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Zanothando by Thobile Ntuli

Chapter 1

She sat down on the chair next to the Royal seat. . The elders of the council were all in the council room . They decided to call the meeting there. She was eager to know why she was summoned in the early hours of the morning. What could be so important that they didn't even had to wait until later.

Nkomo : Siyabonga Nkosazana ngetiye (Thank you for the tea Princess)

She nodded while looking down . She might be a princess but she is a respectful person with a gentle personality ..

Mtshali : You must be wondering why we called you here . The Prince asked us to come so that we can talk to you ngobudala bethu. (As elders)

Dlamini : Makoti we are fully aware of your condition. We know that you are barren and therefore can't have children .

Me : I'm not barren. My womb was removed.

Mtshali : However this kingdom needs a Prince. You are to become a Queen in a few days , and Ntsizwa a King.

Nkomo : You will rule this kingdom but when your time is up , your children need to step up on the throne

Mtshali : Now there comes our problem Princess , you can't bear children .

Dlamini : After giving this a lot of thought we asked the Prince to take another wife after his Veneration next week

Mtshali : He asked us to talk to you for your blessings .

They kept quiet as a sign that they were waiting for her response..

She looked at them one by one while thinking about what she should say to them ,she didn't want to come off as disrespectful.

Her : I'll think about it and ask my husband to get back to you with an answer .

Nkomo : Thank you Princess

Mtshali : Ucabange kahle . (Think constructively)

They went out and she got up from her chair and pushed it under the table furiously .She won't allow another woman in her house and that was final..

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She walked inside the house and found her husband drinking tea

Her : Why did you have to disrespect me like this ? You should've talked to me about this first

Ntsizwa : I wanted the elders to be the ones doing that

Her : Why ? Aren't you man enough to fight your own battle ?

Ntsizwa : So that you could understand it's a matter of preserving the customs of our culture

Her : Despite your promise to me ? You promised that you'd never take other wives.

Ntsizwa : I had no choice. They are the ones who came with the idea and I told them to talk to you

Her : So will you do it

Ntsizwa : Yes ...

Her :And my emotions don't matter ?

Ntsizwa : You are the only person who has my heart , I'll only marry her because it is what's expected of me. She knows it too

Her : She knows ? Usekhona kanti

Ntsizwa : He was chosen by my uncles, I haven't met her yet

Her : Please don't do this . You promised that it'll only be you And I in this marriage . No third parties

Ntsizwa : It's still like that

Her : You are making her your wife. You have to sleep with her so that she gives you children and you are telling me that you won't fall for her

Ntsizwa : My heart only beats for you

Her : You are selfish. You and the council elders . You put me in this position knowing that I can't say no

Ntsizwa: We aren't forcing you to agree with this . I am just asking that you become considerate , if we don't have children the kingdom will be ruled by a commoner when I die . Surely that's not what you want .

She looked at him with teary eyes. She couldn't believe he was doing that to her. Her worst nightmare has been made to come to life .

She promised herself that she would never live like her mother in a polygamous marriage. Ntsizwa promised her that he will never do that to her but that was before she got diagnosed with cancer and now the fact that she don't have a womb anymore reverses his promise to her.

[4 years earlier]

(KWAKHENI VILLAGE- PALACE)

The guards ushered Zano in her father's royal house. It was her first time being here , in nineteen years of her life she haven't been in her father's personal space.

His right hand man notified him that I

She was here to see him .

Him : Qwabe your daughter is here for you

Him : Bring her forth

She stepped inside and knelt down next to his toes.

Him : Who are you ?

Her: I'm Zanothando , daughter of Queen Nokwandisa-Mholikazi.

Him : Are you the third born ?

Her: I'm the last born

Her father didn't know her . For nineteen years living right under his nose but he still didn't know and acknowledge her as his daughter . She wasn't the only one , every children of his born after his seven sons he don't know them. He knows that there are thirteen of them but he forgot about his other five because his focus was on the heirs and his people , he never had time for them . The daughters weren't equally loved like the sons. She had no problem with him not spending time with them while growing up because the palace was huge and had many children to play with but as she grew older she realised that she needed him.

She wanted him to acknowledge her and even if they bumped into each other outside , he'd know that she is his daughter.

Him : Oh Zesuliwe is the third one . How can I help you ?

Her : I wanted to talk to you about something .

Him : Couldn't you talk to your mother about it then she'd pass the message

Her: Yeah you are right , sorry for wasting your time.

She had already talked to her mother and she wanted to talk to him too as her father . That day she went to tell him that a man from the neighbouring village saw a dime in her and he wanted to do things right but with the dismissal she got , she decided not to tell him.

Him : Are you sure that you aren't one of the maids ?

He didn't know her for real and he doubted her identity. The reason for him not even recalling who she was

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was because she was born on the same year and month with two of his other sons from her mother's sister wives . The sons were mostly important to him so she doubts that he was there for her even when she was a baby. Growing up she never bothered him a lot , even when his other kids were begging for

umemulo she wasn't part of that. She had always stood at the back and she was more comfortable there .

Her: it's up to you to know it. Any father would've known that I'm his daughter the minute I walked through the door. So if you doubt me it's fine

She left the royal house after saying that . Her heart broke..

She was sure that he had seen her around with the other kids and when he went to her mother's house he would catch a glimpse of her. Even after growing up , she knew that any person who last saw her in her childhood years would recognise her but her father failed to .

Her mother named her Zanothando because she had hope that she will revive the love they shared with her dad but it seemed like her birth brought the opposite . A year after she was born her father took his last wife , Bakhile who was twenty years younger than her mother. Being in a polygamy marriage broke her mother.

She came from the city to marry her father because he promised her the earth and the heavens along with the angels. Only for him to take other wives on her watch...

" It all started with a second wife " she used to say. After the second wife her mother thought there won't be another one . She was ready to accept the homewrecker as her sister wife but didn't have an idea that accepting her will bring three other wives afterwards. She lost herself when the last one was introduced..

She was Lindo's age , her mother's son who had passed on way before Zano was born. Her dad as old as he was went for a woman who was young enough to be his own daughter.

The wives had thirteen children with her father. Her mom having four , the second wife having six , the third one having two and the fourth one having one. The last one had no children at that time because she was a beauty queen and the most favourite. Her mom's place as the first wife wasn't known in that palace anymore. Except that the people still acknowledged her as Queen. Zano was ecstatic when Ntsizwa proposed to her because finally she was going to be out of that place , no one acknowledged her presence either way.

She could see the pain and embarrassment on her mom's face when she told her that the king didn't even know that she is his child . She pitied her and at the same time embarrassed of her husband. Zano too was embarrassed because all these years she pointed him out as her father to people but he never knew she even existed. Her mom held her very close as she wailed on her chest..

Ma : I'll talk to your father Zano

She nodded. She knew that he'll talk to him , surely but it wouldn't fix the damage done. The love she had for him was rearranged ..

The royal intercom buzzed then the king spoke.

" Queen Mholikazi please charge to the kings royal house"

Her mom wiped her tear...

Ma : I'll go and fix this okay ? You and Nsizwa will get married.

—

Orator : Hail to the queen Mholikazi Qwabe of the Kwakheni village . Our heads bow on your feet , we praise you as the first lady of the kingdom.

Her mom swayed her hips and made her way inside her wings. The guards bowed and so did everyone then she sat down..

Despite her father taking as many wives as he could , he kept one promise he made to her mother. That no one will rule the village as queen except her , the other ladies were just wives and mere queens her mother was the ruling queen , the most important. Funny thing is that she was born by that woman but she was close to a commoner in the King's eyes..

Queen : Thank you . I'm glad that the royal family has gathered here today as I come with great news .

She looked at her direction and smiled

Queen : One of the princesses is going to get married after her memulo ceremony

Everyone ululated and whistled .

Queen : Zanothando will have her memulo done soon and the negotiations will start. This is news worth celebrating.

A numerous phrases of "congratulations" and "we are happy for you" filled the room and Zano smiled happily and with gratitude.

Queen : Thank you , I'll come back with more details later this week.

She walked over to her and sat at her feet

Her : Did you talk to him

Queen : I will . He won't have a reason to not give you his blessings , Ntsizwa is royalty

Her : I know.

Queen : You've grown now and I commend you taking this step. It's not an easy journey but if you start getting unhappy , there's no shame at walking away.

She smiled and bowed shortly then stood up to leave

****two****

It was Nokwandisa's turn to sleep with their husband that night. It has been over years since Nkosi became polygamous and the other wives had gotten used to the routine.

Nokwandisa's heart still ached that she had to share his man and sleep alone for four days . He literally slept in her wing once a week.

Nokwandisa massaged the side of her neck softly as Nkosi sat on the edge of the bed undressing. This was the perfect time for her to address Zano's situation .

Nokwandisa : Baba.

Nkosi : Ndlovukazi yami. (My queen)

Nokwandisa : Our daughter , Zanothando wants to get married. We will do her memulo this weekend and the boy's parents will meet us before the negotiations.

Nkosi : Zanothando is the unmarried twin ?

She sighed and stripped off the silk gown.

Nokwandisa : That's Nompilo baba. You remember that you and I have four children right ? Zesuliwe married off and Ntwenhle too , the other twin. Nompilo and Zanothando aren't married. Zano is the last born...

She explained politely although it didn't make sense to her that her husband could mix up the children he fathered , his own flesh and blood.

Nkosi : Oh how old is she again ?

Nokwandisa : She is nineteen soon to turn twenty.

Nkosi : She is young , she should be going to school.

Me : I also married at nineteen, it's not a horrible idea.

Nkosi : You married at nineteen now did it work ?

She shook her head.

Nkosi : Who is this boy who wants to marry her ? Is he even royalty , I don't want to marry my daughter off to a commoner.

Nokwandisa : She told me that she is a Prince from Hlali...

Nkosi : A Ndlovu ?

Nokwandisa : Yes that's what she said.

She looked confused by her husband's sudden change of tone.

Nokwandisa : Everything okay baba ?

Nkosi : There's no way my daughter is marrying that family Sthandwa Sami . I won't allow it.

Nokwandisa : But they are in love baba. You not giving her your blessings will break her heart.

Nkosi : So what ? Her heart will break more if we let her marry that family. This boy doesn't love her , he is using her.

Nokwandisa : What aren't you telling me baba ? Is there any history or bad blood between your kingdom and theirs ?

Nkosi : Baby that family and ours are sworn enemies. If I give them my daughter then I'd be throwing her to a pack of wolves.

Nokwandisa sighed. Her daughter's happiness meant a lot to her and she knew that getting married was what would make her happy but at the same time she didn't want to step on her husband's toes.

Nokwandisa : So what do I tell her ?

Nkosi : I don't know Mholi you're the mother. If only you had bore sons for me none of this would be happening. Boy children are obedient and they'd do anything to protect their legacy and kingdomship.

Nokwandisa : So all of this is my fault now Nkosi ?

Nkosi : I was just saying.

Nokwandisa : What happened to you over these years ? I miss my husband...

Nkosi : I'm right here aren't I ?

Nokwandisa : I mean the old you. Not the arrogant polygamist of a king in you .

Nkosi : Don't start with me Mholi.

Nokwandisa : I know the Nkosi I fell in love with wouldn't marry multiple wives , he would know his children and he wouldn't even mind who one of his daughters marries. But you ? I don't know who you are or what you are but you're nothing like the man I know.

Nkosi : You know what ? I'm sleeping at MaCele's tonight. I can't stand all this whining.

Nokwandisa : Yeah whatever.

She shifted for him to move then got in bed and rolled herself in a comfortable position . She enjoyed her own peace more than her husband's company because it suffocated her.

...

Ntsizwa put his hand over his forehead and squinted his eyes as he watched the love of his life walk towards him.

Zanothando got to him and a smile flashed across his face.

Ntsizwa : Dudlu ntombazane madolo kanyoko angithuki wena ngithuka uthando .

Zano laughed and stood on her toes as he hugged her.

Ntsizwa : Hayiboh wena wamuhle kushona ilanga MaQwabe. (Why do you look so beautiful at sunset MaQwabe)

Zano giggled and ran her hands on her thick afro.

Zano : Sawubona Sthandwa Sami. (Hi my love)

Ntsizwa : I've missed you.

Zano : You haven't seen me for only a week.

Ntsizwa : That's a long period nje baby.

He folded his trousers and sat on the river bank with his feet in the running water. Zano took off her slippers and did the same.

Zano : Have you talked to your parents yet ? I'm not winning with my dad on my side.

Ntsizwa : My parents have nothing against your family but it seems like your father and your nation doesn't want to let go of the grudge they have against mine.

Zano : Do you know what happened ?

Ntsizwa : It is bad blood between our forefathers

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it is deeper than we both have an idea of.

Zano : I do want to marry you.

Ntsizwa : But without your father's blessings it's impossible. We are royalty , we have to do everything by the book.

Zano : I love you Ntsizwa but things might not work out for us. My dad is hardheaded , I know him.

Ntsizwa : Let's go to the city like we had planned and get our degrees then marry off at home affairs .

Zano : Weren't you talking about doing everything accordingly not so long ago ?

Ntsizwa : Your happiness matters to me more than anything else and if marrying you on paper only is what will make you happy then so be it.

Zano : I'll attempt my dad one more time and if I can't crack him , we're leaving.

Ntsizwa : Ngempela ? (Really ?)

Zano : Ehhe (Yes.)

Ntsizwa : Awu ngadla Mina kababa. Ngadla mina mfo ka Boyabenyathi.

Zano laughed and rolled her eyes. Ntsizwa stood up and cupped her in his arms then spun her around while she was giggling .

...

King Nkosinesihe Qwabe nodded to the royal guards and they positioned themselves at the door. He walked in Nokwandisa's wing and walked down the passage towards Zano's room.

He knocked once and pushed the door open. Zano was sitting on bed with one of her medicine textbook in her hand while others were scattered on the bed.

Nkosi : MaQwabe.

Zano looked up and shut her eyes for a moment then drew the strength to respond to his majesty.

She made a slight bow and placed the textbook away closed.

Zano : Bayede (Hail..)

Nkosi : We need to talk.

She nodded. Nkosi leaned over with his royal stick and fixed his shoulder piece.

Nkosi : Do you love yourself ?

Zano : Yes.

Who doesn't love themselves ?

Nkosi : Then you also love this nation because the nation is you and if that's the case then you won't betray it and marry the enemy.

Zano : He isn't my enemy.

Nkosi : He is the enemy of this nation

Zano : Well I'm not a nation and I love him.

Nkosi : You aren't going to go against my word girly.

Zano : You don't even care , stop this pretense. This has nothing to do with me and everything to do with your ego and your kingdom.

Nkosi : You will not raise your voice at me Nompilo.

Zano : It's Zano. You don't even know me , that I exist and my presence too. If you wont accept the dowry and actually hand me over to the Ndlovus , I'll be forced to elope.

Nkosi : Don't patronize me.

Zano : Try me.

Nkosi puckered his lips and stared at her bold daughter. He wouldn't want her to marry someone on paper only , she is royalty.

Nkosi : If I allow this marriage then just know that you will also be considered as the enemy and I'll write you off my life

Zano : Fine!

Nkosi : You're willing to cut off all ties with us for a boy ? A boy that'll hurt you ?

Zano : Yes and its my life so my choices , they don't have to make sense to you or anyone.

Nkosi : Tell him to set a date with his uncles , it's a wedding I guess.

He then turned and walked out with his stick hitting the floor. Zano screamed and jumped out of bed making a brief victory dance before taking out her phone to notify Ntsizwa about the news.

****three****

MaCele sneered behind Nokwandisa as she walked passed her. Zano noticed and gave her a death scare that made her shy away.

Nokwandisa sat down and pulled the teapot up pouring a cup of chamomile tea inside her favourite cup.

Zano : How do you cope with these two ?

Nokwandisa : Who ?

Zano : MaCele and that Barbie doll. They are so rude and self centered. The others are better.

Nokwandisa : I pay no attention to them , as long as they don't shit on my face.

Zano : Mama why did you allow this polygamy mumbo jumbo ?

Nokwandisa : My baby , it all started with a second wife. The nation needed an heir and I couldn't give your father one since I had the girl twins at that time. He took MaCele as the second wife and unfortunately she also had a girl child. I then had Zosuliwe but the following year your father took another wife .

We fell pregnant the same year and she gave him a son and I gave him you.

Zano : That's why he doesn't love me. His all attention was on his son.

Nokwandisa : Don't talk like that.

Zano : It's not a secret ma. I actually can't wait to get married and move out of here. This place is so depressing yerre.

Nokwandisa : I hope he treats you well. Men tend to give you a fake impression of who they are and turn on you in the long run.

Zano : I'd die if Ntsizwa betrays me in any way , I love him.

Nokwandisa : Love . It is a dangerous game baby.

Zano : I know.

Nokwandisa : You know if I hadn't made mistakes in the past I'd be happy somewhere else not be in a polygamous marriage , sharing a man with a girl my son's age.

Zano : That barbie doll annoys me. How do you marry someone old enough to be your father.

Nokwandisa : It's what it is . She is in this for money , nothing more.

Zano : I'd kill anyone coming near Ntsizwa and I.

Nokwandisa : I used to have that mentality too. When it happens they hide behind culture and it doesn't make matters easier that you are in love.

Zano : No woman wishes to be second best or even fifth best. Polygamy is shit.

Nokwandisa laughed with a bitter heart and lifted her cup.

Nokwandisa : Ungathi umdala ungakaboni.

...

The people ululated loudly as Nkosi moved slowly to hand over Zano to his new family , her in laws. He was against this but since his daughter made her choice then he was going to throw her right inside the lion's den.

Nkosi : This is goodbye , I guess.

Zano : It doesn't have to be like this.

Nkosi : You've made your choice . To me you're dead and buried

Zano looked at her father shamefully and gulped in embarrassment. It was so easy for him to write her off. It made her question if he was really her father.

Zano : Goodbye then.

She smiled as Ntsizwa received her. She bowed a little with the beaded accessory covered her forehead and part of her eyebrows and eyes. Ululation soothed her and the smiles she received from her in laws made her feel welcomed and she knew right there and then that she had made the right decision. She might have lost a father but she couldn't care less because she never felt loved anyways.

...

Nikita had called a family meeting because she wanted to tell her husband and kids the news she had learnt months ago.

Samuel was on his way home from a business trip and Vanessa was helping her mother prepare lunch. Phawu parked his car in the garage and paraded in the house while dangling his keys and shaking his head rhythmically jamming to a song he was lowly singing.

He entered the house and Vanessa quickly rushed to him , embracing him. He giggled softly and kissed his younger sister's forehead.

Vanessa : Hallo jy (Hey you)

Phawu : Hallo skat . (Hello honey)

His mother smiled admirably and wiped her hands on her apron as his son walked to her and gave her a kiss on her cheek while she patted his back.

Phawu : Sthandwa Sami. (My love)

Nikita : Hi baby .

Phawu : Where is the old man ?

Nikita : He will be here just now

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you can wait for him in his study.

Vanessa : Or you can help us with peeling and the works.

Phawu laughed as he placed his keys and wallet on the counter.

Phawu : Not happening my love.

He walked towards his dad's study and pulled open the wooden brown door open then closed it behind him. He poured himself a glass of whiskey and sat on his dad's chair like he owned it. He noticed the maroon box that his dad had always kept in the study on top of the desk today. He usually kept it on top of the stand but today it was very close. Phawu got tempted to open it but he remembered how much he had to respect his father's belongings.

He leaned back and sipped the strong throat-burning drink on his hand. The door opened and his mother peeped in. She noticed the box on the desk and her face grew with worry.

Nikita : Please come to the kitchen , I need an opinion on this new sauce I've tried.

Phawu : Mom you have Vanessa.

Nikita : You know that Vanessa's taste buds are weird. Just come Phawu man...

He smiled and stood up then fixed his blazer. He walked towards the door but accidentally bumped into the box on the corner of the box. The box tumbled down and all the contents scattered to the floor. Nikita quickly rushed to him and held his shoulder as he squatted on the floor picking up the photos.

Nikita : Don't worry baby I'll pick them up.

Phawu : No mom I've got this.

He packed the photos together and placed it back on the box . One photo grabbed his attention. It was a photo of a woman on a maternity bed with a baby wrapped in a blue blanket in her hands. The photo looks like the one hung in the living room except that in the other one the baby was in Sam's hands. The baby was him , that he knew.

He took the picture slowly and looked at it for a while then emptied the box on the floor fishing for other pictures. His father's wedding photos with the woman came out . There was

one that confirmed his suspicions , his father , the woman , Princess and Menzi were on the picture. He looked up to Nikita who was panicking out of her tits. Her face had turned pale and her eyes wandering about the room.

Phawu : Jy nie my ma nie ? (You aren't my mother ?)

Nikita dropped a tear and sniffed. She looked down and dropped her shoulders.

Nikita : Nie (No)

Phawu stood up and cursed while walking out of the room furiously. Nikita stood up and walked behind him.

Nikita : Phawu vaag. (Wait)

She got to the kitchen , Vanessa gawked at the two with confusion.

Nikita : I'm sorry baby , I wanted to tell you but your father...your father didn't want to.

Phawu : It all makes sense now. Me having a vernacular name and a darker skin than Vanessa's. I'm a grown ass man , you should've told me ma.

Nikita : I'm sorry.

Phawu : What happened to her ? My mother ?

Nikita : She left you when you were a month old then I came in your life when you were about four years of age.

Phawu : For twenty eight years you've been hiding this from me . Oekom? (why ?)

Nikita : Your father thought it wouldn't make any difference because your ma left you.

Phawu : Does Princess and Menzi know too ?

Nikita : Yes.

Phawu chuckled in disbelief and grabbed his keys and wallet from the counter. Vanessa tried to call for him but he slammed the front door closed and walked to the garage to get his car. His father drove in as he drove out, he smiled at him but he drove past him leaving him confused.

****four****

Zanothando walked to the palace with the reed mat on her head and her face dropped. The maidens that were accompanying her to her new home sang and danced.

" Ubab' ungilahlile, ngenzeni ?

Khuluma muntu wezwe lakhe ,

Awu , loko kufa kungakanani ?

Ngempela ungilahlile ngenzeni ?

Khuluma muntu wezwe lakhe ,

Awu , loko kufa kungakangani ? "

She shed some tears , Ntsizwa's mother noticed this and walked towards her. She took the reed mat , placed it down and hugged her.

Ntsizwa's ma : Don't worry makoti. This is your new home and we will treat you with love. You're welcome.

She nodded and turned her face towards the wide open gate. She watched as her father's car drove away. She pulled her 'kist' and walked towards the house.

...

For the following few days Phawu never stepped his toes at his father's house. Vanessa tried to blow up his phone with texts and missed calls until he switched it off. He wanted to be alone and he'd really appreciate it if they gave him space.

He was overwhelmed by the news and he was upset too that everyone around him knew except for him . He was old enough to understand and accept the truth but they treated him like a child and saw him feet to be an imbecile. He was crossed at

everyone around him , his parents , sisters and brother. He was mostly crossed at himself because he could've seen the signs but he chose to ignore them.

After those few days of ignoring his parents and everyone , he felt like his temper had moved down the scale a bit . He wanted answers so he slowly slipped in his driver's seat and took himself to his parent's house.

Vanessa was happy to see him after so much worrying. He hugged her and she broke down in his hands. He was the one who should be melting down after such a discovery but her sister pitifully took that responsibility for him.

Phawu : Ukhalelani Vee ? (Why are you crying ?)

Vanessa : Ek weet nie. (I don't know) I was worried I guess.

Phawu : Okay don't be baby. Where are the folks?

Vanessa : Upstairs.

Phawu : I need to talk to them.

Vanessa : Are you sure ?

Phawu : I'm calm now Vee .

Vanessa : Okay I'll call them.

He huffed and sat down then his eyes ran to the photo hung on the wall

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he remembered the one he saw inside the box. He had so many questions about his mother but if the woman left him then she wasn't worth it.

Nikita's face was so puffed and her eyes red and swollen , she was so stressed. Sam held her hand and brushed it with care.

Phawu : I don't know what happened twenty eight years ago and whatever reason led to her... I mean my mother leaving me but I would've appreciated if you told me this a while ago . Not that I would've hunted her down or anything but just so I know .

The parents kept quiet and allowed him to vent all he wanted.

Phawu : I had a lot of questions when I walked from that door but I realised that it's pointless trying to know someone who hasn't made any effort to do the same to you. Ma..?

Nikita rose her head and looked at Phawu.

Phawu : Thank you for the undying love and taking care of me. I never felt like an outcast , you've loved like I'm your own.

Nikita : You know baby , it might not be my blood that runs in your veins but you're mine.

Phawu : And dad I'm old now , no need to keep secrets from me. Okay ?

Sam huffed out a laugh and nodded .

Samuel : Okay.

Phawu : I will need that box please.

Samuel : Why ?

Phawu : I don't think it's a good idea to keep it. It deserves to be in the trash bin.

Sam gulped and nodded. He had always wanted to get rid of Kwanda's memories but he felt like Phawu was entitled to

them. Phawu stood up and walked across the coffee table then hugged his mother.

Nikita : I love you baby.

Phawu : Sthandwa Sami. (My love) I love you too.

...

Zano folded her closed in her luggage thoughtfully. Ntsizwa watched his newly wed wife who was lost in thoughts played with the dress in her hands then placed it in the suitcase.

Ntsizwa : Nothando.

Zano : Huh ?

Ntsizwa : You seem occupied with some thoughts , are you okay ?

Zano : Yes!

Ntsizwa : Is it your father ?

Zano : I don't like how things turned out. He is my father , why did he do this to me ?

Ntsizwa : I'm sorry.

Zano : Is this the price I had to pay for love ?

Ntsizwa : Sometimes love comes at a high price.

Zano : I hope it's worth it.

Ntsizwa : What do you mean ?

Zano : I don't want to be disappointed in the long run. You're royalty Ntsizwa , history might repeat itself and you'll marry other wives like my dad did to my mother.

He walked closer and cleared the bed then sat her down taking both her hands to his.

Ntsizwa : I love you baby and I vow to never bring another person into our lives. It'll be me and you till the end. Okay ?

Zano : Okay.

Ntsizwa : Can you trust me with your heart and entire life ?

Zano : Yes.

Ntsizwa : Thank you. Now let's pack to the city and get your degree then we'll make many kids and live happily ever after.

Zano giggled , Ntsizwa kissed her hands and cupped her face.

...

Later that night the Khumalo family sat around the dinner table and ate dinner over a light conversation. After dinner , the girls cleared the table and Sam with his son chatted over a few beers. Nikita and Vanessa walked in the lounge and Nikita asked for their attention.

Vanessa : Is everything okay mommy ?

Nikita : Yes...no... I uhm. I have something to tell you.

She cleared her throat .

Nikita : I have cancer and I don't have much to live.

Sam widened his eyes and his jaw hung open , his lower lip mopping the floor.

Phawu : Whooaa. What do you mean you don't have much to live ?

Nikita : It has spread to my vital organs...

Vanessa : Mommy no !

She pulled her sleeve and buried her face in it crying.

Nikita : Baby please don't cry okay ? It's God's will.

Sam faced the ceiling blinking away tears. He had lost a wife years ago and now he is to lose one again to death. This was hard for him.

Nikita : I should've told you this sooner but it was hard for me. I'm sorry...

The atmosphere had changed and the mood had dropped. None of them were ready for the news.

Zanothando

****five****

[Present Day]

Ntsizwa walked in their bedroom and looked over at his wife. She was an emotional wreck and he hated every bit of it. He hated that he had betrayed his wife like that and went back on his word. He was hoping too that he wouldn't have to hurt her by taking another wife because that's one of her worst fears but he was to be throned as king soon and it came with such responsibility.

Ntsizwa : Thembalami ?

She was lost in thoughts , her whole world seemed to have come to a halt. It was like this situation had sucked the soul out of her and left her like an empty emotionless vessel. She didn't know whether to be angry and teary on this one but deep inside she new she was hurting.

Ntsizwa: Shout baby , throw things around , lose your mind at least do something to show your emotions thembalami. Don't be so quiet, you're scaring me. Somebody's silence can mean a lot of things.

Zano : I think it's quiet obvious , mine describes the disappointment I feel towards you. I'm more disappointed than deranged.

Ntsizwa : Baby you need to understand that this wasn't an easy decision to make from my side either

Zano : You still made it.

Ntsizwa : I had the family's best interests at heart.

Zano : You hurt your wife in the process , and you don't care. You are so eager to have children that you don't care about how I feel.

Ntsizwa : I'm sorry

Zano : I still have my ovaries . We could've gotten a surrogate and have children Ntsizwa . At least you wouldn't marry her and the children would be mine too.

Ntsizwa : I'm a Zulu man baby , we don't do that.

Zano : Yeah that's the only thing you give a goddamn about , your pride.

Ntsizwa .

Ntsizwa : I made a vow a few years ago that I'll make you happy and never break your heart deliberately but I've failed to be man enough to keep up my promise. I know this is hard for you and yes I've broken your heart but I can't do this without your permission Thembalami. Ngiyakcela Nothando (Please...) , let me take another wife.

She pinched her nose and blinked away the salty liquids that were threatening to fall and make her vulnerable in front of the man who've hurt her.

...

Nokwandisa stripped off from the heavy garments that she had worn all day. Sometimes she wishes that she had married to a common person so she wouldn't dress in multiple royal clothes and walk around with a stick.

The only time she had the chance and audacity to wear a simple tee and leggings was when she was behind her bedroom door. Outside her bedroom she had to be and look like the

Queen that she is. Without further hassle she curled herself on the rag and took out her phone calling Menzi.

After Nokwandisa found out that Menzi was alive the only contact they shared was talking through the phone and meeting at restaurants. She had lost a lot of years of a her son's life and before she knew it , he was very old for her to babysit. She was parenting the twins at that time and there wasn't time to collect all her children together in one place. As much as it was bitter , she was married to Nkosi and Menzi was a child from outside the marriage . He wasn't interested in coming down to South Africa to live with her mother and her new husband. After highschool in boarding school , he juggled a few jobs and studying until years later he permanently found a good paying occupation in South Africa and moved back. Even then he didn't budge much in building a relationship with his mother , he would call and text him and sometimes visit Durban just to see her. It was enough for him and surprisingly it filled a particular void in her heart. Emotionally she was tired and couldn't fight for Phawu anymore , the verve was sadly depleted . Years flew by and she depended on Menzi to update her about her son because he wanted nothing to do with her , not that she blamed him what she did was unforgivable.

After a few rings , Menzi answered.

Menzi : My love ?

Nokwandisa : Hi son. How are you doing ?

Menzi : I'm good ma and how is yourself ?

Nokwandisa : I'm coping

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and getting old. How is Charline and the baby ?

Menzi : They are happy one minute and teary the next. Her hormones are all over the place.

Nokwandisa : (Chuckled) That's pregnancy for you. Try to understand and be there for your wife son.

Menzi : Yes mom.

Silence was maintained for a while until Nokwandisa spoke.

Nokwandisa : How is ... Uh..my son ?

Menzi : You don't have to sound sad every time you ask about him. Phawu is fine , he is just blue since it's Niki's death anniversary this month .

Nokwandisa : As long as he is okay. He still hates me ?

Menzi : It's getting better. He sometimes listens when I talk about you and asks some questions. There's hope.

Nokwandisa : I hope I don't die before we iron things out. I wouldn't rest peacefully.

Menzi : You should come to Jo'burg and try mom. I might not know how he feels but he isn't a child and he'll behave like an adult . All he needs is to see you trying..

The door handle turned .

Nokwandisa : Okay baby we will talk some other time okay ?

Menzi : Okay Sthandwa Sami.

Nkosi sat on the bed and sighed tiredly .

Nkosi : I'm always exhausted lately , amathambo aseqinile. (My bones are stiffer .)

Nokwandisa : Mhm.

Nkosi : I think I should be relieved off my ruling duties by one of my sons....

He rambled on and on while Nokwandisa shifted her mind from him. He wasn't interested in whatever he was saying , her mind was engulfed in her children. Lindo , Menzi , Phawu, Nompilo , Zesuliwe , Zanothando and Ntwenhle. One of her children died , she neglected two , four married off and one was an enemy of this family. She couldn't be a worse mom than the bad one she already was.

...

When Zanothando called and wailed on the phone , like a mother she headed to the cry. She wasn't allowed to contact her but as a mother she'd take all risks and betray her husband if need be just to be there for her daughter. Zanothando is her only child after Ntwenhle that she was close to and grew up clinging on her skirts so it was justified that in time of distress she came crying to her.

Two days later she managed to sneak out of the palace with no bodyguard tailing her and went to meet with Zano in town. Just in case someone spotted them together, she chose a corner restaurant and sat in a table that wasn't noticeable. Zano was

wrinkled with stress , her eyes had sunken and it was quiet obvious that she hadn't been sleeping well.

Nokwandisa : Nono ?

