his ring finger. He tells me about Japan, and how much he loved it. Sbanisezwe and him feel at home there; they have a house there actually, they

rent it out sometimes. The only reason they haven’t permanently moved there is because they’d be lonely without family.

559

“We’re looking into surrogacy. I told Tema that Sbani gives me everything I

want and she di

dn’t believe me.” “Oh!” my surprise can’t be masked. “And you’re not afraid it’s too soon. It’s barely been two months that

you guys have married.” “No!” he giggles, and hands me a bowl to dump the chopped chicken chunks in. “If you want something, then you chase it; there’s no ‘it’s too soon’ when life is so short. I am going after everything I want. Marriage has been ticked off

—

with someone I wouldn’t trade for anything. Someone I love. Now it’s time to have babies with that person.”

Hmkay.

“I can give you one for free,” I joke, “there’s four in here. Take one of the boys.” That ego laughs freely. “Careful, I might take you up on that offer.”

Hell no! Temasiko makes an appearance again, grabs an apple from the fridge and announces that s

he’ll be out in the back. “This thing with her father is taking a toll on her.” “Her father?” “Ciniso Dlamini. He’s a wealthy businessman, imagine! All along I thought she grew up poor but she wasn’t without. Her family was middle

-class. But the

man’s

a bastard who sided with her sugar daddy, and left her to fend for herself.”

Ciniso Dlamini.

The name rings a bell. Fuzelihle has mentioned it twice or thrice before, he is...he’s the man acquaintanced to Jabulani Mahlangu. Temasiko’s father is

associat

ed to a now deceased rapist. How? Why? Is that why she’s so angry? Is

that why her and Fuze seem to have a rift between them? I mean Fuze tries totalk to her; but Tema avoids the poor girl like the plague. She even getsannoyed at the mere mention of her name.

560

“Jabulani Mahlangu was the sugar daddy?” this is probably a rich... but what

are the chances? It would explain why Tema avoids Fuze so much.

“Yes!” Thatego’s eyes are wide, expression disgusted. “Have you seen his

picture? Sbanisezwe showed me, the

—

wait, have they told you about this or am I doing something I’m not supposed to?”

Fuck!

I don’t know. Like I told Tema, Sgalosenkosi and I don’t discuss her... not much anyway. “We’re a family.” “No.” Thatego puts his hand to his mouth, instant regret paints his face.

“Eish, please don’t tell anyone I told you. Sbanisezwe will kill me!” “I’m not the type to gossip.” He’s grateful, I can tell by the expression on his face. Effortlessly, he moves

onto the next topic and starts to discuss his businesses.

Christophe wants to interview him and Sbanisezwe about their respective businesses, and how they juggle their private

lives with fame. He’s excited. And then he asks about me but there isn’t much to tell. I’m working hard, writing my exams, pushing to get my learner’s license and juggling all that with this pregnancy.

Sqalosenkosi finally makes his appearance. The smile on his face when we lock eyes! Bright. Honest. He greets Thatego, and then focuses all his attention

on me. His arms are locking me in, he embraces me and breathes me in. "I've missed you." "You saw me two days ago. Spoke to me just this morning." "It

makes no difference." Warm lips press inside my neck, he sighs. "Khensani is here. You know her, right? She's the mother of my children." "I know." "I hope you can accept her and be kind to her."

561

"As long as she accepts me and is kind to me."

He chuckles, but nods his head. The introductions are done with Khensani.

She's a woman whose light seems to have dimmed to unsteady flickering, her smile doesn't touch her eyes. She's thin, too thin.

"You'r

e the one my daughter

always talks about. I'm so happy to meet you." "Me too." She
nods her head. "Thank you for taking care of her. For being her
stand

-in

mother. I am working through a lot of things at the
moment." "She's really sweet."

More small talk, and Squalosenkosi drags her away. Christophe
stops him,

happily throwing himself in her arms as he confesses that he's
missed her.

Siyabonga rolls his eyes, only faking a smile that seems mutual
when Khensani

returns his gaze. He doesn't spare her a

second glance, and suffocates me with

a hug that I am all too happy to accept. He's missed me,
although we spoke last

night and asks about the babies like usual.

Temasiko shows face a few minutes later. It's just me in the
kitchen now,

Thatego left to h

elp Sbanisezwe with an 'emergency'. I just let him go, knowing very well that what he was wearing won't be what he'll be wearing when he returns. Sqalosenkosi comes back as well and... awkward indeed. Is this about Khensani? I don't understand. "Tema." "Sqalosethu." A fake smile. "I'm going outside."

A small grin in my direction, Sqalosenkosi pulls me to him; he gives me a soft

kiss and then he's setting me free. "I said no, Temasiko!" is what I hear on my way out. Then Temasiko's loud voice but she's not shouting enough to bring attention to herself.

562

Chris comes to join me, sitting beside me on one of the pool-chairs, and he

compliments me about work. He's proud. "You're such a hard worker. Everyone is impressed by you." I don't take compliments well, they make me blush and pressure me. But still,

“Thank you!” I say truthfully. “I enjoy working for you, you’re an amazing boss.” “Daddy!” Lethulwazi is waddling toward him quickly.

The youthful man beside me makes a horrified face, smiling too awkwardly.

“Let’s have babies, Nqobizitha convinced me. Its going to be amazing, he lied. Now look at me, these children can’t function three minutes without me. Our baby girls will arrive anytime now and eish, I am going to die.” “But you love it.” I can see right through him.

He stands, and picks Lethulwazi up. There’s an exhausted beam on his face, he exhales softly. “Its tiring sometimes. But it’s the life I want, and I have everything I could ever need in my family. Despite everything, I’m happy.” “And Lisakhanya?” I have to ask. “Nqobizitha wants her to move with us next year.”

Sheesh!

That will be five children living with them. They’re not even in their late

thirties! Thirty-three and thirty-one. Although, the triplets are turning thirty-four

in December; Thatego and Chris want to plan their birthday... not some

dinner like they did last year. They want to have actual fun this time. But Chris

and Nqobizitha's twin girls will probably be a few weeks old then; I wonder if they'll still go out. "Good luck!" "Definitely needed." He giggles, moving toward Nqobizitha at the grill.

563

Temasiko comes back, collapses beside me and sighs deeply. "He's going to break up with me."

Huh?

"Why?" "The daughter saw us kissing in the kitchen. A makeup kiss that isn't really makeup because he still won't give me that jerk's number but makeup

because

he was making my legs weak and I love him."

My eyes touch the back of my skull.

"She's seen me kiss her father and didn't get upset. Why would she be upset with you?" "Oh wow! You don't need to rub it in." "And you don't need to snap at me!" I snipe back, narrowing my eyes. "I just

want to know why Liyana would hate you for

—”“He’s gonna break up with me.”

“No he's not.”

“Yes he is.”“No he’s not.”

“Yes he is.”

“Who is or isn’t doing what?” Sqaalosenkosi approaches us, jaw tight; he’s holding on to Liyana by her left hand and she’s dragging her feet, face wet with tears, lips pouting. To his daughter, Sqaalosenkosi says, “You owe Temasiko an apology, Liyana.”

“No I don’t.”

“Yes you do.”

564

“No I don’t!”

“Yes, you do.”

Temasiko has already got up from her chair and come over to the two of them

now glaring balefully at each other. “What’s to apologize for? Liyana hasn’t done anything wrong.”

“I don’t like you anymore,” Liyana declares to Tema tearfully, wrenching her

and from Squalose

nkosi’s grip. “You’re stealing my daddy from auntie Sphe and you’re breaking our family... like mommy did. I hate you!” She kicks Tema in

the shin and runs away.

Squalosenkosi looks to go after her but I stop him. “I’ll go.” My tone brokers no

room for argu

ment, just assure Khensani that she's fine. Her eyes are curious, I don't want her to worry. "Stay here," the instruction is given to Temasiko. "Like I'd go anywhere." She snorts, the brave front isn't working; she's teary

-

eyed. I don't think as I squeeze her shoulder in reassurance. "She doesn't hate you." "He won't choose his daughter over me. I wouldn't want him to. He's such a brilliant father, Liyana deserves a man like him in her life." I don't know why she looks too damn emotional –

on the verge of tears,

actually. Sgalosenkosi didn't say he'd have to choose between his daughter and her. But there's a mournful expression on her face –

resigned, as if she's

already letting go. So dramatic!

565

Unrequited Desires : Forty-five Temasiko

“You look awfully depressed!” It’s hard to tear my eyes away from the sight of Christophe dancing happily

with Nqobizitha; they always look too beautiful to look away from; but

Thatego’s adenoidal voice does the trick. He’s like an angel that fell flat on

his

—

all golden locks circling his face like a halo. “This is not what you were wearing before,” I point out suspiciously. “My husband stained my pants by mistake.” There’s a shy giggle in there, he’s biting his bottom lip, playing with the

knit

of shorts that he’s now wearing. Something tells me they belong to Sbanisezwe, I know that Thatego steals his clothes a lot. “You should’ve just told him to shoot it in then.”

He gives me an embarrassed chest pat in return; earthy eyes would swallow me if it were possible

—

but his gaze is travelling to Sbanisezwe, as he plays

with the platinum ring on his finger absently. There's a small beam pulling at

his lips. His eyes travel from his husband to Chris and Nqobizitha, the smile

broadening a little. "Are

you happy here, Temasiko?"

Huh? I mean Sqalosenkosi has disappeared with Khensani, she was overwhelmed

by the noise or something; and I think she's suffering from some sort of anxiety or depression. More than anything, I feel sorry for her; it's like she's going through a lot. Maybe I'm imagining things but she seemed very detached

from the happenings around her. So my ever attentive and supportive

boyfriend dragged her away. She is still probably talking to Liyana. I'm not sure how that's going but I'd be lying if I said I wasn't scared. "Sure, I am." He doesn't believe me, I think. The look in his eyes is doubtful, and he's nibbling on his bottom lip, hesitant about something. I don't want him to feel

566

like I am unapproachable. Granted, Thatego seems like the type to avoid conflict at all costs. The expression on his face changes though, as he exhales softly and keeps beautiful earthy brown eyes on me.

“It’s a little overwhelming at first, isn’t? Being part of this... family.

MaSibusisiwe aside, almost everyone that has Ngcobo blood is so kind-

hearted and... are you happy here? Now. With us.”

What a random question.

Of course I am happy, I’ve never felt judged by them. I’m happy when I am here, at peace; Lord knows I’ve chased it for so long.

Altho

ugh there are days where I feel tired

–

and maybe Liyana’s just made me feel that way –

I am

mostly happy. I'm glad I met all of them. Thatego is such a beautiful friend –

sodamn giving and supportive.

“I am.” He exhales, relieved somehow, I don't know

what the hell is going on with

him. Now he's dragging me up and forcing me to dance with him, to that Lights

Down Low song that should be the anthem for any strip show.

His hands splay on my hips, he sways to the beat.

“Sbanisezwe and I are going to have a baby via surrogacy.

I asked and he said yes.” “It's too soon,” I cannot keep the judgment out of my voice. It's justified, they got married two months ago... and it's wiser to enjoy married life first before

deciding to

bring a newborn into the picture. “What's everyone's obsession

with having babies? Chris and Nqobizitha first. He told me that Siyabonga

wanted them as well but Nhlakanipho said to wait. Now it's you?” “Why are you angry?”

Haibo. I am not angry, this is an innocent question. He should let me judge them in peace, I was bruised by a six year old not long ago; she even kicked

me. I am sure its karma for all the people I've put my hands on. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I'd be a victim of viol

ence at the hands of a six year old.

567

"I am not," the denial is heavy on my tongue, "truly, babes. I'm just wondering

what the obsession with babies is. Ngapha I have a boyfriend expecting a whole brood of children. Its like everyone in this family is rushing to have

babies. Are you guys forming your own cult or something." "Hey!" Thatego punches my arm – hard! Ow.

"That's not a nice thing to say, I am offended. So what if we all want to have babies? It's not like we don't have the means to take care of them."

I want to roll my eyes so bad but fear gaining a migraine on top of the really

bad one that I already have. But really? Money isn't the only thing that raises a

baby. Emotional stability and the art of understanding your child must form part of

the criteria somewhere. If not, then you'll raise babies like Liyana...

who think unremarkable folk like myself have the ability to steal away their parents. She likes Sphehile better. It was all there in her eyes, the resentment. Clearly Sphehile has played this big role in her life that's impacted her deeply; she feels safe and loved with her. I may not be ready to be anyone's mother but I would be lying if I said I hadn't grown attached to the little girl – especially at Thatego and

Sbanisezwe's wedding, that's where we grew close. "Don't mind me," I apologize to Thatego, squeezing his waist to reveal my sincerity. "I'm just a moody bitch."

A giggle. I win!

"Don't take it out on me then." His voice is stern, but always so soft. "I don't

know about

the others but Sbanisezwe and I, we're not just going to bring a baby into the picture. We've talked a lot, especially in Japan; and both of us are

ready

—

in every sense of the word. We've survived the worst and are each other's strength. A baby won't come between us, it's just another opportunity for us to further extend our love.”

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“Then I am happy for you.” “Good.” He nods his head, revealing gleaming teeth. “I know how problematic it is for people to have children they're not ready for, that they don't even

want. This is why some of us encounter parents that only tolerate us; because

they weren't emotionally

ready and

—”“You’re the third born.” I remember Gontse telling me this. Gomolemo is the last-born.

“Still.” He presses, shaking his head. “These things can go anyway. A mother

can be ready for her first baby but not the second. I think this is why there are family tensions; because our parents force themselves to bring us into this

world when they’re not even ready for us –

and sometimes the resentment

remains. Like you could’ve just aborted me if you were going to treat me

differently from the others.

”“Hmm. I never thought about it that way.” I admit, licking my lips. “I guess it helps that I was my mother’s only child.” “You don’t like your dad very much.” He’s not asking, something tells me he...knows. There’s no judgement in his

eyes, and his t

one was light enough that it feels like he’s not prying. With a sigh, I admit, “Not really. I loved him before 17; but after that I

just didn't fuck with him no more." A giggle, there's something like hurt in his eyes though. "Trust parents to fuck

their

children over. It's like they've never been children themselves, and they just hurt us. And if you're not the careful, the cycle is unchanging –

from a hurting child to a hurting adult who cannot properly communicate with their

child." "I'd take a strict

parent who would still choose me at the end of the day

anytime." Most of the time, I pretend it doesn't affect me but it hurts me deeply how my father chose money over me. It's the only explanation; Jabulani was his meal

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ticket after all, a way for him

to increase his revenue. It wasn't enough that we were financially stable, Ciniso just had to have more, more, more. It's his greed

that allowed him to so easily side with his best friend who took advantage of my naivety, and manipulated my emotions.

Jabulani Mahlangu toyed with my insecurities, knew very well how unloved I felt as a teenager; I wanted to feel loved and he made sure to make me feel special while never forgetting to remind me that boys my age didn't fall in love with girls like me. "Strict parents are not it, hey." Thatego sighs dramatically. "I couldn't stand up

for myself for years because of this. I get anxiety attacks sometimes and I have

to count my words, I never want to say anything wrong."

His words sound familiar. The counting of words thing. Sqaalosenkosi does it a

lot. It used to annoy me how silent he'd remain when I've said a mouthful, but he explained that it's his way of digesting every piece of information that way he knows how to respond and doesn't say anything wrong. May

be it has to do

with his past as well? I've never asked; we don't know much about each other's pasts... it sucks. "You seem outspoken now though; maybe something like breakable glass but you still speak your mind." "Therapy." Thatego snorts lightheartedl

y.

“On top of babies, it seems everyone in this family is obsessed with therapy as well,” I tease, swallowing a dry lump. He’s not offended this time, and rolls his innocent

-

looking eyes instead. “Its

medicine, Temasiko, that you have to take sometimes to boost your emotional wellbeing. Most of us are just broken adults walking around with barely patched up tapestry that our childhoods have shred, and every fucked up

situation that we’ve encountered along the way.” “I know what you mean. Sometimes I think I am fine when I am not fine at all.

Before Sgalosenkosi and him offering to get me help, I just thought I shrugged off a

ll my traumas but... there’s a reason I feel so tired sometimes.” “This is why therapy is important.”

570

Sbanisezwe comes to drag him away; he complains about me stealing Thatego

from him for too long. His smile is creepy; his sun sets and rises in Thatego'

s

eyes, and there's a possessiveness in the way he holds the younger man and

leads him away from me. A shrill scream penetrates the air a second later, Sbanisezwe has thrown Thatego inside the pool; he joins him a second later.

They're kissing now, looking

into intimate for anyone's eyes. "Hey!"

Sphehile spares me the torture of watching this soft porn movie in front of

me. There's no smile on her face but her eyes are twitching.

"Did you speak to her for me?" An eye roll, she nods her head.

"Sgalose

nkosi is with her now. He told me to

call you, the three of us are going to talk to her." "Oh... where's

Khensani?" "Resting." My feet are reluctant as I follow behind

her. This is not me at all, but there's a

child involved in this entire situationship

—

and I draw the line where children are involved. I'm afraid that maybe, maybe if Liyana is sure about not liking me then maybe I'd have to take a step back. I'm not going to put Sqaalosenkosi

in a position where he has to choose between me and his daughter, I am not that cruel.

"Is it safe to enter there?" She stops midway on the stairs, and gives me a deadpan. "You can slap me but you're scared of a six year old?" I mean, I don't care whether or not she hates me but Liyana's different. She's

Sqaal

osenkosi's daughter; and with everything we've discussed with Thatego, I wouldn't want to partake in messing up her childhood all because I am in love

with her father. Children are vulnerable beings, their minds are worse

—

and it's crucial that they grow up

in healthy households... it's one of the few ways

we can prevent breeding another generation of bitter and broken adults.

There's already too much crap going on in the world.

571

"Yes." I tell Sphehlehle.

Her glare makes me giggle. Trust her to tickle me when I am feeling nervous.

This is why I enjoy her company, she's too serious for her own good but its

beautiful for my mental wellbeing. She has no idea how she makes my dayover a simple snort sometimes.

"I just don't know why you and Sgalosenkosi didn't discuss this with her previously. I am assuming you guys are serious, so you'd think telling Liyana about your relationship would be one of the top priorities. All of this could've been avoided." "Whoa, hey!" I am taken aback. "We've only been doing this for 6 months. Its

unrealistic to tell her about us when we barely even know that much about

each other. He's only started learning about my family recently." "Then what were you doing in these past six months?" Talking about me mostly. My past. The relationships I've had. To be honest, he

knows so much about me and I barely know anything about him. Is it all done on purpose? Maybe he tells Sphesihle. I push down the sudden jealousy.

"Learning about me. Has he told you about himself?" "I know quite a few things." Oh... wow! "It's because we're from the same village. Knowing things about him that you wouldn't know is because I've known him for a long time." That doesn't make me feel any better. It's almost as if she's flexing this somehow, though I know it's not the case. "Do you know why he walks around with a cane sometimes? I'm sure he had some sort of accident. Remember, he only started driving now." Sphesihle sighs, we're walking through the l

ong hallway now. Damn, it's elegant! That ego and Sbanisezwe are clearly moneyed, this house is worse than the Hyde Park one. In the near future, this will be me; I will have worked

my flat ass off enough to afford all this beauty. I'll buy my own house and

be

my own boss. It will happen one day. I'm already working toward it –

fulfillingmy dreams.

“Ask him all these things. Now come in.” She leaves me no choice as she opens the door. This is a little girl's bedroom, there's too much pink and Sofia the f

irst posters on the wall. It must be

Liyana's room, I know how much she loves Sofia The First. The little girl's eyes find mine behind Sphehile, I don't imagine her mean glare and the jutted lower lip. She's so adorable. I want to pinch her cheeks and kis

s her forehead.

“Sanibonani.” Sqaalosenkosi raises his eyes, there's an apologetic frown on his handsome face. “Temasiko,” exhaustion drips off the deep baritone, “you're here.” I know what he means. No, I didn't leave. I don't have to leave all the time, no

matter how tempted I am so

metimes. I'll only leave if his baby

-girl makes it

clear that she really disapproves of our relationship. I'm scared, maybe indignant, but she has to say it one last time and fuel my courage. Then I'll go cry

about it at home, and unpack everything with my therapist.

It won't be the end of the world. It may feel like it but it won't. "Still here." I pull my lips into an awkward grin, though I can't help the sharp

pinch of guilt seeing how upset Liyana is. Beside me, Sphesihle hums and goes to occupy one of the small pink chairs.

"Grab a seat."

I don't think that's a good idea. The chairs honestly look tiny, I don't want to embarrass myself. It's

embarrassing enough that this little girl assaulted me. No, I am not exaggerating. I shake my head, standing in my corner, uncomfortable as ever. I

can't help fidgeting, my fingers plucking uneasily at the hem of my pants. Clearing my throat, I force my eyes to find the young girl's. "Hey, Lilly."

The little girl ignores me and whips her head around, to the blank computerscreen on top of a medium-sized desk in one corner of the room. Okay, the silent treatment then. Feeling uncharacteristically nervous, I shift to crouch in front of Sgalosenkosi

and his daughter, being careful not to be too close. "I know you're angry at me, but... I kinda don't know why you're angry."

Liyana folds her arms and refuses to look at me, her lower lip stuck out in a

pout. There's still a tear on her blotchy cheek. "I thought you were my friend," she whispers. "But you just w

anted to take my daddy away from me and

auntie Sphe. You didn't like me."

Oh, no. "That's not true, Lilly. I like you. You're cute and friendly, and you love pink and pretty things like I do." My hand wring together. It's true that I like

your daddy, but

I'm not taking him away from anyone. I also want to be your friend."

“I don’t wanna be your friend anymore. I don’t like you. An’ I don’t likemommy neither. I wan’ Baba an’ auntie Sphe to be together.” She sniffs, her little face crumpling up. “It’s not fair.”

A painful lump comes into my throat. I am saved from responding by Sqaalosenkosi, who clears his throat and carries his daughter on his lap, kissing

on her little cheek. “Kukhanya kwam’, do you remember how much Baba loves

you and your sister? Even

when she was alive?”

Sister?

This little girl has a sister? Had... had. Why has no one told me?

Sudden hurt attacks me, I don’t think I can be blamed... this

is huge. Sqaalosenkosi has kept the death of his child away from

me; and we’re dating, I... maybe I’m overreacting but it wouldn’t

hav

e hurt to let me know that Liyana has a

sibling. Okay it would’ve hurt. But still... “Mhmm.”

“This proves that I can love more than one person, right? And that I don’t have

to choose who I like more, because you and Likuwe-ithemba are equally precious in

my eyes and I will love you even beyond death.” “Do you want to die, Baba?” Small, Bambi eyes waver. Liyana clings to her father, the mere thought terrifies her, I can see it in her eyes.

“No, of course not. I don’t want to leave you.” “Then don’t leave me. Tell auntie Sphe to come back home and we’ll be a family again. I will be able to talk about her at school again.” Hesitation morphs on Sgalosenkosi’s face, he clears his throat again. “As I was

saying, I love both you and Likuwe-ithemba very mu

ch. You’re equally important to me, and so very precious. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Baba.” “Good, because it’s the truth.”

His arms tighten around his daughter. “If Baba

can love you two, then he can also love other people like he loves you and Likuwe-ithemba. This is why he loves auntie Sphe and Temasiko at the same

time. They're equally important to him for different reasons. Sphe will always be in your life, Temasiko won't take that away from you." The little girl sniffs, I don't think she's solid yet. Sighing, Squalosenkosi pats her hair and bends to kiss the top of her head.

"Baba and mommy and auntie Sphe will always love you, Kukhanya kwam', and we're always gonna be there for you as long as we live." He sighs again and hugs his daughter. "I understand if you're not happy right now, baby girl, but I hope you can at least be nice to Tema and your mommy, okay? You don't have to like them." He mouths 'sorry' to me.

I shake my head minutely, a small smile on my lips.

"Please understand that nobody is being replaced here. I know you're scared, but I promise you that you will always come first. You're my pretty princess and I am your loyal servant who is bound to love you because that's what pretty princesses deserve. I'm not going anywhere."

575

They continue talking, and Sphehlehle reassures her that she's not going anywhere. I hope she's not feeling compelled to say this. Another problem

with dating men who are raising neglected children; its clear as daylight that

Liyana didn't have a proper mot

her-

figure in her life before Sphehile. I won't judge the mother though, anyone can tell that she's been through the most. Sbanizezwe interrupts us half an hour later, smiling. He's here for Liyana, and the bright beam on the little girl's face... clearly

she loves him so much. I can't

say I am not relieved.

"We need to talk," I inform him, "its not a breakup."

That worried expression on his face was comical. But we do need to talk, I barely know him I realize

—

his past. Its unsettling because part of me does

know him; but at the same time I don't. I'm not sure what makes him tick. I'm

not sure how he handles his anger or stress. The only time I got a glimpse was

when the first time he fucked me. I know he doesn't shout but still... I know

nothing about him. Why is he always helping others? Why is he always careful with his words?

Why does he limp sometimes? Why wouldn't he drive his car? And his daughter, how come I didn't know about her?

The questions are many; and with each new one that pops up, I realize that

maybe I don't know him at all.

576

Unrequited Desires : Forty-six Temasiko

“

-fail to understand why it is so hard to do your job properly and find me the type of models we need for this shoot. I am tired of seeing the same angular face with no memorable features and blond hair, I want something different. Tell Alice we are killing the Saint Laurent shoot, it does not match the edition at all. We

needed warm, tonal colours instead I received cold, distasteful and

ugly. Call Soohyun to inform him we're going to do a new shoot this week.

