

A DEEPER LOVE

-1 MONTH PRIOR..

"I wanna try, I wanna thrive.

Not just survive, no faking.

And every night, when it's
feeling right.

Feel like you're living lies, and
I'm breaking.

But i cannot stay, I'm not
okay.

All on my own. You got to be
good to me.

Please give me peace, and
make me believe.

That I'm not alone. You got to be good to me, me. You got to be good.

It's three AM. I gotta know. Where were you? I've been waiting.

I let it go, but prove me wrong.

Oh something's off, am i crazy?

I cannot stay, I'm not okay.

All on my own. You got to be good to me.

Please give me peace, and make me believe. That I'm not alone.

You got to be good to me,
me. You got to be good.
Don't know what I'm chasing.
Coz i can't erase what I'm
feeling deep inside.
Oh but I, I cannot stay, I'm not
okay.
All on my own. You got to be
good to me.
Please give me peace.
And make me believe.
That I'm not alone. You got to
be good to me, me. You got
to good to me."
I sang my heart out in front
of the crowd that had

gathered to see me perform. It was another Friday night at the jazz club down town. Tonight was another one of those nights when i desperately needed money for a quick fix. It had been a while since i had coke running through my system and i was dying for a line or two. My usual dealer had been out of town for some business and no one else sold the stuff her did. Good quality drugs that lasted you the entire night. The only way

to get them would be to travel all the way to Jozi and get them from this other Nigerian dealer Percy hooked me up with. His were a little too pricy but they were also worth it.

I knew they'd love me. I'd been performing here ever since i was a girl in high school. My story is quite old and boring.

After that last song by H.E.R the crowd went berserk, clapping and whistling.

Others screamed for me to

give them one last song which would cost me a huge amount of time seeing as it was already late and i needed my fix.

"Next time you guys. I have some things i need to sort out." They all seemed disappointed. But it was nothing i wasn't used to. I had this terrible headache also. "Goodnight." They cheered me on nonetheless. Until i got off stage and walked inside the dressing room. Immediately my phone

vibrated on top of the dresser. I looked at the screen and cursed under my breath. I almost forgot about him.

Me: Baby.

I answered calmly.

Zakhele: Where the hell are you?

He was probably waiting for me by the gate. I wasn't ready for another night of smoking weed and having sex with this guy.

Me: Jazz club. I needed to make some money so i

landed a gig.

He sighed. He hated the fact that even when he gave me money i still went out looking for it.

Zakhele: Again?

Me: I needed the cash babe.

Zakhele: You always need cash. I told you to call me whenever you ran short.

Was i wrong for wanting to be an independent soul though? I was born this way.

Me: I hear you Zak but i just... I didn't want to bother you.

He insisted on being my

personal ATM. He sold drugs for a living too and he made pretty good money. He just wasn't aware that i was using too. I knew he'd flip if he were to ever find out and it would ruin our relationship. Zakhele 'Zak' and i had been seeing each other for quite some time now. Maybe two or three years, I haven't really been keeping count. I will take you back to when we first met in a bit. It's also one of those long stories. It goes back to my first official gig at

the Jazz Club.

Zakhele: When have you ever bothered me?

He hated it when i brought this up. He warned me countless times against using this line. He said it made him sound like an incompetent boyfriend. No one wants an incompetent man.

Me: I didn't know what else to say, or how else to say it.

Zakhele: Come home Mercy.

Me: I can't. I ju-

He cut me off like usual.

Zakhele: Manje! (Now!)

He yelled and then he hung up. Nothing new that anyway. The problem about Zakhele was that he was possessive and controlling. He wanted everything to either go his way or the highway. I checked the time on my phone and it was too late for me to take a taxi to town now. I'd either have to wait for tomorrow or steal a stash from Zakhele and hope he doesn't notice. Not that it would take him long to find out but... he would never

suspect it was me.

I texted him: 'Come fetch me.'
Send.

I knew he'd come here
anyway. The text was just
reassurance.

The Jazz club owner's son,
Fikani walked into the
dressing room just as i was
about to change back into
my jeans, T-shirt and a
hoodie. He perched
comfortably on the arm rest
of the chair i sat on when i
did my make up and folded
his arms across his chest.

Fikani: Your fans asked you for one more song.

He said. I hadn't seen him a while for him to just barge in here and bark at me.

Me: I have somewhere to be.

Fikani: Where is that somewhere?

I turned to face him. He was unbelievable sometimes.

Me: I have a job you know.

He chuckled bitterly.

Fikani: You call that a job?

Mercy i thought i told you to quit and come work for me.

We could make the perfect

team... the perfect power couple.

That deserved a dramatic eye roll.

Me: Don't let Zak hear you say that.

He wasn't intimidated by Zak like most of the guys around this place were. Fikani was my first love back when i was in high-school. We were the true power couple then, when my father was still alive.

Fikani: I was here before that boy.

Me: Stop calling him a boy.
No one insulted you when we were together.

Fikani: That's because I'm not a whoos! I don't beat women and hide behind mental issues.

Zak beat me up once. It was so bad that i ended up spending a month in hospital. It never happened again after that but everyone remembers him by that one thing.

Me: Fikani, i want to change.
Please leave the dressing

room.

Fikani: I've seen you naked before Merc, don't worry about me.

He was being difficult unnecessarily. I wasn't in the mood to deal with him.

Me: Get out Fikani. Before i call you father.

That got him standing up and moving along. He shut the door behind him and gave me a much needed space. I changed back to my proper clothing and then i folded my dress up carefully, placed it

inside my bag and headed out to the counter where Mr Mbhele would hand me my payment in an envelope. I signed for it and then thanked him. He asked me to return soon. I doubted i would. As much as i loved singing, Zakhele forbade me to. All these kasi boys hung around that joint. He hated seeing me talking to other men.

His car was parked just by the gate of the Jazz club and he was smoking again. He

never touched anything but weed. It helped him think a lot better and it stimulated his mind. That was his excuse, always. He opened the door and stepped out, walked around the car and once he reached me he stood an inch away.

Zakhele: Why do you insist on defying me?

Not this again. I couldn't handle these petty arguments with him. I also could never catch a break with him, honestly.

Me: Take me home.

He sighed and opened the door for me. I climbed in and he shut it after i fasten my seat belt.

I knew that the sex tonight would either be brutal or boring. It would depend on the weed he was smoking and his mood overall. He was playing Eryka Badu on the radio and the sounds were soothing.

Zakhele: How much did you make?

Me: Three grand, like always.

Zakhele: And you think i can't give you three grand if you ask me nicely? Kanti who is the man here Phindile.

Only he called me that.

Everyone else knew me by my maiden name, Mercy.

Me: Baby, I'm sorry okay? Can we go home now? I had a long night and i want to sleep it off.

He side eyed me and grunted.

Zakhele: Uyang'jwayela Phindi, kancane kancane uyangingena eskwameni.

(You patronize me Phindi,

slowly buy surely you're getting out of hand.)

I chose to keep quiet. I didn't want any trouble with him. He passed me the joint and I smoked the hell out of it. I needed the high to kick on so i could forget about my other craving.

The ride home is unexpectedly pleasant because from here he drives straight to the mall where i work and gets us to McDonald's drive thru and orders an entire meal. I knew

the plan was to avoid my cooking for the night, he said i had a terrible hand. I cooked for him once and he asked me to start watching these cooking shows whenever i came by seeing as i never had a TV of my own. He said they'd help sharpen my cooking skills so i could impress him. I watched them almost everyday and even then he wasn't satisfied. So i stuck to my old cooking ways and he would make excuses for buying takeaway every

other day. But today i didn't question him. I was starving. He got us ice cream too on top of that and then we collected our order on the next window.

Zakhele: Ulala kim namhlanje. (You're sleeping at my place today.) I haven't been sleeping there for three days now. He hated it. But i made solid excuses every time he asked.

Me: This week is not good.

Zakhele: After the stunt you pulled? You think i care if this

week is good or not? Entlek why haven't you moved into my place like we discussed?

Me: Because, i like being independent.

Zakhele: So living with me hinders you from achieving that goal?

I shrugged. How am i independent when i live under his roof and follow his rules?

Zakhele: I asked you a question.

Me: Yes it does. I want to have my own place.

Zakhele: You work at a restaurant Phindile, tell how you're gonna get your own place usebenza lapho? (Working there?)

Me: I've been saving up.

He chuckled.

Zakhele: Ini, amazuka? (What, cents?)

I kept quiet and stared out the window. He didn't really give a fuck about my opinion. I don't know why i bother sometimes. He could never support my dreams like any boyfriend would.

He drove us to his place.

It wasn't much.

It was four room RDP house he bought from some couple who were tired of living in Soweto. He got it for 500K and said he was buying it for us. He tweaked it and turned it into a fortress. He used the money he made from selling dope and he made the house magnificent. I helped with the decor. Not just everyone came into that place. He hated it when his friends came by also. He liked being

alone.

He parked in his garage, turned on the lights all over the place and then closed the gate. He carried the takeaways inside and i followed behind him reluctantly. I used to love staying over at his place. I'd make excuses about not wanting to leave and he'd let me stay because he enjoy the company. But ever since he landed me in hospital three months ago it's been a tedious task. He put the take

always on the counter and turned to face me.

Me: I'll put my bag in the bedroom.

Zakhele: Ng'bone lebhari uFikani lapha kwa Bab'Mbhele. (I saw that idiot Fikani at the Jazz Club.) He hated Fikani with all his might.

Me: He was there to bring my payment.

Zakhele: Nakhuluma. (And you talked.)

Me: No. He's not allowed to speak to me, i made that

clear to him.

Zakhele: Unamanga. (You're lying.)

Me: You weren't there

Zakhele.

Zakhele: Manje?

Me: Waz' kanjani ukuthi ng'khulume naye? (How would you know that i spoke to him?)

Zakhele: Ungazong'dina Phindile. (Don't piss me off.)

I waited for him to answer my question. He failed. So i left him there, removed my shoes and put everything in

his bedroom. I returned to find him eating and guzzling down a beer. I joined him.

Zakhele: I want you to spend the rest of the weekend here. I have plans for us.

I didn't protest

Nor did I ask what or why. I just nodded. Knowing him, he would guilt trip into staying here an entire month. He slid his arm around my waist and then he pulled me close.

Zakhele: Thank you.

Me: You're not expecting anyone here angithi?

Zakhele: I am actually. A few guys will be here in an hour to collect the dope.

I knew it! This gave me the chance to snatch one bag before he could ship it off.

Me: Okay.

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ONE

-Mercy

-3 YEAR PRIOR

|I promised to take you back to when we started dating...|

It was a Friday morning, a busy Friday morning at that. I

was sitting on the bench with Sizwe, my gay best friend and Nonhle. It happened to be our last day of school also, school being college. The semester had ended and we had one last test to write before we could call it pens down. Fikani was in my peripheral vision, trying hard to get my attention. I never quite understood how he always managed to get into the school grounds when he was too old to be a student. We'd just ended our so called

relationship a week ago and he had this idea i still wanted him back. I did want him back but he didn't need to know that, it would inflate his already humongous ego. I did my best to avoid straying my gaze towards him but i failed dismally. Fikani wasn't your average dark skinned guy with handsome features and what not. He was fucking sexy and hot, he knew it and lived by it which is why he always knew i would have a soft spot for

him. He was also the worlds biggest liar and a player. I dated him back in high-school because of his status, ko kasi we didn't really have popular kids and rich ones. We were all facing one problem or the other, that being poverty, abusive parents or both. It was a hard struggle. Fikani happened to be facing none, his father was a hustler by blood so he had everything he wanted. Girls, looks, money. I had looks and a father who loved

me with everything he had. He lived for me. After my mother passed away he lost his job and stayed at home for while.

It got bad from there onwards because we ran out of money and he had to look for a job. He never found one so he picked up odd jobs and did everything he could to provide and i made sure i stayed in my path and studied my ass off.

Got good grades and made him proud. Fikani would also

provide for me on the side. A part of him loved me and he showed it to me everytime but also he would stray and entertain these whore's who wanted every guy they could stick their claws in. When i was in grade 9 Fikani was matriculating but we didn't care. He wanted to show off and i wanted status, to be popular and liked.

Fast forward we dated for an entire year while he was in school. We made history and created drama and whatever

else there was to do in high-school. He would give me money almost everyday and i would stash it for rainy days instead of spending it wastefully. My father taught me to always save and i listened.

He passed away after my last day at school. He was shot in the head for witnessing a brutal crime in the neighborhood and shortly after the man behind his murder was arrested. He also happened to be Zakhele's

father. I didn't know Zakhele back then because he lived elsewhere. Fikani and i kept our relationship going strong and his money put me through college. We also broke my virginity and i fell pregnant in that same year. I lost the baby after a brutal encounter with the infamous Zakhele. He'd heard that the person responsible for his father's incarceration was a friend of my father's so he came for me. He almost killed me that night, but

Something stopped him from doing so. He took me to a hospital nearby because I'd started hemorrhaging profusely. He looked shaken and flustered by all the blood.

I lost Fikani's baby and Fikani was relieved that I did. He made it clear that he wasn't ready for a baby. He never came to see me for the three days I spent at Bara. Zakhele on the other hand was persistent and encouraged by my situation. He stuck by

me and helped me through both my losses. He didn't want a relationship back then because he felt betrayed by me even though he didn't know me. I broke it off with Fikani and he disappeared from the face of the earth. I wasn't surprised there. His father wouldn't put anything past his incompetent and irresponsible son. I shared the same sentiments. Nonhle and Sizwe took care of me after that. Zakhele

went MIA. I searched for him almost everywhere but no one knew him. I went back to school and stayed devoted to my studies because i had nothing to fall back to.

Within a month Fikani's father introduced the Jazz Club. Nonhle and Sizwe encouraged me to join the long list of talent and entertainment. I did and the first week i went there i watched as they performed, earning Bab'Mbhele a crowd. The following week i was up

for my first official gig. I'd been practicing and practising almost all week with the little talent i had. So that night the place was packed. I'd gained my popularity from school so we weren't surprised when half the street was there that night. Also i happened to spot Zakhele in the midst of it all. He didn't pretend not to see me, he kept his gaze on me until I'd sang three of the songs I'd chosen. Each time his gaze grew more and more

intense. He wasn't much of a looker like Fikani but there was something about his presence. His grace and the way he carried himself. He had his own special table where no one could reach him or disturb him. He didn't laugh or smile and wave but the way he stared at me was enough to draw me to his table after the performance. I sat on the chair opposite his and his gaze raked my face. Zakhele: Uphuzani? (What would you like to drink?)

Me: I don't drink.

Zakhele: Juice, coke?

Me: Water will do.

Zakhele: Water is free. Why would i get you that?

Me: Because it's what i asked for.

He ignored my confident ass and asked Bab'Mbhele for a 100% juice instead.

Zakhele: It's rude to turn down a generous offer.

Me: I didn't turn it down. I asked for water, you said it was free.

Zakhele: I wasn't kidding. It's

free.

Me: Thank you for the juice.

Zakhele: Okay.

I took a sip and watched him look at me. He never got tired of staring and i didn't mind.

Me: You left.

Zakhele: I had some things that needed my attention.

Me: You could've just left your numbers you know.

Zakhele: Yes. I know. I just didn't want to.

Me: Why?

Zakhele: I pegged you as the clingy type. I don't like clingy

women.

I laughed. Well, i was clingy but i didn't notice I'd been clinging on to him too.

Me: Excuse me then.

Zakhele: But i happened to really like you. I couldn't stay away so here i am. Having difficulty letting go of your clingy self.

Me: Oh.

He took a sip of his drink and then placed it on the coaster.

Zakhele: Umuhle sisi. I don't know your name but one thing i do know is that i want

you.

And that was it. I'd said yes after spending the entire evening with him until the Jazz Club closed. He asked me to take a walk with him and i did.

I fell in love with two days of knowing this guy. He wasn't really an emotionally present partner for at least 3 months into the relationship because he thought i wasn't serious about him. I proved him wrong and he stuck by me like glue. The same way

Mqhele stuck by Hlomu. He was probably way worse because he was always at my place, with me and by my side every single day...

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-PRESENT DAY...

He had a high tolerance for alcohol. Whenever he started drinking it would take him about 7 glasses before got tipsy. And one thing about him was that he was always high and drunk. When he was sober he never left the house, he was cranky and

grumpy and he gave the best sex. Today he was only high so the sex would be good but not great. We had McD's almost all night before sex. After some heavy, steaming and oral sex.

And late at night when he was waiting for his guys to come get the staff. He had given me his shirt after we fucked all over the place. He claimed to love my body whenever i wore his clothes and when i wore mine he was annoyed and called me fat. I

didn't care. He'd always been verbally abusive and I learnt over the ears to ignore him. He loathed me for it but it was never physical.

All this time my mind kept drifting to the dope he had in his room. I'd grown pretty desperate for a fix once he fucked me good. He never allowed me to see his stash because he respected me somehow. I knew he was a dealer, he thought i was unaware.

He didn't have a good hiding

place. Not because he wasn't smart about it but because he lived by himself so he had no reason to hide it anywhere safe. He knew nothing about my addiction so he couldn't suspect me if it ever went missing. I've done a good job so far avoiding stealing from him which is why i don't really know how his stuff tastes. Inwardly i was quaking as i tip toed to his bedroom while he went out to get something from his car. I found the stash in

his closet, snatched one pack and shoved it inside my bag. I returned to the kitchen and pretended to text Nonhle & Sizwe. He reached over the counter and kissed my lips before he ushered me to the other room. He told me to stay here and behave. I obliged because i was such a good girlfriend.

Zakhele: I'll come for you later.

Me: Wait, uyahamba? (You're leaving?)

It was close to 00:00. How

could he leave me all by myself in this house? It was big enough to house 50 people. I couldn't stay by myself here...

Zakhele: I'll be back before 7AM

Me: Ha.a Zak you can't do this to me. I refuse to stay alone.

Zakhele: Awukame maan wena! (Quit whining.)

He lay a soft kiss on my lips, his arms holding me at bay.

Zakhele: Ngyabuya manje. (I'll be write back.)

Me: Ungahambi. (Don't go.)

Zakhele: Two hours ke. I'll be back in two hours then I'll be all yours.

I wrapped my arms around his neck and stood on my tippy toes. I nodded and returned his kiss with a hungrier and more passionate one. He hated it when i kissed him with so much fire. He couldn't resist what would come next and it would delay him entirely. As much as i dreaded being here i didn't want to be all by myself.

Zakhele: Mmmh! No.

He pushed me aside and moved to the door.

Me: Two hours.

Zakhele: Lock up after we leave.

Me: How long must i wait?

Zakhele: 30 minutes.

I nodded. He gave me one last look before he walked out and shut the door behind him. I paced the bedroom immediately afterwards. I knew he'd be back by 7AM. He was just saying 2 hours because he wanted to ease

my conscience. Also, my stolen stash was in his bedroom and i was all the way over here, 3 rooms away from my bag. If it ever occurred to him that everything i considered personal was in that bag, he'd have hit the jackpot. He wouldn't mind confronting me in front of his men also. I couldn't really have him on my tail and throat all at the same time. I had to think of something, fast.



I woke up at 7AM and found myself sprawled on his King size bed with Egyptian cotton sheets and silky covers.

Ngnyadlala. (I'm just kidding.) I was on his bed though but it was covered in mismatched blankets and he had black sheets. His pillows were white and the rest of the room was in different colours. It was terrible. The downside to all of this was that he wasn't in bed like he

said he would be. But i can tell by the way he left the blankets that he had been there. I threw the blankets off me and pushed my feet into the slippers on the side of the bed.

Zakhele: Usuze wavuka. (You finally woke up.

I screamed in reaction to his unexpected presence and jumped while at it. Where the fuck did he come from? I turned to face him and he was sitting on his ottoman not too far from the bed, my

bag on his lap and on top of my bag the tiny bag I'd stolen from his stash. My eye's involuntarily grew a size larger and I almost gasped. I cleared my throat

Me: What is my bag doing on your lap? And what exactly is that on top of it?

Zakhele: You tell me.

I narrowed my eye's at him and pretended to be confused and dumbstruck.

Me: Tell you what? Yin leyo? (What's that?) He shrugged.

Zakhele: I found it in your bag

babe. Care to explain what this was doing in there?

I sighed uncomfortably and took a few steps towards the ottoman on the other side of his bed.

Me: Whay do you mean you found that, in MY bag? What would IT be doing there seeing as i don't really recall putting something like THAT in my bag?

He chuckled, moving his shoulders along with it.

Zakhele: Baby you better not be doing drugs under my

roof. Because i swear...

Me: Woooooah! DRUGS?

I feigned shock and outrage.

Zakhele: What else am i supposed to think na baby?

Me: Mina Zakhele? Drugs?

He narrowed his eye's at and pretended to be looking through me.

Zakhele: Then explain this?

Me: Njani because I've never seen that stash in my life.

Zakhele: Ever?

I folded my arms across my chest for effect. I couldn't let him defeat me. God knows

what he would do to me if he were to ever learn the full truth. I wasn't ready to put through that and to land myself in hospital again.

Me: It's me, Zak. Me...

Zakhele: I'm not convinced Phindile.

Me: Are you serious right now?

I had to work harder to sell this. I've come too far to let it all end like this.

Zakhele: If so then, I'm calling my doctor. We're doing a test.

I took a deep breath.

Me: I'll be in the kitchen when he gets here. Making breakfast!

I stomped my feet on the wooden flooring in his bedroom and stormed off. I slammed the door behind me for effect. I knew just how much he didn't like pissing me off and i was counting seconds until he ran after me, apologizing. If not then I'd just have to bang the pots and plates until he came to his senses.

That's it!!!

...

TWO

-Mercy

I felt his heavy, unrelenting presence the moment he stepped into the kitchen and he set his phone, screen down on the counter. I chose to ignore him, like an innocent girlfriend would. I decided I'd make him a greasy breakfast because he always appreciated those

before starting his day so i readied all the correct ingredients and pans to fry. He passed me the oil from the cupboard and i ignored him even then, grabbing the oil from his hands and placing it a few inches away from the stove. I still struggled wrapping my head around the fact that he had an open plan kitchen in a RDP house, a former RDP house. I could maneuver the place without the fear of knocking something over or bumping

into counter corners. The beauty of having money... I made eggs, bacon, mushroom heads, the works. While he made freshly squeezed juice with oranges and mangoes. He loved 100% juice with everything that resided in him. I prepared the table and lay the breakfast neatly on it. I had to admit, i had outdone myself of this meal right here. Everything looked scrumptious and mouth watering, i could hardly wait. I sat a couple of

chairs away from him and he chuckled, following me.

I was tempted to move but something about the way he dropped onto the chair warned me against doing so. So i sat there and said a mini prayer to my lord and savior. I needed his light to shine upon me or else I'd be dead. I felt the weight of his hand creep up on my thigh and he rested it on the apex of my knee, squeezing gently and then it slid up to the apex of my waist. He halted, brushing

his thumb lightly across the skin covering my pelvis.

Zakhele: Baby?

I'd gone rigid and cold from the sensation of his touch. I was scared that if I reacted exactly the way I'd felt about his potent touch then he'd throw a tantrum and probably hurt me again. So I had to tread carefully.

Me: Zakhele.

Zakhele: Uthulile. (You're quite.)

Me: I have nothing to say to you.

I bit my tongue immediately afterwards and waited in anticipation for the impact. A slap, a sneer maybe... it never came.

Zakhele: Am i wrong to suspect you? Because it all came from a good place, honestly.

Me: Suspecting your girlfriend comes from a good place?

Zakhele: You're being irrational.

I chuckled.

Me: Irrational? I'm being

irrational about you trying to convince yourself that i do drugs?

Zakhele: Trying to convince myself? Baby there is irrefutable proof right there, concrete evidence.

Me: Irrefutable proof would be me sniffing that shit and you catching me red handed!

Zakhele: Hlisa izwi lakho uma' ukhuluma nam Phindile.

(Lower your voice when you're speaking to me Phindile.)

Sometimes it felt like was

dealing with a 7 year old curious kid who had questions about everything little detail he'd discovered.

Me: What time is this doctor getting here? I have things to do today.

Zakhele: Angizwa? (Excuse me?)

It was a very asinine thing to do right now, announcing plans I never made just to piss him off. If he ever learnt the truth to this, I'll be dead before the day ended or maybe now even. Depending

on how pissed was at that particular moment.

Me: I'm sitting here with a man who is convinced i do drugs... clearly he is not interested in spending his weekend with a drug addict, right?

Zakhele: I never called you that.

Me: No. You were thinking it.

Zakhele: Usufuna imiqondo wena? (You read minds now?)

Me: I don't have to read your mind to learn what you've established doing your

search in my bag.

Zakhele: I found drugs! In my fucking house! In my girlfriends bag of all places. I chuckled softly, clearly intimidated and shaken by his response.

Me: And you automatically assumed they belonged to me?

Zakhele: Don't come here and act self righteous. You're not exactly exemplary in society you know? I asked you a question, wahluleka ukungiphendula. (You failed

to answer me.)

Me: My failure to do so should've alerted you Zakhele. Angizenzi iy'dakamizwa. (I don't do drugs.)

Zakhele: I don't trust you sweetheart. I have no reason to.

Me: Good. I'll go get my things.

He snapped his head at the direction of his bedroom and then he turned back to face me.

Zakhele: Uthi uyaphi? (Where

are going?)

I didn't answer him. Not that i didn't have an official answer, i didn't. But he was in no place to know that. I was at liberty to refrain from telling the truth or else face dire consequences. Also, i liked making him sweat. I dropped my eye's back onto my plate and ate my breakfast.

It came at the sudden, my plate flew right across the room with one accurate swipe of his large hand. He

smacked it away from my hands and startled me. I gasped at the impact and seconds later another one landed on my right cheek. The plate shattered first, breaking into a million infinite pieces. And then came the sensation on my face, like a million needles and hot water came crashing onto my skin all at once. I could feel my eye lose a sufficient amount of moisture along with the inside of my cheek. I turned,

mouth agape to look at him and he threw another one on my left cheek with the back of his hand. I felt his knuckles crashing into my teeth, the impact causing me to bite myself so hard I bled immediately. He slapped me again on the right one and it came with such force that I fell with the chair I was occupying. I hit my head as I landed on the floor with a resounding thud and I audibly cracked a few bones along with my skull.

It wasn't a brutal fall but it might also have been fatal because i went temporarily blind. My vision was so blurry that i couldn't see anything in the periphery. I heard the steel of he's chair scratching against the tiled floor and his slippers sliding on the floor as well.

Zakhele: Sukuma! (Stand up.) I could hardly move a muscle. My back had landed and broke my fall, in turn shattering a few bones itself. I could feel hot mucus in my

nose turning watery with all the tears forming and prickling my eyes.

Me: Angsaboni. (I can't see.)

It came out as a whisper. It was unintended. And at the very moment i asked myself this question, was it worth it?

Why was always at the receiving end of his wrath?

Did he not have other punching bags out there?

Was i the only eligible candidate for this?

Zakhele: Uthini? (What?)

Me: ANGISABONI ZAKHELE! I

think i lost my eyesight.
All this time i was lying of my
back on top of the chair I'd
fallen on to. My cheeks
burning and my head
screaming in agonizing pain.
Me: Angsaboni. (I can't see.)
I wasn't aware he was still
standing over me. He yanked
me off the chair and carried
me somewhere, i don't
exactly know where. All i
know is that the moment my
back hit the soft comfortable
mattress, i passed out.

=====

Zakhele: Is she going to be okay?

Man: She'll be fine. She's temporarily incapacitated, it'll last for about a week or so. She'll experience some nausea, headaches and risk possible blindness. But it'll all be temporary. Also, I would advise you to stop hitting her.

Zakhele: Are you telling me how to discipline my girlfriend?

Man: No. I'm just forewarning you. This woman is delicate

right now because she has a foetus growing inside her.

Zakhele: A what?

Man: Your girlfriend is pregnant Mr Mdluli.

My mind couldn't process the information quite well which would explain why i passed out again shortly after the revelation.

>>>>

This time around when i came to it was evening. It was dark in this room, i could make that much out. My vision still wasn't a hundred

percent so it was difficult to make out shapes, shadows and all that. A sharp pain shot up my spine at my attempt to sit up and i screamed, falling back onto the soft pillow supporting my back. My arms hurt. My back was a million times worse. I was in worse shape than when i lost my baby.

Oh crap!

I have another baby on the way!

Fuck my life.

I started sobbing. From out

of nowhere i just started sobbing uncontrollably, hiccuping and sniffing. They came down in a flood, streaming down the sides of my eyes, into my ears and onto the pillow i had been resting my head on. It wasn't doing anything to soothe the pain in my back. If anything it made everything that much more agonizing. I was pregnant with that monster's baby. I hope i lost this one too, just to teach his abusive a fucking lesson.

The door cracked open,
creaking on the hinges. I tried
to stifle any noise i might've
been making.

Zakhele: Baby.

No!

He had no damn right to call
me that right now. He put me
in this position, it was all his
fault i was here.

Zakhele: Mercy?

Silence.

He definatley deserved more.
My back felt like it would fall
off. My arms were twisted if
not completely broken

because it felt like they too would fall off.

That very moment he took careful strides toward the bed, his weight perching on the edge of the bed. I braced myself for anything, his hand on my leg shook me.

Zakhele: Are you awake?

No!

Zakhele: I'm sorry. I am so so so SORRY baby. I didn't mean for things to get out of hand so quickly.

Sorry? He was sorry?

Hehehe! Funniest joke I'd

ever heard was what his
apology sounded like.

Pathetic like he was.

Me: Get out.

I heard my courageous ass
say. I don't know where it all
came from but i was
suddenly tp courageous that
i let it all out

Zakhele: Phindile...

Me: PHUMA! (GET OUT!)

I couldn't restrain my voice, i
let out my cry and that
strained my lungs and my
back.

Me: How could you do this to

me Zakhele! You promised me to never EVER lay a hand on me again.

Zakhele: I know.

Me: NO! No, you don't know. Because if you did-

Zakhele: I'm sorry Phindile. I don't know how else to say this to you baby. Ngiyaxolisa. (I'm sorry.)

Me: Uyakwa ukuthi ngyak'thanda wena Zakhele. (You take advantage of the fact that i love you.) You think i won't leave you.

Zakhele: Ini? (What?)

I let him wreck his own brain.
He deserved to suffer like i
have.

Zakhele: Ng'khuluma nawe
Phindile.

All i did was start sobbing all
over again. He went silent as
well. I welcomed the reprieve,
at least this way he could
leave me to writhe in my self-
pity. He got the message,
stood up and he left me all
alone.

It would do us both some
good if he evaded my
proximity. That way we'd

both get equal chance to deal with all the pent up emotions. If i needed him, all i had to do was yell and he'd be at my beck and call.

I was delirious from the withdrawal of cocaine. My body hurt a thousand times more than it would a non-addict. I could use a line a two right now, maybe that would help with pain a little.

My phone was no where in sight. Even if it was, i doubted i'd be able to reach it. But i had to try.

=====

I felt a warm sensation on the side of my body. No, let me rephrase. I felt a warm weight next to me, snoring, arm draped around me. This guys must've tripped, fell and hit his head somewhere because he was acting like all was well. Why was he here? I could hardly move so any attempt to get away from him was futile. A dead end. Zakhele: You're awake. His voice raspy, he whispered. I didn't give him

the satisfaction. I kept my mouth shut.

Zakhele: Phindile.

What time was it anyway? I needed the loo also. Shit! And i couldn't really take myself to the en-suite bathroom.

My back still felt like shit.

Would i have to pee in a catheter from now on?

No!

Me: I need the loo.

He sprang up and jumped off the bed, practically running towards the side of the which i occupied. He carefully

lifted the blankets off me and scooped me up from my place. He was very careful too.

He took me to the loo and back.

Me: I need to go to hospital Zakhele. I'm hurting all over. He froze. I wonder why.

Zakhele: I could bring a doctor to watch and monitor you every day.

Me: No! I need to see a profession doctor. I can't take it anymore.

Zakhele: Phindile, you can't

leave me. I won't let you.

Nazoke!

He has officially lost it.

Me: Zakhele! I'm in pain.

Zakhele: Then allow me to call you a doctor. We can bring the hospital to you.

That way you don't have to go anywhere...

Me: Oh my God.

Zakhele: I'll be right back.

What have i gotten myself into? Was he turning into a deranged psycho like those husbands who abused their wives and when they

threatened to leave this
happened? I was stuck in a
horror movie.

....

THREE

-Mercy

I knew Zakhele had money. I
knew his dope generated
enough revenue for him. I
didn't think it would be
enough to hire a live-in nurse
and a doctor who visited me
frequently and I had lost
almost all sense of mobility.

The nurse bathed me, fed me and clothed me. Zakhele on the other hand came in here to check on me, to let me know i wasn't leaving this house anytime soon and to have sex. Lots and lots of sex because in his mind he was convinced i was always horny. Which was funny because never once did i moan from pleasure but from the sheer pain and the hopelessness of it all. I never came because he was drunk when he on top of me.

It was rape basically. But he didn't force himself on to me. He just took "what was his" and disappeared for the rest of the day.

Not even the poor nurse could help me because she was on his payroll and she had signed a contract. Never ever take this to the police, you sign you die along with your family. She wasn't allowed to speak to me and if i were to disobey direct order he would come in here himself and sort me out. His

words not mine. He made a promise to discipline me if i ever strayed. How does a bedridden, innocent girlfriend stray? Sometimes i felt like he just said these things for the fun of it. He loved dictating me to whatever came to his mind he said that first. His voice was a law, gravely rasp. He had a strange hold over me. He also always spoke in a tight tone. He always seemed to know how to read the thoughts behind my gaze. I

do not hold him in very high esteem.

Three days later.

I was sitting now, on the bed watching TV. Yes, he'd moved me from the guestroom to his bedroom where he had a TV mounted on the wall. He did this all for me.

The nurse would come in two times a week now. She used to live with us but with the progress i made she was released. We never once communicated, i understood

why she could never let me confide in her. I didn't want to compromise her position here so i kept to myself.

He would come in, tell me all about his day and just how much he missed me. He would bombard me with his whiskey breath, "fuck" me and then leave. I don't know where exactly he went all day but the house remained quite for hours.