Whenever a child is in the presence of their mother they become vulnerable , no matter how old they are. A mother sees right through her offspring and that makes it difficult for one to act tough. Zano burst out in tears, Kwanda leaned over comforting her while assuring her that it'll be okay. She ordered a glass of lemon water to calm her down afterwards and they sat down talking. Nokwandisa knew exactly how her daughter felt. She too felt like half a woman when Nkosi took other wives while she was watching...

Nokwandisa : At least he is asking for your right in this. Your father didn't care about how I felt.

Zanothando : It doesn't soften the blow ma.

Nokwandisa : I know.

Zanothando : Why did you stay with your husband after the polygamy mom ?

Nokwandisa : I loved him and I realised that I wasn't lucky when it came to matters of the heart so I had to suck it up and accept.

Zanothando : Love ... (Sighed) it's messing with my head right now.

Nokwandisa : I'm not trying to tell you what to do but you and him love each other. Culture is oppressing him and he needs to do what's expected of him.

Zanothando : I want to leave him but he is all I Have. My dad hates me and I don't have a home anymore. I can always start afresh on my own but I love him.

Nokwandisa : Whatever decision you make my love , let it be based on your happiness. It matters a lot to me.

...

Later that night Zanothando walked in the other room that Ntsizwa was currently sleeping in since their fallout. She turned on the light and Ntsizwa stood abruptly from the bed. She stared at him for seconds , their memories together flashing back in her mind.

This time around she didn't bother to stop the tears from falling or wiping them either. She sniffed...

Zanothando : Ungamthatha omunye unkosikazi . (You can take another wife)

Ntsizwa could feel the weight of pain that her voice carried so much. He stood and walked towards her and hugged her.

Ntsizwa : Ngyabonga (Thank you) Thembalami.

Zanothando

****six****

The coronation day of the new king of Hlali had arrived . Everyone was excited about this but sadly Zano couldn't share the same ecstasy. She had drowned in a dark pit of sadness because of the new changes that were about to happen around the Royal house. She wasn't prepared to have a sister wife around , neither was her heart ready. This was the part where the saying "emendweni kuyabekezelwa" came in and she just have to put her selfishness aside and do what was best for her marriage and family.

Despite her bewilderment in this situation she had to play happy wife for the veneration period. Ntsizwa was ordained as king and her as queen then the celebrations started.

...

Nokwandisa received the email and clicked on the keyboard archiving it then she stood up and walked out of her wing. She walked down the hallways to Nkosi's office..

The doors were wide open and Nkosi was on the phone. She let herself in and waited for him to finish with his phone call..

He side glanced her and bid farewell to whoever was on the line then cut the phone call.

Nkosi : Mholi ?

Nokwandisa : Sawubona . (greetings)

Nkosi : Sbona wena Nkosikazi (greetings)

Nokwandisa : Received an email from HR at the JB branch. The general manager passed on.

Nkosi : What does that mean for you ?

Nokwandisa : Johannesburg calls for me. I have to show face at the funeral and also putting up another branch manager. A memorial service needs to be done too..

Nkosi : How long will you be gone for ?

Nokwandisa : A week or two maybe three.

Nkosi : I'll assign a driver and guards for you.

Nokwandisa : That will be highly unnecessary.

Nkosi : You're a queen Mholi , it's very necessary okay ? Your safety is my number one priority.

Nokwandisa : Okay then. Thank you I guess.

Nkosi : Can I spend these two days with you before you leave ?

Nokwandisa : You were with me last night won't the others complain ?

Nkosi : Yes I was with you last night and you'll be gone for weeks so they'll understand.

Nokwandisa : Very well. See you later.

She stood up and stuck her stick under her arm and took out her phone calling Zanothando. It rang unanswered , she opted for a text and walked to her room to start packing.

...

The celebrations went on until midnight. Ntsizwa couldn't take it anymore so he excused himself from the growing excitement of the crowd.

He laid down in the room and closed his eyes as fatigue weighed down over him. The tiredness of the day seemed to be wearing off as he relaxed and got comfortable. His phone rang and he realised that he hadn't took it out of his pocket . He

stood up from the bed irritated to get his phone. His face brightened as he realised who was calling and answered the call.

Ntsizwa : Sthandwa (Love)

Londeka : Hi. Busy day huh ?

Ntsizwa : Yeah baby I know I should've called you but there wasn't time .

Londeka : Did the coronation go well ?

Ntsizwa : Absolutely. And you know what that means right ?

Londeka : Your uncles will be visiting mine soon.

Ntsizwa : Yes and you'll be my wife and Queen of Hlali too.

Londeka : How is your wife feeling about this ?

Ntsizwa : To be honest this is taking it's toll on her . She isn't very happy with the situation although she has given me the go ahead.

Londeka : Does she know about my situation ?

Ntsizwa : I think it's best that she doesn't know because it'll complicate this furthermore.

Londeka : I understand.

Ntsizwa : I can't wait to be your husband and sleep next to you at night.

Londeka : (Giggled) me too.

Ntsizwa : Goodnight.

Londeka : Sleep tight.

He hung up and turned on the bed while Zano stood at the door tears on the verge of falling. She had gone to ask Ntsizwa to sleep in their room together but when she heard him speak to another woman with love and affection evident in his voice , she just felt heartbroken.

She looked at her mother's text and tapped on the keyboard replying.

Mama : " I'm going away for a few weeks. Please come with me ? We need this time to unwind

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catch up and bond. It's been years since we did"

She replied , " Would love to. When are we leaving ? I definitely need the time away. "

She stuck the phone under the pillow and slept.

...

The excitement hadn't gone down although the celebrations weren't intense anymore. Zano couldn't pull out her brave card anymore so she decided to stay in her bedroom and listen to the drums and singing outside while she dealt with her anger silently.

Ntsizwa walked in and sat next to her on the bed. They sat in silence for a good five minutes until Ntsizwa felt like it was too heavy for him to bear.

Ntsizwa : The negotiations with the girl's family will start soon.

Zano : Okay.

Ntsizwa : Are you fully behind this thembalami , are you sure ?

Zano : What difference does my consent make Ntsizwa ?

Ntsizwa : I don't want you feeling like I'm forcing you to accept her. You're my love and I don't want to see you hurting.

Zano : It's fine you can pay dowry and marry her , I don't care.

Ntsizwa : Don't be like that thembalami.

Zano : I won't be here when she gets accepted in the family. I'm going to Joburg to clear my head off and when you get married too I'll leave. I don't want to witness that..

Ntsizwa : Makes sense. Thank you for sticking up with me regardless of everything.

Zano : I'm a fool , I know.

Ntsizwa shyly looked away not knowing how to respond to that.

Zanothando

****seven****

The suitcase wheels rolled on the airport's floors and Nokwandisa's heels clucked on the floor as they approached their hired car. The city's breeze was refreshing to Zano and she wanted to make the best out of her stay there.

She knew that going there would help her think and when she goes back to KZN she would have a soluble decision up her sleeve. Her mother drove them to a very luxurious hotel. They checked into they different rooms since her mother will be on business meetings back to back while she came here to relax .

They went to the beauty spa complemented by the hotel and went to have massages , manicures and pedicures along with facials. This was an opportunity for them to bond and talk about a lot of things.

Nokwandisa got to learn and realise the pain her daughter have been through. Zano coughed everything out from how hard it was to never have parents to run to when things got rough to when she discovered that she had cervical cancer and had to

get her womb removed. Although her mother also had her own fair share of problems but her heart bled as she listened to the tribulations her daughter had to go through alone. If only Nkosi had loved all his children equally , Zano wouldn't feel the need to marry hastily. The root of the problem was the polygamy nonsense that made Nkosi neglect some of his children. All Zano needed was a sense of being loved and accepted. She wouldn't have ran and wed the first man who showed affection to her if love was something that she was used to.

After the spa session, Nokwandisa settled for bed since she was exhausted and Zano decided to go club surfing just like she used to in her varsity days.

...

Phawu's face got washed with sombreness as he placed the phone on his ear. He didn't know how to feel at these news.

Caller : Phawu ?

Phawu : Yeah...yeah I heard you but how did this happen ? I thought you were on contraceptives

Caller : Such happen Phawu okay ? And I can't have a baby , I'm still young and with the father not in love with me..

Phawu : You want to abort my child ?

Caller : What do you want me to do ? I can lose my scholarship and you aren't even serious about me so it'll be just one web of complications.

Phawu : But you can't make such a decision overnight . You drop a pregnancy bomb at me and then at the same time talk about abortion. Give me time to digest woman !

Caller : What do you need to digest Phawu ?

Phawu : Whether I want you to abort or not. Me and you might be just a fling but that doesn't mean I should let you kill my baby.

Caller : Foetus! It's not a baby yet.

Phawu : Whatever but it's mine.

Caller : So you want the baby ?

Phawu : I'm not getting any younger, a baby isn't such a bad idea.

Caller : Well if you wanted a baby then you shouldn't have dated a student. I'm not ready for motherhood , financially and emotionally.

Phawu : If you go and terminate the pregnancy then me and you are done. You better start looking for another man to sponsor your lavish lifestyle because I'll cut all ties with you.

Caller : Don't use that on me.

Phawu : You know what ?! Do what you have to , I don't care.

The caller dropped the call , Phawu screamed frustrated and took his car keys driving out. He would've gone to the residential flats and demand to see Petunia but he was so angry that he'd strangle her. If she wanted to abort she shouldn't have told him because it made her lose a grip of her temper. He instead made a turn at the t-junction and headed to downtown for a few drinks in one of the popular clubs.

...

Londeka managed to sneak out of her parent's house . Although Ntsizwa had paid lobola and damages for her , they weren't culturally supposed to be together until the wedding.

She tucked the Cardigan folds under her arms and folded her arms as the evening coldness hit her upper body. She quickly walked to the car and welcomed the heat when she got in. Ntsizwa leaned over and hugged her then kissed her . Her belly poked his abdomen , she was starting to show.

Londeka : My love.

Ntsizwa : Nkosazana yami , how are you guys ?

Londeka : We're good. Why are you here at this time

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won't your wife be worried ?

Ntsizwa : She is in Jo'burg , even if she was here she wouldn't mind. Your practically my wife

Londeka : It's not right though.

Ntsizwa : Can you stop feeling bad about being my woman ?

Londeka : I can't help it. A woman was betrayed and hurt in all of this. According to her me and you don't know each other. She doesn't know that we are actually in a relationship and I love you.

Ntsizwa : Let it be that way. She won't take well to such betrayal and I don't like to see her hurting

Londeka : We still have to respect her until you and I are officially married. I know it won't count since we've already been intimate but just for the record.

Ntsizwa : Okay so I'm guessing you aren't coming with me.

Londeka : You thought I was sleeping over ? I can't do that. That's Zano's house I can't disrespect her.

Ntsizwa : There are many rooms in there Londeka.

Londeka : It's still her house. I'm not supposed to be snooping around with you in her house. I as the junior wife need to respect umamkhulu (senior wife)

Ntsizwa : I understand. Here I was thinking we were all going to live under one roof. I guess the construction of your house needs to start soon.

Londeka : For the sake of maintaining peace between me and my sister wife , I think we need to live in separate houses . That way everyone can stay in their lane and refrain from stepping on each other's toes.

Ntsizwa : I hear you Sthandwa Sami. Let's talk about something else.

The blasting of music through the speakers at the club gave pleasure to Phawu's ears. His eyes wandered around as he had his shots , hunting for a prey that he would blow off his steam

on. His eyes landed to a lady that had blacked out on the bar of the counter .

She somehow reminded him of Vanessa when she was dealing with the death of their mother. She used to drink like a fish until she passed out at clubs and pubs.

She was a woman and being in that kind of situation portrayed very much danger to her. Some men are sick out there , they would've taken advantage of her. He paid for his drinks and walked to where the Lady was, he notified the barman that he was going to take her.

She dragged her out of the bar as heavy as she was and managed to eventually put her in the passenger seat. He took out her phone and it was password locked , nothing explained who she was and where she lived but he was certainly not going to leave her there. After being indecisive for a good ten minutes he started the ignition of the car and set it in motion the voice GPS leading him to his house as he was tipsy and couldn't see the road that well.

Nokwandisa turned and checked the time , it was two in the morning and she still couldn't sleep. Her navel was painful and her gut told her that Zano wasn't in good space. After so much contemplation she got up and sat on the bed then tapped her phone calling her . It rang for a while then it got picked up , her navel twisted and waved , the pain getting intense.

Nokwandisa : Zano where are you?

Voice : Hi she uhm , she is asleep.

A deep voice of a young man sounded on the other line.

Nokwandisa : Okay who is this ?

Voice : A good Samaritan who found her passed out at a bar and helped her. I didn't know where to take her so she is sleeping in my house.

Nokwandisa : Oh thank you. Tell her to call me when she wakes up

Voice : No problem , bye.

She hung up and sighed in relief. She could easily doubt the young man but for no particular reason she trusted him and knew that Zano was safe. The pain on her navel eased down and she laid on the bed shutting her eyes.

Zanothando

****eight****

Phawu never slept a wink that night. He seemed to have just sobered up just by having this woman in his house. What he felt for her was something strong, it's like they connected in a way. The feeling was nothing sexual but as he watched her sleep he felt like they'd met somewhere before. Something like Déjà vu.

The sun was rising in the morning clear sky and the city was starting to move. Phawu was tired and all he needed was to rest his head. He had never pulled an all nighter while drunk, it was a difficult scenario for him. Sleeping felt bad and somehow he felt like it was his duty to protect the lady. She looked like a lost soul who needed TLC to mend the brokenness in her.

Waking up in an unfamiliar surrounding alarmed Zanothando. She didn't know when and how she got here. Events of last night were still flickering in her mind and she failed to figure out how she got herself in this strange place. She couldn't help but get scared and quickly got up to look around and see if she wasn't kidnapped. She would be kept in an isolated creepy

place if she was kidnapped right ? She sat on the bed and looked around anxiously .

Phawu pushed the door open and closed it again , pushing it with his foot as his one hand occupied breakfast for Zano and another holding water with a container of pills.

Phawu : You woke up ?

Zano kept quiet as her heart thudded against her chest hoping that she wasn't held hostage.

Phawu : Hi Zano , don't be scared I'm not a bad guy.

Zano : How do you know who I am ?

Phawu carefully placed the bowl and glass along with the pills on the pedestal then took out her cellphone from his back pocket.

Phawu : Your mother called and that's when I got your name. I assured her that you will be well taken care of. Here..

She silently released her breath and took her phone suddenly feeling relieved.

Phawu : You were passed out at the bar , so I brought you here since I didn't know where you live. Didn't want to risk your life by leaving you there.

She felt her heart warm up , it was ironic how a complete stranger could care so much about her while her husband couldn't.

Zano : Thank you. I didn't get your name ..

Phawu : Oh it's Phawu , short for Phawulothando.

Zano : I'm Zanothando.

Phawu : Guess our parents were lovers of love.

Zano : (Laughed) Yeah...thank you for what you've done for me. I commend you for it.

Phawu handed the bowl of cereal to her , she chucked at the dry breakfast but ate either way.

Phawu : It was very reckless of you to get sloshed like that while you didn't have an accomplice. This is Johannesburg , people around here are merciless.

Zano : I know and I'm sorry for putting you through so much trouble .

Phawu : It's fine

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I just did my bit as a good citizen.

Zano nodded as he took the last spoonful of the not so tasty oat in the bowl and then placed it back.

Phawu : They'll help with the hangover.

He handed her the pills which she took .

Phawu : You're so young to be this miserable .

Zano : And you just figured that I am miserable just by glancing at me ?

Phawu : Well actually yes. You gave it away .

Zano : I'm fine. Just because I was at the bar sloshed doesn't mean I have life problems and an alcoholic.

Phawu : Okay sorry , you didn't have to bite my head off.
Talking actually helps in terms of putting your mind at ease ,
venting to a stranger is great therapy .

Zano : I don't want people judging me . Phawu : Since I am the one who dug into you , I won't judge.

Zano leaned back thoughtfully.

Phawu : Hoekom is jy so ellendig ?(Why are you so miserable ?)

Zano : What ? (Giggled)

Phawu : (Giggled) ... Talk to me . I might not make your problems go away but you will feel very relieved after this.

Zano : Happiness has always been a foreign feeling in my life you know...

Her phone vibrated disturbing her and she received the call and talked to her mother as Phawu stood up and checked his phone. He had sent Petunia a thread of messages which she read and did not reply.

...

Her heart dropped to her knees as she stood in front of the love of her life . The memorial service had just ended and everyone was moving around at the snacks section nibbling on the delicacies and socializing. Kwanda didn't expect to bump into her ex husband , it was actually the last thing he had hoped for.

Sam : Aren't you going to greet me Kwandisa ?

She cleared her dry throat in nervousness. Sam glared at her and his icy cold eyes were penetrating through her soul making her feel so weird. She gulped down the wine she was holding ..

Nokwandisa : Sawubona Khumalo. (Hi)

He smirked and slipped his hands deeply into his pockets and it somehow reminded her of Phawu.

Sam : Hello Mrs uhm what's the surname again?

Nokwandisa : Qwabe .

She mumbled shyly.

Sam : Nokwandisa Sithole , Ramokene, Khumalo and Qwabe. Talk about the Brook woman tendencies , your life reflects The Bold and the Beautiful struu.

Nokwandisa : Don't insult me Sam.

He raised his hands in surrender while laughing off her comment.

Sam : It was nice seeing you again ... After thirty years.

Nokwandisa : Well I'm in town for a while , hopefully there'll still be a lot of these nice moments where we 'coincidentally ' bump into each other.

He winked at her as she moved around greeting and smiling at a few people. Not bad , he thought. Not bad at all , thirty years later and she still looked good. Some women don't age...

...

Phawu parked at the hotel's driveway and they exchanged numbers with Zano.

Phawu : We need to finish your therapy session when you get time.

Zano : Are you trying to psychoanalyse me ? Are you a therapist of some sort ?

Phawu : By profession yes but I'm not practicing .

Zano : Why ?

Phawu : Because I'm the type of therapist who'd ask you " why don't you actually kill yourself ?"

Zano laughed and threw her head backwards

Phawu : I'm just being my lazy self.

Zano : I can tell by the breakfast you made me this morning (Laughing)

Phawu : Many kids would kill for that mere breakfast . (Laughing)

Zano : Yeah. (Laughed) Thank you once again . There are only five men like you left in Africa as a whole.

Phawu : I know right.

Zano : See you around .

Phawu : Yeah. It was nice meeting you Thando.

She smiled and climbed off the car. He stared at her as she disappeared inside the hotel. He smiled at himself and drove away...

Zanothando

****nine****

No message or voice call questioning whether Zano arrived safely in Gauteng from her husband and she called herself a married woman. Clearly she was the only one in a relationship here because the other party wasn't budging. They were already cracking apart with the issue of a second wife and Ntsizwa wasn't even trying to meet her halfway to mend their marriage. She thought that if she went away , he'd miss her but no her husband was enjoying his freedom without her around. He wasn't even trying to pretend that he cares.

She took it upon herself to call him when she woke up from her nap hoping it will peel off the after effects of heavy drinking from her body.

Ntsizwa : Thembalami?

Zano : "Thembalami "

She imitated his voice and chuckled.

Zano : Kodwa Sthandwa Sami awusafoni to check up on me. (...but my love you couldn't even call...)

Ntsizwa : I'm sorry baby I didn't know you had arrived.

Zano : You should've called to check. A flight from Durban to Jo'burg doesn't take months.

Ntsizwa : I'm sorry thembalami . Did you travel well

Zano : Yes I did , thanks for asking.

Ntsizwa : I miss you already .

That's what she wanted to hear but now that she had called first it didn't feel amazing anymore. It didn't reach the place that it was supposed to.

Zano : I'll be back in a few weeks.

Ntsizwa : Okay baby we will talk ?

Zano : Yes later.

She hung up and sighed rolling on the bed .

...

Vanessa rubbed her eyes while yawning then stared at his father who was smiling to himself while daydreaming.

Vanessa : Papa.

She chuckled and walked towards him. It was when he felt Vanessa tap his shoulder that he got startled and snapped out of it.

Sam : Hey

Vanessa : You are daydreaming.

Sam : I was just thinking.

Vanessa : What were you thinking about ?

Sam bit his lip as he contemplated whether he should have this talk with his daughter or not. He ran his hands through his grown unshaved hair that wasn't attractive when not combed.

Vanessa : You need to cut that bush .

Sam : Yeah I will.

Vanessa : So are you going to tell me what's bothering you or rather making you happy because from where I was standing I could easily make out that you were blushing.

Sam : I was thinking about your mother , I miss her.

Vanessa : We all do but that's how the cycle of life goes. We aren't permanent settlers here on earth , we are just visiting.

Sam : I wish we died at the same time you know. Living without her is so damn hard.

Vanessa : You have to move on though. It's been three years ?

Sam : Move on ? No skat I'm too old to start dating again.

Vanessa : What ? Dad you are very much still suitable to date again . Mom wouldn't want you to grieve her forever.

Sam : But baby..

Vanessa : Get your groove back daddy. Ungavumi ukuguga. (Don't allow yourself to age)

Sam : (Chuckling) So you don't mind daddy sneaking in a stepma ?

Vanessa : Not at all my love.

She slightly pat him on his shoulder while getting on her feet.
He laughed shortly .

...

A cold chill ran down his spine as he parked at the student's residential flats. He was scared of how things might turnout with Petunia. She walked to Phawu's car a few moments later and he leaned over to open for her from inside.

She got in and boldly stared at him , she didn't even greet .

Phawu : Pety.

Petunia : Hi , what do you want ?

Phawu : What are the chances of me convincing you to keep the baby?

Petunia : Close to none.

Phawu : Please Pety... This might be my first and last baby. I don't want to spend the rest of my life feeling sorry for myself and regretting this.

Petunia : I've made up my mind and I'm not turning back.

Phawu : I know you have the upper hand at the moment. I am not in a position to make demands but can you please be considerate for just this once. I will take care of the baby while you continue studying. I'll take care of both your needs and you can give up your parental rights and continue with your life if you don't want to raise the baby.

Petunia : It's not as easy as you make it sound. I am the one who will be carrying a human being for nine months . I have to go through the humiliation of walking around campus with a big belly and I am the one who has to take care of it when it's born. It's not a walk in the park.

Phawu : We are going to struggle together if need be . We are the baby's parents after all .

Petunia : I'm sorry .

He was beyond broken . He sighed in defeat and they stayed in silence for a few minutes. Their breathing being the only thing reminding them they are still alive. He cleared his throat and started the ignition then turned to Petunia.

Phawu : Okay.

Petunia raised her brow in confusion.

Phawu : Do what you want even if it means hurting my feelings. I hope you don't regret this decision in the future.

She swallowed in shame then pushed the door open

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stepping out of the car.

...

Menzi went to get Zano from the estate entrance gate while his wife stayed behind preparing food for lunch.

Menzi : Thando!

Zano : Hey bhuti .

Menzi : You've grown so much .The last time I saw you , you were this tall.

He demonstrated her height with his hand and she laughed while hugging her .

Menzi : It's so nice to see you Thando. If only it was possible to get all my mother's children under one roof and throw in one hell of a party.

Zano : It won't be possible with my father's children. Maybe Zesuliwe might agree but the twins are so much their father's daughters.

Menzi : Yeah but it would've been nice you know. We were all barred by one woman , we are somehow connected.

Zano : I too wished that we have this tight bond with them but I'm more closer to you than them. That are full of themselves.

Menzi : Don't worry we love you this side . You should actually meet our other brother , he will love you like I do.

Zano : We have another brother besides Lindo ?

Menzi : Yes , I'll call him to come.

Zano : I'd love to meet him.

They continued chatting until they got in the house. Charline welcomed Zano with a hug. Her heart sank as her belly poked her , it seemed like everyone was making babies to make Zano feel miserable.

Charline : Hi welcome.

Me : Thank you , lovely house.

Charline : Oh thank you so much. Babe your sister is so adorable.

Menzi : I know right? She takes after me..

She giggled and led Zano to the kitchen .

Zanothando

****ten****

Nokwandisa got out of the shower and dried her hair in front of the bathroom mirror. A knock came through and she walked to the bedroom hoping it was room service. She opened the door with only her face peeping out while her whole body was behind the door. Sam stood at the doorstep with his hands inside his pockets , Kwanda chuckled and opened the door wide for him to come in. He made a slight bow then closed the door.

Sam : Her Highness.

Nokwandisa : Hello Sam. How did you find me ?

Sam stared at her chest that was covered by the towel and Kwanda also turned her gaze looking at the necklace. She kept it around her neck for years , never did she take it off because it was of sentimental value to her. The necklace was the closest thing to her son and ex husband who where dear to her.

Sam : I'm surprised it never rusted or got lost over the years.

Nokwandisa : I took care of it.

Sam nodded and looked around the room while Nokwandisa became uncomfortable as she was only in a bathing towel.

Sam : I'm sorry for just showing up unannounced.

Nokwandisa : How can I help you ?

Sam : I just want to talk. Ever since I saw you I haven't taken you off my mind . I want to talk to you and understand why you did what you did. I am not angry anymore and I'll give you the chance to explain. I'll also try to understand and make some sense out of everything .

Nokwandisa : But why ? It's been over thirty years and I can't undo the past now. Why do you want to revisit it ?

Sam : Because I believe that you were also hurt in the process . I want you to talk about it so I understand that you are bleeding too.

Nokwandisa : Sam I don't think..

Sam : Get dressed and meet me at the dining area...please.

He got up and walked out. Nokwandisa rushed to her suitcase and emptied it on the bed then fished for her favourite dress in the pile of clothes.

...

Back in the outskirts of KZN a car parked in the woods and the owner jumped out with a blunt between his lips. He watched his surroundings for a while before taking out his phone to call Londeka but put it away as he noticed her walk towards the car.

He stretched out his hands and hugged her but she didn't hug him back. He staggered back and scratched his head asking her if she was okay.

Londeka : Ufunani la Nhlanhla ? (What are you doing here ?)

He shrugged and pouted.

Nhlanhla : I'm here to see you , aren't I allowed ?

Londeka : No! What if someone sees you and I together ? I have a huge reputation that I have to keep up here.

Nhlanhla : I miss you..

Londeka : No no no ! Please Nhlanhla, stay away from me . I'm someone's fiancée now.

Nhlanhla : You can still call this whole thing off babe.

Londeka : You had you chance angithi? You ruined the only chance I gave you , so please leave me alone.

He grabbed her wrists and she got scared a little. She looked up to him and then bit her lip in fear.

Nhlanhla : Baby it's me , your boyfriend please just don't give up on me so easily. What we have is special and you know it , come with me.

Her phone rang from her back pocket and saved her because Nhlanhla got startled and let go of her wrists. She answered it while walking backwards running away from him.

...

Zano stared at her sister in law brushing her bump while sitting on the high chair next to the kitchen unit. How she wishes that it was possible for her to experience this too.

Zano : How far are you ?

Charline : I'm on my last trimester. Might pop soon.

Zano : Congratulations. I too wish for a baby you know.

Charline : You are still young you can be pregnant whenever you wish to.

Zano : It's impossible. I was diagnosed with cancer two years ago so..

She shrugged and Charline squinted her eyes feeling sorry for her.

Charline : I'm so sorry.

Zano : I've learnt to live with it. If only my husband was supportive .

Charline : He is not ?

Zano shook her head no

Zano : There are many alternatives. Adoption and surrogacy being our most effective solution but he'd rather take another wife than support me.

Charline : Why are you still with him?

Zano : What ?

Charline : He is making you a clown and you are still married to him

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why ?

Zano : I love him and polygamy isn't such a strange custom in our ethnic race. He is a Zulu man and that's what they do.

Charline : No disrespect on your culture but I wouldn't be part of such bull. See I love your brother but he will have to die first before he thinks of taking a second wife . I didn't come all the way from Canada for him to make a fool out of me. When you were marrying the guy didn't he vow that he'd stick with you through sickness and health ? For better or worse ?

Zano : He did.

Charline : But now that you can't have a baby he rushes to make decisions that'll affect you. He isn't loyal and I doubt that's a husband you want to have. I don't care who says what but polygamy is fucked up and one will never make peace with it. Monogamy is way peaceful not being cheated on legally and your situation being thrown in your face. What your husband did was a complete slap in the face , he disrespected you and he still will because you allowed it. I'm not putting any ideas in your head but as a woman know your worth !

Zano stared in space and then smiled turning back the tears . Charline was right in so many ways and as Ntsizwa's legal wife she had every right not to allow them to marry each other. She wasn't about to become another case of her mother.

Menzi walked in and kissed his wife's cheek then turned to Zano .

Menzi : Unfortunately our brother can't come today . Midlife crisis has him by the balls.

Zano : It's okay . I'm still in town so we will meet each other another day.

Menzi : You okay though Thando?

Zano : Yes. You have an amazing wife , please value her and stick with her. She has a beautiful soul..

Menzi : I know , she is a dime.

Zano smiled admirably at the two then her mind raced back to Ntsizwa , she felt her chest closing in at the thought of sharing him.

...

Vanessa quickly removed her feet from the coffee table as Phawu walked in . He laughed and sat besides her..

Phawu : I saw that. Hey kiddo..

Vanessa : Hi , how are you ?

Phawu : I'm good where is dad ?

Vanessa : You don't look fine to me. Dad is not around , he left a while ago all dressed up.

Phawu : Didn't you ask where he was going ?

Vanessa : No but I think we might have a stepma.

Phawu : (laughing) No!

Vanessa : I'm telling you bro. He'd introduce her to us very soon.

The last time I saw our father this happy was when ma was still alive.

Phawu : Dad is old Vee.

Vanessa : Not too old to be loving again.

Phawu : I guess.

He breathed out and pulled the recliner relaxing his neck and feet.

Vanessa : You sure you okay ?

Phawu : No , but I'll be fine.

Vanessa : Women issues ?

Phawu : Yeah and it's driving me crazy.

Vanessa : If you want to talk I'm your girl okay?

He chuckled and kissed her hand.

Phawu : I'll keep that in mind , thank you my love.

Zanothando

****eleven****

Sam's jaw dropped when Kwanda walked in. She was still beautiful even after so many years , her beauty aroused him. Some women are like fine wine , they don't age. He pulled a seat for her and she sat down thanking him.

Sam : Am I allowed to throw in a compliment to the queen ?

Nokwandisa: Why not ? Queens are human too.

Sam : Well you look so beautiful Kwanda , you're hell fine.

Kwanda blushed then thanked him. They ordered food and then sat in awkward silence as one didn't know how to break the uncomfortableness between them as they didn't want to make it more awkward if they say anything.

Their food came and they continued to eat in silence until Sam reached for a napkin , neatly wiping his mouth then reached for Kwanda's hand.

Sam : Let's take a walk.

Kwanda stood up and followed him to the elevator , it took them to the first floor where they walked towards reception and exited the building . Sam led her to his car..

Nokwandisa : You said we are taking a walk.

Sam : Well I guess we are now driving around . Is that okay with you ?

Nokwandisa : Yes , it's okay.

He started the car and the song that was probably playing on the radio before he parked resumed. He drove out of the lot while stealing glances at Kwanda who was staring outside the window , the song triggering a lot of emotions.

" And we'll linger on

Time can't erase a feeling this strong

No way you never gonna shake me

Oh darling cause you'll be my baby ..."

Sam chuckled then Kwanda turned to look at him driving. She smiled and shook her head while singing along.

He drove around town until he found a perfect spot for them to park on . He pulled over and stopped the ignition then turned to look at Kwanda .

Nokwandisa : What do you want to know ?

Sam : Everything . Why did you leave me with our baby ?

Nokwandisa drew in her breath deeply and released it .

Nokwandisa : I love you and I love our son too . I wouldn't have done anything to hurt you deliberately because if you hurt I hurt too. I thought moving will be the best way for me to get to save my son from a certain generational curse. Someone prophesied that he was going to be cursed and the only way to break it was if I didn't bond with him . It was hard for me and trust me , I didn't up and leave so easily. I regretted the decision after I stepped in the bus heading to KZN.

Sam : Why didn't you tell me about everything ? The curse and how you were supposed to break it ?

Nokwandisa : I was scared and it was absurd to me too. I never thought you'd believe me since curses aren't a 'real' thing

according to society nowadays. I didn't want you to think I resent Phawu to the point that I call him a curse you know.

Sam : This is deeper than I thought. It's way bigger than me and now I regret calling you selfish and all that stuff.

Nokwandisa : And I came back two years later hoping to mend things with my family but you were hurting and I understood why. I was hoping you would forgive me but when you slapped me with divorce papers I lost all optimism. Thought I should give you what you want and get out of your life because I thought it'll make you happy.

Sam : I wanted you to fight for us or for your son at least. I wanted you to prove to me otherwise because in my mind you were already this monster that failed my son and I .