Make sure you confirm my reservation for dinner tonight and that the driver knows where and when to pick Mondli up. Also, tell Xoli I need to see the new

designs for the line. Did you do this?"

My eyes blink rapidly, stupidly, as Chris stops to peer at the assignment Miss M had given me and Sphehlehle. I thought Miss M was an authoritarian, but Chris is something else when work gets busy and deadlines are being chased.

He's been here the entire morning, barking out orders to everyone, in an

innocent manner that only he can manage.

"Yes," I nod my head, proud of this catalogue that I came up with, "not just me. It's a group assignment for me and Sphehlehle." "Sphehlehle!" his eyes widen, like he's just remembered her. I don't blame him, with how busy it is, it's quite expected that he's forgotten one of his best

employees in this office. “Where is she?” “Here!” Sphe shows face, rubbing her hands on the loose, black dress she’s wearing. Her bulge isn’t the biggest, just a slight concave that hints at pregnancy. I honestly thought she’d look like a watermelon, there are four babies in her belly after all. “I was just using the bathroom. I’m so so—” “Nonsense!” Chris dismisses her apology with a wave of the hand. “Tema tells me you and her are responsible for these pieces.” Sphe smiles shyly, what I’ve learned about her is that she isn’t fond of

comp

lements and doesn’t know how to receive them. I mean Chris hasn’t said that he loves what we came up with but... I know him a little bit now; there’s a

577

subtle gorgeous grin on his face. He seems pleased. And proves me by saying,

“This is so perfect! Where have you two been all along?” “Applying Pond’s in Mbongolwane.” A deadpan, Sphe’s beam broadens. “Looking after my mother and my siblings. Maybe even sacrificing my dream to take care of my siblings.” “I was... selling chips to Youssef’s nasty customers.” Argh, fun times! I rarely think about my beginnings, at least

what I was doing this year; I've come so far and have learned many things. I've met people that make it easy for me to drop my guard, whose kindness holds no price tags or hidden agendas.

"It was a rhetorical question," comes the teasing reply from our boss. He looks

really good today

—

baggy jeans and an oversized white tee, he's like a teenager.

"I'm happy you're both here." "Thank—"

"Did Soohyun call to confirm for next week? Call h

im and sort it out. Book an appointment with my dermatologist tomorrow and pull the run-through with

one hour." He's forgotten about us completely. I don't take offense, there was a meeting he had to attend in a few. "Bring me the shirt with the Caribbean

blue

pattern. Saoirse is a complete bitch about the colour blue, and I don't want to disappoint her." And just like that, he's gone! It

doesn't mean that the noise dies down though, everyone is busy with their own thing

—

assigned tasks that should be done by the end of the day. For twodays now, it has been like this; rest will only come once this magazine is pushed out. Very soon, come this weekend actually. Skipping over to Sphesihle, I give her my award-winning grin. She's the rain to my sunshine.

“We make a brilliant team, babes!”

She was typing away on the computer, sending e-mails that have to be

responded to before we close shop. Sometimes, it feels like we're assistants

here, and multitasking all different departments. It can be pressurizing but I love the exposure and knowledge gained. I even know the different shades of

pink now; and which ones to never be caught dead in. I know the different

heels and clothing items. I know makeup and hairstyles. I'm just learning from

one department to th

e other. It's all so cool!"I know."Of course she agrees with me, sullenly, as if I didn't make her breakfast this morning and treat her with my special smoothie. "This is why I love you," Ising, "ooh, this is why I love you. Because you love me."

She snorts, but her lips are twitching.

"How did your talk with your sister go?" she's matriculating soon, I know. It

may not seem like it but we talk sometimes

—

Sphesihle and I. It will amaze you how much of your pride you have to swallow when roaming with

someone you didn't immediately like —

because who else can we talk to when

it's just the two of us? We don't fight a lot, surprisingly, aside from Sphesihle's

snide comments that have no bite.

“She was telling me about a boy she has a crush on. He’s only 14 years old; a

popular high-schooler who dates far too many girls.

Misungwane. She hates

that she’s two years older than him.” “Does he have money?” I breathlessly giggle. “You’ve told me that she’s a girl who knows what she wants in life. Broke boys ain’t it.” “I don’t know.” A careless shrug. “Probably does if she has a crush on him. Money’s her love language. I still told her to stay away though, she’s 16 years old... she must focus on boys her age or a year older.”

I roll my eyes so hard!

“They’re both teenagers, I don’t think she’s too mature for him.” “Have you met this boy? I know I haven’t.” Well...

579

“Okay. Fair enough. But I’m just saying it’s a two year age gap and—” “He’s doing grade 9 and she’s in grade 12. Its embarrassing, the boy shouldn’t

even be having girlfrien

ds. I only began dating when I was 17 years old!"I mean I get what she means, but at the same time I don't think there's something wrong with dating someone around your age group. They're both still just a bunch of babies, I don't even believe that wome

n mature faster than men

—

that's just a ploy men use to excuse their shady behaviour when it

comes to dating women much younger than them. Men like Jabulani

Mahlangu. But... I also get what Sphehlehle is saying. "Then talk to her." "She's smart, she won't go after him."

Hmkay.

I'd be lying if I said I weren't eager to meet Sphehlehle's siblings though, and I can't accurately explain why. Maybe I just want to find out if they're as uptight as her, if they're just as holy and if they shit the bible. No, I don't think

Sphehlehle is a churchgoer but she sure behaves like it sometimes. Totally different from Thatego who forces Sbanizezwe to go there with him every Sunday. 12:30pm comes

eventually, and the sister-wife and I make our way to the canteen. We still sit together and nobody else; most of these people haven't welcomed us here, and it's even worse because Sphe and I are among the top performers within the company.

"How are your exams going?" "Fine." She is chewing on her onion burger. "Done." "Congrats!"

A shrug.

"I just love how sweet you are," I quip.

580

"I just love how un

-

clingy you are." She bites back, sipping on her orange juice. "It's totally not annoying." "What can I say? We're magnets, baby."

Her eye roll makes me giggle

—

a lot. A lot. Few people can make me really laugh. So far, I think it's Squalosenkosi, Sbanisezwe and her. Even when I'm sad, her expressions make me laugh.

"Anyway, about Squalosenkosi—" "Not the getting to know him issue again." "Yes, the getting to know him issue again." My voice is light, but I've been worried; and asking myself a lot of questions. "You're lucky because he tells you things

—" "Hey, I didn't say that! Awuyeke amanga." She reminds me of my beautiful mother when she narrows her eyes, taking another nibble of her burger. "I

told you that we live in the same village, news travel there. We have our own unemployed news reporters there

, our personal media, and that's why it appears as if I know many things about him." She's lying and she knows it. Just last night we were speaking about his night

terrors, and how he excuses himself to be alone in the outdoors after having one of them.

She's had the privilege of sitting with him, and listening him tell her bits and pieces about them. Me, I haven't gotten any of

that. The same way I hadn't gotten a proper introduction to the most important person in his life

until it was too late

—

and now I have said person resenting me because she thinks I will steal her daddy from her and Sphesihle.

"I'm just saying, he already treats you like a wife. And I don't mind, I'm not

jealous of the connection that both of you share

—

truly. It's so beautiful

. I know of my position in his life, it's serious, but just how serious if I barely

know him?" "What do you want to know?"

581

"Everything!" my reply is quiet. "I want to see him through his hardships, the

kind of person he becomes. I want to get inside his brain, and truly know

him... the same way he knows me.”“Khuluma naye ke, and make it known. I won't be your go in

-

between. He's your boyfriend.”“Vele we'll talk. This weekend. But I don't want to make everything depressing

or too serious. I just want

it to be chilled but still deep.”

Her eyes are on me

—

searching. The loud exhale tells me she's a mind

-reader.

It's hard to believe that Sphesihle helped me plan this. She didn't have to but...I swear she likes me better than when we first met. I don't

think I gave her much of a choice; it was either accepting me for me or hating me forever. The latter clearly proved more draining, and so she went with learning to accept

me instead... slowly.

Nothing is out of the ordinary about the house except for the décor in my

room. There's a black board here and a two large bean

-

bags for chairs. There's a colourful blue desk in the middle of the room that's being kept company by a

red vase. There are rose petals on the floor, my room is refreshingly clean and in order.

"Tell me now if you need anything else because I don't want you to bother me in my room." The tone is snippy and irritated.

Checking the time on my wristwatch, I shake my head, beaming gratefully at

Sphehile for her help. "I'm good!" without tho

ught, I press my lips on her both her cheeks and peck her mouth.

She's frowning as I drag my face away from hers. "Don't ever kiss me again." Still lighthearted, she's not disgusted... irritated is the correct word. "I didn't kiss you, it was me showing gratitude for helping me."

582

“Mxm.” An eye roll, she grabs her phone from my desk. “If you’re going to have sex, don’t yell like the last time. No, for the millionth time I wasn’t horny just

irritated. If it does get loud then I will

—”“What?” I bounce on the feet of my balls. “Never mind!” she huffs out sassily, and

makes her way out of my room. If I

were in the mood to annoy her, I’d probably follow her to her room to pester

her but Sgalosenkosi is here. I can hear his voice in the hallway. My smile lifts

automatically, I escape my room to fetch him. He’s just hugged and kissed

Sphehile on the lips. “She didn’t do crap, I decorated.”

Childish, much? Sgalosenkosi is laughing, love found in intimate brown eyes as they follow

Sphehile until she's out of sight. Then his attention is on me, and the smile he

had still

remains. He's ogling me, making my cheeks burn, but I always feel so imperfectly beautiful under his scrutiny. "Hey, sexy fox!" "Hot stuff!"

I roll my eyes, but twirl around for him because hot stuff is what I am vele.

He's too close when I am face to

face with him again, long arms stretched around my waist, muscular body warm against mine. He smells like everything good

—

like home and safety and love. Familiar. Yet still so unknown. Strangely possible, it seems. "Hey, baby."

His mouth presses into a

thin line that twitches. Shame, he doesn't enjoy that 'baby' endearment much, he's a man a month away from thirty-four anyway.

But he loves to make me happy, and calling him 'baby' makes me happy. "Temasiko." I drag him by his hand. "We'll eat later," i

s my explanation, as I lead him down
the hallway and into my room. “Sphehleh did this.” She already
told him, but I want to again. It’s nice to acknowledge another’s
hard work, to put aside the
natural instinct of jealousy, and compliment someone when the
y’ve done a good job. “Beautiful, right?”
The gobsmacked grin on his face tells me all I need to know.

583

“Sit down,” I say, and maybe I force his giant ass on the bean
-bag that makes
him look ridiculously funny but in a good way. The way I love
him... “so

I

called you here today because I realized that... promise not to
get mad.” He eyes me as if I’ve lost my damn mind. Right, my
giant baby does not, does not at all get mad. If he does, then he
doesn’t show it because my giant baby
does not, does not at all

raise his voice. The way I love him... "Umuhle, Munt' wam." I admit softly.

His smile is childish, maybe embarrassed, he scrubs his beard and takes in his surroundings once more.

"There's not much I—" let me just use the blackboard. Next time, I won't wear

my short silken pyjamas, but a sexy school uniform costume that will drive

him absolutely nuts! "Right here, your name." I point to the blackboard with along, thin cane. "Sqalosenkosi Ndlelenhle—" A groan stops me, this man seems ready to kill me! "Ndukenhle? He gave you that forsaken name." "Good job!" I can't help laughing. Why doesn't he like his name? It's just as beautiful as Sqalosenkosi. "As I was saying before you rudely interrupted me –

Sqalosenkosi Ndlelenhle Mzimela Ngcobo. It seems as if you know almost everything about me, look to the blackboard on the right, and how it covers

what you do know about Temasiko Dlamini... yet strangely enough, she knows close to nothing about you. How long have we been together?" "6 months." "Good job!" I hum proudly. "Keep this up, and you're getting fun times tonight.

And other

gifts.”

He laughs, and unbuttons the top buttons of his shirt.

“The blackboard on the left is there to help me fill in the blanks about you! I’m here, wanting to learn everything I can about you, because I don’t want to

wake up one day and realize I g

ot into the wrong relationship. Worse, I don’t

584

want to not know anything about you because that will hinder me from being there for you when you need it most. I want to learn about you, teach me

please.” Reluctance dances in brown eyes, he’s uncomfortable. I hate that I’m making him feel this way but I just want to get to know him better. We’re in a relationship, I can’t go to bed with someone I have no knowledge of completely. He’s a good man, yes –

honest, caring, giving, and all the other things but th

ere’s more to him.” First question –

who is Sqalosenkosi?” “Really?” he snorts out a laugh, glaring softly at the blackboard. “A thirty

-threeyear old man with a daughter and four other children on the way. A boyfriend

—

whose aim is to be a husband to two beautiful women in the near future. A brother to two brilliant men. A brother-in-law to two amazing people. A book

lover. A maskandi lover. A human being.” “There. Wasn’t so hard. Though I was expecting more from him, but men are

like this. They take

shortcuts for everything. “Where did you grow up?” “Most parts of KZN, and then Nelspruit. Then Soweto. We moved around a lot when I was younger.” “Hmm. The only time I moved was when we left Swaziland for here after my

mother died, because my dad is South African

—

and I didn’t even last a year with him. I was living in Nelspruit, that’s where my father met Jabulani Mahlangu.” “Your rapist?”

The

word triggers bitter emotions, but I'm so strong it disgusts me sometimes. All the things I've been subjected to, and how they have a way of feeling so small sometimes... insignificant, as if they're not worth crying over. Funny. I don't cry but the exhaust

ion is still there

—

and weighs heavily on my soul

sometimes. I'm sure it's a coping mechanism, this bad tendency of

disregarding my trauma sometimes.

585

“Yes. Back in Motshane, my father was an electrician and worked in people's

homes. Here, he had enough money to start his own business

—

but Jabulani Mahlangu taught him to dream bigger, and to chase bigger goals than just a

small electrician shop in the busy streets of Nelspruit.” “I see.”

Clearly this is not a give and take. I will have to demand that he returns the

favour. Gosh! “How about you?” I query curiously. “Why did you move around a lot?” “It turns out that Ntwenhle was avoiding meeting Nqobizitha, as per MaKhathide’s instructions. But we did stay in KwaMashu for a very long time, back then...

I used to pray that we’d leave that place.” “Why?” “Kuningi, MaDlamini.” He sighs, stretching his legs awkwardly. “My mother

was subjected to heavy abuse at the hands of a man who claimed to love both her and us

—

me and Sbanisezwe. But he lied, he was always lying; and my brother paid with his childhood instead. I’m lucky I was unscathed.” “Really?” A nonchalant shrug. “Maybe. Sphehile would disagree.”

“Why?” He laughs but it’s nervous. “What, am I being interviewed for some psychology

article

or something? You're trying to diagnose me now." Ah, there's the bit of frustration. "That's not my duty," I remind him kindly, "if you have any heavy problems then you're seeing a therapist for a reason. Just because we're dating, it doesn't mean that you're going to be comfortable

telling me every detail about your life and the struggles you go through, I get

that... I am okay with not being enough for you, because the ideology is unrealistic anyways, but I'd still like to get to know you better. Whatever

piece

of information you feel you can share with me. As for me, I don't mind you

586

seeing all my facets

—

you've proved time and time again that you accept them." "My... I was—" he clears his throat. "Sphesihle says I forget myself a lot. How

can I not when all my life has been spent juggling survival, not just for me but

my mother and brother. My stepfather was a horrible man, I don't care what

Sbanisezwe says about

him being a good father. If that were true, he would've

made sure to not put my mother through so much

—

and deny her her happiness, that also affected us somehow. I was always trying to

—

protect

Sbanisezwe from seeing too much, hearing too much... he'd cry a

nd cry until

he wasn't crying anymore. Until the abuse became normal to him." I don't think he's noticed how he's made this about Sbanisezwe all over again.

He really does rarely talk about himself. Maybe, maybe this is why he always puts others first.

“What about you?” I ask, to gauge his emotions and thoughts. “I did the protecting.” “I know that,” my admission is soft, “but how were you affected? Yes, you feel the man wasn’t a good husband or father –

and though I don’t know him, I do

agree. I still would like to know what you went through, how you coped and

—” “Books. The library. Debate clubs at school.” He detachedly lists off his hobbies. “I love to read.” A smitten grin stretches my lips. “I know.” “What else do you want to know?”

Oh!

We’ve moved on to the next topic already? The blackboard thing isn’t working, I go to join him on the bean

-bag, perching

my ass on his lap. “Who is Likuwe

-

ithemba?”

The pinched expression reveals his deep heartache, its also there in his eyes

—

the uns

hed wetness and how he swallows a clearly painful lump.

“Likuwe

-

587

ithemba is my, uh

—daughter.” His voice is croaky, but he talks, and he tells me about her. And he tells me about the accident. And he tells me about how

Khensani’s deceased fiancé wanted to ge

t rid of him and the children, how he was hoping that Khensani would get a major payout from their deaths. She

died while he was driving, and for a long time he blamed himself... he still

does.

“I am so sorry,” I tell him.

His face is in between my barely there boobs, I can feel him wetting my silkentop. Arms tight on my waist, he breathes against me quietly.

“How do you—deal with your pain?” my question is quiet.

“Show me. I want to know everything about you, I love you.” “Like all of us do.”

Us? Him and his brothers?

“Show me.”

Pulling back, his eyes find mine

—

clearly hurt. Maybe I’m unlocking his bolts

and chains but it must be done. I crave to know him, all of him. He shows me how he deals with his pain, as he st

arts to undress me. It’s not rough, it’s just

all those months ago again

—

when he came back with his brother, and we had sex for the first time.

588

Unrequited Desires : Forty-seven Squalosenkosi

Its soft snores that wake up in the morning, too early;

it's still dark outside although we've well left winter behind. The weather is always moody lately, doesn't matter the season, perhaps it's truly earth's way of revealing its anger

that the human population has subjected it to

—

we've continuously killed

our natural resources, and robbed many animals of their homes to build this and that, and improve on this and that

—

a never ending cycle.

The weather is moody, it's still dark outside but terribly hot.

Temasiko has a

functioning aircon system in this pl

ace, I don't understand how my body is so
drenched. Not completely. I mean I did dream about my
mother and brother
last night, of our time in KwaMashu, but Samkelo hadn't
showed his dirty face and my steady breathing proves that.
Dreams aside, there's also

Temasiko's
temptingly naked body clinging to mine

—

soft and... hot. She's hot next to me, one of her sexy thighs
spread over my torso possessively. My name has slipped past
her lips about three times since I've been awake, it

makes me happy to note that

there's no sadness found in her voice, no distress

or anger

—

just a calm smile, the occasional stern whisper for me to help
her with something.

All of her is so pure, so unrealistically beautiful that it's hard to believe that she's mine –

all mine. Any other time and I'd come up with something romantic like the half-attempt poetry she keeps in her journal, the one

inspired by... what is the white woman's name? Taylor... Something. It would

romantically resemble words like that Peace song she loves so much. But I

don't like to feel overheated, I don't like it even more to ignore nature's call.

Untangling from the octopus is quite a hassle, she fights in her damn sleep, and orders me not to leave her

–

still fast asleep. I decide to disappoint her, gently pushing her limbs from my body, and get up. The room remains in darkness

–

light disturbs her sleep

–

as I find my underwear and slide it on, before padding barefoot to the bathroom to take a leak. I flush the toilet and wash my hands, rinse my face, then head back to the bedroom. Its 04:57am.

589

It shouldn't be this dark now, we're fast approaching summer. "Muhleza." my

voice is deceptively calm for the internal scare I just went through because of

Sphehile. Why is she eating in the darkness? "Sawubona, Mama. Sawubona, Ngelosi."

Her cheeks are beautifully round, she gives me hand gesture that tells me to

let her continue her gobbling in peace. As soon as she's done, she pretends to gag; hazel eyes thinned to slits.

"Corny!" Laughter tickles me, I shake my head. "How did you sleep?" "Peacefully, thankfully." A small grin pulls at her lips. "I wasn't subjected to the sounds of your girlfriend making noise about your big dick!"

My saliva chokes me, as Sphehile starts to laugh her lungs out.

“Oh please, it’s not a secret that you’re having sex. Definitely not a secret that you’re well

-

endowed. I’m just grateful I didn’t have to hear any of it last night. Ew!”

My gaze remains on her intentionally, to scrutinize any discomfort or... people

change their minds. I’m still being in

interviewed for the position of boyfriend,

she hasn’t hinted at wanting to get back, despite the affectionate kisses and embraces. We’re going at her pace, allowing her to set the rules; I don’t want her to wake up and hate me one day. I don’t want her to think that I’ve robbed

her of a chance to experience a different love than the one I am giving her.

“How are you, Sphesihle?” She snorts out her beautiful laughter, searching my eyes. “I am fine, really!

What about you, did you manage to talk to Temasiko without making things

about your family?” “What do you mean?” A knowing gaze meets mine. “I mean did she get to know YOU better?

NotSbanisezwe or Ntwenhle. You always put them first after all.”

590

Oh.

“I mean I tried. She did call me out when I did that, its something that’s mostlydone without notice.”“I know.” A beautiful beam, she drinks her juice. “But she still wants to know

you better. I hope you show her your colours like you do me, though I

understand that we’re different; maybe it’s easie

r to be more vulnerable about

other areas of your life with me than it is with her. Nothing to feel bad about.”

The expression on her face is serious. Not a single lie in her eyes, just good

intentions. She truly is a good woman. “This is the Sphesihle I

know. The one who I met one sunny

—”“Don’t start!” she giggles loudly. “Please don’t. It will be embarrassing, and I don’t want you thinking I am a child all over again. I’m turning 25 years old soon.” Right. Temasiko’s a year older than her. “November 27

th

. Do you know what you want for

your birthday?” “To pass my learner’s licence.”

Amusement makes my lips twitch, though I cannot say I am surprised by her response. This is just like her. Goal-driven Sphesihle Gcwensa who had no

business associating with the likes of MaSibusisiwe. “Maybe a car then.” “Hell no!” her eyes bulge. “No, no!” “Why not?” “I want to buy my first car!”

This talk again.

“You know you’re stubbornly independent, even when you don’t have to be. It’s like you’re always trying to prove something. Is that s

omething I should

look into?”

“Not everything is psychological or traces back to family traumas, weNgcobo.Sometimes we just love to do things for ourselves, this is me, I doubt I’llchange... even when we’re married.”

My heart stops, trips, and then jumps again in fast movements. Carefully, I

study her features to find... something. Is she serious? I do think aboutmarrying her, I hadn’t lied when I put that necklace with the ring around her

neck; in the near future, I see marriage and more between us. Only if shewants those things.

“You still want to get married?”“Maybe. Right now, with how you’re behaving –

yes. Obviously there are Ts

and Cs... we don’t know the future. I may feel differently for whatever reason,and I know you’d understand.”She’s not wrong.“Let’s spend the day together –

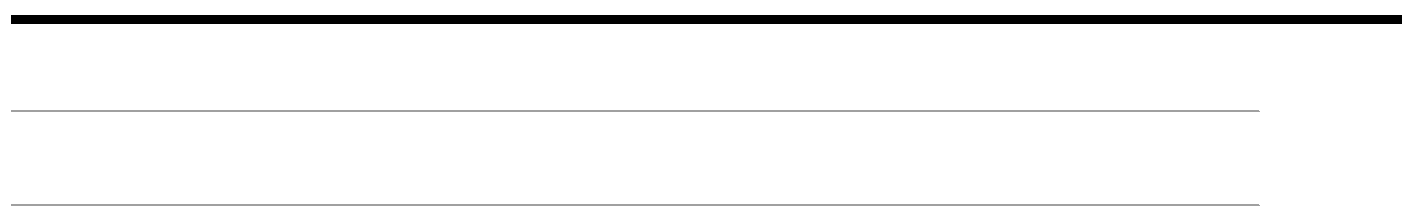
you, me and Temasiko.”“Tell her Korean music is banned.”The words bring a smile to my face. “Noted.”“Don’t you dare give

me that face!” back to the narrowed slits. “I don’t like her,okay? Kodwa...

you get to understand someone better once you live with them. I don’t hate her but I don’t love her either.”I rub the back of my neck, I won’t point out that little grin painting her perfectlips. Perhaps Sbanisezwe hadn’t been wrong in suggesting that

they live

together, it’s worked out for the best clearly. I know Temasiko loves Sphehlehle,though she hasn’t said anything, but it’s the actions that speak.“I see, MaGcwensa. So are you okay with spending time together?”“If you wake her and tell her I’m craving cheesy garlic chicken with lots ofonions.”



592

It’s been a long time since I last went hiking, it’s not really my thing. Out of the

three of us, Nqobizitha and Sbanisezwe seem to like this better. Yet here I am now, my footsteps crunching under stones, as I help Sphehile. Temasiko is

ahead of us, energized, carrying her bag and a plastic bag of Sphehile's junk

food that she insisted on getting at PicknPay.

"I don't want to ever do this again!" comes MaGcwensa's soft shout. "My

babies and I ar

e not enjoying this at all." "Let me carry you." "No." She shakes her head, looking down at... something. "Your knee's acting up again. This is why I told you to bring your cane with." "I'm fine," I insist, ignoring the sharp stabbing pain on my knee. "This is...exercise."