On the fifth day I'd regain all mobile functions so i could take myself to and from the

loo without leaning or holding onto something. It was a crazy fight.

He came in this other time, sober and cranky as hell. He didn't ask me anything, he didn't make small talk he just went down on me and ate me up like i hadn't been in ages. I could suppress my moans, it was good. Really good. I found myself pushing his head deeper into the depths of my mound until i came all over his face. He licked me up clean and good and then he

fucked me all day. It was the best sex I'd ever had. Probably better than any high I've ever experienced. Speaking of highs! The nurse helped me so much with my addiction that i seldom craved drugs. It was a once in a blue moon thing. Funny how a few days ago i could've done anything to get my hands on a straw and a line. But now i was self-conscious. I had a tiny human being growing inside me and i had to get my priorities straight. I

did everything with my power to get rid of my cravings. It worked well for me. Seeing as he would bring me some morphine to help with sleeping. The withdrawal wasn't easy, it hurt like crazy. I thought I'd lose my mind. I discerned this much, he hasn't known about my addiction until now. I'd done a good job so far. I was planning on carrying on like this until i had a chance to escape.

He walked in, sober again and

grumpy as hell. He undressed and slid into his side of the bed, turned his back towards me and then stayed silent. I was smiling from within. He was sober because i guilt tripped his ass into doing so. His alcohol levels were reaching an all new high i couldn't handle. It was concerning and unnerving, the way he consumed alcohol like water.

Zakhele: Phindile

Me: Yes?

Zakhele: I can't go on like this.

Me: Like what?

Zakhele: I need a drink.

I chuckled. When sober he became more human, his emotions were in check and he was a decent human being. He made love to me once and i could never go back. That's the man i wanted. If he was going to keep me here, torture me or whatever the least he could do was change. Stay sober more frequently and give me a reason want to stay through all the abuse.

I admit i was a fool for loving him through his dark and manacing extarioir. But I'd come too far to let this all go now. I wanted to leave him at some point. I was ready to stand up and go but then i watched him brave it out. With no alcohol in his system he could barely function. He was normal, human again but he wasn't Zak anymore. He was Thulani Zakhele Mdluli, the man i fell in love with. He turned to face me. Zakhele: You're killing me.

Me: Have you seen my face?
He buried his face in the
space between the side of
my thigh and my hand.

Zakhele: Just one glass...
please.

Me: No.

Zakhele: Phindile!

He refused to look at me. I
still resented him. He treated
me like an object and he
wasn't remorseful about it
until he was sober. I had him
exactly where i wanted his
ass. I should break him while
at it.

Me: You made me suffer Zakhele. Now i will do the same to you.

He lifted his head to look at me.

Zakhele: Why?

Me: I should've been at work all week. But no, I'm here.

Enduring your inhumane treatment. Your rough, unpleasantness sex. Your snug remarks about my body. When you're sober you become sensitive toward me, you become human.

Zakhele: Are you serious?

Me: As a heart attack.

Zakhele: This is punishment?

Me: Yes.

He rested his head on my thigh and went still. This was so unlike him. He was seething from it all, the harsh treatment. My pain and displeasure. I endure a lot. Even so i knew that at some point I'd have to swallow my anger and look for ways to run from this place. I had to devise a plan to properly escape while he was out. My resolve was strong and my

resilience annoyed him. But he'd have to endure it all too. It was the only way.

He was snoring now. He'd fallen asleep on my lap? How the mighty have fallen. I hope he knew i wouldn't be bedridden for the rest of my life. I'd have to call my friends soon and let them know i was okay.

Zakhele: You should sleep. He said gruffly. I stared at him speculatively, despite ample evidence to the contrary. His face was

enshrouded in sleep as he
move his head from my lap to
the pillow in his place. I
snorted derisively. This was
completely effeminate
(uncool.)

Me: I'm not tired.

Zakhele: At least until i fall
asleep then. I can't sleep with
the TV blaring like this.

Me: I could switch it off.

Zakhele: That won't help
either. Ng'funa wena. (I want
you.)

My shoulders slumped
dejectively. He wore much

the same look of calm and disbotheredness. Upholile lomuntu. (He was chilled.)

Me: Ufuna mina ngenze njan?
Cuddle you?

Zakhele: That would be nice. He chimed in quickly. What a traitor. I felt compelled to point out the fact that he was so undeserving of my potent touch.

Zakhele: Resistance is futile at this point Phindile.

A beguiling smile had appeared on his grotesque face. He'd also shown a

certain affinity to my softer side. Women had a awesome power that they had to wield with responsibility and sometimes it went beyond our capability. I could make this sucker my bitch without him even noticing. I felt a myriad of emotions. He knew this and he was using it to his better knowledge, later he'd do so to his advantage. I slid back deeper into the covers and faced him. He was a charitable human being when he wasn't being too

extra.

He closed the tiny gap between us, taking my leg and draping it over his thigh. His hand cradled my head, his lips moving insistently against mine. A pretty colossal mistake on my part, letting him have his way with me. But i could only resist so much.

I guess it was a woman's prerogative to be temperamental. Being undecided and wanting everything all at once. He

bucked his hips towards my pelvis, brushing his hard, naked cock against my mound. I was dressed in my silky nightdress and lacy underwear, the kind he liked so much he bought me a drawer full. I could feel his warm skin against my nub, brushing gently against it. The air left my lungs in a soft gust as i tried to refrain from moaning. He wanted sex, i did too. But he had to be under the impression that i didn't. But his incessant need to

have me close wasn't helping any of us. I want to stay locked in his embrace but also i hated his guts. His urgent kisses and his potent touch were yielding to my needs more than I'd like to admit. I felt his hand slide all the way from my back down to my panties, shifting them to the side. He brought his hand up to his mouth, licked his fingers wet and then inserted them back down the covers. He rubbed my clit with those wet fingers and

elicited a sharp, derisive
moan.

Fuck!

He had me!

He had me right where he
wanted me. I moved and
bucked my hips to the
sensation of his urgent rubs.

He was aggressive and so
gentle. It drove me insane. I
felt compelled to let him
know what a good job he was
doing. He just needed to go
faster and harder because i
was close. I needed to....

Argh!

It's like he read my mind. He went faster, causing me to vibrate with a painful throb. He rubbed it harder until all I could do was gasp and hope that the deep, thick moan forming in my throat would come out and leave already. It did.

Uproaringly so.

It was loud.

Really really loud.

Probably too loud.

So so so loud that it shook the both both of us. I hadn't had this much pleasure since

three days ago. I winced as i drew in a long, much needed breath. I'd lost my ability to breathe normally. His eye's drooped into slits as he watched me recover from that earth shattering orgasm.

He didn't let me rest, he pushed the panties farther out of the way and he shoved his entire length deep inside me, up to my gut. I screamed.

Me: Zakhele!

That hurt!

I had the right mind to dispel

his cock. But it felt so good!
So fucking good that i
clenched my walls around
him. He groaned softly
agaissant the nape of my neck.
Zakhele: Fuuuuuuuck!
His thrusts were soft, gently
and yeilding toward my
needs. He was a gentle lover
when he willed himself to. He
tightened his grip and his
hold around me altogether.
His one hand was on my ass,
squeezing and grabbing.
The other was under me,
holding me in place. The hand

on my ass pushed me deeper onto his cock and i felt it deep, really deep inside me. He went in circles and thrust deeper and harder. I couldn't explain the level of pleasure i was riding on. I had my arms wrapped tight around his neck, holding him so close i could feel his heartbeat on my chest. He sped it up, thrusting deeper and harder and faster with more aggression. His resolve growing stronger and more solid as he went along.

Me: You're gonna get me pregnant again.

I said in a highly strained voice. I was high strung on this man's cock i would say anything to please him at this point.

Zakhele: That's the whole point.

Me: Shit! I think I'm gonna come.

Zakhele: Wait for me.

Me: Hurry!

And hurry he did. He fucked me faster until we both came.

Shit!

Zakhele: Hmmm.

If my baby survived that then he or she is a fucking soldier. He wouldn't retract his cock. He stayed buried inside me as we both fell asleep. His arms locked around me and my face buried in his chest.

If this isn't love.

Then it's domestic violence. Period.



The clock had struck 12 noon and i was in this tub, him behind me. Sober for the

fourth consecutive day. I
couldn't been more proud.
My head was resting on his
hard, chiseled chest. His arms
around me and the
strawberry bubble foam
surrounding us.

Zakhele: I haven't been work
in a week. I can't cope
without a glass a alc-

Me: I would appreciate it if
you kept that word out of
your mouth.

Zakhele: Phindile.

Me: Baby?

Zakhele: Just one glass.

Me: Iqala kanjalo. One glass followed by many others afterwards.

He kissed my neck unconsciously and then lent back. I could feel his cock on my back, soft and warm. He wasn't thinking about sex which was a good sign.

Zakhele: You're cruel

Me: You have me locked up in here.

Zakhele: Because you threatened to leave me. Do you understand what that'll do to me?

Me: I will never leave you
Zakhele! I love you...
honestly.

Zakhele: After i bear you up?

Me: It wouldn't be the first
time.

Zakhele: Even so, you could
still leave me. I can't handle
that.

Me: So you resort to keeping
me away from my life? My
friends?

Zakhele: That's not true.

Did he even understand the
serverity of this whole thing?
I'd been missing for at least a

week. My friends have probably reported me missing and are searching high and low for me.

Zakhele: I went to your work place. They know you're safe. Your friends are aware of your whereabouts.

I hastily removed my head from his chest and turned to look at him, mad as hell and boiling. I was livid!

Me: Excuse me?

Zakhele: Well... i had to assure them of your safety at some point.

Me: And you neglected to tell me this, why?

Zakhele: Because of this reaction. I knew you'd be mad.

Me: You should've at least warned me Zak!

He sighed.

Zakhele: I'm sorry.

Me: You're always sorry!

Zakhele: Keep your voice down.

Me: Mxm.

I turned back and lay my head on his chest. I had nothing else to say to him, i

just couldn't wait to get out of here and never return.

Zakhele: Mercy..

Me: What happened to Phindile?

Zakhele: Baby.

He said softly. He never used that tone with me unless he wanted something.

Me: What?

Zakhele: Askies. (I'm sorry.)

Ncese baby. I was only looking out for you.

Me: You wouldn't have to if you let me go. I want my life back Zakhele. I want to enjoy

it before i have to take care of little Zak.

I rubbed my tummy as i said this. He put his hand over mine and held on to it.

Zakhele: You're gonna be a mommy.

Me: And i don't want to be couped up in this place waiting... hoping for another chance at my life. I feel like a prisoner.

Zakhele: I wish i could explain to you how i can't stand the thought of another man talking to you, looking at you

or even touching you.

Me: But you can't lock me up because of that. I'd stay here with him if it meant not having a life. These men will always make advances towards me. Ngimuhle, you said it yourself. But i want only one man.

Zakhele: Who, uban loyo?
(Who's that?)

Me: You. I want you. I have proven this so many times and yet here we are.

Zakhele: Then move in with me.

I sighed. I can't leave my father's house all by itself. I don't want to sell it even. It's home. The only place that reminds me of my childhood. It held memories close and dear to my heart.

Me: You don't understand do you?

Zakhele: I do. I underst-

Me: If so then stop trying to get me to sell my place. It's mine.

Zakhele: Then rent it out.

Silence.

I haven't really thought of

that before. It could bring in some heavy revenue, seeing as it's in really good condition. Thanks to him. He renovated the shit out my dad's place, it looks good but his is a total upgrade from every house in hood. Mine is a normal, big house with a fresh coat of paint. New furniture and new doors.

Me: I'll think about it.

Was i ready to consider moving in with this monster after he showed me what he was capable of?

Hell No!

But i had to make think I'd do it.

I had to get out of this place.

Now!

....

FOUR

-Zakhele

One week had gone by in a blur and all i could so was sit at home and watch. It wasn't the most ideal way to spend my days but it was all for a good course. She was healing very well. I'd never seen

anything as rapid as her recovery. Even though she wasn't her usual, jovial self. She was still Mercy. She grew more beautiful by the day. It encouraged my mission. I couldn't let her leave me. When she talked back she pissed me off. All she had to do was live by my rules. She'd really done it this time. Her big mouth had sent me off into a frenzy again. I didn't want to have to hurt her but it's like she kept on asking for it. No man in their right minds

wanted to hurt a woman like Phindile. Myself included. It just really set me off how easily got under my skin. I always thought she knew better than to challenge me. It would seem i was way off course than i would liked to admit. She knew every way there was to upset me. She knew the right buttons to press, to set me off.

I watched as she fell asleep the moment i helped her out of the tub. I had to dry and and dress her before tucking

her in. When she was safely tucked in, snoring like a little cat i myself got dressed and walked out to the kitchen.

There was someone at the gate and from the looks of it that person wasn't happy about being kept out there in the sun for long. I used the remote in my hand and opened the gate.

She drove into the garage, parked and killed the engine. I knew she would find me one way or the other. It took her long enough. She knocked

the moment she sat foot outside my door. I had the right mind to ignore her and carry on doing what I'd came here to do but knowing my brother's wife, she'd break down this door just to get in. Also she could see me through the thick glass, i picked that up through her raging expression. She could kill somebody.

I moved around the counter and unlocked the door.

I greeted her with open arms
Me: Gracie, baby.

She still had the attitude of a stallion. She believed that no one could break her so she went wild. I always questioned Bandile's methods of discipline. This is why he could never tame this she beast. He'd let her run wild way too long. She was out of control. She pissed me off.

I stood blocking the entrance. She wasn't welcome in my home. I wanted to make that much clear. But she was blind. Never saw the signs.

She stood there with her hands on either side of her hips, annoyed by my stance.

Grace: Are you kidding me?

Me: Hello to you too, honey.

How on earth did you find me?

I mocked her. She rolled her big eye's at me.

Grace: You have some nerve!

She pushed me aside and tore down the kitchen and stilled midway between the counter and chairs.

She needed to cut to the chase, i hated dragging shit.

So, i threw caution to the wind.

Me: Ufunani la Grace? (What are you doing here Grace?)

Where is your husband?

She flickered her heavily made up eye's at me, a wild fire dancing in the corners of her face. Grace was hot.

Probably hotter than most women I've been with, even Mercy. But she was too full of herself. She thought the world needed her, that I needed her.

She saw her husband in me

because we looked alike. I always had to end up reminding her who she married exactly.

Grace: I should be asking you that. You're his brother.

She spat venomously.

It worked for her smokey eye. It did wonders for her face honestly. She looked like a meal.

Mercy never wore make up. I always asked why and she would never answer me. But she didn't need it. She was pretty without it.

Me: True. But i wasn't kidding when i said he never comes here. He made it clear where we stood as brothers.

I sighed.

Grace: Don't you dare lie to me! Bandile is a spineless schmuck. Just like you!

She pointed a finger at me, poking me in the chest. I

dropped my eye's to that long, slim finger of hers. I

could break it, make sure she never got to use it again. But i wasn't in the mood for that...

instead i moved backwards

and lifted my gaze to her face.

Me: Oh. I didn't realise...

I made my way to the door, taking my sweet time as I thought of another way to get rid of her... a more effective and less aggressive way.

I kept the door open, signalling to her that her visit was over, she needed to go. She was disturbing Phindile's peace.

She narrowed her eyes at me in menace and folded her

arms across her chest like a woman scorned.

My gaze on her never wavering.

Grace: You tell that useless son of a bitch that I'm looking for him. That I will find him and I will kill him.

She commanded.

I chuckled, folding my arms across my chest and watched her coolly. She was testing me.

Me: I'll be sure to pass on the message.

She examined me and then

clicked her tongue. I wonder where all that anger came from.

Grace: I'll be back.

Me: Don't bother. I won't let you in next time.

Grace: We'll see about that. She sneered.

No respect for me whatsoever. And she had the nerve to threaten me in my house.

Me: You have some serious anger issues, Grace. What's the problem, your man ain't hittin' it right?

She was none too happy about that statement.

Grace: Why don't you keep your nose you bloody business.

Me: I was. Until you tore down my house demanding to see your man. I don't have him sweetheart.

I emphasized the last word. For effect.

It didn't have the desired effect on her. She was a hard nut to crack. Defiantly harder than most.

Grace: I know you're lying

Zakhele.

I lifted my brows inquisitively. Now she knew? Wow.

I dropped my voice into a subtly cool tone, without posing any threat.

Well maybe not...

She needed to hear it.

Me: I'll give 10 minutes to search for him. Ten. If you don't find him i will hurt you... bad.

She chuckled loudly. Like she was daring me to repeat my last statement.

Grace: Hurt me?

Me: Just try me. You'll see.

Grace: Hehehe!

She clapped once, raking my face with her gaze.

Grace: Hurt me? Zakhele i will break you! I will destroy you and that thick head of yours and you will regret the day you were born.

Hmmm. I would like to live to see that day.

Me: Go ahead.

She continued to stare me down. Like my threats meant nothing to her. I closed the

gap between us, my resolve growing stronger and unwavering. I grabbed her chin into my forefinger and thumb and i tightened my grip.

Me: Do me a favour Grace, don't look back. You've me pissed off and it's enough now. I don't want to hurt you. She snorted. Totally disbothered by my attempt to intimidate her.

Grace: You were never man enough to handle me.

All this as she stared me dead

in the eye. Fearless and driven.

Me: I don't handle trash Grace. Bandile does. Now get out of here while you still can. I won't be held responsible for the thing i might do to you.

I gritted my teeth at the thought. She would probably enjoy half the things i had in mind. That's how nasty she was.

I let her go aggressively and i watched her rubbing part of her chin I'd been holding on

to. She walked out after another stare down, slamming the door behind her and balancing herself on those long ass high-heels. She carried so much power in her walk that i sometimes was intimidated by her presence. She just never understood the basic fundamental of a relationship. She cannot wear the pants in a relationship. Bandile was too chicken to make her realise that. Had she been my type,

I'd have straightened that nasty attitude out.

I look at the time on the wall and then on my wrist watch.

They weren't the same.

But that didn't matter.

I ordered in.

I couldn't leave the house and risk Phindile finding an

escape route. She'd done it several times before and i

feared that this time would

be the last. She would never

look back. I wanted to hire

some extra hands, a maid or

something. The house was

always spotless thanks to Phindi but i wanted someone to keep an eye on her for me. Someone i can trust to keep her locked away and if she tried to escape they would report to me.

I called in a few favours from a friend of mine, Percy. He wasn't really fond of me like the rest of these kasi boys. I didn't care. I didn't come here for their likes. I came here to conduct business and to move some great dope. I happened to stumble upon

this beautiful gem of mine
and I couldn't let it go.

I wanted to keep her away
from all these prying eye's
and these thirsty men. She
was mine. They had to
understand that I would do
absolutely anything to keep
it that way. She needed to
understand that she
belonged to me.

I'd invested too much into
this relationship to just it go
down the drain like that.

I also had to be the
disciplinarian in this union.

She had to understand that to disobey me is to disrespect and disregard me as a man. I told her that no woman wants an incompetent man. She agreed with me on that much. If I had to use violence to get my way then so be it. My father taught me that no woman should ever disrespect me as a man. I needed to prove to her that I controlled everything around me. She needed to come to terms with the rules about

dating me.

She was awake.

The food I'd ordered had arrived a few minutes ago and not so long after she i walked into the kitchen, limping. It was getting better with time, she healed very fast i had to give her that.

Mercy: What smells so good? She asked with a smile on her face. One of the few I'd been seeing for the third time this week.

Me: Lunch. Sit down and let me feed you baby.

She nodded and washed her hands first.

Mercy: Need any help?

Me: No. Everything is fine. You just find a seat and I'll serve.

Mercy: Oh. Okay.

She found a comfortable chair on the side of the table. I watched her as i dished out the takeaway food onto plates. She avoided meeting my gaze, but i pretended not to notice.

Me: How are you feeling?

Mercy: A little sore on the

legs. But nothing a pain killer can't fix.

That's my girl! She was getting it now. She would never leave this place until i felt it was necessary for her to do so. There was just too much danger out there for a woman like her. These men didn't understand what it meant to touch another man's property.

Me: I went to get your clothes from your place yesterday. Sizwe i asking about you a lot.

He was slowly asking for it. I didn't want to hurt her friends. But they were starting to piss me off.

Mercy: Oh?

Me: You should call him. He seemed really worried.

She nodded.

If that would get them off my back then I'd have no choice but to let her.

Mercy: Will.

Me: Good. Lunch is ready.

I brought her plate to her, I placed mine next to hers and we had wine for a beverage.

She said grace so beautifully that i couldn't close my eye's so i stared at her. She finished and then dug in first. I wondered how she felt about marriage.

I think it's time.

Me: Baby.

Mercy: Mmmh?

She had food in her mouth.

That didn't matter. I wanted to ask her to marry me. It was long overdue.

Me: Marry me.

Mercy: Huh?

She looked confused.

Me: Ng'shade baby. (Marry me.)

She didn't look too pleased about it. If anything she looked flustered and flushed. Was it too sudden?

Mercy: Uhm... *clears throat*
You uh... you want me to marry you?

Me: Yes.

She chuckled softly.

Mercy: Uhm... wow. I uh. I don't know what to say.

Me: Say yes. Please.

Mercy: No. I mean uhm... isn't it all too sudden? I mean

after the whole incident with the chair an-

Me: We should put that past us Phindile. This is the future.

Mercy: So i should forget that you hit me?

I sighed. I knew it would get to this. I hadn't anticipated it but i knew it would take this direction.

Me: What do you think?

Mercy: What do i think? Do you really want an answer to the question?

Me: I asked it so yes. I want an answer...

Mercy: You hit me and then expect me to just get over it? What if I'd lost the baby, my eyesight and my mobility forever?

Me: But you didn't.

Mercy: What if i had? What then?

Me: You didn't lost your eyesight or the baby so don't dwell on it.

She looked at me, mouth agape as she tried to make sense of this. I had a hard time accepting rejection. It really didn't sit well with me

and i just sat there, boiling and agitated.

Me: So, will you?

I willed her to reject me one more time. I willed her to defy me. If she was brazen enough then she'd do it. But i knew how much of a coward she was.

Mercy: No.

Me: What?

Mercy: No. I won't marry you.

I laughed uproariously.

I was losing it.

Surely this was the only explanation. I had to have

been losing it. She couldn't say no to me. ME?

NO. She didn't have the guts.

Me: Phinda futhi. (Say it again.)

Mercy: No.

Her voice began shaking. Her restraint would wane. I know her like the back of my hand.

Me: No ini Phindile?

Mercy: I don't want to marry you.

Me: And you're so sure about this aren't you?

Mercy: Yes.

She cleared her throat.

I smiled at her. Looking at her matrimonial finger. The ring would look perfect on that slim finger of hers. She would make the perfect wife too.

Me: I'll give you the ring. And five days to think this though. Within those 5 days baby i will give you freedom. As much as you need. I will let you go out with your friends, i will let you enjoy life.

I took the wine glass and poured her some.

Me: When you say yes. You'll be signing yourself over to

me. In that way you are free to come and go as you please.

I poured myself a glass too. I'd been sober long enough. I needed this glass.

Me: If you stick by your answer, that being no. Then you are signing your freedom away. Simple as that. You do anything stupid, i will get my guys to kidnap your friends. Rape all of you until you can no longer walk and then i will have the executed and i will sell you to the highest bidder,

are we clear?

Her chin and mouth her quivering. She trembled under my gaze.

I liked that.

Me: Yezwa? (You heard that?)

She started sobbing.

I hated weaklings. I hated that she couldn't give me a fight. I grabbed her by the chin like i did Grace and tightened my grip.

Me: Ngithe uyezwa na? (I said can you hear me?) I asked through gritted teeth.

She shrieked, wincing and

squirming under my intense gaze.

Mercy: Yes.

She whispered.

Me: Huh?

Mercy: Yes! I heard you.

Me: Good. I'll go get the ring.

Don't do anything stupid. You know what's at stake right?

She nodded.

Me: Good girl.

I pulled her in for a kiss and she resisted at first. I

squeezed her cheeks until i felt her teeth through the

thick skin. I kissed her deeply,

delving my tongue deep into her mouth until she could feel me.

Me: I love you girl.

I said this up close, looking down at her.

Me: Yezwa?

Mercy: Yes.

Me: Uyang'thanda? (Do you love me?)

She sniffed.

Mercy: Yes.

Me: Yes what?

Mercy: Yes baby. I love you too.

Me: Good. Kiss me.

She lent in and kissed me. Although she was shaking i still welcomed her lips on mine.

She'd virtually agreed to being my wife. Now all i had to do was take her to home affairs to sign the papers before officiating our union. I had no one to send to her family because she was an orphan so all i had to do was marry her and sign papers. Then she'd me mind for ever. And EVER.

....

FIVE

-Mercy

I'd finally established this much. I fell in love with a psychopath unknowingly. I thought that by now i would've figured him out because he was such an open book. Little did i know that all this time he was psycho analysing me. Now he knew just how my mind functioned. He knew a little too much about me. I should've never let him in.

He was stuffing his face with the meat from Barcelo's and the wine in his left hand. I hadn't touched mine. I couldn't bring myself to take a sip because well, I'm pregnant. And wine makes me cranky.

He made good on his word and fetched the engagement ring. I was expecting a silver band with a diamond maybe. A single diamond.

But no.

This one looked like an actual wedding ring. It had two thick

bands surrounded by tiny diamonds all around them. And then three diamonds to officiate the rock itself. Two little ones on the sides and one in the middle.

Me: That's the engagement ring?

Zakhele: Yes. You like it?

Me: It's too big. It looks like a wedding ring.

He looked at the ring in confusion. To him it probably looked like a normal ring any man would propose with.

Zakhele: I bought two. Just in

case you didn't like the first one.

And he drew it out of his pocket. He flipped the box open and pushed it toward me. It looked like a proper engagement ring.

Me: How much were these?

Zakhele: You don't need to worry about that. You just choose the one you like and the other i will put away.

Me: Choose the one i like? Am i proposing to myself?

He sighed, closing the box with the big ring. He grabbed

my hand and shoved the slim banded ring into my matrimonial finger. He dropped my hand carelessly and it hit the sharp corner of the table with a loud thud. Zakhele: You could've just asked me nicely.

My hand would bruise in a couple of minutes and it would look hideous. A big, purplish greenish bruise.

That's how light skinned i was and he didn't care. I rubbed my hand as he stood up and left.

The ring was beautiful.
Probably the most beautiful
thing I'd ever laid my eye's on
in a long time. I've been
locked up in this place for
way too long. I ate my lunch
because i had no other
choice, I was both starving
and pregnant. He walked
back in and smiled at me.
Zakhele: There's more in the
microwave if you want some.
Me: Thanks.
He took my hand and
inspected it. I was already
starting to bruise. He ran his

thumb lightly across the skin and then looked at me.

Zakhele: You should avoid this. You're a smart girl.

He kissed the reddening skin and then looked at me with remorse.

Me: I'm fine.

Zakhele: No. You're hurt.

Me: I'm fine Zakhele. Really. I would do anything at this point for him to refrain from touch him. His touch was lethal now, infectious like some kind of disease.

Zakhele: I'll be back. Again.

He hesitantly pushed his chair backwards and stood up. With all these chances to run away he was giving me i chose to ignore them. I wasn't ready to put any lives in danger. He returned with an emergency medical kit. I'm not sure if he knew how to use this.

Zakhele: You know, i have a degree in medicine. I was supposed to become a doctor like my mother. But when she left us... my father took charge and forbade to

become what my mother was.

Me: Oh. That's good.

Zakhele: Let me see your hand.

Me: Okay.

I obliged. I wasn't ready to get another bruise for not cooperating. He would definatley inflict more pain this time around. And he was right, i knew better than to piss him off. I was a smart girl. I had to do the smart thing.

Me: So, you just let your

father demolish your dreams
like that?

Zakhele: I don't want to talk
about it.

I cleared my throat
uncomfortably.

Me: Oh. Sorry.

Zakhele: Don't you have
anything else you want to
ask me?

Me: Uhm.

Zakhele: Since you're wearing
the ring, you can start using
your newly found freedom.

Me: Already?

Okay.

Not that this was my chance to escape because I knew what lie head if I were to ever take that road. But it was a welcomed gesture. I could finally see my friends again.

Zakhele: There are conditions.

Shit!

Nothing ever comes easy with this guy. He always has an excuse.

Me: Oh.

Zakhele: You quit that job. You are going to be my wife soon. I don't want you

working for anyone.

Me: Quit?

Zakhele: You heard me.

Me: Uhm, okay. I uh... speak to the manager and submit my resignation.

Zakhele: Speed it up Phindile. Quit.

Me: I can't just do that. It would be very incompetent and unprofessional of me.

Zakhele: Do you not understand the words that are coming out of my mouth Phindile? Q.U.I.T

Oh my God.

I thought being sober would change his abusive ways. I thought for second there that i could tame him. He was so different from this animal a couple of days ago.

Me: I hear you.

Zakhele: Good.

He wrapped my bruising arm in a bandage and then held it together using a plaster.

Zakhele: Tomorrow we're going to home affairs.

Me: Oh. Why?

Zakhele: To get married.

Obviously.

Me: At home affairs?

Zakhele: Yes.

Me: Hmm. I see.

Zakhele: My brother will be our witness. Don't worry.

This guy was deranged. He needed some serious mental health evaluations. He needed to be psycho analysed and thoroughly looked into. He left the kitchen once again and i sat there, looking out the thick glass door. I heard a female voice a few minutes before i came here and i thought

someone had come to save me.

But no. It was just his brother's wife. His brother came over here last night and i didn't see me leave nor did i hear him anywhere in this house. He must be in one of the rooms out back. He returned, collected the plates and washed them all on his own.

Zakhele: We're going to have a maid in the house very soon. I'm still interviewing candidates.

I ignored him.

I didn't care who he hired to do what. As long as i had this one chance to leave this place. I'd have to ask for help from a friend of mine. I couldn't get married to this crazy person.

Zakhele: She'll be a live-in maid. Along with a few guards outside. I want them to keep you safe.

From what, you?

I rolled my eyes. I wonder who he was trying to impress.

I could sell this ring, take the money i made from the Jazz Club and the money i would make from selling this humongous stone and vanish from the face of the earth.

Tell Bab'Mbhele to rent out my house for me and send the rent money to wherever i went. Probably lie low for a few months, until this blows over.

Zak was delusional if he thought I'd stick around much longer.

He knew better than anyone

that he didn't deserve me. I couldn't let my child grow up in an environment as inhospitable and toxic as this. We would both die within weeks. Forget all the money I'd be missing out on. I had to consider my mental state and the state of my baby's health.

Zakhele: Phindile?

Me: Hmm?

Zakhele: Ukuphi, (Where is your head at.) I'm talking and you're silent.

Me: Ngik' mamele. (I'm

listening.)

Zakhele: How do you feel about a tight security detail?

Me: For who, you?

Zakhele: For you.

I widened my eye's in shock.

Security detail?

Me: For me? Isn't that a tad bit drastic?

He shrugged. This is Soweto, no one goes around with a security detail. Who the hell does he think he is?

Zakhele: I think it's perfect.

Me: I don't understand. You said i could have my freedom

back. A security detail isn't exactly what I'd call freedom...

Zakhele: It's a suggestion.

Me: Oh. Well i think it's too much.

Zakhele: Hmm.

Silence.

I think I'm losing my mind while couped up in here. He's projecting his mental illness onto me. I'm slowly going senile... at my age.

The door swung open and in trudged his brother, Bandile. Dressed in grey sweatpants,

a long sleeved suspender that hugged him in all the right places. He nodded his greeting and then walked past us without greeting or acknowledging his brother, paddling barefoot into the living room. I swung my gaze back to his brother who his back towards me this whole time. I could sense some bad blood between the two.

Zakhele: Phindile

Me: Yes?

Zakhele: Uzopheka ukudla kwak'sihlwa noma

ngiyok'thenga? (Will you cook supper or should i order something?)

Huh?

I didn't know my opinion mattered at this point.

Me: Uh... if you don't mind my cooking then I could whip something up.

Honestly my cooking wasn't that bad. He just never had anything nice to say to me other than telling me I was good in bed, I was beautiful and that I gave good head and the best kisses. That's all

he had.

Zakhele: Hmm.

He went back to wiping the dishes. Bandile's presence bothered him, it was heinous. I have never seen him so uneasy and conflicted.

Bandile: Thulani

He froze.

I beguiling smile had appeared on my face, unbidden, the moment he went rigid from the mention of his second name. The tone used was chilled and a little cold to be friendly.

Zakhele: Bandile.

Bandile: Ufikile uGrace la?

(Did Grace come here?)

Zakhele: Ja. I told her to get lost. Yin ndaba? (What's the matter?)

Bandile: Don't let her in here again. Don't answer her calls, I don't care what she does or says. Angim'funi la.

Syezwana? (I don't want her here. Are we clear?)

I was at the edge of my seat watching Bandile rattle his cage. He nodded and then Bandile disappeared back

into the living room.

Uhm...

Who's house was this anyway? Because I swear it became Bandile within a mere second. I understood he was the eldest, I just didn't think he'd be this bossy. Now i had to cook for three and i had to impress.

I watched Zakhele curse under his breath, mumbling to himself. I was afraid to move from the chair i was sitting on without asking for permission. I didn't want to

upset him.

Zakhele: You can go and sleep. I'll wake you up later so you can cook.

Me: It's alright. I can start now.

Zakhele: Hambo lala Phindile. I nodded.

He helped me off my chair and walked me to the bedroom, shut it and locked me in.

Great.

=====

-Bandile

He had this beseeching

(begging) expression on his face the moment he trotted into the living room. I had the big black book in my hands going through the numbers and they weren't up.

Thulani: Bafo (brother.)

Me: Hala phantsi Thulani. (Sit down Thulani.)

I warned him against bringing just anyone here. I warned him countless times to stop disrespecting our father's home. Aside from the fact that she'd been with him for close to three years and she

was probably too familiar with this place she wasn't welcome here. None of them were. No excuse could make up for his dishonesty and disloyalty.

Thulani: I can explain.

Me: Explain what? That you've basically locked her in here? She's a prisoner in dad's home?

Thulani: Dad is no more Bandile.

Me: Did i ask you?

He dropped his eye's onto his hands.

Me: Uyamshaya? (Do you hit her?)