Nokwandisa : Yeah I had failed . Two years later I married again and I promised myself that I will gather my kids in one place. I was going to fight for Phawu's custody and take Menzi in but I failed again. Menzi was refusing to be with me

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he chose boarding school over me and before I knew it I gave birth to twins. They took all my time and energy that I forgot about fighting for Phawu. When the girls were grown enough I had marriage problems. Nkosi wasn't faithful anymore. Him being a polygamist became the final nail in the coffin , I broke

apart. I couldn't fight anymore , the strength was depleted and all I wanted was peace. Staying away from you and Phawu along with Nikita was peace. Letting Menzi be was peace. Allowing Nkosi to marry as many times as he wanted was also peace to me because I've been through a lot of hell in my life. Maybe it was karma for me because I had you an , amazing man and I messed up.

Sam sighed looking away. Maybe if he had listened to her sooner she wouldn't go through so much heartbreak. He should've heard her side of the story but he allowed anger to blind sight him. The woman has been through a lot in the name of love. And what she did to Phawu was selfless , if only she had just told him.

...

Later on that night Zano laid on the hotel's bed while tapping on her phone chatting to Phawu.

Phawu : What are you up to ?

Zano : I'm about to sleep even though I feel like partying.

Phawu : I'm at a club in Waterfall City . Wanna come and join me ? 😊

Zano : Are you going to take care of the tab ? 😊 🤔

Phawu : Of course. 😊 Should I come and get you at the hotel.

Zano : I could catch a cab.

Phawu : I don't want to risk your life. Cab drivers are deceitful nowadays so I'm coming , get ready.

Zano : Awww 🤔. Okay. 🙌

She put her phone down and skipped to the shower. Half an hour later her phone beeped. She checked it and then took her bag and walked out of the hotel room. She bumped into her mother in the corridor ..

Zano : Mama ?

Nokwandisa : Mhm?

Zano : What's wrong my love ? You seem so down.

Nokwandisa : It's one of the days that I realise how my life is so messed up. It is like a ball of wool.

Zano : What happened ma ?

She gave her a faint smile .

Nokwandisa : Don't worry about me my baby. Where are you off to ?

Zano : Clubbing , as usual.

Nokwandisa : Have some safe fun.

Zano : I will.

She continued walking down the corridor to the elevator. She noticed his car at the parking lot and walked towards it.

Zano : Hi.

She greeted after climbing in the passenger seat.

Phawu : Zanothando

Zano : Phawulothando.

He stared at her and then they both broke out in laughter.

Phawu : Let's go party.

Zano : Oh yes! Let's go paint the town red.

What was supposed to be a party night turned out to be a deep conversation session. Phawu and Zano never got to get out of the car at the club . Something Zano said triggered the conversation and they started talking about their lives. Zano talked to him about her marital woes while Phawu also talked about his saga with Petunia .

Phawu : When life is throwing so much lemons at me I wish my mother was here to guide me hey.

Zano : Did she pass on ?

Phawu : Unfortunately yes. A few years ago..

Zano : I'm so sorry but I doubt your mother being alive would make any difference. I have both my parents but the pain I am feeling isn't any lesser

Phawu : At least she would've came up with a solution. My mother always guided me.

Zano : Talk to your father . He might help you naye you know. You are actually lucky that until the day one of your parents departed from earth they had your back. Some kids were on their own from day one..

Phawu : Are you part of those kids who've had it rough on their own ?

Zano : Kind of. My dad disowned me at the age of twenty and as a result my mom had to cut ties with me too. The only time we get to be together is when we go away like now nakhona it's in secret. Well even before my dad disowned me , we didn't have the best of a father-daughter relationship. He was an absent father even though he was around.

Phawu : I'm sorry to hear that Zano.

Zano : I think that's why I rushed to getting married to the first man who uttered the words " I love you " to me because I never got to experience a father's love. Having a man loving me for a change felt good.

Phawu : I guess we have something in common. Although I never felt a void because my mother was there almost my whole life but I discovered when I was an adult that my biological mother left me when I was a month old. I don't know why she did what she did but I'm glad she did because I gained a wonderful mother in the process. The fact that she left me goes to show how much she didn't deserve to be a mother .

Zano : But this is an experience for us. When it's time for us to be parents then we will be great ones because we know how it feels to be unwanted. We will never by chance make our children feel like this..

Phawu : True and I realise that forcing Petunia to be a mother will only make her a bad one. I don't want a child of mine growing up without a mother like me.

Zano : If your mother came back now , would you forgive her ?

He chuckled.

Phawu : After thirty two years ? I don't know Zano. My life was okay without her so forgiving her or not will not affect me in any way.

Zano : Be open minded though. There is always an explanation to everything and you choose whether to judge and be angry forever or you try to understand the motive. I doubt your mother is a monster.

Zanothando

****twelve****

This was the twelfth vibration that her phone made and it kept disturbing the conversation she was having with Phawu. Phawu glanced at the phone and at Zano who was seemingly ignoring it on purpose.

Phawu : That might be important.

Zano : It can wait. I don't think it's that important .

Phawu : Let's get food , we've been parked here for hours. Clearly we aren't going to party anymore..

Zano : That's a good idea

Phawu : And I think you should text back the person who've been continuously texting you.

Zano : People just don't give up.

Phawu started the car and pulled out of the parking area while Zano reached for her phone checking the messages . She had a message from her mother asking if she is okay , she replied and

tapped back noticing that her sister in law had sent her ten texts.

Skoni : " 📷(2)

" Skoni where are you ? Ntsizwa has brought a lady home "

" Said she is his future wife ."

" Do you have an idea about this ?"

" She is even sweeping our yard Zano 😊"

" Cha mina lokhu ngiyakweshwama "

" Zano come home and teach this tramp a lesson please "

" Her name is Londeka. Ntsizwa brought her here so they she can spend time with us . "

" He said we should get used to her "

" She is even pregnant "

Zano finished reading the thread of messages then tapped at the two photos. The first one , the lady was a holding an outdoor broom sweeping the yard while in the second picture she was drinking water while her bump stuck out of the tight

dress she was wearing. She felt her chest closing in and her throat tightening while she ran out of breath . How could Ntsizwa betray her like that ? He said the marriage was arranged.

She clenched her hand into a fist and kicked off his legs as she struggled to breathe . Phawu panicked and parked at the side of the road..

Phawu : Zano ? What's wrong ? Are you having a panick attack?

Her skin stuck to her chest bones as they seemed like they will prick it. She continued having these palpitations while Phawu didn't know what to do. His head buzzed and he glanced at her bag. He quickly took it and emptied it on his lap. An asthma pump fell among all the lady things that where in the bag. Without further hesitation he took it and placed it between her lips. She inhaled once and twice then her strength seemed to return because she held the pump herself and inhaled again. After that she removed it and breathed in and out deeply. Phawu remembered he had bottled still water at the back seat.

He took it and handed Zano the water , she gulped them down then exhaled.

Phawu : It's over now?

Zano smiled at the worry written over his face.

Zano : Did I scare you ?

Phawu : Of course you did child for a moment there I thought you were dying.

Zano : I'm sorry, I'm asthmatic. My anxiety might have triggered it.

Phawu : What happened?

Zano swallowed and looked at her phone.

Zano: I think it's time I went back home. Things are getting out of hand with me not there.

Phawu : KZN ?

She nodded and slithered on her seat shutting her eyes while the pictures came back exploding her brain.

...

One has to learn to appreciate what they have before time makes them appreciate what they had because time awaits no one. What one needs to do is live a life of serenity and not regrets.

Kwanda regretted every decision she has taken in the past after that talk with her ex husband. A part of her felt relieved that she had offloaded everything to him but a part of her was still burdened . There was nothing to do so that she turn back the time and do things differently and that on it's own left a bitter taste in her mouth. She missed Sam , she missed herself more. She missed the person that she was when they were still married , she was so happy and a baby would've been a bonus to them but fate had it's own intentions.

She turned on her pillow probably for the hundredth time since that night. Sleep was something that her body was refusing to give in to because her medulla oblongata was in it's own world fantasising about her ex husband. It was totally impossible for her body to fall asleep while her brain wasn't keen to shut down and fall into temporary death.

Her alarm rang and like lighting she quickly snoozed it because she still wanted to lay there and continue thinking about Samuel Khumalo. Her phone rang

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it was an incoming call. She sighed and answered it.

Nkosi : Mholi ?

Nokwandisa : Baba .

Nkosi : Sowakhile lapho ? (Are you a permanent resident there now ?)

Nokwandisa : Cha. (No) I've been here for three days only Nkosi , there are a lot of things yet to be done.

Nkosi : Ngikukhumbulile nje nkosikazi (I just miss you dear)

She sat up rolling her eyes.

Nokwandisa : I miss you too.

Nkosi : When are you coming back ?

Nokwandisa : Next week baba.

Nkosi : I so wish it was tomorrow. Aren't you lonely there ? I can fly down there to keep you company.

Nokwandisa : That won't be necessary because I'm always busy here. I don't even get time to sit and be alone.

Nkosi : Okay my love. The twins are home and they send their love , hope they'd still be here when you come back next week.

Nokwandisa : Send my love back. I will try to come back sooner so I see them Nkosi : They'll appreciate that.

Nokwandisa : Okay baba look I have to get ready for the office. We are appointing a new GM today .

Nkosi : Okay Mholi call me later.

Nokwandisa : I will.

Nkosi : Bye.

She hung up and threw the phone on the rag. She walked to the mirror and looked at her exhausted self. After the staring and posing contest with her reflection on the mirror , she stripped naked and stepped under the shower.

...

Phawu walked in the guest bedroom and drew the blinds open. The light that penetrated through teased Zano's sleep and she

flapped her lashes multiple times before squinting her eyes open. She placed her palm over them and grumbled.

Phawu : Wakey wakey !

Zano : You're torturing me.

Phawu : Wake up young lady , I have to be somewhere.

Zano : You can leave me here I won't steal anything.

Phawu : Zano get up.

She woke up still grumbling flipping the covers to the side and stepped on the cold tiles.

Zano : Why the fuss ?

Phawu : I made breakfast and it's getting cold.

Zano : Let me guess . You dished dry fruit in a bowl this time around.

Phawu : What do you take me for ? You'll be impressed this time.

They walked to the kitchen and Phawu placed the plate in front of her. She smiled at the sight of the mouthwatering breakfast

then furrowed her brows when she saw takeaways in the dustbin . Phawu laughed in embarrassment.

Zano : You are such a liar.

Phawu : Wanted to impress.

Zano : You should've thrown the takeaways deep inside the bin .

Phawu : I just wanted to make something special for you before you leave.

Zano let go of the fork and sighed. For a moment he had forgotten about Ntsizwa and his shenanigans . She had forgotten about going home because of the happiness she was feeling here.

Phawu : What really happened?

Zano : My husband had his mistress over at our house.

Phawu : What ?

Zano : Yep. Made me a clown in front of my in laws.

Phawu : When a man does that , let him go. How is his family supposed to respect you when he doesn't ? Clearly he doesn't appreciate you the way he should.

Zano : Well after this , he can kiss this marriage goodbye . I'm tired of him..

...

Londeka tied the cotton straps of the dress around her waist and took her bag.

Ntsizwa : Ready ?

Londeka : Yep .

Ntsizwa : Okay let's go.

They exited the bedroom and on their way to the car they crossed paths with Ntsizwa's sister who gave Londeka a side eye.

Londeka : Your sister doesn't like me.

Ntsizwa : They are very close with Zano so you being here isn't pleasing her.

Londeka : I understand. I shouldn't have slept here but I was scared you know.

Ntsizwa : I will take care of Nhlanhla don't worry.

Londeka : What is that supposed to mean ?

Ntsizwa : Do you enjoy having your ex boyfriend on your back ?
Do you want to live your whole life looking over you shoulder ?

Londeka : No.

Ntsizwa : Then let me deal with Nhlanhla. It is my duty as your husband to protect and deal with any thing or anyone that might be potential danger to you and our baby. Now please don't question me okay?

Londeka : Okay.

Ntsizwa : And we need to speed up the process and get married already . I need you to be my wife now.

Londeka smiled.

Londeka : Soon baby , soon.

Londeka's phone alerted a new message. She double tapped the screen unlocking it then read the message from Nhlanhla.

" If you dare give my child another man's surname , I'll skin you alive "

Her heart skipped as she reread the message. She deleted it and turned to Ntsizwa faking a smile.

Zanothando

****thirteen****

The meetings dragged for Nokwandisa. She was very absentminded and all she wanted to do was go back to her hotel room and lay down thinking. She'd been in town for a week but she hasn't seen Phawu. Although she knew that the boy wouldn't be interested in seeing her she was hoping to at least bump into him so she sees him . Even if she had to look at him from a distance it'll be fine with her..

The meeting was adjourned and she was the first to waltz out of the room. Sam called while she was driving..

Nokwandisa : Sam ?

Sam : Can we meet MaSthole ?

Nokwandisa : Aren't you at work ?

Sam : I long retired Kwanda. Now I sit around and watch my kids work.

Nokwandisa : Okay where do you want to meet ?

Sam : I'm actually on my way to your hotel room.

Nokwandisa : Okay I'll see you in a minute .

She cleared her throat as the call was still running.

Nokwandisa : Where is Phawu ?

Sam : He is at his house . He doesn't hang around with me a lot nowadays. He is outgrowing me.

Nokwandisa : Do you think he might want to see me ?

Sam : I don't know . Do you want to see him ?

Nokwandisa : I was hoping we could talk.

Sam : Your son is very hardheaded so I doubt he will want to talk to you but I'll try him.

Nokwandisa : Okay thank you

Sam : I'm in the parking lot now should I come in ?

Nokwandisa : I'm on my way , wait for me.

Sam : Okay.

He hung up. Nokwandisa stepped on the accelerator increasing her speed as she tried juggling traffic.

In less than twenty minutes Kwanda parked next to Sam's car and climbed out. Sam was leaning with the bonnet of his car waiting for her..

Kwanda : Hi.

She greeted when she got to him.

Sam : Hey. Beautiful car you have..

Kwanda : It's hired, not exactly mine.

Sam : It suits you

Kwanda : Shall we go inside ?

Sam : Sure.

They walked towards the entrance with Kwanda fishing for her access cards in her bag.

...

Londeka finally arrived home and rushed inside . Throughout the whole drive she was unsettled by the text and she tried to find the odds that could make Nhlanhla the father but because of nervousness , the odds didn't line up or they did but because she wasn't herself anymore she couldn't think straight.

She furiously fiddled with her phone as she tried to call Nhlanhla. It rang unanswered five times but she kept on

tapping the dialing icon. After nine attempts she rested on her bed and tried to count her weeks by tracing back when last she had her period. Her head was now buzzing. The possibility of carrying that criminal's baby exploding her brain cells. It would be a complete catastrophe if that was the case..

Her phone vibrated briefly. Nhlanhla had sent a 'please call me ' . She clicked her tongue and dialed him. It didn't take long for him to pick up the call..

Nhlanhla : Finally she comes back to her senses.

Londeka : What did that text you sent mean ?

Nhlanhla : Can't you read now Londy?

Londeka : Which your baby are you referring to ?

Nhlanhla : I knew that will get your attention. I'm talking about that baby you are carrying ..

Londeka : It is not your baby Nhlanhla.

Nhlanhla : You seem so sure.

Londeka : I'm getting married with Ntsizwa and this is his baby. I won't let you ruin this for me.

Nhlanhla : I don't mind you marrying the punk but all I'm asking for is my child.

Londeka : It's not your child and you won't get him.

Nhlanhla : We will see about that.

Londeka : What do you mean..? Nhlanhla ... Hello ?

She stared at the cut call with dismay making her heart heavy. She tried to call again but it led her to voicemail. She walked towards the drawer and opened the first , the second and then the third banging them in the process. She got her clinic card and placed it on the bed while kneeling on the rag analysing the dates.

...

" I brought wine , " Phawu winked at Charline when she opened the door. Charline laughed and let him in..

Charline : Are you trying to provoke me sir ?

Phawu : Me ? Not at all.

He hugged her and then walked towards the living room. He placed the bottle of wine on the coffee table and greeted his brother .

Menzi : And that ?

He asked pointing at the bottle.

Phawu : I brought it for our sister .

Menzi : I see you are excited about meeting her huh ?

Phawu : I am just failing to understand why you kept her from me for years.

Menzi : She is our mother's child so I figured you wouldn't be keen on building a relationship with her.

Phawu : Come on bro , she isn't her mother . Why would I crucify her for her mother's sins ?

Menzi shrugged.

Meanwhile in the kitchen Zano knocked at the front door and Charline shouted for her to come in while sitting on the highchairs ordering food online.

Zano : Hey.

Charline : Hi . Right on time , you will help me order food.
Suggestions ?

Zano : Well you know my brothers more than me so you would know what they want to eat.

Charline : Right. What about you ?

She flipped her hand..

Zano : Anything is fine with me , I don't have preferences.

Charline : I'll just order salads then they'll braai meat.

Charline tapped the phone for a few minutes then put it away.

Charline : They are in the living room .

Zano followed her to the living room where she met Phawu who was conversing with Menzi. She sat down on the couch and stared at him.

Phawu : Zano ?

Zano : Hi..

Menzi : You two know each other ?

Zano : Yeah we've met before but not as siblings of course.

Phawu : Wow

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small world hey.

Zano : Yeah.

Phawu : I'm glad we've met , at least know I have clear insight on the kind of person you are. You make a lovely younger sister..

Zano : I'm glad to have another addition of a brother to the long string of the ones I have.

Menzi : This is beautiful. Look at you guys getting along just fine , wish the others were also here.

Phawu : Kusekhona nabanye ?

Menzi : Your mother is an obedient child of God. When He said , " Produce and be fruitful " she listened attentively.

Phawu laughed shaking his head.

Phawu : If all of them are like Zano then I'm open to knowing them.

Zano also laughed disagreeing .

Zano : They are nothing like me.

Phawu : Shuthi abazona izidakwa ?

Menzi : Another Vanessa case ?

Phawu : Yep.

They laughed.

Menzi : We are in deep shit.

...

Kwanda was still taken back by what Sam said to her . How could he still love her after everything ?

Kwanda : What did you say ?

Sam : I can't sit and watch you suffer in the hands of a polygamist. I love you Kwanda and even if it's the last thing I die doing , I'll fight for you ... Again.

Kwanda : But why ? I mean how.. After all these years and all these heartbreaks I've put you through.

Sam : I've married again after you and yes I loved Nikita but my love for you never perished . What you and I have can't be erased by any circumstance.

Kwanda : It's a web of complications though , I'm married.

Sam : He doesn't deserve you .

Kwanda : And I deserve you ? Sam I feel bad about everything that have happened no matter how I can justify if. Yes Nkosi doesn't deserve me but I don't deserve you just as much. I don't deserve such love after everything.

Sam : Don't you love me ?

Kwanda : I do.

Sam : Then please listen to your heart just this once. I know it will not make up for all these years but please choose yourself. Do you enjoy being fifth best and share your husband with four others ?

Kwanda : No . It's not something I enjoy..

Sam : Then please come back to me. You don't want to live what's remaining of your life in regrets. You've lived that life for a long time now. Please Kwanda..

She puckered her lips together while she thought about it.

...

The setting had turned into a braai reunion for the children because Princess and Vanessa joined them. Princess brought her husband with who helped the men with the meat. The

ladies were welcoming for Zano because she didn't feel out of place and uncomfortable with them.

Vanessa : I want a Zulu man that'll treat me the same way my father was treating my mom. Will you find me a Zulu man Zano ?

Zano : Not all Zulu men treat women with respect. It really depends on the kind of person one is .

Vanessa : Don't you have brothers that you can hook me up with ?

Zano : My brothers are shitty , I doubt you will get along with any of them.

Princess : I say Zulu men are shitty . There are about a ten percent of them in the whole Zulu tribe who treat women right.

Vanessa : I disagree. The Zulu men that I know are amazing.

Zano : They are amazing from a distance , trust me. It's like getting married to someone thinking he is all diamond only for them to be a stone after tying yourself with them.

Charline : Zulu men are the tribe that marries polygamously ?

Princess : All African men can but Zulus are the ones who love to.

Charline : Well I say they are shit. You guys should marry Pedis.

Princess : Just because your man is a Pedi ?

They all cracked in laughter.

Charline : Pedis won't break your hearts . I've been with your brother since college years in Canada and look at us..

Zano : It's not a matter of colour , tribe, ethnic or nationality guys . Some people just know how to love their partners right. They are just good at this love thing.

Vanessa : True. I still want that Zulu man though.

They laughed and continued conversing. After a while Zano took out her phone and booked a plane ticket to Pietermaritzburg for the day after the next. She wanted to catch Ntsizwa by surprise..

Zanothando

****fourteen****

Some things can't be ran away from , especially the past. It might be hard to confront it but you can't run away from it. Sooner or later your sins will catch up with you. The heartbreak from the past will catch up with you. You have to go back and iron out the wrinkles of the past before they destroy the present and future.

Despite Phawu's anger towards his mother he had to talk to her because what he didn't know was if he didn't he'd live to regret it.

He walked in the living room and raised a brow at the woman sitting across his father. He recognised her from the picture but she was older now.

Phawu : What's going on ?

Sam : Sit down son , your mother needs to talk to you.

Phawu : What mother ?

Sam : Sit down.

Phawu : No why would I ? She is not my mother.

Nokwandisa : Son I..

Phawu : Don't you dare . (To his father) Did you call me here for this ?

Sam : You need to hear what she has to say. She is your mother son whether you like it or not and you have to talk to her.

Phawu : No , I don't have to talk to her if I don't want to. She's been gone for thirty years , what difference will it make ?

Without waiting for a reply from both his parents he stormed out. Nokwandisa's heart ached , not that he was expecting him to understand and welcome her with warm hands. She was hurt by the pain and anger she had instilled on the child when she abandoned him.

She sighed and Sam put his hand on her shoulder.

Sam : Give him time.

Nokwandisa : He will never forgive me.

Sam : It may be hard but you're his mother. He will give you a chance eventually. Don't stress okay ?

Nokwandisa : Yeah I should get going. Sam : One more thing..

Sam held her as she attempted to stand up and leave.

Sam : Are you willing to come back and be with me ?

Nokwandisa : I don't know Sam. I really don't..

Sam : But Kwanda you aren't happy there.

Nokwandisa : There are a lot of things we have to consider in this. I'm married Sam and not just to anyone , I'm a royal bride. I can't just up and leave like that ! Ancestors are involved, we had vowed to God that "till death do us apart". I've already broken that vow two times by divorcing and remarrying I'm tired now. I have kids with Nkosi and they are looking up to me , it's very complex Sam. My son wants nothing to do with me and I bet your daughter wouldn't too. How do I get in a relationship with their father if they are holding grudges against me ?

Sam : I didn't say it would be easy too but I'm here and I'll hold your hand. This could be your way of making it up to me and honestly it is what I need. I'm still bleeding Kwanda because the wound that you left me with years ago hasn't healed but maybe this is what I need. Maybe getting back with you will help me because as much as I'm still hurting I'm also still madly in love with you.

Nokwandisa : It won't be easy Sam. I love the idea and I'm open to it but it won't be the same. We separated thirty years back , I

doubt our relationship will be the same even if we do get back together. It'll be difficult for you to trust me again. There'll be insecurities floating in this relationship and thus making it a flop.

Sam : You are leaving me again ? Don't you see that I love you Kwanda ? You are disappointing me yet again.

She looked down , her heart skipping.

Sam : You are still indecisive and I understand. I'll give you time and space to go back to KZN and think hard about what you want . If you still want me , I'll welcome you back with wide opened arms. I might sound like a fool for saying this but that's how much I love you. Go back home

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I'll wait.

Nokwandisa : Thank you.

He hugged her and then pulled out.

Sam : I'll see you before you leave ?

Nokwandisa : Yes.

Sam : Bye.

Nokwandisa : Bye Samuel. Talk to Phawu for me , please.

He nodded in acknowledgement and she stood up leaving .

...

"Skoni , " Ntsizwa's sister exclaimed as Zano walked inside accompanied by the gate guard who helped her with her bags.

Zanothando : Hey skons.

Ntombi : Wasiza wafika . (Good thing you here) the royal house was turning into a circus.

Zano gave her a plain side smile.

Zanothando : Where is your brother?

Ntombi : I haven't seen him you know.

Zanothando : Okay skoni , I'll see you later okay ? I need to go and rest.

Ntombi : Hamba mntwanabantu. (Go poor child) I'll tell you everything when you wake up.

Zano chuckled and left the breathing Dailysun standing in the middle of the yard. All the rooms were empty and from how the beds were neatly made , it was obvuous that Ntsizwa hadn't slept in one of them. She went to her bedroom and

retired to her bed. A car sounded parking outside and she sat up quickly discarding the sleep that was invading her eyes.

Ntsizwa whistled walking in and stopped at her slightly opened door. He peeped in and was alarmed by Zano sitting on her bed. He walked in..

Ntsizwa : Thembalami ?

Zano sat quietly on the bed while he moved towards her.

Ntsizwa : Why didn't you tell me that you are coming back ?

Zano : I wanted to surprise you but it seems like the surprise didn't excite you.

Ntsizwa : What , no ! I am happy baby. I've missed you..

He hugged her while Zano remained stationary not hugging him back.

Ntsizwa : How was your trip ?

Zano : How was your stay , did you miss me ?

Ntsizwa : Of course I missed you.

Zano : To the point that you brought your mistresses around?

Ntsizwa : What ?

Zano : You heard me , I'm not gonna repeat myself like some broken record okay ?

Ntsizwa : I didn't bring any..

Zano : I was about to sleep so please give me space. When I wake up I don't want to be begging you for the truth. You know what you did and you will confess.

Ntsizwa : I don't know what you are talking about.

Zano : Phuma Ntsizwa . (Get out)

She said this and pilled over a fleece then laid on the bed closing her eyes. Ntsizwa walked out closing the door. Tears ran down her nose and side of her eye wetting the pillow.

...

After shutting Zano's door Ntsizwa walked to her sister's wing where she found her sister now in the kitchen.

Ntsizwa : What did you tell Zanothando ?

Ntombi : Nothing.

Ntsizwa : She knows that Londeka was here and the only person who could've told her is you.

Ntombi : Was it meant to be a secret ?

Ntsizwa : Yes ! You know how fragile Zano is , this had made her cross.

Ntombi : Well if you know how fragile your wife is , why did you betray her like that ?

Ntsizwa : Ntombi.

Ntsombi : No Ntsizwa what you did was wrong and I had every reason to tell your wife . I will not help you cover your promiscuity okay ?

Ntsizwa : It's not promiscuity , Londeka was supposed to be my wife initially.

Ntombi : Oh did Zano know about that? Did she actually know that the wife that the elders 'chose' for you is actually your mistress .Why are you doing this to the poor child after everything she has been through ? She has already been through so much please cut her some slack.

Ntsizwa : She chose to marry in a royal family , such things are normalcy.

Ntombi : Yes she chose to marry you. Even if it meant betraying her own family . She chose you over her father. The least you

can do is also choose her bhuti. Choose her over Londeka and all this polygamy nonsense. You promised to love her and her only , why are you now going back on your word ?

Ntsizwa : Ntombi you won't understand the priorities that this chieftaincy came with.

Ntombi : And you won't understand the pain you have caused your wife. Nothing is as painful as being scorned but you won't know it because you aren't a woman. Next thing Zano will be acting crazy and you'll call her dramatic . You've disappointed me Ntsizwa and I hope for her sanity she divorces you because you don't deserve her.

Ntsizwa : Don't talk like that Ntombi . Zano understands the situation okay? Even though it was hard for her but it's her duty as my wife t support me . No one said marriage was easy.

Ntombi shook her head in disapproval and clapped once. This inhumane side of her brother was unbelievable.

Zanothando

****fifteen****

The silence treatment that Zano gave Ntsizwa was upsetting. She was hell mad and there was nothing he could do or say to pacify the situation..

A few days later she was still at it. To her it was better if they didn't talk about the other woman at all. It was better to ignore and run from her problem than actually facing and dealing with it because what Ntsizwa did couldn't be reverted. The damage he had done in her heart couldn't be repaired. The betrayal had cut her deeper than any kind of knife.

Ntombi : Uzosala uba right ? (Will you be okay after I've left ?)

She asked her sister in law when she helped her with her suitcases to the car that it's ignition was already running in the driveway.

Zano : I guess, although I'll miss you and your gossips.

Ntombi laughed briefly then straightened her face looking at Zano's wrinkled face. Her eyes had dark eye bags and there

were lines of frustration across her forehead and wrinkles next to her eyes.

Ntombi : Have you been getting enough sleep ?

Zano : Of course I sleep Ntombi , you know I love sleeping so much.

Ntombi : I'm concerned Zano. This thing between you and my brother seems serious. You've fought before but it was never this intense.

Zano : We might be heading for divorce. I can't handle this heartbreak. This time around he has gone too far you know. And to think that I was considering accepting him taking another wife because from what I know the marriage would've been loveless as he said it was arranged. But now that it is sinking in that he had been cheating on me with someone else , I don't think I'll handle this.

Ntombi : I told Ntsizwa about this, I genuinely warned him but it seems like he has made up his mind. Pity he will lose a good woman while he is busy chasing after straatmates.

Zano : Chieftaincy has ruined him and if I knew he'd turn out to be like this then I wouldn't have married him. Don't get me wrong , I love your brother . I love him a lot but if loving him means I have to endure such then I'd rather not . I grew up in a polygamous household and trust me it is not a very appeasing

environment for a child to grow up in. There's a lot of fighting , jealousy and hatred that was going around . I used to envy other kids because they received more of a father's love than I. Not everyone can be a good polygamous father and husband. You can't do a lot of things at once , one or two will suffer. I know when Ntsizwa brings other wives into our marriage, I'll be the one to suffer because they'd be giving him what I don't. I've had so much pain when growing up Ntombi that I can't and I don't want to feel like that anymore. I don't want to be hurt ever again. All Ntsizwa had to do was love me and protect me from heartbreak . He had to be my happy place and he did that for a few years then slowly stopped. If death is the only thing that is supposed to do us apart then I'll die before my actual death. I'll die from all the knives he'll keep stabbing me with because honestly your brother has crushed my soul.

Ntombi : Yet he is the one who always preached about how we should treat you like one of us and not allow anything to happen to you. We never mistreated you and it is safe to say we were good in laws to you because Ntsizwa didn't want anything happening to you. Now the same person who was shielding you becomes the source of your pain. There are a lot of ways for you to conceive apart from the normal way and it's not like Ntsizwa isn't aware of them. He knows very well that there is adoption and IVF out there. He is aware of surrogacy but he chooses to marry another wife in the name of wanting

kids. Let him not use your inability to carry children as a cover for his promiscuity. He wanted to take another wife in the first place , because if he didn't he would've considered other means of you guys having kids. I mean you and Ntsizwa are young you know about these things , he shouldn't be much of a traditionalist. If there is a generation that can bend all the rules for love , it's our generation. Love means a lot to us and if Ntsizwa can't love you the way he has to then he doesn't deserve you. Zano : My thoughts exactly . Why cheat on me for a baby if he loves me that much? I think I've become a burden to Ntsizwa and that's why he is doing all the things he is doing. He is tired of supporting me and understanding. I thought he was understanding but he isn't . Now that things are getting hot in the kitchen , he is opting for the easy way out. One that will benefit him only and make me cry. This is not how things are done in marriage. When one is weak in marriage the other have to be strong to strengthen the other. Ntsizwa isn't strengthening me but pressing on me instead. He is the reason for my weakness and it hurts that I love him.

Ntombi put a hand on Zano's shoulder and looked into her eyes. She could feel the density the pain that she saw reflecting in her eyes.

Ntombi : Look Sisi you are still young and you can still achieve a lot of things. If you want to leave Ntsizwa , leave now that you

are still young so that you can still find someone who will love you. Polygamy is not something that Ntsizwa is obligated to marry in , my father loved my mother only and that's how he kept it until they both died. Just because he is a king doesn't mean he should be marrying ten wives. Isdala leso , now people protect what they love. If Ntsizwa isn't protecting you then you are not what he loves...or not anymore.

Zano : I hear you and thank you. You've been a wonderful sister since I arrived here to come and marry your brother and I know that in whatever situation I found myself in you would take the good side and not your brother's. Which makes me feel free to make a decision that'll make me happy and put me first without fearing criticism from you. Thank you..

Ntombi : I am a woman and before I attempt to judge I step in that person's shoes and turn the tables to view the situation from their perspective. I wouldn't like for my husband to do what Ntsizwa is doing to you so just know that I'll always stand by you.

Zano : I love you for that and whenever I feel like the world is getting heavy for my shoulders

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I will come to you. Always.

Ntombi : You are welcome. Let me leave Zano, my husband misses me and my runny mouth.

Zano laughed and accompanied her to the car walking the short remaining distance from where they were standing all this time talking. They put the suitcases in the trunk and Ntombi jumped in the backseat after hugging Zano goodbye.

Ntombi : Bye skoni.