Without another word, but an eye-roll that says all I need to know, she

trudges forward. Some fifteen minutes later and we reach Temasiko, she's found a perfect spot for us to settle in. Hard at work, she's already laid down

the white sheet and placed the

picnic basket on it, along with Sphehleh's plastic bag. "Did we forget my Red Bull?" It's in the bag I am carrying. Sphehleh situates herself in between my legs,

letting out a soft breath. The sun touches her beautiful face, she has her eyes closed, sagging entirely against me as if exhausted. She probably is, pregnancy

hasn't gotten better in the second trimester. Her favourite pastime is to sleep. "This is nice," Temasiko beams, "it's relaxed. I never realized until Thatego

took me out one day. Or ma

ybe I just enjoyed the food a lot." "Maybe you did." Sphehleh's eyes are still closed. "I thought we agreed you'd tell her no Korean music." "Eh..." I clear my throat, as my arms tighten around her; lips pressing inside

her neck.

"He did. But I don't have to listen to both of y'all."

593

"Mxm." Temasiko giggles happily, like a child, and shifts until she's close to me and Sphehleh. "Stop pulling back and trust me!" a halfhearted snap, she finds Sphehleh's left foot again, and removes her shoe and sock. "Your feet are swollen, they

need to breathe; I just want to help you.” “Gee, if I didn’t know better, I’d say you like me.”

Temasiko rolls her eyes, though Sphesihle cannot see it with her eyes closed.

“I don’t have a choice.” “We always have choices. You’re levelheaded so you went with the right one.” “I beg to differ.” “Does that mean you’re not levelheaded?” “You know what I mean... mxm.” Melodious laughter echoes, spreading to the nature, with Temasiko’s gaze focused on Sphesihle’s swollen foot. “I’m just messing with you. I just... it’s a pleasure to live with you! You’re quite the girlie under that cold front of yours.

But you should keep it up for anyone who messes with us. Sgalosethu and I

won’t have to do a single thing.” “I don’t do anything vele. It’s you who has untrained hands.” “Guilty but I’m working through it.” My eyes are trained on her but she’s not even looking at me as

she continues giving Sphesihle a foot massage, tongue darting out at the corner because

she’s fully focused on what she’s doing. When she does find her voice eventually, it’s to talk about work with Sphesihle. They’re both doing very

well, and Chris enjoys working with them for a reason.

“You should volunteer as a model for the latest spread. He was complaining about the models they brought in, I’m sure it will give you exposure.”

594

Temasiko’s eyes widen, only to narrow a second later. “Who is this and wh

ere

has Sphesihle de Cruella go to?” “Sphesihle de Cruella?” a snort. “You don’t like me.” “I don’t.”

“Manje—” “Your face is bearable.” Temasiko’s eyes snap to Sphesihle’s, but she still has her own eyes closed. I’ve

known her long enough to know what the expressions on her face mean, the

little beam particularly. “You really think I should ask him?” “Don’t ask, tell him why you’re better than the unremarkable, angular faced women with blond hair.”

I join in on the laughter.

“That’s what Chris had said, not me.” “I remember!” Temasiko’s giggles die down. “Then I shall do as you’ve said, girlie!” “I know.” “Mxm.” A teasing smile.

Its been a blissful three months, quite a few things have happened. Nqobizithais a father of five now; having welcomed his twin daughters a mere day after our birthday. December 17th

. Sihlelokuhle and Simhlelile Ngcobo. Lisakhanya lives with them now, a major change that seems to be working out for the best. Understandably, we barely see my brother and his husband, being a parent is a full time job.

595

I know with Liyana. Its going to be worse when the quadruplets get here;

Sphehlehle is six months in now. She’s so very different from what she looked

like three months ago; big and still so beautiful. Her pregnancy is progressing well, and though she hates it; MaSibusisiwe moving in with her and Temasiko has been a blessing in disguise for her.

Yes, my aunt lives with them. She forced her way into their lives, and she's

here to stay. Quite funny, because she ought to be staying with Fuze; working on their relationship but MaSibusisiwe has a mind of her own. In her absence and failure to be there for her daughter, Sbanisezwe has stepped up and decided that she lives with him and Thatego. He was rather insistent,

threatening me to not deny her the opportunity to take care of her... but he

almost always has ulterior motives.

My office door opens suddenly, and though I have my back turned to it, I don't have to guess who's at the door. Only one bastard barges in this place like he

owns it, sweet-talking his way out of whatever excuses my PA comes up with to avoid him coming in here with no prior meetings scheduled.

"I am hungry!" his voice sounds petulant.

I roll my eyes, turning to face him; for someone who truly sounded upset that

he hasn't had food, he's smiling very brightly. That's the thing about

Sbanisezwe, he's always cheery –

and marriage has made him worse. Made his

childishness worse. He's... happy. This is all I've ever wanted for him. Thatego's changed him –

a long process that only he had the patience for.

“And you couldn't buy

something to eat?” “No. There's no samp and beef where I'm coming from.” “Why are you here?” He makes an offended face, batting his lashes stupidly. “Hawu, Bafo, you're not going to take care of your beloved brother. Your favourite one.”

Weeeh.

596

“Let's go out. Fuze will tag along.”

Its almost lunch time anyway.

“No, she won't. She went out with some white boy with glasses, they're in Rosebank.”

What?

I grab my phone, searching for her number. “What the hell is she thinking!? It’s too soon for her to start dating again! Matter

-of-

fact, she shouldn’t be

doing it at all, why did

—”“Phefumula, Bafo, and let her be.” Sbanisezwe’s smile is lazy, he rubs his lowerlip in a back and forth manner, too relaxed, as if he doesn’t know how manytimes love has broken Fuzelihle. She’s only 24, I don’t want her to tire outbecause love’s bruised her on

e too many times.

“It’s not that simple,” I say.

“It is.” He snorts, following me out of the office. “Soon she’ll realize that skin

colour has nothing to do with a man doing you right. On the contrary, it has to

do with him. There’s no formula.”“Who are you, imposter?” Laughter jumps to his throat, falling childishly on his tongue. “Just...leave her. Her man’s busy orchestrating

hijackings and house burglaries in Durban. Not long ago the bastard was stealing our livestock.”

What is he talking about?

“Are you in prophet mode now?” Again, the childish laughs.

We’re driving my car, I don’t trust him to abandon

me in the middle of nowhere if we had taken his car. His eyes are watering as

he still laughs. “We’ve found a surrogate. Two candidates actually.” “You’re happy?”

597

“As long as its boys. I think it will be boys. I hope it will be boys. Twins.” “Prophet mode?”

“No.” He shakes his head, doesn’t bother to hide his amusement. “Not at all. Just hope. If not, then I will take your boys for myself.” “You’ll have to kill me first.”

“That... will be a problem.” He blinks his eyes at me, fingers drumming on his thighs as he nods his head to the song blasting peacefully in the car. “When are

you making things right with Sphesihle? The sooner you handle your affairs with, the sooner you can concentrate on Tamasiko as well. You know our

ancestors will not accept her before you wife your rightful wife. I mean they're both your rightful soulmates but... Sphesihle comes first." "Prophet mode?" "Maybe." A careless shrug. "When are you going

to do right by her?" "She only agreed to being my girlfriend six days ago. If I overwhelm her

with

—"Boring. Boring. Booring!" comes my baby brother's childish song. "Lalela, sometimes you don't need to be so fucking kind all the time! So fucking

co

nsiderate and polite and gentle. I still wonder how you're prospering in

your business with your nice-guy mentality. Sometimes forcefulness is the

way to go to capture your dreams." "That has nothing to do with my relationships." "Hehehe!" his laughter

is loud and childish. "It does. Women like to be begged, and they like it when you lead the way. Not all the time. But... you get what I mean. You're going to wait forever if you think Sphehile will reach a stage where she'll tell you that she now wants to

marry you." Maybe... I mean he could be right. All those months ago, I remember Sphehile telling me I know nothing about women. Several months later and her words

598

still ring true, and maybe this is just me as a person; forcefulness is not my

thing. "I'll talk to Temasiko first, to find out how she feels about it." "Of course." He nods his head, we both follow the waiter as he leads us to our table. We're near Park Station, this is

where Sbanisezwe likes to have his sampand beef stew. “Make sure you’ve at least married her traditionally by the time she gives birth.”

What!?

“Wendoda!” my eyes find his relaxed posture, he’s sipping on a glass of water. “That’s two months away!” Sphesihle’s doctors have given us the date a while back, she’ll be having a C-section because

of the number of babies. She won’t even make the full term of

pregnancy because of the high risk involved in a pregnancy of multiples. May 16

th

, that’s when she’ll be having our babies. “Then let’s begin the process, shall we?” the lazy grin broadens. “Who’re we calling and when?”

I scrub my beard, sitting back in resignation.

“Don’t be so reluctant. I’m helping you and her here... MaSibusisiwe as well. Clearly, she’s not made for the Gabadiya life. MaKhathide must be turning in her grave.” “Uthini ke

manje?” “That all of you would be completely hopeless without me.”

599

Unrequited Desires : Forty-eight Squalosenkosi

“Hey, baby!” She skips happily at me, beautiful as ever in the long flowy dress she’s wearing –

something that Sphesihle would

normally be wearing. “This place is nice, thank you.” She pulls her chair in, leaning up to accept the kiss on

her lips.

“Nqobizitha recommended it,” I divulge, grabbing my own seat.

“He came here

with Christophe last week

–

date night.” “Are they still holding up fine? Chris barely shows face at work these days,

even in the mornings. When he does, he looks horrible

—
all boerewors eyes
and ruffled shirts.”

“His mother had to go to Gabon; family emergency.” “That explains it. I don’t mind volunteering to—” “No, leave them be. They’re so damn stubborn; they have to realize that they need a nanny. Well Chris isn’t against the idea but Nqobizitha...” I trail off, shaking my head. “He doesn’t trust easily, when KaMasango left for KZN, he just did without the nannies.” “Why?” “Private.” I purse my lips, pretending not to notice the look of curiosity lighting her beguiling features. Nqobizitha is a goddamn psychologist but sometimes he’s skeptical, something I cannot blame him for. Aside from his own past traumas, he also hears stories, speaks to children who have survived the worst... sometimes, the perpetrators are the ones meant to take care of them. “Are you offended?” “Not really.” Temasiko shrugs her shoulders, sipping on her lemonade. “So

why are we here? I know you love to take me out but you look like you have something on your mind.”

600

“Later.” I, silently, thank the waitress for my food. “Let’s spend time together right now. How’s the modeling gig going?”

Beautiful teeth reveal themselves, she presses a finger one the tiny silver other nose ring

—

from a random decision she made one day after she went out with Th

atego. It’s taken a bit of getting used to, I’m just happy it’s not a septum

nose piercing that everyone seems to want nowadays. She wanted a tattoo on her butt-cheeks as well, drunkenly called me that same night to tell me that Thatego had one of Sbanisezw e’s name and that she was thinking of getting one. I’m thankful to the tattoo artist who realized she was too drunk to

makesound decisions. The man who did her piercing, I don't hate him but I don't

like him either.

"Chris wants to use me for another fashion line," she removes her hand from

her nose, cancelling my previous thoughts in the process, a proud beamstretches her pink-

painted lips. "Neavena –

its pronounced Nirvana."

Hmm.

"They're a sportswear company that look like they're trying to rip o

ff

Beyoncé's Adidas line. But all they're items are just as pretty." "As long as you're happy," I remind her, washing the piece of steak in my mouth with a glass of water, "also, it's not a bad idea to have someone manage you... your career, I mean.

These

people tend to take advantage

—“I’m not that big yet!” My hand jumps to my chest, I pretend to be dying from a heart attack. “Ouch!”

the exaggeration slips past my tongue, she rolls her eyes, but she genuinely

wounds me. “You’re going to be big, because you’re an amazing woman who is more than talented.” “I know that.” Her smile is beautiful. “But thank you for always reminding me.

Your support means the world to me

—

nine months later and you haven’t switched up on me at all. Back to this gig, it’s going to be huge! They want me to go Cape Town... how cool is that?” “Brilliant!”

601

“Yeah. It’s in three weeks, I’m super excited.” That much is clear to see, her eyes are bright and happy. “Good. I am so proud of you. I love you, MaDlamini.” “Me too, baby.”

Most of the lunch is spent with her telling me about work, she loves working for Chris

—

and appreciates the doors that have been opened for her. She loves learning from one department to the other.

“I forgot to tell you the other day, my doctors... they’ve given the go

-ahead for

me to go through with feminizing hormone therapy. On Wednesday, I’m going

there to begin the process. Do you want to

—” “Of course!” I don’t wait for her to finish. “I’ll cancel all my meetings, what time are you going? Or maybe I’ll just spend the night at yours, so that I don’t waste time by driving from my house to yours and then to the hospital.” “That works.” “Alright.

Within a year, you'll be able to apply for gender marker change at

Home Affairs. I went there with Fuze, long ago, they needed two

Doctor's

letters from the doctor prescribing her HRT and one from her psychiatrist. I

say you'll be able to apply for a new ID within a year because that's how long you should've been on HRT for about a year. You said you were born here, right? They're going to need your ID copy certified at a police station."

Silence ensues right after.

She's looking at me with... teary

-

eyed and a glinting beam. I don't know what she's searching for, maybe a lung

-squeezing hug. Her arms surround me, lips pressing inside my neck, heartbeat fast against mine. Her hair tickles my

cheek but I don't complain. "Do you have any idea how much I love you?"

“I have an idea.”

602

She pinches my side, warm breath giggling against my skin. “Its too damn

much! Wish I could be poetic like Taylor Swift just to show you how much. Thank you for being there

—

in every manner. You’re

paying hundreds of thousands for this, and you know something that might seem so insignificant

to others but it means the world to me.” “I just have a good memory. When I was supporting Fuze, we found out together.” “Still! This is... Ngyabonga.” “Okay.” My lips stretch into a smile. “Its time for our second date, come.”

The rest of the day is spent at her favourite hiking spot, we have our dinner there as well

—
courtesy of the chefs I'd hired. There's overnight camping here,
and a tent has been set

up, Temasiko can't hide her excitement. Sphesihle
helped plan this, packed her overnight bag; and my saliva
touches the ground

at the sight of Temasiko's barely there night clothes —
the silken pants that shape her butt. She looks gorgeous.

"I'm enjoying

today very much." "I'm enjoying your company."

She laughs, her eyes roll to the back, and straddles my lap. Her
thighs hugging my body

—
and grinds slowly on top of me. My breath quickens, I grip her
hips and help her set the seductive pace

—
pressing my lips to her left nipple,

through the matching string top she's wearing. "Do you want me to drive you insane? I wasn't wearing any underwear today —

and I was touching myself to thoughts of you before you fetched me."

A moan tumbles out of my throat.

"What—thoughts?" "Your...dick," slowly, she slithers down my body and plays with the band of my boxer-

briefs, "in my mouth; you choking me with it." "Tema!"

603

"Let me suck it." She's stroking my cock, giving me sultry eyes. A kiss touches

the tip, I suck in a stuttering breath, as my hands find purchase in her hair. She gives me a marvelling expression for a moment, mouth watering, before she moves in to kitten-lick just below the head. Another intake of air from me, and my hands press a little firmer to

her hair, but he don't force her to move, to

take me in, and Temasiko-She opens her mouth, saliva pooled on her tongue, and allows some of it to trail out, using her hand to spread it along my cock before she's letting the head pass her lips, suckling firmly, and stroking what she couldn't fit in her mouth. Slowly, she moves further down, jaw wide, taking her hand away as my throat goes fully hard and nudging the back of her throat, stopping her air supply before she pulls back and looks, eyes glazed, up at me, the tip sitting on the very end of her tongue, her mouth still open

—

an offering.

I don't move, don't do anything, until her hands grasp mine, getting me to slide my fingers deeper into her hair, she makes me cup her head and take. My grip tightens roughly, as my hips begin to move so quickly, cock shoving so hard into her throat, brown eyes are watering and it's like she can't breathe again, but this... sometimes she wants it this way. There's thick trails of saliva oozing from the corn

ers of her mouth, sliding through his jaw, down her neck, into her collarbones. My hands tighten a little more every few thrusts as I hold her down, shoving my cock into her throat, forcing an involuntary gag, her entire body jerking against the hold, but

I don't

relent and her hands never move to push me away. She closes her eyes

—

serenely, hands on my thighs. My groans are accompanied by slick sounds of my cock sliding in and out of her mouth and her struggling breaths. Shivers flash in my spine as my vision begins to black

out a little, my movements stuttering, my fingers tight in Temasiko's hair. I

make a sudden move as if to pull away, but Temasiko whines, brow furrowing; a strangled noise escapes my tongue as I grip her tight, my cock pulsing on her tongue with my orgasm. She moans, swallowing.

There's a wet patch on the front of her pyjama shorts when she pulls away,

collapsing on the mattress beside me, her breath heavy and uneven. I roll her on her stomach, and push her shorts only halfway. Her butt is enticing

—

big,

604

round and jiggly. Her fingers dig into the mattress when my hand connects with her butt-cheeks.

“Do you know how wet I am for you? How horny you make me?” her breaths

are still so heavy

—

tone silent. “Only you can make me cum from

pleasuring

you. That’s how horny you make me.” “I’m going to fuck you now.”

She giggles, breathlessly, and pushes her ass back on me. “Take me then, I am all yours.”

Foreplay first. I take my time to explore her

—

all of her. My lips sing praises to her back, my fingers express their love on each part of her body. Her moans are soft, only increasing with each sensitive spot I find. “You’re not going to cum until I tell you to,” I order, clinching my fingers around her erection. “I like it better this way.” “I know.” I press against her ass, guiding the head inside —

fighting through the

little bit of resistance. She moans my name, I don’t waste time as I press into

her warm hole. My hands grip her hips to pin her in place, as I move hard and fast.

Another angle makes me find her prostate, and she screams. “Bingo,” my lips curl up amusedly, I pull her up using my arm around her throat. “Do you like this?” “I love it!”

My arm tightens around her

—

choking. Her asscheeks slap together against my front, she's pushing back on me. Her penis is smacking against her thigh, making the sexiest sound. "You were meant to be on your knees for me,

MaDlamini-

just like this." I remind her.

She nods her head quickly.

605

Less than a minute into me nailing her prostate incessantly, she tries to crawl

away towards the tent's opening. "Too much, too good –

perfect." She

whimpers, still trying to escape. I hit that spot again, chuckling at her squeals and shudders. My lips press into the nape of her neck in hot kisses. My organism is crawling to the base of my

spine, but it's my duty to fulfill her first. Holding her tighter, to prevent her escape, I piston fast into her and drill her pleasure button. "Shh, MaDlamini,

let me

take care of you. Don't run from it, this is what you love. I'm giving you what you need. Touch yourself for me." "Yesss." Her voice is high

-

pitched, she's nodding frantically. "Tell me you love me." "I'll always love you," I murmur through a harsh breath.

"So—good!" Her voice breaks, her body next. She's shooting her load, shuddering viciously against me. "I love you." It doesn't take me long to join her. My body falling atop her soft one. "Asiqedanga njalo, ngisazok'phinda." "Great! The sex addict." I chuckle, carefully pulling out of her, and readjusting her body so that she's

beside me

—

resting on my chest. The spacious tent reeks of sex and sweat. Our breathing forms the only sound in this place. This is our little world for the night. Her

lips are touching my chest, warm thigh spread over my waist.

"I know you joke a lot but... do you ever wonder about marriage?" "Why, do you want to propose?"

Maybe. In the near future.

“You don’t have to answer a question with another question.”

Her laughter is beautiful, she snuggles deeper into my body, kissing my beard.

“When I was young, I thought about it a lot. Things happened and suddenly it

606

wasn’t in the cards for me anymore. Before you, I guess we can say no. With you, right now, I’d marry you

in a heartbeat if you asked me to.”

The words should make me happy, they do; just as much as they bruise my

gut. I do want to marry her, just as I want to marry Sphesihle. It doesn’t make

sense how I cannot picture either of them out of my life, it would feel...

incomplete somehow.

“My family wants to send a letter to the Gcwensas. To make things right,traditionally, and marry her.”

The next moment feels like an eternity.Her heartbeat is fast against mine, she sighs, her face burrowing in deeper

inside my neck. Quiet breathing. “Then do it.”“I... I want to know if you’re okay with it.”

She pulls back a second, reddish brown eyes clashing with mine

—

soft,

secretive. “Of

course, I am okay with it. It’s not like marriage is everything anyway, some of the most lasting relationships are like that because people

are not married. That... Kate Hudson’s mother, do you know her?”“No,” I whisper, shaking my head.She doesn’t reply for a while, I wonder if I am responsible for the... is it awkward or am I imagining things? Maybe I am.

“Yeah well, her parents are not married and they’ve been together for over 30years! Can you imagine that? It just goes to show, marriage isn’t everything.

Not everyone aims for marriage.” “This is not about everyone. It’s about you –

and how you feel. I am curious to

know, because I value your input. You’re my girlfriend and—

” “Mshade. She’s—

how is it fair that you marry me first? Go with her, s

he’s expecting your unborn children, I’m sure that’s why you’re marrying her first. Its fine. Thank you for discussing this with me.”

607

“I thought you were giving me six,” I try to tease her, to lighten the mood.

“Please don’t say that. It’s not... it’s not

funny.” “Tema—” “No, Squalosenkosi!” she’s getting angry, her body is snatched from mine too soon. “What, do you think it’s funny that I can’t fall pregnant? Do you think I enjoy that?” I didn’t mean to sound insensitive but I don’t think she cares.

Sh

e’s pulling her pyjama shorts up, and fixing her top. “I don’t like it, believe it or not. And I don’t appreciate you making a joke out of—” “It wasn’t my intention, Temasiko.” Her eyes connect with mine, I don’t think she believes me. She’s already moving as I look around for my pants. “Marry her! I’m not against it, she acts tough but she’s not and I know for a fact that if roles were reversed, she wouldn’t be able to handle it

but I’m still okay with you marrying her. I just...don’t make things worse by reminding me that I’ll never be like her. That she’s

a better woman

—

in every sense of the word. Because society says, right?” “Temasiko, please slow down and let’s—”

The tea

rs escaping her eyes, heavy, stop me. Her lips are trembling, she's

breaking down. This time she says nothing, walking out of our tent.

A bitter lump lodges itself in my throat, I don't entertain the storm brewing,

and pull on my pants as soon as I find them. I need to find her and make things right.

608

Unrequited Desires : Forty-nine Sphesihle

The front door banging loudly gives me a scare, my heart jumps just like my body as I grip my chest with one hand, and close my laptop with the other. WTF!? By the time my body has cooperated, and granted me the privilege of moving, the sound of something slapping against marble tiles hurriedly reaches my

ears, getting closer and closer until the culprit appears. Of course, it's her!

Why does she look so horrible, I planned an entire night trip in the woods for her to spend with Sgalosenkosi.

“You!” she snaps, smudged makeup marring her face. “Tell him to stay away otherwise I will chop off his big dick and we’ll be relying on dildos for the rest

of our lives

—

and you won’t be able to give him any babies ever again!”

What the hell? BANG! I startle; and as if just as terrified, the babies throw nasty kicks and punches against my belly. Ouch! Ouch, ouch

—

ow! My eyes water, I take a calming

breath, blinking rapidly to be met with Sgalosenkosi in front of me. He’s half

-

naked, wearing just a pair of faded blue jeans. “Are you okay?” he’s beside me, arm extended at my lower back to steady me. “Sphesihle?”

“Fine. They’re just playing karate in there.” Clearly I’m not the joker out of the three of us because instead of laughing, Sgalosenkosi keeps his worried glance. He helps me to the living room, and sits me down, only to disappear a second later. He comes back, with a bottle of water in one hand and a glass in another. “Here.” “Ngyabonga.”

609

A shrug of the shoulders, he sits down beside me, entire body seeming to droop out of nowhere. Okay, something’s wrong. Sighing softly, and placing my glass on the table, I focus all the attention on him. He looks confused and tired

—

all red eyes. An exhaled breath escapes him, and he scrubs his beard.

“She said to not go in there lest she mutilate your penis.”

He flinches, a shudder.

It’s a funny sight so I erupt in laughter. What’s going on here?

This is not him

at all, he doesn't fear anyone. "Kwenzenjani? She wasn't a fan of the wildlife in the night? That's her favourite hiking spot." "No." He shakes his head. "It was going fine until..." the glance he gives is reluctant, as if he's not sure whether or not to divulge whatever is on his mind.

"It's... you know how it is for her –

as a transwoman." "No, I don't.

I know nothing at all actually. Whenever she talks about her trans-identity, she likes to call herself privileged. Not many women like her can get the opportunities that she has been afforded apparently. Not many get the jobs

they want, they don't live the lives they want, they're not really free –

in a

constitution that says democracy for all and preaches equality.

She's one of

the lucky ones, she likes to say.

"I don't really know," I admit, "but when someone talks, sometimes the best thing to do is shut up and listen."

Sqalosenkosi moves his hand from his beard, blinking his long lashes at me, he

nods his head. "I listen." "Then why is she

mad?" "She won't talk to me."

Oh, I see.

610

"Then... maybe you're not the one she wants to listen. Maybe it's someone else. It is you who likes to say it's not okay to be enough for a person after all, right? It's not your duty to complete, you're not going to be her everything.

Sometimes she will fal

I but you won't be the one she needs, because –

because

of many reasons. Am I making sense?"

He clears his throat, only to swallow what looks like a hard lump less than a

second later. His hands are rubbing together, he seems anxious... strange. I think he's zoning out, the emptiness in dark pupils reveals that, it's a bit

creepy if I am being honest. The fogginess of unshed tears in his eyes.

"Sgalosenkosi," I whisper his name. Words fail me, I'm not sure what to say. "I just want to help her." "You d

o, you are

—

by staying away, I... guess." Their story remains unknown to me, I don't know what went down and why both of them are acting like this suddenly. "You can't help her now."