He cleared his throat. His eye's never leaving his hands. He fumbling with them meaning he was definitely hitting her.

Thulani: I uh

Me: Black and blue?

Thulani: Nginike ithuba lok' chaza Bafo. (Give me a chance to explain Brother.)

Me: Uchaza ini Thulani?

(Explain what Thulani?) You're dad now? Putting this poor girl through the bullshit dad

put mom through?

Thulani: Only when it's necessary.

Me: Angizwa? (Excuse me?)

He kept quiet. I laughed to myself.

Me: Uyamshaya Thulani? (You hit her?)

He nodded. He was unashamed of his actions, i could tell by the way he stared me in the eye.

Me: Uyajabula maye'Khaliwa okwa Ma? (Does it make you happy when she cries like Mom did?)

Thulani: Ungam'faki uMa kulento. (Don't involve ma in this.)

Me: Fokof Thulani maan! uMa went through the very same thing you're putting this poor girl through and you claim to love her?

Thulani: Vele ngyam'thanda. (I do love her.)

Me: You call this love?

Uzok'shiya (she'll leave you.) I swear she'll leave your sorry ass. When she does i hope you never find a woman who will put up with your shit.

Thulani: Wazin wena ngo'thando? (What do you know about love?)

Me: Enough to know that a woman can only take so much.

He went silent.

Me: Ngim'dinga ehambile emzin' kababa. (I need her gone from dad's house.) You have a week.

I waved him off and he stood up and walked out. I shut the book closed and then looked at the TV mounted on the wall.

I turned my phone back on and watched as it was flooded with missed calls and texts from Grace and some of my business associates. I called the wife first.

Grace: Bandile Mdluli.

Me: Grace Mdluli, i heard you went looking for me at my brother's place. Can i help you?

Grace: It's been a week.

Me: Yeah, so?

Grace: Please come back home. I miss you.

Me: You miss me or Pedro?

She went silent.

I didn't want to probe further so i just let this silence stretch on for a little while longer until she got uncomfortable enough to answer me.

She caved.

Grace: He kissed me.

Me: You had your arms wrapped around his neck, Grace. He had his hands in his pockets. So please... tell me who the fool is here.

Grace: I... I'm sorry.

Me: You're sorry for what

Grace? You're sorry you got caught or that you called me a spineless schmuck?

She gasped.

I heard it all. I was standing behind the wooden door when she stormed in. I

watched the bitter

expression on her face, i

watched as Thulani grabbed her by the chin. He will pay. I

would see to it that he paid dearly.

Grace: Bandile

Me: Grace?

Grace: I didn't mean what i

said. I was really mad at you for ignoring me for so long.

Honest to God.

Me: And i will continue to ignore you until i feel i can stand you again.

Grace: What?

Me: Bye.

I hung up.

Answered emails, returned other missed calls and texted back before i shut my phone off from the world again. I don't know why I've been delaying coming here, this place is was better than i

thought. Thulani kept it in better condition than what I thought he'd do to the place. Even my father couldn't maintain it this well.

I was completely baffled when I found him standing behind the sink instead of the woman he was with until my eye's landed on the bandage on her arm and the darkening, hideous scar on her right cheek. It marked her pretty face and it would be a constant reminder of the pain Thulani put her through.

I didn't understand how he thought this was the right thing to do, when he watched our father put my mom through shit almost all her life.

He was gone.

He never reported his whereabouts to me or where he was headed. I didn't ask. The girlfriend woke up and limped into the living room. The house was dark, just how i liked it. She switched the light on and almost screamed

as she saw me staring right at her.

Mercy: I'm sorry. I didn't see you.

Me: Cima. (Switch it off.)

She obliged. She had one of her hands embedded on her rib. That must've been where she was hurting the most because she held onto the wall, reeling from the pain. She winced as she tried to move to the kitchen.

Me: Phindile.

Turned to look at me, her face contorted in sheer

agony.

Mercy: Yes?

Me: Sit down.

She didn't question me. She found a seat and slowly sat down and winced...

Me: Did he take you to see a doctor at least?

Mercy: No. He brought someone to check on me though.

Me: Someone? You look like you broke a few ribs.

She shut her eye's and breathed.

This couldn't be good. I

reached for my phone,
switched it on and called for
an ambulance.

Mercy: No! Please... you don't
know what he's like.

Me: The ambulance will
probably take longer.