Zano : Bye and don't be a stranger.

Ntombi : I won't.

The driver drove off with Ntombi waving until they drove out of the palace's gates.

...

"Hail to Her Majesty , welcome back Ndlunkulu Mholikazi "
Nokwandisa smiled happily and walked in. Her two daughters rushed to welcome her with a group hug that she gladly received.

Ntwenhle : Finally !

Sibahle : Sicishe sahamba sithi awusabuyi. (We almost left thinking you aren't coming back anymore)

Nokwandisa : I'm here now , you guys had to wait patiently .

Sibahle : No ma we also have our own marital homes than we need to keep on their feet.

Nokwandisa : Konje you got married , I'm not going to hear the end of it .

They laughed as Nkosi walked to them.

Nkosi : Girls can I have a minute with your mother ?

Ntwenhle : Sure.

They walked back to the living room. Nkosi hugged her and then kissed her while she tried to give him the exciting energy he was giving to her back.

Nkosi : I missed you.

He said , his chin resting on her head and his fingers caressing and moving the strands of hair that were underneath her doek constantly flowing to her face.

Nokwandisa : I missed you too. We need to talk ... after the children have left ?

Nkosi : Okay?

Nokwandisa : Yeah , let me go catch up with them.

He kissed her forehead.

Nkosi : See you later.

Nokwandisa : Later it is

He let go of her and she travelled to the living room where Sibahle and Ntwenhle were chatting loudly.

Nokwandisa : You guys have grown up so much.

Sibahle : And we don't look that much alike anymore neh ?

Nokwandisa : No you don't.

They laughed.

Ntwenhle : At least mom was able to tell who was who unlike ugogo.

Sibahle : We used to confuse granny so much sometimes she'd ask " Manje who is who ?"

Nokwandisa : And you guys didn't make things easier for her because Ntwenhle will go to her and tell her that she is Sibahle.

Sibahle : Ntwenhle was troublesome.

Nokwandisa : So when was the last time you talked to Zosuliwe or uZano?

Ntwenhle rolled her eyes at the mention of her sisters' names.

Ntwenhle : Zano and I don't talk , you know your child mos. She lives in her own world. And as for Zosuliwe she only calls when she needs something from me.

Nokwandisa : But you guys are siblings you have to have a tight bond. Nothing makes a mother more happier than seeing her offspring getting along perfectly .

Ntwenhle : It won't happen with Zano and I . I don't know about Sibahle but me and your daughter we repel.

Sibahle : I love her as my sister because I wouldn't hate her but we won't be sister goals ma I'm sorry.

Nokwandisa sighed defeated.

Nokwandisa : You don't say such things about your sisters girls.

Ntwenhle : Let's rather not talk about it ma because I can see what you're trying to do. Zano and us will never be that close , besides she chose a man over us and that's betrayal. She betrayed this family.

Nokwandisa nodded and looked away while the daughters continued chatting without a care in the world.

...

Sam's mood shot up when Phawu's car parked in the yard. He hadn't seen him for days and him showing up meant he wasn't angry anymore. He walked to where his father was and leaned with the wall .

Phawu : Timer (Dad)

Sam : Hi son , how are you ?

Phawu : I'm okay , I just brought you some good news.

Sam : Okay ?

He put down the hosepipe and wiped his hands then walked closer to him also leaning over the wall.

Sam : I'm listening.

Phawu : You are going to be a grandfather. There is a girl that I've impregnated ..

Sam : Really ? (Laughed in excitement) congratulations mfana wami , usuyindoda manje. (..my boy , you're a man now .)

Phawu : Thanks dad. She gave me a runaround though at first. (Chuckled) She wanted to terminate the baby because she said she wasn't ready and all that but I talked to her and we are keeping the baby. I have to step up and pay her fees though , pay for her livelihood.

Sam : If you have ruined things for her then you have to be responsible.

Phawu : That's why I came to you. I want to pay damages to her family but she has to tell her parents first.

Sam : Way to go son. When she has let her parents know then they'll come to report the pregnancy , that's when we as the Khumalos will go and pay the damages.

Phawu : Understood.

Sam : Congratulations once again.

Phawu : Thank you.

He looked at him contemplating whether he should bring up the Nokwandisa issue or not. Phawu realised the look and it clicked that he wanted to talk about his mother.

Phawu : I don't want to talk about that woman dad.

Sam nodded , he thought he shouldn't push it .Phawu walked to pick up the hosepipe and continued washing his father's car.

Zanothando

****sixteen****

Ntsizwa stood in the passage and when Zano walked through he put both his hands to either sides of the wall blocking her from walking past. She sighed and folded her hands tucking them under her armpits.

Ntsizwa also huffed out and then opened his mouth to talk but quickly shut his lips thinking carefully about what to say.

Ntsizwa : Can we please talk Thembalami?

Zano : Yeah about what ? You want to talk about how you made a fool out of me or you want to talk about how you continuously break my heart and lie on my face even after I begged you not to ?

Ntsizwa : Baby I..

Zano : No let's talk my love . Let's talk right here and right now siphumele obala. (..let's ease ourselves) You want to justify yourself. Okay go ahead , ngifuna ukuzwa uzozithethelela uthini .(I want to hear what you have to say about yourself)

Ntsizwa : Look there's no explanation or justification to what I've done. I was a complete cow and I know I took you for granted. That wasn't my intention Thembalami.

Zano : What exactly was your intention? To lie and betray me then get away with it?

Ntsizwa : Please just listen to me.

Zano : No !

She was getting worked up and he was hating it. He was hoping they'd talk calmly about this but it was understandable , she was hurting. Zano walked past him bumping into his shoulder . He quickly turned and followed her into their bedroom.

Ntsizwa : MaQwabe we are married and couples fight everyday. At the end of the day we have to iron out our problems and move on with life.

Zano : That easy huh ? We overlook your cheating ways and move on with life . I'm supposed to share you with another woman that you've impregnated and I'm supposed to smile and hold on because we are married ? Do you have an idea how much it kills me when I have to think about that girl and her bump ? You chose her because I can't fall pregnant. Don't you have no guilty conscience na wena ?

Ntsizwa : I do feel bad about this baby trust me. I stay up all night thinking about it . I'd do anything to make it up to you , I promise.

Zano : You stay up all night to think about her ! I stay up all night because the hole in my heart keeps me awake. I can't sleep , I can't relax or be the same Zano anymore and it's all your fault. You will do anything to make it up to me right ?

Ntsizwa : Anything.

Zano : Well I want a divorce and you'll file for it.

Ntsizwa : But baby I don't want to divorce you. I love you Zano and living without you wouldn't make sense to me.

Zano : If you don't want to do that for me then there's nothing me and you have to talk about. I'm done with you Ntsizwa, done ! Get out of my room.

Ntsizwa : MaQwabe !

The surname reminded her of her father and she became even more mad. She grabbed her perfume bottle from the dressing table and threw it at him. It hit the wall and broke while the liquid spilled out.

Zano : Get out ! I hate you Ntsizwa !

He attempted to walk to her but she threw more things at him. She was angry , the first time he ever saw her this angry. He raised both his hands in surrender and walked out . Zano sank to the floor and sobbed .

...

Kwanda's navel twitched just when she was sharing a laugh with the twins. She tried to brush it off but the pains got more intense . She frowned and put her hand on her abdomen.

Sibahle : Ma are you okay ?

She frowned even more as the pains continued to attack her poor navel. The pains expanded to her uterus , she felt like she was going on labour again..

Ntwenhle : Ma ?

She was now leaning back taking in all the agony she was feeling. She was okay not so long ago but now she was crying in pains.

Nokwandisa : Awwww!

She pressed harder on her abdomen with both her folded fists hoping the pain will ease.

Sibahle : Ntwenhle go call dad !

She held her mother's back as she rocked herself grumbling in pain. Tears rolled down her cheeks , she was now screaming like a mad woman. Nkosi got in and squatted next to her trying to make her face him..

Nkosi : Sthandwa Sami...Mholi ? What's wrong baby talk to me?

She whimpered while she stretched her legs crying. Nkosi saw her constantly pressing her lower body and took out his phone.

Nkosi : Should I call the ambulance ?

Nokwandisa : No..no..don't.

She said in amidst of the cries and grumbling.

Nokwandisa : I'll be Awww. I will be fineee!

Sibahle shook his head and told her father to go ahead and call the ambulance. Kwanda stood up and walked around crying hoping that stretching her legs will do the trick. The other two wives and maids had heard these cries and were now standing at the door in awe gawking at her.

Nkosi : I'm calling the ambulance Mholi you'll be fine.

She shook her head grunting in the process. Her phone rang and she walked to the coffee table to get it

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Sibahle got a glimpse of the caller and it was saved as "Sanalwami ."

She cried while answering it. A scream from Zano almost deafened her..

Zano : Mama!

She was sobbing and crying while calling her name.

Nokwandisa : Baby?

Zano : I need you mama. I know it's impossible but I just need you at the moment !

She continued sobbing while Nokwandisa was trying to ignore the pain in her navel. She hung up and turned to the others who wore worried looks across their faces. She gritted her teeth together. Zano's voice was still ringing in her ears ,she needed her. She was calling out to her and what she needed was her mother to respond to the call.

" Mama ! " It still rang in her ears. She ignored her own pain and walked towards the couch taking her car keys.

Ntwenhle : Mama uyaphi ?(Where are you going ?)

Nokwandisa : I'll be back baby.

Although walking was hard with the way her abdomen was paining she leaped across the yard to her car. Nkosi was following her..

Nkosi : The ambulance is on it's way where are you going ?

Nokwandisa : I'm sorry Nkosi , my daughter needs me.

She reversed and then drove ahead speeding out of the area towards the neighbouring outskirts.

...

Vanessa put a plate full of food in front of her brother. Phawu chuckled at the heap of rice then asked for a spoon so he can dig in.

Phawu : Thank you Vee , I don't have that much of a huge appetite though

Vanessa : I know you haven't had a delicious home cooked meal in the past few days. I know you don't cook for yourself.

Phawu : You know me very well.

Vanessa sat on the other side of the island on the high stool.

Vanessa : So have you given the situation with your mother a thought?

Phawu : Vee please.

Vanessa : She is your mother Phawu , you can't run away from that. No matter how much you'll try to , sooner or later it'll haunt you.

Phawu : She abandoned me. She rejected me.

Vanessa : I'm sure there is an explanation to it. That's the reason she is reaching out to you now right ? She wants to mend things with you .

Phawu : If there's a need for her to explain then there's something wrong and I don't want to hear it.

Vanessa : She is your mother !

Phawu : Vee stop ! You've made your point. I know I'm not your mother's child now please shut the fuck up I want to eat in peace. If you want me and you to get along then stop forcing that woman down my fucking throat.

Her skin cringed as he snapped at her. She swallowed and kept quiet with the intention of refraining from pouring petrol in fire . The issue of his mother was a fresh wound to Phawu and if Vanessa wanted him to heal , she better stopped poking it.

...

Dust arose as Kwanda's car slowed down at the gate. The gateman opened for her when she told him that she is Zano's mother. At least the pains had gone down while she was driving. She was driving recklessly but everything else didn't matter to her anymore. She wanted to reach her child regardlessly..

She ran to the house like Usain Bolt not a sight of Ntsizwa around. She knocked several times with no one coming to open.. She tried opening the door and it opened. She walked in peeping in all the rooms ..

Zanothando was on the floor with bleeding palms while a bottle of perfume's broken pieces were scattered to the floor.

Nokwandisa : Zano ?

Zano looked up to her and rubbed her face with the back of her hand.

Zano : Mama ?

Nokwandisa : Oh my poor baby.

She kneeled next to her and hugged her while fits of sobs where the only audible thing in the room. Kwanda kept rocking Zano and hushing her

She was breaking apart and all that she needed was a mother's touch. She was trying to be strong all this time but the honest truth was that she wasn't handling everything very well . She needed her mother now more than ever..

Nokwandisa : What happened ?

She asked taking both his hands to hers.

Zano : I became angry and ran my hands on the broken bottles and they cut me.

Nokwandisa : It's okay baby , your mother is here now okay ? I'm here.

Zano : What did you tell your husband?

Nokwandisa : Don't worry about your father. Where is your first aid kit ?

Zano : Closet .

Nokwandisa : Okay baby.

She stood up and walked to the closet. Zano smiled and wiped her tears. For the first time ever , she felt like everything will work out. That's what a mother's presence can do to a child. It came with a sense of relief...

Hours passed while everyone waited for Kwanda to return. Eventually she came back when everyone had resorted to sleep. She found Nkosi sleeping in her bedroom.

He woke up when he felt movement on the bed.

Nkosi : Where have you been ?

Nokwandisa : Hlali.

Nkosi : To Zano?

Nokwandisa : She needed me.

Nkosi sighed not knowing what to say.

Nokwandisa : I think our marriage is in shambles. If you're keen to mend it and make it work again then we should go for couple's therapy , see a marriage counselor.

17

Zanothando

****seventeen****

The therapist welcomed Kwanda and Nkosi then offered them a seat. It didn't make sense to Nkosi why an old couple like them should sit in a room with a stranger then offload to her their problems. That's absurd..

Counsellor : I welcome you and commend this step you've taken to come and try to mend your marriage . Some couples wouldn't have bothered to come and iron out the problems threatening their marriage.

She reached for her notepad and gave them a warm smile. The old couple seemed uncomfortable since it was their first session. People don't kick it off on the first day of counseling so she understood.

Counselor : Okay let's start. What is the problem ?

Nokwandisa cleared her throat.

Nokwandisa : We ...I don't think I am happy in this marriage. I am satisfied with how things are but I'm not happy. Satisfaction and happiness are two different things.

Counselor : Mr Qwabe did you have an idea that your wife isn't happy ?

Nkosi : She never told me about it. I tried all I could to make her a happy wife but I guess my efforts only reached the satisfaction level not happiness. I wasn't aware..

Counselor : What do you think is the root of the problem ?
What did you do wrong or what did you not do ?

Nkosi : I don't know.

Counselor : Mrs Qwabe ?

Nokwandisa : Our problems are caused by two things , our children and his wives. They date back to when we had just gotten married..

Counselor : Go ahead ma.

Nokwandisa : A woman can't be happy if her kids are suffering or unhappy . I was trying to get my life together and take in my children from my previous marriages. One was four years and I had to fight for his custody because when me and my ex husband divorced he said I shouldn't think about coming near my son. Nkosi was well aware of what I went through and

instead of supporting me he put a strain on me too. I remember after giving birth to the twins I wanted to contact my lawyer for Phawu's custody but Nkosi's mother stopped me. She told me that children from my previous marriages shouldn't come near this marriage because according to tradition they don't belong in this home. That pained me so much but I kept quiet about it because this was my third marriage , I didn't want to jeopardize it also . Then he went and took a second wife , I lost myself right there. Nothing else didn't matter anymore . I gave up on my sons and trying to make this marriage work. I let everything be and year after year for thirty years following that my marriage was drowning in my tears. I was happy for about five years but after that , pain became my friend . my heart is still aching..

Nkosi : You know I have nothing against your children. Whatever my parents may have said or done to you it was beyond my control . You shouldn't have let them oppress you in the name of tradition.

Nokwandisa : What about the things that weren't beyond your control ? When you disowned our daughter and when you took other wives despite my unhappiness about it ? Nkosi , did you even love me ?

Nkosi : Of course I loved ... I love you Kwanda. You are the mother of my children and my first wife.

Counselor : What drove you to taking other wives while you had one ? Wasn't she enough ?

Nkosi kept quiet .

Kwanda : Please answer . Was the problem with me all this time ?

Nkosi : Yes !

He said promptly, tears glistened Kwanda's eyes.

Nkosi : You never gave me an heir . We tried three times for a boy child but you kept giving me girls after girls. What was more absurd was that you had three sons before we met but when it came to me you became useless.

Kwanda : Wow.

The therapist let them be in their feels and cough everything out from their chests. That's what counseling is about , letting the other person know how you feel and confronting your own demons.

...

The lights in the house were dimmed when Ntsizwa parked in the garage. He checked the time before climbing out. It was just after seven and there was no way that Zano was asleep already.

He was surprised to be greeted by the aroma of roasted turkey . The last time Zano prepared his favourite dish was when things were still okay between them .

Ntsizwa : Zano ?

The table was set up with scented candles worthy of the honour of a romantic dinner for two. He was still dumbfounded when Zano walked in , in a three piece lace number. She smiled and fixed the folds of the silk gown.

Zano : You home ?

Ntsizwa : What's going on ?

Zano : It's our anniversary , have you forgotten ? I don't blame you though , with everything that has been going on around this house it was quite easy for it to slip your mind.

Ntsizwa : I hadn't forgotten I just never thought you'd want to celebrate since you're conflicted.

Zano smiled and came over to take off Ntsizwa's jacket and relieve him off the things he was holding. She pulled a chair and signalled him to sit down.

All this loving act was scaring him but he sat down. His eyes couldn't stop wandering and each time they landed on her thighs and cleavage he felt aroused.

Zano : How was your day ?

Ntsizwa : It was good

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nothing extra ordinary happened until I got home.

Zano : You seem unsettled , relax now will you ? I'm not going to do anything to you.

Ntsizwa smiled.

Zano reached for the big knife on the table , Ntsizwa got alarmed and threw his upper body back.

Zano laughed and started slicing the stuffed turkey. He dished a few pieces with the veggies in Ntsizwa's plate then hers .

Zano : Gin or wine ?

Ntsizwa : Wine please.

She poured wine in his glass and the gin in hers. She gulped down the neat strong liquid and frowned then filled the glass again..

Zano : Bon appétit .

Ntsizwa started digging in while Zano kept downing glasses of gin.

Ntsizwa : Slow down on the alcohol please.

Zano : I'm trying to calm down my nerves. There's something I need to tell you.

Ntsizwa put down his fork and told Zano to say whatever it was she wanted to.

Zano : I've been thinking a lot about our situation. I can conclude that no marriage is without sin right ?

Ntsizwa : Right.

Zano : I love you and I want to save our marriage so that means I should get what is making us fight out of the way .

Ntsizwa : How ?

Zano : I'll accept your wife and child . I won't be a bitter wife anymore and I'll try to get along with her .

Ntsizwa : Really ?

His mood shot up and he beamed in excitement.

Zano : Yeah I mean me and her will be sister wives whether I like it or not. The least I can do is to accept her. I can't be angry for ever.

Ntsizwa : Thank you , thank you so much. You have no idea how much this means to me. Ngyabonga thembalami. (Thank you)

He kissed her hands then smiled adoringly .

Zano : How's the food ?

Ntsizwa : My favourite dish , it's delicious thank you.

She smiled and drank from her glass. He looked at his untouched plate.

Ntsizwa : Why aren't you eating yours?

Zano took off the gown revealing the undergarments. They complimented her body and skin so well since they were lace material.

Zano : Because the food is poisoned.

Ntsizwa choked and coughed while he gawked at his wife in disbelief. His eyes threatening to fall from their socket.

Londeka's mother passed by her room and noticed that she was still up. She knocked and walked in with the white envelope that was bearing good news in her hands.

L. Mother : Nontombi awukalali ? (You aren't asleep my girl ?)

Londeka : Cha ma , I'm thinking. (No mom)

L. Mother : What's wrong ? You don't sound well for someone who's been chosen by the royal family to be their bride.

Londeka : Ma ?

She handed her the envelope.

L. Mother : This is a letter from the royal family asking for a date for your negotiations . It came last week..

Londeka : That was quick.

L. Mother : This professes the love Ntsizwa has for you my baby. Now listen to me , you don't let this go. This is an opportunity that you have to have a tight grip on because it comes once. This is every girl's dream Londeka , marrying in that family will secure a good future for you and the baby you are carrying. Don't mess it up okay ?

Londeka : I am not pretty sure I still want to do this ma. Being someone's second wife and all that is scary . His wife doesn't even like me.

L. Mother : She doesn't have to. You aren't marrying her , you are marrying Ntsizwa and what matters is that Ntsizwa loves you. Being a second wife doesn't mean you are loved lesser it

just means that Ntsizwa met you later when he had already committed to someone else.

Londeka : What if I regret my decision after marriage ?

L. Mother : You are just scared and it's understandable. Every married woman can relate to the wedding jitters. You will feel like this until you and Ntsizwa finally tie the knot. You are just scared and that's why you feel like you having doubts.

She pointed at the letter.

L. Mother : That is proof of how much you are loved. Someone else would've impregnated you and left but Ntsizwa being the true man that he is , he took responsibility for this. That's the kind of man you want to spend the rest of your life with , trust me.

Londeka : You are right. I am blessed

L. Mother : Your father and I are proud of you.

She hugged her and stood up to leave. Londeka took her phone and searched for Nhlanhla's numbers . She blocked him and deleted the contact then she got in bed.

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Zanothando

****eighteen****

Ntsizwa coughed continuously while Zano laughed. He stood up to get water from the fridge .

Zano : Nice move. Water will actually give the poison the platform to work efficiently.

Ntsizwa : Why are you doing this Zano are you crazy ?

Zano : No are you crazy ? Do you think you can betray me and I'll let it slide just like that ?

Ntsizwa : Poisoning me will solve this?

Zano : Yes ! The problem would be out of the way if you die. Okuyiyona mbangela yakho konke loku is you. (You're the cause of all of this)

She now had the knife in her hands while Ntsizwa leaned with the counter trying to process everything.

Ntsizwa : Who are you ?

Zano : I'm a woman scorned. I'm hurt !

She threw the knife across the room.

Zano : One chance ! Just one chance I'm granting to you. If you hurt me like this ever again I swear I'll poison you for real. Break me one more time , Londeka will be singing amagugu .(Funeral hymns.)

She clicked her tongue and put on her silk gown again.

Ntsizwa : You didn't poison me ?

Zano : I will if you fuck up again.

Ntsizwa : I am not going to die.

Zano : Not yet. Goodnight..

She took a strand of meat from his plate and ate then walked upstairs. He sighed in relief.

...

The weeps were loud enough to wake up the dead and crack down the walls. Her tears were gushing out in numbers uncontrollably that Nkosi felt a pint of regret while he watched her from the doorway.

She had her knees up and rested her face down on them. Her voice kept cutting in between her sobs then she'd draw her breath deeply and wail again.

Nkosi walked in and sat on the edge touching her feet.

Nkosi : MaSthole !

Kwanda remained in that position despite Nkosi's call , the cries never seized too.

Nkosi : I'm sorry mkami , if I knew that going to the counsellor will cause problems for us I wouldn't have agreed.

What I said back there was uncalled for and I'm sorry I spoke out of turn. It wasn't my intention to upset you and now that you are crying like this I regret it.

A moment passed by and Kwanda still didn't reply or slow down on her wails. Nkosi awkwardly sat on the edge waiting for her to raise up her head.

Nkosi : Sthandwa Sami. Angithandi masilwa kanje ..(I don't like it when we fight like this)

Kwanda got up and pushed his hand off. She wiped the pool of salty liquids from her face while hiccups escaped her mouth.

Kwanda : Why are you still here ? Usafunani lana Nkosi ? (What do you still want here Nkosi ?) Go to MaCele or whoever you want to go to that bore you sons. Angithi I'm useless (Aren't I ...) Go Nkosi ! Go..

She sank back to her emotions and cried.

Kwanda : You called me useless. Is that was what you think of me ? For thirty years ! Thirty years you thought I was useless ? Maybe you should go back to biology class and learn meiosis all over again. The gender of our daughters was determined by the shots you were shooting. You were shooting Xs and it's your fault. If you want to know who's useless , look in the mirror..

In the speed of lightning Nkosi flew his hand across Kwanda's cheek slapping her. The sound of his palm colliding with her soft , wet cheek echoed in Kwanda's ears.

Nkosi : Don't you dare talk to me like that. Ungazongiqinela wena mfazi ndini uyezwa ? (Don't you dare act fresh on me woman !)

She huffed out in disbelief. The last time she had a man slap her was with Mike , decades ago.

Kwanda : Get out of my room.

...

Phawu took two steps per second jogging up to the twelfth floor since the elevator was broken. He eventually reached the anticipated room in the student's residential apartments and knocked panting. His limbs were tired and aching.

Petunia opened with a sleepy face but her face lit up when she saw Phawu.

Phawu : Fifteen minutes past nine . I'm on time with your breakfast ma'am .

He handed her the brown paper bag and mango juice.

Petunia : I said coffee.

Phawu : You don't have the decency of consuming caffeine.

Petunia : Yeah yeah . Good morning , please come in.

Phawu : Morning.

Petunia : Thank you for bringing me breakfast.

Phawu : The securities gave me trouble though.

Petunia : How did they let you up ?

Phawu : Nothing money can't fix.

He looked around and admired the neatness of the surroundings. Everything was in place and clean.

Petunia : So I was on the phone with my mother and she said we will come report the pregnancy to your family soon.

Phawu : That's still done ?

Petunia : My family believes that it is supposed to be done that way before you pay the damages .

Phawu : I understand it's not a problem. You can come. I'm just grateful that you kept the baby , it means a lot to me.

Petunia : I was just being difficult , I wasn't going to abort. Abortion is not that easy , a mother and child have a strong unexplainable connection.. You can't just think you want to abort and do it instantly. You become skeptical and think a lot before you eventually do. I don't think I'd had lived with myself after aborting. I think this thing eats you for the rest of your life. It's like neglecting a baby , the mother never rests. They

think about their child for as long as they live. It's not that easy...

Phawu : Well I don't think mine thought about me every moment of her life. If that was the case , it wouldn't take her thirty two years to come back.

Petunia : What matters is that she came back and she is sorry. You won't forget it as yet but learn to forgive. Everyone deserves a second chance.

Humming was audible from the kitchen when Ntsizwa woke up. No cramps or vomiting to show that he was poisoned availed the whole night so it was quite clear that Zano was just bluffing.

He walked in the kitchen still in his nightwear and watched Zano moving around preparing breakfast while she danced.

Ntsizwa : Good morning.

Zano : Morning hubby.

Ntsizwa : You are in a good mood for someone who wanted to kill me yesterday.

Zano : I was just threatening you.

Ntsizwa : Everything you said yesterday , did you mean it ?

Zano : That I'll kill you if I found myself heartbroken again ? Yes.
That I am willing to be civil with your mistress ? Of course I
meant every single thing I said.

Ntsizwa : I'm happy to hear you say that.

Zano : Don't mistaken me for a fool though . I'm only doing this
for my inner peace . I'm tired of fighting and crying.

Ntsizwa : I understand and I'll make it up to you , I promise.

Zano : You know Ntsizwa , I'm willing to overlook the betrayal
and carry on with life. What about you ? Are you still going to
love and treat me the same way ? I don't want this to default
what we had.

Ntsizwa : It won't and I promise. Take my word please . I won't
love any other woman the way I love you. I might have lied to
you and caused you heartache but it doesn't change the fact
that I love you. You are my first love and hopefully my last..

She nodded and dished up for him. He told her to eat first
before he does. She laughed and handed him a glass of juice.

Zanothando

****nineteen****

A month later.

Frustrated by the noise outside Zano woke up and checked the time from her pedestal alarm clock. Five o'clock in the morning and already people are here to bring the bride ? What , were they trying getting rid of her ?

Ntombi walked in with a head wrap and shawl blanket for Zano in her hands.

Ntombi : Skoni ?

Zano covered her head with the pillow grunting.

Ntombi : Bakabo mnakwenu sebala , vuka. (Your sister wife's family is here , get up.)

Zano : It's so early.

She threw the pillow aside and sat on her butt.

Zano : I came here during the day. Yena waletswa ngamasa ? (Why is she brought in the early hours of the morning ?)

Ntombi shrugged and sat on the couch.

Ntombi : You need to get up so the umembeso can begin because they've been outside for about an hour now , they are cold. The ceremony cannot go on without you.

Zano : I seriously don't want to see that girl Ntombi. I feel like I'll jump on her and strangle her to death

Ntombi : I thought you had accepted her ?

Zano : I have but it doesn't make the hatred I have for her any lesser. I just have to learn to tolerate her.

Ntombi : Why did you eventually agree Zano ? I thought you were wiser than letting Ntsizwa do this to you. You had to put your foot down or threaten to divorce him if you had to.

Zano : Skoni I know what im doing okay ? It might not make sense to you but it honestly doesnt have to so please relax.

Ntombi : Let's go then.

Zano : I have to take a bath first.

Ntombi : You are abusing your authority sis .

Ululation and loud traditional wedding songs filled the yard as the bride entered. While Zano was getting ready the elders took Londeka to the kraal. The customs were done then the gifts were offloaded by the bride's family as they had to gift the groom's. Almost everyone was now gifted except for Zano who was nowhere in sight. Zano being gifted was a necessity as she was filling in for Ntsizwa's late mother.

Elder : Uphi uMaQwabe ndodana ? (Where is MaQwabe son ?)

He directed at Ntsizwa who himself had no idea. After a brief commotion Zano walked out with her traditional attire and the head wrap and shawl that her sister in law gave to her earlier on.

She apologised for inconveniencing the elders and sat on the grass mat next to Ntombi. A song was sang while Londeka took out a blanket from it's plastic bag. She walked to her with her head down as a sign of respect and put the vermilion blanket around her shoulders.

Londeka : I hope you accept this gift with a warm heart as I also bought it lovingly. I specifically chose this colour because it speaks for itself. Red is the colour of love and I'm hoping that as you accept me in your home we will love each other. Not only will you be a sisterwife to me but I hope you'll be my guide as a sister and a friend. I hope we will live in peace because I too come in peace. I only came here for the same reason you are already here therefore I hope there won't be any acrimony going on between me and you.

She made a slight bow and got the rest of the gifts. People ululated and sang as jolliness was what they felt.

Zano was lost in vexation as this marriage proved that the vestigial love between Ntsizwa and him was lost and will never be restored .

...

Kwanda parked her car under the school's visitor's parking lot and got out with her assistant . The school's gardener noticed that they had a lot of heavy boxes in the trailer that they needed help with and came to give a hand.

Gardener : Where is all of this going ?

Kwanda : The storeroom. Thank you..

They lifted the boxes to the storeroom and counted if they were the anticipated number after gingerly placing them on the floor.

The principal walked in with a sachet of sweets which she handed to Kwanda. She laughed and took them..

Principal : Thank you so much for what you're doing for the school. We need a lot of these and having you to donate makes a huge impact.

Kwanda : I'm glad I could be of help.

Principal : Sports management received your email and they might get back to you before the end of the week.

Kwanda : It's okay ma'am . Thank you for opening your school gates and allowing me to help where I can.

Principal : No , thank you.

Kwanda : And for the sweets as well.

She laughed and bid them farewell. Kwanda and her assistant walked out to the parking lot.

Kwanda : We are done for the day

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should I drop you off at home ?

Assistant : No it's okay , I'll take a taxi.

She leaned by the girder pressing her phone probably ordering an uber ride.

Kwanda : Okay then , see you on Monday. Enjoy your weekend..

Assistant : You too.

She got in her car and drove out of the premises. Minutes later while driving a call came through and she answered in hands free mode while she slowed down in traffic.

Lawyer : Your husband's lawyer contacted me today and he is demanding half of everything you own since you are the one who filed.

Kwanda : If I give him half of my estate is he going to sign right away ?

Lawyer : I think he is stalling on purpose. He knows that you won't agree to his terms-

Kwanda : Give him whatever he wants. Even if he wants my underwear too , give it to him so long he signs those papers as soon as possible.

Lawyer : Mrs Qwabe you can't be throwing in the towel and abiding to this man's demands. He is not entitled to even a third of what you own since he married in polygamy. You can't give everything to him.

Kwanda : I've been fighting all my entire life and I'm tired. I've had two divorces before this one and trust me they've sucked out all the energy in me. The first one was the nastiest and I can predict that this one will also drain my emotional strength and I don't want that. I'm too old to be fighting battles that I won't come out victorious in. Give whatever it is Nkosi wants , money isn't what I care about at this moment .

Lawyer : I still think its a bad idea Mrs Qwabe.

Kwanda : Okay then go ahead and fight because you are the lawyer but make sure that Nkosi signs the damn papers. I want to be divorced by the end of this year.

Lawyer : Yes ma'am.

She hung up and accelerated towards a red light absentmindedly . A bakkie came from the other side and collided with her car. She screamed as glass shattered and cut her face. The car rolled out of the highway to the side with the trailer smashing on it while the Bakkie just remained with a few scratches and a broken bumper on the road.

...

Petunia's aunt and mother made her sit on the floor and narrated to Sam why they were here.

P. Mother : Thank you for welcoming us in your house.
Sekunomonakalo osvelele thina baka Ngema. Sithole ukuthi Inja yenu idle amaqanda ethu.

Aunt : What we are trying to say is that our child here is pregnant and we are here to let you know that your son is responsible.

Sam nodded at the ladies.

Sam : I'm fully aware of what my son has done and us as the Khumalo family will take responsibility and remunerate the situation .

Aunt : That's good to hear. Can the boy come here so he can say for himself that he does know our daughter?