He shakes his head, as if refusing to believe it. Any other day and ma

ybe I'd tell him to stop being so damn stubborn. To ditch the hero complex because he wasn't put on this earth to save anyone but

himself. He can only be there for them

—

in the manner that the affected asks

him to. But this is Sgalosenkosi; and though he's
s being irrational right now, I know why. Its second nature to
him to put others first and to try and fix, fix, fix. It makes no
sense to him to not be what another needs

—

in every aspect

—

when he's fine with the same person not being his enough. 'I
wouldn't want to burden you like that' he likes to
say. "Mapholoba," I use my soft voice —

well it's always soft, but this is the patient one. My hand
touches his shoulder in comfort. "I don't think Temasiko would
want to burden you by making you think tha

t you're supposed to be

everything she needs. A psychologist. A therapist. A blesser. A
dick giver.

You're not God, you're not going to cater to her every need; its
unrealistic." I know these are the words he'd tell any other
person. He told me once, tha

t he

didn't want to burden me with the responsibility of being his everything. He

611

loves me regardless of the things I cannot do for him, the things that maybe I

wouldn't understand. Sometimes, he just needs to talk to another man because they'd get where he's coming from. Men like his brothers. He just needs...

Wait!

"Maybe this is a girl problem," I tell him, nodding my head because I am right. I have to be right. I am not wrong. "It is a girl problem. That's why she's mad, you don't know where she's coming from." "Bullshitting me!" This is the glorious expression he gives me

—

all furrowed brows and thinned lips. He looks very cute at the moment, nothing at all like

serious Sqalosenkosi. “I—don’t know how not to be there for her. I don’t know how to not be there for you. I don’t know how to not be there for someone.”

Bingo!

“Oh baby,” my voice is teasing, “my extended family can teach you all you need to know. I can give you one of their numbers.” “Awukahle, MaGcwensa.” Quietly, he says this. “I—” “Need you to understand that you can be there for someone sile

ntly. And that

it’s okay if they push you away sometimes, half the time it has nothing to do with you. She’ll come around.” “Makusho wena.” “Kusho mina vele,” I quip, pinching his bearded cheek, “stay here or go to my

bedroom if you want. Mina ngiyokhuluma naye lomatemema wakho

osanganayo ekhanda.” His chuckle is just a ‘Haha!’

How rude!

612

Deciding to not be offended, because he's clearly going through the most, I settle for pressing my lips against his in a soft kiss.

He's snatching my breath,

so ea

sily, he's a bad influence –

his babies are copying him, it hurts. Ow! "The babies can sense their father, they're going insane in there."

He smiles against my lips

–

pecks them once, twice. I don't stop him when his

hand travels to cup my belly, he spla

ys his hand on the side and... he's pulling back. Beautiful, the boyish grin he gives me. "Ningahluphi uMah

wenu, angithi?" Baby C... or is it D? –

I have no idea how this thing works. All I know is that

there's a baby that acknowledges his request by doing

the exact thing that he

told them not to. There's a Sbanisezwe here –
charmingly naughty

–

I just

know it. He's the one that influences the others on giving me
such a hard time. Maybe this Sbanisezwe is a she... you never
know. "One just kicked," I confess

breathlessly.

"I felt it. I am sorry." He should be sorry, he's the reason I am
here after all. "Let me go to Temasiko's room. Pray I make it out
alive."

He chuckles heartily. So now he laughs, this man. My eyes touch
the back of my skull, I push him away in irritation

–

and bring him to me a second later so that he can help me
up. I moan softly, feeling a strain on my back. "Never again!
Pregnancy is not

on the cards for me ever

again." "Never say never."

I mean it.

“Stay here,” I remind him.

A head nod.

613

I don't waddle yet, but I feel heavy. It feels like all the weight of the babies has been extended to my legs and... I don't waddle but I feel it. I can really, really

pregnant. How else should I explain how breathless I have become making a

less than a minute walk from the living room to Temasiko's door? Knocking once, I then open the door and let myself in. She's not here, on the bed, and she's not in the bathroom either

—

the en-suite is see-through, I would know if she were there. Closing the door, I remain paused in the hallway, my hands gripping my waist

—

and look towards my door. Somehow, somehow I just know that...

This girl has no sense of privacy.

It's true,

I open my door and there she is on my bed. Our eyes clash, and...bright. She brightens, sitting up a little. "There you are. It took you long enough!"

Girl, I am not your friend.

"What are you doing in my room?" I don't bother to hide my frown. My footprint are slow towards the bed, she's judging me. Fuck her! She's lucky she can't get pregnant, and experience this torture I am going through. "Sqaalosenkosi will come to my room." "He won't." I can't help rolling my eyes. "He's in the couch. I told him to come to this room that you're now invading." "Ooh, sex?" She's an idiot.

"Of course not!" I scoff, maybe I'm one of the weird pregnant women who don't care much for sex, no

t with how unsexy I am feeling. My body is always

inflamed, always so sweaty. The last thing I need is... actually I wouldn't mind at all. "The plan was to join you in your room, and have him sleep here." "Ah!" chomp, chomp. "You did good."

614

Little tramp is eating my platter of brownies. I baked these for myself, its what I was craving. She looks better than when she came in

—

and for some reason, I cannot bring myself to really call her out on starving me and my babies. I never know what to do with her emotional self, the loud side is better

—

it's the

one I prefer. The beauty of living in luxury houses is that you have mini refrigerator everywhere, I have one in my bathroom, and one here. Grabbing a tub of ice-cream in the fridge, I then go to join her

; holding a bottle of wine that she's

dispatched me to grab.

“Don't ever date men,” she tells me after she’s downed the wine halfway. “They make stupid jokes and they’re not funny.” “You’ve just discovered this,” I tease.

She snorts, and covers her mouth to prevent the wine from slipping past her

giggling self. Her body reeks of sex, I wish she’d had the thought to take a bloody shower first but... just tonight, I will let this go. She’s laughing at my joke that wasn’t funny at all. I don’t find my jokes

funny but the way she’s

giggling causes me to erupt in fits of my own giggling.

“Ow!” I whimper when it happens again –

the kicks. It’s nearly 01:00am, why are these babies still up?

“What is it?” “The babies,” I distractedly murmur, cupping the pulsing bulges, “they didn’t listen to their father and they’re kicking roughly.” “Wow!” I awoke. “They... kick?” “Who doesn’t know this?”

Temasiko clearly.

“It’s not a fun experience, trust me.” I don’t mea

n this entirely. My pregnancy is

high risk. The babies kicking means they're fighting to see things through until

the end. They want to live, to experience the beauty life has to offer, despite its

615

ugliness. My insides rearranging to make space for them is small compared to the company they give me. I love to hate their constant moving around.

"Really? They kick badly." "Sometimes. It's just like stomp

-

stomp!" I emphasize my point by pressing the heel of my palm against her bare thigh. "Is that sore?" "No." She rolls her eyes, still laughing. "Okay then, it's just like..." I wince, snatching her hand to place on my belly.

Nothing happens for a while, and then it happens

—

stomp, stomp. "There," I

mutter breathlessly.

“Wow! Woooow!” Temasiko gets on her knees and puts her other hand on another part of my belly. “Things like this make me believe God exists. Howelse do you explain this?”

I have to agree. Imagine carrying three souls inside you? All of them at the same time, surviving inside you, taking the time to get to know you. It’s amazing.

“What’s wrong?” she has tears in her eyes.

Her eyes snap to mine, she blinks rapidly, nibbling on her lower lip. Maybe she

doesn’t trust me... not fully. I don’t blame her, it’s not like I have reached that level

with her as well. But I’d be lying if I said she hasn’t been bearable, living

with her has been blissful to put it lightly.

“I don’t know why God hates me.”

Huh? Perhaps the confusion is showing on my face because how do we go from saying He exists

—
with wondrous grins on our faces
—

to He hates me. I'm missing something here... clearly.

616

She downs the wine again, all of it this time, and then drags me down with her

on the bed. "Your boobies are super comfortable. Sgalosenkosi, you lucky son of a bitch!" "Temasiko!" I manage to push her away slightly. "I can't lie on my back, give me my pillow; it's made for pregnant women." "Oh... sorry!" She enunciates drunkenly. "Here, I don't want you to think I'm jealous that you can fall pregnant."

Ohhkaay.

"Because I'm not, I kinda actually like you now. You're an alright girlie, I'm glad it's you I am sharing Sgalosenkosi with. Not some random bitch who

quotes bible ve

resses the whole day.”

I laugh.

“Did you know I cannot have babies of my own? Biologically, I won’t be able to give our man babies because God hates me. He didn’t give me the parts I desperately needed. Instead I’m stuck with sperm I don’t even need.” “I thought sperms meant you could have babies.” She snorts out a miserable laugh. “Sss not the same, girlie. I mean my belly won’t grow round like yours. It won’t feel kicks or weird fluttering. It won’t

feel any contractions. Do you know those, I hear

they’re painful.” She really does become something else when she’s drunk. The front of her head is touching mine, she’s breathing slowly and hiccupping every other

second. The pain is etched on her face, it mingles with her drunken stupor, there are light tears on her face.

“Hopefully I will not be experiencing those,” I tell her, as my hand involuntarily moves to wipe away a tear that would’ve touched her trembling lips. “I’m giving birth prematurely because it’s not safe to wait until full term.

Chanc

es are I wouldn't even make it that far, there's barely any space
as it inside me."

617

"That's nice." I don't think she was fully concentrating, but her
breathless giggles are back. "When I was young, I still hoped my
periods would come but

they never did. Did I tell you I thought we could choose
between pussy and

dick? It's no surprise that the dick remained. I waited for my
boobs but they're

barely there. I waited for a more beautiful face

—

angular but delicate. Soft like
yours. It didn't come. And though

I know its stupid, there's a part of mewishing for a pregnancy
that will never ever happen." "Never say never," I use
Squalosenkosi's words. I am still gathering my
thoughts.

“Don’t be such an—asshole!” she croaks, shifting just enough to search my eyes. “Pregnancy is not on the cards for me. It will never ever happen.” “You sound very desperate to get pregnant,” I point out. “I don’t care what people think about me. Most of the time, I don’t. But...maybe I do sometimes. I think I’m too drunk to express myself. I want that

man and I to have babies, because I want to give him babies. I also want to get

married and spend my forever with him. It just... I don’t even hate you but if there’s one thing I envy about—” “Babies don’t determine your womanhood, Temasiko.” “I know.” “Then—” “You’re obviously always going to be first choice in their eyes because,

because you have it all. You’re the epitome of womanhood. Everything about

you screams

—” “So you’re telling me you’ve changed your mind and no longer a woman?” “Fuck you!” rage dances in her eyes. “My identity isn’t a costume I put on for

fun. Why do you think

—” “Ngiyezwa. I just want to understand why pregnancy is so important to you.

Why I should be involved when you try to explain why you wish you could get

618

pregnant. We're different for a reason, Tema, you're going to drive yourself

nuts trying to change something you know very well cannot be changed. You said it yourself

—

you will never be able to fall pregnant." "Still..." "Nothing. Aren't you the one who likes to say I should focus on my journey with Sgalosenkosi? Now it's time to

follow your own advice

—

and not break your own heart because Sphehile can give Sgalosenkosi babies. Sphehile has

nothing to do with what you share with Sgalosenkosi.” “He’ll marry me in the near future. Thank God its not now! My modelling work

is pick

ing up.” “Good for you.” I stroke her hair. “Eish, I can’t believe I was being so dramatic! Even if I could fall pregnant, I don’t think I would’ve been ready for a baby right now. My career... I most likely would’ve considered aborting.” “And kissed your relationship goodbye. He—that’s where he draws the line.” “Good riddance,” she giggles, still very much not sober, “I hope he didn’t force you to keep these babies.”

“No.” I shake my head. “They’re here because they’re supposed to be.” “That’s nice.”

I roll my eyes, as she continues laughing, and then

—

her lips touch my cheek

and then my lips lightly. “Don’t kiss me.” “I like kissing you.” “I am not gay.” “Good! These are sister

-

wives pecks that I give you. One for every time you're kind or making me feel better."

619

Mxm. The door breaks

our staring contest. "Oh, I..." Squalosenkosi, this is why Tema should've stayed in her room. "MaGcwensa, I thought—" "Cuddle—mee!" The drunkard slurs, leaving the bed to drag Squalosenkosi

inside the room. Using her forceful strength, she sits his ass on the bed, makes him lie down and joins him

—

us

—

a second later. "This is warm."

It is. Squalosenkosi gives me a worried expression. My eyes touch the back of my

skull again, I move slowly and place my head on his chest. Temasiko's arm is outstretched, she touches my belly again. I don't stop her. She's singing quietly

to herself. One of the babies must be irritated by the screechy sound because

they kick against her. “

All these people think love's for show. But I would die for you in secret.

The devil's in the details, but you got a friend in me... And you know that I'd swing with you for the fences. Sit with you in the trenches.

Give you my wild, give you a child...”The tone is melancholic coming from a barely sober woman, but it's the way she enunciates her words that makes things better. It's... the three of us here,

together like this, strangely feeling like we all belong somehow. Somehow. I

can't describe it exactly but... peace. That's the word.

My feet are killing me! I detest high heels, I really do, but for some reason these aspiring models love them

—

and though sometimes it's good to stand out that's not always the case. Chris told me to wear standard jeans, a white shirt

and heels for this casting

g. He didn't tell me that I'd have to spend most of my time on my feet and that I'd be a hungry bitch by the time we were done with

this. They did provide food, but fat bitches have to diet too apparently. The food

wasn't tasty, it's something that Thateg

o would cook

—

the spice-less, boiled

chickens and the long green sticks with pimples on them. Ah... asparagus, right? That's what we ate, in portions that are meant for toy dolls; I kinda hate Christophe right now but he's family, and, and, and. I'm going

to get proper food right now, meeting someone actually, someone private. They contacted me, they found my number, and they arranged this

meetup. It feels like karma against my boyfriend for denying me this man's

number all those months ago. Yes, I am meeting Ciniso Dlamini. Am I anxious? A little bit. Angry? A little bit. Lost? A little bit. But I thought about this when he called almost two weeks ago, and I want to do it. I want to do it.

Closure, that's the word. I have questions and I seek closure. He

hurt me, he was the first man to ever hurt me. Not Jabulani Mahlangu. I could take his punches and kicks because I still had the man I called my father, and I thought we were leaning on each other because I had lost a mother and he had lost his wife.

Clea

really that wasn't the case. Clearly his love had conditions and limits. I just... I want to find out how he slept knowing he hurt me like that. I want to

know how he felt in the beginning stages, when he let me go. How simple was it for him to continue with his life after he sent me packing? Did he ever think about me at all? Does he regret what he did? Is his success worth it?

The questions are a lot. I know I shouldn't, but I can't help wondering. Sometimes we can't help opening the dusty closets, to dig up things we'd

hidden away

—

screw the damage or pain those things will give us. This is me, opening those dusty closets to take care of what I'd buried there for too long.

621

"Ngyabonga, Baba." I say to the elderly man who brought me to Eastgate in his

Ube

r. Bab' Shange is busy all day with Sqalosenkosi, I will not say I have

missed him. Sometimes I feel like Sqalosenkosi has him drive us around so that he can keep tabs on us through him.

We're meeting at Piatto, Ciniso and I. It's the last place to discuss personal

issues but I wasn't going to meet the fucker somewhere private. The last time

we were in private, he was beating me up black and blue, he was breaking me

and he was disappointing me. I don't think I'd feel safe around him, not at all.

There

he is, looking...

Fuck everything good to ever exist in this life! Fuck karma for being so selective.

My sperm donor looks good, really good. I'm talking Denzel Washington good

-looking here, all brown skin and timelessness. This is not the same man I was

escaping in Nelspruit, he's not. This is a man who looks expensive, even from a distance. He's a busine

ssman sipping on whiskey, oblivious to the young mangiving him looks from a discreet corner. Argh!

The man's not gay, I wish the good

-

looking kid knew. He'd kill him at hello. My feet are reluctant to move, strained, even though I'm wearing my Dior sl

ippers

now. 'You can do this, you bad bitch you!' my subconscious reminds me

fiercely, and I nod my head to myself. Right. Bad bitch me. Brown eyes connect with mine as I take my first step, as if instructed by the silent sound. I watch this familiar man

's eyes widen, almost... comically.

Flashes of the past smack me blue and green

—

good memories, they repress

all bad ones, forcing them down because... because I don't know.

Here I am right now, looking at my sperm donor, all I can think of is how much he taught me about electricity. It's because of him that I never needed any handyman, I could fix anything

—

broken fridges to ruined kettles. He would

drag me to people's houses in Motshane, so I'd gain first hand experience. He

622

taught me how to tie my shoelaces, how to fasten my belt and he taught me how to be confident and how not to be.

“Mabutfo!” his voice is still so deep. There’s... he’s not smiling actually, but he isn’t frowning either and I don’t know what he’s searching for but the

unwavering attentio

n is unsettling. “You’re a... is it really you? Jesus, what have you done!?” I... flinch. My body, it goes into panic mode and shivers are taunting my spine.

I feel icy shards crawling up to my throat, I think I am scared. Unable to audibly let out a breath, I force myself to snap out of it, and look at this man.

He no longer looks indifferent, he’s anything but... the muscles in his face have tightened, and his lips are pressed into a thin line. It’s no rocket science that

the man looks angry now, clearly the sight of me is displeasing.

“My name is –

my name is Temasiko. Temasiko Dlamini.” Regret fills me instantaneously. Dlamini. That is my surname. Dlamini. Fuck! Fuck, fuck,

fuuuck! I should’ve pulled a Fuze and gone with my mother’s surname instead,

because

of this man, he doesn’t like me. He will never like me. “As soon as I am able to apply for my new ID, I will be using my mother’s surname. Don’t worry

you’re transphobic, little

—”“Sit your ass down.”“Yes, daddy!” I smile sweetly at him, perching my ass on the comfy chair, as he does the same. “Now why am I here?” He says nothing, my visuals are obvious shocking him. Maybe I’m not that pretty right now, but I’ve improved so much from my days as a the

girl who looked so much like a boy and had two vetkoeks implanted in both of her

cheeks. The staring is offputting, surely he didn’t call me here to give me this...lost expression he’s giving me. What the actual hell!?”“Hello! Earth to Ciniso. Why am I here?”

First comes the sound of him clearing his throat, and then the rapid eye

blinking. Sigh. He sits up, joined hands on the table.

“Mabutfo—”

623

“If you call me that one more time, I will embarrass you by drowning your

shady ass with this glass of water. I wil

I leave next, and block your number.”His eyes darken, nostrils flaring up. Oh, oh. I’m making him angry. Unfortunately for him, I don’t give any fucks! It’s me who should be angry, he’s

lucky I even agreed to meet up with him. He should be on his knees begging like the pushover he is. He should be on them and asking for my forgiveness. It

doesn’t matter that I will never forgive him but this is what he should be

doing. The sadistic fucker!

“Is that any way to speak to your father?” “Oh please,” my

sneer comes out quiet, the waitress is approaching us with

our orders. A burger and BBQ ribs for me, there's no way in hell I was going to leave this place without getting food. I love their food! "I haven't had a father

in years, Ciniso. Spare that fuckin

g bullshit." "And you're even cursing!" disgust drips out with every enunciated word. "What has Johannesburg done to you? This is not my boy, this is not the boy I raised. You're dressing up like a woman and—" "Muntfu WeNkhosi, ngifunani lana?" "You're so disrespectful!" he spits out, on the verge of a high

-high. Shame! It

won't look good for someone who seemed so dignified to lose his cool in such a public setting. "Have you forgotten who I am?" "A snake?" this burger is really good. Sigh, I defini

tely did good by coming

here. "I mean you are slimy, aren't you? Any man who sells his own child for his own personal gain is a snake in my books!" "That's not true and you know it." "Really?" the chips are just as good, I think I'll order more. Maybe I'll grab

something for Squalosenkosi and Sphesihle, I know it will make them happy.

“So you’re slimy because you couldn’t accept that your son
wasn’t your son
but a daughter. And to punish said daughter you
—”

624

“This is why the world is ending!” he snaps u
napologetically, trembling hand
reaching out for a glass of water. “Confused souls who wander
the earth, wanting to change their genders! I won’t be surprised
if someone says they’re a zebra next, and force us to call them
that because it’s their right. Me

ntal

illness is a real problem, but... you’re lucky I still care for you.
Allow me to connect you with someone who will help you stop
this madness.” “Ha!” amusement tickles my insides –

incessant. “Haha! Oh daddy, oh daddy.” “Mabutfo—”

“And how did you find me? How did you find me to tell me about this bull

-crap

you’re feeding me?”

The glass he was holding lands with a harsh thud on the table, sounds like silent noise compared to the giant noises around us. A clacking of plates. Slosh

ed alcohol. Footsteps. Even the smell of food is so noisy. Ciniso’s anger is the loudest though... in all its silence. Tsk, tsk! “You’re on some billboard, and you think I wouldn’t recognize you through the disguises you’ve put on? All the makeup in the world wouldn’t change that you’re my little boy.” He’s doing this on purpose. I know he is. The problem is that I think it’s working, and I am really getting riled up.

Smacking the blissful ignorance out of him is so tempting, so very tempting. I just wou

ldn’t put it past him to have me arrested. This is the same man who

hurt me so badly once upon a time.

“I think I will leave now.” The food is amazing, but something bad will happen

if I entertain this cruel bastard a second longer.

“Go then! Do what you did back then, its in your nature to run away.”What the... is he serious!?

625

“Because you chose him over me!” I hiss, mindful of the many eyes in thisplace. “I left because you told me to –

with your actions. Your fucking bestfriend got away unscathed, while I was the one being bruised, whose spiritwas being crushed and whose trust was being broken. He bruised me just for

you to do it too, and I will never ever forgive you for how badly you hurt me!”

He laughs, shaking his head, nose upturned in sup

erriority. “Forgive me?” thequestion is accompanied by a raise of his brows. “Forgive... forgive me? What

for exactly? For setting you straight. You expected me to be happy with your

little confessions about womanhood that you’ve never had? I was supposed to

cheer you on even though it was crystal clear that you were losing yourself. I

know your mother's death took a toll on you but I hadn't realized how much damage had truly been done." "Oh fuck you!" I spit out. The laughter hasn't died down. "Now you'r

e asking for sex from your own

father? Truly, you're hanging on the precipice of being irredeemable, Mabutfo.

I can help you, the only regret I have is not going after you when you ran away. My duty as a parent was to find you and help you through your iss

ues." "I can't... I can't take this." "I think I made a mistake by coming here." "This happening because it was supposed to happen. Trust me. You're here because you're supposed to be helped by me. This is what I plan to do, just give me a chance, Mabutfo."

That forsaken name! He keeps calling me this though he knows I do not appreciate it. It's not enough that I actually work hard on my makeup now, that I do look like a

woman now... what I've always been. It's still just the same to him, I'm a boy that he has to rescue. I think I am going to leave. To be honest, I don't know

what I was expecting but this is not it.

Karma truly is so fucking selective because he's supposed to be crying and

telling me how miserable life has been ever since he betrayed me. He was

626

supposed to apologize for hurting me and cry even harder when I told him to fuck himself with his fucking apology. He was supposed to be leading a very sad, very miserable life.

Yet here he is...

Superiority complex, snobbish attitude and a hero complex. He wants to save

me from myself because I don't know myself clearly. What

a load of bullshit! What a disappointing load of garbage from Mother Earth herself. This is a

man's world indeed because that man is the one who convinced Earth Mother

that men like this one do not deserve karma.

“Did you...” yes, I’ve gone back to him. I

told myself I was leaving and grabbed my bag, planning my exit but I have gone back. Asshole is unperturbed as ever,

blankly looking up at me. “Do you even regret your treatment of me? Did you ever feel anything when I left? That first night... you felt nothing at all?” He’s still looking at me, while I fidget with my bag. I hate this! The cracks in

my soul reveal the hidden insecurity, making me feel bare in front of this

man... vulnerable. Not a good thing. Not a good thing at all around him. My

grip on the sling of my bag is really tight.

I think he’s going to say yes. The way his eyes look emotional. “I felt anger that

you dared to leave. Regret? No way in hell. As your father, it was my duty to

put your back in line when you were straying.”

Fuck! My gut takes a really bad punch, it hurts. I fight through the lumps choking me.

“I see.” “And look how you turned out as soon as you left home.”

I am so fucking tired of him!

“And you’re still a dog, Ciniso!” the half

-eaten burger lands on his white shirt. The orange juice sinks into the skin of his bald head. People exclaim their

shock all around us but fuck them, fuck him. “You nasty piece of shit! I hope

you die a very painf

ul death.”

627

He laughs! The lunatic laughs and laughs and laughs.

That’s it... I am leaving. Head held high, I make my way out of the restaurant. This mall is always so fucking packed! Okay, I didn’t even manage to get

Sphehleh some food. She loves it when we cater to her cravings. Lately its chocolate cake and hake. Is there a PicknPay here? I know she loves their hake too much. Which way to exit? I fucking hate malls. My hands are trembling, feet super unsteady as I push my way through this annoyin

g ass crowd. Okay, there's a Checkers and—

oof. Ow! Do people have

to wear heels? They've just stabbed my pinky toe. "Watch where you're going, goddammit!" no, this is not because of my father. "Sorry!" the voice is soft. "I was—Tema!"

Thatego.