I hurried out to get my shoes,
my wallet and car keys. I
couldn't have her dying on
my watch. I returned and
found her still rubbing the
painful part of her ribs. I
scooped her up and hurried
her to the car.

~~~~~

I wasn't surprised when the doctor ordered an emergency surgery. She was in pretty bad shape and anyone could see that. I signed her in at the reception and waited in the waiting room.

He called...

Me: Ja.

Thulani: Where the hell is she!

Me: Ukhuluma nam kanjalo?

(You're speaking to me like that?)

Thulani: Uphii!! WHERE THE FUCK IS SHE!

I hung up.

I couldn't have him speaking to me like that. I put my phone aside and let it ring... it was his fault she was in this condition. I was helping her where he couldn't. I thought he was a doctor. Shouldn't he have seen the signs? The damage inflicted was bad. She could hardly walk.

I answered the third call. By now he was probably more calm and rational.

Me: Are you ready to talk to me like a normal human

being?

Thulani: I just want her home.

Was he crying?

I laughed to myself. This couldn't possibly be the Thulani you called a few minutes ago.

Me: Manje uyakhala? (Now you're crying?)

Thulani: She said she'd leave me.

Me: And she finally has. I told you.

Thulani: Uphi! Bandile ngyam'funa. (I want her. Where is she?)

Me: She said something about seeing her friends. She'll be back by 8. Relax.

Thulani: Yoooooh!

He cried in distress.

What has this girl done to the almighty Thulani. He sounded like a drunk deer.

Totally crushed and angry that she got away.

Me: Yini? (What?)

Thulani: Akasa buyi lomuntu. Akaphinde abuye. (She's isn't coming back. She's never going to come back.)

Me: And you blame her?

Thulani: Yoooooh.

He sounded like a man who just lost everything in a fire. I didn't think he was capable of crying. I think i liked this side of him.

Me: Call her.

Thulani: She left her phone here.

Me: Erh! I thought she was bluffing when she said she might never return.

Thulani: WHAT?

He shrieked.

Thulani: And you let her go?

Me: She was never mine to

keep. And you never said i should keep an eye on her. He hung up immediately after.

It wasn't the calm hang up you did after a normal conversation with another human being. I think he threw his phone on the wall. I got him where i wanted him. Now, to make him pay...

...

SIX

-Bandile

She didn't deserve my mercy. I didn't know her and she'd never seen me before in her life. Why should I spare her life? Why should I save her from his clutches? How do I know that she doesn't deserve what she was receiving?

I knew because no woman on this earth deserved to be treated the way he treated her. She was precious to him and yet he had no way of knowing how to handle her delicate form. She was

fragile. I could tell by the discoloration on her face that her build was not created for this monster but for a man capable to nurturing it and keeping it glowing and growing strong and more beautiful each day. I'd seen beautiful women all my life, bedded them and rejected them. But there was something delicate about Phindile that i couldn't put my finger on. I just knew I wanted to protect her and keep her away from that

monster. She was such a fearless spirit and she deserved more than what he'd been giving her.

The doctor returned to me a couple of hours later and by this time I was joined by my brother. I knew he'd find me, one way or the other and I wasn't bothered.

Me: How is she doc?

He nodded at us and then cleared his throat.

Doctor: She's okay. She's in the ER for now but we're just monitoring her and the baby.

She suffered some serious damage to the spine and arms. She's lucky it wasn't fatal because then she'd be bedridden for the rest of her life.

That statement right there sent me into a frenzy. My anger came unbridled and dangerous, threatening anything that stood in its way.

Me: Can we see her?

Doctor: I'm afraid we can't let that happen right now. She needs the rest. She's been through 4 hours of surgery.

She won't wake up until tomorrow.

Me: Alright. Thank you doctor.

Doctor: I'll go check on her now.

With that he left us. I turned to face his churlish and obnoxious self. He really set me off.

Me: Does that make you happy? Hearing the doctor say she's hanging by a thread.

Thulani: He didn't say so.

Me: Well, she might as well

be hanging by it with the way  
your hitting her!

Thulani: I didn't mean to hurt  
her.

I couldn't help it. I felt  
compelled to do it on her  
behalf, I slapped him hard  
across the face and he  
stumbled backwards. He  
deserved that and way more.

Me: When you lay your hand  
on her what do you think  
happens? She gets tickled  
and starts laughing?

He held onto his cheek and  
rubbed it with intent. I almost

threw another slap but that would be too kind of me. I threw a punch instead and it landed squarely on his jaw. This time around he staggered and fell on his behind. The security guard sprang to his feet and jumped to assist and tear me off this stupid fucker I called a brother. In the eye's of bypassers It all might've been unwarranted but if they were to learn the reason behind my savage attack then they would probably commend

me for it. The guard looked at me for assent and I nodded and he helped Thulani up. He held onto his jaw looking shell-shocked. This day had turned into an unnecessarily dramatic one. His face hardened as pain flashed across his eyes. I returned his gaze, imperturbed. He spat out the blood that had accumulated in his mouth. His face grotesque with all the pent up anger he felt. He couldn't do shit to me, he knew that well enough and

yet I could feel the threat hanging in the balance.

Thulani: I'll be outside.

Me: Go home and change.

You smell like a damn brewery.

Thulani: I'm not taking any chances. I'll be in my car in case you try anything stupid. I chuckled humorlessly.

He underestimated me way too much.

Me: Whatever rocks your boat.

He gave me one last menacing look and then

crushed his bucket hat into his hands and left. The cleaner wiped away his bloody spit and the splatter on this side of the floor I'd been standing on. I move towards the water dispenser and got myself a cup.

I'd earned a couple of eye's during my moment of discipline. They sought me out like i was some kind of target.

Guard: Sir. Please keep it down.

Me: It's all over now.

Guard: Thank you.

He left after that. I drank too more glasses of water before I found the courage to sit amongst the other visitors. They all shifted uncomfortably but that didn't bother me one bit. I'd had worse, much worse reactions in response to my unbridled anger. I also didn't mean to make anyone uncomfortable in this common space. I was a bit drastic, I admit. But all is well now.

I had to leave this place quite soon, I needed to get back home and try to organize a meeting with a client of mine. Mercy would be just fine. Thulani might've been a bit rough with her but he wouldn't hurt her for a while. My threat stuck. It affected him a lot and I could see it in the way he didn't fight back when I hit him. He felt guilty. Mercy was safe.

\*\*\*

I reached the house later that night and switched on all the

lights. Phindile was supposed to cook dinner and I was starving. But it would seem that my scrupulous (wary) brother had gotten that department sorted. He could never enarm (to embrace) the fact that his woman could cook. That in itself was a big blessing from God. My wife stuck to take outs and made an effort to learn anything from all the cook shows they have on TV these days. I microwaved a few pieces of meat, added some buns and

a fat glass of juice. No beer for me tonight, I wasn't feeling up to the occasion. I lowered myself into the seat in the kitchen and had a peaceful dinner. I was resolute in my decision to stay away from Grace until she learnt her lesson. I married her because I loved her. She belonged to me and she would be mine to the end of time. The stunt she pulled with Pedro would probably scar me for life but that was nothing compared to what I'd

done in the past. I just needed an excuse to get away for few days, to get my head back on earth for a few days and recuperate. My body was feeling a little intoxicated, I had to detoxify and quickly. There was a complete lack of adequate forethought in almost all my pitches. I struggled to come up new material. I could never acquire enough information about a certain pitch without losing interest within it's first quarter. I

needed to reflect. What exactly had gone wrong in my place of business? Was I losing perspective like my business partner said? But I'd been in this advertising and campaigning business for 6 years. It was close to impossible for me to lose site of what is substantial in this line of business. My knowledge and experience were a fairly noxious combination.

My head drifted back to the unsavory situation Mercy

had found herself in. I hated to be the one to break it to her but that man will never change. I knew him better than anyone that he was imperative and a ticking time bomb. He could never handle his problems with aplomb. He always had to take the easy route, short cuts. It seemed a little odd and incongruous (out of place.) I don't like to be disparaging of members of my own sex, but where my brother is concerned there is always chaos and violence. He

can never have a peaceful thing going on. He'd always been an antagonist (unfriendly.) And militant (combative). Such a vapid and basic depiction of a man's life. He lived to make people suffer, basically. He never cared.

=====

-Mercy

I woke up to a wailing Zakhele. He was so unnecessary sometimes and bothersome when he wanted to be. He had no sense of

decorum (respect) for other  
patience whatsoever. His  
gaze flickered over to me and  
he blinked a couple of times.  
Why was he crying? Sleep  
had eluded me for way too  
long and I was made as hell.  
Why?

I wasn't an insomniac so why  
did I have to battle with  
myself to sleep? I wasn't  
having any nightmares  
either. If anything i dreamt  
about my savior, Bandile.  
That couldn't be why i was  
suddenly experiencing a

serious case of insomnia, right? Back to the sadist sitting next to me, he looked wary of his surroundings. I was merely getting my bearings in order.

Zakhele: Baby!

He seemed relatively elated to see me away. My head was screaming at me in pain along with my skull, my arms and torso.

Me: Where am I?

Zakhele: Hospital. Bandile brought you here last night when you fell.

Me: Fell?

My throat was drier than the Kalahari Desert.

Zakhele: Yes. You just passed out on the living room floor and he rushed you in here.

Me: Amanzi. (Water.)

He sprang to his feet and got me a glass full with some make-shift straw that could bend. He helped me drink up as much as i could hold in.

Zakhele: How are you feeling?

Me: Fine. Considering my condition.

Zakhele: I'm glad you're okay. My feeble attempts to get him to feel guilty were such a waste of time. He could hardly see any fault in what he'd done. He probably would never see it until I died one day.

Me: Thank you for the water.

Zakhele: Would you like something to eat maybe?

Me: No. I'm good.

Who was he trying to fool? I looked at him coolly and chuckled to myself. He took my hand into his and kissed

it.

Zakhele: I was so scared when I heard you'd been hospitalized.

Me: Why? You put me here.

Zakhele: Baby!

Me: You slapped me senseless until i fell. I'm here because of that.

Zakhele: Ngiyaxolisa baby.  
(I'm sorry baby.)

What an ill-mannered creature this man was. He said sorry like the word had no significant meaning whatsoever. He didn't care to

sound a little remorseful about this. I'm pretty sure in that empty head of his, all of this was somehow my fault and as a man of power he was instilling discipline and order in his house. He came up with the most bizzare reasons for his actions.

Me: Where is Bandile?

His face hardened immediately with unrecognizable expressions. I couldn't read him.

Zakhele: Home.

Me: Hmm. Thank him for me.

If he hasn't been there to take me to hospital, I'd be dead.

Zakhele: He just wanted to look like a savior. He didn't do it for you.

Me: But he was lucid enough to bring me here anyway. I'm feeling better already.

That was a big, fat lie. I felt worse but I'd gotten proper medical care and that's all that mattered at this point. He couldn't hide the anger he was feeling, his eye's left mine and he stared at the

window. I squeezed his hand and he swept his gaze from the window and back to me.

Me: He was trying to help.

I rubbed it in.

This was something he was incapable of. Helping people and it tore through him that his brother, of all people was the one to offer me this help that I desperately needed.

Zakhele: You didn't need his help.

Me: I would've died.

Zakhele: Stop exaggerating.

Me: I went into surgery

immediately after i was trotted in here.

Zakhele: Mxm.

Me: You're a doctor. You should know this. My condition was critical.

Zakhele: You were fine.

There was no use trying to convince this dumbass man that I was in a critical state because of the foetus I had growing inside me. I let go of his hand and looked up at the ceiling. He wasn't exactly scintillating company. My frail-looking exterior did

nothing to change his mind.  
He was convinced i was fine.  
Me: Maybe you should leave.  
He looked at me frazzled. I  
wasn't going to stand for his  
bullshit.

Zakhele: What?

Me: Hamba Zakhele. I want to  
be left alone.

Silence

I took his science for  
acquiescence. With an  
expression of beffudlement  
he stood up from his chair,  
bent to kiss my forehead and  
then my lips.

Zakhele: This isn't over.

He whispered and then he walked out. The shook me. I never could have impunity in his eyes. I always deserved punishment somehow. For shit i didn't do.

Even in these extenuating circumstances he left i was deserving of his wrath. But, I had Bandile now. I knew he'd protect me. Even though he made it explicitly clear that he didn't want me in his father's house. I failed to understand why he'd want

me gone when he never really came by to the house himself. But that was the least of my worries.

Zakhele had basically threatened my life. Again. He made it so eloquently clear that come rain or shine, I'd pay for whatever deeds I'd done wrong.

"Hello." My heart literally jumped through my ribs. Where did he come from? I watched as he took careful strides toward my bed.

Me: Bandile.

Bandile: Mercy. You look better than you did yesterday. How are you feeling?

I blinked at him in utter shock.

Me: I'm okay.

Bandile: Where is your fiancé?

Me: I asked him to leave.

He looked shell-shocked by my confession. What was so hard to believe.

Bandile: And he obliged?

Me: He had no choice. I had the panic button in my hand.

Bandile: And you threatened him?

Me: No. I just asked him politely.

Bandile: And I'm guessing his response was a threat.

I sighed heavily.

He could never take anything for what what it was. His mind was always on overdrive so every word had a meaning in his head.

Bandile: You sure are dumb.

I looked at him, my mouth agape. Did he just call me dumb?

Me: What?

Bandile: You heard me.

Me: Please enunciate your words.

Bandile: You could've run while you had the chance.

But you stuck around because you "loved him."

Me: You don't know the half of it.

Bandile: Mm.hm

He sat down on the chair beside my bed and evaluated me.

Me: What?

Bandile: I've known my

brother all his life. I know the kind of man he is and let me tell something, he has beaten every woman he's ever been with. Even the one's as tough as my wife, he will break you. Me: He's already started.

Bandile: This is your chance. You should run while you still can.

I chuckled humorlessly, turning my face back to the ceiling. I heard his threat, I felt it crawling under my skin and it rolled down my spine. He said it with so much

conviction that the air left my lungs in a harsh gust. I knew he'd make good on his promise. I wasn't ready to sacrifice the lives of innocent people for my own gain.

Me: You swore to kill my friends. On top of that he said he'd make sure his men raped us... tortured us and then...

I bit my tongue.

The man who claimed to love me so much promised to sell me to the highest bidder. I couldn't tell Bandile tell, it

made me want slit my wrists and bleed out until i died.

Bandile: And he promised to sell you didn't he?

My head snapped in his direction. Had he been eavesdropping on us this whole time?

Me: You know?

Bandile: It's like I said. I know my brother, he's bluffing. The reason he's bluffing is because he genuinely loves you. And when he loves, he loves real hard. Like he loved Yolanda. She ended up six

feet under, I told her to run.  
Just like i told Poppy,  
Nomonde, Sidney and Palesa.  
They never listened.

Me: They're all dead?

Bandile: No. After Yolanda he  
couldn't bring himself to love  
again. But I don't know... i  
guess there's just something  
about you that broke that  
cycle. And you're a few  
punches away from your  
grave.

I believe that would've shook  
anyone in my shoes.

Me: I can't run from him.

Where will i go? I ran once  
and he found me within 26  
hours.

Bandile: I'll help you.

...

SEVEN

-Mercy

He had this smug look on his  
face. I knew he had motive.

He wasn't doing this because  
he wanted to help. He was  
doing this because it would  
benefit him in the long run. I  
suddenly felt like a pawn  
between these two sadistic

and sinister brother's. But he was more gentle than his lava breathing replica so i preferred him to his brother.

Me: How do you plan on doing that exactly? Helping me behind his back, won't he flip?

His tongue came out to moisten his lips. He did that a lot, licked his lips and i couldn't help but wonder why. It gave him this shady vibe.

Bandile: You leave that to me.

Me: You do realise that I don't

know you and therefore I don't trust you.

He laughed softly, throwing his head back. He found this amusing.

Bandile: Yeeeeeyi! Ngoba umuntu omnyana akanawo udankie nje. (Wow. Black people can't even say thank you.)

I was highly offended.

Why did he use black people in that context as opposed to just directing it to one person. Me.

Me: How do I say thank you

when you haven't done anything to get me away from this...

I gestured with my hand between myself and the bed i was lying on.

Bandile: Patience is virtue, Mercy.

Me: I don't believe in virtue.

Bandile: Well, I do.

All this time he kept his hands tucked underneath his biceps and a look of bemusement plastered across his face. He seemed very proud and pleased with

himself. He was very tenacious too. A self-sustaining man. I wondered what it portended, honestly. Me: Hmm. Clearly.

I voiced a tone of dissent.

Bandile: If we're going to get along you really need to get rid of that attitude. I'm not doing this out of the goodness of my heart. I'm simply putting an end to my brother's madness. He can be very litigious if and when he pleases.

Me: Liti- what?

Bandile: Fussy. He can be fussy.

Me: Oh. I know that much.

A tremulous smile had appeared on my face. I wasn't sure if this called for a smile or what.

Bandile: Attitude, drop.

Me: Right!

Bandile: Also. I want you to be open-minded. Remember, I have a wife. So my helping you may come across as something else to her.

Me: You mean it may come across as infidelity?

He let out an exasperated sigh.

I let him down with my lack of knowledge on such issues. I wasn't really up to speed with the whole marriage thing.

Bandile: Just do as i say.

Me: And what's in it for you?

Bandile: A clean conscience. For now.

He shrugged with no care in this world. He wasn't ashamed to admit that he would want something from me in the long run.

Psst!

As if.

The only thing he would get from me was a big fat thank you and a slap in the face for taking his own precious time to realise i needed saving and then a peck on the lips for being brazen enough to get me out of that dumb.

Qhaaaa!

Anything else he can get from his wife. Ang'zodlala amadoda wakwa Mdluli mina. (I wouldn't let these Mdluli men take advantage

of me.) But for now, beggars can't be choosers.

Me: Well, fair enough.

I lied with feigned indignation.

He had a plan up his sleeve.

So did i.

He looked revolted. He probably thought I wouldn't agree to his terms. I would do absolutely anything to get out of this situation. I had to plan inconspicuously or else he'd catch on pretty quickly. He was good and fast like that.

ALSO,

I hoped I wouldn't trip and fall for this Mdluli heart-throb. I don't think my heart can handle the strain. I'd loved Zakhele way too much. I'd become very conscientious about keeping my heart locked behind high and safe walls.

It was the only way.

Bandile: Good!

Me: When do I leave this place?

He cackled. (Laughed.)

Was it permissible in this

area though? He sounded like a witch.

Bandile: Ngithe mana phela. (I said wait.) Patience is virtue la. You need to trust me.

I chortled.

Where did he think he was, a comedy show? Maybe he was friends with Trevor. I on the other hand was ambivalent. I had contradictory ideas to the ones that he had.

Me: Trust is earned big guy. And big he was. He was huge, tall and hovering. He was a

sky-scraper basically. He had an array of accoutrements.

He looked at me incredulously.

Bandile: We're still there.

Me: I understand your decision to help me was impromptu. But I can't just trust you because you've decided to become generous.

Bandile: Ouch.

He was as imperative as his brother. A narcissist alltogether. Such an unsavory character.

Me: Truth hurts doesn't it?

Bandile: One point for the lady covered in scars.

Me: Hmm. That was low.

Bandile: You started it.

I rolled my eye's.

Very inane. But also, he was great company. A wise companion.

Me: You're a bold character Mr Mdluli.

Bandile: Ngyaphapha mina?  
(I'm forward?)

I shrugged.

Me: Basically.

Bandile: I'll take that. I will enarm that!

Me: You will what now?

He rolled his eye's.

I was dumbstruck. He kept using these concrete words, some I'd never heard before in my life.

Bandile: To embrace. I will embrace my boldness. Is what I meant.

Me: You're so unnecessary sometimes. Why didn't you just say embrace.

Bandile: You have a lot to learn.

I wondered how long he was planning on sticking around

too. I mean there were only so many hours in a day and visiting hours had ended fifteen minutes ago. What and how was he still here?

Me: Where is your wife?

His face dropped, anger flashing across his eyes. That was a pretty basic and straightforward reaction. I could decipher a lot from that...

Bandile: That conversation is off limits. Period.

Me: I'm just wondering how you are here when visiting

hours ended fifteen minutes ago.

Bandile: I have my ways.

Me: Hmm.

Bandile: Have you eaten?

He cares? How cute.

Me: Yes. I have.

Bandile: Good.

He pushed his chair backwards and stood up. Unlike his brother, he had nothing on his head or his hands. He cleared his throat and scratched the back of his head.

Me: Yini? (What?)

Bandile: I'll just go now.  
I nodded. He moved away from the space between my bed and the chair he'd just vacated and he left. The hope he'd given me was very restorative despite the many challenges we'd face indefinitely. He was my light at the end of the tunnel.

=====

I felt him before I could hear him. I had just finished taking a piss and washing my face in the bathroom of this hospital. He was either

talking on the phone or finishing off a conversation with someone in the hallway. Where was he coming from? Who was he speaking to and most importantly what was he doing here.

I wheeled myself in to my ward with and his gaze dropped from my empty bed to the wheelchair i was perched on. He crushed his bucket hat tighter between his hands at the sight of me. Zakhele: Baby.

He said breathily. Like

someone had knocked the air out of his lungs. I had stitches on my torso but he had no way of seeing that.

Me: Zakhele. You came back. I was unable to guise my contempt and overall disappointment.

Zakhele: I... yes. I came back.

Me: Great.

He helped me up on the bed. When he left this place he was a totally different man. What had happened to him?

Zakhele: I bought food. I figured you'd want

something else apart from hospital food.

He thought right.

I was starving. All they served was mashed potatoes, green peas. Broccoli and some other stuff I failed to pronounce. I couldn't eat that.

Also, his eye's had lost their darkness. He'd come back new man. Or maybe he wanted me to think that.

Whatever the reason may be, he wasn't feral and callous.

He was soft and

insubstantial.

Me: Thank you. I was starving.

He placed the takeaways plastic on my lap the moment I'd covered it with the comforter. I unfastened it and dug in. I hadn't had a decent meal in hours and this was heaven.

Zakhele: Has my brother been here, to see you?

He said this while lowering himself onto the chair. I

nodded. The last thing I

wanted to do was set him off

by lying to him.

Me: He just came to make sure I was okay.

Zakhele: And?

Me: And what?

Was he expecting me to go into lurid details? I owed him nothing!

Zakhele: What did you talk about?

Me: What do you mean? We didn't have much to say to each other. I thanked him for saving my life and that was it. He left.

Zakhele: Don't lie to me.

I sighed.

He looked bored of my games. But I wasn't about to tell him anything.

Me: He said he had someone he came to see here. A lady friend of his and he wanted to start by me and see if I was alive.

Zakhele: What did you say?

Me: I told him that I'd be fine. He asked if you'd come to see me and I said yes.

Zakhele: He asked about me?

Me: Uhm. Yes.

Zakhele: Hmm. Qhubeka. (Go

on)

I spun him a story. A believable story and he ate it up like the dumb fuck that he was. I just had to down play it a little bit and sugarcoat shit. I even went as far as praising his egotistical ass until he could only smile and watch me eat. I wanted conversation to remain minimal between us. That way I won't be suspicious when I have nothing to say to him.

Zakhele: We were supposed

to go to Home Affairs today.  
Shit!

I forgot about that. He was a bit disappointed but I knew he'd drink it away.

Me: Yes. I remember that.

Zakhele: I miss you. The house isn't the same without you.

He just missed bossing me around and getting all the sex he wanted and more. I couldn't say the same for him or his house. I struggled to form a sentence. I had nothing positive to reply

back with so I kept my lips zipped.

Zakhele: My bed is cold without you. I miss having to move your leg off my face and having to shift to create more space for you to push your butt. Even when I was sleeping at the edge already. I couldn't help but laugh. It was short-lived though because the bad overshadowed the good. What exactly had gone wrong?

How did he change into this

unrelenting monster who was resolute in his quest to end my life.

Zakhele: Come back home so we can fix this.

There was no fixing this.

If I had the guts I would slide the ring off my finger and hand over to him. But he might just strangle me right here to put a pillow over my face. Rendering me powerless and defeated right there.

Me: The doctor will discharge me soon and we can go

home...

I dreaded finishing this sentence for obvious reasons. I hated lying.

Zakhele: I'm sorry.

Apology not accepted.

Men don't change because

we want them to. They

change because they want

to, they feel the need for

change and it takes place. No

woman can will her man to

become something their not.

It just never works. I nodded

in acknowledgement. Just to

let him think I'd heard him.

Crocodile tears glistened in his eye's.

....

EIGHT

-Mercy

My bad mood had festered. He was in no hurry to leave and I'd officially ran out of things to talk about with him. I remember when I never ran out of updates and gossip, we used to stay up all night laughing and sharing stories. To be quite honest Zakhele was never like this. Or maybe

he was just getting me comfortable, too comfortable to want to leave his sorry ass. His eye's would soften and he didn't hold the strain of a criminal. This may come across as stupid but I love him. At some point I'd become obsessed with him, knowing little about the kind of man he really was. I was misled by the affection he'd shown me so many times. He would treat me like a queen, show me how much I meant to him. Even when he was

drunk most of the time. He was gentle, sweet. Good-natured. Such a gentleman. He was an honourable man, at least to me. I don't know what he's approach was with the other women he'd beaten. But I had this insufferable physical weakness when it came to him. I could never help myself. He worked out a lot. A frequent visitor at the gym and his chiseled body spoke for him. He wasn't very fond of tight clothing hence I could

never really see much of that powerful and toned body. Only when he was indoors and inside the bedroom would he remove everything apart from his pants and walk around half naked. No tattoos, no dent, no scar. He really was prepared for being a doctor.

But looking at him now.

While he sat there, reading up on neurological diseases and stuff like that I had to question my decisions. Why is it that everytime a chance

for a relationship comes by I walk into the whole thing blind and clueless. Did I not learn anything from the woes of dating Fikani and that other guy who was too eager... i forgot his name but I remember it had a Q in it somewhere. Well, technically I never dated him. He was too ghetto. He had the walk, he had the talk and I could tell by his behaviour that he'd been arrested more than once. He just kissed me once or twice and i remember

being blown away by how good he was but whenever he opened his mouth to speak I lost interest rapidly. So I told him it wouldn't work, ever.

He was cool with it.

He too disappeared from the face of the earth. It didn't really matter much. I knew I'd meet someone else soon enough. And I did. Probably too soon, in my head. He never gave me any hope, he told me I could never handle him. I should've listened to

him. I should've dropped it and focused on school. I made it. Passed with flying colours but then he came... he returned and this time he wanted me. I wanted him too. Little did I know.

Zakhele: Usuyephi? (Where are you?) Your mind is no longer present.

Me: Hmm. I'm just thinking.

Zakhele: Ngani? (About what?)

Me: My life. After we get married.

Best lie i could ever concoct.

I cleared my throat.

Zakhele: Oh.

All this time his eye's are glued to the book on his lap. It is pretty thick. I can see why he can never tear his gaze from it.

Me: Quick question.

Zakhele: Sure.

Me: Why don't re-do your residency? Became a doctor like you've always dreamt about...

He scoffed.

Smug asshole. But it wouldn't hurt to have an abusive

husband who is also a doctor.

Zakhele: I finished my residency before my mother left us. Which makes me a doctor.

Me: Oh.

Zakhele: A neurosurgeon to be specific. I have my degree, everything.

Me: And their just sitting there?

Zakhele: Yeah. My dream is dead.

He said the drolly. Like he had no interest in ever living to his fullest potential. Fulfilling

his life long dream. I would  
kill to have sufficient  
resources to fulfill my dream  
of becoming a lawyer.

Me: Dead? Just like that...

Zakhele: Yes. I could never be  
a doctor Mercy.

Me: It is too late?

He shrugged, waving me off.  
And that was the end of that  
conversation. Too bad he  
didn't see the whole point of  
this conversation.

Me: My dream would be to  
see you answer to your  
calling. The world needs more

neurosurgeons.

Those 16 words were enough to get him to lift his head from the book and glare at me, nostril flared and his chest rising and falling rapidly. I didn't want to rub him up the wrong way but he sure didn't appreciate my comment. I cleared my throat uncomfortably and turned away from him.

Zakhele: That's your dream?  
To see me live my dream?  
I nodded.

That was partly true. It

wasn't my dream but my wish. The country needed more doctors and he could be an addition to that equation. He rubbed the underneath of his chin in thought. I was shaken. I thought he'd either give me a scalding response, chastise me or probably tell me where to get off.

Zakhele: You want me to become a doctor? You wanna marry a doctor?

Me: It would be nice.

He smiled. That crooked smile

of his where he looked like he was blushing but trying too hard to hide it with a weird smile. It looked like he was in pain.

Zakhele: Really?

I nodded.

Was he trying to impress me? He looked dumb. But i had to give it to him. He was a good actor.

Zakhele: I'll think about it.

Me: Fair enough.

Zakhele: And you... you're going to be the stay at home mom right?

That's just how much he disapproved of me dreaming. He had no care in the world. He wasn't ashamed to crush my dreams.

Me: Until the baby is old enough to go to kindergarten. Yes.

Zakhele: You think this is the only baby we'll be having? Huh?

Zakhele: I want 6 more.

Me: Six?

Zakhele: Yes. I want seven children altogether. A big, happy family.

I couldn't help but chuckle.  
Honestly.

Which bubble was this guy living in? Could someone kindly pop it for me. He needed a serious and thorough reality check.

Me: I get that. But four is still a big, happy family. Four kids is more than enough. Seven? That's a bit of a stretch, don't you think?

Zakhele: No. I just know what I want and Zak always gets what he wants.

Me: Seven kids?

Zakhele: If you can endure my fists then i see no problem in you bearing me seven kids.

His playfulness had evaporated.

His face was neutral. He saw nothing wrong in what he'd just said. His dark exterior was back, eye's cold and calculating. He was adamant on getting his way...

He just had to take this route everytime. The conversation was going so well.

Me: And you want to marry

me?

Zakhele: You don't want to marry me?

Me: When you keep threatening me like that what do you expect?

He went silent.

I wasn't surprised. He could never handle his own truth. He kept a stoic expression. He was adamant on coming across as imperturbed but I could right through him.

Me: I can't marry you if you keep reminding me that you'll beat me up every chance you

get.

The scowl left his lips.

In it's place came regret and remorse. The cryptic conversation had turned into a confrontation.

Zakhele: I wasn't remi-

Me: Don't back-paddle

Zakhele. Do you like having me here?

Zakhele: No.

Me: Do you want me to stay?

With you and this baby?

Zakhele: How could you ask me that? Of course I want you around.

Me: Do you believe me when I say that I love you?

He cleared his throat.

Zakhele: Yes baby.

Me: Because I meant it. I love you. I want you in my life.

Always.

Zakhele: I know. I know. I love you Phindile. God knows I do.

Me: Good. Because I want to be your wife. I want to be

Mrs. Mdluli

That pleased him.

It tickled his fancy. That was good for me, for Bandile's plan.

He stood up, bent over and planted a soft kiss on my lips.  
Zakhele: When you say things like that Phindile... you drive my obsession. I want you. Only you.

I cupped his face in both my hands and rested my forehead against his.

Me: I want to be yours Zakhele. Only yours... I can't do that when you hurt me like this.

He sighed heavily, dropping his scorching gaze to my lips.

Zakhele: I'm a fool.

Me: Show me that you can change. I want nothing more than to be your wife... prove to me that you want me to stay forever.

His eye's raided my lips and then it crept back up to my eye's.

Zakhele: I will.

Me: Good.

I kissed him. That reassuring kiss that would break my promise to both myself and Bandile.

I think he deserved one last chance. Not because I felt

sorry for him but because I spent three years learning how to love him with his flaws. I spend everyday learning how to accept him and change him as a man. I taught myself to brave the many dangers of being with a man like him. I've come too far to just drop it all now. And in everything that I do, I wanted him to have a chance at being a father. He'd never had a child before.

Zakhele: So, we're going to Home Affairs tomorrow?

I laughed.

Me: As soon as the doctor discharges me. Unless you're in a rush then you can always find a pastor to marry us off right here.

Zakhele: In the hospital?

Me: Yes! I've seen people in movies do it all the time.

Zakhele: You want to get married in a hospital?

Me: Well, I've always wanted to get married at the beach. But we could do that some other time.

Zakhele: Okay. I'll get right on

it.

Me: No. You can do that on your own time. This is my time.

I shifted to the side and made space for him. He was good at taking hints so he lay next to me and draped his large arm over my stomach. He held me close.

Zakhele: This is your time?

Me: Our time. The baby agrees.

I left his warm lips on the side of my head.

Zakhele: All three of us.

Me: Yes daddy.

He smiled.

I hope I never regret my decision to give him one last chance. It would've been hard to let him go. I'd grown to love him hard, harder than I imagined possible. He'd treated me well before and I believed he could still be that man. For his child and for me, his soon to be wife. I just had to learn how to please him all the time, to dispel this demon that had claimed his body and mind. His heart

would always be mine, I know he loved me. It was pretty deep because he fought this demon to the best of his ability.

Me: Please don't leave. Until I fall asleep? You're so warm and it gets really cold in here at night.

Zakhele: Why didn't you tell me this earlier? I could've sent someone to get you another blanket.

Me: You would?

Zakhele: Yes!

He reached for his phone and

dialed someone. They answered and he gave strict orders to them... he made them buy blankets, new pyjamas and tracksuit. Something to nibble on later. Very inane.

But he wanted to impress me. I didn't mind.

=====

I had fallen asleep under the new found heat and comfort of my blanket and the warm comfort food we'd shared through lively discussions about the future. He had an

entire future planned out for us and to think he wanted us to sell everything and leave Soweto to start anew tugged at the strings of my heart. He was so soft spoken and gentle when talking to his unborn baby. He sounded excited about being a father more than this marriage.

I stutted awake at the disembodied voice that had just called out my name a few seconds ago. Zakhele was gone, in the chair he had vacated sat Bandile. A very

pissed off and scowling  
Bandile.

Me: Bandile, what are you  
doing here?

Bandile: Are you kidding me?

Me: Yini? (What?)

Bandile: You're two faced you  
know that? You're marrying  
him know, after you spoke  
about leaving his ass?

Me: Keep it down!

Bandile: Don't tell me to keep  
it down! This is your fault!

Me: Let me explain, Bandile.  
I said through gritted teeth.

Bandile: Explain what? That

you're dumber than I thought? You think he's gonna change just because you asked him to? He's been like this all his damn life. He loved Yolanda just as much as he loved you! Where is she now, huh?

Me: At least close the door. He sprang to his feet, shut the door and stood behind it, waving his hands in the air in sheer frustration.

Bandile: He's playing you.

Me: He will do anything for his kid.

He laughed humorlessly.  
Bandile: Yolanda was 9  
months pregnant. She had  
three days until she could  
give birth. He beat her to  
death... HE. BEAT. HER. TO.  
DEATH!

Me: Bandile...

Bandile: He will kill you  
Mercy. I won't be there to  
stop him because I tried to  
help you.

Me: Listen to me.

Bandile: Mercy, open your  
eye's. Before it's too late. He  
will never, NEVER change.

Me: Bandile, listen to me-  
He was determined to keep me quiet as he tried to get his point across.

Bandile: Get this through your skull. He loves you but he is not willing to change. Not for you, not for that baby.

He took slow strides toward the bed and stopped at the foot, placed his hands on the edge and lent forward. His chest rose and fell at his attempt to breathe in and relax.

Bandile: You're a smart girl, Mercy.

Me: Everyone deserves a chance.

Bandile: Yes. That's why I'm here. To help you escape this hellhole and start a fresh somewhere far from here. Far from him.

Me: Why didn't you help Yolanda?

Bandile: She told me where to get off. I called the cops and she told them to get lost. She thought she could change him, the same as you.

She died having failed that mission. Don't make that same mistake Mercy...

Me: Why shoul-

Bandile: Why should you trust me?

He chuckled, shaking his head in disbelief. He stood up straight and walked around the bed, he stood right at the head and lent over. He reached for my ear and breathed in.

Bandile: Because I believe I can help you... I want to help you.

Me: Why no-

He shut me up with a kiss.

I hadn't seen it coming but he crashed his thin lips on mine and kissed the stubbornness out of me. I responded in kind, feeling his weight fall comfortably over me. It lasted for 5 seconds and he moved back.

Bandile: Let me help you.

....

NINE

-Bandile

Sigh!

That might've been a really bold move. I shouldn't have kissed her. I didn't know how else to get her attention. She refused to see the truth and I had to do something. I just never envisioned myself kidding the woman my brother loves so dearly. I was full of regret and contempt as I moved backwards after realising what I'd done. I cleared my throat and blinked.

Me: Let me help you.  
I heard myself utter.

That was a better comeback than I'd expected. She was shell-shocked, from the way she stared at me. I felt the same way, confused and sorry.

Mercy: Wh- what was that?

Me: I'm sorry, Mercy.

Mercy: Bandile you can't do this. You can't just come here and drop a bomb on me and then shut me up like that...

Me: I know. Forgive me, I just got carried away there.

Mercy: You should leave.

Me: Yes, of course.

Mercy: I'm going ahead with this marriage.

My eye's popped open in shock.

Did she not just hear me warn her against marrying Thulani, or was i mumbling and talking to myself? I thought I'd spoken in a more modulate tone. Kanti I'd been unheard or ignored straightforward. I felt an inexplicable rage deep in my gut, rising and bubbling up to my throat.

She disregarded my warning.

Just like Yolanda had done,  
just like Palesa had done.

Me: Are you serious?

Mercy: I think I know enough  
about Zakhele to stick to my  
decision. He might be an  
abuser but I know he has  
never killed anyone.

I scoffed.

How incompetent and dumb  
of her. I don't know what  
about Mercy drew me to care  
about her but I did.

Immensely so. I questioned  
myself everyday about this...  
why her? I've never

connected with any of my brother's victims before.

Mercy had this pull about her that was so hard to ignore. I wanted to throw my hands in the air in surrender but something kept pulling me back. I was shaking with rage at her terse response.

Me: I can't keep up with you.

She waved her hand dismissively. I was so engrossed in the present moment that I didn't hear tentative knock on the door. I shifted a couple of steps

from the bed as the door swung swiftly open.

No one had given consent to the person on the other side of the door to come in.

It was the doctor.

Doctor: Mr. Mdluli

Me: Doc, how are you?

Doctor: I'm alright. Just came to check on my patient. How are we today Ms Mercy.

Mercy: I'm feeling a lot better now.

Doctor: Good. I can see you're responding well to the treatment medication.

Mercy: So, when can i leave this place?

He laughed softly, shifting toward the monitor and reading the signs and numbers beeping on the screen.

Doctor: We still want to keep you in here for observation. Just to make sure there are no complications with the baby.

I had forgotten about her pregnancy, honestly. And I couldn't help but remember the time Yolanda was

pregnant too and I happened to walk into a heated argument between her and Thulani. He had her arm in his grip, an iron grip that is and she had begun bruising around that area. I shoved him off her and pulled her behind me.

Seeing Phindile in this same situation made me fear the worst.

Mercy: How long will that be?

Doctor: Two to three days.

Depending on how well it all goes.

She did little to guise her disappointment. She was peeved at the situation she'd found herself in.

Mercy: Oh.

Doctor: It will be quick. You won't even feel the days.

Mercy: I'm already kinda feeling them. I mean, there's nothing to do here all day. I cleared my throat.

All attention was diverted to me immediately. Kind of overwhelming but okay...

Me: We could have a TV installed in here you now. Or

maybe books.

Mercy: A TV? This is not a private ward, Bandile.

Me: We could move you to one.

Doctor: That could uhm... cost you a fortune sir.

Mercy: And, I'm quite comfortable here. Thank you. I could see the desperation in her eye's. She was begging me to stop.

Me: Okay. Books then?

Mercy: I would appreciate that.

Books it is then.

I'm pretty sure she'll love my collection of Goosebumps books, Christopher Pike novels, Tess Gerritsen. Liss Gardiner and Stephen King. To name a few. It would also be a great a excuse to pop by more frequently.

Me: That's settled then.

Doctor: Good. I will be back with your vitamins and something to eat.

Mercy: Thank you doc.

Doctor: You're welcome.

He patted my shoulder and then exited the ward. There

were 4 more beds surround hers and it made me feel uncomfortable.