Sam : Very well.

He disappeared to the study while Petunia's aunt marveled the house and hinted that the family is well off.

Sam came back with Phawu who respectfully sat next to his father.

P. Mother : Wuye lo ? (Is thus him ?)

Petunia : Yes ma.

She acknowledged with her head faced down and accompanied it with a slight nod.

Sam : Do you know the girl Phawu ?

Phawu : I do.

Sam : Okay then.

Aunt : Thank you. We are going to leave then , hopefully we will see each other again when you come to pay damages.

The elders stood up and shook hands. Phawu smiled at Petunia and offered to walk them out. Her mother and aunt didn't mind for them to walk behind them and chat.

After a few minutes of randomly talking , Petunia said her goodbyes to Phawu and got in the car driving off with her mother and aunt. Phawu walked in and bumped into her father who was on the phone looking frustrated.

Phawu : Where are you going ?

Sam : Hospital.

Phawu : Why what happened ?

He followed him in the garage.

Sam : Your mother was involved in an accident. They said she is critical..

Phawu : What ? I'm coming with you..

He jumped in the passenger seat as his heart pounded. For some odd reason he panicked and he prayed silently for her to make it.

20

Zanothando

****twenty****

Zano fixed her collars and took her bags ready to leave. Ntsizwa walked in and he got filled with awe when he noticed that Zano was in her uniform.

Ntsizwa : Thembalami ?

He called lowly. It's been days and they haven't slept in the same bed because it's either Zano is working night shift or it is Londeka's turn .

Zano : Baby.

Ntsizwa : You're working again ?

Zano : Yeah I was put in the night shift this week. Is it my turn tonight ?

Ntsizwa : Of course.

Zano : Oh love , I'm so sorry. Duty calls..

Ntsizwa : Your job is taking you away from me.

Zano : I thought you agreed that I should do my practicals because I'll be graduating soon.

Ntsizwa : I'm not against you being an independent woman and working but these awry shifts are not pleasant.

Zano : I know baby , I know and I'll make it up to you.

She put down her bags and car keys and went to hold either sides of his shoulders.

Zano : Look on the brighter side though. This is a chance for you to be with Londeka and make her feel welcomed since you just got married . I'm not saying me and you shouldn't spend time together but since we are forced not to , make the best out of the situation . Okay ?

Ntsizwa : Yeah I understand. I miss you though and when I finally have you , it'll be world war III.

Zano laughed and took her bags from the bed and dangled her keys as she walked towards the door.

Zano : I love you for understanding. Bye .

She walked out of the main house and headed to the guest rooms outside that Londeka was using since her house wasn't

finished. If there is one thing that Zanothando put her foot down in were the living arrangements. She wasn't about to live in her house with her sister wife because chances are that when it was her turn she'd probably hear their lovemaking session at night which is an unbearable situation. Her father got that one thing right and that was to never get all his wives living under one roof because that calls for havoc.

She knocked lightly on the door and waited for a reply. A few seconds passed without any sound or movement from inside. She knocked again , louder this time. Her knuckles hitting harder on the wooden surface. Londeka opened with messy hair and a brash expression across her face evident that she was disturbed from a nap .

Zano : Hi , I'm sorry . It seems like I woke you up.

Londeka : It's fine. How may I be of help ?

Zano : I'm going to work.

Londeka : Futhi ? (Again ?)

She exclaimed loudly.

Zano : Yeah again. Please cook for your husband and make sure that he takes a bath.

Londeka : I will do that.

Zano : And braise the chicken , I've already taken it out from the freezer. He likes it braised.

Londeka : Okay thank you.

Zano : Bye love.

She turned and left rolling her eyes while Londeka turned around closing the door , yawning.

Zano got in her car and drove off sighing. Working was the only escape for her and sometimes she wished that she could stay at the hospital forever because of the peace she found there.

She arrived at the hospital and fixed her tag then jumped off the car. She bumped into her colleague as she walked in the foyer.

Colleague : Hayi Zano aren't you supposed to be off ?

Zano : I'd rather overwork myself than be at home. That place will drive me crazy for real.

The colleague laughed as they walked in .

...

Kwanda had sustained internal injuries and as a result she had to be operated. Sam and Phawu's hearts were up their throats because of how nervous they were. Kwanda was admitted two days ago but she still hasn't gained her consciousness yet. She has been to theatre and got operated but there was still no progress. She was breathing and her brain was working but her eyes just stayed glued closed. Even though this seemed like a setback

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Phawu and Sam never stopped coming to the hospital to check up on her. They clung to the hope that she will wake up. Their hope was so strong that the disappointment they felt after each visit never overturned it.

They were in her room listening to the machine beeping detecting her heartbeat . One not saying anything to the other just sitting there quietly embracing the silence .

The door opened and Nkosi walked in. He looked between Phawu and Sam then at the motionless Kwanda lying on the bed.

Nkosi : And then ? Who are you ?

Sam and Phawu turned simultaneously to look at him. Phawu chuckled and turned back to his mother .

Nkosi : What are you doing here ?

Sam : No , what are you doing here ?

Nkosi : I'm here for my wife.

Sam : You aren't together anymore.

Nkosi : I'm sorry to burst your bubble but we are very much still married. Legally and traditionally.

Sam : Kwanda wouldn't have wanted you here. Just leave.

Phawu felt irritated at them bickering and stood up .

Phawu : If you guys want to fight and behave like kids , why don't you just go outside ?

Nkosi : And who are you to talk to me like that? Mholi is my wife and if there's anyone who needs to leave here is you. I didn't fly here from KZN to be disregarded.

Sam : Isn't it enough that you disrespected your 'wife' throughout your marriage and even beat her ? Now you want to come here and finish her off ?

Phawu turned a fist towards Nkosi's face and knocked his jaw. Still dumbfounded Nkosi received a rain of other fists while Sam tried to pacify his son.

Phawu : You hit my mom ?

Sam held him and stood between them.

Phawu : You fucking put your filthy hands on my mom ?

Nkosi realised that the grown up man was Kwanda's son that was a few years old decades ago. He swallowed as Phawu breathed fire while his father shielded him.

...

Londeka cooked supper with a broken heart. It wasn't fair on her that she had to always cook and sleep with Ntsizwa while Zano worked night shifts without taking her turns. To her it

looked like she was doing it on purpose and it made her question if she really accepted her fully.

Ntsizwa : You okay my love ?

Londeka : Yes. I'm just preparing us supper.

Ntsizwa : Okay.

Londeka : Baby tell me . Is Zano always going to work night shifts while I have to do the cooking ?

Ntsizwa : Complaining already ?

Londeka : No baby I...

Ntsizwa : My love, if that's how things are going to be like then your house better be finished quickly because such small things is what will lead to you and Zano not getting along. Zano is working and I don't mind. If you too wish to work after giving birth , I won't stop you. I don't understand why you complain about cooking because you are cooking for me , your husband and yourself. Does feeding yourself really have to make you complain?

Londeka : I wasn't saying it like that baby , it's just that I was thinking Zano is purposely avoiding me.

Ntsizwa : You and Zano are sister wives not friends. She might've accepted you but she isn't going to be your best mate overnight. I advise you to mind your own business and stay in your lane . I'm not about to be a mediator between you and Zano because you are grown adults and I'm sure you can avoid stepping on each other's toes.

Londeka : I don't understand why this has turned to be an aggressive talk. I was just voicing out my frustrations.

Ntsizwa : Your frustrations aren't valid. Just a few days in this and you're already frustrated. This is polygamy Londeka and it's not a walk in the park. You and Zano are yet to disagree on certain things. Some issues which you will resolve and some you won't be able to. With the mentality you're going at , you won't survive in this. I'm not trying to be aggressive my love but I'm trying to navigate you through this. Zano is hardcore and you will end up divorcing me and walking away if such little things will easily get to you. If you are going to compete with her then you're in for a surprise because Zano is a lioness. She roars when she's angry and her anger is deadly. Grow a thick skin my love , polygamy is not for the fainthearted.

Londeka turned around with tears held with her lashes and minded her pots.

Zanothando

****twenty one****

Nhlanhla wiped his sweaty forehead as he sat down and drank water. It had been a long day and job hunting is a tiring task to carry out under this much blazing hot sun. It was hard to secure a job with only a matric certificate to bring to the table while other kids had degrees to flaunt with.

He wasn't worried about a job all along because he lived by the mercy of God but now that he had a baby coming, he had to make a plan. Even if it meant walking around handing out his CVs while being burnt by the sun. That's what being a parent meant to him , making sacrifices for his child.

He felt an excruciating arising pain from his forearm. He folded his t-shirt and noticed that his wound was bleeding and staining the bandage. He got up and walked all the way to his car. A car that he probably would have to sell to get extra cash. He got in and drove off with one hand careful not to put pressure on his other arm. He decided to drive by the clinic for some painkillers

and maybe have the wound checked out because he wouldn't be able to sleep with the agony that kept shooting up.

The drive was long and slow but eventually he got there and had his wound checked up.

Nurse : How can I help ?

Nhlanhla : I had my arm stitched a week ago but now it's bleeding so I need to know if everything is okay.

Nurse : Okay I'll help you.

Zano peeped in at the door.

Nurse : Sister Mkhonto please take over this case.

Zano : Are you knocking off ?

Nurse : Yeah I'm tired. Heard you are taking double shifts at the hospital and clinic ?

Zano : I need them.

Nurse : Girl I need your energy. He needs his wound to be checked out .

Zano : Okay.

The nurse left while Zano walked to the patient putting on her gloves.

Zano : Hi.

Nhlanhla : Hey.

She untied his bandage and looked at the wound.

Zano : Your stitches has ruptured. I'll have to stitch you up again and give you antibiotics.

Nhlanhla : Thank you.

Zano : What happened ? The cut seems deep.

Nhlanhla : Tavern fights.

Zano : Okay.

Nhlanhla : So heard your surname is Mkhonto. Related to Ntsizwa...that snob ?

Zano laughed while taking out the thread and needle.

Zano : The snob is my husband.

Nhlanhla : I hate him..

Zano : Really , what did he do to you ?

He chuckled and narrated everything to her while she did her work.

...

During his lunch break , Phawu decided to visit his mother in hospital. It was peaceful since he was alone , his father and stepfather absent. He placed the vase of flowers he had brought on the small table and opened the blinds for fresh air.

Phawu : Hey.

He whispered while he sat down holding her hand . He wasn't sure if she could hear him but he have been told that it's always a good idea to talk to someone in a coma because chances are huge that they might hear you.

Phawu : It's funny that it took me almost losing you for me to realise that I actually care about you. I never thought I'd be moved by an accident for me to express myself.

I read that letter you dropped off at my house that evening you came to Jo'burg. I know you never thought I'd read it but I

actually did the second after you left . I realised that my anger wasn't that deep if I was open to reading that letter and have insight on what actually happened. Reading that letter proved to me that I actually wanted to hear you out. I was angry but I was keen on giving you a chance. After reading that letter I think it changed everything. I'm not saying what you did was right because it wasn't but I understand the oppression you were under. I understand that you had to sacrifice everything for me. True love cannot get any deeper than that.

He squeezed her hand tighter.

Phawu : With all the time we have lost I want to make the best out of the time we have left. You are going to walk me through parenting and that's the best way you're going to make it up to me. Now please wake up and let's start over again because I have forgiven you and I'm willing to let you in ma.

The door swung open roughly startling Phawu. He quickly let go of his mother hand and turned to Nkosi who was equally surprised to see Phawu in there .

Phawu : You again ?

Nkosi : Is that how you speak to your elders ? Did whoever raise you raise you to disrespect your elders ?

Phawu : Well my dad and mother raised me with the outmost respect. But the streets taught me that any man who hits woman isn't worth my respect

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not even a tiny tint of it.

Nkosi : You have anger issues my boy. It is very obvious that you grew up without a mother with the way you are so angry at everyone and everything.

Phawu : Don't you dare !

Phawu warned with his pointing finger drawn out. Nkosi pulled out the ' what are you going to do if I dare ?' Face.

Phawu stepped closer and faced him while their foreheads touched.

Phawu : Say shit about my upbringing again. I dare you to say it again and I swear I'll regret what I'm going to do to you. You aren't my mother's husband anymore so I don't fear rearranging your already worn out face.

A doctor passing by heard the bickering and walked in to find Phawu screaming his lungs out pointing at Nkosi. Kwanda's

fingertips moved while her lashes flapped slightly almost opening.

Doctor : I think you should leave because you are fighting and upsetting the patient.

Phawu : Doc that's my mother.

Nkosi : And my wife.

Phawu : Shut up wena madala!

Doctor : I don't care what she is to both of you. She is my patient and she doesn't need this. Come back later when you know how to control your tempers. Please leave.

With their hearts on their knees , they both walked out with sagging shoulders while the doctor glanced at Kwanda and then walked out without noticing that she was slowly gaining her consciousness back .

...

Menzi and Charline were about to go to the hospital in Johannesburg North to check on his mother when Charline abruptly bowed with her hands on her knees.

Menzi : Baby ?

Charline shook her head whimpering as pains hit her abdomen.

Menzi : Are you okay ?

He held her back and also lowered her upper body to be at her level. She felt her underwear becoming damp.

Charline : My water broke.

Menzi : What ?

Charline : I'm going to labour dammit !

She barked at her husband.

Menzi : Okay let's walk to the car so I can get you to the hospital. Where is your bag ?

She cried and fell on her knees while brushing her back.

Charline : No it's too painful I can't go.

With his head all over the place. He rushed to get the bag while he called Zanothando.

Zano : Bro .

Menzi : Hey I need your help with some women things.

Zano : Call mom Menzi , I'm busy .

Menzi : Mom is in hospital and Charline is going on labour but she is acting up , I don't know what to do.

Zano : Mom is in hospital. Why ?

Menzi : She was in an accident , I thought you knew.

Zano : I don't know hence I'm this surprised. How come no one told me about this ?

Menzi : Zano my wife is screaming her lungs out , what must I do ?

Zano : It's normal Menzi. Just keep on apologising and assuring her that it'll be okay.

Menzi : But..

Zano : Why the fuck hasn't anyone told me about mom? Why are you guys like this?

Menzi sighed and took the bag and walked back outside. The call was supposed to be about Charline but now Zano was angry about her mother being in hospital while nobody bothered to let her know.

Menzi : It must have slipped our minds. Bye

Zano : I'm going to deal with you and Phawu when I get there...

He cut the call and went to help Charline up and walk to the car.

Charline : I hate you so much.

Menzi : I know baby I'm sorry.

She kept huffing consistently and screaming in pain.

...

Zano walked in on Londeka cleaning the countertops. She collapsed on the chair and exhaled as the fatigue weighed down on her body.

Londeka : Long day ?

Zano : Don't even mention it. Double shifts are tiring.

Londeka : Why are you overworking yourself like this ?

Zano : I just love my job and the experience I'm gaining from this will come in handy when I finally work at King Shaka.

Londeka nodded and squeezed the cloth drying it.

Zano : Uhm I had a patient today. A Nhlanhla Masuku , you know him ?

Londeka got perplexed and cleared her throat trying to maintain herself.

Londeka : No.

Zano : Funny because he knows you. Uthe angkhonze. (He passes his regards ?)

Londeka : You discuss me with your patients?

Zano : Actually he was the one who had to say all interesting things about. He actually ran his mouth so much.

Londeka : He must've been mistaken because I don't know anyone by that name.

Zano : Oh ?

Zano remarked amused and yawned afterwards.

Zano : Okay then. Let me go and sleep because I'm tired and I'm going to Jo'burg tomorrow.

She stood up and took her bags then dragged her feet towards the bedroom. Londeka instantly had a migraine at the thought of Zano and Nhlanhla talking about her.

Zanothando

****twenty two****

The excitement that filled Phawu when he found his mother awake was unexplainable. It was kind of weird to hold a conversation with her since he was supposedly angry before the accident but he went with the flow. Although Kwanda was smiling weakly and her sentences accompanied with groaning in pain , she felt lighter that she saw her son on her bedside when she woke up.

Phawu : What happened ? Dad told me you wouldn't just drive through a closed traffic light like that because he knows you're a responsible driver.

Kwanda : I was stressed out. I think I didn't pay attention to the red light and drove passed it.

Phawu : Why are you stressed , what's wrong ? I was so frustrated thinking that maybe the tension between us was messing up with your head. I remember on the day of the accident , you called and I ignored you.

Kwanda : It wasn't your fault. I admit that I was heartbroken by your anger towards me but it wasn't that , that got me in an accident. You know I'm going through a divorce right ?

Phawu : Yeah ?

Kwanda : Yeah and it's stressing me a lot. I had just gotten off a call with my lawyer and he was telling me about how Nkosi was making demands trying to stall signing the papers . That alone just froze my brain and I guess that's when I skipped the red light.

Phawu : He is giving you a hard time ?

Kwanda : I don't like your tone. Are you going to hit him again ?

He laughed lightly

Phawu : How did you know I hit him?

Kwanda : You thought I was dead when I was lying in here unconscious? I heard a few things.

Phawu : What else did you hear ?

Kwanda : The most important thing. That you are appeased. The little speech you gave me yesterday moved me. I didn't know you were such a baby .

Phawu : Okay that's a little awkward.

Kwanda : I heard everything you said. Even the part where you were pleading with me not to die.

Phawu : (Laughing) Mama stop it. You're making me feel awkward.

Kwanda's eyes shone with tears and she smiled.

Phawu : You're okay ?

Kwanda : You called me mama? For years I've yearned to hear that four-letter-word coming from your mouth.

Phawu smiled awkwardly.

Kwanda : Thank you

Zano's voice screamed in the corridor calling Phawu's name. He laughed and stood up.

Phawu : Your drama queen is here.

Kwanda : Why is she screaming ?

Phawu : We might have forgotten to tell her about the accident so she is angry . I didn't want to petrify her.

Nkosi walked in with two girls who looked like a combination of him and Kwanda.

Phawu : I'll get Zano before they throw her out of the hospital.

Kwanda : Okay baby.

He exchanged a look with Nkosi and then walked out. He spotted Zano walking down the corridor . He laughed at her getting lost and looking like a lunatic.

Zano : Phawu !

She turned around.

Zano : Phawulothando Khumalo !

Phawu rushed to her and hugged her before she could protest.

Phawu: Hey love , why are you screaming like a lunatic ?

Zano : Why are you and Menzi treating me like a child ? What was so hard in telling me that our mother is in hospital ?

Phawu : We didn't want to stress you further seeing that you are stressed enough with your marital issues.

Zano : Oh. You still shouldn't have done that though.

Phawu : I'm sorry. When did you get here ?

Zano : A few minutes ago. I'm from the airport as we speak.

Phawu : Your dad is here with two girls who I supposed are your sisters. Did you see them ?

Zano : No , I just want to see my mom.

Phawu put his hand across her shoulder and walked with her to their mother's ward.

The tension in the room was too thick that one could cut it with a knife. When Zano walked in with Phawu the room went dead quiet. It was very awkward but she seemed to be giving zero fucks.

Zano : Ma wami . (My mother)

Kwanda : Sthandwa Sami.

Zano : I'm so glad to see you awake although no one notified me about the accident.

Kwanda : I'm fine. I'm glad you came all the way from KZN for me. You always come through for me.

Zano : And Menzi called , he said I should let you know that Charline gave birth to a girl.

Kwanda : That's good news. My first grandchild.

Zano : You're officially a gogo.

Phawu : There'll be more grandchildren ma , don't worry.

They continued conversing and laughing

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purposely leaving the trio out of their conversation until visiting hour was over.

...

A red VW Golf parked inside the royal house after the owner had notified the guards that he was here to work.

At first Londeka thought her eyes were deceiving her but after having a long and hard look at the registration number she realised that it was indeed Nhlanhla. Her heart skipped from the kitchen window and she wrapped a towel around her belly then stepped out.

Londeka : Nhlanhla , what's wrong with you ?

Nhlanhla : Hi.

He responded not minding her drama and walked around the car to the boot to get a measuring tape and his notebook.

Londeka followed him.

Londeka : What are you doing here Nhlanhla? Are you seeking for trouble..

Nhlanhla closed the boot and turned to her.

Nhlanhla : Please get out of my way Londeka I'm here to work.

Londeka : Work ?

He sighed.

Nhlanhla : You know I've been doing piece-jobs from when we were still dating so I'm here to work. Umnakwenu asked me ukuthi ngikhande ikitchen unit . (Your sister wife asked me to fix her kitchen unit)

Londeka : So you did meet Zano ? What did you say to her about me ?

Nhlanhla : Nothing.

Londeka : Nhlanhla..

Nhlanhla : I just told her I know you. Nothing about our relationship and that baby being mine.

He entered the kitchen and started measuring the cupboard doors and countertops since Zano wanted to change the design but wanted the shelves to remain where they were.

Londeka : Why are you so adamant in the fact that this baby is yours ?

Nhlanhla : Because it is.

Londeka : It's not Nhlanhla. Why are you such a bitter ex ? If Ntsizwa hears you talk like that , we are ruined. This marriage is destroyed because I'll come off as someone who isn't loyal. You and I know that when I got involved with Ntsizwa , our relationship was already paring.

Nhlanhla looked at her and chuckled noting down the measurements then folded the book tucking it under his arm. He folded the tape and clucked the pen.

Nhlanhla : Whatever Londeka... Whatever makes you sleep better at night. You and I know the truth.

He headed to the door and turned.

Nhlanhla : Goodbye.

She felt parched and turned the tap collecting water with a glass before gulping it down in one go.

...

At the parking lot while Phawu helped Zano load her bags in his car , Nkosi excused himself from the twins and walked to them. Phawu cleared his throat when he weirdly stared at Zano.

Nkosi : Zanothando ?

Zano : Qwabe.

He seemed surprised by that but concealed it.

Zano : How can I help ?

Nkosi : Hawu mntanami , I thought..(my child)

Zano : Mntanakho ? (Your child ?) The universe is full of wonders. Now you know that I'm your child ? Doesn't it sound funny and taste electric that this is the first time ever in my life time that you get and say my name right ? After being your child for twenty four years. Kuyimanje wazi ukungbiza ngomntakho . (You're only calling me your child now .)

Nkosi : We don't have to come at each other's lives like we aren't family. We are family , you're my child Zano.

Zano : Well it's too late now. You're only acknowledging me as your child now and it's too late. You've broken me already..

A lone tear travelled down her cheek. She quickly tried to wipe it sniffing but before she knew it , more tears flooded her face.

Zano : Maybe a few years ago this acknowledgement would've gotten me wiggling and smiling in joy..but the damage has been done now. I'm sorry but I'm nothing to you , you were long dead and buried in my heart.

She looked ahead at the twins in the car.

Zano : Go Qwabe. Go to your rightful children , they are waiting for you.

She turned around telling her brother that they should go.

Nkosi was left standing there like an imbecile while the siblings comforted each other in the car. Phawu reflected to his own pain when he saw his sister broken like that .

Zanothando

****twenty three****

Nkosi's eyes ran from Phawu to Menzi and finally Sam. All four of them did not know the answer to the doctor's question. There was a huge pink elephant in the room and not even one of them knew how they were going to deal with it.

Doctor : She will need someone to care for her so who is taking her home?

The doctor asked again hoping for an answer this time. It became awkward when he asked the first time and no one seemed to know what to reply.

Sam : I will!

Nkosi : I will !

They both phrased at the same time and looked at each other.

Nkosi : Doctor , Nokwandisa is my wife so it only makes sense that she comes with me.

Sam : You can't take her to KZN , she is still wounded and like the doctor said , she needs to be under very good care.

Nkosi : Who are you and why are you trying to make decisions concerning my wife whereas I'm the husband here?

Sam : We both know you and her are getting a divorce.

Nkosi : What's in it for you even if we are ?

Sam : You are not taking her home with you.

Nkosi : We'll see about that.

He chuckled and turned to the doctor.

Nkosi : I'm taking my wife home.

Phawu : Which home ?

Nkosi : KZN .

Phawu : Not happening.

Nkosi : It wasn't a request to you. I don't need anyone's consent in this room to take decisions concerning my wife.

Phawu : Stop going on and on like you and mom were in good terms before the accident. She won't allow you to take her either way.

Nkosi : Doctor I'm sure you can vouch for me on this one. I'm still Kwanda's next of kin since we aren't divorced yet.

The doctor nodded.

Nkosi : There you have it. She is coming with me and it's final.

Menzi : No it's not.

Nkosi turned to him. He has been quiet all this time that they all forgot he was in the room. He tucked his hands deep in his pocket.

Menzi : My mom will be in my care. No need to fight over her as if she is some price to be won.

He moved towards the doctor.

Menzi : I'll fill in the discharge forms Doc.

It was the way he carried himself with so much dominance yet calmness at the same time that Nkosi's mouth got shut instantly.

...

Londeka walked in the living room and scattered the photos on the coffee table. Ntsizwa was lost in thoughts , daydreaming about Zano.

These constant trips to Gauteng made him grow suspicious. Zano wasn't one to love travelling but she's been going up and down and she seemed to enjoy it a lot. Ntsizwa questioned it now...

He didn't think that Zano would let the Londeka issue slide so easily. What if there was someone else in Gauteng that had started treating his wife better than he did ? The thought of it frustrated him .

Londeka snapped her fingers in front of him bringing him back to the real world from his own web of thoughts where Zano is his number priority.

Ntsizwa : Mhm?

Londeka : I asked you a question. Which one should we go with between the two ?

She waved two pictures in front of his face. He mindlessly pointed at one then zoned out again. Londeka noticed this and placed the pictures down

Londeka : What's wrong babakhe?

Ntsizwa : Nothing's wrong.

Londeka : Don't give me that , please don't. You haven't been yourself lately and I tried to downplay it but it gets worse everyday. Talk to me

Ntsizwa : Nothing is wrong Londeka , I've been saying. Stop asking me the same question , it's frustrating. Stop pestering me.

Londeka : You know that I'm your wife too Ntsizwa ? Ever since Zano left you've been secretly moping around. How do you think that makes me feel as the wife who is around ? It's like you care about her more than me. Even if you do baby you don't have to show it , it's hurting me.

Ntsizwa : You can't be comparing yourself to Zanothando . Even if her absence was what's bothering me

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I don't think that's something you should be whining about really.

Londeka : Ntsizwa...

Ntsizwa : No Londy , I've told you this before and it still stands. I don't like a woman who talks too much and has unnecessary drama. Such women are the factor that causes polygamy to be a drag for us. I don't want to always get caught between you and Zano just because you let your insecurities get the better of you. Please Londeka , sometimes keeping your mouth shut is the best solution. For the sake of everyone's peace. Don't cause turmoil in my father's house. Ngyak'cela

He balanced his body by placing his palms on his knees and stood up leaving Londeka with her tongue snatched by an imaginary cat. She chuckled in disbelief.

...

The receptionist flashed her Colgate smile that Nkosi kindly returned and walked to the elevator. He was angry and felt insulted by Kwanda and her children. He , and only himself was Kwanda's husband but those kids telling him straight up that he can't take her home felt like they'd spat on his face.

He knocked on the twin's room and Sbahle opened for him. He walked in and exhaled before he sat down.

He knew how his children were so looking forward to their mother coming home , him coming back without her kind of disappointed them.

Nkosi : Please pack your things , we are going back to KZN.

Sbahle : What about uMa?

Nkosi : Your mother is staying behind .

Sbahle : Why ?

Ntwenhle : Who's going to look after her here ?

Nkosi : Her sons will. Zanothando is here too .

Ntwenhle : This is not making sense to me at all.

Nkosi : Well before the incident your mother had filed for divorce.

Both of them gasped . That was news to their ears and it was unexpected. Despite the whole polygamy thing , they thought Kwanda was happy with their father. A divorce was the last thing they thought could happen between them.

Nkosi : I know I should've told you this but it was hard. I thought that things were still in a chance of being fixed but it seems like she has made up her mind and nothing can change her mind. Now that she is reunited with her sons and Zanothando , nothing else matters to her.

Ntwenhle : Wow!

Sbahle : Wow indeed.

...

The front door opened and Menzi wheeled her mother in and Phawu followed with her things behind them.

Zanothando rushed to them and hugged her mother .

Kwanda : Baby

Zano : I'm glad you are back. And the wheelchair , why the drama ?

Phawu : Hayi wena.

He teasingly slapped the side of her head.

Kwanda : I too don't understand why your brothers fussed about it because I can walk on my own.

Phawu : The doctors said you are still weak ma.

Kwanda : The doctors like to complicate things. This is my body and I'm telling you that I'm okay.

Zano : Mom is okay guys come on.

Kwanda : Where's Charline ?

Menzi : She is in hospital . She and the baby are coming back tomorrow.

Kwanda : I can't wait to see them.

Zano : Aww Shem bro , you are grown up now. You are a father and you should start acting responsibly.

Menzi : I am responsible .

Zano's phone rang in her pocket. She moved away leaving the rest of them conversing .

She didn't know the caller but she answered either way.

Zano : Hellow.

Caller : Zanothando.

She sighed recognizing the voice and replied lowly.

Zano : Qwabe.

Nkosi : Hi. Can we please meet and talk before I leave town ? I know I might be the last person you want to talk to but I need to get a few things off my chest.

Zano : Why ? You disowned me.

Nkosi : I know but you are still my daughter. No amount of anger or ego can change that and I've realised that now. You might not believe it but in the past four years I've been thinking about you in random times. Asking myself if you are happy and well-taken care of.

Zano : Don't lie to me baba ka Ntwenhle please. I know you don't care about me like that.

Nkosi : Can we at least meet and talk? I promise I'll get off your back after that.

She kept silent for a while thinking.

Zano : No.

She replied .

Zano : I'm sorry but I can't. Goodbye Gumede.

She hung up and sighed then turned around walking back to the living room. Phawu put his arm around her shoulder and they chatted loudly and happily .

Zanothando

****twenty four****

Zano finished dressing her mother's wound and cleared the coffee table. Menzi's car parked outside then a few minutes later the door opened. Phawu was holding the baby while Menzi was helping Charline walk with her bag hung on one of his shoulders.

Charline : Hello mom , Zano.

Kwanda : Hi baby.

Zano : Hey . I want to see the baby , Phawu bring the baby.

Phawu : No uzomwisa. (You'll drop her)

Zano chuckled and stretched out her hands . Phawu placed the new born on her arms. She cooed her as her heart melted at this little human being in her arms. If only she could have her own.

Kwanda : Bring her to granny .

Zano handed the child over and rubbed a tear that had ran down her cheek without her noticing .

Zano : She is beautiful .

Kwanda : A lot. I think Charline's genes were dominant on this baby.

Menzi : She betrayed me.

The family continued to crowd the child and took turns in cooing her and kissing her countlessly. Zano felt a slight ping on her heart when the thought that she'd never feel the excitement and pride of being a parent washed over her. She too wished to have her own adorable baby that she'd feed , change her diaper or put to sleep. Someone to worry about when their fever's high or when they are teething . Someone to watch growing up , from their first ever step to the day they graduate in tertiary. Unfortunately for her , it was an experience that she was never ever be able to enjoy. Ever !

...

Communication is vital in all relationships. From romantic relationships to friendships . It's what keeps the relationship alive and all parties involved happy.

People need to be comfortable and free to talk about their feelings , to voice out their fears and be able to be rigid when certain things threaten the stability of the relationship.

The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't be said.

Although Ntsizwa never uttered it with his own lips that he favoured Zano more , it was quite obvious to Londeka. Not that she expected him to shower her with more love than his wife but the least he could do in this setup is to treat both of them equally. Him rubbing it in that his wife has so much effect on him and that she means a lot more than what Londeka means to him was breaking her.

She is the mother of his child , his soon to be wife. They are supposed to be planning their wedding and be this jolly couple but not even six months after umgcagco and they are already having problems. It was too early for them to go to bed in bad terms every night

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that's no healthy way to build a marriage.

Londeka parked her car next to the construction van and climbed out. Surprisingly Ntsizwa's car was also on the sight. She walked on the sand while lifting up her dress. Ntsizwa who was conversing with the builders noticed her coming from a distance and stood up to meet her halfway. She put a hand over her forehead shielding herself from the heat and waited for Ntsizwa to get to where she was.

Ntsizwa : Are you following me around now ?

Londeka : Hi.

Ntsizwa : Not only do I have to deal with your pestering , you stalk me too? Your insecurities are very deep Londeka.

Londeka : I didn't even know you were here. I'm not following you

Ntsizwa : Listen...

Londeka : No you listen ! I've put up with you being an asshole for quite some time now. I'm trying to be the calm wife that I have to be but you are tiring me. You always try to find a reason to fight me even where it's unnecessary and it makes me question if you love me as much as you claim to. It has been

vividly clear to me that you love Zano and I'm always going to remain the other woman even in marriage. You just love the idea of having two wives. One that you love so much and would turn the world upside down for ; and one that will always suck up to you and give you babies. You don't love me !

Ntsizwa's mouth became dry and he became mute.