I'll o

nly forgive him because he looks teary-eyed, and the apology sounded really sincere. He looks so beautiful, like usual, wearing simple jeans and a black t-shirt, he has on a matching bucket hat and YSL heels on. Minimal lipstick as well. Absolutely beautiful.

"The only reason I'm forgiving you is because I love you."

Apologetic grin widens, he rubs the back of his neck bashfully, and brings

attention to the glittering glow of his wedding ring. "What are you doing here?"

No, what is he doing here? He

's with his security personnel... well, it's just one man but still.

The man is

like a brick wall, rarely smiles

—

and rarely ever tags along when Thatego is going out. Sbanisezwe must have something to do with this... somehow.

628

“What are you doing here?” I answer his question with my own question. Where Sgalosenkosi would be mildly annoyed, Thatego simply waves me off and giggles heartily. “Shopping. There’s an orphanage we’re visiting on Sunday, me and my husband. He’s buying clothes in some part of this mall, and I was going to take care of the grocery.” “Wow! I didn’t know you guys were involved with orphanages as well.” “Private.” The beautiful man pretends to zip his lips, glossy eyes smiling joyously. He really is breakable glass to be handled with care. “This, we do private. No cameras or anything. We don’t make a big deal out of it.” “I never understood celebs who help people in front of cameras,” I

confess. "I think... I think others really do have good intentions. Sometimes it's to

attempt to positively encourage the public to give as

well." "Give our R10s when they have millions in their accounts!" An eye roll, Thatego bites his bottom lip to stifle his giggles. "I give up!" "You should." A sigh, and an absentminded habit to play with his wedding ring. "So what

were you doing here? I know you had a casting but that was in Midrand,

right?" "It's a long story involving a sperm donor." He doesn't ask me to, but it feels natural to fall in step with him and head to the Checkers store. We're both pushing large trolleys. "Sperm do

nors are the

worst." "I don't know if it gets worse than that man I just poured juice on at Piatto." "What!?" Large brown eyes consider me. "So naughty!" "He deserved it."

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"My father waited until I was engaged to the millionaire boxer for him to pitch up. I don't regret cutting ties with him." "Try a

transphobic father who sides with your rapist,” I say. “Sheesh!”
Thatego shakes his head. “Are you—are you okay?” f

Not really, but I will be.

Seeing him was enough closure... now that I think about it.
Maybe it didn't happen the way I wanted but his... the way he is
a person, I cannot change

that. A horrible man is a horrible man. He will not be regretful
not because he

doesn'

t have a heart but because its vile and bitter. I hope my mother
chooses

better in her next life. As for me, I'd rather come back as a
stone than to have

that man in my life again.

“I'll be fine. The world may try but it will never break someone
like me.” “I'm relieved!” Thatego murmurs, grabbing too many
packets of braai packs –

the 5kgs. “They must grow tired of all the tin stuff people
always send them. Change is good. Anyway, it's okay to be weak
sometimes as well. I know you're

strong but do you ev

er allow yourself to break down?" "I will when I get home, I just know it. Then my boyfriend will cuddle me, and it will feel like all is right in the world." "Hmm." Pouty lips twitch playfully.

"Sphesihle as well." "She'll tell me to snap out of it." "The best of both worlds," he continues to tease me. "Yes, Thatego Ngcobo –

who would've thought?" "My husband. I should learn to trust him a lot sometimes." "I have no idea what he's talking about, I don't care."

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Unrequited Desires : Fifty-one Sphesihle

Sqalosenkosi proposed.

I don't mean the ring sitting beautifully on my chest, but an actual proposal with a ring that I got just days after he asked me to marry him. Well, he didn't

go on one knee and all that

, but... he just reminded me about all those months

ago, when he said he had big plans for us, then he told me he was ready to see some of those plans through if I felt the same way.

I did, of course, my relationship felt like mine now. It wasn't being con

trolled by MaSibusisiwe, the decisions that take place in it are all mine, un-influenced

and certain. He didn't have a ring with him when we were discussing this, he

was scared of being turned down, but a lovely platinum ring sits on my finger

now. It's be

en close to a month.

My extended family has been contacted to begin the lobola negotiations, we're

hoping to get everything out of the way before I can give birth to the babies.

May's just around the corner, it feels like there's too little time to plan everything but we're all working together. I don't care for the White wedding,

Sqalosenkosi and I agreed.

Then there's Temasiko, I always kinda thought that she'd walk down the aisle

with him first but this is not the case clearly. We spoke, I wanted to gauge her feelings

—

it's important this communication thing when you're in a setup like ours, and I tolerate her very well lately so it was only fair. I don't know what

bread of a woman she is, but open-minded is what she is. She is open-minded and communicative and very accepting.

She wasn't really surprised when I told her the news, and she freaking hugged me! 'Ndlunkulu,' she calls me a lot lately.

I always try to find hints of jealousy or any insecurities but... nothing. She likes to say she understands

love better

than most people, and how it's different for everyone else. She does get jealous, like any normal person, but it doesn't control her.

And this wedding, she's more excited for it than I am! Imagine that –

having someone who genuinely cares for you and doesn't hide the mask of jealousy

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with a happy smile because what you see is what you get with them. I don't like to get all sentimental but I see it all the time with her, and maybe... maybe I'm just as glad that it's her that I am sharing Sqaalosenkosi with. She's the happy virus in our dynamic.

Right now though, her happy self doesn't rid me of my frustrated scowl as I look back at my reflection. I don't know what it is about the way I look today that's making me unsatisfied. Maybe it's how round

I look. Or it could be this

ridiculous outfit that Temasiko has made me put on. Yes, it's definitely the

outfit. White is not my color

—it really isn't. Not with the way I look at the moment. I resemble the Michelin Man. And my stupid nipples won't behave—

the peak things are showing so visibly in the bodysuit I am wearing. The white

thing has the words 'Quad Mommy' written across it in gold. It feels like that

brings attention to how big my boobs are even more. I release a sigh, having resigned myself to the fact that this pregnancy is out to

ruin my body and I can't do much about it. I have accepted defeat. Perhaps just

for today. I can always cry about it later but today I am giving up. I am wearing my natural hair a lot lately, and run my fingers through the curled fro, making

it fluffier. Now my hair brings me joy at least. It's one of the few things in my body that isn't betraying me. Heck, it's growing so much that it's extended to

other parts of my body. The sad part is that I can no longer shave my

own body hair because I can't

see anything and Sqalosenkosi had to do it two days ago

—

again. This has become routine to him, every other weekend we have sex and I reward him by having him shave off my pubic hairs. He loves it, I swear.

I've also been

to confined bedrest. My doctors have mutually decided to have me come to the hospital weekly now, and I was told to take it easy because the babies will be joining me soon. I went in for a checkup yesterday, and my pregnancy is without hiccup, the babies are growing right on track and my cervix is still holding strong. Temasiko has noted how bored I am to no longer be going to the office, and

she has decided to take me out today. It's okay because she called

Sqalosenkosi first and he confirmed with my doctors that it was still okay for

me to go out. We're going to the mall—

baby stuff shopping, according to her

and to also grab lunch together. I'm just not sure why Tema thought buying

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me a hideous bodysuit to wear in public would be a good idea.
And I'm not

sure why I even agreed to wearing it. My mind's a mess these
days though—

and she told me that yesterday I agreed to wearing the
tight white thing

—

though I don't remember —

so I have no choice.

“TEMASIKO, CAN YOU COME HELP PUT MY SHOES ON!?”

“SURE!” she shouts right back. I can hear her footsteps in the
hallway. “Sandals

or

—” she pauses, shaking her head as if she finds something funny.

“What is it?” I folds my arms on top of my large belly, gaze narrowed in on her.

“Where are your pants, sweetheart?”

“What do you mean where are my pants?” I raise my brow.

She sighs, clearly still so amused, and enters my room fully, placing her hands

on my shoulders as she guides me towards the mirror. “This is what I mean.”

Oh. Shit. Shit times infinity.

“I’ll just put them on.” I don’t mean to snap but my cheeks are warm, and the

tramp-

online is giggling. Me, I can’t believe that I was obsessing over my appearance in front of the fucking mirror but failed to realize that I haven’t

put my pants on. Those ugly, stretchy black things that Tema told me are jeggings. Where are they?

“On your bed, Ndlunkulu.”

“I said that out loud?”

“Yup.” She is grinning like the idiot she is.

I shake my head, accepting the ugly pants from her “My private parts are going to sweat horribly in this hideous outfit.”

Tema has the decency to look a bit guilty at least. “The jeggings shouldn’t be so bad. The bodysuit —well, I couldn’t find a normal t-shirt like this bodysuit in

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your size. So I had to do with this one

—I think it'

s cute on you. You have to

step out in public in style.”

Rolling my eyes, I settle on the bed, allowing Tema to help me
put on my

sandals. “I don't want to step out anywhere. If I see one more
picture of myselfresembling a whale...” they always take pictur

es of me

—

this creepy family. I

waddle to give myself a final once over at the mirror. “I can't
even breathe

right. I also think I need to pee

—

fucking hell, I just did that twenty minutes
ago!”

“Go, I’ll wait in the living room.”

I reluctantly obey. A few minutes later and I am done. I grab my phone, keys

and my wallet. Bab’ Shange is driving us, he greets me with his cheerful smile, helping me into the backseat. Yes, I’m a walking watermelon that needs to be

helped every second of every hour, it sucks.

Temasiko’s music turns on, and movement takes place in there. I think these babies love the music, it’s not horrible but... this is not something I prefer to listen to. Worse, I’m subjected to the torture almost daily on my side. “Th

is isNCT127

—

Sticker.” I didn’t ask but she always feels the need to tell me these things. “Let me tell you that the best vocalists to come out of K

-pop are all

bred at SM. From SHINee to EXO to NCT, they’re all untouchable.” “I didn’t ask.” “And yet you love Baekhyun so much. Weren’t you listening to Bambi just last night?”

“My babies not me,” I snort, rubbing my nose. “Hmk!” she giggles. Whatever. I roll my eyes, letting my head rest against the window. I won’t let

her know that I really like Chen from all these singers of hers, because ballads are literally perfection

—

and Beautiful Goodbye is a masterpiece. Sometimes, when I’m bored at home, I look up these artists she listens so much to. Chen’s

my favourite, his voice is goosebumps inducing.

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“Are we stopping at Chris and Nqobizitha’s house first?” I spare Temasiko a glance. This route we’re taking, it leads to Nqobizitha’s house and we’re about ten minutes away from his house in fact. “Tema?”

“Yeah, I gotta get a few things from Chris.” She isn’t meeting my gaze.

I trap my lower lip in between my teeth, “Okay.” I nod my head, opening my handbag. There’s my chocolate stash in there, I offer Temasiko one for the sake of being polite

—

I am relieved when she declines.

“Remove your seatbelt,” she tells me once I have parked the car. There’s plenty of cars in their driveway today. What is going on?

“Stop it, stop it.” My attempts at dodging her offered hand are unsuccessful,

she finds my hand and grips, dragging me inside the house with her. Walking is a daunting task

—I can feel my heart starting to race. It feels like I’ve been running a bloody marathon. I am so unfit it’s not even funny. “Phew...” I

release a long breath.

“Hey come in,” Chris greets us. Wow! He looks un

believably gorgeous for a

person living with and taking care of five babies. He's carrying one of the twins right now, I still can't tell them apart.

"That ego's cooing over Simhlele inside." "Oh, and where are—"
"SURPRISE!"

I nearly jump out of my

skin, clutching Tema's arm, and shrinking into her. "What's going on?" there's chaos all around us.

"It's your baby shower, silly." Siyabonga rolls his eyes, hands in his pockets. "I don't like this shit. I just came here to say I hope you have a good one

, to

remind you that you're loved and wholly supported. I'm here for you anytime, but I can't be surrounded by so much flowers and pink! My gifts are wrapped in blue wrapping with cars on it. There's a pink one with flowers." "Hawu, Siyabonga." I don't w

ant to break down like a little bitch in front of

him, his embrace is so warm. "Ngyabonga."

“Anything for you, Muhleza.” “Only Sqalosenkosi calls me that.” “And me from now on. I have to...to go. You know how it is working in a

different province, I have to spend as much time with that demanding man

who thinks he’s my Master.” “He is your Master.” “Hmm, wasn’t told about this.”

I shake my head as he breaks into a laughing fit. We chat again for a few more

seconds before he’s leaving. He says goodb

ye to the others. Thatego skips happily over to me, Temasiko is holding one of the babies now,

looking in love as ever. I never fail to gawk at Thatego’s unrealistic beauty, how innocent he makes it. He’s carrying a beautiful headdress made of white

rose

s. “And here’s your crown...” he nearly stumbles as he stands on his

tiptoes.

“Careful, precious.” It’s Christophe’s mother. She balances a blushing Thatego as he ‘crowns’ me. And then he’s making me wear a midi

-tutu looking whitethingy.

“There you go. Perfect!” Thatego giggles, pleased with himself.

“My husband’s here by the way, I hope you don’t mind. I mean there’s barely females in this baby shower already so he shouldn’t make a difference, right?” Of course, it shouldn’t. Who doesn’t know that Sbanisezwe prefers to stick Thatego like glue? And vice versa. Only Thatego can actually control himself and Sbanisezwe can’t. He’s... impulsive. I wouldn’t be surprised if he, out of the blue, decided to join Thatego here. But I don’t mind at all.

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“Are we ready to begin?” Chris asks loud enough for everyone to hear. “Temasiko came up with this, just so you know, I have to agree that it was a brilliant idea and we planned it over two months.” “Wow! You guys are really effective.” “Obvious.” Chris smiles, pleased with himself. “Alright, people!” Tema’s loud

voice rings in the living room. “Can we have our guest of honor come occupy her throne, please?”

The guests cheer as I look at the mix of seriousness and amusement found in Tem

asiko’s eyes. Taking a breath, I waddle on to take center stage near the

fireplace. A content moan slips past, the chair they got me is so comfortable. My hands rest on my belly while Tema begins with the program. She welcomes everyone to the baby shower

—

and goes on to make a few silly

jokes before announcing that it’s game time. An icebreaker is the first on our list. Its... different. Fun. I can admit to having a great time with those I hold dear to my heart. It’s a pity that Qalokuhle is in

varsity, I kn

ow she would’ve loved to come. She’s going to complain and complain about being left out but she’s doing her first year in varsity and it’s

not all like high school, she likes to tell me. Her education comes first

—
above everything.

“This is nice,” Fuzelihle comes to join me, when it’s time for a breather. She’s

absolutely divine in her yellow dress and sandals. They blend in well with her

skin tone. “I’ve never been to a baby shower before.” “Oh...” I don’t know why I thought... with all her money and equal

ly wealthy

friends, you’d think that one of them has at least gotten pregnant. “That’s quite shocking.” “Not really. I’m not friends with a lot of old people, my peers are not rushing to have babies at the moment, they’re chasing their dreams.” Is she...

this sounds like shading of some sort. Maybe it’s not her intention, she continues sipping on her juice like it’s nothing –

and looks around. “Good for them, some of us are doing both. Multitasking isn’t for everyone, right?”

“Ha!” she giggles, laughs her ass off in expensive, in elegance. “That’s a different take on it, I like that. Next time, I’ll tell them that.” My eyes touch the back of my skull. “Where is your mother?” I ask curiously, they’re not getting along well lately. It’s that issue with Ja

bulani Mahlangu.

“She’s... I think she’s dating Ciniso Dlamini. Or they’re doing the nasty.”

The name rings a bell.

“Okay, and?” “I don’t like him. I’m not even sure how they met, his friend raped me and I—don’t trust him.”

Wow!

“Did you tell Sgalosenkosi or Sbanisezwe at least?” I’ve noticed how

Nqobizitha is blissfully protected by his brothers. He has newborn babies, I

don’t think they’d want to involve him in any mess. “I have to be sure. My relationship with my mother is already strained, I don’t want to make things worse. I owe her my life, she didn’t abandon me.” “Are you going to tell me more or—” “Let me find booze first. I need to get really drunk.” “I thought you were told you’re not allowed to touch alcohol anymore.” “My daddy’s in

Eshowe, Sphe. I'm a grown woman here."She's gone, a skip in her step.

Sqalosenkosi

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Sphe is less than three weeks away to giving birth. She's still staying in

Hyd Park while we take care of everything. Lobola negotiations were finalized

just last Saturday, and she's going to be my wife. She will be moving in after

the babies have been delivered. Temasiko too. With a relationship like the onewe have, everything is discussed beforehand, tables laid on the cardcompletely to avoid future problems.Both of them are moving in with me. Three days ago, we sat Liyana down toexplain the situation to her. She only took it well because of her unwavering

love for Sphesihle, but she's been getting close to Temasiko as well –

and

they're slowly picking up from

their previous positive. As for me, I am in Mbongolwane again, visiting the departed. Sbanisezwe told

me to do this, urged me especially get in touch with Sphesihle's mother because... he wouldn't tell me but MaSibusisiwe is in the picture as well. All I

know is that I was supposed to come here and speak from the heart.

I've brought flowers with me, was fortunate enough to be let in by one of the

boys who guard the house in the absence of Sphesihle and her siblings. This boy guiding me to the elderly woman's

grave. My feet are reluctant to take a

step closer but the boy leaving me forces courage.

"Mah," I begin, crouching in front of her grave, "how are you?"

No response, as expected.

"I am fine as well. I'm here because... because I want to let you know

now that your

family is in good hands, and that they're my family also.

Sphesihle. Qalokuhle.

Nhloso. Nzuzenhle. I know how hard it was for you, but I promise you that I will take care of them

—

and they're my family. Please don't worry about anything, I...

your home will never collapse. It will forever remain

standing. Please bless our impending marriage, I will do my best

to ensure that her tears are always joyful. Bless our union and

our children. Please do not forsake her, and always be her

guiding light.

”

Nothing. The wind breezes against my skin gently.

“I also ask for forgiveness. For myself. For my biological father.

And my biological mother. For my family. I'm sorry that she fell

in love with me, and

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that I have fallen in love with her too. Please

accept my apologies.” Sbanisezwesaid I had to do this, and though I question his sanity sometimes, I...understood him here. “I’ll take care of all of them, Mah. Please bless us, I amasking because you’re so important in our lives. Accept and bless our un

ion, I

humbly ask of you.”

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TWO YEARS LATERUnrequited Desires :

EpilogueSqalosenkosiThere is chaos all around me

—

the sound of something crashing, a dozen

footsteps, and a million voices. I suppose it’s to be expected, considering I am

getting married to Temasiko. Her and chaos are usually synonymous, never

mind that she’s only one person, no immediate or extended family members.

Her father, Ciniso, died two years ago

—

a heart attack. The woman was never really pleased about the manner in which

he died, she'd always thought that cockroaches would suffocate him until he couldn't breathe. I'm not there though, I'm on this point of chaos. There are tiny footsteps

coming in the direction of my suite, rushing, and the door opens a second later. Lethukuthula is leading her fellow troopers, the boys waddling behind her like penguins, even Mhlanganisi is keeping up

—

he was the last one to start walking, long after his siblings, at eighteen months.

“Baba!” this is Lethukuthula's favourite word —

this is why Sphehile calls her

‘Kayise’. “Up!” They don't look messy at least, they're already dressed in their wedding

outfits

—

beautiful. I juggle to pick all of them up at the same time, but manage, though this will no longer work in the near future

–

at twenty-two months,

they're getting heavier and heavier. "Nishoda ngani, zinkanyezi zami?" The door opens before one of them can say anything, it wouldn't have been

much anyway. Most of their words consist of counting up to five; demands of milk, juice and fruits; they greet unnecessarily and bid farewells spontaneously; and they love the pet dog that Sphehile insisted we get them. The same Sphehile who enters my room, beguilingly beautiful, in her black

dress. She's cut and bleached her hair, Temasiko encouraged her to. "Hey." She smiles, grabbing Mnotho –

he and Mhlanganisi are the mommy's

boys. Lethukuthula and Lethokuhle are more independent, maybe Lethokuhle than all the others

–

I'm not sure if you can tell the personalities of a bunch of

twenty-two month olds, but h

e is an introvert compared to his brothers. “Why

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are you not wearing your tie? You know how dramatic Temasiko is, she’ll complain about you stealing her shine. The bride’s supposed to be fashionably late, not the groom.”

I chuckle, leaning down to press

my lips on hers in a soft kiss. “I love you, MaGcwensa.” Her smile is against my lips –

delicate. “You weren’t late when I married you.” “Because I’m not dramatic, duh!”

Ah, this is true. I humour her with genuine laughter, placing the boys back down.

“Let me get ready then.”

She nods her head, walking out of the room with our little squad following her

–

moths drawn to a flame. Sphehile has proved herself to be very capable and

driven over the last two years, I don't know how she managed to juggle f

our

babies, her schooling and work but she's managed. She even got her driver's license six months ago, and she's a go

-getter. I fix my tie, and don my blazer, then walk out to silence in the hotel suite. This is what I mean when I say Sphehile works wo

nders. She's in the living room,

three of out of four are sleeping. Montho is suckling her breast, he and

Mhlanganisi are the only ones who still breastfeed. "Sbani called to say he's on his way." "Okay, that's good." My hands rub on my pants, I sit besi

de her on the couch

—

mindful of the three babies in between us. "How are you—

how are you

feeling?” “Really?” she giggles, running her hand down Lethokuhle’s round cheek. “Uyamangaza kodwa, I should be asking you that.” “I’m fine... happy.” “I’m fine too... happy.” Her giggles grow louder at the roll of my eyes, she doesn’t let up. Truth reveals itself in her eyes, and the mellifluous notes of her laughter, truly she’s happy. “I can tell.”

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“Good.” She updates me about work, it’s good to work for Chris but... her and

Temasiko have a surprise for me later on

—

after the wedding. Then she moves

on to Liyana, she wants to stay with Khensani for the June holidays, but I don’t

think I can allow it. Not that

I don’t trust Khensani, she’s shown great improvement these past two years, her depression is ever present but she’s

learned to live her life despite it. She has happy days, a lot of them, most of the time they revolve around Liyana. Their relationship strengthens by the day.

And yet with all this... I am still skeptical to leave my daughter in her mother's care. "Maybe next year." "No, this year."

Sphesihle asserts softly. "This woman leaves alone, she must have lonely days in her apartment. Let her and

HER daughter bond. We're not

going to sweep their trauma under the carpet but at the same time, we have to

try and I don't know if move is the right word, but we must try to... live despite past traumas. She feels alive when she's with her daughter, you're

not

going to deny both of them this opportunity." "Sphesihle—" "Thank you! I love it when you see things my way." Her tone is firm, brokers

no room for argument, and she hands me Lethokuhle at the sound of knocking

on the front door. "That must be Nkanyezi's father." Right.

Nkanyezi's father. He and Thatego will be parents to

Isinathi Phawulothando Ngcobo in July. They're expecting

a baby boy through their surrogate, and it's all they talk about. Thatego is excited, he loves babies, he

cried when their first surrogate miscarried their baby. He cried for months, Sbanisezwe was indifferent; there are times where it feels like he has no heart at all. He only spoke about the deceased child once, saying he missed the little boy, and then never again.

"Bafo!" his smile is bright and empty. "Ready to do this again?" "Obviously. How's my bride?"

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"Dramatic. She took Thateho away from me very early in the morning because she wanted her makeup done." "It's her special day." "Took you long enough." He knows it would've happened sooner, but Temasiko was and is still busy building her career. Most of the time, she's travelling to different parts of the world for her modeling gigs. "UMhlanganisiwezizwe," he sings softly as he nears my son, "uphupha ngani namhlanje?"

The little one opens his eyes, and his lips stretch into a smile. Sbanisezwe

grabs him, embracing, and searches his eyes. They... they share a special bond.

I mean I know Sbani loves all my children, but his connection with Mhlanganisi is deeper

—

they're alike and different. Mhlanganisi is a naughty introvert sometimes, there are days where he talks a lot. His favourite word is

'ngcengce.' He is a mommy's boy through and through.

Sbanisezwe is carrying Lethokuhle and Mhlanganisi. Sphehile has Mnotho, he

wasn't done breastfeeding and clings to her even in the car. I have Lethukuthula in my arms, and she's babbling about something that's a mixture of numbers and cartoons. She truly is daddy's daughter.

The wedding is in Soweto, taking place at the church that Thatego forces

Sbanisezwe to go to. We're there. Everyone has taken their places, and I have my brothers with me for support. Temasiko doesn't have bridesmaids, she doesn't make a lot of friends. But Sphehile is here as a maid of honour. Her

duties were not performed to the tee though, she's a mother to four children...five actually. Liyana is practically her daughter. They're really close. There's this song... a song that Thatego once played for Tem

asiko. He told her

he would've walked down the aisle to it had he and Sbanisezwe not eloped

while in Japan. He said it was his second choice after the first one that they

played as soon as they had a 'westernized wedding' in Japan. Aurora's Exist

For Love.

This is the song that's playing as Temasiko walks down the aisle, with Sphehile in place of her father. It was their idea, the giving over thing. Two years ago, Temasiko had done the exact same thing for Sphehile. Because only the three of us know how this

works, and we don't need permission from any other person but ourselves to

do this. Unconventional as it is, it works. It had then. It does now. They both look beautiful. Sphehlehle in her black. Temasiko in her white. She

kisses Sphehlehle's cheek, and murmurs a few words that I can't hear before

the pastor tells us that we should begin. There are no personal vows, we both

agreed, because they're personal and we live them daily.

But my hands are

clammy as I repeat every word the pastor says, my heart is filled with great

happiness and... there's a contentment that I never thought I'd have.

A kiss seals our love, just as the crowd erupts around us. My thoughts are only on Tema

—

her scent and everything about her that intoxicates me.