Mercy: You should really go.

Me: Yes. I uh... about the leaving this place situation...

Mercy: Bandile.

She said, her tone dripping with impatience.

Me: Please, reconsider.

Mercy: Hamba. (Go.)

I nodded my head in resignation and exited the room shortly after the Doctor. I had concluded that she hated me now because

I'd bombarded her with all this information and then I overstepped the boundary when I kissed her. I hadn't meant to overstep the line and cause havoc in her already dramatic existence. But for her to snub me like that... pretty dissuading.

My phone vibrated aggressively in my pocket. It could only be the wife. I set her ring apart from the others just to know and be careful about answering or choosing not to.

Me: Grace Mdluli

Grace: Bandile Stephen  
Mdluli.

I winced.

Not even my short-tempered  
mother called me that.

Me: That name.

Grace: Baby, come home.

Me: I'm still held-up. Taking  
care of business this side... I  
also remember mentioning  
the fact that I wasn't ready to  
face your lying ass.

She whimpered.

I really couldn't be bothered.

I'd had much worse

reactions.

Me: I love you.

Grace: Come home then.

Me: In a month.

She gasped dramatically. I

had to hang up after that

because I could sense an

entire year's worth of

lectures headed my way.

I reached the underground

parking area, opened the

door to my car and slid inside.

There he was, perched

comfortably on the back

passenger seat. A cigarette

dangling from the edge of his

lips. He looked so proud of himself...

Thulani: Bandile.

Me: Thulani. Are you alone?

Thulani: No. I came here with Qhawe. He was in twin so he thought he could come by and see how we're doing.

Me: Where is he?

Thulani: In my car, obviously. I nodded.

He stayed glued to the leather seat.

Me: Can I help you?

Unflinchingly, he answered.

Thulani: Who is this lady

friend you keep visiting here.  
Lady friend?

What the fuck was he on  
about.

Thulani: Mercy told me about  
her. Who is she and is she  
worth your marriage?

Realising dawned on me. Of  
course she'd spin him a  
story...

Mercy!

I should've known.

Me: She's a colleague. We go  
way back and I just... wanted  
to make sure she's good.

I shrugged, for effect.

Thulani: And Mercy?

Me: She's not my problem now. I brought her in here... I did my part.

Thulani: Hmmm. Thank you.

Me: Say hi to Qhawe for me.

He slid off my car and shut the door behind himself.

So much for respecting my vehicle. I watched him sauntering towards his car and leaning over the back passenger-seat window and Qhawe's head popped up from inside. They spoke between themselves and the

Thulani took a detour to the elevator.

....

NINE (2)

-Mercy

I had his neurosurgery book on my lap as i sat on the wheelchair not too far from the window. I couldn't take the solitude and the silence of the place. It was slowly driving me insane, honestly. It didn't make much sense because I never studied medicine as young girl. I just

read whatever I could and the pictures helped embed a clear understanding in my mind through these images. It was also a much needed distraction from Bandile and his bombshells.

"Baby." I cringed that very same moment his baritone reverberated through the ward. He was back. I slowly turned my head toward the source and he sagged against the door like he'd just ran up 12 flights of stairs to get to me.

Me: Zakhele.

He smiled warily.

He had one those light the up the room kind of smiles.

Bright and infectious.

Although I couldn't return it.

He wasn't genuinely smiling at me, he was examining me.

Looking for possible signs of dishonesty.

Zakhele: Is that... my book.

Me: I didn't know what else to do with myself.

Zakhele: You could've called me.

Me: I didn't want to impose. I

thought you'd be too busy with the wedding preparations.

His face lit up at the mention of the wedding. He was genuine about his excitement... I could see it in his eye's.

Zakhele: I work fast baby. Before the end of today we'll be married. The priest has agreed to grace us with his presence. He just has a few loose ends he needs to tie up.  
Me: Oh. That's great.

Zakhele: I just came here to

drop your dress off.

Me: A dress?

Zakhele: You want to get married in a hospital gown? Now that I thought of it, that wasn't very conventional. This thing looked like it was on a hanger.

Me: No.

Zakhele: Good.

Me: But you got me a dress?

Zakhele: You're about to be my wife, of course I bought you a dress.

Me: This is wonderful. May I see it?

Zakhele: Yes. But when I'm gone. I might've gotten the dress but i haven't seen it. I want to see it on you...

Me: Where is it?

Zakhele: Qhawe?

He turned his head toward the door and called out to someone. I wheeled my wheelchair around and turned it toward the door.

We heard footsteps first and then a six foot tower of human stood at the door, his hand on his shoulder with the suit bag hanging behind him.

He still had it with him, the presence of the ghetto guy he always was. He had the match stick on the side of his mouth, he wore jeans and a polo shirt. He never really gave a shit about his appearance but he did retain his grace and influence. He had this thing about him that commanded attention. He was a man of power but also a man of very few words. He nodded at me in acknowledgement and then averted his gaze to his

brother.

Qhawe: Yebo.

Zakhele: Nantsi ingubo yakho. (Here is your dress.)

Qhawe swung the cover over his shoulder and gave it to Zakhele who brought it forward and draped it on the bed. Qhawe didn't seem to recognise me, he didn't care too. He left immediately after he'd handed the dress over.

Zakhele: That was my brother, Qhawe. He's not much of a talker.

Brother?

Qhawe was this monster's brother? How many more were there?

Me: In total how many are you?

Zakhele: Four. Wandile is the youngest of us all, Bandile is the eldest. Qhawe comes after me.

Me: Oh. I see.

Zakhele: So, here is the dress.

Me: Thank you. I'll look at it later.

He was about to agree with me when his phone vibrated aggressively in his pants. He

drew it out and looked at the caller ID, frowning deeply.

Zakhele: I need to take this.

Me: Alright.

Zakhele: Qhawe, please watch over her for me. I'll be right back.

Even before I could protest he pushed his brother inside the ward, answering the phone with his back already facing me.

Qhawe stood at the door against his will and looked at me like he'd just seen a ghost. We were both equally

shocked and I was acutely aware of the recognition dawning on his face. He remembers me..

Qhawe: Phindile?

Shit.

He remembers me alright.

Me: Hello.

Shy as ever, I waved at him.

He stared at me in disbelief.

His eye's had grown a few inches wider and his mouth fell open at the lack of words.

He was truly shell-shocked.

Qhawe: Phindile?

Me: Qhawe.

He still couldn't wrap his head around the fact that he was seeing me after so long and I was in a wheelchair. About to marry his brother who I had no idea was his brother. He couldn't guise the anger and confusion that settled on his face a moment later.

Qhawe: Ufunani la, Phindile? Kwenzakaleni kuwe? (What are you doing in here, Phindile. What happened to you?)

Did he not know who and

what his brother was? I doubted that.

Me: Ngashawa yimoto. (I got hit by a car.)

Qhawe: Nini? (When?)

Me: Three days ago.

He rubbed his hand through his face in confusion and hurt.

Qhawe: Utholakele'ni lomuntu okashayisile? (Did they find the person responsible for this?)

Another lie.

I couldn't keep it up any longer. I'd lied my way

through most of my  
conversations with Zakhele.  
Me: Yebo. Uboshiwe. (Yes. He  
was arrested.)

It sounded believable.

I had to make it all up, again.

Because I don't remember  
Qhawe to be the kind that  
took anything lying down.

Just like Zakhele. He

would've probed further until  
he found all the answers and  
then he'd do a man hunt.

Qhawe: Benza kahle. (That's  
good.)

Me: Ufike nini ke wena la?

(When did you get here?)

Qhawe: Ngyafika nje namhlanje ekseni. Ng'suka eMbumbulu. (I just got here this morning. All the way from eMbumbulu.)

I'd established that much.

Zakhele was from eMbumbulu, he boasted about his rich Zulu roots. He was proud of the man he was and where he originated from. He prided himself in being a true Zulu man.

Me: Wedwa? (Alone?)

Qhawe: Cha. Nobhuti

omncane ney'ngane zami.

(No. With my younger brother and my kids.)

Me: Uney'ngane wena? (You have kid?) He nodded with so much pride, all his anger had vanished that instant.

Qhawe: Ezimbili. (Two.)

Me: Oh. Ai cha, ngyak'bongela.

(Congratulations.)

Qhawe: Zindala, aibo. (They're old enough.)

Me: Kodwa ungubaba (but you're a dad), That's a big deal.

Considering that his brothers had none.

Qhawe: Awu. Ngyabonga.

(Thank you.) He smiled with so much joy it was infectious.

He found a seat and lowered himself on it, scratching his

head. He wasn't a man of many words so I wasn't

bothered when he stayed

silent. I looked unseeing at

through the high window. To

avoid unnecessary eye

contact.

Qhawe: Phindile.

I tore my gaze from the

window and back to him.

He'd been staring at me this whole time.

Me: Qhawe.

Qhawe: Wang'lahlekela wena.

(You're the one that got away.) I cleared my throat.

His brother was just outside.

He could hear us at anytime, apart from the fact that he was shouting over the phone in frustration.

Me: Qhawe... your brother is just outside.

Qhawe: Uyangizwa'ni? (Do you hear me?) I forgot to

mention how hard headed he was.

Me: I hear you.

Qhawe: Bengikuthanda. (I loved you.) Highly inappropriate. But he said this unflinchingly.

Me: Bensingazani, Qhawe. (We hardly knew each other, Qhawe.)

Qhawe: Washelwa yimi wena. Ngangikwazi ke... (I asked you out. I already knew you...)

My heart palpitated hard.

First it was Bandile, with his irresistible self and that

stupid kiss that will probably occupy my mind for the next couple of months. Now Qhawe?

No.

These Mdluli brothers thought and treated me like a play thing.

Me: Beng'cela utshengise inhlonipho kubhut' wakho.

(Please how some respect to your brother.)

Qhawe: Ngyam'hlonipha uZakhele. Kodwa

bengikwazisa nje. (I respect my brother... but I just

wanted to let you know.)

He was never like this.

Me: Okay.

Even then, he kept his gaze glued to me. It was uncomfortable. Scorching and too intense... even when I cleared my throat.

Qhawe: Uqinisile njalo ngokuthi washawa yimoto?

(Are you being honest about being hit by a car.)

Me: Yebo. (Yes.)

He gave me a bored look. Like he could read right through my façade.

Qhawe: Yaz njalo ang'sona islima. Ungangenzi ke sona ngoba ngeke uzung'thande masengiz' phathisa okwaso. Ngithi kuwe, uqinisekile ukuthi yimoto le ekwenze wanje? (You know I'm not stupid. So don't treat like I am because I promise you, you won't like it when act stupid. So I'm asking you this, are you sure that a car did this to you.)

I didn't know how else to answer him. I'd finally ran out of solid and believable lies.

Zakhele: Usufuna  
ak'phendule athini ke manje,  
Qhawe. (What else to you  
want her to say now, Qhawe.)  
Relief washed over me like a  
long awaited rain on dry land.  
I had never been so happy to  
see him in my life. Qhawe  
was making this whole thing  
unnecessarily dramatic and  
exhausting. He cleared his  
throat.

Qhawe: Hay beng'buza nje  
wena Bafo. (I was just asking  
bro)

Zakhele: Umhlalisa

kab'hlungu umkami Bafo.  
Kahle ngemi buzo. (You're  
making my wife  
uncomfortable bro. Stop  
questioning her.) He nodded  
with so much  
uncomfortability washing  
over him that he sprang to  
his feet immediately and  
walked out.

I watched Zakhele with  
fondness as he paced the  
ward. He'd just saved me  
from an unnecessary  
interrogation. I was grateful.  
Me: You're making me dizzy

with all that pacing.

Zakhele: Sorry.

He halted and then scratched his chin in thought.

Me: Yini? (What's wrong?)

Zakhele: That was the priest on the phone. He can't make it today. As I'm speaking he's at the airport, about to board a plane.

Me: What?

Zakhele: I'm running low on options.

Me: And what was his excuse to go to the airport?

Zakhele: His daughter just

passed away and he's fetching the body from Limpopo.

Me: Oh. That's unfortunate. I send my condolences to his family.

Zakhele: Uhm... baby. It was just him and the deceased daughter. The wife passed away a few years ago.

Me: Oh. I uh... wow.

Zakhele: I'll let him know as soon as he lands then.

Me: Thank you.

He perched on the edge of the bed, three feet away

from me.

Zakhele: I want us to get married pretty soon.

Me: Really soon you mean.

Zakhele: Yes. Really soon.

Me: Then make it happen

Zak. I thought Zak always gets what he wants.

He narrowed his eye's at me and folds his arms across his chest.

Zakhele: You're pressuring me now?

Me: Maybe.

Zakhele: Why?

Me: Because, I want to be

Mrs. Mdluli.

He smiled.

Zakhele: You can't wait?

Me: Yes. I can't... make it happen.

Zakhele: Hmmm.

=====

The following day was none too exciting...

Zakhele was adamant on finding a priest to get us married when I'd suggested his first idea, Home Affairs. He said he wanted to give me the hospital wedding I'd seen so much in movies. I

regretted sharing that experience with him. I sat there reading books Bandile had brought me the previous evening and kept myself occupied. Nonhle and Sizwe hadn't gotten word on my stay here at the hospital when I asked Bandile so nicely to notify them. How I wish had them right here with me, concocting and scheming like we did wherever we were together. I missed the days when we'd smoke weed at work and

laugh all day until the manager called us to chastise us. I missed Sizwe's hot, juicy gossip. His crazy life with his taxi driver boyfriend and the spontaneous sex they have. He'd insist on telling us about it even when we were clearly disgusted by the details. Then there was Nonhle and her ranting and raving about her boyfriend problems and asking for advise she'd ignore a second later. Such a toxic bunch but we made it work. I missed my life, my privacy

and my own bed. I missed watching old re-runs of Hawaii Five-0. Grey's Anatomy and The Good Fight. I closed the book in frustration and put it next to me. Bandile had better be right... I love Zakhele and the thought of faking my kidnapping didn't sit well with me. But if I was bound to end up six feet under for loving him and believing that he would change then I had no other option. I had to make a run for it.

Bandile: Mercy.

I lifted my gaze from my fingernails to his face. His gorgeous and tempting face... lord lead me from temptation.

Me: Yes?

Bandile: They're here. Are you ready? Zakhele is an hour out...

Me: And hour out from what?

Bandile: He's coming here.

We have to make it look like a struggle.

Me: Oh. Okay.

Bandile: I'll be waiting at the

car for you.

He gave me one last nod before he walked out. Now I had brace myself for anything...

....

TEN

-Gracie

I paced the bedroom immediately after the call. Bandile had just told me he was staying at his brother's place for another month. He was someone's husband, he's days of acting like a bachelor

were way behind him. He never quite understood the concept of a marriage, he thought it was all roses and rainbows throughout. We've been through so much and we've overcome quite a number of obstacles because of his cheating ways. Even with the many alignments in my name and his, it made no difference. He could never get enough of these whores he met at the night clubs he frequented. At some point he'd thought his cheating

was nondescript. He'd call me litigious and Inane and I'd let it all get to my head.

He'd started frequenting this club and spending an inordinate amount of time there. But as his wife I turned a blind eye to his lipstick smeared collars, the cheap perfume scents the had rubbed off of his cotton shirts. His delicate underwear that dripped with come and smelled like pussy most of the time. He didn't quite understand that I could

see these things clear as day. He was a little oblivious to the truth for a while. But then he grew. He became the man I'd once married, stopped gelavanting and sticking his penis into every whole there was out there. He owned up to his mistakes and he worked on fixing us. I hadn't meant to scare him but I pulled a stunt that brought him back to his senses. I threatened to commit suicide and straightened up, he quit

going to clubs and returning home with lipstick stains and cheap perfume all over him. I'd prayed hard for that, fasted and meditated. But it was all futile in the end. But the moment I lost my way and kiss Pedro, my ex fiancè in a moment of heat I am crucified. It was an honest mistake, something that would never happen again. I deeply regretted crossing that line and I would make it up to him. He didn't care about my remorse, he

said that I'd always been impulsive and temperamental. He'd given me an ultimatum at some point, marriage counselling or he'd leave. I agreed to that, he left anyway. It was already etched deep his mind, the need to vanish for a while, unknown location. That would put a dent on our relationship and marriage altogether. I regretted letting him go when I could've made a threat. Even if it's one threat.

I had my phone in my hand as I paced the room. What was he so busy with anyway? I'd refrained from pulling out my PI contacts to start digging. I didn't want to be that wife, imperative and paranoid. I know he loves me. He never gave me any reason to doubt him after the whore stunt he'd pulled years back. Why start now?

Mandy: Grace?

Me: Uhm- sorry, yes?

Mandy: It's okay to be distracted babe. But don't

get lost.

I sighed, dropping my head.

Me: I'm sorry girl.

I'd been pacing my room so much I forgot I had a guest. I sat down and looked unseeing at the floor to ceiling window, a great focus area for my thoughts.

Mandy: He refuses to come home?

Me: Yes. I'm afraid he'll learn the truth that way.

Mandy: No. He won't. You keep working through that witch doctor and none of

them will know. Remember, they're all focused on mission. Finding their mother.

Me: Yeah. But- Bandile is exceptionally smart and quick on his feet. When he learns the truth behind her disappearance then I'm truly dead.

A loud, sharp intake of breath was audible in the room. She was frustrated..

Mandy: Enough negativity. She knows the truth behind Faith's death and she'll sing.

Me: She said she knew nothing about her relationship with Qhawe.

Mandy: Yes. But she knows about the 'accident' and I can assure you that she'll sing soon enough.

Me: I hope you're right.

Mandy: Qhawe had his chance to explain. He never did.

Me: I think there's more to this.

Mandy: There.

As much as Bab'Gumbi is an asset to this investigation he

needed to be silenced. He knew too much.

Me: I should go to work.

Mandy: I'll hold the fort.

Incase he returns to get some clothes.

Me: Good idea.

I doubted he would return but it didn't hurt to have a little faith. I took my bag and shoes from the side of the bed and hurried toward the door.

Mandy: I love you sis.

Me: I know. I love you too.

This was a personal mission

for both of us. We needed to learn the truth behind my father and sister's deaths. It was important that we found peace and healing.

I loved Bandile. Probably way more than I should and I loved Zakhele too. I think I wanted him more than I did my husband but I also couldn't let it blind me from this.

=====

-Bandile

As much as I had faith in this plan, a part of me felt guilty

for betraying my perpetual other half. I knew that it would all backfire at some point too but a huge, dominant part of me felt the need to rescue this woman and be her saviour. I'd seen too many deaths of innocent women around me to let it go on like this. The night I walked in on Zakhele standing over Yolanda's badly beaten and barely alive body I made a decision. I couldn't watch them die like this. Palesa, Sydney and

Nomonde had listened to my warnings. They left within a period of 2 months. I was grateful to have successfully instilled an ounce of wisdom and strength to the women who were able to free themselves from this invisible hold Zakhele seems to have over them. Mercy on the other end was special because she was carrying a baby. Just like Yolanda I would do my best to protect her. I failed once, I wasn't about to fail again. I would

never be able to live with myself.

I hurried to the parking lot and started the car...

\*\*\*\*\*

She was none too happy about the manner in which her abduction had been conducted but we had to make it look real or else Zakhele would know exactly what had went down. He would stop at nothing to find the truth and then bodies would start dropping. I watched as she lay on her

back in the backseat. I drove out of the car park and braced myself for any surprises.

Mercy: "Where are you taking me?"

Me: "I haven't decided yet. But for now I'll just take you to a secluded safe-house."

Mercy: "Safe-house?" She asked incredulously.

Me: "Yeah, you don't like the idea?"

Mercy: "No. No. It's not that. I didn't think it would be so complicated."

Me: "Oh."

It was go big or go home at this point.

We reached the safe-house in no time and I showed her around. She had to sit on a wheelchair all the while. She didn't like the idea but in the state that she was in we couldn't take any chances. I pushed her around the house and made sure that she was comfortable with the setting before we had lunch. I was expecting a call from Zakhele in about 10 minutes so I

excused myself in the middle of chewing.

And just as I had predicted, he called. He sounded mad.

Zakhele: "Bandile."

He tried with all his might to guise the anger and rage but I could sense it.

Me: "Zakhele, I'm in a meeting Bafo."

Zakhele: "Bandile, where is my wife?" He asked shakily.

Me: "What?" I feigned being clueless and impatient.

A loud intake of breath was audible through the speaker.

Zakhele: "Where is she?"

Me: "Zakhele, ukhulumanga ngani manje. I told you ukuthi (that) I'm in a meeting.

Enunciate your words."

(Zakhele, what are you talking about now.)

Zakhele: "Bam'thathile, Bandile.(They took her, Bandile.) They fucking took my wife!"

Me: "Who took who!" I yelled.

Zakhele: "Phindile! They took Phindile! SHE'S GONE!" He shouted in kind. It was kind of expected. I could hear his

tone wavering into a  
whimper. He was about to  
start crying, weak ass nigga.  
Me: "WHAT? Who took her?  
What the fuck man, how?"  
Zakhele: "Bam'thathile!"  
(They took her.) It came out  
as a whisper, his voice filled  
with pain, anger, worry and  
hopelessness. I'd never heard  
my brother sound like this,  
even when Yolanda was  
buried. He kept a strong front  
and he never cried in front of  
us. He always held it  
together.

But right there he just broke down. I heard him sobbing. The scene must've been really convincing for for him to cry like that from out of nowhere.

Me: "I'm on my way. Call the others." I hung up and took a deep, replenishing breath. I needed to think and fast.

Mercy: "Was that Zak?" She asked softly. I turned and cleared my throat as I faced her.

Me: "Yeah. He uhm- he's crying." She gasped

inconspicuously. Then she covered her mouth with the palm of her hand. "I think we made a mistake, Mercy. We shouldn't have taken you right then."

Mercy: Oh my God.

Worry enshrouded her facial features.

Me: It's been done though.

We can't go back now.

I cleared my throat again.

Mercy: I- I think I need some air.

Me: Mercy.

Mercy: Please.

She turned back her wheelchair and wheeled herself back inside. She was trying to get away from me frantically.

It saddened me to see her this way. I realise now that we should've waited. I think in his head Zakhele was determined to make this happen, to marry Mercy. She doesn't realise the dangers involved in this. Marrying my brother is a death sentence within itself. She struggled to digest this pathologically. I

understood where she came from exactly, I'd planted a seed of doubt in her mind by telling her that we'd made a mistake when in actual fact we'd done the right thing. Now all I had to do was show up and make sure I kept up an appearance until she was safely out of this place. Then I would truly rest and breathe.

=====

I arrived at the hospital 15 minutes later and found Zakhele on the floor weeping, in her ward. The

place was a mess. Qhawe was pacing the space between the window and the water dispenser and Wandile was on the phone with someone. I walked up to Zakhele, knelt beside him and patted his shoulder.

Me: You can't be serious.

Zakhele: Bam'thathile!

He sounded even worse than when I first took her to the hospital.

Me: Obani? Obani abamthathile Zakhele? (Who? Who took her Zakhele?) But

he refused to answer. He just cried. I'd never seen him so broken and torn down.

Qhawe: Zizonya lenzinja.

Bazonya bonke! (They'll pay.

They will all pay!) He yelled for everyone to hear. He was going insane. Wandile hung up his phone and then walked over to where Zakhele had been lying.

Wandile: Angsazi ke mina. (I'm all out of options.)

Me: Zakhele, khuluma nam Bafo. (Speak to me bro.)

Zakhele: Ngfun' uPhindile

mina. Ngfun' uPhindile wam!  
OWAMIIIIII!

He hit his fist against the tiled floor.

Me: We have to get him out of here.

Zakhele: Hayi! HAYI!!! FIND MY WIFE FIRST. NGFUN' UPHINDILE WAM MINA!

I ran my hand down my face in defeat. He was adamant on staying on this cold, tiled floor. Qhawe refused to let it rest for now. He cursed under his breath like a madman. Wandile looked

dumbstruck, he knew nothing about this.

Me: We'll find your wife. You need to get off this floor and start somewhere.

Zakhele: NGYEKENI!

He cried out as we tried to lift him off the ground. The nurses and doctors were glued at the door looking at us. I was tempted to yell at them to do something but then it clicked in my head that there was only so much they could do. So I mouthed to the doctor to sedate him.

At least so he can rest because the place had been trashed by him moment realisation dawned on him. He threw everything on the floor and hurt himself in the process. He was bleeding. He nodded and disappeared. 10 minutes later he was lying on the bed that had belonged to Phindile once. Qhawe was sitting by the window with his head elsewhere and Wandile had left. I on the other hand was texting Phindile with updates on his

condition. It seemed this was a little too hard for everyone to digest. I was battling with myself on whether or not to come clean and spare my brother but what good would it do Phindile?

...

ELEVEN

-Mercy

He smiled down at me and scratched his head. He was standing over me, hovering

to be exact.

“Are you okay?”

Me: Yes.

I cleared my throat and shifted backwards. I was lying on my back on the soft, inviting couch.

Me: I needed to lie down.

He had this contagious smile plastered across his face. He had been gone for most of the afternoon and the night. He called in a few times to check on me and kept up constant updates on Zakhele's escalating

condition and that wasn't doing so well. He'd gone into shock three times in an hour.  
Bandile: You ate?

Me: I'm not hungry.

Bandile: But you have to at least eat something. I managed to get your meds.

Me: Thank you Bandile but not right now. I just wanna lie down here and look at the beautiful ceiling.

He nodded and stopped persisting. It would be much easier if we stayed out of each other's way. That way I

could focus solely on my recovery and he would do whatever it is to get me to safety.

Bandile: Call me when you need to get to your bedroom.

Me: I will. Thanks.

I shut my eye's.

His heavy presence receded away. I could no longer smell his strong, heavy scent of old spice. A door shut somewhere in the house and then it was silent again. I hadn't executed him to come home so early but I was glad

he was here. That way I felt more safe than when I sat there, wondering what was going to happen next. He has done his part, I'm safe and away from the evil clutches of the love of my life. What happens now that I'm 'missing?' What about my friends and colleagues? I'd fallen in love and now I was paying the price. It would seem I prayed the price quite frequently in my life. I owed the world a lot.

I started singing from out of

nowhere. A song so etched in my brain that it would play without me thinking too much about it. I listened to a lot of Soul & RnB. So this song was very close to my heart, A song by Sabrina Claudio. Me in Her. It was slow but I could hear the beat in my head loud and clear... I'd sang it so many times in front of the mirror and in the shower but never in front of a crowd. I sang to my hearts content and then I reached out to wipe the tears falling

to the side of my face. It had nothing to do with my situation but it made me feel better. It healed the wounds that had formed and stuck onto the flash of my soul.

Bandile: Wow.

I shrieked.

I almost jumped out of my skin. When did he get here!

Me: Bandile!

Bandile: Sorry. I just... you sing so beautifully. You drew me out of my sleep with that beautiful voice.

I cleared my throat.

I don't remember when I last sang. It felt strange not to sing anymore.

Me: Thank you.

Bandile: Do you mind singing like that again?

Me: Bandi-

Bandile: Please.

Me: I can't. I-

Bandile: I'll just stay in my bedroom then. I won't make it awkward for you.

I cleared my throat.

Me: I'll sing. You don't have to leave.

I sat up and looked down at

my hands. I started singing again.

Snoh Aalegra this time around. I Want You Around was the name of the song. At some point I lifted my eye's up and met his. I sang a specific line to him. It wasn't meant for him but I just sang it.

His intense gaze bore hole into my soul. His jaw clenched and his face changing from soft and beautiful to hard, feral and hot. I stopped singing

midway and cleared my throat. He looked so much like him that I could no longer sing.

Me: I uh, I think I'd like to go to my bedroom now.

Bandile: Why did you stop?

Me: Please take me to my room.

I wasn't about to have this conversation with him. He just elicited some uncomfortable thoughts and I wasn't going to explore them. Not when I was barely in the right state of mind.

He didn't probe. He helped me onto my wheelchair and wheeled me silently to my bedroom. He shut the door behind him after he'd left and I breathed.

\*\*\*\*\*

This house was so silent and unsettlingly dark at night that I would constantly wake up thinking I'd heard something when it was just my imagination playing tricks on me. I wanted to check the time but the phone Bandile had given me to use while I

was here had stayed behind in the lounge. I could use to the distraction but then, it wa- argh! Fuck this. I helped myself off the bed and onto the wheelchair through the agonizing pain and wheeled myself to the lounge. The phone was on the coffee table next to the remote. I reached for it and checked the time.

02:30 AM.

Great.

Just what I needed.

More paranoia.

Why was it still so early? I couldn't will my body to go to sleep anymore than I could stop myself from thinking about Bandile and the fact that he was in the same house with me and that- What am I doing? Where is this all coming from anyway? Trepidation settled in. One more thing to strain my body. I might as well look for another distraction. I couldn't carry on like this. I reach the kitchen and the fridge door proved impossible to reach in

my position. I'd become too short to reach food now all thanks to Zakhele.

"You could've just come to me. I was right there in the lounge." I froze. Where the hell did he come from again? He had this uncanny ability to be at the same place as me or reach me so silently it was baffling. He move silently like a shadow and descenced on me when I least expected it. Me: Bandile.

It came out as a whisper.

An unintended whisper that

shook my body. I cleared my stubborn throat and wheeled myself back.

Me: If you would kindly get me something to eat. Please.

He nodded.

He was shirtless. My eyes darted to the wall behind him and everywhere else but his spectacular torso. His abs rippling and his chiseled chest dripping with barely visible sweat. He got me some chocolate cake and a warm glass of milk, placed the on the counter top and

from out of nowhere.

Literally out of nowhere he scooped me up and sat me down on the counter next to my food. He reached for two forks and stood closely next to the cake and stuck the fork out and scooped a piece. He threw it into his mouth and then he watched me. I thought the cake was for me, It was kind of thick and fat but... I was eating for two now.

Bandile: What?

Me: Hm.m, nothing.

I scooped a piece too and washed it down with the milk.

We ate in silence and it didn't find it strange. It couldn't handle being in the same room with him after i sang to him earlier. But I couldn't really chase him away in his own house. He had a right to invade my space in his own kitchen.

Bandile: We'll get you something to wear tomorrow.

Me: We'll?

Bandile: Me and Nomali, the maid.

Me: Uhm. Won't it look suspicious?

Bandile: Not really. I'll be with a fellow female. How suspicious could that look?

Me: I mea- never mind.

Bandile: I'm very careful, Mercy.

I nodded.

Me: Of course.

He reached for the milk and took a sip then placed in my hand.

He helped me off the counter

and back onto my wheelchair. He placed the plate in my lap.

Bandile: Goodnight.

And with that he was gone.

Okay.

He just felt this insatiable desire to torment me

because it was exciting to

him. He left his scent

lingering in the kitchen and

my vagina clenched at the

scent. Why was he suddenly

so appealing to me?

Was this pregnancy messing

with my head? Shit!

I forgot about the bun in the oven. I took the cake to my bedroom. I don't think I could handle bumping into him again and enduring all those mixed emotions.

=====

2 WEEKS LATER

He was in my face.

Everyday, he was either working from home or bothering me to no end. He'd brought his wife here, twice. Told her about my dilemma and that I would be leaving this place in a week or two,

depending on the length of time it took his guy to fix my documents. Grace was nice when her husband was around and silent when he wasn't. She didn't have much to say to me verbally but the way in which she stared at me creeped me out. It's like she loathed me but could never act on it because she didn't know exactly how to. Bandile had kissed me again. This time he pinned me against the wall and held me there until he came to his

senses. By then I had already made up my mind! I would give it to him if he really wanted it. But it never got to that because I pushed him back and threw up all over the place. After that I was annoyed by him in just a space of 3 minutes. I stayed away from him for three whole days until i recovered from my unstable emotional connection. The moment I laid eye's on him I wanted to strangle him.

From then on I threw up

almost every morning and every night. Sometimes I wanted Bandile badly, I wanted to be held and kissed by him. The next I wanted him out of here, I wanted him dead. But then I wanted him again, to kiss me and hold me tight. To ensure my safety. Another week went by and that marked three weeks of living and breathing the same air as him. It was much better than living in fear but also it was straineous and tedious to pretend I didn't want him

when I did and to pretend that I didn't want to strangle him when the need was so strong. It shocked me how much I could restrain myself. Grace stopped coming here after she found me in Bandile's arms. She jumped to conclusions only to learn I'd sprained my ankle trying to evade the kitchen counter corner. I fell on the floor. But Bandile talked her down. Not sure how she feels about this but she seemed calm when she left.

.

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Wednesdays morning I was limping to the kitchen to get something to eat. Bandile hadn't been here for 4 days and that was because I'd asked him to go home and be with his wife. The need and wanting him had grown larger and me insistent from then on. I loved having him here to take care of me and to show me the dos and donts of this place and what to eat. He stopped

mentioning Zakhele the first week I came here and has since kept it up. The stress had left my body and I was slowly gaining weight. I was glowing, visibly and my skin showed. He complemented me almost always but he managed to keep the distance between us. He stayed away from kissing him and I tried to block out how good he felt against me. I wanted to make it easier on both of us doing things for myself and keeping my

distance too but he was persistent on taking care of me. He fucked with my emotions and he didn't know it.

I made a greasy breakfast and sat at the kitchen counter. It tasted even better than Zakhele gave it credit for. He downplayed his comments on my food.

Bandile loved my cooking and without the constant voice in my head reminding me that my cooking tasted like crap it was actually decent. Zakhele

just had this bad habit of discarding my efforts because he couldn't appreciate things for what they truly were.

.

I felt his warm, soft hand on mine and his warm breath brushing against the nape of my neck. He stood behind me and then he reached for the other hand. He closed it over mine and helped me off the chair I'd been sitting on. He turned me around to face him and then he pulled me

close to him.

"Phindile."

My body froze.

What nightmare was this! I needed to wake up right now. My breathing hitched.

Me: Za-

Zakhele: Shhh. I won't hurt you.

The softness in his tone was questionable. How did he find me?

Me: Wha-

Zakhele: I missed you.

I blinked and in his place stood Bandile. I blinked a

couple of more times and then looked at him again. It was just Bandile. Did my mind just replace Bandile's face with Zakhele's? I was shaking.

Bandile: Mercy?

His soft, seductive tone broke me out of my day-mare.

Me: I- It's just you.

It was only Bandile!

**BANDILE AND NOT ZAKHELE.**

My mind had been playing tricks on me.

Me: Bandile!

It registered in my mind. I threw myself at him and held on to him. Thank goodness it was just him and not...

Me: Thank god it's just you. I thought I'd just seen Zakhele...

Bandile: It's just me.

I started kissing his ear, the side of his face, his cheekbone and his lips. I settled there and kissed him deeply.

Me: It's you. It's just you! I murmured against his lips. He reciprocated the kiss in

kind and held me tight. I'd been waiting patiently for him to get home.

Bandile: It's okay. I'm here. He murmured against my lips.

Me: Thank you for coming back.

Bandile: Come.

He took my hand and pulled me along as we made our way to his bedroom. He closed the door behind us and we both crawled onto the bed. He lay back and I joined him. He cuddled me

very close to him, probably to close for comfort but I didn't mind. I held onto him, my head on his chest.

Me: I missed you.

I felt him smile as he laughed softly. I found myself kissing his chest and then his cheek and his Adam's apple. "Thank you for returning." I

whispered against the skin of his neck.

Bandile: You're safe.

I nodded and buried my face in his chest. He'd taken better care of me in these three

weeks than Zakhele could his entire life.

....

TWELVE

-Gracie

He said he wouldn't let me in the next time I came over here. It's funny how he didn't even think twice about flipping the lock up and sliding the door to the side. But I wasn't here to rub that in his face. I came here as a concerned sister in-law. He watched me place the

takeaway bag on the counter and my clutch just next to it. I turned to face him and just then i noticed the stubble that had accumulated on his face, his uncombed hair and his sweatpants. He hadn't had a shower and shave in days, I could tell by the way he stared at me.

Me: You can't keep living like this.

Zakhele: Grace.

Me: You're a walking zombie.

Zakhele: How are you?

He completely blocked out

my comments. I sighed, moving toward him. I threw my hands around his neck and he remained rigid and unmoving.

Me: Everything is going to be okay.

Zakhele: I'm good too.

He pushed me off and move toward the takeaway bag. He opened it and emptied it out into the counter.

Zakhele: Who sent you here?

Me: No one sends me, Zakhele. I came here on my own accord.

Zakhele: To do what?

Me: To help you out. Bandile is worried about you, that means I'm worried about.

He scoffed.

That meant he was either imperturbed or just bored of hearing us say this. I'd called him almost everyday but he wouldn't take my calls. He read my texts and never replied.

Zakhele: Why are you worried about me, Grace?

Me: Because I care about you. You're my brother in-law.

Zakhele: I am? Wow. I never noticed.

Me: Hayi, Zakhele!

He stopped opening the takeaway containers and placed his hands on the counter. Clearly frustrated and irritated by my constant response to all his questions.

Zakhele: Uzofunani la ngempela Grace? Ngoba mina ng'fun' Indunu (What do you want here, really.

Because I want Pussy).

Uhambile uPhindile (Phindile is gone) and that's all I can

think about. Pussy would be a great distraction right now so if you're not here ukuzong'nyobisa (to give me some pussy), you might as well get the fuck out.

My initial reaction was a loud, sharp gasp. But then it sank in. I knew this would be his only other resort. To find pussy as a distraction and a sort of reprieve from his misery. A part of me got excited at his blunt and straight-to-the-point revelation. I'd always wanted

to get him like this, weak and vulnerable. But another lucid part of me stood strong and unshaken. I couldn't let this blind me from my mission. As much as I've always wanted Zakhele I couldn't let it cloud my judgement of this family.

Me: Ufuna ngik'nyobise kanjani (How could you ask me for Pussy) Zakhele, I'm your brother's wife.

Zakhele: Ungzong'khulumel' amasimba wena. Uze la ngoba ufuna iPipi (Don't talk shit. You came here because

you want dick.) I can see it in your eye's.

I chuckled, shaking my head. Ngiyavivinywa nkosi, ngisize. He folded his arms across his chest and lent forward over the counter. He ogled me, taking his time to size me up and scrutinize me. It was so asinine of him to walk this path knowing his brother.

Me: Mina ngifuna ipipi Zakhele? Usuyakwazi wena lokho mva nje? Yindaba bhuti, abasekho onondindwa bakho obuba biza

bazok'nyobisa manje  
uphaphela mina? (I want dick,  
Zakhele? You know that  
now? What's the matter,  
your hoes have given up  
being at you beck and call  
now you're patronizing me?)  
He just rolled his eye's,  
untangled his arms and used  
them to balance himself on  
the counter. "Yini, you can't  
take the truth now?"

Zakhele: Uyang'funa (You  
want me), admit it. You can't  
stand the fact that you can't  
get me.

Me: I love your enthusiasm, Zak. But you're way in over your head.

Zakhele: Am I?

Me: Listen, I think I've overstayed my welcome. I'll leave now. Enjoy the food and leave some for later.

Zakhele: Ave ulisaba iqiniso Gracie. (You're so scared of the truth Grace)

Me: Wouldn't you like to know.

I approached the counter and grabbed my clutch. "I'll leave you to your lunch then. You

should shave that stubble. Really isn't a great look on you." I winked at him, swirled and took slow, steady strides to the door. Swaying my ass and giving him the full, inobscured view. I heard him laugh inwardly, I'd touched and rattled his cage.

BINGO!

He cleared his throat...

Zakhele: Wait.

I stilled near the door handle and turned to face him.

Me: Are you done acting like a boy?

Zakhele: Don't be like that.

Me: Angith' ufun' indunu wena? (You want Pussy, don't you?)

Zakhele: It's all I can think of.

Me: I could hook you up.

I had someone in mind.

Someone I could use to get

him to spill. That way I

preserve myself for my

husband and sustain our 8

years of marriage while

redeeming myself. Great plan

Gracie.

Zakhele: That's the thing,

Grace. Ng'funa wena. (I want

you.)

No surprise there.

Me: Unfortunately, Zak. I'm off the table, so is Mandy.

Zakhele: Fuck Mandy, Ngfun' eyakho indunu mina. (I want your pussy.)

I chuckled.

He wouldn't give up. I knew it.

So I had to up the stakes.

Me: So do I but we can't always get what we want.

Right?

Zakhele: Are you sure?

Me: Zak. Enough with the games. I'm off the table, but I

can you someone who won't mind being at your beck and call. Everyday.

Zakhele: If she is not you then no. I'm all good.

He stuffed his face with Raman. He loved Chinese food despite his uncensored hatred for the culture itself. He never failed to express his deep seated hatred for the way they live and conduct their rules but he is awfully attracted to many of their products. Mainly food and anime.

Me: Well then, I will see you again some day.

He had a way of unconsciously messing with my plans. I flipped the lock and exited the house in much reluctance.

Zakhele: Safe drive.

Me: Fuck you.

He winked at me.

I flipped him off with a middle finger and then I headed to my car.

Fucking asshole.

I entered my car and called Bab'Gumbi. He hated having

to hear from me all the time  
but I needed something.

Anything get Zakhele to talk.

Bab'Gumbi: Ntokazi yakwa  
Langa. (Ms Langa)

Me: Baba. I need to see you,  
today if possible.

Bab'Gumbi: Kumayelana  
nani? Okwa manje angikho  
ekhaya, ngisendleleni eya  
eMlazi. (What is this about?  
I'm not at home right now.  
I'm on my way to Mlazi.)

Shit!

Me: No. I just wanted some  
herbs for this man...