Londeka : I'm here to see the progress of my house not for you. I'd never stalk you Ntsizwa because I might see things that I'm not supposed to and that's the last thing I want. I don't want to stress myself and lose this one person that'll probably love me wholeheartedly since you are failing. Please move.

Ntsizwa shifted and she walked past him to the direction of the still-in-construction house. Her brief speech left a huge lump on his throat . He swallowed and followed her.

...

Phawu walked in on Vanessa and his father eating dinner later that day. He placed his house and car keys on the table then joined them.

Vanessa : What gender is the baby ?

Phawu : A girl. She looks white , nothing like her father.

Vanessa : Her mother is white so it's expected. I look like my mother too but my dad is black.

Phawu : She is adorable though , can't wait to have mine.

Sam : While we still on that matter , when are you planning to pay damages to Petunia's family ?

Phawu : Am I going to do it myself?

Sam : No but the money has to come out from your pocket.

Phawu : Oh that's not a problem. I'll find out from her when's the perfect timing.

Sam : I'm glad you taking responsibility of what you did. That's what real men do . Real men don't flee from the product of their sperms.

Phawu nodded.

Phawu : I know.

Sam : How's your mother ?

Phawu : She is fine . She will get better and the scars will fade .

Sam : That's good to hear.

Vanessa : So dad...are you and her going to be pushing your thing ?

Sam : What ?

Vanessa : I mean , I've seen the way you look at her and how your face beams when you see her. You love her Sam : I do ?

Vanessa : If you want to move on with her , it's fine. She is a beautiful woman , inside and out. Phawu and I don't mind.

Sam : Are you seriously expecting me to discuss my love life with you ?

Vanessa : I'm an adult.

Sam : Still my child.

Vanessa : On a serious note dad. If you love her and want to be with her don't hesitate. Y'all old now and you can't be wasting time refraining from exploring love again. Love is beautiful

Phawu : You don't normally hear these words coming from me but I second what my dear sister here just said.

Sam smiled.

Sam : Thank you.

Zano signed for Kwanda's parcel that was delivered and walked to the guest bedroom she was in. Menzi and Charline had already gone to bed and she had just helped her mother bathe.

She placed the brown A4 envelope on the bed.

Kwanda : What is this ?

Zano : I don't know but it's yours.

Kwanda : I wonder..

She carefully torn the envelope and slid out the papers that were inside. She scanned them then paged each and every one of them. All of them were signed and initialed.

Zano : What is it ?

Kwanda smiled and placed them on the bed then lifted both her hands.

Kwanda : Freedom , finally!

She covered her mouth and giggled while Zano peered over the divorce papers.

Zanothando

****twenty five****

She smiled at Londeka. Something that she never ever did. Londeka sheepishly looked around and then returned a half smile. She took her by surprise , even the smile she gave her was hesitant.

Zano : Mnakwethu!

Londeka : Zano ?

She was puzzled. Why was she so happy to see her when she hated her not so long ago ?

Zano : You look...tense. Had you missed me ?

Londeka leeringly looked at this Zano with such a strange behaviour. Zano noticed the discomfort she had soaked her in and exhaled then smiled.

Zano : Please sit down .

Londeka swatted a fly that was hovering over her pot with the dishcloth and closed it before she settled on the chair.

Zano : When I was in Jo'burg I had time to think and I realised that I've been very harsh towards you.

Londeka : Harsh ? You hated my guts.

Zano : Hate is a strong word Londeka ; I was just pissed at the fact that you were an accomplice in my husband's betrayal to me , but I thought hard about this situation when I was away and I realise that my anger shouldn't be directed to you.

Ntsizwa hurt me and you helped him but it's in the past now. We are a family now and we have to put our differences aside and love each other. Your kids are going to be mine as well and me and you need to start getting along to maintain peace. Not only are we sharing a husband ; we will share a home too , we might not be living in the same house in the future but my home will be yours , your children mine and we need to love each other. I know it might not happen overnight but can we at least start tolerating each other and take baby steps to see how this relationship goes ?

Londeka : I never thought I'd hear you say those words and honestly they are music to my ears. I didn't have any grudge against you , none ; but I understood why it was hard for you to accept me. The thought of having a third person interfere in your marriage with Ntsizwa was dementing , I'm sorry.

Zano : Honestly it was. After finding out that there's you in the picture I went mad. I nearly slipped into depression and it didn't help that I didn't have any support system throughout this. Those trips to Gauteng kept me sane honestly . They made me reconnect with my mom and siblings , I felt like a human being again. Come to think of it this is actually a blessing in disguise ; I have gained a sister now , someone to vent on and run to when our husband drives me crazy.

They both laughed.

Zano : I'm willing to give it a try if you are willing also.

Londeka : Of course I want a relationship with you. I don't want us to raise children in a toxic environment.

Zano : True that. Children raised up in a toxic polygamous relationship turn out broken and I don't want that for your kids.

Londeka : I'm glad we are having this conversation. We might as well surprise hubby and be besties.

Zano smiled.

Zano : How have you guys been ?

Londeka sighed and switched off the stove then sat down again.

Londeka : We fought. It was so bad that he now sleeps in the other guest room and we are not on speaking terms too.

Zano : Why ?

Londeka : I felt unappreciated Zano. We are supposed to be planning our white wedding and be happy but he has been off for days. He doesn't treat me right and I don't like it. I know that I'm not you and I'd never be you but I also need to be treated in the correct manner as his wife. Ntsizwa isn't giving me the respect that's due to me and sometimes I feel like this relationship isn't genuine , I feel like I'm being used by him.

Zano : No one has to make you feel like that not especially your husband who is the father of your child. I'll talk to him , he can't do you so low.

Londeka : You'd do that for me ?

Zano : We are a team now Londy. I have got your back . If Ntsizwa starts mistreating you then it'll only be a matter of time until he starts doing it to me too. If I fold my arms and watch him doing it to you then he'd think it's okay to treat his wives like pieces of shit. I'll get him back in line.

Londeka : You are sweet you just hide it. You like me already ?

Zano : (Laughing) Stop it !

Ntsizwa walked in amid loud giggles. He turned to look around the house to confirm that he wasn't in the wrong house. He wasn't lost , Zano and Londeka were actually sharing a laugh.

It was the most beautiful sight a man could ever walked to , especially if he knew that his wives never got along.

Ntsizwa : Nothando , you are back my love?

Zano nodded and stood up to hug her. He held onto her for the longest of time then he baby kissed her lips. All this time Londeka was watching them. She noticed how his eyes instantly lit up when he saw Zanothando , and how he showed affection to her while completely disregarding her. It stung a bit ; but she was glad that she had built a relationship with her sister wife , it was what mattered the most because she was going to talk to the sulking husband and make things right.

...

With her laptop on her lap she typed her schedule for the following week while sipping on her green tea. She hasn't worked in what felt like the longest time and now that she was healing

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she wanted to get back to work.

Moving from KZN after she decided that she was done with Nkosi , Kwanda didn't know what to do with her life. She had long retired from working and there's was no way she was going back to designing ; so she came up with a way to keep her life busy , giving back to the community.

Nothing's more important than upscaling literature in the black society . So she decided to do exactly that , started donating some books to public schools and it became something big that she enjoyed a lot. Now she wanted to extend her parameters by giving out bursaries and scholarships to deserving children. It's the least she can do to help the younger generation , she just needed to secure a few sponsors.

The helper walked in with Sam. Kwanda put the laptop away and made space for him to sit next to her.

Sam : How are you feeling ?

Kwanda : I have healed , just these scratches that need to be tendered.

Sam : I'm glad.

She blushed. Sam squinted his eyes and laughed.

Sam : What are you blushing about my lady ?

Kwanda : I'm not blushing.

Sam : Out with it then , what's going on ?

Kwanda : The divorce will be finalised soon , Nkosi signed the divorce papers.

Sam : That's wonderful.

Kwanda : Yes it is. I get to be a free woman and move on with my life now. Sam : I love the sound of that.

Kwanda : There's something else though.

Sam : Okay ?

Kwanda : I love you and I know it's reciprocated on your side but I'd like us to savour every moment of our relationship. I don't want to get married again , let's love each other without bringing marriage into the topic.

Sam : I understand and honestly it'd be selfish of me to ask that of you .As long as I got to have you again ..

Kwanda : So when are we going to tell the kids ?

Sam : We don't have to. They are old enough to see for themselves.

Menzi walked in.

Menzi : Tell the kids what ?

Kwanda looked at him and blushed. Menzi smiled and shook his head. The chemistry between the two couldn't be missed even by a three year old.

...

Ntsizwa pinned Zano on the wall and kissed her neck. She gasped for air while he sucked on her neck. The thought of

Londeka in the next room with a heavy heart hit her. She slowly pushed Ntsizwa off and told him to stop...

Ntsizwa : What's wrong ?

She breathed heavily and sat on the bed with her hands between her thighs .

Ntsizwa : Baby what's wrong talk to me. I've missed you so much and now unghshaya isandla .

Zano : I've missed you too.

Ntsizwa : Then ?

Zano : It's this issue with Londeka.

Ntsizwa : I thought you fully accepted her njena , you were even laughing earlier on.

Zano : That's true. We agreed to get along and be a team. One can't sit back and watch when the other is unhappy...Londeka isn't happy Ntsizwa.

Ntsizwa : Ngisheshe ngajabula. Kanti this newly found friendship means ganging up on me ?

Zano : No but she is hurting. She is the mother of your unborn child baby , how do you sleep at night knowing you guys aren't cool?

Ntsizwa : I...

Zano : Go and fix things with Londeka and you'll sleep here tomorrow. And don't do it for me , do it for the both of you.

Ntsizwa : I don't understand baby , why are you fighting her battles ?

Zano : For this polygamy shit you got me in to work. I don't know Londeka and I don't know what she's capable of. But do you know what I do know ? I know that polygamy is very dangerous . The envy , hatred and tantrums ; I know all of them because I grew up in that environment. I don't want that to happen to us. I don't want us to have altercations all the time , I don't want Londeka to click her tongue when I turn my back like she wasn't laughing a minute ago. I want us to get along genuinely and you are the person who can make that easier for us. Only you can drive a wedge between us and only you can make us friends. You should start treating your first and second wife the same. Even if you don't feel the same way between us , don't make it oblivious. That's what lures the hatred and witchcraft between sister wives and that's not going to happen in this house. We going to love each other here.

She got up and got the pillows off the bed and got under the blankets.

Zano : Go babe !

Ntsizwa laughed and walked over to kiss her.

Ntsizwa : Goodnight Sthandwa.

Zano : Goodnight. Switch off the lights on your way out.

He walked out and left the door open. She laughed in disbelief then he walked back and turned off the switch of the lights then blew a kiss before closing the door. Zano turned and switched off the bedside lamp then sighed closing her eyes to sleep.

Zanothando

****twenty six****

Ntsizwa and Londeka woke up to Zano already in her uniform. She had made breakfast for all three of them. The trio sat down and ate. It was awkward at first because they've never sat down together but Zano conversed with Londeka who went with the flow.

Zano : Did you guys solve your issues?

The question was directed at Ntsizwa. He nodded and swallowed his food.

Ntsizwa : We did talk until after midnight. The little madam didn't want us to sleep before talking.

Zano : She just wanted her parents to make peace. I'm glad I have support from her.

Londeka : I didn't know you are going to work today , I wanted to take you out.

Zano : Oh I'm sorry but my leave has ended mnakwethu , duty calls.

Londeka : It's okay. I'll go to the mall and do some shopping to pass time while you are at work.

Ntsizwa : I'll come with you , we'll spend the day together.

Londeka : Thank you.

Zano smiled at both of them and stood up.

Zano : Okay , goodbye lovebirds.

Londeka : Bye sister wife.

Ntsizwa : Bye my love.

She took her bag and walked out. She clicked her tongue and huffed out when she got to her car. She glanced back at the house and laughed in sarcasm .

She started her car and drove to the hospital. She tried to toughen up but she felt tears sting her as she drove . She held onto the steering wheel and burst into tears. She slowed down and parked at the side of the road. She cried until she had hiccups . Eventually the tears dried up and she couldn't cry anymore . She reached for her handbag and fixed her makeup then exhaled joining the road.

...

Nhlanhla stared at the baby stroller as her sister proceeded walking down the aisle looking between shelves while pushing the trolley.

Nomfundo : Should I get Nola or Crosse & Blackwell ?

She turned realising she was talking to herself. Nhlanhla was still focused on the stroller at the end of the aisle.

Nomfundo : Nhlanhla...?

He picked up a box and walked towards her. He placed the box in the trolley and turned around pulling his pants.

Nomfundo : And then ? Are you having a baby ?

Nhlanhla : Yes.

She gasped and laughed.

Nomfundo : Nhlanhla I'm serious , whose stroller is this ?

Nhlanhla : I already told you that it's my baby's .

Nomfundo : The last time I checked you were single bro , who did you impregnate and how ; when even ?

Nhlanhla : Not that it's any of your business but it's Londy.

Nomfundo : Isn't she married and carrying her husband's child ?

Nhlanhla : You can be slow sometimes sis I have to spell it out. The baby is mine not the husband's.

Nomfundo : Oh my !

She put her hands over her mouth in shock.

Nhlanhla : But nobody knows about it so please don't breathe a word about this to anyone.

Nomfundo : But how's this going to work ? Surely she will not allow you near the baby because that'll break her marriage.

Nhlanhla : I don't know , she wants nothing to do with me.

Nomfundo : And you are already buying strollers ? Bro you'll be disappointed you know.

Nhlanhla : If Londy agrees to do a paternity test after the baby is born then she will be obligated to let me be a part of our child's life.

Nomfundo : What if she refuses to do the paternity tests or even worse you do the test and find out it's not your baby?

Nhlanhla : I know the baby is mine but if she refuses me access to her then all hell will break loose. I won't let another man raise my baby while I'm alive. Such situations tend to be problematic. We are blacks and as you know we have certain rituals that we need to do. I can't let Londy call my baby by the Mkhonto surname and even have her introduced to their ancestors. That won't happen

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uzobikwa kithi because she is mine.

Nomfundo : Just be careful. People from royalty like things to go their way and anything that hinders their way or threaten them they eliminate it.

Nhlanhla : Nothing will happen to me i have it under control.

Nomfundo : First thing's first , you need to make things right and pay damages to Londeka's family. I don't know how you are going to do that since she is a married woman. Maybe kuzofanele uhlanze nomuzi wabo.

Nhlanhla : Londeka dated that snob when she was already pregnant with my child. Angihlanzi lutho.

Nomfundo : Okay.

...

Zano yawned and got her bag from her locker. She hardly slept last night and as a result she was drowsy all morning. She took out her lunchbox and closed the locker.

Nurse Ngele waved at her to join her since she was eating all alone. Zano went to get tea and then sat down with her.

Zano : Hi

Ngele : Hi , you don't look too okay ?

Zano : I'm just tired that's all.

Ngele : So you won't be working double shift today ?

Zano : Double shift when I just gotten back ? Girl please !

They laughed softly.

Ngele : You know I was working at the clinic last night. This other girl gave birth and told us that she doesn't want the baby.

Zano : Why ?

Ngele : She is still very young so I figured that parenthood somehow freaks her out but even after letting her east and

reconsider her decision for hours she put her foot down and said she doesn't want the baby.

Zano : That was inhumane. Does she have an idea how many of us would kill for the opportunity to have a child ? God blesses her with one and she tosses it like trash.

Ngele : True. Luckily the father wanted the child so they came back hours later to fetch the baby. They said the father will take her , the mother was even refusing to hold her own child . I've never been so heartbroken.

Zano : And what hurts the most is that there's nothing we can do about it. She has a right to freedom of choice so our job is to take the child to the social workers who'll find her a stable home.

Ngele : They get dropped at orphanages and even they can't be given the best life there. They get the bare minimum and it's just so painful they deserve more than that.

Zano : That's correct. If I had a child , she/he wouldn't live a mediocre life. I want more than that for my children.

Zano looked at her watch and closed her lunch box.

Zano : We have about ten minutes left from our lunch break ,
let's go to the nursery .

Ngele smiled and nodded.

Ngele : Let's go.

They both stood up and walked to the clinic. The social worker and the nurse were having their lunch at the nursery and they let both the nurses in. The babies were either asleep or staring at the ceiling with their hands and feet wiggling. Each of their beds had tags with their names written on the. Zano smiled and blinked away the tears that were forming in her eyes. Merely thinking that these babies were a few months ; some even weeks old and waiting to be adopted or being admitted to an orphanage got to her. If only Ntsizwa had agreed for them to adopt , she could at least give three of these children a better life.

...

Ntsizwa helped Londeka out of the car then locked it. They walked towards the mall's entrance conversing.

Ntsizwa : Which concoction did you give to Zano that made her love you overnight?

Londeka : The same one I gave you ?

Ntsizwa : No wonder she is so madly in love with , she even stands up for you.

Londeka : We just reached common ground babe. We decided to be a team and try to get along.

Ntsizwa : I don't wanna lie I like it. You are like sisters now.

Londeka : Exactly.

She giggled as Ntsizwa brushed her stomach. Nhlanhla passed them pushing a trolley with her sister . She felt flushed and all that excitement she had flew out the window. The way Nhlanhla looked at her made her feel a bit guilty.

Ntsizwa : You okay ?

Londeka : Yeah let's go to Earth child.

Zanothando

****twenty seven****

The ladies positioned themselves under and behind the furniture. Zano had turned off the music and dimmed the lights. Meanwhile outside Londeka crouched over feeling tired. Her sister had taken her from home when she was supposed to sleep , she had to rest and rest her body since she stood up all day.

Bandile : Let's go Londy.

Londeka : I'm tired , this baby is very heavy on me ngapha you are also making me walk ebsuku.

Bandile : Hawu sis , stop being a crybaby we are almost there.

Londeka : Okay.

She put her hand over her bump and continued walking.

Bandile stood in front of the door and turned to her.

Bandile : We are here .

Londeka : I still don't understand why mom and dad would want to meet at a lodge so late.

Bandile : Stop whining. Come in.

She opened the door and let Londeka in first. Everyone jumped out from their positions and screamed , " Surprise !"

Londeka frowned and looked around as the lights went on. She frowned more and placed her hand over her forehead .

Londeka : You guys !

Zano : Please don't cry.

She chuckled and wiped her tears then sniffed.

Zano : Congratulations mommy and welcome to your baby shower.

Londeka looked at the pink themed room and the big banner written "it's a baby girl ". She smiled and hugged Zano. When they decided to get along, she never thought it'd become so deep . Now they are like sisters or rather best friends. Zano has proved to be a woman of her words and supported her throughout.

Zano : Stop crying sisterwife , it's your baby shower.

Londeka : I'm just happy , thank you guys.

Zano : You're welcome , I know you are happy.

Londeka : Wena Bandile , you are such a crook . Why didn't you tell me ?

Bandile : It wouldn't be a surprise now would it ?

Ntombi came forward with a drink in her hand.

Ntombi : Okay let's get the party started !

Everyone cheered and Londeka's friends moved around the room bringing the snacks and drinks .

...

Ntsizwa tossed on the bed then exhaled getting up. His body was tired but his brain didn't want to fall into sleep. He got up and sat on the edge of the bed thinking.

Seeing how Zano and Londeka's relationship turned out made him proud. He was mostly proud of how Zano became the bigger person in all of this. He was more worried about her more than he was about Londeka. He knows how savage Zano can be and his worst fear was her making Londeka's life miserable. Also the thought of her hurting because of him after everything she's been through haunted him. But Zano managed

this so beautifully, she proved to be a big girl and be considerate in this whole thing. When the first wife is happy then the polygamy setup will most definitely work.

He got up and turned on the light then walked to the drawer. He took out the family album and sat on the couch near the bed. He flipped the pages looking at the photos. It was a large photo album , even after accommodating so many photos there were still many pages left for him to attach future photos. He looked at his graduation photo. He was in the middle with Zano by his side hugging him and his parents at either sides of them. Zano was still young , they had just gotten married . They were so happy at the time , still in the honeymoon phase. Ntsizwa smiled and continued flipping the pages. His traditional wedding photos brightened the album , then his white wedding photos followed up then a lot more photos from when he and Zano were living in Durban while Zano was still studying. He slowly paged the album knowing which photos were following. There were two of them

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one in which Zano was smiling faintly probably at some whack joke he cracked and the other she was covering her face with the hand where the drip was connected with her forehead creased. She was pale and had lost a little weight, she wasn't

that bad but she was worrying. Ntsizwa sighed sadly as he remembered the day clearly. It was the day when Zano was going to be operated and had her womb removed.

It was after they had discovered that she had womb cancer and her womb had to be taken out. It was a painful and traumatic time for both of them but with the amount of support Ntsizwa showed his wife they got over it. Ntsizwa knows that Londeka being pregnant now has hurt Zano , it low key brings back the pain.

They are in this situation now due to what happened in the past with her sickness. Honestly Ntsizwa wouldn't have fallen in love with Londeka if it wasn't for the fact that she was the mother of his child , let alone marry her. He vowed to never intentionally hurt Zano and being a polygamist was the last thing on his mind.

Shit happened and he found himself sleeping with another woman for an heir. He is now grateful that in all of this , Zano didn't divorce him. He'd be caught between his wife whom he loved so much and the mother of his child and Londeka wasn't worth losing his wife for.

He shook his head and continued paging the album. The last picture before the blank pages was of the printout of the sonar

scan of the baby. A smile crawled from his lips , he beamed and took out the photo. He admired it for some time and then a date caught his attention at the bottom printed in very fine print.

It was the date of when the baby was conceived , it dated back to a few months ago. The day and month didn't add up though.

A minute of confusion passed by then he stood up and walked to the bed .

He took his phone and called a friend of his .

Friend : Ndoda.

Ntsizwa : Hey man I need help with something.

Friend : Yes shoot.

Ntsizwa : There's a date on the sonar scan printout. Is it the date when my wife conceived ?

Friend : Yes it is the estimated date when she conceived. However it is not accurate .

Ntsizwa : Say it isn't accurate , how wrong can it be ?

Friend : By a day or two or a week even but not more than that.

Ntsizwa : Okay thank you.

Friend : Is everything okay ?

Ntsizwa : Yes I just needed to confirm something. Thank you man.

Friend : Anytime.

He hung up and glanced at the date again. Something didn't add up with the date. Even if it was inaccurate with a day or a week , it still didn't add up.

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Londy's friend , Sindi stood up with the vouchers in her hands. They had just finished playing the baby shower games .

Sindi : Friend , first and foremost congratulations. Well I'll save this speech for later. Here are your gifts. We wanted to buy baby strollers, nappies and all those kind of things but we decided to get you vouchers instead. That way you'll be able to buy what you want for yourself and the baby and avoid witchcraft because hey...

They all laughed including Londeka.

Sindi : The first one is from your sister, the baby's aunt. Bandile wants you to buy clothes and all necessities for your baby from Babies R Us . From me and Nelly , the baby's godmothers want you to buy toys for the little madam at Toys R Us. Angadlali ngama cosmetic akho. (She shouldn't play with your cosmetics.)

They laughed again and she handed the second voucher to her.

Sindi : Vouchers equal to R4000 added together. From the paternal aunt , uskwiza wakho (Your sister in law) . She is gifting you a voucher of R1500 at a clothing store to buy clothes for yourself mommy. The last voucher comes from sisterwife , the baby's second mother. Why wasn't this one first?

Zano wiggled her brows and they laughed.

Zano : Because it is a big one!

Sindi : O-kay! A holiday getaway to Mozambique after you've given birth. Wow and it is worth a lot of money. It is indeed a big one. Thank you Mrs Mkhonto the first.

Zano : You're welcome.

Sindi : Speeches time !

Londeka : Should I go first ?

Bandile : Of course.

Zano's phone rang . She excused herself and walked out to take the call.

Zano : Babe.

Ntsizwa : My love uhm...

He sighed and blocked the phone from the other side with her hand. He let out a sigh and tried to neutralize his voice.

Ntsizwa: You are still here babe ?

Zano : Yes what's wrong ?

Ntsizwa : There's something I need to ask you. Can you talk ?

Zanothando

****twenty eight****

Zano's phone rang . She excused herself and walked out to take the call.

Zano : Babe.

Ntsizwa : My love uhm...

He sighed and blocked the phone from the other side with his hand. He let out a sigh and tried to neutralize his voice.

Ntsizwa: You are still here babe ?

Zano : Yes what's wrong ?

Ntsizwa : There's something I need to ask you. Can you talk ?

Zano : Yes , what's up ?

Ntsizwa : Do you remember the vacation we took at the beginning of the year on your birth month ?

Zano : Yes baby I do.

Ntsizwa : Please remind me when we left for the Seychelles and when we came back.

Zano : The exact date ?

Ntsizwa : Yes babe.

Zano : Wait let me think...we left on the 13th and we returned on the 2nd of the next month .

Ntsizwa : (Disappointedly) oh ?

Zano : Yes , why are you asking ?

Ntsizwa : There's something I was looking at in the office and I wanted to know if it took place during the getaway or not.

Zano : Oh I see.

Ntsizwa : How's the night going ?

Zano : We are having fun this side my love. What about you ?
Do you miss us a lot ?

Ntsizwa : You have no idea !

Zano : Don't sleep I'll be back before 12.

Ntsizwa : I love you Nothando but I can't wait for you my love ,
I'm tired.

Zano : I love you too and bye. I'll wake you up when I come home.

Ntsizwa chuckled and hanged up. Zano smiled seeing that her plan was coming together. She sent a text to Nhlanhla and shoved her phone in her Jean's pocket then walked back to the villa.

The noise from the ladies welcomed her back, she forced a smile and sat down. Ntombi might have said something funny because they were all giggling. She cleared her throat and continued with her speech.

Ntombi : To be honest I never liked you when you first stepped in my parent's house.

The room went quiet. Ntombi is brutally honest and a straight talker. She doesn't beat about the bush and calls a spade a spade.

Ntombi : I never liked how you as a woman could do something like that to a fellow woman. You knew Ntsizwa was married but you dated him and by doing that causing another woman sleepless nights. Zano is strong but she is emotionally

vulnerable at the same time. When you and Ntsizwa hurt her like that she broke down , believe it or not she did. Therefore I didn't like you for that because I care a lot about my sister in law. But you are one of us now , my sister in law too and I care about you. Zano and I have fully accepted you and we love you.

Zano's heart pounded and her chest closed in. She reached for her drink and gulped it then exhaled trying to stay calm.

Ntombi : Now on the issue of parenthood. Uhu , my girl you are in it for a challenge.

They laughed softly.

Ntombi : Children are a wonderful gift from God. Yes they are mischievous and when they grow older they'll challenge your parenting skills. Some days will be harder than the other. They'll make you proud or cry , they'll make you angry or happy and sometimes they'll embarrass you. There isn't a manual for parenthood and there isn't a place where you'll dump them whenever you feel tired of them . You as a mother will learn about parenthood as the time goes , we are here to educate you and sometimes you'll learn on your own. What you need to know about children though is that your child will be your joy and you'll live for her. Even when everybody else turns their backs on you , your children won't. You treat your child right

and she will love you forever. Otherwise welcome to motherhood..

She raised a glass and everyone raised theirs too. Tears blinded Zano's eyes , she stood up and went to the bathroom. She silently cried then washed her face. Ntombi's speech stung on her , actually this whole thing hurt her and she was getting tired of pretending like it wasn't as more days passed by. She thought she was strong enough to handle everything but it was getting heavier than her poor heart can take.

She walked back and pulled a smile again.

Londeka : Just in time mnaks , it's your turn.

She laughed softly.

Zano : Oh ? Okay then.

She stood up and looked around. Everyone in the room had kids except for her.

Zano : I don't know what you want me to say because I don't have kids. If this was a bridal shower then I'd advice you because I know how tough marriage can be. (Smiled) Well regarding what our sister in law said

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there isn't a place where you'll dump them when they drive you crazy ? There is a place and that place is my house . We are sister wives and I want you to know that we are in this together. We will help each other with the kids , starting with this baby girl and many others to follow. I want to say congratulations and thank you for carrying our husband's first child. You might not know this but this baby brought happiness and light in our lives. We are blessed.

She walked over to her and hugged her then wiped her tears.

Zano : I don't know if it's the hormones or she is naturally a crybaby.

Bandile : Yhoo uyathanda ukuchiphiza loyo , uhlezi adlala ngezinyembezi. (She loves crying.)

Zano : Ntsizwa is in trouble because both his wives can't get a grip of their emotions.

Londeka : Thank you babe , thank you so much. You always say the right things and I...thank you.

Zano smiled and blew her a kiss. The ladies continued to enjoy their night.

...

The next morning Nhlanhla zipped his lunch box bag and whistled his favourite song while his head shook in rhythm.

Nomfundo stood at the door with her arms folded. She smiled admiring how his brother was so happy.

Nhlanhla turned and saw her. He put the bag on the table and walked to her. He pulled her towards him and danced. She stepped on his toes a few times then they laughed as he let go of her.

Nhlanhla : You are a moodkiller my sister. Bloody toe stepper.

Nomfundo : You know I can't dance.

Nhlanhla : Talk about having two left feet. Good morning !

Nomfundo : Morning . You are in a great mood today.

Nhlanhla : That's because I'm happy my love , I'm going to be a father.

Nomfundo : I do charge for babysitting.

Nhlanhla : You and money!

Nomfundo : Do you think she will agree to co-parenting with you though?

Nhlanhla : If she doesn't then I'll take my daughter by force , I mean that.

Nomfundo : You'll get arrested.

Nhlanhla : No I won't , I'm a man of action and good plans.

Nomfundo : I don't like it when you talk like this.

He laughed it off and kissed her hands.

Nhlanhla : Goodbye.

He walked out still whistling. She shook her head .

Nomfundo : Bye.

...

Londeka walked out of her bedroom with her rope untied. She lazily dragged her feet and sat down on the highchair after plugging the kettle.

Ntsizwa walked in and gave her a terrible stare.

Londeka : Morning babe !

He kept quiet and opened the fridge. Londeka looked at him confused. She shrugged and took out a mug then poured the hot water in it.

He turned and placed the apple on the countertop.

Ntsizwa : Do you have something to tell me Londeka ?

Londeka : No .

She stirred her tea and sat down .

Ntsizwa : Londeka ...!

She frowned and looked at him confused. He looked angry

Ntsizwa : When was the last time you saw Nhlanhla ? Been with him ?

Londeka : Seriously?

Ntsizwa : Is that baby mine ?

Her mouth hung open. She felt her mouth canal going dry.

Londeka : Wow. How could you ask me such a question?

Ntsizwa : I just want to know Londeka and I want you to tell me the truth. I've seen the sonar scan picture and the date doesn't add up. It shows 16 February and I was in Seychelles at that time.

Londeka : These things aren't accurate babe , you know that.

Ntsizwa : Even so , I left on the 13th with Zano and she can vouch for that. If I remember correctly we had last had sex at the end of January.

Londeka : Uhm , I don't know babe but I swear I wasn't with Nhlanhla after I dated you. I swear.

Ntsizwa : Then how do you explain this !?

Londeka : Maybe it's just a glitch.

Ntsizwa : Fuck that Londeka !!

She remained quiet then tears rolled down her cheeks.

Ntsizwa : Don't you dare cry on me , give me a logical reason for this.

She didn't answer but cried harder. She didn't know what to say or how to explain because she too was confused.

She sniffed and wiped her tears.

Ntsizwa : Talk Londeka.

Londeka : What do you want me to say?

Ntsizwa : Just tell the truth .

Londeka : There's no truth beyond the one that I'm telling you.

Ntsizwa : You are frustrating me because you are denying this. Just tell me the truth please.

Londeka : Can you please bring the sonar printout ?

Ntsizwa : Londeka please don't-

Londeka : Bring it and we'll take it from there.

Ntsizwa exhaled and walked to the bedroom. Zano was still soundly asleep on the bed. He walked to the drawer and took out the album then took out the ultrasound scan printout.

He walked back to the bedroom and threw it at Londeka. She took it and analysed it.

Londeka : The date is the 28th of January , where did you get the 16th of February from ?

Ntsizwa : What!?

He snatched the picture from her. He looked closely at it. There was the date , written in fine print. This didn't make sense , it was written 16 February yesterday and now the date had changed. How was this possible? It was like he was now losing his mind.

He looked at Londeka not knowing what to say.

Ntsizwa : Baby I'm so-

She stood up and yanked his hand off. Ntsizwa : Londy !

He called out and followed her while she angrily walked out through the door.

Zano smiled standing at the door of her bedroom while holding the actual sonar printout. The conversation between Ntsizwa and Londeka went out exactly how she anticipated.

Zanothando

****twenty nine****

Zano knocked lightly on Londeka's ajar door. She was sitting on the bed and packing her clothes in her suitcases.

Zano : Can I come in?

Londeka nodded. Zano walked in and closed the door. For a moment she didn't know what to say or where to start. She sat on the bed and took a dress helping her pack.