Wetness muddges my

cheeks, she's crying. She cries a lot lately, it's the hormone shotsthat turn her emotional. Sometimes she's moody for no reason, sometimeshe'll cry because she's in Rio De Janeiro and she misses our family.Sometimes she'll cry over pizza toppings or

giggle maniacally when watching

horror movies. It's a rollercoaster of emotion, but I've enjoyed and still enjoy

experiencing every moment with her.

She's happier. Tiny things make her happy. When she began shedding her

body hair, she sent me a picture of it with many crying faces.

When herbreasts feel tender, she cries and smiles at the same time. Her face finallylooking how she wants makes her happy.

Some changes are small, some arebig and everything is a process

—

but all of it makes her very happy.

In the limo, after we've escaped the crowd to drive to our reception venue, shegets on my lap and caresses my beard.

She's teary

-eyed again, her bottom lip

trapped between her teeth, a lot on her mind clearly.

“Baby.” “I’m thirty

-

five years old.” I r

emind her with a lighthearted frown on my face.

“Not a baby.” “Yeah, yeah!” she sniffle

-

giggles. “But you’re still my baby, Mr. Ngcobo.” A playful exhale

departs my lips. “Whatever you say Mrs. Ngcobo.” “Mrs.

Ngcobo the second.” Laughter jumps to her

throat. “Permission to say

something to you, my brand-

new hubby.”

645

“Anything.” “I love you.” Her eyes search mine, brows twitching

with the movement of emotion found in brown pupils. “Our

vows, the personal ones, I just want to

say I love you and am so thankful for you. I love who we are together and how we make sense to us. Thank you for supporting me and loving me. Thank you for being so consistent in your kindness and thoughtfulness, not just for me but for... everyone. I love you so much for leading i

n your own place, and for

allowing me and Sphehile to lead in ours... not that we need your permission but you get what I mean." "I do." "You're a good man, Sgalosenkosi. Our babies are so lucky to have you in their

loves, they will know how to treat their partners and how to be treated in return. You amaze me so much with your consistency. I love that the most about you. So thank you! Anyo

ne in the world and I'd still marry you and choose the life we have because look at us... all three of us. We're amazing!" "We are." A smile pulls at my lips. "Okay. Let's hear it, your vows for me." "I love you," I say. "Fair enough!" she giggles, and buries her face in my neck. "Taylor Swift

definitely had you in my mind when she wrote all her songs about perfect men. But Peace, she definitely had you in mind for Peace. I hope you have it

with me." "I do."

Her smile touches my neck. She holds me tight, and only lets go when we reach our destination. The party's already begun without us, Sbanisezwe authorized it. We were taking too long apparently, and the children have to leave soon so that adults can really indulge. The same song plays for our first dance, but the babies interrupt us by wanting to share in the moment. Liyana too. She's grown close to Temasiko all over again.

646

I allow them to do their thing, and dance with Sphesihle for a while. Then I let her go because Nhloso wants a moment with his sister. Finding a quiet corner, my gaze spreads over the spacious hall. From Temasiko with Liyana to Sphesihle with Nhloso. From Nqobizitha dancing with Chris to Sbanisezwe dancing with Thatego and Nkanyezi. Nhlakanipho is watching in a quiet corner, just like me, but his eyes are trained on Siyabonga and their three year old son. They were fostering

him, and they fell in love. They have a little girl too, just three weeks old

–

she's not here though.

Our eyes clash, Nhlakanipho and I, as Siyabonga takes the baby to him before

coming to join me. "I'm so happy for you!" he hugs me. "Ngyabonga, Shandu

-

Ngubane." He laughs, all genuine joy. "You, more than anyone else, deserve to be happy."

Maybe.

"How are you holding

up with Milisuthando?" "She's perfect!" he gushes. "Just like Mnelisi. I proved Nhlakanipho wrong, he didn't think we'd make amazing parents but... look at us now!" Yes, their children are named after Nhlakanipho's siblings. "I am happy for you, Siyabonga." "I know you are."

He leaves, and then I go back to my staring. Every family member of mine has

found happiness, the ones who matter at least. Maybe not...

Fuze

lihle is

dancing with some white boy she invited, he's just a friend she told me but I know better. She's only 25 though, she has plenty of time to fall in love.

My wives

—

the word feel foreign but so right

—

come at me, conniving beamson their faces. A kiss on one cheek and another one on the other. Now I know

they're planning something, they always go on and on about how such kisses are corny... unless they're teaming up and want something. "How much?" I

ask.

“Damn it!” Temasiko snipes. “Told you he

knew,” Sphehlehle says. “Hubby, listen here,” Temasiko again, she smiles brightly like the sun, “as soon

as our honeymoon concludes, expect an e-mail from me and Sphe, attached to

it will be our business proposal. Set up a meeting for us and we’ll blow y

our

mind away... not in the way you’re thinking though.” They’re serious, the looks on their faces. “Well I mean it would be in that way for me but you know how your

Ndlunkulu is, everything must be done professionally. We have to labour honestly so that we can be proud when we begin this business. She thinks

people were put on earth to suffer, this is why she’ll be doing all the labour here while I shake my ass for you in

Thailand.” “Mxm.” “No problem,” I say. “What type of business?” “Fashion, what else?” Good for them, this is a common interest they share. “I’ll be happy to assist.”

They grin widely again, and high-

five each other, then... those kisses again. My
heart jumps

—

in contentment, peace. Siyabonga's eyes clash with mine from
a distance, briefly, they turn back to Nhlakanipho. It looks like
they're bidding

their son farewell.

There's no... longing. I've come far from who I was back
then. Maybe, maybe Unrequited Desires are not the worst
sometimes. Maybe they exist to lead us to a greater love, far
deeper and meaningful.

"This is why I love you," Temasiko giggles, she was singing as
well, "oh, this is why I love you. Because you love me." "Don't
look at me, I don't love you." Sphehile quips, rolling her eyes.

601

“Yeah. It’s in three weeks, I’m super excited.” That much is clear to see, her eyes are bright and happy. “Good. I am so proud of you. I love you, MaDlamini.” “Me too, baby.”

Most of the lunch is spent with her telling me about work, she loves working for Chris

—

and appreciates the doors that have been opened for her. She loves learning from one department to the other.

“I forgot to tell you the other day, my doctors... they’ve given the go

-ahead for

me to go through with feminizing hormone therapy. On Wednesday, I’m going

there to begin the process. Do you want to

—” “Of course!” I don’t wait for her to finish. “I’ll cancel all my meetings, what time are you going? Or maybe I’ll just spend the night at yours, so that I don’t waste time by driving from my house to yours and then to the hospital.” “That works.” “Alright.

Within a year, you'll be able to apply for gender marker change at

Home Affairs. I went there with Fuze, long ago, they needed two

Doctor's

letters from the doctor prescribing her HRT and one from her psychiatrist. I

say you'll be able to apply for a new ID within a year because that's how long you should've been on HRT for about a year. You said you were born here, right? They're going to need your ID copy certified at a police station."

Silence ensues right after.

She's looking at me with... teary

-

eyed and a glinting beam. I don't know what she's searching for, maybe a lung

-squeezing hug. Her arms surround me, lips pressing inside my neck, heartbeat fast against mine. Her hair tickles my

cheek but I don't complain. "Do you have any idea how much I love you?"

“I have an idea.”

602

She pinches my side, warm breath giggling against my skin. “Its too damn

much! Wish I could be poetic like Taylor Swift just to show you how much. Thank you for being there

—

in every manner. You’re

paying hundreds of thousands for this, and you know something that might seem so insignificant

to others but it means the world to me.” “I just have a good memory. When I was supporting Fuze, we found out together.” “Still! This is... Ngyabonga.” “Okay.” My lips stretch into a smile. “Its time for our second date, come.”

The rest of the day is spent at her favourite hiking spot, we have our dinner there as well

—
courtesy of the chefs I'd hired. There's overnight camping here,
and a tent has been set

up, Temasiko can't hide her excitement. Sphesihle
helped plan this, packed her overnight bag; and my saliva
touches the ground

at the sight of Temasiko's barely there night clothes —
the silken pants that shape her butt. She looks gorgeous.

"I'm enjoying

today very much." "I'm enjoying your company."

She laughs, her eyes roll to the back, and straddles my lap. Her
thighs hugging my body

—
and grinds slowly on top of me. My breath quickens, I grip her
hips and help her set the seductive pace

—
pressing my lips to her left nipple,

through the matching string top she's wearing. "Do you want me to drive you insane? I wasn't wearing any underwear today —

and I was touching myself to thoughts of you before you fetched me."

A moan tumbles out of my throat.

"What—thoughts?" "Your...dick," slowly, she slithers down my body and plays with the band of my boxer-

briefs, "in my mouth; you choking me with it." "Tema!"

603

"Let me suck it." She's stroking my cock, giving me sultry eyes. A kiss touches

the tip, I suck in a stuttering breath, as my hands find purchase in her hair. She gives me a marvelling expression for a moment, mouth watering, before she moves in to kitten-lick just below the head. Another intake of air from me, and my hands press a little firmer to

her hair, but he don't force her to move, to

take me in, and Temasiko-She opens her mouth, saliva pooled on her tongue, and allows some of it to trail out, using her hand to spread it along my cock before she's letting the head pass her lips, suckling firmly, and stroking what she couldn't fit in her mouth. Slowly, she moves further down, jaw wide, taking her hand away as my throat goes fully hard and nudging the back of her throat, stopping her air supply before she pulls back and looks, eyes glazed, up at me, the tip sitting on the very end of her tongue, her mouth still open

—

an offering.

I don't move, don't do anything, until her hands grasp mine, getting me to slide my fingers deeper into her hair, she makes me cup her head and take. My grip tightens roughly, as my hips begin to move so quickly, cock shoving so hard into her throat, brown eyes are watering and it's like she can't breathe again, but this... sometimes she wants it this way. There's thick trails of saliva oozing from the corn

ers of her mouth, sliding through his jaw, down her neck, into her collarbones. My hands tighten a little more every few thrusts as I hold her down, shoving my cock into her throat, forcing an involuntary gag, her entire body jerking against the hold, but

I don't

relent and her hands never move to push me away. She closes her eyes

—

serenely, hands on my thighs. My groans are accompanied by slick sounds of my cock sliding in and out of her mouth and her struggling breaths. Shivers flash in my spine as my vision begins to black

out a little, my movements stuttering, my fingers tight in Temasiko's hair. I

make a sudden move as if to pull away, but Temasiko whines, brow furrowing; a strangled noise escapes my tongue as I grip her tight, my cock pulsing on her tongue with my orgasm. She moans, swallowing.

There's a wet patch on the front of her pyjama shorts when she pulls away,

collapsing on the mattress beside me, her breath heavy and uneven. I roll her on her stomach, and push her shorts only halfway. Her butt is enticing

—

big,

604

round and jiggly. Her fingers dig into the mattress when my hand connects with her butt-cheeks.

“Do you know how wet I am for you? How horny you make me?” her breaths

are still so heavy

—

tone silent. “Only you can make me cum from

pleasuring

you. That’s how horny you make me.” “I’m going to fuck you now.”

She giggles, breathlessly, and pushes her ass back on me. “Take me then, I am all yours.”

Foreplay first. I take my time to explore her

—

all of her. My lips sing praises to her back, my fingers express their love on each part of her body. Her moans are soft, only increasing with each sensitive spot I find. “You’re not going to cum until I tell you to,” I order, clinching my fingers around her erection. “I like it better this way.” “I know.” I press against her ass, guiding the head inside —

fighting through the

little bit of resistance. She moans my name, I don’t waste time as I press into

her warm hole. My hands grip her hips to pin her in place, as I move hard and fast.

Another angle makes me find her prostate, and she screams. “Bingo,” my lips curl up amusedly, I pull her up using my arm around her throat. “Do you like this?” “I love it!”

My arm tightens around her

—

choking. Her asscheeks slap together against my front, she's pushing back on me. Her penis is smacking against her thigh, making the sexiest sound. "You were meant to be on your knees for me,

MaDlamini-

just like this." I remind her.

She nods her head quickly.

605

Less than a minute into me nailing her prostate incessantly, she tries to crawl

away towards the tent's opening. "Too much, too good –

perfect." She

whimpers, still trying to escape. I hit that spot again, chuckling at her squeals and shudders. My lips press into the nape of her neck in hot kisses. My organism is crawling to the base of my

spine, but it's my duty to fulfill her first. Holding her tighter, to prevent her escape, I piston fast into her and drill her pleasure button. "Shh, MaDlamini,

let me

take care of you. Don't run from it, this is what you love. I'm giving you what you need. Touch yourself for me." "Yesss." Her voice is high

-

pitched, she's nodding frantically. "Tell me you love me." "I'll always love you," I murmur through a harsh breath.

"So—good!" Her voice breaks, her body next. She's shooting her load, shuddering viciously against me. "I love you." It doesn't take me long to join her. My body falling atop her soft one. "Asiqedanga njalo, ngisazok'phinda." "Great! The sex addict." I chuckle, carefully pulling out of her, and readjusting her body so that she's

beside me

—

resting on my chest. The spacious tent reeks of sex and sweat. Our breathing forms the only sound in this place. This is our little world for the night. Her

lips are touching my chest, warm thigh spread over my waist.

"I know you joke a lot but... do you ever wonder about marriage?" "Why, do you want to propose?"

Maybe. In the near future.

“You don’t have to answer a question with another question.”

Her laughter is beautiful, she snuggles deeper into my body, kissing my beard.

“When I was young, I thought about it a lot. Things happened and suddenly it

606

wasn’t in the cards for me anymore. Before you, I guess we can say no. With you, right now, I’d marry you

in a heartbeat if you asked me to.”

The words should make me happy, they do; just as much as they bruise my

gut. I do want to marry her, just as I want to marry Sphesihle. It doesn’t make

sense how I cannot picture either of them out of my life, it would feel...

incomplete somehow.

“My family wants to send a letter to the Gcwensas. To make things right, traditionally, and marry her.”

The next moment feels like an eternity. Her heartbeat is fast against mine, she sighs, her face burrowing in deeper

inside my neck. Quiet breathing. “Then do it.” “I... I want to know if you’re okay with it.”

She pulls back a second, reddish brown eyes clashing with mine

—

soft,

secretive. “Of

course, I am okay with it. It’s not like marriage is everything anyway, some of the most lasting relationships are like that because people

are not married. That... Kate Hudson’s mother, do you know her?” “No,” I whisper, shaking my head. She doesn’t reply for a while, I wonder if I am responsible for the... is it

awkward or am I imagining things? Maybe I am.

“Yeah well, her parents are not married and they’ve been together for over 30years! Can you imagine that? It just goes to show, marriage isn’t everything.

Not everyone aims for marriage.” “This is not about everyone. It’s about you –

and how you feel. I am curious to

know, because I value your input. You’re my girlfriend and—

” “Mshade. She’s—

how is it fair that you marry me first? Go with her, s

he’s expecting your unborn children, I’m sure that’s why you’re marrying her first. Its fine. Thank you for discussing this with me.”

607

“I thought you were giving me six,” I try to tease her, to lighten the mood.

“Please don’t say that. It’s not... it’s not

funny.” “Tema—” “No, Sqalosenkosi!” she’s getting angry, her body is snatched from mine too soon. “What, do you think it’s funny that I can’t fall pregnant? Do you think I enjoy that?” I didn’t mean to sound insensitive but I don’t think she cares.

Sh

e’s pulling her pyjama shorts up, and fixing her top. “I don’t like it, believe it or not. And I don’t appreciate you making a joke out of—” “It wasn’t my intention, Temasiko.” Her eyes connect with mine, I don’t think she believes me. She’s already moving as I look around for my pants. “Marry her! I’m not against it, she actstough but she’s not and I know for a fact that if roles were reversed, shewouldn’t be able to handle it

but I’m still okay with you marrying her. I just...don’t make things worse by reminding me that I’ll never be like her. That she’s

a better woman

—

in every sense of the word. Because society says, right?” “Temasiko, please slow down and lets—”

The tea

rs escaping her eyes, heavy, stop me. Her lips are trembling, she's

breaking down. This time she says nothing, walking out of our tent.

A bitter lump lodges itself in my throat, I don't entertain the storm brewing,

and pull on my pants as soon as I find them. I need to find her and make things right.

608

Unrequited Desires : Forty-nine Sphesihle

The front door banging loudly gives me a scare, my heart jumps just like my body as I grip my chest with one hand, and close my laptop with the other. WTF!? By the time my body has cooperated, and granted me the privilege of moving, the sound of something slapping against marble tiles hurriedly reaches my

ears, getting closer and closer until the culprit appears. Of course, it's her!

Why does she look so horrible, I planned an entire night trip in the woods for her to spend with Sgalosenkosi.

“You!” she snaps, smudged makeup marring her face. “Tell him to stay away otherwise I will chop off his big dick and we’ll be relying on dildos for the rest

of our lives

—

and you won’t be able to give him any babies ever again!”

What the hell? BANG! I startle; and as if just as terrified, the babies throw nasty kicks and punches against my belly. Ouch! Ouch, ouch

—

ow! My eyes water, I take a calming

breath, blinking rapidly to be met with Sgalosenkosi in front of me. He’s half

-

naked, wearing just a pair of faded blue jeans. “Are you okay?” he’s beside me, arm extended at my lower back to steady me. “Sphesihle?”

“Fine. They’re just playing karate in there.” Clearly I’m not the joker out of the three of us because instead of laughing, Sgalosenkosi keeps his worried glance. He helps me to the living room, and sits me down, only to disappear a second later. He comes back, with a bottle of water in one hand and a glass in another. “Here.” “Ngyabonga.”

609

A shrug of the shoulders, he sits down beside me, entire body seeming to droop out of nowhere. Okay, something’s wrong. Sighing softly, and placing my glass on the table, I focus all the attention on him. He looks confused and tired

—

all red eyes. An exhaled breath escapes him, and he scrubs his beard.

“She said to not go in there lest she mutilate your penis.”

He flinches, a shudder.

It’s a funny sight so I erupt in laughter. What’s going on here?

This is not him

at all, he doesn't fear anyone. "Kwenzenjani? She wasn't a fan of the wildlife in the night? That's her favourite hiking spot." "No." He shakes his head. "It was going fine until..." the glance he gives is reluctant, as if he's not sure whether or not to divulge whatever is on his mind.

"It's... you know how it is for her –

as a transwoman." "No, I don't.

I know nothing at all actually. Whenever she talks about her trans-identity, she likes to call herself privileged. Not many women like her can get the opportunities that she has been afforded apparently. Not many get the jobs

they want, they don't live the lives they want, they're not really free –

in a

constitution that says democracy for all and preaches equality.

She's one of

the lucky ones, she likes to say.

"I don't really know," I admit, "but when someone talks, sometimes the best thing to do is shut up and listen."

Sqalosenkosi moves his hand from his beard, blinking his long lashes at me, he

nods his head. "I listen." "Then why is she

mad?" "She won't talk to me."

Oh, I see.

610

"Then... maybe you're not the one she wants to listen. Maybe it's someone else. It is you who likes to say it's not okay to be enough for a person after all, right? It's not your duty to complete, you're not going to be her everything.

Sometimes she will fal

I but you won't be the one she needs, because –

because

of many reasons. Am I making sense?"

He clears his throat, only to swallow what looks like a hard lump less than a

second later. His hands are rubbing together, he seems anxious... strange. I think he's zoning out, the emptiness in dark pupils reveals that, it's a bit

creepy if I am being honest. The foggy of unshed tears in his eyes.

"Sgalosenkosi," I whisper his name. Words fail me, I'm not sure what to say. "I just want to help her." "You d

o, you are

—

by staying away, I... guess." Their story remains unknown to me, I don't know what went down and why both of them are acting like this suddenly. "You can't help her now."

He shakes his head, as if refusing to believe it. Any other day and ma

ybe I'd tell him to stop being so damn stubborn. To ditch the hero complex because he wasn't put on this earth to save anyone but

himself. He can only be there for them

—

in the manner that the affected asks

him to. But this is Squalosenkosi; and though he's
s being irrational right now, I know why. Its second nature to
him to put others first and to try and fix, fix, fix. It makes no
sense to him to not be what another needs

—

in every aspect

—

when he's fine with the same person not being his enough. 'I
wouldn't want to burden you like that' he likes to
say. "Mapholoba," I use my soft voice —

well it's always soft, but this is the patient one. My hand
touches his shoulder in comfort. "I don't think Temasiko would
want to burden you by making you think tha

t you're supposed to be

everything she needs. A psychologist. A therapist. A blesser. A
dick giver.

You're not God, you're not going to cater to her every need; its
unrealistic." I know these are the words he'd tell any other
person. He told me once, tha

t he

didn't want to burden me with the responsibility of being his everything. He

611

loves me regardless of the things I cannot do for him, the things that maybe I

wouldn't understand. Sometimes, he just needs to talk to another man because they'd get where he's coming from. Men like his brothers. He just needs...

Wait!

"Maybe this is a girl problem," I tell him, nodding my head because I am right. I have to be right. I am not wrong. "It is a girl problem. That's why she's mad, you don't know where she's coming from." "Bullshitting me!" This is the glorious expression he gives me

—

all furrowed brows and thinned lips. He looks very cute at the moment, nothing at all like

serious Sqalosenkosi. “I—don’t know how not to be there for her. I don’t know how to not be there for you. I don’t know how to not be there for someone.”

Bingo!

“Oh baby,” my voice is teasing, “my extended family can teach you all you need to know. I can give you one of their numbers.” “Awukahle, MaGcwensa.” Quietly, he says this. “I—” “Need you to understand that you can be there for someone sile

ntly. And that

it’s okay if they push you away sometimes, half the time it has nothing to do with you. She’ll come around.” “Makusho wena.” “Kusho mina vele,” I quip, pinching his bearded cheek, “stay here or go to my

bedroom if you want. Mina ngiyokhuluma naye lomatemema wakho

osanganayo ekhanda.” His chuckle is just a ‘Haha!’

How rude!

612

Deciding to not be offended, because he's clearly going through the most, I settle for pressing my lips against his in a soft kiss.

He's snatching my breath,

so ea

sily, he's a bad influence –

his babies are copying him, it hurts. Ow! “The babies can sense their father, they're going insane in there.”

He smiles against my lips

–

pecks them once, twice. I don't stop him when his

hand travels to cup my belly, he spla

ys his hand on the side and... he's pulling back. Beautiful, the boyish grin he gives me. “Ningahluphi uMah

wenu, angithi?” Baby C... or is it D? –

I have no idea how this thing works. All I know is that

there's a baby that acknowledges his request by doing

the exact thing that he

told them not to. There's a Sbanisezwe here –
charmingly naughty

–

I just

know it. He's the one that influences the others on giving me
such a hard time. Maybe this Sbanisezwe is a she... you never
know. "One just kicked," I confess

breathlessly.

"I felt it. I am sorry." He should be sorry, he's the reason I am
here after all. "Let me go to Temasiko's room. Pray I make it out
alive."

He chuckles heartily. So now he laughs, this man. My eyes touch
the back of my skull, I push him away in irritation

–

and bring him to me a second later so that he can help me
up. I moan softly, feeling a strain on my back. "Never again!
Pregnancy is not

on the cards for me ever

again." "Never say never."

I mean it.

“Stay here,” I remind him.

A head nod.

613

I don't waddle yet, but I feel heavy. It feels like all the weight of the babies has been extended to my legs and... I don't waddle but I feel it. I can really, really

pregnant. How else should I explain how breathless I have become making a

less than a minute walk from the living room to Temasiko's door? Knocking once, I then open the door and let myself in. She's not here, on the bed, and she's not in the bathroom either

—

the en-suite is see-through, I would know if she were there. Closing the door, I remain paused in the hallway, my hands gripping my waist

—

and look towards my door. Somehow, somehow I just know that...

This girl has no sense of privacy.

It's true,

I open my door and there she is on my bed. Our eyes clash, and...bright. She brightens, sitting up a little. "There you are. It took you long enough!"

Girl, I am not your friend.

"What are you doing in my room?" I don't bother to hide my frown. My footprint are slow towards the bed, she's judging me. Fuck her! She's lucky she can't get pregnant, and experience this torture I am going through. "Sqaalosenkosi will come to my room." "He won't." I can't help rolling my eyes. "He's in the couch. I told him to come to this room that you're now invading." "Ooh, sex?" She's an idiot.

"Of course not!" I scoff, maybe I'm one of the weird pregnant women who don't care much for sex, no

t with how unsexy I am feeling. My body is always

inflamed, always so sweaty. The last thing I need is... actually I wouldn't mind at all. "The plan was to join you in your room, and have him sleep here." "Ah!" chomp, chomp. "You did good."

614

Little tramp is eating my platter of brownies. I baked these for myself, its what I was craving. She looks better than when she came in

—

and for some reason, I cannot bring myself to really call her out on starving me and my babies. I never know what to do with her emotional self, the loud side is better

—

it's the

one I prefer. The beauty of living in luxury houses is that you have mini refrigerator everywhere, I have one in my bathroom, and one here. Grabbing a tub of ice-cream in the fridge, I then go to join her

; holding a bottle of wine that she's

dispatched me to grab.

“Don't ever date men,” she tells me after she’s downed the wine halfway. “They make stupid jokes and they’re not funny.” “You’ve just discovered this,” I tease.

She snorts, and covers her mouth to prevent the wine from slipping past her

giggling self. Her body reeks of sex, I wish she’d had the thought to take a bloody shower first but... just tonight, I will let this go. She’s laughing at my joke that wasn’t funny at all. I don’t find my jokes

funny but the way she’s

giggling causes me to erupt in fits of my own giggling.