Bab'Gumbi: Ngizobuya k'sasa Ntokazi. Ngilinde. (I'll come back tomorrow Ms. Wait for me.)

Me: I will. Goodbye.

I hung up first and cursed! He was delaying my damn plans! I looked at the time on my watch and then thought back to Bandile and that skank he was "Trying to save" from his brother. I could tell just by looking at her that she would be all over him the moment I left that place.

She needed to understand,

like all those other women that Bandile and Zakhele belonged to me. They were my men! I was first!

I exited the car, locked it and trudged back inside the house. With the herbs that I took this morning, He should be all over me the moment I kiss him.

He opened the door for me again and pulled me inside. No questions asked and he kissed me. Right on! I would fuck him all day and claim him as my own. Then I would

claim Bandile and have them playing in the palm of my hand. I would destroy them like they'd destroyed my family. I was going to drive them both to insanity and then kill Qhawe.

But first:

I would make love to Zakhele. I was going to show him just how much I'd always wanted him. I loved him before Yolanda and all those other skanks. I should've been the one to carry his child and not Yolanda.

I loved him.

=====

-Mandy

I opened the door for him.

He was a little startled at first  
but then he smiled.

Me: She's not here.

Qhawe: I know.

Me: What are you doing  
here?

Qhawe: I wanted to see you.  
It's important.

Me: I'm listening.

Qhawe: Can I come in?

I sighed.

Letting him in would be

breaking a promise I made to myself and Grace. These men had a way of turning us to putty. I hated that he could just stand there and I'd melt.

Me: Sure.

I moved away from the entrance and allowed him in. He took my hand and dragged me toward the lounge.

Qhawe: Sit down.

Me: What is this all about?

Qhawe: Sit down Amanda.

I obeyed his command and sat. He went down on one

knee and placed a hand on my thigh.

Me: Wha-

Qhawe: Marry me.

I almost jumped out of my skin. My heart caught in my throat.

Me: What?

Qhawe: Ng'sshade Amanda Langa.

Oh my God.

Why was he doing this to me? He just had this uncanny ability to fuck with my emotions and render me immobile.

Me: Qhawe...

I whispered.

Qhawe: I love you.

=====

-Gracie

He withdrew himself after a few rounds and retreated to the bedroom. I had the idea that my herbs hadn't done the job. He'd enjoyed himself when we began. We made love and we fucked. Why was he not falling hard for me?

Me: Are you okay in there?

He was silent.

I was still buried deep within

his sheets and I felt empty after he drew out his large cock. I could still feel his warm skin on mine... the remnants of cum dripping from my pussy to the crack of my ass. Warm and sticky.  
Zakhele: I'm okay.

Me: Should I-

Zakhele: You should go, Grace.

Me: Excuse me?

Zakhele: You should go.

The bathroom door swung open and he stood at the center, his cock touching his

chiseled abs. He still wanted me.

Me: But we're not done here.

Zakhele: We can't do th-

Me: We've already fucked all over this place. And by the looks of things, you still want me. If your cock is anything to go by.

He cupped his erection and stroked it a couple of times and it leaked.

Zakhele: Damn right.

Me: Then don't wait. Don't over think it. Just come to bed and show me how much

you want me.

Zakhele: Fuck!

=====

-Mercy

I turned around to face him.

He was snoring gently, his

lips parted. He looked like

heaven on a pillow. He had

his hand loosely draped

around me, the moment I

began moving he pulled me

close and locked me in.

Bandile: Hmmm. No.

I snuggled close and buried

my head on his chest. "Don't

go."

Me: I won't.

I felt his soft lips on the skin of my forehead. "I'm not going anywhere."

...

#Continues

TWELVE (2)

-Mercy

I woke up to him staring at the window, his hands buried deep in his pockets. I didn't realise he was gone until now, when my skin came into contact with his cold side of the bed. From the way he

stood near the window I could tell he was deep in thought by the way his face contorted. He was frustrated and mad at someone. Or something. I watched him go through the motions and then he turned his head toward me. I pretended I was still in deep sleep.

Bandile: Yeah. She's still asleep. I'll get there quick and we'll call him to find out more about this. Yeah.

He hung up I think because he was suddenly silent. I felt

his cold lips on my forehead and then he moved back. I stirred. "I'll be back soon. I just need to run some errands."

Me: Hmm.

Bandile: Sleep tight.

He left.

The door shut gently behind him and it was cold that instant.

He was gone, again. I hugged the pillow tighter and snuggled it close to me. His scent radiated from the soft cushion and that was more

than enough reassurance  
that he'd be back.

=====

-Mandy

The fat rock fit snuggle on my  
matrimonial finger and it  
shone in the sun. I'd said yes.  
It wasn't a spur of the  
moment decision. He was the  
father of my kids and despite  
him being a possible suspect  
in the murder of my sister I  
loved him. Faith's death was  
a tragedy, an unfortunate  
tragedy and Qhawe was  
sitting on hard evidence. We

didn't know that it might be  
but we were willing to dig  
deeper to find it.

I don't know how I was ever  
going to explain this rock to  
Grace. She would probably  
hate my guts which was why  
I would have to downplay it.  
I would put off the wedding  
idea until we uncovered the  
truth behind Faith's death.

My love for Qhawe was  
infinite, I would love him even  
if he were dead.

I smiled at the rock once  
again. It was marvellous and

a little too big for my slim finger. It caused the bend to slip and slide around my finger but that didn't matter. Even though I would've appreciated it if Qhawe paid a little and careful attention to detail at times. He wanted what was best for me and I would appreciate that to my death. I watched the door slide open and she walked in.  
Grace: He fell for it.

Me: Fell for what?

Grace: The whole thing. He knows now that I want him

too. But that doesn't matter.  
She had her high heels  
dangling from her fingers and  
her handbag on the other  
hand.

Me: What are you talking  
about, Grace?

She looked up at me.

Grace: He-

And then she went silent.  
What is she talking about?  
Who fell for what exactly?  
And where is she coming  
from.

Grace: I'm on the phone  
Mandy.

She pointed to the device sticking out of her ear.

Me: Oh! Sorry.

I mouthed. She rolled her eye's and moved along, removing her blazer and throwing it on the couch along with her heels and bag and then she turned spontaneously to stare at me.

Grace: Coffee please babe.

Me: Cool.

I stopped admiring the rock on my finger and prepared two mugs for coffee. She

was chatting happily with whomever was on the other line, ignoring me flat.

Should've expected this.

Grace: Yeah. I should've done it the other way but he refused anyone else. He wanted to fuck me.

Did she make a detour from work to her husbands place?

But then she couldn't have, the last time she spoke to him she was livid, breathing fire. She'd convinced herself that she didn't need him in her bed until she was calm

and back to her senses. So who could she have been talking about?

I took the coffee to her once I'd made it and handed it to her. She thanked me and retired to her bedroom upstairs and I was left wondering who the hell she'd been referring to.

\*Where are you ?\* That was a text I had just received from Qhawe. He wasn't much of a texter, I could tell by the unnecessary spacing between each word.

\*Where you left me this afternoon. At my sister's place. Call me instead.\* The text went through and a second later my phone vibrated.

Me: You're terrible at texting.

Qhawe: I'm outside.

Me: Huh?

Qhawe: Ngila phandle. Woza.  
(I'm right outside. Come.)

He hung up afterwards.

I placed the mug of coffee on the table, pushed my feet back into my slippers and headed for the door with my

phone in my hand.  
Sure enough he was.  
Standing outside his car,  
ankles crossed over each  
other and his hands buried  
deep in his pockets. He had  
his spotty (bucket hat) barely  
hanging on to his bald head.  
He removed it and crushed it  
into his hand. Standing up  
straight and untangling his  
ankels. He reached out for  
me and pulled me in a warm,  
bone crushing hug. I let it  
linger because his cologne  
was everything. He kissed my

neck and then let go...

Qhawe: Sawubona Ntokazi yakwa Langa. Waze wamuhle. (Good evening Ms. Langa. You look stunning.) I couldn't help the blush that creeped up on my face. I was in my Pyjamas basically.

Me: Waze wanehaba bo. (Stop exaggerating.) I'm in my Pyjamas.

Qhawe: K'lungile phela nalapho. (That's okay.) You look breath taking.

Me: Kahle. I know you want something when you keep

sweet talking me like that.  
He laughed awkwardly,  
scratching his head.

Qhawe: Ja. Eish.

Me: Khuluma. (Talk)

He cleared his throat and  
shifted backwards to get a  
better view of me.

Qhawe: Bengi ngathanda  
uma ungeza kwam namuhla.  
Uzo lala khona no Phiwo and  
Amahle. (I would really  
appreciate it if you came to  
my place tonight. To sleep  
with me and the kids.)

I smiled sweetly.

Me: K'lungile. Let me go get my things and we can leave together.

Qhawe: Yebo.

He bowed slightly and let go of my hand. He watched me as I headed back inside the house to get my things.

Knowing Gracie, she wouldn't care much if I left. She was too immersed in her call to pay any attention to me anyway. She wouldn't miss me until the morning after when there was no breakfast on the table.

I returned a few minutes later and he helped me into the car. No questions asked and he drove us off.

=====

-Mercy

I felt his warm hand on the small of my back as I was preparing dinner. He didn't say much, he's presence alone was enough. He kissed the side of my head and then he dropped his hand and the skin on my back felt cold. He moved to the fridge and reached for bottled water

and a glass from the cupboard on the other side. Even as he moved around the kitchen he did it with such grace and influence that I couldn't tear my eye's off of him. He took a sip and noticed I was staring. I averted my gaze in a haste back to the chopping board. He chuckled humorlessly, moving around the counter to the other side.

Bandile: How was your day?  
I turned to face him and he had his eye's glued to me.

Me: It was normal. Nothing special, yours?

He shrugged drolly, like he didn't know what else to say.

"What's the matter, It wasn't anything special too?" He

nodded, dropping his eye's back onto the glass between his hands. He looked

exhausted but even then he

oozed masculinity and sex

appeal. He was an exotic

being. He blinked at me as his

gaze rose and he caught me

staring shamelessly.

Bandile: I should go take a

shower. I'll be back for  
supper.

Me: Great.

He left the glass there and  
disappeared down the  
hallway. I went back to my  
task at hand and tried to  
eliminate any thoughts  
regarding Bandile and his  
perfect form. In my head I  
was jovial, singing and  
dancing but physically I was  
still and concentrated.

Bandile: Has anyone made  
contact with you over the  
past few days?

He yelled from wherever he was in the house.

Me: No. It's just been you.

Bandile: Okay.

Silence.

Bummer! I thought we'd have another yell conversation like the other day he'd run off after kissing me. It was fun and stupid.

Bandile: Not even Grace?

Me: She doesn't like me much so I doubt she'd be interested in starting a conversation with me. Let alone try to reach me. Why?

Bandile: Just making conversation.

I dropped the knife onto the board and silently approached his room. The door was slightly open so I pushed it back and it swung effortlessly inward.

My eyes landed squarely on the erection cupped in his hand. His enormous crotch stood to attention, leaking pre-cum. He wasn't really stroking it but it sure was dripping. He had some of the sticky liquid on his abs and

his clothes were on the bed. I shrieked, startled by the length and size of that thing. I turned around, giving him my back.

Me: I'm so sorry!

I murmured.

The initial plan was to chastise him for making conversation by yelling all the way from his bedroom but now I was almost hyperventilating.

Bandile: When did you get here.

Me: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to

sneak up on you like this.  
I heard the rustle of clothes  
before he gave me  
permission to look at him.  
Even then I was reluctant but  
I trusted he would never  
mislead me. I did a slow turn  
and he laughed. I had my  
eye's tightly shut and my  
hands over them.

Bandile: Really?

I dropped my hands and my  
eye's shot open. I blinked a  
couple of times. I could never  
get used to his shirtless torso  
even when I'd seen Zakhele's

similar one a million times over. "Did you have anything to tell me or you're ju-"

I nodded vigorously.

Me: I wanted to tell you that this is no way to start a conversation. I didn't mean to-

Bandile: It's alright.

Me: I'll leave you to it then.

He nodded.

I left immediately afterwards, almost bumping into the door on my way out. I stumbled but that didn't stop me. I shut the door

behind me and I hurried back to the kitchen. What the fuck was that Mercy! You can't just walk into people's bedrooms like that. I slapped my head twice and took a deep breath.

.

.

Bandile walked into the kitchen right after I'd dished out and placed the food on the placemats on the table. He sat at average distance from me and washed his hands on the basin just next

to him. I ignored his presence and ate. He cleared his throat, earning my attention. Bandile: Can we please say grace first? Or you're a non-believer?

Me: Uhm. Sure.

I had already said grace before eating but I guess I could say it again. I bowed my head and he led the prayer.

Amen.

We feasted in silence. I had outdone myself on this one dish.

It tasted like heaven.

He agreed with me, he was vocal about it. He ate everything on his plate and asked for seconds. I gave him another and he offered to do the dishes.

Me: I'll help you wipe them.

Bandile: It's really okay. I don't mind doing the dishes.

Me: Okay. I'll wash the pots.

He laughed.

Bandile: I can never win with you. It's just dishes.

Me: It keeps me sane. I hardly have anything to do around

here and I can't spend my days reading, watching T.V. and sleeping. It's not healthy. Bandile: Fine. You can do the dishes. I'll go watch the news so long.

He left.

I washed the dishes as we discussed, the pots and wiped down the counter. It gave me a sense of purpose. I missed my job and my friends, this kind of connected me to them. We always cleaned together.

=====

-Mandy

He tied my hands and legs onto the chair and removed my blind fold. My ring was gone.

Me: What is this?

He had it in his hand. The blindfold was in his brother's hand and something that looked like a mini jar. He rattled it's contents at me and then set it on the wooden table behind him. It looked like it was carved into the wall. He stood tall, hovering over me.

Qhawe: Amanda.

Me: What is this, Qhawe? I thought you were taking me to my children.

Zakhele: He was. But then I instructed him to bring you here for more important business.

The place had the pungent smell of decaying wood and decomposing leaves. It was some kind of dungeon, dark and creepy. It made my skin crawl.

Zakhele shook the jar, rattling the contents.

Zakhele: Niyaloya manje  
Amanda? (You're into  
witchcraft now Amanda?) I  
narrowed my eye's at the jar  
in his hand.

Me: What?

Zakhele: Your sister had the  
smeared all over her pussy.  
She thought she could cuff  
me by using traditional  
herbs.

He laughed uproariously.  
He found it hilarious. And  
then it all made sense!

Amanda had been so sure  
that he fell for it. He was

Zakhele.

Me: That bitch!

I cursed under my breath.

How could she spread her legs for another man when

she was married to a

wonderful man like Bandile?

How could I have been so blind to her greed! Argh.

And I was related to her.

Zakhele: Niyas'loya nina.

(You're bewitching us.) My

heart palpitated, my

breathing hitched.

Me: Ukhuluma ngani? (What are you talking about?)

Zakhele: Ngo Bab'Gumbi.

My eye's popped open in shock.

I hadn't seen that coming.

Qhawe: Ubuthi wenzan' vele baby? (What did you think you were doing anyway, baby?)

Me: Did you just call me baby?

Qhawe: Yes. I just did.

Me: Unesbindi. (You're have some nerve.) I shook my head.

Qhawe: You're technically my wife, Amanda. I will marry

you. I just need to discipline and punish you.

Me: In your dreams, baby!

He laughed at me.

Zakhele: You and your sister have been trying to drive us insane. Using traditional herbs instead of confronting us about whatever it is that we "did" to make you guys so mad.

I chuckled humorlessly.

He had to be fucking kidding me.

Me: Are you serious?

Zakhele: Nakhu phela

niyas'thakatha Amanda. Nisi faka imithi ukuthi senze inzinto zob'lima. (You're bewitching us. You're using traditional herbs on us to make us do stupid things.)

Me: You deserved it.

Zakhele: I deserved the death of my fiancè and unborn child?

I looked at him in confusion.

Me: What?

Zakhele: Yolanda. I deserved to find my wife dead on the floor of our living room, is that wh-

Me: Woouoooooah! You what?

Zakhele: Don't act dumb.

Me: What?

Zakhele: You and your sister killed my wife. You murdered Yolanda and made it look like I did it.

I gasped.

I thought she was bluffing when she said she'd send a hitman to take care of Yolanda. She'd said it like it was an insane joke. Only it wasn't a joke.

Grace has gone insane with revenge. She was losing her

mind.

Me: Grace!

I whispered in pain.

What has she done in the name of avenging our family.

Zakhele: Yes. You and Grace.

Me: She... I thought she was joking when she threatened to send someone to- Oh my God.

I started sobbing.

Bab'Gumbi should've warned me. He should've warned me about this. He did say that the use of such strong herbs would have dire

consequences and in my head I thought we were ready to face any repercussions... I didn't think they'd be this severe.

Zakhele: She did what?

Me: Oh my God. Grace, what have you done in the name of our sister.

This was a serious cry for help.

....

THIRTEEN

-Mandy

My wrists were hurting. The thick rope was burning my skin and I was slowly losing the sensation in my hands. I couldn't stop trying to get out of these things. My ankles were in worse condition but that didn't matter. These people weren't ready to release me any time soon and Grace – wherever she was – was clueless to the fact that we'd been made. She did warn me that these men were smarter than we thought. It just never clicked

to me how good they were.  
We had underestimated  
them.

Qhawe: Ukhalelani? (Why are  
you crying?) He asked  
incredulously. Like he would  
slap me if I didn't stop that  
instant.

Me: You won't understand.  
You've never had someone  
close to you taken away for  
no apparent reason.

Qhawe: Ukhuluma ngani  
wena? (What are you talking  
about?)

Me: I'm talking about my

sister, Faith. The woman you killed because she would testify against you and your family.

His face hardened with unbridled anger.

Qhawe: Excuse me?

Me: You heard me!

Qhawe: You think I killed Faith?

His tone was cold.

Questionable in a situation like this but I guess I understood why.

Me: I know you did. I know you killed my sister.

I felt a hard, sharp slap on my face before I could continue speaking. It landed squarely on my cheek, affecting my eye as well. I felt the water from my eye spill out onto the side. It burnt so badly that I screamed in sudden shock.

Zakhele: QHAWE!

Qhawe: Uyang'nyela lo!

He yelled at his brother.

Qhawe had never been the violent type. This must've touched a nerve or two and proved to me that he was

clueless as to what I was talking about.

Me: What the fuck!

Qhawe: You think I would kill my own girlfriend? Baby do you even know who I am?

Me: I thought I did.

Qhawe: No. You don't know me because you'd know that I was in Cape Town when your sister passed on. I was never told about her death. Until the day after her funeral.

Me: LIAR!

I screamed.

Me: You're a fucking liar,  
Qhawe!

Zakhele: Yey, fokof wena  
mdidi! (Hey! Shut up you  
cunt!)

His voice reverberated  
through the thick walls. His  
tone alone commanded so  
much respect, it dripped  
authority. I bit my tongue.  
Qhawe was never this  
aggressive.

Zakhele: Your sister's death  
was an accident. The target  
was your father but she  
happened to be in the same

car as him. We decided to kill two birds with one stone. I was hoping she would survive, but she didn't. Unfortunately.

Qhawe: Your father was a monster. He was a pedophile. Preying on young, innocent men like my little brother Wandile.

I gasped dramatically.

My father was anything but!

Me: Don't you DARE LIE! YOU PIG!

Zakhele: Ngithe fuseg msun' wakho! Mqundu! Fuseg,

thulaaa! (Shut the fuck up!  
You cunt.)

Qhawe: Sekwanele manje  
Bafo. (That's enough now  
bro.)

Zakhele: Thul' umamele. (Shut  
up and listen.)

Me: My father was no  
pedophile. You have him  
confused with someone else.  
Zakhele scoffed, opening the  
laptop on top of the wooden  
table. He pressed play on the  
space key and the video  
played.

My father's face, clear as day

in front of the camera. His beautiful face in the video doing horrible, despicable things to those boys. The man I looked up to. The man I confided in, the same man was balls deep inside of some boy who was screaming for mercy. He was crying, tied up on the bed and my father was fucking him in the ass. Enjoying himself. Clearly lost in his own world of pleasure. He was groaning so hard, telling this poor boy how good his ass felt and

now deep he wanted to be buried inside him. Other were waiting for the same fate on different bed around the room. Old, bald men about to torment and terrorise them. They looked so happy and delighted. My father wouldn't stop moaning and groaning.

Me: TURN IT OFF. PLEASE.

The video stopped.

I would never recover from that. I would never look at his pictures the same way. I would never miss him the

same way. My mother could never handle this. It would kill her.

Grace on the other hand would just end up in an asylum for mad people. She would lose her mind for real this time.

Zakhele: Your sister was never supposed to die.

Me: Yet she did.

Zakhele: She knew we would come after your father some day. She refused to get out of the car before we shot at it... she said justice would prevail

but let it be in the hands of law enforcement.

Both him and Qhawe chuckled humorlessly.

Qhawe: Law enforcement my foot. Those guys were in on this scheme.

Me: So you took justice into your own hands?

Zakhele: Wouldn't have you done the same had Phiwokuhle been one of the victims? Wandile is barely twenty-one.

Me: Don't bring my son into this.

Zakhele: Wandile was just as innocent, Amanda. Now he can never be the same again. He sees a psychologist three times a week because of the trauma.

My tear ducts were packed. I don't know where all the tears soaking my face had been stored but they were coming down in buckets. I was sobbing from all the pain and confusion. My father wasn't just a monster he was an evil predator. Wandile would never forgive us for

doing this to his brothers.

Qhawe: I wish you could've come to me Amanda. Talk to me and tell me what was bothering you.

Me: I thought traditional herbs were much better than executing you in your sleep. Little did I know that this was all for an innocent boy.

Qhawe: This was for all those young men in that place.

Those who died in the hands of those sick bastards. We had to kill them all or else this would go on forever.

Me: Please untie me.

Qhawe: No. Not until you give us the location of my mother.

Me: Your mother is in Cape Town, Qhawe. I let her go long before this nonsense started. She was too precious and my children fell in love with her.

Qhawe: She's safe?

Me: Yes. She's in Belville with her husband and three beautiful daughters.

I couldn't hold on to her.

She was able to talk me out of this. Grace doesn't know

this yet and when she finds out she'll kill me for sure.

Zakhele: So, all those women who testified against me?

Me: I'm sorry, Zakhele.

Zakhele: You had people paint me as an abuser. You made them think I was a monster. Yo-

Me: The herbs will wear off. You'll be back to your normal self again in no time.

Zakhele: I almost killed Phindile!

I winced at the high pitched baritone. I hadn't meant for

anyone to get hurt. I was really angry about the injustice of my father and sister. I would never heal from this but now I understood the pain and anger they were feeling too. We were all going through tough times.

Me: I'm truly sorry, Zakhele.

Zakhele: You're sorry?

Me: Yes.

He chuckled.

Rage was written all over his face. His eye's were dark and filled with hostility.

The door swung open and he unceremoniously exhaled, looking at the figure that emerged through it. Grace, an unconscious Grace and Bandile carrying her in. I hadn't noticed the second chair just next to mine. He carefully placed her on it and then tied her up just like I was tied up. The expression on his face was unreadable. He moved back after tying her up and folded his arms across his chest. Qhawe threw a five litre bucket of

cold on to her face and I got the bulk of it all over my Pyjamas.

This place was already freezing cold. The water would make it much worse. Grace startled awake and she screamed at the shock of the cold water seeping through her clothes. It took her a while to recover and when she had she stared daggers at her husband, her face unmistakably murderous. Her nostrils flared as she tried to draw in huge chunks

of breath in a short amount of time.

Grace: Bandile!

Zakhele: Yey, thula mthakathi ndin! (Shut the hell up you witch!)

Zakhele was on fire tonight.

Bandile: Baby.

Grace: You kidnapped me?

Bandile: Do you blame me?

You slapped me across the face, three times in five seconds.

Grace: Because you manhandled me! What the fuck.

Bandile: We're even then. She tried to calm herself by breathing in and out. Zakhele and Qhawe explained to both Bandile and Grace everything that had gone down so far in lurid details. They made sure to add a little drama just to mock and torment Grace. They made sure to pain us as the bad guys and themselves as heroes. Bandile had his gaze locked on Grace the entire narration and when they were done he grabbed

the jar, opened it and threw the herbs in her face.

Bandile: And you call yourself my wife? How dare you!

Grace: I'm sorry.

Bandile: Don't lie to me! You tried to get my brother to fal- you're truly sick Grace. You need help.

Grace: I was jus-

Zakhele: Fuseg! (Fuck off.)

Grace: I wasn't talking to you!

Zakhele: Ngithe fuseg msunu!

Qhawe and I laughed.

I couldn't help it. He kept

such a straight face when he said that. He was such a character. He ignored us and turned back to face Bandile.

Zakhele: How is she?

Bandile: She's doing okay. She's healing well and the baby is healthy.

Zakhele: Good. I need you to keep it up for a little while-

Bandile: No. I can't do that.

Mercy is vulnerable right now. In her head she thinks falling for me is good. I can't have that.

Zakhele: Just for another

week. Keep her there for another week. We have to discipline these two.

Bandile: Be that as it may, I want to come back home to my wife.

Grace lifted her head up and beamed at him. "Wipe that silly smile off your face!

Uyang'nyanyisa wena." Her smiles died down and she sank her head back down. "I want to punish and discipline my own wife. You need to come clean with your girl. I'm sure she'd appreciate the

truth."

By the way he was staring at Grace I could tell that he longed for her. I knew that Bandile loved Grace. I didn't think it would be this deep.

Zakhele: So, you mean to tell me that Mercy is falling for you?

Bandile: With the time we spent together and the 'accidental kisses' she was bound to catch feelings.

Zakhele: Hmm.

He scratched his head.

I'd never been this

entertained in my life.

Qhawe: I think I'll punish my own fiancè too. But we should leave them here over night just to teach them a valuable lesson.

Grace&I: NO!

Zakhele gave us murderous stares and we both shrank back into place. Now he could make me piss my pants.

Qhawe: I'll lock up.

Me: Qhawe, bab-

Qhawe: Don't!

Me: Baby please. After the video you just showed me I

think i deserve to go home  
and-

Qhawe: Fuseg yezwa?

Grace: Bandi-

Bandile: Ung'thulele wena.

Thula nje before ngik'nemba  
ngo labhabha wempama.

(Shut up! You shut up before I  
slap you.)

He looked repulsed by his  
own wife. I couldn't spend  
the night here. It was dark  
and cold.

\*\*\*\*

They were true to their word.  
They locked us up in this

place with nothing jail  
blankets to keep us warm.

They were so rough that I  
shrugged mine off of me.

Grace: I can't believe our plan  
failed so miserably.

I couldn't even look at Grace.

What she did to Yolanda?

Me: Grace, how could you?

Grace how could I what?

Me: You helped kill Yolanda?

Grace: What?

Me: Did you send those men  
to kill Yolanda?

She chuckled.

Grace: I may be many things

Amanda, a killer? I know I may have been a little head over heels about Zakhele but I would never. NEVER kill anyone over him.

Me: Then who did it?

Grace: I thought Zakhele beat her to a pulp...

Me: Zakhele was innocent. He loved Yolanda.

Grace: I don't know.

Who hated Zakhele so much? Who would send someone to kill his wife and son for revenge?

Me: So, you didn't send that

hitman to kill her?

Grace: What hitman?

Me: Yolanda was killed by a hitman.

Grace: You know this?

Me: Not really. I mean when Zakhele admitted to finding her already dead I thought you'd sent the-

Grace: No. I didn't send anyone.

Me: Then who?

That was the million dollar question. Who would do something this sinister?

=====

-Mercy

The TV had become my main focus point for my thoughts lately. I could never watch an entire episode or show without dosing off, drifting back to Zakhele. It had become second nature to me. I missed him. I missed having to sit around and watch him fuss over me for no reason. I missed his drunk jokes and his terrible sense of humor. I missed his sober sex and his cuddles. I missed watching him cook because

he thought my food was terrible.

I missed listening to Notorious B.I.G even when I clearly hated his music. I missed smoking weed and getting high then laughing at everything he did even when it wasn't funny. I missed challenging his authority and watching him get mad and frustrated. Sometimes he just left me alone and sat in his bedroom until he was calm. Then he'd return and pull me towards him or on

top of him. Depending on his mood.

He would tell me that he loved me even when I wouldn't quit driving him insane.

He just changed.

One day he was gentle and the other he was hostile. As much as I loved him I couldn't stand his abusive ways.

Then there was the married Bandile who was madly in love with his wife. I knew I never stood a chance when he brought her over the

other day just after we had kissed. He was practically rubbing her in my face and I took the hint then.

I could never have Bandile as mine. I wanted him. But he wanted someone else.

I couldn't go back to Zakhele. He'd done a solid on me.

Landing me in hospital and almost killing me. But my stupid heart longed for him, the doctor who preferred selling drugs over healing patients. He was as ghetto as they came.

My ride or die.

My soldier, my man.

He-

Bandile: Mercy?

That broke me out of my  
trance.

Me: I'm in my bedroom.

Bandile: Oh. I'm home.

Me: Okay.

Bandile: Goodnight.

Silence.

What time was it anyway?

He'd had dinner, watched the  
news and then left after a  
serious phone call. I never  
asked him where he was

going, he never told me because none it was my business. I respected that. But whenever he returned I felt safer. I couldn't handle being left alone on this place but I also didn't want to nag. The door swung open and he peeped his head through the tiny hole.

Bandile: We need to talk.

Me: Oh. What about?

Bandile: Us.

Uhm-

There never was an us before.

Me: Us? I didn't know there was an Us...

Bandile: We still need to address the issue, Phindile.

Me: Okay.

Bandile: Lounge.

And he was gone.

Great.

I was having a great time by myself, reminiscing and feeling nostalgic. He had to just ruin it all by mentioning "Us"

....

## FOURTEEN

-Mercy

I exited my bedroom and there he was, leaning against the wall. He outstretched his hand to me and I automatically put my tiny, slim-fingered hand into his big one. He closed his hand over mine and just stood there, looking at it and then at me. He pulled me over to him gently, bringing my hand up to his lips. He kissed it softly while his gaze was glued on me. His free hand

snaked its way around my waist and he pulled me closer, locking me in. We stood like that for a couple of minutes, his minty breath with a hint of cinnamon fanning my face.

Bandile: Hey.

He whispered softly, brushing his lips against my face. I closed my eye's in anticipation as he whispered again: "I missed you."

Me: Bandile.

I croaked. Jesus Christ!  
Where did that all come

from?

Bandile: I know I haven't been honest about my feelings.

But that's for your own good.

Me: Don't do this. Please.

Bandile: Look at me.

It took me a while to recover from the shock of his soft lips but I opened my eye's and looked up at him. He brought his forehead closer to mine, dangerously close. "I never meant to string you along, Mercy. I thought... I thought I'd be able to handle it but I can't. I can't let you go, I don't

want to let you go. Stringing you along might've been selfish of me but it was the best thing I'd done for myself in a long time. I was able to explore these feelings I'd developed for you over the period of your hospital stay. As much as this is wrong, I want you."

My body shook with excitement.

Physically and emotionally.

My breathing was uneven and a part of me was

conscious and aware of the

thick bugle growing under his pants. I could feel it on my stomach.

Me: Bandil-

I felt the cold sweep of his wet lips on mine. It was so subtle and quick that I wasn't sure he'd done it but I felt a soft tickle on my line between my lips and my bottom lip. I let out a shaky breath "Band-" Another cold swipe, this one was more hard and I felt it in the way he moved his hand to the back of my neck, cupped it

aggressively and brought closer to his lips. He deepened the kiss, parting my lips with his warm tongue, delving it deeper. I could almost feel it going down my throat. He tightened his grip around my waist and he pulled so close to him I could feel his cock straining between us, I could feel it pulsating on the thin fabric of my top. I could practically feel it on my skin. That's how close I was to him. One hand on my face, the

other holding me at bay. He bit my bottom lip, sucked on it and let it rest while he continued his assault on my top lip. He gave them enough attention to last me an entire week. He swayed us around and pinned me on the wall with his lips still attached to mine. He pressed me deeper into the wall and spread out my hands, pinning them against the wall as well. He did the same thing with my legs, bucking his hips and pressing his crotch harder on

my now exposed valley. He groaned softly against my lips and his lips upturned into a smile.

Me: Bandile...

It came out as a whisper.

I didn't understand the warm sensations all over my body but I knew I wanted to be ravaged!

Me: Your wife.

Bandile: What about my wife?

Me: How will she take this?

Bandile: I'm only kissing you, Mercy.

Me: I can practically feel your cock against my stomach.

He bit his bottom seductively and smiled at me.

Bandile: Just this once.

Me: I might be running away from your brother, Bandile but I'm not about to fuck you.

Bandile: You don't have to. I can do all the work. Against this wall.

Me: No. It's a tempting offer but No.

Bandile: Hmm. I'll respect your decision...

Someone cleared their throat

and Bandile, disbothered held his own and remained close to me. He breathed out onto my face, his forehead still attached to mine. I tried to push him back but he was too strong for me.

Bandile: Shit!

He cursed lightly.

He moved off me and stood a few inches away from me. I turned my attention to the person who'd just interrupted us.

I almost jumped out of my skin. My heart assaulting my

chest.

Me: Zakhele...

Zakhele: Phindile.

Me: You-

I pointed at him.

I thought I was seeing a ghost. Bandile on the other hand looked calm and imperturbed. Zakhele, his hands buried deep in his pockets. He had this contagious smile plastered across. Like he hadn't just seen his girlfriend kissing his brother.

Zakhele: Can I please see you

in the lounge? Both of you.  
I blinked, unbelievably at  
him.

When

How

Why?

I stuttered, I pointing from  
him to Bandile and then back.  
"I'll explain everything in the  
lounge. Come."

Bandile: It's okay. He won't  
touch you with me here.

That was supposed to make  
me feel better about my  
decision to strut my way  
toward danger but it didn't. I

walked up to him reluctantly and he outstretched his hand to me. I took it unconsciously and he pulled me in for a hug. A tight yet gentle hug. His scent radiated from all over his body, bombarding my nostrils. I felt a soft kiss on my neck and then he let me go. I made my way to the lounge and instructed and waited for the brothers to make their way to the lounge as well.

=====

-Bandile

The murderous stare he gave me couldn't have been mistaken, I could tell by the rage dripping from his eye's that I was in for a beating. A much deserved beating. He reached for me in a few long strides and threw a punch at me, landing it squarely on the jaw. The impact was one I'd anticipated so I stumbled backwards, almost hitting the floor. He threw another one at my stomach. Landing it straight in the middle of my abs, the air leaving my lungs

in a hush gust. I hadn't anticipated that one which is why i fell to my knees. The moisture leaving my eye's. I felt that one to the back of my head.

He helped up and then threw a slap at me. Hard and unmistakably stinging.

Zakhele: We're not done here.

Me: I know.

I pushed him off me and took a few deep breaths to ease myself into the agonizing pain. I stood up straight and

walked toward the lounge.

=====

-Mercy

The minute I saw the  
approaching the lounge, one  
after the other I sprang to my  
feet and looked straight at  
Zakhele who's expression  
softened when his eye's  
landed on mine. He smiled at  
me.

Bandile: Sit down, Phindile.

Me: What happened to your  
face?

Bandile: Sit down please.

I blinked at both of them and

then I sat down. "We have some explaining to do." My heart palpitated that same moment. I couldn't the bad feeling that crept up in my tummy.

Me: Okay.

I sat down and Zakhele remained standing a few feet away from me.

Bandile started narrating a long story to me that made no sense. Zakhele chimed in, trying to explain it in simpler terms. It made little sense then as they continued to tell

me some sob story about Grace and her sister being the ones behind Zakhele's anger and rage.

He wasn't really the monsters I'd seen him as. It was only the herbs that made him act a certain way. They went on and on.

My focus was on Zakhele this whole time. He was glowing man. His skin a little lighter than when I'd last seen him. He let his beard grow and it made him look a lot older than he was and fucking

sexy. I could eat him up right now. The amber of his shone brighter under the florescent lighting of this lounge. His lips were much more pink and plump than I remembered them. I shifted my intense gaze on Bandile with his dark, really dark features that made my legs shake. I was wet just watching him talk and lick his lips every now and then. His voice was deep. But nothing compared to Zakhele's. His was sharp and

raspy. Like he's just had shards of glass and steel for breakfast. Rough and husky. He stopped talking when he realised I was no longer listening but dreaming. He scratched his head and looked at his brother and then at me.

Zakhele: Phindile?

Me: Hmm, yes?

Zakhele: Did you hear what we just told you? Do you understand?

Me: Understand what?

Now I felt dumb.

I stopped listening after they said Grace, herbs, and death. Something about death.

Bandile: You've got to be kidding me right now, Mercy.

Me: Oh. But I heard your lame story. I heard all your excuses and I'm not convinced.

Zakhele: Hawu, baby.

Me: Zakhele, you landed me in hospital. Almost killed our baby and your excuse is that you were bewitched?

Zakhele: But, it's all true.

Me: I believe you. But come on! You're the almighty

Zakhele Mdluli. I thought you'd have seen this all coming.

Zakhele: Huh?

Me: Bandile, you strung me along. Because your brother asked you to? This was your plan all along?

Bandile: No. It-

I interrupted him by throwing the scatter pillow in my hand at him. It hit him in the torso. I stood up and threw another at Zakhele.

Me: What the hell is this? Am I a joke to you?

Bandile: Phindile, mamela.

Me: Zakhele?

Zakhele: No. You're not a joke to me baby. I'm sorry.

Me: Why are you sorry?

He twisted the bucket hat in his hands. I turned to Bandile and he narrowed his eye's at me.

Me: This is what you do, play with women's feelings like this?

Zakhele: We don't do that.

Me: Then what? I was just an object la kuwe?

Zakhele: No.

His eye's full of remorse.

He sounded so sincere that I felt kinda bad for doing this to him. But I couldn't help it, he had it coming.

Me: So, what is this?

Zakhele: It's a complicated situation.

Me: I'm a complicated situation?

Zakhele sighed, rubbing his face in frustration. Bandile gave up and lowered himself onto the couch.

Me: You took my love for you for granted. Do you have any

idea how much I wanted a life with you Zakhele?

His eye's softened to cotton.

Me: I wanted to marry you! I- I started sobbing.

I could feel my heart literally break into a million infinite pieces.

Me: I can't do this.

Zakhele: Baby. Please...

Me: I love you, Zakhele.

You're just too blind to see how much.

Zakhele: Make me understand, Mercy. Make me see just how much you love

me.

I shook my head.

I could hardly see him, the tears were blurring my vision.

Me: It's too late for that now.

Zakhele: No. It's not too late baby. It can't be too late.

Me: I'm sorry.

I moved away from the couch straight toward the bedroom that was appointed to me by Bandile. I shut it and locked it. I cried myself to a stupor.

Wrecking my brain for answers as to why I still felt so drawn to Zakhele after all

the hurt and the pain he put me through. I still loved him and it hurt. I'd never felt a love so deep and earth shattering.

A love deeper than the ocean.  
A deeper love.

It didn't even understand what I was saying. I cried for being made a fool. For being made to feel like a pawn between the two brothers. For the time i wasted running away from Zakhele only to learn that it was his plan all along.

And to think I trusted Bandile with my life. I let him kiss me. I let him taste my terrible cooking. I let him pin me against the wall and press his dick on to my tummy. My poor baby must be traumatized.

I let him cuddle me and I saw his cock. I dreamt about it at night. I had wet dreams about Bandile. Hoe could I let that happen!

I'm such a slut!

I disgusted myself.

I was no different from a

hooker. A hoe! A bitch!

=====

I woke up that morning with the mother of all headaches. I sat up and felt sorry for myself... it hurt. I almost jumped out bed when I noticed a bulging figure on the side next to me. Zakhele had slept in my bed last night? But I locked my door. He tossed to the other side and draped his long arm over my waist. He snored so badly it made the bed vibrate. How did he get in here?

What the hell happened here last night.

Oh Shit!

I was naked. So was he.

Did we?

Oh god Nooooo! The memories came back in a flood and I remembered just how he begged me to let him in. I did, he locked the door behind him and went on his knees apologizing and begging me to forgive him. He'd started kissing me and one thing led to the next.

I was screaming his name,

heaving for breath. We  
screwed all night and fell  
asleep afterwards. I let him  
get to my head!

I was a real slut.

A dumb slut!

It was just 5 thirty in  
morning.

He wouldn't wake up for  
another hour or two.

Depending on his tired he  
was.

Argh fuck it.

I slipped back under the  
covers and draped my leg  
over his thigh. Basking in sin

and burying my head in his chest. He stirred and then closed me in.

I'd deal with it when I felt better and my senses were back to normal. And I was fully awake.

I was dick-whipped.

....

FIFTEEN

-Mercy

I woke later that day with the headache still clinging to my brain and an empty space next to me. I pushed the

covers off of me and rolled out of bed.

I didn't bother to check the time.

I grabbed the gown hanging from the ottoman and covered my body as I found my footing, heading to the bathroom down the hall. I went straight for the toilet, lifted the seat and threw up to my hearts content. I couldn't believe I was able to keep it all down during my sleep. I washed my face and mouth afterward and

stepped under the shower. I could use a cold wake-me-up shower right now.