Londeka : How could Ntsizwa say something like thar to me ?
Why would he accuse me of trying to pin the baby on him?

Zano : Only Ntsizwa knows what goes on in his head.

Londeka : He has hurt me Zano I don't want to lie.

Zano : I just think he was confused with the dates. I don't know how but they must've confused him in a way and he acted impulsively.

Londeka : You should've seen the hatred in his eyes when he was shouting at me.

Zano : He didn't mean to.

Londeka sighed and pulled a pillow then balanced her head with it.

Zano : I'm just sad that you are leaving. Can't we kick him out or I come and live with you then we file a protection order against him ?

Londeka chuckled.

Londeka : Always brightening the mood , my sister wife.

Zano leaned over and brushed her hand.

Zano: It's okay to be mad , I'd be mad too. Don't allow him to stress you and the baby. Give yourself time and take all the time you need. What Ntsizwa did can't be justified in any way. Torture and punish him all you want until he learns and swears that he won't do this to you ever against. He did you pretty low and I know it's not forgiveable.

Londeka : He is still going to apologize and beg me until I'm satisfied. I can't let him get away with this.

Zano nodded.

Zano : I hope you guys fix things soon because I don't want to get caught in the middle. This is not my fight though I'll give you guys space to handle this your way , I won't get involved.

Londeka : It's okay , I wasn't expecting you to get involved in our issues.

Zano : Can I drive you to your house ? Are you certain you want to leave though?

Londeka : Yes , I've overstayed my welcome.

Zano : I'm not going to lie , I'll miss you.

Londeka : I'll miss you too but at least I live a few streets away. You can pop up anytime.

Zano : That I will.

They stood up and zipped the bags.

Zano : Are you ready ?

Londeka : Yes.

Zano : Oh man.

She pouted and hugged her while Londeka laughed.

Zano : I'll call your husband to carry them , you can't be carrying these large suitcases while you are already carrying such a precious cargo.

Londeka : Wena awufuni ngami yazi.

They both walked out laughing. Ntsizwa was in the kitchen with Ntombi. Londeka greeted her skwiza only while Zano told Ntsizwa that the bags were packed. Ntsizwa walked to the bedroom after handing the keys quietly to Londeka.

Londeka : Bye guys.

Zano : We are behind you.

Ntsizwa walked out with the bags and minutes later the car drove out.

Ntombi : Trouble in Paradise ?

Zano : I don't want to get involved. You shouldn't too.

Ntombi : You know , I still don't like her. Something about her rubs me off

Zano : Hayi uqalile , let's go and see her house.

Ntombi : Oksalayo I don't like her.

Zano laughed as she got her keys. They both walked out and locked the door then walked to the garage.

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Ntsizwa tried reaching for Londeka's thigh but she pushed his hand away and looked out of the window as the car moved.

Ntsizwa : Baby-

Londeka : Don't.

He heaved a sigh and parked the car at Londeka's new house. The ground still needed to be paved and a few touch ups here and there for it to be a complete house.

Londeka jumped out first and walked inside the house passing the contractors sitting under the tree eating their early breakfast. Ntsizwa followed behind her and tossed the car keys to one of the workers telling him to get the bags from the car after eating then quickly walked inside the house.

Ntsizwa : Baby we have to talk about what happened sooner or later. This silent treatment isn't sitting well with me.

Londeka : Oh ?

Ntsizwa : Please my love. I'm deeply sorry for what I've done. Not a day passes by without me recalling that fallout we had a few days ago and I can't help but regret it. Forgive me, please ?

Londeka : You were out of line Ntsizwa. What you said showed me how unready you are for this marriage, you don't trust me.

Ntsizwa : I do trust you , it's just that-...gosh I don't know how to even explain what I saw because I sound crazy.

Londeka : You are crazy . If questioning your unborn daughter's paternity and claiming to trust me afterwards isn't crazy then I don't know.

Ntsizwa : I said I'm sorry !

Londeka : What's sorry gonna do ? Will it make you unsay or make me un-hear you accusing me of cheating on you ?

Ntsizwa : No.

Londeka : Exactly. Your sorry isn't going to revert everything. You were out of line and it's going to take me some time to forgive what you did to me. Some things , sorry can't fix.

Meanwhile outside Zano and Ntombi stepped out of her car and greeted the workers. They whistled and saluted then continued chatting amongst themselves.

Ntombi : The house is beautiful.

Zano : Very. When the construction is complete

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it'll be a killer.

Ntombi : I still don't understand why your sister wife had to move out in such a hurry. Did something happen ?

Zano shrugged.

Zano : Maybe she couldn't wait anymore. I'm glad she has moved out, and I'm not saying this out of bitterness but because it was awkward sleeping in the same house with her while she probably was having sex with my husband.

Ntombi : I've noticed tension between her and Ntsizwa though. Did they fight?

Zano laughed and shook her head as they reached the door.

Zano : I don't know skoni. Be nice.

She opened the door and they walked in. Ntsizwa and Londeka were yelling at each other. They turned and kept quiet when they noticed the two ladies walking in.

Zano :Sorry , we didn't mean to interrupt you ; I see you are in the middle of something. We'll look around the house while you guys talk.

She dragged Ntombi and they walked down the passage.
Londeka cleared her throat.

Londeka : Later.

She said with her index finger up then walked away. Ntsizwa sighed and put his palm over his face. How could he have made such a mistake ? Was he perhaps losing his mind ?

Menzi called for Charline and she appeared holding the baby. She sat down next to her husband and smiled looking at the screen.

Charline : Hey babe!

Zano : Hey mommy how are you ?

Charline : I'm good. Just your niece depriving me a good sleep.

Zano frowned.

Zano : Is it that bad ?

Charline : It's motherhood Zano , nobody said it was easy.
Mothers don't rest.

Zano : Right. She is growing up though. Can you turn her to the screen so I can see her ?

Charline turned the baby and Zano cooed and baby talked her .

Zano : She looks like you Charline.

Menzi : She looks like me.

Zano : Not a chance.

Menzi : I'm your brother, you have to always take my side .

She laughed and threw her hands in the air.

Zano : She looks like you then. Where's mom?

Menzi : She moved out a few days ago. Her and Khumalo are back together.

Zano : I knew they would , they are soulmates. How does Phawu feel about that ?

Menzi : Not that his opinion would've mattered but he is okay with it. His relationship with mom is getting better.

Zano : That's good to hear.

Menzi : What about you , are you good?

Charline : How's the polygamy setup going?

Her face changed.

Zano : It's hell. I've tried bro , god knows I did but I can't do this. I tried accepting it and tried to be selfless but pretending hurts more than openly hurting.

Menzi : Zano I told you not to allow it if your heart didn't want to.

Zano : I thought I was..we were going to make it work. Thought I was strong enough to accept seeing my man happy with another woman but I was wrong. I was wrong bro , it would never work. Not with me...

Menzi : Then why are you still with this man ? He is hurting you and you are allowing it. Your happiness comes first sis and you should know this.

Zano : That's why I want out.

Menzi : Does he know that?

Zano : He doesn't know and telling him is hard , I've been trying to bring about the courage to do it but I can't.

Charline : Well you have to talk to him first before serving him with the divorce papers. Find closure before you decide to walk away . Vent and let him know how much he has hurt you , be honest to yourself and him.

Zano : I will tell him soon. I have to do it vele. It's just makes me sad though , I love Ntsizwa.

Menzi : We all lost the ones we loved at some point in life. It doesn't mean you won't find another one who will love you and you will love them the same if not more. Leave this toxic marriage and God will bless you with another partner. You'll even forget how loving him feels like.

Zano : Thank you guys.

Menzi : You are welcome , take care of yourself.

Zano : You do too. Take care of each other , I love you.

Charline : Bye babe.

She cut the call and looked up. Ntsizwa was standing at the door looking down at her. She removed her earphones slowly as her heartbeat lost it's rhythm.

Zano : Babe ?

Ntsizwa : What is it that you need to tell me but you are hesitant ? It sounded very serious.

She shut her eyes and exhaled. Her heart hit against her ribcage violently. The pair of eyes didn't tear it's stare from her , he needed an answer.

Zanothando

****thirty****

Ntsizwa put his keys on the table and sat down next to Zano. He put his arm over her shoulder and made her lay her head on his chest.

Ntsizwa : Talk to me my love. What is it?

Zano : I was thinking...

Ntsizwa : Yeah ?

Zano : Forget it. It's petty and you are also going through a rough patch with Londeka so I can't be burdening you with this too.

Ntsizwa : I'm with you right now and you are the only person who matters to me most. Let me know what you want to tell me and forget about Londeka and her issus.

Zano : I want us to adopt.

Ntsizwa kept quiet. Zano moved his head from his chest and sat up straight. This was exactly the reaction she guessed he'd give her.

Zano : Like I said , never mind. It's too much to ask and if you didn't agree before what could possibly change your mind now ?

Ntsizwa : No babe. Listen I understand why you would want to opt for adoption but these things are complicated.

Zano : It's fine.

She stood up and walked towards the passage but she turned and walked back.

Zano : Actually , it's not fine. You are selfish Ntsizwa. Why are you hurting me like this ?

Ntsizwa sighed and leaned back. Londeka had kicked him out of the house and was angry at him , he didn't need another altercation with Zano too.

Zano : I gave you what you wanted and blessed your marriage with another woman. I sacrificed my own happiness for yours. I'm asking you for one thing and you're denying me the only chance of being a mother.

Ntsizwa : Don't make this about you Zanothando. Just because Londeka is pregnant you suddenly want to adopt? Competition isn't healthy Zano.

Zano : I'm not competing with her I just want to be happy too. I want a child that's mine also.

Ntsizwa : It wouldn't be yours. It wouldn't be ours Zano and that's what's bugging me. I can't be raising another man's child , no! If I was a random person then I'd agree but I'm royalty babe. If we adopt then he'd have to take over the chieftaincy in future. That is not possible.

Zano : I don't want a baby that's gonna take over your chieftaincy Ntsizwa I just want a child to raise. I want to have my own joy too.

Ntsizwa : Forget it !

Zano : Fine. If I can't do it then I can't do us. I'm tired of giving a part of me for you all the time. Do you know how much it hurts me to see you happy with Londeka ? Just because she gave you a child , something I failed to do. I didn't ask for cancer and I didn't ask for a hysterectomy Ntsizwa. You as my husband was supposed to support me but you brought another woman into our home instead. You know how I feel about polygamy but you had to go and hurt me like that. Now you don't want me to adopt ? You didn't want us to have babies through IVF? You actually just don't want to see me happy , you are against me honestly. I'm done putting up to your shit just because I love you . I want a divorce !

Ntsizwa : What ?!

Zano : You heard me , I'm tired Ntsizwa. I'm dying inside and you aren't aware of it because you are busy babying your emotions. Let me leave you peacefully with your wife. I want out of this whole nonsense!

She clicked her tongue and reached for her phone and fleece.

Zano : I don't even know why I agreed to this shit in the first place. Mxm.

She walked to her bedroom and locked it once inside .

...

Meanwhile in Kwanda's flat her phone vibrated under her pillow as she slept. Sam rose up his head as the vibration persisted while Kwanda was asleep with her leg over his. He always reprimanded her not to place her phone under her pillow but she never changed. Thirty years later she still did this. He shook her lightly , she groaned and turned her face away. He laughed and shook her even more.

Kwanda : Mhm-mh Sam.

Sam : Your phone is ringing.

She got up and switched on her bedside lamp then rubbed her eyes reaching for her phone under the pillow. The call got cut but it rang again. She squinted her eyes looking at the caller ID.

Kwanda : Baby ?

She sat up and looked at Sam . He asked what was wrong but she shrugged.

Kwanda : Zanothando stop crying and tell me what the problem is my child.

Zano :I'm tired ma...

She broke down once more. Kwanda's heart sank. She wasn't there to comfort her own daughter. She got heartbroken as she sobbed over the phone.

Kwanda : Okay...let it all out my love.

She sniffed and released hiccups.

Zano : I love him ma. I love him so much but it is killing me. Is love supposed to hurt like this ?

Kwanda : Love hurts my baby.

Zano : But not like this mama. Angsafuni

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I want to leave this marriage. I want to come home to you and forget about him. I am willing to start afresh.

Kwanda : Yes. Yes , baby you are always welcome . I'll support you and hold your hand. Starting over isn't embarrassing trust me. I started over years ago when I divorced Menzi's father. It was the hardest thing to do but I managed. I have started over now again , at my age I wasn't scared of starting over again. A fresh start is good but make sure you have nothing that ties you to what you have left behind following you. Come home my baby , I'm your mother and I'll support you.

Zano put her hand over her mouth and cried all over again.

...

Londeka grabbed her sheets as the pain that was jabbing on her abdomen intensified. She cried silently and turned as her big bump got heavy on her. She got up and bent crying out in pain.

She eventually got up from the bed and slowly walked to the wardrobe where she took out her delivery bag. Not knowing what to do next , she fanned herself and paced in the room.

Londeka : Awemaaaa!

She cried out and rubbed her back. She got her phone and texted Zano , " I'm dying. The baby is coming , please come and help me. "

Zano received the text and clicked her tongue . She got up and changed her clothes then took her car keys.

Ntsizwa was in the lounge in front of the TV , the television watching him while he was deep in thoughts.

Zano : Londeka is in labour , let's go.

Zanothando

****thirty one ****

Five months later...

The social worker walked in with the baby in her hands and handed her to Zano while she looked around the house. Zano sat down and played with the baby. The social worker walked around the apartment analysing the space. The place was baby-friendly ; the plugs unreachable, the floor carpeted and it was in a safe neighbourhood. Everything was in check..

S. Worker : This is my last visit before the adoption is finalised. Between me and you , Angela is already yours because you tick all the boxes. What's left now is just standard procedure.

Zano : So I can start preparing for her to come home ? Sisi please don't get my hopes up , I don't want to be disappointed.

S. Worker : Trust me , she is all yours.

Zano : Won't the fact that I'm filing for divorce jeopardize the adoption process?

S. Worker : No , that's why I encouraged you to finalise the adoption first before divorcing. There are single mothers who adopt and succeed in doing so. You have a strong support system, that counts in your favour because it shows that the baby will be groomed in a good family. Zano : I'm glad. For a moment there I was so scared that I'll lose my angel.

S. Worker : You won't lose Angel. You have a nice house and a good job to raise the baby softly. You are going to give Angel a home and that's what the agency wants . The baby having both parents is a bonus , we don't care about that nowadays.

Zano : Thank you so much. You don't know how much this means to me.

S. Worker : It means a lot to the baby too. You are giving her what her biological parents couldn't.

Zano nodded and held the baby making her stand on her lap.

S. Worker : Can I use the loo?

Zano : Walk down the passage , second door on your left.

S. Worker : Thanks.

She stood up and walked down the passage. Zano sighed and caressed the baby , rubbing the baby hair on her forehead. When she came to Jo'burg she was a mess , she was on the verge of depression. It was still unbelievable that she managed to stand for herself and actually leave that toxic marriage. With the help of her family she managed to get up , dust herself and move on.

Zano : I'm in love with you. You don't know how much you've changed my life for the better. You are my sunshine through the heavy storm and that's why I want to name you Hope. You'll be Angela Hope Qwabe...(laughed) if it was up to me we wouldn't use that surname though. I'd choose my mother's surname instead but hey , that's not possible. I love you so much , strange right ? A few months ago I didn't know you but when I met you , I fell deeply in love with you.

I've never been a mommy before but I promise you , I'll be the best one you know. Thank you for making me a mother Angela.

The social worker stood at the corner and listened. Her lips twitched into a smile as she watched Zano play with her soon to be daughter. This was what she liked to see , parents who

were genuine and adopted because they wanted to not because they could.

S. Worker : Okay mamaka Angela we have to leave now.

Zano : Alright. Uhm I wanted to ask?

S. Worker : Yeah shoot.

Zano : How long do I wait to adopt again?

S. Worker : The agency doesn't mind you adopting again after a year or six months too but I advise you to bond with this one first before rushing to adopt again.

Zano : I understand. Let me see you out.

S. Worker : Okay.

She packed her things and they walked out with Zano holding the baby. They bid farewell and she drove out. Zano sighed and walked back inside the house.

...

Kwanda walked in the house followed by Sam. She put her bag on the couch and took off her heels. She exhaled as she threw herself on the couch.

Sam : That went well.

Kwanda : It sure took some time though. I thought it was going to be peaceful without any demands kodwa uNkosi...Yhoo hayi he showed me flames.

Sam : But you are now a free woman. His demands didn't do any good to him , you are now divorced .

Kwanda : Yeah and that's what I'm happy about. Why didn't you warn me that when you're the one filing for divorce it gets this hectic ?

Sam : Now you know. Uhm babe ?

Kwanda : Mntungwa ?

Sam : Can you please move in with me?

Kwanda : Uh..

The door opened and Phawu walked in with Petunia.

Kwanda : I'm really not in the mood for you Phawu today what do you want?

Phawu laughed and leaned over to hug her.

Phawu : Hawu ma

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not even a hello?

Kwanda : I'm just kidding baby how are you?

Phawu : We are good.

Petunia : Hello parents.

Sam : Hi Petunia. Where did you leave my grandchild?

Petunia : His grandmother is babysitting. Phawu and I decided to take a break and go out , just the two of us.

Kwanda : How's parenthood ?

Petunia : We are coping by helping each other. His father is supportive , thank god for that .

Kwanda : Keep up the good work son.

Phawu : Ma we were just passing by to see how you are holding up. How was court today ?

Kwanda : Well the divorce has been finalized so I'm good.

Phawu : That's good to hear Sthandwa Sami. Sun City is waiting for us so we better leave. Dad take care of my mother.

Sam : Phawu , why don't you just leave already ?

Phawu : (laughing)Bye guys.

Kwanda : Bye baby.

Sam : So ?

He turned back to her when the kids left. Kwanda nodded..

Kwanda : I will move in with you.

...

Londeka untied her robe and looked at her reflection on the mirror , totally not recognising the woman that stared her back. She had lost a lot of weight , her eyes puffy and eye bags purple , her backbones were sticking out and she just looked tired.

She stripped off her pyjamas and got inside the bathtub and soaked herself. The night she gave birth to her baby girl was the same night she gave birth to pain. She only saw and held her after pushing her out. She was probably older now , five months older. Not knowing where she was or whether she was

well taken care of or not bugged her the most. No parent wants to feel the pain that she is feeling right now , she doesn't even know what her baby looks like. The law failed to find her daughter and the father of her child failed too.

The water had gone cold , she had fallen asleep in the tub. She woke up and drained the water then got out.

Ntsizwa was sitting on the bed busy with something on his phone.

He looked at her as she walked in the room. She dropped the towel and got inside another set of pyjamas. With the way her heart was heavy she sometimes got lazy to even dress up , never mind leaving the house.

Ntsizwa : Londeka...

She turned to him .

Ntsizwa : You need to see a professional , you are slowly losing yourself.

She didn't respond , instead she pulled the bed covers and threw the pillows on the floor.

Ntsizwa : Baby.

Londeka : Leave me alone Ntsizwa.

Ntsizwa : I'm concerned about you.

Londeka : Then bring my baby to me. If you are that concerned , you will hunt down my baby and bring her to me. That is what's going to help me not a shrink.

Ntsizwa : I'm trying baby.

Londeka : I told you to hunt Zano down , she has my baby. She took my baby.

Ntsizwa : That's not true baby , why would Zano do that ?

Londeka : It's too much of a coincidence that she disappeared at the same time with my child. She took her.

Ntsizwa : Zano didn't disappear , she left. She didn't kidnap our baby babe , stop saying that.

Tears flooded her face as she laid on her side. She sniffed and tried to wipe them as more tears wet her pillow.

Zanothando

****thirty two****

The helper walked in and shook her head then took the tray that she had put on the pedestal an hour ago , which Londeka didn't even bother to stick a single finger in. She appreciated her job but making food for the dustbin wasn't what she signed up for. To her it seemed like Londeka was taking advantage of her being the madam . She walked with the tray back to the kitchen. Londeka's mother and sister walked in while she washed the dishes.

L. Mother : Where's my daughter ? Tell her we are here to see her.

No greeting , her statement accompanied by an attitude and a sneer. Dinah continued to rinse the dishes then reached for the drying cloth.

Bandile : We are talking to you.

Dinah : Where I come from there's something called a greeting. Sawubona is just one word that takes only two milliseconds to utter.

L. Mother : You sure have a big stinking attitude for a kitchen girl.

Dinah: I might be a kitchen girl but I deserve respect. I clean after your daughter and keep this house a home since your daughter fails in doing that, the least you can do is show me some respect. If you can't do that then you have another thing coming because I am not the type that tends to be the bigger person. You give me shit , I reciprocate.

Bandile : Yoh.

Dinah : Your zombie daughter is in the shower in her bathroom.

Londeka's mother clapped once and exclaimed. Bandile dragged her down the passage. They shouldn't have done that to her , she has done a lot for Londeka's family. They can't give her such an attitude after she had kept the husband's bed warm for months after his wife became a walking corpse. As tired as she'd always be , she'd still wake up every morning and clean this big house. Make food for the guests and make them feel welcomed. Also make food for that one who is forever cooped in her bedroom , food that she'd turn out not to eat. Her afternoons were busy too , she'd cook and run a bath for the husband then wash the dishes. She is more than a

housekeeper to them and they wouldn't give her such an attitude if only they knew.

...

Londeka sighed when she walked to her mother and sister in the bedroom. Her mother sitting on the couch in the corner , legs crossed while Bandile was busy typing on her phone.

Londeka : Ma.

Her mother looked at her thin tiny body then shook her head with pity. Bandile walked towards her sister and embraced her.

Bandile : Hey sis.

Londeka : Hi.

L. Mother : You're so thin Londeka , are you taking care of yourself ? What about your husband , is he well taken care of ?

Londeka : Ntsizwa is the least of my worries ma. In all of this misery I'm in , you care about Ntsizwa. What about your daughter's wellbeing or your missing granddaughter?

L. Mother : You have my empathy Londeka but the whole world shouldn't just freeze because you lost a baby. The police are

trying all they can to find your child and let them do their job. In the meantime focus on your marriage , when was the last time you made love to your husband?

Bandile : Ma!

She shook her head with disapproval trying to reprimand her mother.

L. Mother : Stop calling my name. Did you see the attitude of that girl in the kitchen? You can see that she is already picturing herself as the madam of the house already

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she even called you a zombie ! If you keep neglecting your husband , someone else will take care of his needs because men are weak like that. If he cheated on his other wife with you , what will stop him from doing the same to you ? Vuka Londeka or you'll find yourself in the streets. Uzobanda umuzo wakho , uzokuhlula umendo.

Bandile : Mama stop ! Can't you see that she is hurting and you're pressing her down even more while you're supposed to be consoling her as her mother. Not everything is about pleasing men. Ntsizwa would be selfish if he doesn't understand the situation Londy is in. She lost a baby for crying out loud.

L. Mother : I was just warning her. She lost the child and she might lose the husband too. Is that what you want for her?

Bandile : Leave ma. Just go!

L. Mother : Mxm oho.

She slammed the door when she walked out. Bandile pulled Londeka in her arms and hushed her as she broke in a sob.

Bandile : I'm sorry sis. Don't mind her she is being insensitive.

She rubbed her back tenderly.

...

Ever since they had moved to Ulundi their life have been easier and brightened by the little addition in the family , the bundle of joy. Although it still didn't make sense to Nomfundo as to how Londeka just handed the baby to her brother without any hassles but she gladly babysat her niece and helped her brother through the sleepless nights and parenting.

Nhlanhla got a job and Nomfundo babysits the baby full-time. She loves her brother's child a lot but something about them

suddenly moving to Ulundi and the baby coming to live with them doesn't make sense.

She put the bottles in cold water and then turned to get Nhlanhla's food from the oven and placed it in front of him.

Nhlanhla : Thank you mntase.

She sighed and sat down opposite him.

Nhlanhla : You seem troubled.

Nomfundo : I'm fine.

He wiped his hands and took out his wallet then pulled a few two hundred notes out before putting it back in his pocket and resumed eating.

Nhlanhla : I'm giving you the weekend off , you've been taking care of my child without a break. This is my token of appreciation.

Nomfundo : You don't have to give me money Nhlanhla.

Nhlanhla : Go to the mall or spa with your friends. Just go and spoil yourself , I know it's not much but go and enjoy .

Nomfundo : Thank you.

Nhlanhla : No , thank you for taking care of us without whining or bragging about it.

Nomfundo : Is Londeka coming over to see her child ?

Nhlanhla : No.

Nomfundo : Qhama is almost 6 months old now , how come her mother never came to see her till date? Does Londeka hate her child that much?

Nhlanhla : Londeka doesn't know we moved down here .

Nomfundo : Don't you think she deserves to know so she visits her child? I find it strange that she doesn't even call to check up on her at the very least .

Nhlanhla : It's complicated.

Nomfundo : How ?

Nhlanhla : Can you try not to interfere in my business...I love you and you are my lil sis but please...

He stood up and wiped his hands then left the plate inside the sink. Nomfundo sighed and went to wash it.

...

Bandile leaned over and pulled the plush blanket covering her sister then stood up to leave. Ntsizwa was walking down the passage when he bumped into her.

Ntsizwa : Sbali.

Bandile : Hey.

Ntsizwa : Are you here for your sister ?

Bandile : Yeah I wanted to check up on her. She is asleep now and I must say she is becoming worse emotionally.

Ntsizwa : I've noticed.

Bandile : Please don't hurt my sister Ntsizwa. Take care of her and be there for her , I beg you. I know it's hard for you as a man and you are also hurt by this. You are dealing with it your own way while Londeka is getting depressed like this. She needs you , now more than ever. She might be pushing you away and isolating herself but she needs you as her husband. Otherwise she will lose her mind because when you are alone your mind battles with you in every kind of way. Slowly , she will lose her sanity.

Ntsizwa nodded and put his hand over Bandile's shoulder.

Ntsizwa : Yes , noted.

Bandile : Thank you. Goodbye

Ntsizwa : Bye.

She walked away while Ntsizwa exhaled feeling a bit of guilt hitting him. He walked inside their bedroom and removed his shoes then climbed on bed cuddling Londeka from behind. If only he could find his daughter or his remains if the worst has happened; for closure , they'd all move on from this trauma.

To be continued...

Zanothando

****Thirty three****

Dinah was taken by surprised when she walked in to the bed made and the curtains drew open. She placed the tray of food on the dressing table. Water was running in the bathroom and a scent of "Oh so heavenly" bubble bath lingered on , all the way to the room. She shook her head and walked out .

Londeka drained the water in the bathtub then stepped out covering herself with a towel. She hadn't felt so good in ages , she had felt very sombre for a long time that today she told herself to be positive for once. She was tired of feeling useless , she needed to do something to find her child as a mother.

Once she was dressed up , she had breakfast and went to wait for the detective handling her child's case on the porche. She hadn't stepped outside in months and the feeling of the morning sun rays hitting on her skin gave her goosebumps and a sense of hope.

Detective Nkuna arrived and Londeka showed her the thread of messages that Nhlanhla was sending her throughout the course of her gestation period. He was threatening her in some , and begging her to not deny her the chance of fathering their child in others.

Detective : Do you understand that you have withheld information from us for months? Information that could've helped us with this case. That is against the law Mrs Mkhonto and you are aware of it.

Londeka : Detective ; you have to understand that I'm a married woman. Me being involved with another man and possibly carrying his child is an abomination from my side.

Detective : So you'd rather protect your image rather than helping us find your daughter? Do you care that much about your image that you'd risk your daughter's life? Do you even know if she is alive or not , well fed , clothed or not? He might be molesting her for all we know. Do you even want her to be found ?

Londeka : Nhlanhla wouldn't do that to my child. And yes I want my child to be found , I wouldn't be sitting here with you if I wanted otherwise.

Nkuna shook his head then stood up to leave.

Detective : It's fine Mrs Mkhonto. We'll look for your lover , hopefully we will find the baby.

Londeka : He is not my lov...

Detective : Good day.

He put on his cap and left. Londeka sighed and laid her head back. Meanwhile Dinah stood at the door where she was eavsdropping shocked by what she just heard , she went to the kitchen and laughed clapping her hands.

...

The door slid open and everyone stood excitedly anticipating for Zano to walk in. She pushed the stroller in and everyone excitedly rushed to her.

Angela's eyes hopped at one person to the next and then the new environment , she looked at them with awe. Phawu took her and cooed her then she giggled softly and reached for his

face with her tiny hand , she held his nose then pulled a strand of his beard .

Meanwhile on the other end of the room

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Kwanda emotionally embraced her daughter.

Kwanda : I'm happy for you baby .

Zano : Thank you ma.

Kwanda : I know I've done put you through hell by allowing you father to convince me to cut ties with you. I've been a bad mother to you and your brothers but I'll forever be grateful for allowing me to mother you once again and making me a granny too.

Zano : Let sleeping dogs lie ma , we all have an embarrassing moment in the past that we wish to erase. It's all in the past and what we have to do now is focus on the future.

Kwanda : I love you

Zano : Me too ma.

She hugged her once again then Kwanda walked over to Phawu so she could also pick up Angela.

Phawu : Your daughter is going to finish my beard Zee.

Zano : Maybe she is trying to tell you to shave.

Phawu : (Laughing) Shame on you for saying that to your brother Zee , shame on you.

Zano watched as everyone took turns in picking up Angela and playing with her. She was giggling and that warmed her heart. She finally had a baby , that she was going to dote on. Seeing her family this supportive and loving was what she moved down here for ; the peace of mind that came with it.

...

The waitress put Nhlanhla's order in front of him then left. He put Qhama in her baby seat and grabbed the glass quenching his thirst. He would've loved to have a beer but knowing he still has to drive back to Ulundi with Qhama he couldn't risk driving tipsy.

He was halfway through eating his food when Qhama started crying , he wiped his thumbs with the napkin and picked her up. Immediately after he took her in his hands , she vomited all over his black t-shirt leaving it with a white mushy substance. His beard and chest had vomit too.

Nhlanhla : Oh baby.

He said with a hint of disgust still holding Qhama in her hands not knowing what to do. She continued crying and gagging in between.

Seeing Nhlanhla struggling with his daughter , Mandisa stood up from her seat and approached their table. She took baby Qhama without a word and searched for wipes in her baby bag.

Nhlanhla : Thank you

He said after wiping himself but the huge stain and the pungent smell of vomit remained although it was downsized by the scent of baby wipes.

She smiled and laid the baby on her chest and she seemed to calm down.

Mandisa : I couldn't stand back and watch a father struggling while I could help. I'm Mandisa .

Nhlanhla : Nice to meet you ; I'm Nhlanhla , father to the amazing Qhama.

Mandisa : (Smiled adorably) Qhama is beautiful. Where is her mother ?

Nhlanhla : I'm a single father.

Mandisa : Oh. Her temperature is very high , I think she has a fever so I'd advice you take her to a doctor.

Nhlanhla : Her paediatrician is around town so I can take her now , would you like to accompany us?

Mandisa : I don't want to impose.

Nhlanhla : Please. It is only just that I thank you properly for helping me out so accompany me to the doctor and I'll get you something to eat when we return , maybe get to know each other also.

Mandisa : I'll only come because baby Qhama is adorable not because I want free food.

Nhlanhla : Fine by me.

She walked over to her table and took her bag then followed him to his car. How suitable she looked as Qhama's mother , Nhlanhla thought to himself. He smiled at the thought and drove out heading to the main avenue.

...

Laying down on her bed felt heavenly due to the fatigue of the day. Angela had surely worn her out , she had no idea how energetic children can be.

She fixed her pillow and closed her eyes but her phone cut the resting short by ringing. She looked at Angela who was sleeping peacefully next to her then quickly answered the unknown caller.

Caller : Congratulations Thembalami.

Zano rubbed her eyes and sat up alarmed. A web of confusion wrapped around her medulla , she did not know what to say and why she was being congratulated.

To be continued...

Zanothando

****thirty four****

She sat upright and stared at the screen then rubbed her eyes with her palm.

Caller : Zano ?

She recognised the voice and gently got out of bed. She closed the bedroom door behind her and squatted in front of it with the baby monitor held in the other hand. She replied whispering.

Zano : Ntsizwa ?

Ntsizwa : Sawubona MaQwabe .

Zano : What do you want ? Where did you even get my numbers from?

Ntsizwa : What kind of a husband would I be if I didn't have your numbers? I called to congratulate you on your newly found happiness.

Zano : What are you talking about ?

He heaves out a sigh and keeps silent like he is trying to recollect his thoughts.

Ntsizwa : Please come home Nothando . I'm willing to start over and give us another chance. Please don't give up on our marriage, please babe. Look , I'm willing to let go of everything that's a hindrance to your happiness...I just want to be with you.

Zano : Anything ? You know my problem is your wife , right ?

Ntsizwa : I can separate any day with Londeka. I don't want to lose what's worth for nothing. For the five months that you've left , I realised that I lost a diamond while groping for stones.