“Ow!” I whimper when it happens again –

the kicks. It’s nearly 01:00am, why are these babies still up?

“What is it?” “The babies,” I distractedly murmur, cupping the pulsing bulges, “they didn’t listen to their father and they’re kicking roughly.” “Wow!” I awoke. “They... kick?” “Who doesn’t know this?”

Temasiko clearly.

“It’s not a fun experience, trust me.” I don’t mea

n this entirely. My pregnancy is

high risk. The babies kicking means they're fighting to see things through until

the end. They want to live, to experience the beauty life has to offer, despite its

615

ugliness. My insides rearranging to make space for them is small compared to the company they give me. I love to hate their constant moving around.

"Really? They kick badly." "Sometimes. It's just like stomp

-

stomp!" I emphasize my point by pressing the heel of my palm against her bare thigh. "Is that sore?" "No." She rolls her eyes, still laughing. "Okay then, it's just like..." I wince, snatching her hand to place on my belly.

Nothing happens for a while, and then it happens

—

stomp, stomp. "There," I

mutter breathlessly.

“Wow! Woooow!” Temasiko gets on her knees and puts her other hand on another part of my belly. “Things like this make me believe God exists. Howelse do you explain this?”

I have to agree. Imagine carrying three souls inside you? All of them at the same time, surviving inside you, taking the time to get to know you. It’s amazing.

“What’s wrong?” she has tears in her eyes.

Her eyes snap to mine, she blinks rapidly, nibbling on her lower lip. Maybe she

doesn’t trust me... not fully. I don’t blame her, it’s not like I have reached that level

with her as well. But I’d be lying if I said she hasn’t been bearable, living

with her has been blissful to put it lightly.

“I don’t know why God hates me.”

Huh? Perhaps the confusion is showing on my face because how do we go from saying He exists

—
with wondrous grins on our faces
—

to He hates me. I'm missing something here... clearly.

616

She downs the wine again, all of it this time, and then drags me down with her

on the bed. "Your boobies are super comfortable. Sgalosenkosi, you lucky son of a bitch!" "Temasiko!" I manage to push her away slightly. "I can't lie on my back, give me my pillow; it's made for pregnant women." "Oh... sorry!" She enunciates drunkenly. "Here, I don't want you to think I'm jealous that you can fall pregnant."

Ohhkaay.

"Because I'm not, I kinda actually like you now. You're an alright girlie, I'm glad it's you I am sharing Sgalosenkosi with. Not some random bitch who

quotes bible ve

rses the whole day.”

I laugh.

“Did you know I cannot have babies of my own? Biologically, I won’t be able to give our man babies because God hates me. He didn’t give me the parts I desperately needed. Instead I’m stuck with sperm I don’t even need.” “I thought sperms meant you could have babies.” She snorts out a miserable laugh. “Sss not the same, girlie. I mean my belly won’t grow round like yours. It won’t feel kicks or weird fluttering. It won’t

feel any contractions. Do you know those, I hear

they’re painful.” She really does become something else when she’s drunk. The front of her head is touching mine, she’s breathing slowly and hiccupping every other

second. The pain is etched on her face, it mingles with her drunken stupor, there are light tears on her face.

“Hopefully I will not be experiencing those,” I tell her, as my hand involuntarily moves to wipe away a tear that would’ve touched her trembling lips. “I’m giving birth prematurely because it’s not safe to wait until full term.

Chanc

es are I wouldn't even make it that far, there's barely any space
as it inside me."

617

"That's nice." I don't think she was fully concentrating, but her
breathless giggles are back. "When I was young, I still hoped my
periods would come but

they never did. Did I tell you I thought we could choose
between pussy and

dick? It's no surprise that the dick remained. I waited for my
boobs but they're

barely there. I waited for a more beautiful face

—

angular but delicate. Soft like
yours. It didn't come. And though

I know its stupid, there's a part of mewishing for a pregnancy
that will never ever happen." "Never say never," I use
Squalosenkosi's words. I am still gathering my
thoughts.

“Don’t be such an—asshole!” she croaks, shifting just enough to search my eyes. “Pregnancy is not on the cards for me. It will never ever happen.” “You sound very desperate to get pregnant,” I point out. “I don’t care what people think about me. Most of the time, I don’t. But...maybe I do sometimes. I think I’m too drunk to express myself. I want that

man and I to have babies, because I want to give him babies. I also want to get

married and spend my forever with him. It just... I don’t even hate you but if there’s one thing I envy about—” “Babies don’t determine your womanhood, Temasiko.” “I know.” “Then—

” “You’re obviously always going to be first choice in their eyes because,

because you have it all. You’re the epitome of womanhood. Everything about

you screams

—” “So you’re telling me you’ve changed your mind and no longer a woman?” “Fuck you!” rage dances in her eyes. “My identity isn’t a costume I put on for

fun. Why do you think

—” “Ngiyezwa. I just want to understand why pregnancy is so important to you.

Why I should be involved when you try to explain why you wish you could get

618

pregnant. We're different for a reason, Tema, you're going to drive yourself

nuts trying to change something you know very well cannot be changed. You said it yourself

—

you will never be able to fall pregnant." "Still..." "Nothing. Aren't you the one who likes to say I should focus on my journey with Sgalosenkosi? Now it's time to

follow your own advice

—

and not break your own heart because Sphehile can give Sgalosenkosi babies. Sphehile has

nothing to do with what you share with Sgalosenkosi.” “He’ll marry me in the near future. Thank God its not now! My modelling work

is pick

ing up.” “Good for you.” I stroke her hair. “Eish, I can’t believe I was being so dramatic! Even if I could fall pregnant, I don’t think I would’ve been ready for a baby right now. My career... I most likely would’ve considered aborting.” “And kissed your relationship goodbye. He—that’s where he draws the line.” “Good riddance,” she giggles, still very much not sober, “I hope he didn’t force you to keep these babies.”

“No.” I shake my head. “They’re here because they’re supposed to be.” “That’s nice.”

I roll my eyes, as she continues laughing, and then

—

her lips touch my cheek

and then my lips lightly. “Don’t kiss me.” “I like kissing you.” “I am not gay.” “Good! These are sister

-

wives pecks that I give you. One for every time you're kind or making me feel better."

619

Mxm. The door breaks

our staring contest. "Oh, I..." says Squalosenkosi, this is why Tema should've stayed in her room. "MaGcwensa, I thought—" "Cuddle—meee!" The drunkard slurs, leaving the bed to drag Squalosenkosi

inside the room. Using her forceful strength, she sits his ass on the bed, makes him lie down and joins him

—

us

—

a second later. "This is warm."

It is. Squalosenkosi gives me a worried expression. My eyes touch the back of my

skull again, I move slowly and place my head on his chest. Temasiko's arm is outstretched, she touches my belly again. I don't stop her. She's singing quietly

to herself. One of the babies must be irritated by the screechy sound because

they kick against her. “

All these people think love's for show. But I would die for you in secret.

The devil's in the details, but you got a friend in me... And you know that I'd swing with you for the fences. Sit with you in the trenches.

Give you my wild, give you a child...”The tone is melancholic coming from a barely sober woman, but it's the way she enunciates her words that makes things better. It's... the three of us here,

together like this, strangely feeling like we all belong somehow. Somehow. I

can't describe it exactly but... peace. That's the word.

620

Unrequited Desires : FiftyTemasiko

My feet are killing me! I detest high heels, I really do, but for some reason these aspiring models love them

—

and though sometimes it's good to stand out that's not always the case. Chris told me to wear standard jeans, a white shirt

and heels for this casting

g. He didn't tell me that I'd have to spend most of my time on my feet and that I'd be a hungry bitch by the time we were done with

this. They did provide food, but fat bitches have to diet too apparently. The food

wasn't tasty, it's something that Thateg

o would cook

—

the spice-less, boiled

chickens and the long green sticks with pimples on them. Ah... asparagus, right? That's what we ate, in portions that are meant for toy dolls; I kinda hate Christophe right now but he's family, and, and, and. I'm going

to get proper food right now, meeting someone actually, someone private. They contacted me, they found my number, and they arranged this

meetup. It feels like karma against my boyfriend for denying me this man's

number all those months ago. Yes, I am meeting Ciniso Dlamini. Am I anxious? A little bit. Angry? A little bit. Lost? A little bit. But I thought about this when he called almost two weeks ago, and I want to do it. I want to do it.

Closure, that's the word. I have questions and I seek closure. He

hurt me, he was the first man to ever hurt me. Not Jabulani Mahlangu. I could take his punches and kicks because I still had the man I called my father, and I thought we were leaning on each other because I had lost a mother and he had lost his wife.

Clea

really that wasn't the case. Clearly his love had conditions and limits. I just... I want to find out how he slept knowing he hurt me like that. I want to

know how he felt in the beginning stages, when he let me go. How simple was it for him to continue with his life after he sent me packing? Did he ever think about me at all? Does he regret what he did? Is his success worth it?

The questions are a lot. I know I shouldn't, but I can't help wondering. Sometimes we can't help opening the dusty closets, to dig up things we'd

hidden away

—

screw the damage or pain those things will give us. This is me, opening those dusty closets to take care of what I'd buried there for too long.

621

"Ngyabonga, Baba." I say to the elderly man who brought me to Eastgate in his

Ube

r. Bab' Shange is busy all day with Sqalosenkosi, I will not say I have

missed him. Sometimes I feel like Sqalosenkosi has him drive us around so that he can keep tabs on us through him.

We're meeting at Piatto, Ciniso and I. It's the last place to discuss personal

issues but I wasn't going to meet the fucker somewhere private. The last time

we were in private, he was beating me up black and blue, he was breaking me

and he was disappointing me. I don't think I'd feel safe around him, not at all.

There

he is, looking...

Fuck everything good to ever exist in this life! Fuck karma for being so selective.

My sperm donor looks good, really good. I'm talking Denzel Washington good

-looking here, all brown skin and timelessness. This is not the same man I was

escaping in Nelspruit, he's not. This is a man who looks expensive, even from a distance. He's a busine

ssman sipping on whiskey, oblivious to the young mangiving him looks from a discreet corner. Argh!

The man's not gay, I wish the good

-

looking kid knew. He'd kill him at hello. My feet are reluctant to move, strained, even though I'm wearing my Dior sl

ippers

now. 'You can do this, you bad bitch you!' my subconscious reminds me

fiercely, and I nod my head to myself. Right. Bad bitch me. Brown eyes connect with mine as I take my first step, as if instructed by the silent sound. I watch this familiar man

's eyes widen, almost... comically.

Flashes of the past smack me blue and green

—

good memories, they repress

all bad ones, forcing them down because... because I don't know.

Here I am right now, looking at my sperm donor, all I can think of is how much he taught me about electricity. It's because of him that I never needed any handyman, I could fix anything

—

broken fridges to ruined kettles. He would

drag me to people's houses in Motshane, so I'd gain first hand experience. He

622

taught me how to tie my shoelaces, how to fasten my belt and he taught me how to be confident and how not to be.

“Mabutfo!” his voice is still so deep. There’s... he’s not smiling actually, but he isn’t frowning either and I don’t know what he’s searching for but the

unwavering attentio

n is unsettling. “You’re a... is it really you? Jesus, what have you done!?” I... flinch. My body, it goes into panic mode and shivers are taunting my spine.

I feel icy shards crawling up to my throat, I think I am scared. Unable to audibly let out a breath, I force myself to snap out of it, and look at this man.

He no longer looks indifferent, he’s anything but... the muscles in his face have tightened, and his lips are pressed into a thin line. It’s no rocket science that

the man looks angry now, clearly the sight of me is displeasing.

“My name is –

my name is Temasiko. Temasiko Dlamini.” Regret fills me instantaneously. Dlamini. That is my surname. Dlamini. Fuck! Fuck, fuck,

fuuuck! I should’ve pulled a Fuze and gone with my mother’s surname instead,

because

of this man, he doesn’t like me. He will never like me. “As soon as I am able to apply for my new ID, I will be using my mother’s surname. Don’t worry

you’re transphobic, little

—”“Sit your ass down.”“Yes, daddy!” I smile sweetly at him, perching my ass on the comfy chair, as he does the same. “Now why am I here?” He says nothing, my visuals are obvious shocking him. Maybe I’m not that pretty right now, but I’ve improved so much from my days as a the

girl who looked so much like a boy and had two vetkoeks implanted in both of her

cheeks. The staring is offputting, surely he didn’t call me here to give me this...lost expression he’s giving me. What the actual hell!?”“Hello! Earth to Ciniso. Why am I here?”

First comes the sound of him clearing his throat, and then the rapid eye

blinking. Sigh. He sits up, joined hands on the table.

“Mabutfo—”

623

“If you call me that one more time, I will embarrass you by drowning your

shady ass with this glass of water. I wil

I leave next, and block your number.”His eyes darken, nostrils flaring up. Oh, oh. I’m making him angry.Unfortunately for him, I don’t give any fucks! It’s me who should be angry, he’s

lucky I even agreed to meet up with him. He should be on his knees begginglike the pushover he is. He should be on them and asking for my forgiveness. It

doesn’t matter that I will never forgive him but this is what he should be

doing.The sadistic fucker!

“Is that any way to speak to your father?”“Oh please,” my

sneer comes out quiet, the waitress is approaching us with

our orders. A burger and BBQ ribs for me, there's no way in hell I was going to leave this place without getting food. I love their food! "I haven't had a father

in years, Ciniso. Spare that fuckin

g bullshit." "And you're even cursing!" disgust drips out with every enunciated word. "What has Johannesburg done to you? This is not my boy, this is not the boy I raised. You're dressing up like a woman and—" "Muntfu WeNkhosi, ngifunani lana?" "You're so disrespectful!" he spits out, on the verge of a high

-high. Shame! It

won't look good for someone who seemed so dignified to lose his cool in such a public setting. "Have you forgotten who I am?" "A snake?" this burger is really good. Sigh, I defini

tely did good by coming

here. "I mean you are slimy, aren't you? Any man who sells his own child for his own personal gain is a snake in my books!" "That's not true and you know it." "Really?" the chips are just as good, I think I'll order more. Maybe I'll grab

something for Squalosenkosi and Sphesihle, I know it will make them happy.

“So you’re slimy because you couldn’t accept that your son
wasn’t your son
but a daughter. And to punish said daughter you
—”

624

“This is why the world is ending!” he snaps u
napologetically, trembling hand
reaching out for a glass of water. “Confused souls who wander
the earth, wanting to change their genders! I won’t be surprised
if someone says they’re a zebra next, and force us to call them
that because it’s their right. Me

ntal

illness is a real problem, but... you’re lucky I still care for you.
Allow me to connect you with someone who will help you stop
this madness.” “Ha!” amusement tickles my insides –

incessant. “Haha! Oh daddy, oh daddy.” “Mabutfo—”

“And how did you find me? How did you find me to tell me about this bull

-crap

you’re feeding me?”

The glass he was holding lands with a harsh thud on the table, sounds like silent noise compared to the giant noises around us. A clacking of plates. Slosh

ed alcohol. Footsteps. Even the smell of food is so noisy. Ciniso’s anger is the loudest though... in all its silence. Tsk, tsk! “You’re on some billboard, and you think I wouldn’t recognize you through the disguises you’ve put on? All the makeup in the world wouldn’t change that you’re my little boy.” He’s doing this on purpose. I know he is. The problem is that I think it’s working, and I am really getting riled up.

Smacking the blissful ignorance out of him is so tempting, so very tempting. I just wou

ldn’t put it past him to have me arrested. This is the same man who

hurt me so badly once upon a time.

“I think I will leave now.” The food is amazing, but something bad will happen

if I entertain this cruel bastard a second longer.

“Go then! Do what you did back then, its in your nature to run away.” What the... is he serious!?

625

“Because you chose him over me!” I hiss, mindful of the many eyes in this place. “I left because you told me to –

with your actions. Your fucking bestfriend got away unscathed, while I was the one being bruised, whose spirit was being crushed and whose trust was being broken. He bruised me just for

you to do it too, and I will never ever forgive you for how badly you hurt me!”

He laughs, shaking his head, nose upturned in sup

eriority. “Forgive me?” the question is accompanied by a raise of his brows. “Forgive... forgive me? What

for exactly? For setting you straight. You expected me to be happy with your

little confessions about womanhood that you’ve never had? I was supposed to

cheer you on even though it was crystal clear that you were losing yourself. I

know your mother's death took a toll on you but I hadn't realized how much damage had truly been done." "Oh fuck you!" I spit out. The laughter hasn't died down. "Now you'r

e asking for sex from your own

father? Truly, you're hanging on the precipice of being irredeemable, Mabutfo.

I can help you, the only regret I have is not going after you when you ran away. My duty as a parent was to find you and help you through your iss

ues." "I can't... I can't take this." "I think I made a mistake by coming here." "This happening because it was supposed to happen. Trust me. You're here because you're supposed to be helped by me. This is what I plan to do, just give me a chance, Mabutfo."

That forsaken name! He keeps calling me this though he knows I do not appreciate it. It's not enough that I actually work hard on my makeup now, that I do look like a

woman now... what I've always been. It's still just the same to him, I'm a boy that he has to rescue. I think I am going to leave. To be honest, I don't know

what I was expecting but this is not it.

Karma truly is so fucking selective because he's supposed to be crying and

telling me how miserable life has been ever since he betrayed me. He was

626

supposed to apologize for hurting me and cry even harder when I told him to fuck himself with his fucking apology. He was supposed to be leading a very sad, very miserable life.

Yet here he is...

Superiority complex, snobbish attitude and a hero complex. He wants to save

me from myself because I don't know myself clearly. What

a load of bullshit! What a disappointing load of garbage from Mother Earth herself. This is a

man's world indeed because that man is the one who convinced Earth Mother

that men like this one do not deserve karma.

“Did you...” yes, I’ve gone back to him. I

told myself I was leaving and grabbed my bag, planning my exit but I have gone back. Asshole is unperturbed as ever,

blankly looking up at me. “Do you even regret your treatment of me? Did you ever feel anything when I left? That first night... you felt nothing at all?” He’s still looking at me, while I fidget with my bag. I hate this! The cracks in

my soul reveal the hidden insecurity, making me feel bare in front of this

man... vulnerable. Not a good thing. Not a good thing at all around him. My

grip on the sling of my bag is really tight.

I think he’s going to say yes. The way his eyes look emotional. “I felt anger that

you dared to leave. Regret? No way in hell. As your father, it was my duty to

put your back in line when you were straying.”

Fuck! My gut takes a really bad punch, it hurts. I fight through the lumps choking me.

“I see.” “And look how you turned out as soon as you left home.”

I am so fucking tired of him!

“And you’re still a dog, Ciniso!” the half

-eaten burger lands on his white shirt. The orange juice sinks into the skin of his bald head. People exclaim their

shock all around us but fuck them, fuck him. “You nasty piece of shit! I hope

you die a very painf

ul death.”

627

He laughs! The lunatic laughs and laughs and laughs.

That’s it... I am leaving. Head held high, I make my way out of the restaurant. This mall is always so fucking packed! Okay, I didn’t even manage to get

Sphehile some food. She loves it when we cater to her cravings. Lately its chocolate cake and hake. Is there a PicknPay here? I know she loves their hake too much. Which way to exit? I fucking hate malls. My hands are trembling, feet super unsteady as I push my way through this annoyin

g ass crowd. Okay, there's a Checkers and—

oof. Ow! Do people have

to wear heels? They've just stabbed my pinky toe. "Watch where you're going, goddammit!" no, this is not because of my father. "Sorry!" the voice is soft. "I was—Tema!"

Thatego.

I'll o

nly forgive him because he looks teary-eyed, and the apology sounded really sincere. He looks so beautiful, like usual, wearing simple jeans and a black t-shirt, he has on a matching bucket hat and YSL heels on. Minimal lipstick as well. Absolutely beautiful.

"The only reason I'm forgiving you is because I love you."

Apologetic grin widens, he rubs the back of his neck bashfully, and brings

attention to the glittering glow of his wedding ring. "What are you doing here?"

No, what is he doing here? He

's with his security personnel... well, it's just one man but still.

The man is

like a brick wall, rarely smiles

—

and rarely ever tags along when Thatego is going out. Sbanisezwe must have something to do with this... somehow.

628

“What are you doing here?” I answer his question with my own question. Where Sgalosenkosi would be mildly annoyed, Thatego simply waves me off and giggles heartily. “Shopping. There’s an orphanage we’re visiting on Sunday, me and my husband. He’s buying clothes in some part of this mall, and I was going to take care of the grocery.” “Wow! I didn’t know you guys were involved with orphanages as well.” “Private.” The beautiful man pretends to zip his lips, glossy eyes smiling joyously. He really is breakable glass to be handled with care. “This, we do private. No cameras or anything. We don’t make a big deal out of it.” “I never understood celebs who help people in front of cameras,” I

confess. "I think... I think others really do have good intentions. Sometimes it's to

attempt to positively encourage the public to give as

well." "Give our R10s when they have millions in their accounts!" An eye roll, Thatego bites his bottom lip to stifle his giggles. "I give up!" "You should." A sigh, and an absentminded habit to play with his wedding ring. "So what

were you doing here? I know you had a casting but that was in Midrand,

right?" "It's a long story involving a sperm donor." He doesn't ask me to, but it feels natural to fall in step with him and head to the Checkers store. We're both pushing large trolleys. "Sperm do

nors are the

worst." "I don't know if it gets worse than that man I just poured juice on at Piatto." "What!?" Large brown eyes consider me. "So naughty!" "He deserved it."

629

"My father waited until I was engaged to the millionaire boxer for him to pitch up. I don't regret cutting ties with him." "Try a

transphobic father who sides with your rapist,” I say. “Sheesh!”
Thatego shakes his head. “Are you—are you okay?” f

Not really, but I will be.

Seeing him was enough closure... now that I think about it.
Maybe it didn't happen the way I wanted but his... the way he is
a person, I cannot change

that. A horrible man is a horrible man. He will not be regretful
not because he

doesn'

t have a heart but because its vile and bitter. I hope my mother
chooses

better in her next life. As for me, I'd rather come back as a
stone than to have

that man in my life again.

“I'll be fine. The world may try but it will never break someone
like me.” “I'm relieved!” Thatego murmurs, grabbing too many
packets of braai packs –

the 5kgs. “They must grow tired of all the tin stuff people
always send them. Change is good. Anyway, it's okay to be weak
sometimes as well. I know you're

strong but do you ev

er allow yourself to break down?" "I will when I get home, I just know it. Then my boyfriend will cuddle me, and it will feel like all is right in the world." "Hmm." Pouty lips twitch playfully.

"Sphesihle as well." "She'll tell me to snap out of it." "The best of both worlds," he continues to tease me. "Yes, Thatego Ngcobo –

who would've thought?" "My husband. I should learn to trust him a lot sometimes." "I have no idea what he's talking about, I don't care."

630

Unrequited Desires : Fifty-one Sphesihle

Sqalosenkosi proposed.

I don't mean the ring sitting beautifully on my chest, but an actual proposal with a ring that I got just days after he asked me to marry him. Well, he didn't

go on one knee and all that

, but... he just reminded me about all those months

ago, when he said he had big plans for us, then he told me he was ready to see some of those plans through if I felt the same way.

I did, of course, my relationship felt like mine now. It wasn't being con

trolled by MaSibusisiwe, the decisions that take place in it are all mine, un-influenced

and certain. He didn't have a ring with him when we were discussing this, he

was scared of being turned down, but a lovely platinum ring sits on my finger

now. It's be

en close to a month.

My extended family has been contacted to begin the lobola negotiations, we're

hoping to get everything out of the way before I can give birth to the babies.

May's just around the corner, it feels like there's too little time to plan everything but we're all working together. I don't care for the White wedding,

Sqalosenkosi and I agreed.

Then there's Temasiko, I always kinda thought that she'd walk down the aisle

with him first but this is not the case clearly. We spoke, I wanted to gauge her feelings

—

it's important this communication thing when you're in a setup like ours, and I tolerate her very well lately so it was only fair. I don't know what

bread of a woman she is, but open-minded is what she is. She is open-minded and communicative and very accepting.

She wasn't really surprised when I told her the news, and she freaking hugged me! 'Ndlunkulu,' she calls me a lot lately.

I always try to find hints of jealousy or any insecurities but... nothing. She likes to say she understands

love better

than most people, and how it's different for everyone else. She does get jealous, like any normal person, but it doesn't control her.

And this wedding, she's more excited for it than I am! Imagine that –

having someone who genuinely cares for you and doesn't hide the mask of jealousy

631

with a happy smile because what you see is what you get with them. I don't like to get all sentimental but I see it all the time with her, and maybe... maybe I'm just as glad that it's her that I am sharing Sqaalosenkosi with. She's the

happy virus in our dynamic.

Right now though, her happy self doesn't rid me of my frustrated scowl as I look back at my reflection. I don't know what it is about the way I look today that's making me unsatisfied. Maybe it's how round

I look. Or it could be this

ridiculous outfit that Temasiko has made me put on. Yes, it's definitely the

outfit. White is not my color

—it really isn't. Not with the way I look at the moment. I resemble the Michelin Man. And my stupid nipples won't behave—

the peak things are showing so visibly in the bodysuit I am wearing. The white

thing has the words 'Quad Mommy' written across it in gold. It feels like that

brings attention to how big my boobs are even more. I release a sigh, having resigned myself to the fact that this pregnancy is out to

ruin my body and I can't do much about it. I have accepted defeat. Perhaps just

for today. I can always cry about it later but today I am giving up. I am wearing my natural hair a lot lately, and run my fingers through the curled fro, making

it fluffier. Now my hair brings me joy at least. It's one of the few things in my body that isn't betraying me. Heck, it's growing so much that it's extended to

other parts of my body. The sad part is that I can no longer shave my

own body hair because I can't

see anything and Sqalosenkosi had to do it two days ago

—

again. This has become routine to him, every other weekend we have sex and I reward him by having him shave off my pubic hairs. He loves it, I swear.