I returned to the bedroom and found a pale, sickly Zakhele stomping around the room looking for his other shoe. He stopped and turned to acknowledge me.

Zakhele: Oh. Baby, hi.

He sniffed and then went back to his shoe finding quest.

Me: You look worse than I feel.

He chuckled with his back

towards me. "What's up?"

Zakhele: Beng'futha. Getting the herbs out of my body.

Me: Oh. How did that go?

Zakhele: Let's just say that Bandile has found a great mental health hospital for his wife and her sister and has booked them in there.

Me: Huh?

He turned, his face looking gravely pale and discolored.

"Take a seat. I'll look for the shoe. You tell me what is really going on here. You were serious last night about

the whole traditional medicine issue."

He dropped his entire weight on the ottoman and took a few deep breaths. Now that I think about it he does smell strange. Like a mixture of herbs and other medicine to cleanse the spirit.

Zakhele: I don't know how else to explain this, Phindile. Ngigabhile baby, ngapeta. Ngenza yonke le nyakanyaka. Kwaphuma izinto ezifile, iynwele nama khasa abolile. Ngaphuma nezinye izinto I

can't speak of because I will throw up.

Now I had the show in my hand and it was right in front of him this whole time.

Me: Haw! Wena wedwa? (You alone?) He shook his head.

Zakhele: Siphalaze sonke baby. Ngisho no Wandile.

Although he had nothing inside him. Bandile is still traumatised.

I handed the shoe back to him and found a comfortable seat on the edge of the bed.

Zakhele: Ngikhuluma nje we

still have to go back there in two days siyo geza. Siphahle khona sokhuluma nokhokho bethu. I'm scared, Mercy. The things I saw today? I can never un-see.

He looked like he was about to start crying. He must've seen some nasty things then. Me: What's going to happen to Grace and her sister?

Zakhele: Hopefully they'll stay in there for a while.

Bandile thought he would discipline her. Turns out she gave him love potion, lots

and lots of it. I don't see them ever getting back together. He placed his hand on his mouth and made gagging sounds.

Me: Zakhele!

He threw up all over the floor.

It was mostly black water that reeked of sewage pipes and other ungodly things. I ran out of the bedroom to get him water and a mop to clean up.

I returned with an ice pitcher, a jug of water. Jayes Fluid,

Domestos and Handy Andy. I found him on his knees, still throwing up.

I opened all the windows and handed him the iced water.

He drank it all up and then sprang to his feet and ran out. I had to will myself to look, summoning heaps of courage not to throw up. It was a little difficult at first because all I did was gag and swallow remnants of vomit that got stuck on my throat. But after a few deep breaths and some serious self control

I was able to throw water over the nasty water and wipe it off.

Thank god the mop I picked out had a pull that made the mop wring itself dry.

Otherwise I'd have vomited all over the place as well. I used all three cleaning products at once and cleaned the whole place up. The stench would probably last for the entire day but that didn't matter.

Zakhele: **BABY!**

He yelled.

Argh. He was such a damn baby. I prepared myself, cleaning products and bucket in hand and headed to the bathroom. I found him standing over his own vomit. It was on the sink, the toilet seat, the bathtub, floor and on his clothes. The look on his face was that of a man who'd just seen a ghost. I felt so scared for him because he was still heaving even when there was puke elsewhere.

Me: Phuz' amanzi Zakhele.

Zakhele: The more I drink

water the more I want to vomit.

Me: Oh god.

He looked at me like I was his last hope. I outstretched my hand to him and he gave me his, I pulled him out of the bathroom and handed for the kitchen. While there I helped him out of his jeans and jacket. I made him black tea with no sugar and handed it to him. This would probably help keep his gag reflexes strong and unaffected. I searched for

the yellow rubber gloves I'd seen Nomali use the other day, a cloth and more cleaning products. I had some serious work that needed to be done.

=====

Bandile stumbled into the house along with Qhawe and Wandile. I didn't really know Wandile but he looked a lot like Bandile so I took it he was the younger brother. I handed them the black tea with no sugar too and they thanked me and headed to

the lounge.

Wandile: Are they going to be okay?

Me: I hope so.

Zakhele was snoring like a pig in my bedroom. All I hoped for was that they didn't throw up too because I don't think I was equipped to handle any more vomit.

Wandile didn't stick around much longer. He left after thirty minutes and in that time I had prepared a meal I knew would be easier to stomach after what they'd

seen. They looked horrid and terrified, most probably haunted by images of whatever they'd seen. I was no stranger to potions and herbs myself.

My father had this one woman who had him by the balls with herbs. I learnt how to deal with a man bewitched through my father and I'd seen him look exactly like they do right now. He taught me what I needed to do and here I was, doing it.

I was helping these men who

didn't deserve my help. Argh!  
I made simple pap and  
inkukhu yesintu. (Bone  
broth.) That would keep the  
vomit at bay and it was an  
easy meal to keep down. It  
took a while to prepare  
though.

\*

I served it to them hours  
later.

I was glad to say that they  
hadn't puked. They also were  
sceptical about the food at  
first. Especially Zakhele but I  
assured them that they

would need the strength and this is exactly the kind of meal they would get the strength from. I made black tea again and poured it into a teapot and cups while I made coffee for myself.

I let them eat while I cleaned up after myself in the kitchen and washed the pots I'd used. I could really use a few minutes of rest after the day I went through.

They ate.

All of it.

Zakhele even asked for

another plate. I gave them whatever was left of the chicken and they ate that too. All of it. Zakhele even did the dishes and sang praises. I was shocked but I did my best to hide it.

He asked for more black tea. Said it helped a lot with keeping everything down. I made another pot full and retired to bed.

What an eventful day.



I felt his warm arms around me.

I wasn't in the mood for a cuddle. I wanted to lay by myself and have some time to think about everything. But with everything that had went down today I let him cuddle me from behind and he fell asleep almost immediately after he hit the sheets.

He woke up in the middle of the night and sat up straight. I had taken the ottoman instead because I couldn't find any sleep and tossing and turning had tired me out.

Also I didn't want to wake him up so I left the bed carefully a few hours ago. He searched for me with his eye's and all I did was watch him frantically searching.

Zakhele: Baby?

He called out softly.

Me: Go back to sleep.

Zakhele: Ukuphi? (Where are you?)

Me: I'm right here. Go back to sleep.

He let out a heavy sigh and switched on his bedside lamp. He found me within

seconds. His eye's landing squarely on mine. I was acutely aware of his hollow figure, he looked like a dead man.

Zakhele: Uright?

Me: Ja. Just a little exhausted but I can't find any sleep.

Zakhele: Insomnia again?

I nodded.

It wasn't a condition. I'd always had this ever since I was a little kid. I ran out of sleep and it would days before I found any. He

rubbed his face in frustration and leaned his head back on the headboard.

Zakhele: Thank you, Phindile.

Me: No need to thank me. I was only helping.

He shook his head, smiling faintly.

Zakhele: No. Thank you for being here. For staying even when you had every reason to pack up and leave. I don't know what we would've done without you today. Hell you did things I never thought were possible. You

took care of me and asked for nothing in return. I may never thank you enough.

Honestly.

Me: You're welcome.

He nodded.

Zakhele: You're amazing. I know I never say this but you're the backbone of this family. It sounds crazy but it's true.

Me: Zakhele...

Zakhele: No. It's true. The guys agree with me. Thank you.

Me: I was only helping.

Zakhele: You didn't have to. But- you're always there. I don't know how you do it but you're always there, helping and building me. I- I can't watch you waste your life away like this for a guy like me.

I chuckled softly.

He was right. Our time had come and gone. It was time to go our separate ways now. I nodded.

Zakhele: I love you, Phindile.

Me: I know. I love you too.

Zakhele: Which is why I'm

letting you go. I've held you back for way too long. I don't know if I could ever live with myself.

I kept quiet.

I knew he was thinking about it. But when he said it like that it cut through me like a sharp knife. It hurt.

Zakhele: Phindile.

Me: Hmmm?

Zakhele: I know this is selfish of me baby but please understand the place that this is all coming from.

Me: I am. I'm trying to

understand it.

Zakhele: You may never see me again. I'm leaving in a few days, after I speak to my ancestors.

Me: Oh.

Zakhele: I will take full responsibility of my child. But I will do that through my brothers.

It took a while for me process this. In which case I had already anticipated worse.

He went on to explain that it was only best that he left that way he could stop

obsession about me. The more he stuck around was the more he felt the need to take over my life. Maybe if he left it would subside and he would be able to focus on his own life and his own ambitions.

I agreed with him.

It was better that he left and never looked back. I also would never keep him away from his son. Or daughter.

Depending on the paternity of the baby. I listened to him as he explain further why he

needed be away from me and just how much he loved me. He valued me.

Also, he would leave me enough money to start my life all over again and that he would leave all his cars to me if that's what I wanted.

I told him I didn't want his money or his cars. I grew up poor and that never pushed me to search for money and riches elsewhere. I wanted to earn my keep in this life. I wanted to work my way up to the top with the little I had.

He said he would leave the money for our child. I didn't protest.

We ended up in bed again, panting and heaving for breath. We had swx almost all night and I passed out again.

---

TWO WEEKS LATER

I stood in my kitchen, in my own house. Well it was my father's house technically but he'd left it to me and I was grateful, always.

Zakhele was true to his word.

He left Soweto a week back and he never came to say goodbye.

He left all his cars to me, crazy bastard and he left everything to his brothers.

Apparently he was going overseas to study medicine again. He left his money with me and he asked me to open a business of my liking or to further my studies. He threatened to return if I were to ever work for someone else. He said he'd drag me by my ass back to my place and

lock me up until I learnt to stand for myself.

Bandile stayed away.

He never spoke to me for those two weeks and I kept my distance.

I could feel Zakhele's absence. I missed taking care of him. I missed waking up to his snores. But he'd left a letter explain just how much he loved me and that in another life time we would get married.

He left nothing of his details so I could never reach him.

I missed him.

=====

-Bandile

Grace had asked to see me.

I'm not sure why because we were in the process of a divorce. She swore to me that she never used love potion on me. She lied to my face and I believed her because I was blinded by love.

I probably still am.

I walked into the visitors room and found her sitting on the other side of the

bench. She looked even better than the last time I saw her. She got more beautiful as time went by. Amanda was with the nervous break-down crew on the other side. She worked well with people who suffered from such illnesses. Grace ogled me. She scrutinized me. Like she didn't remember the way I looked.

Grace: Hey.

Me: Hi. Unjani?

Grace: I'm okay. How are

you?

Me: I'm good.

She smiled at me and then looked down at her hands. "I-I did it."

Grace: Hmm?

Me: I tore the papers.

Grace: You to- ... why?

Me: Because. I thought about what you said. I thought about what I did and the things I put you through. I am to blame for our marriage going south like this. For you resorting to using traditional medicine on me. I-

She shook her head, reaching over the table and taking hold of my hand.

Grace: No. Don't say that.

Me: I just- I had a chance to think it through. I believe we can work it out. I know we can.

Grace: Bandile...

Me: I love you. Even without the potion. I can't stop thinking about you and the things you've done for me. I love you Grace.

She started sobbing.

Me: What's wrong now.

Grace: I'm pregnant.

....

SIXTEEN

-Bandile

I blinked.

I don't really recalled the last time we both had sex. I don't recall ever having sex with her in the few weeks that had passed. So I was quite baffled by her confession.

Me: You're pregnant?

She nodded.

This couldn't be.

How long has she been

pregnant? How could it even be? In the infamous opinion of almost all my doctors I was infertile. Which would explain the absence of kids in our 8 year marriage.

Me: How?

She just shrugged.

Me: How far along are you?

Grace: Three months.

Me: Three months? But-

She just nodded.

It couldn't be.

Me: Grace... could this be-

Grace: Yes! We are pregnant!

She screamed.

I let them cascade down my cheeks. I couldn't believe it. Calculating everything now it only made sense. She had sex with Zakhele three weeks back meaning this was my chance!

Me: Please let this be true!

Grace: It is. It's true.

Thank you God!

She just laughed through her tears at my own moment of truth.

=====

-Mercy

He stumbled into the house

after knocking like a mad man at the gate. I watched him balance himself on the counter, placing the bottle of Hennessy on the counter. He went for the cupboard, grabbed a glass and came back with his booze. He didn't say a word nor did he look at me. He just headed straight to the lounge.

Nonhle walked in after a few minutes, threw her arms around me and then followed Sizwe to the dining room. I was tempted to ask what the

problem with him was but something told me it wasn't a great idea. I kept the questions to myself, made finger foods for the gang and I joined them in the lounge.

Nonhle: Don't ask.

Me: I wasn't planning to.

She grabbed a mini sandwich and a glass of juice from the tray and then looked straight ahead.

It's like I was never gone.

They were both still the same but Nonhle had put on some weight. She concentrated on

the TV and Sizwe just drank his booze. It's been over a week since I came back and they haven't stopped coming over to make sure I was really there and that I would never leave again. Bandile had assured them of my safety after learning that they were so loyal to me they filed a missing person's report three days after I'd disappeared. He had to show them photographic proof of my safety. They still were sceptical and therefore never

dropped the case until I was back. Sizwe had been having boyfriend problems all along. Which wasn't surprising at all but to see him throwing himself away like this was a bit of a stretch and it did worry me. A lot.

Me: Sizwe

Sizwe: He dumped me. He fucking dumped me!

Me: It's been three days, babe.

Sizwe: He could've told me he was married, Mercy. At least so I know that even when

this ends I wouldn't be this miserable. But no.

He laughed.

He laughed so hard that he almost fell from the couch. I can't believe he went back to Khaya after we warned him against it. I guess he was doing it for the money then because he didn't love him.

Khaya was an old man.

Probably older than my father but Sizwe didn't care.

Me: Askies man friend.

Sizwe: Fok! Yahamba imali chomi.

Me: Argh, Sizwe man.

Sizwe: Ngithi the money is gone! Uhambile uKhaya nama million akhe. And I'm back to square one.

He slurred through that whole sentence and I heard just half of it but it didn't matter because I knew Sizwe like the back of my hand and he lived for terrible choices and bad decisions. But I loved him the way he was... He stared at me and then we just ass automatically burst into laughter.

To be honest, Sizwe always shared everything with us. Khaya would spend ridiculous amounts of money on Sizwe and he would wake us up with e-wallet the following morning. He bought gifts, food and clothes. Before Zakhele and the Jazz Club I lived off of Sizwe and the money I made every month at work. So seeing him like this really affected me.

Nonhle: Msun' wakhe maan. Sizwe umuhl' chomi. You'll

find another Khaya with more money and a better lifestyle. Not le fake BEE.

Me: Futhi you can always come live with me if Londi gets tired of you.

Sizwe laughed.

We joined in.

Sizwe: Londi is my sister. She can never get tired of me.

Me: Uyis'dakwa wena. Of course she'a tired of you.

Sizwe: Even so, she needs me. I always make a plan to put food on the table.

If Sizwe saved the money he

got from all these blesser's  
he would own an entire salon  
and restaurant right now.  
But he favoured partying and  
getting drunk over living a  
serious and straight life. He  
always said he would live fast  
and die young. He started  
singing a song by Sir & Jill  
Scott - Still Blue. I couldn't  
help but laugh. He sounded  
terrible and he didn't even  
know the lyrics to the song.  
He only sang this song  
because I sang it once at the  
Jazz Club and I poured my

heart into it. Before I met Zakhele.

He loved every moment of it. He said it reminded him of his dearly departed mother. It made me cry.

Nonhle: Still Blueeeeeeeeeee  
I laughed.

Me: You're butchering the song.

Sizwe: Still blueeeeeee

Me: Shut up!

We all laughed.

How I missed these very moments.

I rubbed my tummy,

remembering the time Zakhele had played this song and asked me to dance with him. He'd had his moments. I was still hard to accept that he was gone. All his cars were parked all over the yard. Even when I fell asleep in them it never made me feel close to him. His scent was still heavy in all three cars.

Sizwe: Love is for the brave.

Nonhle: Cheers to that!

Me: Love is for the blessed.

Sizwe: Fuckin' ay!

We all raised our glasses and

toasted to that.

We'd all had our chances at love and they never quite worked out the way we'd hoped. I guess this is life.

Sizwe: *May we find another chance at love, please.*

Me: Not right now though.

-----

A YEAR LATER

-Bandile

She had given birth to triplets about three months ago and we did a DNA test. They were all mine.

When all hope was lost, she

gave me this one gift. This one little miracle that would change our entire lives. After spending an entire year in a mental institution, she faced her fear.

Letting go of the past.

The past was in the past. I had nothing to do with the death of her sister. I had to admit that what my brothers had done was a bit churlish and even though it was for a good cause, they went about it the wrong way. Hurting innocent people in the

process.

Grace was standing at the door looking at me and the triplet play around on the plush carpet we'd decided to put in here. She's given me two over protective boys and a beautiful princess who grew to love her daddy way too much. She clung to me as her brothers screamed and yelled in baby language. They were barely 7 months old and already they were the loud speakers of the house. Grace: It's time for their nap.

I was happy to have her back home. It wasn't the same without her and it was hard to cope all on my own. But now there were 5 of us in here and it brought life to the house again.

Me: I do have some paper work I need to work on. You can take over now.

Grace: Dinner will be ready in thirty minutes.

Me: Great. I'll be get going then.

She pecked my lips and then took over from me. I left the

rowdy bunch and headed to my tiny office just next to our bedroom work on a few proposals for the new company I had been meaning to start.

It was long overdue.

And having Zakhele all the way overseas make everything a lot harder.

Juggling threw babies, a career in marketing and Zakhele's empire wasn't child's play. But it taught me great life lessons.

I'd been working on my

marriage and getting over my little crush on Mercy and it was a slow process of both ends but it was all working in my favour. Grace was supportive of the fact that I was working hard on getting us back to where we were and trying to put Mercy behind me. It was a tedious task, with all the dreams I had about her. I couldn't forget her even if I wanted to.

I'd driven to her place once because I couldn't take the

torment. I couldn't handle the dreams and the wild fantasies I'd been having of her. It nearly drove me crazy. I saw her exiting one of the cars parked in the yard, her tummy almost falling off her tiny frame. She looked even more beautiful than the last time I'd seen her. I almost went inside the house but I warned myself against it. Ever since that day the dream got worse. They turned into wild, crazy wet dreams that had me coming

in my sleep every time. It was so vivid that at times I thought I felt her on top of me, grinding and humping me. Grace would try to make me up but it never worked. I would groan in my sleep, call out her name, pant and stroke myself in my sleep. Grace took the guest room because she couldn't handle it. I was trying everything in my power to stop this. I went to see Bab'Gumbi a few days ago and he couldn't help me. He said that this had

something to do with the heart and it was beyond his ability.

I went to see a doctor and he warned me against manipulating my brain. If this is what the mind wanted then it would go on until it stopped. He never estimated when but he did say that it would go on for a long time. I thought seeing her would help my plight. But then I thought back to the time when I saw her and it all got worse from then on. I

couldn't risk it.

.

.

Grace served dinner thirty minutes later. I couldn't face her with the paper work I had next to me.

Grace: I saw Mercy at the all today.

I blinked, lifting my gaze from the papers in front of me.

Me: Oh.

Grace: Her son looks exactly like Zakhele.

Me: Yeah. I figured he would. She smiled faintly.

I rubbed my face in frustration and put the pen down. "What is this all about exactly, Grace?" She cleared her throat.

Grace: I heard you last night. The phone call with Zakhele.

Me: Yes. What about that. She shrugged.

Grace: They won't stop, Bandile. The dreams will keep haunting you. I know that you love her.

Me: I love you. She's just a woman I once had feelings for.

She chuckled, shaking her head.

Grace: I know you, Bandile. I know how your mind works. Soon you will be all over her and I won't blame you baby. Mercy is gorgeous.

Me: Stop that.

Grace: No. Hear me out.

Me: Grace. I love you. I married you and I will not have you trying to pin me to another woman.

Grace: Face it, baby. Our marriage had run its course. You love her, I love someone

else.

The managed to knock all the words right out of me.

She had someone else she loved?

How did I not know about this exactly? How did I not see it in her eyes?

Me: Who?

It came out as a whisper.

A pained whisper.

Grace: Pedro.

Me: Grace!

Grace: I'm sorry, Bandile. I'm truly sorry baby. I know I should've said something

sooner.

Me: Pedro? I thought he was married. I thou-

Grace: He loves me. He left his wife for me.

Me: And now you're leaving me for him because you're convinced I love someone else.

Grace: I know you do. I know you love her. I can see it in your eye's.

Me: But Grac-

Grace: You have my blessing, Bandile. She's all yours.

And that was the end of our

conversation. She pushed her chair back, took her plate and headed to the lounge.

Leaving me all alone in the kitchen with my thought whirring around in my head. I couldn't pinpoint the exact emotion i felt but heart was the most dominant.

=====

I found myself at her doorstep.

She hadn't locked the gate and by the sound of it she wasn't alone. I knocked after a few moments of hesitation.

The door swung open and there stood the woman invading my dreams every night. She still had her braces on and they made her look much more younger than she was.

She blinked at in shock. Her mouth slightly hanging open.

Me: Hey.

Mercy: Bandile.

The way she said my name always made me want to kiss her right on the lips and never part.

Me: Phindile.

She had her hair tied up into a bun. She kept it all natural and it had grown since the last time I saw. She let her head hang. "Can I come in?"

Mercy: I have guests.

Me: That's okay. I'll stay out of your way until they're gone.

Mercy: Bandile... I don't know about this. I me-

Me: She left me.

Again, she blinked.

Lacking the right words. I wasn't yet privy to the ramifications of this situation

which is why I ended up at her door after driving around for hours.

Mercy: Come in.

She moved from behind the door and I walked in. I was met by two bug-eyed stares.

Me: San'bona.

Mercy: Uhm... Bandile, this is Sizwe and Nonhle, guys this is Bandile.

They both greeted in unison, standing up and fixing their clothes.

Nonhle: We'll see you tomorrow ke chom. Call us.

And they didn't give her a chance to explain or say anything. They just left, smiling and squealing. She shut the door behind them and she showed me to a chair. I preferred to stand really because what I came here for required me to be on my feet. She stood behind my tall towering figure. I rotated, meeting her tiny frame and almost knocking her over.

I caught her before she fell and held onto her. I couldn't

believe it had been over a year since we last saw each other. She'd lost a lot of weight since then and not a shred of her beauty. I covered her lips with my own within those moments and kissed her like I'd never seen her before. I held onto her like she would slip and fall if I didn't. This wasn't just any kiss... this was a declaration of my love for her even after a year and 6 months since I last saw her. She held onto my biceps, squeezing and

caressing them to her hearts desire.

I broke the kiss briefly.

Me: I love you.

She shut me up with another kiss. This one was more sloppy, lazy and sensual. Like she was pouring her heart into it.

I wasn't sure where to go from here but if she felt the same way I did then I guess I'd let her lead me into it. I loved her and that would never change. Zakhele gave me his blessing to pursue her

and if he left he was no longer inclined to claim her then I would take this chance to show her what I mean when I tell her I love her.

=====

I woke up in the morning to a warm smile. She was in the guest room bringing me breakfast in bed.

Last night we'd ended the night with a bottle of wine and great childhood stories. She introduced me to her son who couldn't understand a word we said but was very

happy to have his mother close. He'd named him after his father, Thulani Mdluli and she refused to tell me the second name. I respected that.

She perched on the edge of the bed and folded her arms across her chest. She was already all dressed up and ready to go somewhere.

Me: Uyaphi?

Mercy: Job interview.

Me: Oh! I almost forgot about that. You look great.

Mercy: Thank you. Last

minute shopping but thanks to Sizwe and his shady dealings I was able to land this baby.

She had this new glow in her. Her eye's had a bright sparkle to them and she was smiling brighter.

Me: You look happy.

Mercy: I am. I'm happy.

Me: Why?

Mercy: If this goes well then you'll be looking at CEO of Mercy Enterprises.

Me: Wow!

And here I was convinced

that the reason behind this unmistakable glow was a man.

Mercy: I'm keeping my fingers crossed.

Me: I'm keeping my fingers crossed too. I know you'll land this. Just have faith.

Mercy: Thank you.

Me: I'll hurry on out then.

Mercy: No! Don't do that. You just have your breakfast and relax. Sizwe will be here soon to look after the house...

don't leave until he gets here. Please.

Me: Before you go.

I put the tray on the side, removed the covers and swung my legs to the side of the bed. I stood up and approached her slowly. "I wanted to ask you something... important."

Mercy: Bandile I know what you're gonna say. I feel like it's just too soon after the whole fiasco with your brother.

Me: But that was a year and 6 months ago.

Mercy: It's still fresh to me.

Plus, you're going a rough patch with your wife.

I chuckled.

She wasn't listening to me when I told her about Grace leaving me.

Me: Mercy. It's over between me and Grace. She loves someone else.

Mercy: Be that as it may, she's still your wife.

Technically.

Me: Mercy...

Mercy: I can't put myself through this again. Bandile. I can't do this to myself again

knowing the end resu-  
I shut her up with a kiss.  
She hated it whenever she  
was interrupted but she was  
talking too much and all I  
wanted was a goodbye kiss. I  
would see her again later  
tonight but I needed  
reassurance. She let it linger,  
holding onto my biceps. She  
loved that area of me.

Me: I want you. You don't  
understand that now but  
soon you will. Go to your  
interview. We'll talk as soon  
as you're home.

She just nodded. "I love you Mercy. I will prove it to you..."

I kissed her one last time for the road and then I let her go. I watched her strut her way out of the house, swaying her ass from side to side like she owned the world. I laughed and she joined in.

Me: Dinner tonight?

Mercy: I have plans.

Me: Cancel them haw.

She stopped midway and turned to face me.

Mercy: Just like that?

Me: It's just dinner Mercy.

Mercy: I have plans nje.

Me: Okay fine.

She smiled. "What time should I come fetch you?"

She just burst into laughter and left me there in the middle of the guest from.

Me: 7 PM it is then.

....

SEVENTEEN

-Mercy

I returned home after a long, unnecessarily dramatic day. I threw my bag on the couch

and removed my shoes. It was already dark outside when I entered. Sizwe was sitting on conjoined couch with a sleeping Thulani. I kissed Sizwe's cheek and then relieved him of this tedious duty I'd given to him.

Me: Thank you chomza!

Sizwe: No need.

He stood up to his feet and started stretching. His bones audibly cracking as he groaned and moaned.

Me: Should I get takeaways or cook?

Sizwe: No need. Your boyfriend dropped off a bag from UberEats not so long ago. He said he wouldn't be able to make dinner because something came up with his brother but that we should enjoy and leave some for him. He might just come by later.

Me: And you remembered all of that?

Sizwe: I have a good memory.

Me: Nonsense!

Sizwe: Jealousy is a nasty trait on you.

Me: Tsek!

I lay my son on out court and then joined Sizwe in the kitchen as he dished out the food onto plates.

Sizwe: He went to unnecessary lengths to impress you ne. What is this?

Me: Those are just pizza toppings, Sizwe. Yin ngawe! He laughed, splitting the pizza evenly and leaving some slices for Bandile.

Sizwe: When did you start seeing that hunka hunk! I rolled my eyes.

Even if I explained it to him in simple English he would reach his own conclusions and stick to what he understands or what he wants to understand.

Me: He's Zakhele's brother.

And He's not my boyfriend.

He is a good friend of mine.

Sizwe: Mamela la. Zakhele is

gooooone! Wahamba loyo

lwabhish and he ain't

returning. Khohlwa ngaye.

You need to move on now.

This is your chance.

Me: I don't want to move on!

Sizwe: You can't sit here and mope while Zakhele is probably fucking some blonde woman against the wall in some dark alley. Or better yet, what if he's already married to some Latina woman who gave him three kids?

I found myself laughing.

Me: Your imagination is too vivid baby. Too vivid and very over active.

Sizwe: You need to face the truth, sooner or later.

Me: You don't have to be that

deep about it. I'm still not moving on until I feel I am ready.

Sizwe: And when will that be?

Me: Whenever I feel like it!

Sizwe stop bugging me. If you want Bandile then take him.

I took a careful bite of the thick Pizza with the many toppings. He got a lot of food from Mr D's and it was a heaven and a half!

A variety of finger foods and starter dishes. We ate everything there was to eat

in that moment.

Me: And even if I did move on with Bandile I know I wouldn't be fully satisfied because he loves his wife and I can never fully have him.

Sizwe: So you do want him.

Me: I want him. All of him. It's been this way since I first saw him at Zakhele's house. But I just... I couldn't have him.

Sizwe: Uyam'thanda?

Me: I wouldn't put it like that. But I wouldn't mind having him as my boyfriend. Just to

explore these feelings.

Sizwe: Manje, umeleni?

Me: He loves Grace. He has always loved her and I don't want to fight for my place in his life knowing there's still his wife. I want him to fully let go of his past first... I've been through too much these past few months.

He sighed.

He of all my friends understood the heartache I've had to deal with physically and emotionally. The nights I stayed up and

cried for Zakhele. The nights it hurt to remember vividly the pain he put me through. The nights when I'd see him in my dreams and just start screaming and crying.

My heart was still hung up on him. I still wanted my chance and I still loved him. But he was never going to return and sooner or later I would have to face that bitter truth. The ramifications of a love this deep were that I would have to let go all on my own. While he was probably living

it up all the in way in America.

Sizwe: Just... I don't know man Mercy. Try and forget about Zakhele. I know it won't be easy but try.

Me: I will. Just not now.

Sizwe: I can tell you one thing chom. Bandile is into you. It's deep and I don't know if you understand me. He loves you. I can see it in his eye's.

Me: Dr Love. Please stop making me feel like shit. I already feel bad for not wanting anything serious with him right now... don't

rub it in.

Sizwe: He's a good guy.

Me: I know that much. I don't want to rush into anything.

Sizwe: But do give him some acknowledgement. He's here and he loves you. M'nake.

=====

Sizwe was gone before we could have a glass of wine.

Bandile had made an

unexpected entrance. He

stood there looking

particularly delectable in his

slim fitting three piece grey

suit. He filled it out perfectly

looking like the epitome of a sex god. He smiled the moment he saw me munching on the fries that came with the pizza. For a man going through marital problems he looked refreshed and elated. His eye's sparkled and he oozed contentment.

Me: Wow.

Bandile: Hi.

Me: You look, good.

Bandile: I wish I felt as good as I look.

Me: Hmm. Sit down and let

me pour you a drink. How was your day?

He shrugged, pulling his jacket off and placing it over the counter. He filled his shirt out as well, it hugged him taut.

I couldn't wrench my eye's off thick, bulging arms. It was one of my many weaknesses on him and he didn't seem to notice I was visibly drooling over him.

He places his elbows on the counter and ran his hand through his bald head. I have

never seen him so bothered.  
And ravenous.

I poured him a glass of scotch  
I kept in the liquor cabinet for  
Zakhele. A cube of ice sitting  
at the bottom. He thanked  
me and downed the amber  
liquid in one go. He asked for  
another. I filled it up and he  
did the same, guzzling it  
down like it did nothing to his  
throat. Third, fourth and then  
he slowed down on the fifth.  
I didn't think he could  
stomach any solids so I  
placed everything in the

fridge and he poured myself a glass of wine.

Me: Are you gonna tell me what's bothering you?

He lifted his eye's from his drink and laid his bloodshot eye's on my face. Was he drunk already or was he crying?

He just chuckled at my failed attempt to read his face.

Bandile: I'm not drunk. Yet.

Me: But you're not sober either.

Bandile: I'm always not sober. That wasn't true.

I had the privilege of seeing him sober almost every time.

Me: Talk to me.

Bandile: Grace signed the divorce papers. Not only that but she wants full custody of the kids until they're three.

Me: Oooh.

Bandile: She also wants the house. So, now I'm homeless because I signed the papers too. In a month or so she wants me gone from the house.

Me: Bandile...

Bandile: I'm thinking of taking

the house Zakhele left in Pimville since it's still unoccupied. The problem is that it has so many bad memories.

Me: For you?

He blinked at me.

Like I'd asked the dumbest question there was to ask.

Bandile: For you.

Me: Uhm... what does moving there have to do with me?

Bandile: Everything, baby.

I raised my brows inquisitively.

Shocked at his abrupt

mention of the word 'baby' but he didn't seem to catch the whole thing. He just cruised right through.

Bandile: The things he put you through. I just... I don't want to go there.

Me: Then rent an apartment so long while you hunt for a perfect home.

He just chuckled, taking a careful sip of his drink. I hadn't touched mine.

Bandile: Thing is. All the houses around here are either already occupied or

not for sale.

Me: Woah. Houses around here?

Bandile: Yes.

Me: Why here?

He shrugged.

Bandile: Because I want to be close to you and Thulani.

It felt like he was moving too fast.

What exactly was he looking for here? There is no life for a man like him here. He had to rethink his decision.

Me: Bandile. You can't be thinking like that right now.

You're supposed to be looking for houses in secluded places. Somewhere far away from this dump.

Bandile: But I have been living in a secluded place all my life and I've grown tired of it. I want to be here with you now. I want to start my own family.

Me: But you have a family. Grace and the triplets.

Bandile: She's taking them AWAY! Uyabathatha bayohlala no Pedro.

He guzzled his drink again

and then put the glass on top of the coaster and move it aside. "I'm all alone again." He said it with so much sadness that he lent forward and put his head on his arms. I automatically put my hand over his back and rubbed it gently.

Me: You're not alone.

Bandile: I have abandonment issues. All my life it has been this way. Everyone either stops loving me and leaves or they just die.

Me: That's not true. I'm here.

I snapped his head up and in my direction.

Bandile: You don't even want me.

Me: But I'm here with you.

Bandile: Hmmmm.

He slid off the chair, took his jacket and car keys and stumbled to the door.

Me: Uyaphi?

I asked following right behind him.

Bandile: I'm going to Zakhele's old place. I don't want to bother you again tonight.

Me: Nooooo. No. No. No. No.  
No! Nooope. You're not  
driving in your state bhuti.  
Not on my watch.

Bandile: Then you drive me.

Me: It's Friday, Bandile. Stay  
over again and you'll drive  
there first thing in the  
morning.

I held onto his waist and  
turned him back to the  
kitchen stools. He was so tall  
that I felt like I was pulling a  
730L fridge all on my own. He  
turned and I had to crane my  
head to look up at his eye's.

He smiled.

Bandile: You can drive me there nje.

Me: No! You're staying over. I can't just leave Junior all on his own.

Bandile: But why?

Awung'fune nje wena.

Me: Bandile!

He did the unthinkable.

He picked me up from the floor and I automatically wrapped my legs around his waist, throwing my hands abruptly around his neck for balance. "Put me down,

please."

Bandile: Why ungang'funi?  
Ngimumbi?

Me: Put me down Bandile.

Bandile: I will. Just answer  
my questions please.

I couldn't answer that.

He knew I found him sexy  
and attractive which meant  
he was fucking handsome.

But I would be strong that fat  
Ego of his. So I shut him up  
with a kiss instead.

I felt my ass sit comfortably  
on the hard granite top of my  
counter as he rested me

there and remained stationed between my legs as he deepened the kiss.

I felt his hand tugging at the hem of my shirt and I allowed him to take off my blouse followed by the button of my pants. I did the same, helped him take off his shirt followed by his suspender.

His arms and torso were nearly covered in tattoos but I didn't mind.

I loved seeing his arms out in the open. He picked me up again and took me to the

lounge and layed me on my back on the conjoined couch and helped me out of my pants as we planted wet kisses all over my body. He didn't give me a chance to protest and push him off me. We were really doing this. He layed a foundation of wet, sensual kisses that caused my aroused me. The heat emanating from my limbs pooling between my legs, my nether region throbbing painfully. He hadn't started on the more explicit things

and already my panties were soaked. With just lip contact I had started shaking.

And then he pulled a fast one on me.

He tied my hands together with his tie and kept them above my head and he laid the hot kisses that made my body shook from my neck down to my sensitive, perky nipples. He paid little attention to those because I still breastfed my son so we both didn't want to deal with any spills. He moved down

South slowly and carefully, licking and biting me gently all over. He left an inordinate amount of hickeys all over and keeping my hands to myself became a lot harder as he reached my thighs and parted them gently, kissing and nibbling on the skin of my inner thighs.

I believe he left more hickeys there than any other place.

My skin had began turning a darker shade of pink. He blew warm air over my lace covered nub and I almost

screamed, shaking from within.

It's been a year since I last had a man go down on me. And I happened to hate pubic hair so I had none because I shaved it off frequently. I fought with myself on keeping my hands to myself but it was proving impossible. I needed him, urgently so. Slowly he tugged at the hem of my lacy thong, sliding it off my thighs, leaving trails of my arousal all through my legs. He carefully

places the thong on the coffee table and then returned to Nederland.

He blew more air on it and then took a long, deep whiff of my pussy.

"Hmmmm. You smell amazing." And he kissed it. A long kiss and I gasped, taking in the long, anticipated sensation of his lips. I was vibrating.

He used his thumb to rub against the clit softly, parting my flaps and almost delving in deep. He licked the pink,

sensitive part and rubbed the clit again. This time he wasn't gentle.

Fuck these restraints. I fought to get them off and placed my hands on his head. He didn't seem to mind.

I felt his hot tongue on the clit and it started building.

The orgasm was bubbling up inside and soon I'd come apart. That's just how much I wanted him. He sucked on the clit and used his finger to fuck the whole. One wasn't working for him so he slid in

the second one and ate me out like he hadn't had anything for lunch. He paid careful attention to the clit and all I did was grab hold of the scatter cushion, press against my face and moan against it, my legs on his shoulder. I didn't want to wake Junior up. I screamed his name as I felt the orgasm break through me like a tsunami. It hit me so hard that I almost cried as I came on his face.

He licked it all up, clean and

then returned to my face, removing the cushion. He didn't say much when he was aroused but I could tell he wanted me just as much by the hooded eye's. I helped him out of his pants and watched as his cock snaked it's way up to the hem of his boxers. He took those off and it sprang to life, resting on his abs. It was bigger than the last time I saw it and longer. Thick and fat. It leaked all over his abs as he stroked himself. I reached for drawer

where Zakhele used to keep his emergency stash of condoms.

I removed an entire pack of three and he opened on with his teeth, discarded the foil and slid in on with one hand. With the other he roamed it around my clit.

To be honest, I wasn't ready for that big thing. But he positioned himself in between my legs, gently pushing it in. It took a while for him to sink in deep. I was really tight from all the

withdrawal. He also kept wincing and praising the pussy for being tight. He started thrusting slowly, stretching me wider and sinking in deeper. I could feel him all the way to my stomach and it was the most uncomfortable feeling. But he was comfortable and soon I'd feel the pleasure kicking in and all would be forgotten. He place both his hands on my waist and held me in place as he began ramming and rocking into me like a

man possessed and the pleasure crept up on me. All I could do was moan and beg him to please do deeper and harder. He obeyed.

Fucking me harder until all I could hear was our skin to skin contact making clapping sounds. It was an incredible experience, better than what Zakhele had ever shown me. He never praised me much during the sex. He never really groaned at all. It was like he was unaffected by it. But when he came he roared

like a lion, depositing his seed into the condom and the discarding it and putting on another one. He flipped me over and placed a pillow under my waist so my ass would stick out, he held me down and fucked me in the ass. This time he was very vocal about the way he loved how my ass jiggled. He said the nastiest things and I loved them. His deep, raspy voice reverberated through his body and coursed through mine. It was the

sexiest thing.

Bandile had a thing for his mother tongue so his dirty talk was mostly in IsiZulu which sounded too raw and dirty. I tried to block it out but his voice was doing things to my clit I could never explain.