Zano : I can't up and rush back just because you suddenly realised my value. It doesn't work like that Mkhonto , I have a life here , a family and I'm actually happier. I can't jump at your command to jump.

He grunted as if he felt physical pain then exhaled softly.

Ntsizwa : We lost our baby. It's been months now , I've lost hope and Londeka is a mess.

Zano : Why are you telling me this ?

Ntsizwa : I did you dirty. Took you from your maternal home to turn you into a laughing stock. I admit that I was selfish Zano...

Zano : Wait you think I stole your baby ?

Ntsizwa : At this point I don't know what to think anymore.

Zano : I'd want to hurt you back but not with your baby. I'm not a mental case Ntsizwa , surely you know that.

Ntsizwa : It's just suspicious that you left and my baby disappeared. You're a nurse Zano , you could've easily stolen her. I'm giving you a change to redeem yourself and bring back my baby , please.

Zano: I don't know where your child is.

Ntsizwa : (Lowly) Zano.

Zano : Look I'm sorry you had to go through this. I might not be a mother biologically but I know that I'd feel like it's the end of the world if my child went missing . I wouldn't do that to another woman , please don't make me a vile person.

Ntsizwa : Then please come back home , we need you.

Zano : No , you don't. Please focus on your wife and finding your missing daughter Ntsizwa.

Ntsizwa : Please don't give up on us.

Zano : Goodnight.

She hung up and sighed as guilt weighed down on her conscious. The baby monitor beeped in her hand , she stood up then walked in the room.

....

How do you explain the pain of being abandoned by your husband to your parents after your newborn had gone missing ? Ntsizwa knew that Londeka needed him but he just wasn't there for her emotionally. They slept seperatly for months because he just couldn't face her. He was guilty and she knew it. To her all he cared about at that time was his missing first wife and not his missing firstborn daughter . She didn't cry at first , she had hope that her baby was around somewhere . They probably were pulling her leg about her missing. Hours passed

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days passed and eventually weeks. The tantrums begun. She started crying and screaming and kicking every chance she got , blaming Ntsizwa while at it. She ordered him to go look for her child. At one point she had told him that if he doesn't come back carrying her baby in his hands , she was going to leave and go back home.

She was a zombie laying in bed all the time. She barely ate or bathe. All her time was consumed by her either sleeping or crying in bed. She could see that even the housekeeper was getting tired of her . But she was drained and all she wanted to see was her child. The only time she saw her was after she gave birth to her , she held her and caressed her then she fell into a deep sleep. She never even got the chance to name her .

Five months later and she still can't come up with a name that is good enough for her. She wants to give her a name that is unique , a name she'll call her when she is eventually found because she still is clinging to optimism .

Dinah was given a day off , she needed the house to herself and feel alive again. She cleaned , from her kitchen down to the guest bedroom . She cooked her favourite meal and tried to force it down her throat. The thought of her daughter not

eating wherever she is crossed her mind and she pushed the plate away. It always haunted her , not knowing what was happening to her child and whether she was eating and and and...

Her motherly instincts couldn't let her go about her life without worrying about her child.

She grabbed her car keys and drove out. Not knowing where she was going but she knew she needed a change in environment , she found herself parked in front of her father's house. She was hoping not to see her mother because she has a way of ruining her mood , sometimes making things worse than they are.

Her sister appears from the house with a grin. She gives her a brief hug and inspects her body before shaking it off with a smile.

Bandile : Londy. You look much better sis.

That's a lie , she looks horrible but she lets her get away with it by just smiling.

Bandile : Come in , dad is here.

Londeka : Ma ?

Bandile : She went grocery shopping. We all refused to accompany her.

That's a relief to her , she had no intentions of sitting with her mother and listening to her chanting about how her marriage is in shambles and it's entirely her fault. Her father never does that unless her mother is the one doing the talking and makes him input his opinion.

The hallway has all their pictures lined up. There's one that is their parents' and also her favourite. It's Londeka when she was about eight months old , she was smiling at the camera with two upper and bottom teeth . Tears filled her face as she looked at it wondering what her child looked like. If she looked entirely like her or took some of her features. Her heart sank as she said down and tried to conceal her emotions.

....

Mandisa glanced at the mirror and frowned sadly. She didn't look that good , her outfit didn't come out the way she hoped it would. She was about to undress when she realised that she didn't know this man and she didn't have to look hot for him. He didn't say he was taking her on a date , he wanted to thank her for helping him. He was only doing this to show gratitude because she helped his daughter.

She sighed dismissively and headed out. It wasn't exactly an ideal date. They were going to hang out at the nearest shisanyama and talk.

She is the first to arrive and orders a glass of soda while she waits for him. Minutes go by and she is starting to grow impatient. She calls him , his phone rings unanswered. She waits for a couple more minutes which turns into an hour and half. She leaves the place raged and disappointed for being stood up.

To be continued...

Zanothando

****thirty five****

His heart is beating so fast you could almost hear it from a metre apart. He had to run , very hastily. He had to take his child and run. As much as he regrets seperating Qhama from her mother but as far as he knows himself , he was never a coward. He wasn't going to sit by and let another man raise his child as if he was dead. He knew that he had to do something when Zano confirmed to him that the baby was his. He had to raise her even if it took him being a single father. He even went to the lengths of sneaking in at the hospital with the help of a medical practitioner to take his daughter. Steal is the word he doesn't want to use , he took what was rightfully his.

So when the cops showed up at his place to question him while Qhama went out with Nomfundo. He knew better than to stay there. The cops were going to come back and with a search warrant in sight. Even a blind person could smell a baby's presence in that house. They know and he knows that they are going to come for her.

He isn't intending to let six months go down the line. Qhama knows and is used to him as her father. She hasn't called him yet but he can see the warmth in her eyes when he is around. She trusts him and he's not going to give her up.

When he took the N2 out of KZN penitence sat on his shoulders because he left a lot of things unresolved. Nomfundo is going to be in trouble. She is an accomplice because she kept quiet about a mysterious newborn brought home and took care of that baby. She even moved with him to a new town so technically both Nhlanhla and Nomfundo stole the baby plus that midwife.

He makes a stop at a filling station to change Qhama's diaper and also check his phone. Mandisa called and called and left messages after messages. He sighs and types a message apologizing before he switches off his phone .

Nhlanhla : I'm sorry I stood you up. I got caught up but I had no excuse to not call and notify you. I'm out of town and I'll be gone for some time. I know you're angry but I'm hoping that we will have a talk once I come back. Was looking forward to a friendship with you.

He chews the simcard and discards the cellphone on the side of the freeway that's in between hills .

...

When the in-laws call for a meeting with the elders and you , you present yourself. You sit in front of old men and aunties and listen to them bash you. You apologise for the sake of if and go back to your husband. All becomes forgiven and you blame the devil for whatever he's done to you. Married women know this , most of them abide but not Zano.

They asked her to come talk about 'it' numerous times but she made it clear that she had nothing left for her in KZN. She demands that Ntsizwa signs the damn divorce papers and they all move on with their lives.

It doesn't matter how he begs and cries. It's not enough to bring her back to the place where her sanity was lost . Her heart is with her adoptive daughter now , and that's just her whole world.

She is Kwanda's daughter. From her perseverance to her stubbornness , she took from her mother.

Kwanda : We should call your father.

Nkosi isn't an option. She vowed to do this life thing on her own. Without Nkosi and without Ntsizwa.

Zano : No mama. I'll pay him back if I have to.

Kwanda : Do you have money for 16 cows?

Zano : I'll make a plan.

Kwanda : I understand you've had enough and all you want to do is divorce him . We're cultural people Zanothando. Cows were sent , umgcagco was done ; umabo as well. They spread you with bile mntanami ancestors were involved. If you choose to walk away , do it properly. If it's his cows he wants back

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your father will gladly return them.

Zano : Knowing your husband he won't agree to return the cows. He loves messing up my life , he enjoys my suffering.

Kwanda : Let's try. I'll take it upon myself to reach out. I don't want you to be me , leaving loose ends and generational curses. You're royalty , you wedded a royal man. You don't want a bad cloud hovering over you for the rest of your life.

Zano sighs. Her mother has a point, if Ntsizwa is demanding his cows back he has to also slaughter an animal to let his ancestors know that what had be knotted a few years ago is now being untied. They , Ntsizwa and his forefathers , need to let her go.

Zano : Call your husband.

...

A rain of claps lands on Nomfundo's face before she can make a run for it. She can see it. The jumbo pack of Pampers Gold are

proof that a baby is living in this house. Londeka is old enough to connect the dots.

Guilt eats her. She had been shying away from the fact that her tricky ways might've been the cause of her baby's disappearance. And now that she is here she regrets not getting her shit together on time. Nhlanhla is not here with her daughter.

Londeka : Where is that shithead?

Nomfundo doesn't say anything. Her face feels swollen.

Londeka shouts Nhlanhla's name a few times searching each and every corner of this house.

Londeka : Iphi ingane yami ?

Nomfundo is just standing there feeling awkward.

Londeka stands in front of her breathing heavily. Tears shining in her eyes.

Londeka : I just want my child Nomfundo.

Her voice cracks and she walks to the couch looking defeated.

Londeka : Your brother is killing me slowly. I want my child.

She sobs loudly with her hands on her face. Nomfundo just stands there not knowing what to do.

A smirk on his face is evident when he hangs up.. it's satisfaction. He knew that tables will turn , bridges will burn and Zano will need him one day. Who would've thought that him accepting her dowry will work in his favour in future ?

He will give them the runaround. That's what Nkosi sets himself for. He wants to see them beg him until they kneel and lick off the dust from his feet. He knew that Zano would turn out to be a failure like her mother. She failed to be loveable , she failed to be pretty , failed at being a part of this family and now failed at keeping a man. Exactly a younger version of Nokwandisa.

To be continued...

Zanothando

****thirty six****

Ntsizwa will be glad to know that his lobola will be returned to him soon and they can start with the divorce. That's what's making Zano happy. To finally be free from this man who caused her pain.

Vanessa is sitting on the couch. She was hoping to find Phawu but his sister is here instead. They are not that close and it gets rather awkward to be alone together.

Zano : Hi Vee.

Vanessa : Hi.

Her voice is husky. Zano wants to ask if she is sick but she'd be overstepping the line. They aren't close like that.

Zano : Phawu isn't home ?

Vanessa : No . Dad and him are planning something for your mother.

Zano : A surprise ?

Vanessa : I think so.

She stands up and staggers a little to the countertop. There's a bottle of vodka and a glass that she grabs and comes back to her seat. Zano watches while she gulps the vodka from the bottle. She wipes her mouth furiously and exhales heavily.

Vanessa : It's my mom's birthday this week. They've forgotten about it.

Zano : I'm sure they haven't.

Vanessa : Yes they have. They have forgotten about my mom entirely. Normally we'd be celebrating it already in her commemoration. Dad has moved on , Phawu is too busy with his kid and fiancée then there's me , all alone.

Zano : You're not alone Vee , you have brothers and a father ; they all love you.

Vanessa : They aren't there for me sis , I'm depressed. I feel alone . Ever since mom died I feel like there's no one there for me. It hurts

Zano : I know and I'm so sorry.

Vanessa :I visited my brother but he was too busy to even ask how I was doing. Is it because I'm not your mother's child?

Zano : Nobody is sidelining you.

Vanessa : I need to be alone please if you don't mind.

Vanessa sniffed and lifted the bottle to drink again. Zanothando watched pitying her then stood up to leave.

...

Nhlanhla slowed down as he approached the board that welcomed him to Umthatha. He has only his bank cards and baby. No family and nowhere to go . But this is his fresh start and he is willing to start over with no connections or assistance.

First thing he does when he arrives in some small area is look for accomodation. He finds a backroom that he could rent in an

old lady's yard. He bought a burner phone which he uses to text his accomplice to lay low because the police is onto them.

...

Meanwhile the police sat opposite Nomfundo who was shaking with fear.

Cop : Sis please call your brother so that we can track him down and I promise you won't have even a single charge on your name.

Nomfundo : His phone doesn't go through and he left without telling me where he is going. Am I going to be arrested ?

Cop : Not really , the mother just wants her child back. But if she does press charges of kidnapping you'll have to be arrested as an accomplice. Right now this is still a missing person's case.

Nomfundo : He said it's his child.

Cop : Still doesn't give him the right to take the child from her mother. It's been months sifuna lengane.

Nomfundo : I had no idea.

Cop : Does he have any relatives or friends outside Ulundi whom he might go to ?

Nomfundo : We don't get along with our relatives and I don't know his friends. He was always here with me or out to wherever.

Cop : Please try to think. Any colleagues or...?

Nomfundo : There is a lady that I can think of. I can't say they are exactly friends but she came at by our house once or twice before we moved down here.

Cop : Do you know what her name is ?

Nomfundo : Unfortunately, no.

Cop : Address or phone number?

Nomfundo : No but I know her face.

The cop sighed.

Cop : Please , if your brother calls let us know.

Nomfundo : Of course .

Cop : Bye

...

Ntsizwa tossed in bed and turned facing the ceiling then he sat up unable to sleep. He turned on the lamp and looked at Londeka who was staring into space.

Londeka : Can't sleep ?

She sighed and sat up balancing her head with a continental pillow on the headboard.

Londeka : Me too.

Ntsizwa : When were you going to tell me ?

Londeka kept quiet .

Ntsizwa : You made me marry you knowing very well that the baby wasn't mine. You've been lying to me for over a year.

Londeka : I thought the child was yours.

Ntsizwa : That's not true Londeka. Every mother knows the father of their children. You wanted the child to be mine , that's it.

Londeka : I promise you , I thought the child was yours.

Ntsizwa : I can't believe I lost my wife all for nothing.

Londeka : You're being insensitive right now. We also lost a daughter .

Ntsizwa : She's not mine.

Londeka : We're not even sure , can't we do a DNA test to prove who's the father?

Ntsizwa : I don't know if I can trust you anymore.

Londeka sighed.

Londeka : I feel like you have fallen out of love with me a long time ago and you're using this as an excuse to get rid of me.

Ntsizwa : I do love you but I hate lies.

Londeka : I never lied to you. I didn't know I was already pregnant when I dated you. Vele you never supported me or shown any affection towards me ever since Zano left. It's like I'm on the receiving end of your anger when I'm not the one that wronged you. You just don't like me anymore and it would've been better if you told me the truth. We aren't kids please , I can see ukuthi kwenzekani right now. Just don't treat me like trash please

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I know I'm not Zano but I'm your wife also.

Ntsizwa's heart sank as he felt guilty.

Ntsizwa : Can we find our daughter then we can fix things in our marriage ? I'm sorry , I didn't realise you felt like this.

Londeka : What if she isn't yours?

Ntsizwa : She is yours and that makes her ours right ?

Londeka nodded blinking away tears. Ntsizwa moved closer cuddling her.

...

Phawu knocked once and let herself inside Zano's flat. She smiled nervously as he stepped over and hugged her.

Phawu : Hey sis .

Zano : Hey , I stopped by your house earlier and you weren't there.

Phawu : Oh Vee told me. Dad and I had to take care of something. He wants to say his vows again so we're planning the event , I'm so excited.

Zano : Wow , that's nice.

Phawu : Yeah it's a surprise tho , don't tell mom.

Zano : I won't.

Phawu : Are you okay ? You're sweating .

Zano : I'm fine. Yazi I think Vanessa has a problem , do you guys talk ?

Phawu : Yeah like everyday.

Zano : I'm talking about a serious conversation Phawu. Where you'll allow her to vent .

Phawu : What did she say , is she okay ?

Zano : No she's not okay. She misses her mother and she feels alone , like you guys don't pay attention to her now that Kwanda is back in your lives.

Phawu : But that's not true. She is my sister , I wouldn't do that to her.

Zano : Then talk to her . She is drowning her sorrows in alcohol.

Phawu : Will do.

Zano took the baby bottle out of the warmer and looked at Phawu.

Phawu : Zee what's wrong ?

Tears blurred her eyes as she sat down.

Phawu : Hey talk to me , what happened ?

Zano : I need your help . They are going to take my baby and I can't allow that because she is my sanity. Without her , I'll be nuts. Please you got to help me..

Phawu : Okay I'll help you. What is it ?

She sniffed and wiped a tear that had rolled down her face.

Zano : I messed up and I think I am so close to being busted.

To be continued

Zanothando

****Thirty Seven****

Phawu gasped as Zano narrated what happened. He laughed while clapping in astonishment.

Phawu : You did all of that ? I thought you were an angel.

Zano : I was hurt.

Phawu : Still , I thought you were the bigger person type of girl. You never came across as someone vengeful to me.

Zano : Please just help me.

Phawu : I don't know how I'll go about doing that honestly .

Zano : I can't go to jail.

She broke down crying.

Phawu : You won't go to jail sis , I'll make sure of that. I'll talk to dad.

Zano : No you can't do that. If you tell your father , he'll tell my mother and she won't be happy about this.

Phawu : Of course she won't be happy. No parent likes to be painted this kind of picture about their children . Uyisgebengu
Zano

He burst out laughing.

Zano : I'm glad to see that this is amusing you , thank you so much Phawu. This is a huge joke to you .

Phawu : Look I'll tell my dad , he will know what to do. He might be old but he is very smart and he was a criminal like you when he was younger.

Zano : I'm not a criminal.

Phawu : Yet. You're not a criminal yet because you're going to jail and everyone will know that you're a criminal.

Zano : Phawu this isn't a joke.

Phawu : I'm just amazed at how you handled betrayal. Remind me to never cross you.

Zano : Will you help me though?

Phawu : Yes , dad and I will help you. Don't stress just focus on being a mother to your child. We will deal with this.

Zano : Thank you so much.

Phawu : Never do something like this ever again okay ?

Zano : Yes.

Phawu : Please because next time you won't be lucky and uzoboshwa.

Zano : Ngikzwile.

Phawu : Fine bye... kiss my baby for me.

He stood up and left. Zano leaned back and sighed in relief.

...

The following morning Nhlanhla put Qhama to sleep and walked out to sit next to the door. The backroom had a bed and a two plate electric stove only . The space was limited but he was going to try and make it work.

He took out his cellphone and the folded piece of paper he had written all important contact numbers on.

He stared at Nomfundo's numbers contemplating calling her but decided to call Mandisa instead.

...

Londeka smiled as Ntsizwa walked in. He kissed her cheek and settled down while she got his breakfast.

Londeka : Morning

Ntsizwa : Good morning , thanks for breakfast. You look so much better

Londeka : I woke up feeling hopeful.

Ntsizwa : I like that. Londeka look , I meant what I said last night. I realised that I might have been very harsh on you and I want to rectify that.

Londeka : I wouldn't intentionally mislead you Ntsizwa and you know that.

Ntsizwa : Yeah. I guess I let Zano's disappearance blindsided me and this divorce thing is also taking its toll on me.

Londeka : Divorce ?

Ntsizwa sighed and pushed the plate aside.

Ntsizwa : Yes. I'm waiting for her family to return my cows and then we part ways. I guess she was tired of me.

Londeka : She never agreed

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did she ? She wasn't okay with this polygamy setup.

Ntsizwa : No she wasn't , it hurt her.

Londeka : I was going to leave also. You make it so hard to endure in this marriage sometimes.

Ntsizwa : I know and I regret how I've even treating both of you.

Londeka : So the divorce ?

Ntsizwa : Yeah we will start with the process soon.

Londeka : How do you feel ?

Ntsizwa : I had it coming. I'm heartbroken because I thought we were going to love each other and be together till death do us apart. Thought it was going to be us against the world for a very long time. She chose to cut ties with her family for me. I need to let her go , I owe her that much.

Londeka : That's deep.

Ntsizwa : Yeah she is starting over without me with her family. She is being a mother to her adopted baby and things are going well for her.

Londeka : Mother ?

Ntsizwa : Yeah she adopted... it's not our child .

Londeka : I thought it was her all along . I thought she took my daughter and hurt her or killed her to dump her on some ditch somewhere.

Ntsizwa : Zanothando isn't vile.

Londeka : And how com you know this much about her while she's not around?

Ntsizwa laughed briefly.

Londeka : Are you stalking her ?

Ntsizwa : She is my wife.

Londeka smiled and took the plate to the kitchen.

...

Mandisa knocked quietly on the door. She stepped back peeping in the keyhole. It seemed like nobody was home. She looked at the addresses she wrote down when Nhlanhla called her earlier. She wasn't sure if this was the correct house. She knocked again and waited. The door flung open and Nomfundo stepped aside with pluffy eyes.

Mandisa : Hi , I don't know if I'm at the right house. I'm looking for Nomfundo

Nomfundo : I'm Nomfundo , how can I help you ?

Mandisa : Your brother sent me . My name is Mandisa.

Nomfundo : My brother. Please , come in.

Nomfundo led Mandisa to the living room. She sat down waiting for her to talk.

Mandisa : I don't know what's happening but it hasn't been long since I met your brother. He told me that he is running away from the police ...something that has to do with his daughter.

Nomfundo : Where is he ?

Mandisa : He isn't anywhere near , he didn't tell me where exactly he is. He called me to come check up on you and let you know that he is okay.

Nomfundo : I want the number he called you from.

Mandisa : I'm afraid I can't do that he asked me not to...

Nomfundo : He has put my freedom at stake , I'm facing a criminal record here because he implicated me. I don't care wether he is okay or not , he must come back and face the music.

Mandisa : You're taking out your frustrations on the wrong person .

Nomfundo : Well I would take them out on the right person had you given me the numbers.

Mandisa : Okay I'm going to leave now because I can see that you're angry.

Nomfundo : Tell him that he cannot run forever and definitely can't hide. They will find him sooner or later.

Mandisa nodded politely and stood up to leave. Nomfundo sighed covering her face with her hands.

Zanothando

****Thirty eight ****

The house was squeaky clean and smelled fresh. At eight in the morning it is already in order. Londeka likes this but at the same time Dinah needs to go.

She climbs out of bed and stares at her reflection on the mirror in the bathroom. She looks better , she feels better also. She brushes her teeth and gets an envelope under her mattress before walking out.

Dinah's feet are on the sofa inclined while she is leaning back sipping juice.

She quickly stands up and place the glass on the coffee table when she sees Londeka.

Londeka : Hi

Dinah : Hi ma'am

Londeka : Sit down.

She puts the envelope on the table. Dinah slowly sits down pulling down the inclination. Londeka's face is neutral but Dinah can feel that something is amiss.

Londeka : I can see you've been cleaning my house very nicely. It's okay to rest and sip juice but your feet can't be on my sofas.

Dinah : I'm sorry ma'am.

Londeka : It's fine. Listen , you came at a very difficult time for all of us. You helped me around the house ... actually you did everything. Running me baths , making food for me and my husband and keeping this house homely . Thank you.

Dinah nodded , she felt like Londeka was about to drop a bomb on her.

Londeka : I'm back to being myself as you can see . I think of getting my daughter a nanny when she comes home and I can clean the house by myself . My husband doesn't want me working either way.

Dinah : Am I being fired ?

Londeka : Yes I'm relieving you from your duties as my housekeeper. I don't need you anymore , I'm so sorry.

Dinah : I need this job ma'am please don't fire me. I can be your baby's nanny I mean why get someone else while I'm already here?

Londeka : Like I said , I don't need you anymore. You can't be my baby's nanny because I don't know if I can trust you . I'm not even getting a full time nanny because I'll be here most of the time.

She leaned forward and took the envelope then handed it to her.

Londeka : Your salary advance for the next two months. It will carry you through until you find another job. Thank you and good luck.

Dinah : Thank you.

Londeka : You may carry on with work until the end of this week.

She stood up without a word. She breathed out furiously and took out her phone to text Ntsizwa.

...

Nervously Zano handed Sam his tea and Phawu his juice. She took her seat and waited anxiously for Sam to speak to her. Sam looked at Phawu and Zano then sighed putting down the cup.

Sam : Phawu told me you're in trouble ?

Zano : Yes uhm I made a mistake.

Sam : No you didn't. If it was a mistake it would've been sloppy but you seem to have done this thing like a pro.

Zano : I wouldn't ask for help if it wasn't sloppy.

Sam : What happened that day ? Please tell me every single detail.

She shifted over uncomfortably and started narrating.

Zano : My husband and I had fought. Eversince Londeka arrived all we did was fight and I'd cry myself to sleep most of the time. And then one night I got so angry that I started digging on Londeka's past , that's when I met Nhlanhla. He said the child

was his and I saw this as an opportunity to hurt them. I promised him that I'll get his child for him and convinced him that this was the right thing to do for himself. The truth is that we both weren't sure the baby was his but we went ahead either ways. Londeka texted me the day she went on labour . We all went to the hospital together , myself , her and the husband. When we got there I decided to give them space . I called Nhlanhla while I packed my clothes at home

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I checked at a hotel near the airport and sneaked back to the hospital disguised. Londeka was still in labour when I arrived. As a midwife I went to help her . Immediately after she gave birth I took the baby to the nursery , I drugged her so she can oversleep then that's when I took the baby to Nhlanhla. Then I went to check out at the hotel. I took a plane coming here.

Sam breathed out and shook his head. That was a despicable thing to do.

Sam : If it was someone else telling me this I'd jump on the hill and defend you because I don't picture you stealing someone else's child. Do you realise how much pain you've inflicted to another person?

Zano : I was angry.

Sam : It doesn't justify it ! I'm disappointed in you Zano.

She kept quiet regretting this. Being judged was the last thing she needed , all she wanted was to not even go an inch near a jail cell.

Sam : I'm disappointed in you honestly but I'll help you because it'll kill your mother if something happened to you.

Zano : Thank you.

Sam sighed and stood up

Sam : I'll sort it out. Let's go son

Phawu quickly hugged Zano and walked out.

...

Later that night Ntsizwa kissed Londeka's cheek . She smiled and turned to hug him.

Londeka : Hey , the officer was here earlier.

Ntsizwa : Good news ?

Londeka : Yes they got a court order that they took to his bank and tracking company. They'll track down his car and also his bank cards will show them his current location once he uses them.

Ntsizwa : Wow baby that's brilliant right ?

Londeka : Yes finally.

She sighed and sat down .

Ntsizwa : What's wrong ?

Londeka : I can't help but feel bad. If I gave the police a clue about Nhlanhla sooner we would've long gotten her.

Ntsizwa : It's okay baby , you wouldn't have known it was him and what matters is that you did realise he might have done it at the end of the day. Our baby will be coming home soon.

Londeka : I'm so happy

Ntsizwa : Me too.

Londeka : The helper is gone.

Ntsizwa : Why ?

Londeka : I fired her , I don't trust her with my baby. I'll find another one

Ntsizwa : I thought you loved her.

Londeka : Yes she did a splendid job in keeping the house clean but I didn't trust her anymore.

Ntsizwa kept quiet. There was something about the way she insisted that she didn't trust Dinah. It was like she knew what they had been doing behind her back for months. Not wanting to impose further Ntsizwa nodded and headed to the bathroom.

...

Zano calculated the amount that the worth of her lobola cows equalled to. She was done chasing people , her father included. She knew that he was going to give her the runaround with those cows. As to how she was going to raise so much money to refund Ntsizwa she was clueless. It would clean out all her savings and with her raising a child unemployed that would be a bad thing.

At times she sat down and tried to picture how her life would've turned out if she wasn't married to Ntsizwa or even born in royalty. If her father wasn't Nkosi and her mother not Kwanda. She envied everyone who came from good family structures , hell she even envied Londeka for having both parents who never disowned her.

She picks up Angela who is mumbling and blowing out saliva while clapping her hands. She has grown so much and will be seven months old soon. Although her life has been hell , she is grateful to God that she came out stronger and wiser. She has managed to turn her life around and find her happiness somewhere else , in her baby.

Now all that's left is for the divorce to be finalised and the ceremonies to guarantee her freedom... that's if she refunds Ntsizwa's dowry.

To be continued...

Zanothando

****Thirty nine****

A week later

Charline and Petunia stopped by to pick her up. They brought outfits for both her and her baby. Apparently Sam has planned a surprise for Kwanda where they are going to renew their vows. Their love is beautiful but Zano wishes that they didn't wait for almost thirty years to be together again. Renewing vows in their sixties when they've been divorced for decades doesn't make sense to her.

They arrived at the venue just a few minutes before the event could start. Sam had chosen a private place that is outdoors . Only family was present with the MC being Phawu's friend and the pastor.

Meanwhile Kwanda stepped out of Phawu's car and looked around. It did not seem like a conference was happening here.

She stood on her toes and tried to look around the lodge but it was quiet.

Kwanda : Son , what's going on?

Phawu : Uhhh... it's a conference , I told you.

Kwanda : But nobody seems to be here , are you sure we aren't lost ?

Phawu : No we are not. Come

He pulled her inside one of the lapas . Her dress was hanging on the padded hanger. It was marron with laced sleeves and flowing from the abdomen. Next to it on the floor were her short stilettos .

Phawu : Surprise !

Kwanda : What is this ?

Phawu : Dad planned something for both of you. To celebrate your love and reignite the spark between you. This is to say , he wants to spend the remaining years of your lives with you.

Kwanda : A wedding ?

Phawu : No , he just wants to renew his vows and mean them this time.

Kwanda nodded and walked to the couch where her jewellery was laid out. She smiled tearfully and turned to hug her son.

Kwanda : Thank you.

Phawu : It's dad you should thank. Let me call someone to help you dress up.

Kwanda : Yes , please .

Phawu : All the best mama .

Kwanda : Thank you son.

He walked out. Kwanda sniffed and blinked away her tears then smiled admiring her dress .

...

Londeka's mother ululated as they walked in accompanied by her aunt. They placed the case of Carling black label beers on

the floor then the two bottles of vodka in front of Ntsizwa's uncles.

Londeka's aunt handed the plastic full of baby clothes to Londeka and sat besides her taking Qhama into her arms.

Londeka smiled at the elders and looked at her mother. She was dancing proudly and Londeka wondered whether she was truly happy or relieved that the person connecting them with the Mkhonto's was now here. She also wondered how her mother would react if the DNA tests came back and proved that Nhlanhla was the father. What then?

L. Mother : Londeka ngane Yami I'm so proud of you. I've brought these gifts today so we can celebrate the arrival of my first ever grandchild. I know that in this journey you stumbled and fell but with the courage you took from me , you always got up and dusted yourself.

Londeka looked her and chuckled. She wasn't exactly supportive but jumped at the opportunity to take credit for the "courage" she has now that things were normal.

L. Mother : I really wish you an amazing experience in motherhood and where you lack knowledge come to us we will help you . I love you Londeka.

She ululated again and started a song as she stomped her feet dancing.

...

The small crowd cheered as Kwanda walked towards the podium with her arm hooked on Phawu's. She smiled shyly with her eyes on Sam. He side smiled and nodded maintaining eye contact with the love of his life.

The family sat down as Phawu handed over his mother to Sam.

Sam : Hi , you look beautiful.

Kwanda : Thank you. What a beautiful surprise.

The MC gave Sam the mic. He cleared his throat then quickly glanced at his family before beginning to talk.

Sam : My love. Firstly this is isn't a wedding , it's a vow renewal. It's a gift from me to you and our family so that we can remind ourselves of the love that we built thirty years ago. I'm not asking you to marry me again

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I'm asking you to unlock that door leading to the place that holds me in your heart once again. I love you Kwanda

Kwanda : I love you too.

Sam : When you came back , I thought I was angry at you and that I'd live without you because I had learnt to. But your mesmerizing beauty took my breath away and your character hadn't changed , I fell in love again . I loved you when we made Phawu and I love you now...still. Things didn't go according to plan but at the end of the day we found our way back to each other. I want to keep you in my heart and mind until the day I take my last breath , I want death to do us apart and for real this time around.

He leaned over and kissed her cheek as the kids cheered briefly.

Kwanda : You said it's not a wedding but it does feel like marriage all over again , like I'm knotting myself to you for eternity. I love you so much Sam I want to spend the rest of my life with you. Thank you for loving me with my faults and flaws. Let's make the best out of the remaining years of our lives. Let's make memories and moments that our family will remember us with. I'll carry you in my heart and mind. I'll open that door and lock you in there again. Not even death will do us apart , I want to love you even in our after life.

She smiled and they both held hands as the pastor officiated and blessed the union.

Among the crowd a quick tear rolled down Vanessa's face , she wiped it and forced a smile.

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Later than evening Zanothando kicked off her shoes and sighed throwing herself on the couch . Her eyes got heavy as she felt a

wave of fatigue pressing down her body. A knock sounded on the door. She called for the person to come in and sat upright as the police walked in. Her heart pounded , she looked at Angela laying on the sofa peacefully sucking her thumb.

Police : Mrs Mkhonto ?

Zanothando : Yes ?

Police : Detective Zondi from Durban , I've come to make an arrest on the charges of defeating the ends of justice and abduction. Please call someone to look after the baby , I'm taking you to KZN.

.....**The End**.....

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