I've also been

to confined bedrest. My doctors have mutually decided to have me come to the hospital weekly now, and I was told to take it easy because the babies will be joining me soon. I went in for a checkup yesterday, and my pregnancy is without hiccup, the babies are growing right on track and my cervix is still holding strong. Temasiko has noted how bored I am to no longer be going to the office, and

she has decided to take me out today. It's okay because she called

Sqalosenkosi first and he confirmed with my doctors that it was still okay for

me to go out. We're going to the mall—

baby stuff shopping, according to her

and to also grab lunch together. I'm just not sure why Tema thought buying

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me a hideous bodysuit to wear in public would be a good idea.
And I'm not

sure why I even agreed to wearing it. My mind's a mess these
days though—

and she told me that yesterday I agreed to wearing the
tight white thing

—

though I don't remember —

so I have no choice.

“TEMASIKO, CAN YOU COME HELP PUT MY SHOES ON!?”

“SURE!” she shouts right back. I can hear her footsteps in the
hallway. “Sandals

or

—” she pauses, shaking her head as if she finds something funny.

“What is it?” I folds my arms on top of my large belly, gaze narrowed in on her.

“Where are your pants, sweetheart?”

“What do you mean where are my pants?” I raise my brow.

She sighs, clearly still so amused, and enters my room fully, placing her hands

on my shoulders as she guides me towards the mirror. “This is what I mean.”

Oh. Shit. Shit times infinity.

“I’ll just put them on.” I don’t mean to snap but my cheeks are warm, and the

tramp-

oline is giggling. Me, I can’t believe that I was obsessing over my appearance in front of the fucking mirror but failed to realize that I haven’t

put my pants on. Those ugly, stretchy black things that Tema told me are jeggings. Where are they?

“On your bed, Ndlunkulu.”

“I said that out loud?”

“Yup.” She is grinning like the idiot she is.

I shake my head, accepting the ugly pants from her “My private parts are going to sweat horribly in this hideous outfit.”

Tema has the decency to look a bit guilty at least. “The jeggings shouldn’t be so bad. The bodysuit —well, I couldn’t find a normal t-shirt like this bodysuit in

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your size. So I had to do with this one

—I think it'

s cute on you. You have to

step out in public in style.”

Rolling my eyes, I settle on the bed, allowing Tema to help me
put on my

sandals. “I don't want to step out anywhere. If I see one more
picture of myselfresembling a whale...” they always take pictur

es of me

—

this creepy family. I

waddle to give myself a final once over at the mirror. “I can't
even breathe

right. I also think I need to pee

—

fucking hell, I just did that twenty minutes
ago!”

“Go, I’ll wait in the living room.”

I reluctantly obey. A few minutes later and I am done. I grab my phone, keys

and my wallet. Bab’ Shange is driving us, he greets me with his cheerful smile, helping me into the backseat. Yes, I’m a walking watermelon that needs to be

helped every second of every hour, it sucks.

Temasiko’s music turns on, and movement takes place in there. I think these babies love the music, it’s not horrible but... this is not something I prefer to listen to. Worse, I’m subjected to the torture almost daily on my side. “Th

is isNCT127

—

Sticker.” I didn’t ask but she always feels the need to tell me these things. “Let me tell you that the best vocalists to come out of K

-pop are all

bred at SM. From SHINee to EXO to NCT, they’re all untouchable.” “I didn’t ask.” “And yet you love Baekhyun so much. Weren’t you listening to Bambi just last night?”

“My babies not me,” I snort, rubbing my nose. “Hmk!” she giggles. Whatever. I roll my eyes, letting my head rest against the window. I won’t let

her know that I really like Chen from all these singers of hers, because ballads are literally perfection

—

and Beautiful Goodbye is a masterpiece. Sometimes, when I’m bored at home, I look up these artists she listens so much to. Chen’s

my favourite, his voice is goosebumps inducing.

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“Are we stopping at Chris and Nqobizitha’s house first?” I spare Temasiko a glance. This route we’re taking, it leads to Nqobizitha’s house and we’re about ten minutes away from his house in fact. “Tema?”

“Yeah, I gotta get a few things from Chris.” She isn’t meeting my gaze.

I trap my lower lip in between my teeth, “Okay.” I nod my head, opening my handbag. There’s my chocolate stash in there, I offer Temasiko one for the sake of being polite

—

I am relieved when she declines.

“Remove your seatbelt,” she tells me once I have parked the car. There’s plenty of cars in their driveway today. What is going on?

“Stop it, stop it.” My attempts at dodging her offered hand are unsuccessful,

she finds my hand and grips, dragging me inside the house with her. Walking is a daunting task

—I can feel my heart starting to race. It feels like I’ve been running a bloody marathon. I am so unfit it’s not even funny. “Phew...” I

release a long breath.

“Hey come in,” Chris greets us. Wow! He looks un

believably gorgeous for a

person living with and taking care of five babies. He's carrying one of the twins right now, I still can't tell them apart.

"That ego's cooing over Simhlele inside." "Oh, and where are—"
"SURPRISE!"

I nearly jump out of my

skin, clutching Tema's arm, and shrinking into her. "What's going on?" there's chaos all around us.

"It's your baby shower, silly." Siyabonga rolls his eyes, hands in his pockets. "I don't like this shit. I just came here to say I hope you have a good one

, to

remind you that you're loved and wholly supported. I'm here for you anytime, but I can't be surrounded by so much flowers and pink! My gifts are wrapped in blue wrapping with cars on it. There's a pink one with flowers." "Hawu, Siyabonga." I don't w

ant to break down like a little bitch in front of

him, his embrace is so warm. "Ngyabonga."

“Anything for you, Muhleza.” “Only Sqalosenkosi calls me that.” “And me from now on. I have to...to go. You know how it is working in a

different province, I have to spend as much time with that demanding man

who thinks he’s my Master.” “He is your Master.” “Hmm, wasn’t told about this.”

I shake my head as he breaks into a laughing fit. We chat again for a few more

seconds before he’s leaving. He says goodb

ye to the others. Thatego skips happily over to me, Temasiko is holding one of the babies now,

looking in love as ever. I never fail to gawk at Thatego’s unrealistic beauty, how innocent he makes it. He’s carrying a beautiful headdress made of white

rose

s. “And here’s your crown...” he nearly stumbles as he stands on his

tiptoes.

“Careful, precious.” It’s Christophe’s mother. She balances a blushing Thatego as he ‘crowns’ me. And then he’s making me wear a midi

-tutu looking whitethingy.

“There you go. Perfect!” Thatego giggles, pleased with himself.

“My husband’s here by the way, I hope you don’t mind. I mean there’s barely females in this baby shower already so he shouldn’t make a difference, right?” Of course, it shouldn’t. Who doesn’t know that Sbanisezwe prefers to stick Thatego like glue? And vice versa. Only Thatego can actually control himself and Sbanisezwe can’t. He’s... impulsive. I wouldn’t be surprised if he, out of the blue, decided to join Thatego here. But I don’t mind at all.

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“Are we ready to begin?” Chris asks loud enough for everyone to hear. “Temasiko came up with this, just so you know, I have to agree that it was a brilliant idea and we planned it over two months.” “Wow! You guys are really effective.” “Obvious.” Chris smiles, pleased with himself. “Alright, people!” Tema’s loud

voice rings in the living room. “Can we have our guest of honor come occupy her throne, please?”

The guests cheer as I look at the mix of seriousness and amusement found in Tem

asiko’s eyes. Taking a breath, I waddle on to take center stage near the

fireplace. A content moan slips past, the chair they got me is so comfortable. My hands rest on my belly while Tema begins with the program. She welcomes everyone to the baby shower

—

and goes on to make a few silly

jokes before announcing that it’s game time. An icebreaker is the first on our list. Its... different. Fun. I can admit to having a great time with those I hold dear to my heart. It’s a pity that Qalokuhle is in

varsity, I kn

ow she would’ve loved to come. She’s going to complain and complain about being left out but she’s doing her first year in varsity and it’s

not all like high school, she likes to tell me. Her education comes first

—
above everything.

“This is nice,” Fuzelihle comes to join me, when it’s time for a breather. She’s

absolutely divine in her yellow dress and sandals. They blend in well with her

skin tone. “I’ve never been to a baby shower before.” “Oh...” I don’t know why I thought... with all her money and equal

ly wealthy

friends, you’d think that one of them has at least gotten pregnant. “That’s quite shocking.” “Not really. I’m not friends with a lot of old people, my peers are not rushing to have babies at the moment, they’re chasing their dreams.” Is she...

this sounds like shading of some sort. Maybe it’s not her intention, she continues sipping on her juice like it’s nothing –

and looks around. “Good for them, some of us are doing both. Multitasking isn’t for everyone, right?”

“Ha!” she giggles, laughs her ass off in expensive, in elegance. “That’s a different take on it, I like that. Next time, I’ll tell them that.” My eyes touch the back of my skull. “Where is your mother?” I ask curiously, they’re not getting along well lately. It’s that issue with Ja

bulani Mahlangu.

“She’s... I think she’s dating Ciniso Dlamini. Or they’re doing the nasty.”

The name rings a bell.

“Okay, and?” “I don’t like him. I’m not even sure how they met, his friend raped me and I—don’t trust him.”

Wow!

“Did you tell Sgalosenkosi or Sbanisezwe at least?” I’ve noticed how

Nqobizitha is blissfully protected by his brothers. He has newborn babies, I

don’t think they’d want to involve him in any mess. “I have to be sure. My relationship with my mother is already strained, I don’t want to make things worse. I owe her my life, she didn’t abandon me.” “Are you going to tell me more or—” “Let me find booze first. I need to get really drunk.” “I thought you were told you’re not allowed to touch alcohol anymore.” “My daddy’s in

Eshowe, Sphe. I'm a grown woman here."She's gone, a skip in her step.

Sqalosenkosi

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Sphe is less than three weeks away to giving birth. She's still staying in

Hyd Park while we take care of everything. Lobola negotiations were finalized

just last Saturday, and she's going to be my wife. She will be moving in after

the babies have been delivered. Temasiko too. With a relationship like the onewe have, everything is discussed beforehand, tables laid on the cardcompletely to avoid future problems.Both of them are moving in with me. Three days ago, we sat Liyana down toexplain the situation to her. She only took it well because of her unwavering

love for Sphesihle, but she's been getting close to Temasiko as well –

and

they're slowly picking up from

their previous positive. As for me, I am in Mbongolwane again, visiting the departed. Sbanisezwe told

me to do this, urged me especially get in touch with Sphesihle's mother because... he wouldn't tell me but MaSibusisiwe is in the picture as well. All I

know is that I was supposed to come here and speak from the heart.

I've brought flowers with me, was fortunate enough to be let in by one of the

boys who guard the house in the absence of Sphesihle and her siblings. This boy guiding me to the elderly woman's

grave. My feet are reluctant to take a

step closer but the boy leaving me forces courage.

"Mah," I begin, crouching in front of her grave, "how are you?"

No response, as expected.

"I am fine as well. I'm here because... because I want to let you know

now that your

family is in good hands, and that they're my family also.

Sphesihle. Qalokuhle.

Nhloso. Nzuzenhle. I know how hard it was for you, but I promise you that I will take care of them

—

and they're my family. Please don't worry about anything, I...

your home will never collapse. It will forever remain

standing. Please bless our impending marriage, I will do my best

to ensure that her tears are always joyful. Bless our union and

our children. Please do not forsake her, and always be her

guiding light.

”

Nothing. The wind breezes against my skin gently.

“I also ask for forgiveness. For myself. For my biological father.

And my biological mother. For my family. I'm sorry that she fell

in love with me, and

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that I have fallen in love with her too. Please

accept my apologies.” Sbanisezwesaid I had to do this, and though I question his sanity sometimes, I...understood him here. “I’ll take care of all of them, Mah. Please bless us, I amasking because you’re so important in our lives. Accept and bless our un

ion, I

humbly ask of you.”

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TWO YEARS LATERUnrequited Desires :

EpilogueSqalosenkosiThere is chaos all around me

—

the sound of something crashing, a dozen

footsteps, and a million voices. I suppose it’s to be expected, considering I am

getting married to Temasiko. Her and chaos are usually synonymous, never

mind that she’s only one person, no immediate or extended family members.

Her father, Ciniso, died two years ago

—

a heart attack. The woman was never really pleased about the manner in which

he died, she'd always thought that cockroaches would suffocate him until he couldn't breathe. I'm not there though, I'm on this point of chaos. There are tiny footsteps

coming in the direction of my suite, rushing, and the door opens a second later. Lethukuthula is leading her fellow troopers, the boys waddling behind her like penguins, even Mhlanganisi is keeping up

—

he was the last one to start walking, long after his siblings, at eighteen months.

"Baba!" this is Lethukuthula's favourite word —

this is why Sphehile calls her

'Kayise'. "Up!" They don't look messy at least, they're already dressed in their wedding

outfits

—

beautiful. I juggle to pick all of them up at the same time, but manage, though this will no longer work in the near future

–

at twenty-two months,

they're getting heavier and heavier. "Nishoda ngani, zinkanyezi zami?" The door opens before one of them can say anything, it wouldn't have been

much anyway. Most of their words consist of counting up to five; demands of milk, juice and fruits; they greet unnecessarily and bid farewells spontaneously; and they love the pet dog that Sphehile insisted we get them. The same Sphehile who enters my room, beguilingly beautiful, in her black

dress. She's cut and bleached her hair, Temasiko encouraged her to. "Hey." She smiles, grabbing Mnotho –

he and Mhlanganisi are the mommy's

boys. Lethukuthula and Lethokuhle are more independent, maybe Lethokuhle than all the others

–

I'm not sure if you can tell the personalities of a bunch of

twenty-two month olds, but h

e is an introvert compared to his brothers. “Why

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are you not wearing your tie? You know how dramatic Temasiko is, she’ll complain about you stealing her shine. The bride’s supposed to be fashionably late, not the groom.”

I chuckle, leaning down to press

my lips on hers in a soft kiss. “I love you, MaGcwensa.” Her smile is against my lips –

delicate. “You weren’t late when I married you.” “Because I’m not dramatic, duh!”

Ah, this is true. I humour her with genuine laughter, placing the boys back down.

“Let me get ready then.”

She nods her head, walking out of the room with our little squad following her

–

moths drawn to a flame. Sphehile has proved herself to be very capable and

driven over the last two years, I don't know how she managed to juggle f

our

babies, her schooling and work but she's managed. She even got her driver's license six months ago, and she's a go

-getter. I fix my tie, and don my blazer, then walk out to silence in the hotel suite. This is what I mean when I say Sphehile works wo

nders. She's in the living room,

three of out of four are sleeping. Montho is suckling her breast, he and

Mhlanganisi are the only ones who still breastfeed. "Sbani called to say he's on his way." "Okay, that's good." My hands rub on my pants, I sit besi

de her on the couch

—

mindful of the three babies in between us. "How are you—

how are you

feeling?” “Really?” she giggles, running her hand down Lethokuhle’s round cheek. “Uyamangaza kodwa, I should be asking you that.” “I’m fine... happy.” “I’m fine too... happy.” Her giggles grow louder at the roll of my eyes, she doesn’t let up. Truth reveals itself in her eyes, and the mellifluous notes of her laughter, truly she’s happy. “I can tell.”

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“Good.” She updates me about work, it’s good to work for Chris but... her and

Temasiko have a surprise for me later on

—

after the wedding. Then she moves

on to Liyana, she wants to stay with Khensani for the June holidays, but I don’t

think I can allow it. Not that

I don’t trust Khensani, she’s shown great improvement these past two years, her depression is ever present but she’s

learned to live her life despite it. She has happy days, a lot of them, most of the time they revolve around Liyana. Their relationship strengthens by the day.

And yet with all this... I am still skeptical to leave my daughter in her mother's care. "Maybe next year." "No, this year."

Sphesihle asserts softly. "This woman leaves alone, she must have lonely days in her apartment. Let her and

HER daughter bond. We're not

going to sweep their trauma under the carpet but at the same time, we have to

try and I don't know if move is the right word, but we must try to... live despite past traumas. She feels alive when she's with her daughter, you're

not

going to deny both of them this opportunity." "Sphesihle—" "Thank you! I love it when you see things my way." Her tone is firm, brokers

no room for argument, and she hands me Lethokuhle at the sound of knocking

on the front door. "That must be Nkanyezi's father." Right.

Nkanyezi's father. He and Thatego will be parents to

Isinathi Phawulothando Ngcobo in July. They're expecting

a baby boy through their surrogate, and it's all they talk about. Thatego is excited, he loves babies, he

cried when their first surrogate miscarried their baby. He cried for months, Sbanisezwe was indifferent; there are times where it feels like he has no heart at all. He only spoke about the deceased child once, saying he missed the little boy, and then never again.

"Bafo!" his smile is bright and empty. "Ready to do this again?" "Obviously. How's my bride?"

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"Dramatic. She took Thateho away from me very early in the morning because she wanted her makeup done." "It's her special day." "Took you long enough." He knows it would've happened sooner, but Temasiko was and is still busy building her career. Most of the time, she's travelling to different parts of the world for her modeling gigs. "UMhlanganisiwezizwe," he sings softly as he nears my son, "uphupha ngani namhlanje?"

The little one opens his eyes, and his lips stretch into a smile. Sbanisezwe

grabs him, embracing, and searches his eyes. They... they share a special bond.

I mean I know Sbani loves all my children, but his connection with Mhlanganisi is deeper

—

they're alike and different. Mhlanganisi is a naughty introvert sometimes, there are days where he talks a lot. His favourite word is

'ngcengce.' He is a mommy's boy through and through.

Sbanisezwe is carrying Lethokuhle and Mhlanganisi. Sphehile has Mnotho, he

wasn't done breastfeeding and clings to her even in the car. I have Lethukuthula in my arms, and she's babbling about something that's a mixture of numbers and cartoons. She truly is daddy's daughter.

The wedding is in Soweto, taking place at the church that Thatego forces

Sbanisezwe to go to. We're there. Everyone has taken their places, and I have my brothers with me for support. Temasiko doesn't have bridesmaids, she doesn't make a lot of friends. But Sphehile is here as a maid of honour. Her

duties were not performed to the tee though, she's a mother to four children...five actually. Liyana is practically her daughter. They're really close. There's this song... a song that Thatego once played for Tem

asiko. He told her

he would've walked down the aisle to it had he and Sbanisezwe not eloped

while in Japan. He said it was his second choice after the first one that they

played as soon as they had a 'westernized wedding' in Japan. Aurora's Exist

For Love.

This is the song that's playing as Temasiko walks down the aisle, with Sphehile in place of her father. It was their idea, the giving over thing. Two years ago, Temasiko had done the exact same thing for Sphehile. Because only the three of us know how this

works, and we don't need permission from any other person but ourselves to

do this. Unconventional as it is, it works. It had then. It does now. They both look beautiful. Sphesihle in her black. Temasiko in her white. She

kisses Sphesihle's cheek, and murmurs a few words that I can't hear before

the pastor tells us that we should begin. There are no personal vows, we both

agreed, because they're personal and we live them daily.

But my hands are

clammy as I repeat every word the pastor says, my heart is filled with great

happiness and... there's a contentment that I never thought I'd have.

A kiss seals our love, just as the crowd erupts around us. My thoughts are only on Tema

—

her scent and everything about her that intoxicates me.

Wetness muddges my

cheeks, she's crying. She cries a lot lately, it's the hormone shotsthat turn her emotional. Sometimes she's moody for no reason, sometimeshe'll cry because she's in Rio De Janeiro and she misses our family.Sometimes she'll cry over pizza toppings or

giggle maniacally when watching

horror movies. It's a rollercoaster of emotion, but I've enjoyed and still enjoy

experiencing every moment with her.

She's happier. Tiny things make her happy. When she began shedding her

body hair, she sent me a picture of it with many crying faces.

When herbreasts feel tender, she cries and smiles at the same time. Her face finallylooking how she wants makes her happy.

Some changes are small, some arebig and everything is a process

—

but all of it makes her very happy.

In the limo, after we've escaped the crowd to drive to our reception venue, shegets on my lap and caresses my beard.

She's teary

-eyed again, her bottom lip

trapped between her teeth, a lot on her mind clearly.

“Baby.” “I’m thirty

-

five years old.” I r

emind her with a lighthearted frown on my face.

“Not a baby.” “Yeah, yeah!” she sniffle

-

giggles. “But you’re still my baby, Mr. Ngcobo.” A playful exhale

departs my lips. “Whatever you say Mrs. Ngcobo.” “Mrs.

Ngcobo the second.” Laughter jumps to her

throat. “Permission to say

something to you, my brand-

new hubby.”

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“Anything.” “I love you.” Her eyes search mine, brows twitching

with the movement of emotion found in brown pupils. “Our

vows, the personal ones, I just want to

say I love you and am so thankful for you. I love who we are together and how we make sense to us. Thank you for supporting me and loving me. Thank you for being so consistent in your kindness and thoughtfulness, not just for me but for... everyone. I love you so much for leading i

n your own place, and for

allowing me and Sphehile to lead in ours... not that we need your permission but you get what I mean." "I do." "You're a good man, Sgalosenkosi. Our babies are so lucky to have you in their

loves, they will know how to treat their partners and how to be treated in return. You amaze me so much with your consistency. I love that the most about you. So thank you! Anyo

ne in the world and I'd still marry you and choose the life we have because look at us... all three of us. We're amazing!" "We are." A smile pulls at my lips. "Okay. Let's hear it, your vows for me." "I love you," I say. "Fair enough!" she giggles, and buries her face in my neck. "Taylor Swift

definitely had you in my mind when she wrote all her songs about perfect men. But Peace, she definitely had you in mind for Peace. I hope you have it

with me." "I do."

Her smile touches my neck. She holds me tight, and only lets go when we reach our destination. The party's already begun without us, Sbanisezwe authorized it. We were taking too long apparently, and the children have to leave soon so that adults can really indulge. The same song plays for our first dance, but the babies interrupt us by wanting to share in the moment. Liyana too. She's grown close to Temasiko all over again.

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I allow them to do their thing, and dance with Sphesihle for a while. Then I let her go because Nhloso wants a moment with his sister. Finding a quiet corner, my gaze spreads over the spacious hall. From Temasiko with Liyana to Sphesihle with Nhloso. From Nqobizitha dancing with Chris to Sbanisezwe dancing with Thatego and Nkanyezi. Nhlakanipho is watching in a quiet corner, just like me, but his eyes are trained on Siyabonga and their three year old son. They were fostering

him, and they fell in love. They have a little girl too, just three weeks old

—

she's not here though.

Our eyes clash, Nhlakanipho and I, as Siyabonga takes the baby to him before

coming to join me. "I'm so happy for you!" he hugs me. "Ngyabonga, Shandu

-

Ngubane." He laughs, all genuine joy. "You, more than anyone else, deserve to be happy."

Maybe.

"How are you holding

up with Milisuthando?" "She's perfect!" he gushes. "Just like Mnelisi. I proved Nhlakanipho wrong, he didn't think we'd make amazing parents but... look at us now!" "Yes, their children are named after Nhlakanipho's siblings." "I am happy for you, Siyabonga." "I know you are."

He leaves, and then I go back to my staring. Every family member of mine has

found happiness, the ones who matter at least. Maybe not...

Fuze

lihle is

dancing with some white boy she invited, he's just a friend she told me but I know better. She's only 25 though, she has plenty of time to fall in love.

My wives

—

the word feel foreign but so right

—

come at me, conniving beamson their faces. A kiss on one cheek and another one on the other. Now I know

they're planning something, they always go on and on about how such kisses are corny... unless they're teaming up and want something. "How much?" I

ask.

“Damn it!” Temasiko snipes. “Told you he

knew,” Sphehlehle says. “Hubby, listen here,” Temasiko again, she smiles brightly like the sun, “as soon

as our honeymoon concludes, expect an e-mail from me and Sphe, attached to

it will be our business proposal. Set up a meeting for us and we’ll blow your mind away... not in the way you’re thinking though.” They’re serious, the looks on their faces. “Well I mean it would be in that way for me but you know how your

Ndlunkulu is, everything must be done professionally. We have to labour honestly so that we can be proud when we begin this business. She thinks people were put on earth to suffer, this is why she’ll be doing all the labour here while I shake my ass for you in Thailand.” “Mxm.” “No problem,” I say. “What type of business?” “Fashion, what else?” “Good for them, this is a common interest they share. “I’ll be happy to assist.”

They grin widely again, and high-five each other, then... those kisses again. My heart jumps in contentment, peace.

Siyabonga’s eyes clash with mine from a distance, briefly, they turn back to Nhlakanipho. It looks like they’re bidding their son farewell.

There’s no... longing. I’ve come far from who I was back

then. Maybe, maybe Unrequited Desires are not the worst sometimes. Maybe they exist to lead us to a greater love, far deeper and meaningful.

“This is why I love you,” Temasiko giggles, she was singing as well, “oh, this is why I love you. Because you love me.” “Don’t look at me, I don’t love you.” Sphehile quips, rolling her eyes.

.....**The End**.....

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