His breathing hitched and hearing him panting and heaving for breath only made me more wet and hungry for that cock. The third round was a little hard because he wanted me on top.

Not my strongest suit.

But I was happy to oblige. I straddled him and he slid the dick deep inside. He directed me through it all and I have to say, I favoured having my ass in the air than humping him and trying my best not to complain about the pain and uncomfotability. He made me feel sexy though... which counts for a lot these days. Then there was the love making session where he slowed down and went into gentleman mode. I loved

having him breathing so closely to my ear, whispering sweet nothings while he grinded into me slowly and passionately. His moans sounded so beautiful I found myself pushing him deeper into me. Even though I knew I had reached my limit. I wanted to having him embed inside me.

Bandile: I love you, Phindile.

He groaned into my ear.

And then shortly after he went rigid, releasing his seed into another condom. "You're

incredible."

I was thoroughly fucked and now I wanted to sleep.

My eye's were heavy as I move from underneath him and lay on my side. He followed suit and we fell asleep.

.

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I woke up to a giggling Thulani.

There the heck was he giggling from anyway. I searched with my eye's and found him playing with

Bandile on the other couch. He was all dressed up in yesterday's clothes. He still looked mighty fiiiine.

Bandile: Good morning baby. That would still take some getting used to but I ignored him and waved at my son.

"We've been waiting on you to wake up. How are you?"

Me: I'm okay. You slept well?

Bandile: I did. Breakfast is ready.

Me: Breakfast?

Bandile: I ordered in. I figured you'd still be exhausted from

last night.

Me: Hmmm. Thank you.

He picked Thulani up and brought him to me. He laid a hot one on my lips and them moved away.

Bandile: I have a meeting in two hours and I wanted to pass by my place for a quick shower. I'll see you later angithi?

Me: I'm not sure. Today is Saturday you know. I have plans.

Bandile: Cancel them.

Me: Asoze!

Bandile: Ngyak'cela baby. I want to spend some time with you.

Me: Bandile... not today. I have plans.

Bandile: Eish. Okay ke.

He leaned in, captured my lips in an enticing kiss and then backed away after leaving me breathless. "We will finish what we started. Soon..." he left.

Just like that.

He walked out and I didn't have the strength to call after him. My muscles ached

and he was in a rush. We could've soaked in the tub. Together.

Argh!

And I had some serious shopping to do today. I had no groceries in this place and Thulani needed some real nutrients. And also I had a feeling Bandile would stick around for much longer so I had to prepare myself for overtime work.

Cooking for him almost everyday and cleaning after him. Even though he was a

neat freak on his own accord.

Also:

Was I accepting the "Baby" label?

Was I his girlfriend?

Eish.

....

EIGHTEEN

-Bandile

The house was even bigger than the last time I saw it.

Maybe because it was empty now that Zakhele took all his belongings with him. I had the realtor replace the old

built-in cupboards with new ones which gave the house a more masculin feel with dark, sultry colours. The lighting was minimized for an even darker ambiance. The tiles almost matched the counter tops. It looked different than when I saw it last and they'd done an exceptional job.

The paint in every other room was also changed, the carpets removed and in their place was either animal skin or dark patches new carpeting with thicker fur.

The lounge had deeper colours as well and The TV was no longer mounted on the wall. In its place were paintings I'd bought at some art gallery in Durban and some that I had already owned.

I wanted Mercy to feel comfortable whenever she stepped inside this place. I changed the setting of the house because I thought it would better accommodate her. I wanted that for her. I needed to buy some

furniture soon and fill this place up because I'd be moving in. She didn't want me too close to her and Thulani and I respected that. Which is why I would be staying here for a while. Grace was serious about this Pedro arrangement. I found them sitting together in my lounge, kissing and feeding each other strawberries. That did make me bitter but I pretended not to care because I know she would do the same for me. She would

keep her distance and respect my decisions. All my bags were in my car.

After seeing Grace in another man's arms I made a decision to extract myself from that place before I did and said some things that I would later regret. She helped me pack everything in silence, more was on the way with a moving truck. All I needed to do was settle in and work from home.

=====

12 hours later I was already

settled in with all my boxes packed away. I was obsessed with order. When I did something or started a task I had to finish it right now. I worked fast and alone because that way I got things done quick and I had them done my way. I still lacked some furniture but I would get some whenever I wasn't busy. I had a TV set so I was all sorted. All I needed were groceries and a few pots. While I was going through my appliances trying to get

myself a cup of coffee my phone rang on the kitchen counter. I grabbed it and answered without checking the caller ID.

Me: Mdluli.

Qhawe: Mercy is missing!

Me: Huh?

Qhawe: They snatched her!  
Bamthathile uMercy Bandile.  
Angaz ukuth' obani!

I drop the spoon in my hand, my heart beginning to palpitate at the mention of Mercy and Missing in one sentence.

Me: Where, how?

Qhawe: EMALL!

He sounded panicked and afraid. It was unlike him so I knew this wasn't a joke.

Mercy had been kidnapped.

Me: Where are you right now?

Qhawe: Parking lot yeMall where I just saw her get taken by two men and Thulani also. Angazi ukuthi ngenzeni Bandile.

Me: Okay. Stay right there. I'm on my way.

I hung up, took a few deep

breaths and then I moved to the lounge feeling a little dizzy.

Mercy was missing. My head felt heavy as realisation settled in. She couldn't have been taken in broad daylight like that. I found myself calling Zakhele's number. He asked us never to call him unless there was an emergency.

This was a catastrophe.  
He answered in one ring.  
Zakhele: Bafo.

Me: Bamthathile.

I said that in a whisper. I was having a hard time breathing through the devastating news.

Zakhele: Ye?

Me: Qhawr uthi Bamthathile uPhindile. He just saw her get kidnapped eMall!

All this time Zakhele had been hiding out in Durban. He convinced Mercy that he was in America when he just flew to Durban and found permanent residence. He was a doctor there and he was doing well for himself.

Whenever Qhawe or Wandile would get Thulani from Mercy they flew him to his father in Durban. She didn't know that. Zakhele didn't want her to know that because he knew she would come after him like he almost came after her three times. He had watched over her for three days before deciding to go back in hiding. He asked me to take care of her because he couldn't handle knowing that some random guy was doing the job

Zakhele was supposed to be doing. But that was a story for another day...

Zakhele: Ang'zwanga?

Me: Come home Zakhele.

Zakhele: I'm on my way. You find out more about this kidnapping right now! I asked you to keep her safe.

Me: Just come home.

He hung up.

I went on my knees crawled toward the couch. I needed to sit down and breath. I couldn't think straight.

.

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It took him 6 hours to get here from Durban. He'd booked the first flight out and I was pleased to see him and a few friends from uMhlanga back home. He knew I was serious.

Zakhele: I was hoping this was a joke. A way to get me out of my hiding spot.

Qhawe chimed in before I could get a word out.

Qhawe: I wish it was.

He showed Zakhele pictures of the two cars that had

driven off with Mercy and baby Thulani. There were no registration plates on either car and it was your typical tinted window van. The men were wearing balaclava's and were 6-feet tall each. No way Mercy could've fought them off by herself. She was tiny and too slender to even succeed if she were to try.

Zakhele: And they took my son?

Me: I'm sorry, Bafo.

Zakhele: Ubukephi wena Bandile?

Me: I was at home unpacking. She had asked for space for the day. I didn't want to impose so I went to get my things from Grace.

Zakhele: Qhawe, where were you?

Qhawe: I was right behind her. Pushing the two trolleys filled with groceries when I heard screaming. I reacted a minute too late. And I couldn't exactly start shooting at them in front of all the people at the mall. Just now I get arrested.

Me: Tell me you saw at least one feature that could help us identify one of the men. Qhawe laughed in disbelief, shaking his head.

Qhawe: If it wasn't Themba. I just saw the tattoo on his left arm.

Me: Themba Mbhele?

He nodded.

What the hell? What did Themba know about Mercy.

Zakhele: Fikani!

He said through gritted teeth.

Who was Fikani and what

exactly did he know about him.

Me: Who the hell is that?

Zakhele: Mercy's crazy ex. He warned me that he would come for what was his pretty soon. I thought maybe he was talking about the drug ring... I would have given that to him if he wanted it that bad.

I rubbed my face in frustration.

What had we gotten Mercy into anyway? First it was Grace and Mandy now this

crazy fuck who was probably trying to prove a point by kidnapping her. What next, death?

Me: If he touches a single strand on her hair ng'yafunga nasi! I will cut off his dick and feed it to my dogs.

I poured myself a glass of scotch. I needed something to burn away the anger I could feel rising from the pit of my stomach.

I turned to face him.

He had his arms folded across his chest.

Zakhele: Nantsoke inkinga.

Fikani loves Mercy. He may never hand her over even at a price. He's stubborn.

Qhawe: How do we know it's him and not just Themba acting all on his own? The last time I checked Fikani was overseas closing some deals.

Zakhele: Themba has no business taking Mercy unless he was sent by Fikani. Or someone else.

The room went dead quiet.

There was someone else? Did I know this someone else?

Was he or she an enemy, a foe, an ex lover gone completely bonkers?

Why was Mercy caught up in the middle of this? Who was it!

Last night when we had sex I couldn't believe she was finally letting me hit it. After so much pent lust and sexual frustration she finally let me have her. I wasn't sure how to react. But then it happened. She let me in... she let me fuck. I was still shaken and now that she was

missing my head was spinning. I was losing it.

Me: There's someone else?

Zakhele: Possibly. I'm trying to remember who it might be.

Me: You asked me to protect her from YOUR enemies?

How am I supposed to know who those enemies are?

Zakhele you put Mercy in danger!

Zakhele: I didn't put anyone in danger. I already had enemies before I met her.

Me: And you neglected to

inform me of this, why?

He was just as frustrated as I was and I needed someone to blame. I couldn't take the guilt. I should've persisted until she gave in. That way she would be safe right beside me.

I didn't want to invade her space.

She needed breathe and I had to allow her to process what we did last night. "Today better not end without Mercy back home safely. I need her here!"

Zakhele: We're working on it.

Me: We need to work faster.

Zakhele try calling whoever this Fikani guy is and find out more about what and why he would-

Zakhele: Yes boss.

He rolled his eye's at me.

I was so clueless when it came to this game that I stood there and watched them work while I was wrecking my brain with worry.

Mercy... come home baby.

=====

-Mercy

My head was heavy and foggy as I tried to peel my eye's open. Every inch of my face hurt.

What had happened? Where the heck was I anyway? The room was dark and enclosed, tendrils of shadows pouring in from each and every corner. It smelt like fresh paint and I was on a bed. A very comfortable bed but who's bed was this? I tried to gather my bearings and center but it seemed

impossible with the mind-numbing headache that had settled in. My eye's could barely make out how big the room was or what kind of room it was.

Me: Hello

I croaked.

How long had I been asleep anyway for my voice to sound that horrible? I cleared my dry throat and it stung also it tasted weird.

Where was my son?

Me: Thulani? Thulani...

I snapped out of my pain

induced headache and searched for Thulani all over the dark room. I tripped over something and fell but even then I couldn't stop screaming out Thulani's name.

The lights went on immediately after that and I could see clearly the tiled floor underneath me. They weren't just any tiles. They were marble tiled, marble flooring which meant I was either in a palace or whoever had put me here was filthy

rich. I helped myself up and swept my gaze across the room.

Yup!

Whoever lived in this place was rich as hell. Ridiculously rich. The bed was so big that I wouldn't rolled all over it and it would've taken me 10 minutes to fall off. It was huge and it hardly took up any space. There were 4 doors and a floor to ceiling window covered in thick, charcoal grey curtains. Every door had it's own unique

design that captured my attention for at least 4 minutes each. I was mesmerized by the space in the room. It was bigger than every room in my place combined. The soft carpet just next to the bed matched the flooring in colour and the dressing table was big enough to house my entire collecting of clothes and shoes. Although it was empty.

Then there was the conjoined couch also charcoal grey.

Everything in here was either black, navy blue or grey and white. Such sultry colours meant the room belonged to a man. I could tell by the faint scent of cologne lingering in the air mixed with paint.

On the left side of the room was a human sized mirror and on the right hung a beautiful portrait of a man and a woman in their late 50s, a boy next to them with much darker features. I figured the boy was adopted because the parents were

white and the boy really dark. Even darker than Bandile and he was dark. But he was a beautiful little boy with distinctive features.

Thulani!

Me: HELLO!

I wanted to bang on the door. But which door do I bang? I started rushing over to each door, frantically opening. One led to an open plan bathroom. A bathroom bigger than my bedroom and bathroom combined. It housed two showers, a tub

big enough to swim in and still never fit. A mirror mounted on the wall, and a basin. A toilet on the other side.

The bathroom was in dark shades of black and grey contrasting against each other and making it look so dark and welcoming but also shady and masculine. Navy blue towels and gowns hanging from the rags just behind the door.

Beautiful space this was.

I reached for the other door

and it led to an enormous walk in closet filled with dark shades of charcoal black and creme white. When the door swung open an array of lights went on automatically, giving life to the once dead room. It looked like a store filled with manly attire. Suits, ties, watches, shoes and then casual wear.

Talk about neat freak.

Bandile had the same basic habit of organising his closet in colour, size and form.

Obsessive Compulsive

Disorder this. I didn't touch anything, I was in owe of the person who owned these. Everything was colour coordinated and there was a lot of black, grey and blue. Meaning they were his favorite colours. Shoes were either black, brown or a mixture of the two. Even the way his belts were hung up I could tell that he was obsessed with order. Even with his sneaker collection. Jeans on one side

Khakhi pants on the other. All in order. He must be the Christian Grey type. I rushed out and pushed the third door open and yup! I was right.

Christian Grey alright.

The place was just as I'd seen it on the movie Fifty Shades of Grey. Only it was dark with little lighting and really big.

He must enjoy his space.

On the walls of this room were paintings of women bound with ropes. Others hanging from some pole and

others were bent in the strangest portions.

Aibo.

Some were blind folded, naked and on their knees.

Equipment hung from walls and in the middle was a huge bed covered in dark colours.

It was a very strange thing to see with your own eyes.

I turned and headed for the other door which opened to a hallway that was never ending. I had reached a conclusion that this place was either a fortress or a

palace. I was on my bare feet as I ran down the right side and searched for my son.

Me: THULANI! WHERE ARE YOU BABY! WHERE ARE YOU?

I was slowly losing patience. I needed some son and it seemed I was alone here.

"SOMEONE HEEEEELP! PLEASE HELP MEEEE!"

No one answered.

I saw a flight of stairs leading down and I took them shouting and screaming for Thulani but it seemed I was all alone in this place.

It was so big that I concluded on it being a mansion. It had to be.

I ran into a kitchen, an open plan kitchen and my eye's landed on a figure with broad shoulders and a head full of hair.

Brunette hair that was tied was tied up into a man bun. A beautiful man bun, strands of hair falling out of the hold onto his neck.

Me: Hello?

He had his back towards me and seemed to be whipping

someone. He didn't answer me nor did he turn to acknowledge me. He was in black slacks and a white vest. The two domination colors of this entire place. He must've been the owner.

Me: Where is my son? What am I doing here and where the hell is here? Hello?

He remained unmoved.

I have never been so desperate to get someone's attention before. How exactly did I get here?

He was either making food or

whipping up something to drug me with. I turned and left him to do whatever he was doing as I searched this place and got lost. I searched even when I didn't know where I was going.

I started sobbing against one of the walls in the rooms here because I didn't know where I was. I hadn't seen my son ever since I woke up and it was stressing me out. How did a house this big only belong to one person and how was it so empty?

I slid down against the door  
and cried my lungs out.  
Who the hell had taken my  
innocent baby?

---

I felt myself rising from the  
floor into someone's arms. I  
don't remember how long I  
stayed on the cold floor  
weeping and asking myself  
how I could've lost my son.  
Someone scooped me off the  
floor and carried me out. I  
was too weak to fight them  
off so I just remained 'dead'  
until we entered the

bedroom I had just escaped a few hours ago. He lay me down and then walked back out. It was the same man I saw in the kitchen and he looked nothing like boy on the portrait.

What exactly was happening here?

Me: Hey!

He stilled just by the door.

"Can you at least tell me what I'm doing here? Where is my so?"

He stood there for a couple of minutes, silently staring at

the wall.

"Please." I begged.

He didn't turn nor did he bother answering me. He twisted the door knob and sauntered out. My heart dropped to the pit of my stomach. He barely looked at me.

Like I disgusted him and he loathed the very idea of me.

I went back to crying.

I couldn't find an exit from this place. The entire house was a big lump of rooms and windows and doors leading

to other rooms that had  
windows sealed shut.

Who took me?

Where is Bandile?

Where am I?

I hugged my knees to my  
chest and lay on my side.

Would they even look for  
me?

What about Zakhele? Would  
he fly down from America  
just to come look for me?

Was I even lost to begin  
with?

=====

-Bandile

I couldn't sleep.

I couldn't bring myself to climb on the comfortable bed in her place. I just remained seated on the ottoman just by the corner and held onto the blouse she was wearing the time I last saw her.

Baby Thulani had been brought back to us by Sizwe who claimed to have found him at the gate in his carseat. Had he not been there the time a black car dropped the baby off I don't know what would've happened. I told

him that Mercy had been taken and that we were searching for her. He lost it and ran. Since then I haven't heard from him.

Zakhele was sitting with his son in the lounge feeding him the bottled milk he found in the fridge.

I had made calls all over the place and no one had seen this Themba character anywhere around this place since last year.

Zakhele called Fikani and he came rushing to his father's

Jazz Club. He had landed yesterday from L.A and he wanted to know what his dumb brother had done now. Zakhele let him in on the situation and he too lost it. He went in search of Themba while I made the calls.

No one knew where or how to get to Mercy.

I wipe the tears falling down my face with the back of my hand. How could I lose her like this? How could I not have seen this coming?

I was so useless. How would I

find her now? We were all hopeless and distraught over her kidnapping. I thought by now they would've contacted us and made a ransom demand. I was wrong.

Zakhele: The food is here.

Me: I'm not hungry.

Zakhele: You need to recharge your energy,

Bandile. We have to keep searching.

Me: I'm not hungry. Leave me.

He sighed and walked out.

I covered my face with her

blouse and wept on it.

So many dead ends?

Things weren't even looking up. I couldn't lose hope but where was the hope in this situation?

My heart broke into a million pieces just thinking about the things she was going through all alone wherever she was.

What was she eating?

Where was she sleeping and was she safe and sound?

I bet they were torturing her.

I would kill them in a

heartbeat if they ever

touched her.

=====

-Mercy

I heard the shower running in the ensuite bathroom.

It was 3:02 AM.

I was neck deep inside the covers of this humongous bed and I don't remember ever tucking myself in. I rose to my ass and sat there wondering who was inside the shower at this time.

A few minutes later the door swung open and he dragged his slippers against the

marble floor with his hair wet, clinging onto his facial skin and the gown wrapped around his lean body. He was drying his hair when he realised I was staring. He stopped drying himself and stared at me too.

If I didn't know better I would say he was Arab. He never showed any emotion nor did he favour speaking.

He swept his tongue over his lips to moisten them and then continued to ignore me and he walked into the closet

and shut the doors behind him.

If this is his house then who were the people in the portrait? Because he wasn't in there with them.

He came out dressed in black jeans, black turtle neck and black combat boots with a blazer. His hair tied up again with some strands falling at the back of his neck. Watch in place and his powerful cologne that lingered again. He stopped and stared at me. I'm pretty sure I looked crazy

with my afro no combed and my eye's swollen from crying nonstop. He stood there looking perfect and just burnt wholes into my soul. Betraying no emotion at all. He licked his lips again and remained still like a statue. I couldn't pinpoint the exact color of his eye's but they looked inhumane. He took small strides towards the bed, crawled on top of his eye's still locked on mine and he lent in and blew a soft, minty breath in my face.

Before he laid a cold kiss on my parted lips. He moved back and disappeared through the big, white door leading to the hallway.

I remained like that as I tried to process what had just happened back there.

Who the fuck was that and why did he just kiss me like that?

\*\*\*

I woke up again and it was still dark in this room. He never opened the curtains and I wondered why.

If this was a kidnapping then shouldn't I be bound and gagged somewhere in a dark room with rats and dead mice?

Instead I was in this big, beautiful mansion with a mute man who kissed me and wouldn't tell me where my son was. He could stare at me and show now emotion whatsoever, confusing me. And I was longing to be in the comfort of my own home with Thulani in my arms and Bandile behind me holding

me close and assuring me that I would be safe.

The door flew open and he walked in again. He stared at me once more, not blinking. I was tempted to scream at him and ask him why I was here but he wouldn't answer me. I knew he wouldn't.

He used a device in his hand and the curtains parted on their own, tendrils of light filtering through, bringing the room to life. It was raining outside. But I could never tell because the roof

muffled the sound. I only saw the droplets on the windows. He removed his jacket and threw it on the dressing table. He removed his shoes and then disappeared into the walk-in closet.

Another routine shower and he returned smelling manly. He hit the closet again and retained to collect the clothes he had felt on the dressing table. He left for an hour.

Returned in just boxers and crawled onto the bed. This

time i shifted to the far side. He ignored me, turned his bare back toward me and slid into the covers.

Me: You've got to be kidding me.

Silence. "HEY!" I gathered enough courage to slap him on the back gently. He shrugged me off. "Hey Mr. I need to go home! Where the hell am I and what the fuck do you want with me?"

He did what he was good at. Ignoring me. I punched him and he sprang up and looked

at me with so much shock he  
chuckled. "I want to go home.  
What do you want from me?  
Why am I here?"

He stared at me.

God! "Are you ever going to  
tell me anything? Your  
name?"

Him: Eli

I gasped.

He just spoke! He spoke!!!!

It was so abrupt that it  
caused the bed vibrate. His  
voice was so deep and husky  
that it felt like he was  
speaking through a bottle.

My breath caught in my throat and my heart palpitated.

He didn't say another word. He gave me his back and covered himself again. I slid out of bed and headed for the door with the intention of escaping.

Eli: It's locked.

I reached for tha knob and faught with the door to open. It didn't budge. I kicked it and turned.

Me: You're British.

He didn't answer. "Why am I

here?"

Eli: Go to sleep Mercy.

Me: No! You kidnapped me!

Eli: Go to sleep.

I chuckled humorlessly.

I stormed to his side of the bed, pulled the covers off him. He didn't budge either.

Me: Take me back!

I slapped his arm.

Eli: You have anger issues.

Me: Take me home! I want to see my son!

He turned to lie on his back and then faced me.

Eli: Your son is safe. Come to

bed and quit hitting me. It hurts.

Me: I want to go HOME! MY BLOODY HOUSE! TAKE ME HOME.

Eli: No.

...

EIGHTEEN (2)

-Bandile

Morning came and she still wasn't here next to me. I fell asleep on the ottoman last night after establishing a connection with a friend of mine who might have a slight

idea where Mercy could be. I met up with him at around midnight for him to tell me that the man who took Mercy was like a shadow. The only way for us to get her back or to get to him was if he wanted us to find him. He didn't want to be found, yet. And the way he put was that by the time this man was done with Mercy, we would no longer want her. What confused me though was why he took her and not someone else. What ties did

she have to him and what ties did he have to us?

He went on to further explain that if we persisted he would come after us one by one.

I laughed at that.

The guy was serious. I

wanted to find out why he took her and not one of us if he had a problem with us.

Unfortunately he couldn't answer that because he didn't know.

Themba was found.

Fikani was on his way with him. I freshened up quickly

and got dressed in simple clothes. I wasn't in the mood for anything drastic and dramatic. I left Zakhele to care for his son and I drove to the location where Fikani had said we would meet. I wasn't sure how angry I was because I couldn't get myself to slow down as I drove down the road. I never stopped until I found the location.

I parked and exited the car that instant. I found Themba bound to a chair in the middle

of a room that looked like store turned storage space for illegal drugs and ammunition. I stopped at the door and watched at Fikani punched him in the gut like he wasn't blood related to this guy. He didn't flinch once and he laid them squarely on the part where he would bruise the most.

Fikani: Where is she!

Themba: I swear! I don't know where she is!

Fikani: I'm having a hard time believing that. You snatched

her waz' ukuthi uMercy.

Where the fuck did you take her?

Themba: We took her to some safe house in Randfontein and from there we were given our money sahamba. I don't even know the guy who wanted her. She exchanged hands! I just took the job because I needed the money.

He slapped him hard across the face and then moved back.

Fikani: There he is.

I stepped in and headed straight to the chair he was sitting on. I couldn't bring myself to touch him. He was bleeding on to his own clothes and his eye was swollen shut.

Me: You didn't have to beat him up like this Fikani. He can barely see.

Fikani: He worked for the enemy. He deserves this.

Me: At least clean him up. I could only stare at him for so long. I moved away from him and took a seat on the

vacant seat just next to where Fikani stood.

His hands were caked with dried blood. But he didn't care. "What did you gather?"

Fikani: That whoever sent these idiots to get Mercy had his dirty work done for him. He won't find him anytime soon.

Me: We need to find her!

Fikani: Yey! I know. Don't rush me. I'm also working as hard and as fast as I can. Whoever took her is clearly smarter than we thought.

Me: I know that already.

Fikani: Then we need to drive to Randfontein soon. Gather your brother's and meet me at The Jazz Club.

Me: What about him?

I pointed at his brother who looked half alive.

Fikani: We'll drop him off at Lenmed Hospital after he shows us where exactly he took Mercy.

I let out a deep sigh and nodded.

I stood up and handed him the amount of money we

agreed on. He thanked me and walked me out.

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Zakhele was sitting in the kitchen having lunch. I don't know how he was able to stomach anything solid at a time like this. I could hardly react to anything, threat or not. I wanted to punch the wall and then curl up and die. But I couldn't give up just yet. As long as we retrace the steps of her kidnappers then I know we're close enough to

finding her. I will do everything in my power to find her before the week ended. That's the least I could do for her son and my conscience.

Zakhele: Qhawe found something.

Me: So did Fikani.

Zakhele: Hmmm.

I poured a glass of scotch and a few ice cubes to cool it down and I took a few sips.

"So, what did he find exactly? Apart from his brother?"

Me: The last location they

took her to before she was transported somewhere else. He nodded and shrugged nonchalantly.

Zakhele: Not bad.

Me: It's a good start.

Zakhele: We could do better.

Me: I'm listening.

Zakhele: This guy that they're working for is not from here.

I don't know how he knows us or what ties he has to us.

But I know that he is Herman Shepherd's brother. Elijah Shepherd.

My breath caught in my

throat.

Me: Thee Herman Shepherd?

He nodded.

Fucking hell!

I knew he would come back. I

knew he would get his

retribution one way or

another. Zakhele had made

enough enemies to last him a

life time but I'd made an

enemy to last me

generations. Killing Herman

might've been for the good

of mankind because he was a

psychopath serial killer who

was on the verge of

destroying half of South Africa with an atomic bomb because he left the need to be seen, heard and understood. He was deranged to the point of killing people because it was in his blood and he lived for it.

After both his parents and sister died in a explosive accident he lost his mind and started killing people for no reason.

He was my best friend and we served together in the

army for three years. Highly decorated and when I made commander her made general. We led the team to victory and served two tours in Iraq and Congo. He fell in love and got married in Congo, leaving the army and joining some police force.

An enemy took out his family and the wife and two kids. He went rouge after that.

I had to put an end to him because only I knew how he thought and where exactly to find him. When I did, Elijah

was there. Elijah was just 20 when I killed his brother 10 years ago. He never spoke a word.

I thought he was mute but it turns out he never was a fan of talking. His actions spoke loud.

I'm guessing they were speaking now as well.

Zakhele: I'm curious.

Me: About what?

Zakhele: You killed Herman in front of his younger brother. What exactly did you expect? A warm hug?

Me: If you knew half the things Herman did to make a living and to keep himself entertained then you'd understand why I killed him. Eli was innocent.

Zakhele: You shouldn't have executed his brother while he stood there watching.

Me: Eli just walked into the room at the wrong time. I had already shot the bastard.

Zakhele shook his head. I knew he found fault in every little thing I did but I wasn't exactly privy to the

underhanded ways of the underworld. I was a soldier who served his country with pride and honour and when the time came for me to make a good judgement call I did. I saved my country. I would do it again in a heartbeat. Losing his wife was tragic. It would've been tragic for any man and I felt his loss. He knew that. But the rest of the country didn't deserve to die for the sins of some enemies we'd made during the war. Innocent kids

who died at the hands of that monster. He had slaves working to serve and please him. When he was done with them he murdered them and moved on to new, fresh ones. I didn't feel an ounce of remorse for ending his pathetic existence. I saved a lot of innocent girls who had bright futures in front of them.

I thought Eli would understand. He saw the damage his brother had done. He watched as he killed

women and children who didn't deserve it one bit.

I guess he was as heartless as his brother. He was smarter too though. I knew deep down that it would take us longer to find her. If he was able to move around in just a short amount of time. By the time we found him she would either be dead or no longer the Mercy we know.

Mercy had this thing about her that reeled any man in. I thought I was just helping when I fell in love

unintentionally. I hope Eli doesn't fall in love with her too because then she would never come back.

Me: We're headed to Randfontein in a few hours to get more intel. Are you coming with?

Zakhele: I think I'm going to follow my own leads. You're welcome to help me. Qhawe has agreed to help me.

Me: You keep me posted. I'll go with Fikani and try to find out more about these people. He nodded.

I just had to take another shower after the day I'd endured.

=====

-Mercy

I tried to open the floor to ceiling window and it had no handles whatsoever. I tried to open the other windows and all my attempts were futile. I tried doing everything in my power to get out of that bedroom and nothing worked.

He on the other hand was snoring away. He fell asleep

right after I had stopped trying to scare him into letting me go. I screamed at me and slapped him twice and all he did was just stare at me. Right after he "No." He went mute on me again. He didn't like talking.

I made that conclusion way before he told me who he was. Eli. I wondered if that was short for Elijah or it was just Eli plain. But it was a sexy name either way. I sat down on the soft carpet and tried to devise a plan of escape.

But how would I do that when every window in this house was bulletproof and impenetrable. And they didn't have any handles. He said that they opened remotely and that only he had access to that.

I ended up falling asleep on the carpet after giving up hope of ever being found.

\*

I felt him again.

He was picking me up from the floor and taking me to bed. I started slapping him

and screaming for him to put me down. He threw me on top of the bed and folded his arms across his chest. He looked appalled by my sudden reacting.

Eli: What is wrong with you?

Me: YOU! You're what's wrong with me Eli! I want to go HOME!

Eli: I said no.

What was the use!

Me: You can't keep me here forever Eli! You know I will find a way to escape.

He chuckled and headed to

the walk in closet. He returned with his jacket and threw it at me.

Eli: It's supposed to get really cold outside today. I suggest you wear that and stay in bed. I don't want you getting sick on me.

Me: When am I leaving?

Eli: You just follow orders and you'll be home really soon.

Me: If that's the case then I need food. I'm starving.

He sighed.

Eli: Behave.

And with that he disappeared

through the white door and locked it behind him. I contemplated putting his jacket on. He would see it as me giving to whatever this is. So I threw it at the dressing table and grabbed the fleece blankets on the side of the bed and covered myself with that instead. This should keep me warm along with with heater on the far side of the wall.

He can keep his jacket. I'm pretty sure it was expensive, probably worth more than

me but whatever. I was too cute to give in to some Arab guy turned British with his gorgeous eye's and that slick smile of his although I jusy saw a glimpse of it.

I wanted to go back home to Bandile and Thulani. I wanted to live my own, normal life until I got married and died a happy woman. Not this.

And then I started singing because that made me feel better. It always managed to calm me down and get me to my center where I knew

nothing could hurt me.  
Nothing could harm me. A  
song by H.E.R - Uninvited.  
Although it didn't make sense  
that I would sing this  
particular song I just loved it.  
It calmed me and it made me  
feel close to home. Which  
was better than being stuck  
in this beautiful mansion.  
He cleared his throat.  
I stopped my singing that  
same moment and looked at  
him. He had a tray of food in  
his hands. I could've gone  
down with him to eat.

Eli: Your food.

He brought it close and then placed it just next to the bed on the nightstand. There were two mugs of steaming coffee and toasted bread with peanut butter and jam. How did he know? Argh!

Me: Thank you.

I dug in after crawling toward the food. He took his mug and disappeared again.

Arrogant schmuck!

I remained in the bedroom for the rest of the day. Bored out of my skull rolling on the

bed and doing absolutely nothing all fucking day.

I would be in Bandile's arms right now watching a terrible series and just laughing at nothing.

But no. I was stuck here for the rest of my days with this weird man who spoke whenever he felt he needed to and he knew my name.

He was probably from Britain and somehow out thousands of women in this country he chose me!

What was this about

anyway?

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After about an hour or two of rolling in bed I got tired and started knocking on the door from the inside. I knew I would attract his attention now matter what because I was pretty loud when I wanted to.

Me: ELI! OPEN UP! I'M DYING OF BOREDOM IN HERE.

I was probably the worst person to kidnap in this century. I made too much noise and I always had

questions. No matter what came to mine. I would ask.

"ELIIIIII!"

Eli: What?

He was behind the door.

Good!

Me: You can't just leave me here all by myself. I'm bored.

Eli: Sit down and shut up!

You're starting to annoy me.

Me: Ung'thathelani wena?

Eli: If you just swore at me then you deserve to stay in there by yourself.

I laughed.

I forgot he doesn't speak my

home language. It was funny to hear him say that.

Me: If I was swearing at you Eli you'd know. Now get me out.

Eli: You're supposed to be kidnapped yet you're acting like a damn guest. What is wrong with you! You're getting under my skin and I don't like that.

Me: You treated me like a guest! I feel like a fucking guest! You should do a better job at kidnapping me!

Eli: Oh. Don't worry about

that sweetheart. I have plenty to keep you entertained. I'm just energizing. We will start soon.

That ought to shut me up for the rest of the day. I found myself backing away from the door. What have I gotten myself into?

Eli: You should sleep too. Energize. Because I won't let you rest once we begin.

His voice grew thicker and creepier. They carried so much weight that I felt them

settling in the pit of my stomach. So, he would rape me? Was he going to tie me up like those women in the paintings inside that creepy room? Oh god!

...

NINETEEN

-Elijah

She was starting to annoy me.

Her constant demands. Her squeaky voice. Her nasty remarks and the hitting. I wasn't a fan of talking or

communicating in general but she was forcing my hand. All I wanted was peace and quiet until I was done with my job. If she stays put I wouldn't have to scare her this much. All I wanted was to lure her boyfriend to me and I'd let her go. I wasn't interested in mingling with her. She wasn't my type. She was more Herman's type. But he wasn't here to witness that and who's fault was that. She was slowly getting under

my skin. I was warned by the guy that brought her in. She's a hand full. Vicious, a fighter. He had to smoke her out to have peace. She wasn't taking this kidnapping lying down. She kicked and screamed and cursed and bit his arm.

She put up a real fight.

But I wasn't in the mood to entertain her. I needed to get the man I came here for, do what needed to be done and then go back home.

Her screaming had seized

after I threatened her. Which meant I would have to make good on my promise. Even when I didn't want to. I also couldn't be the guy who makes idle threats. She would never take me seriously.

.

I turned the door knob to my bedroom and pushed the door open. But it was stuck. What the hell?

Me: Mercy.

She didn't answer.

I think she placed a chair

underneath the knob so the door wouldn't budge. She didn't want me to enter. This was childish.

Me: Open the door please. I needed to get my things. I couldn't kick the door down. It was heavy wood from centuries ago. I would need an axe and a saw to cut it open. "You can't keep me locked out forever.

Remember I have remote access to this house. I come and go as I please. Now open the door before I change my

mind and hurt you." Silence. She must be adamant on keeping me out of my own bedroom. I laughed at that. It was cute. Her thinking she had any control over this. I used the remote control to open the secret door that leads from outside right into my closet. She wouldn't know I was in there until I exited. I collected a few items I would need and then headed out toward the bedroom. I found her pacing the bedroom with a steel

candle holder and a number of other weapons from my room of pain on the bed. She stopped pacing the moment her eye's landed on me. She held out the candle at me, threatening to beat me with if I ever stepped out.

Mercy: Stay away from me.

Me: I just need to use the bathroom.

Mercy: Don't touch me!

Me: I said I need to use the bathroom lady. I won't touch you. At least not yet.

She stopped and then backed

away. I followed her as she swung the candle holder at me, missing and almost tripping on her shoe. She stopped moving once her back was against the wall. She started hyperventilating as I struck the weapon out of her grasp. "You're testing my patience Mercy. I don't want to hurt you but you're forcing my hand."

I caged her in and stared at her beautiful eye's. She reminded me of Antoinette, my ex-fiancè. Her hair was

uncombed and even then she looked pretty with her lips parted like a little baby.

Mercy: Please don't hurt me.

She said that in a shaky whisper as if she would start crying if I moved an inch. I sighed.

Me: I'm not a monster. I won't hurt you. You're too pretty for that.

Mercy: Please.

Her eye's betrayed the fear she was feeling, her breathing uneven. When she begged I could picture her

crying and screaming for mercy. I ran my hand on the side of her face and she flinched.

Me: I'm not a monster Mercy.

Mercy: Then please let me go.

Me: I can't. Not until I get what I want.

She started sobbing, fear dripping from her strangled cry.

Mercy: What do you want?

Me: Your boyfriend.

Mercy: My boyfriend?

Me: Yes.

I still had my hand on her

face, caressing her soft cheeks. She displayed a lot of uncomfortability. I couldn't have that... I needed her to keep an open mind.

Mercy: I don't have a boyfriend.

Me: Don't mock me sweetheart.

Mercy: I'm being honest with you. I don't have a boyfriend. I laughed, leaning in on her and placing my forehead on hers. She shut her eye's tightly in fear and tried to breathe through her nose. I

watched her... an then I lent in and kissed her but she didn't respond. I wasn't surprised by that. She pursed her lips and kept her stance.

Me: You need to cooperate Mercy. I won't hurt you I promise.

She shook her head.

I sighed and let her go. She wasn't worth it anyway. I kissed her cheek and then headed for the bathroom.

.

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I returned and found her still

standing in her corner. She squirmed as she saw me standing there with nothing but a towel covering lower abdomen. She didn't pretend, she really was scared.

Me: Come here.

She didn't budge. I was slowly losing my patience with her. She just stood there and if she pushed herself back any longer she would blend in with the wall. "I don't want to fetch you over there because I sure as hell won't be gentle. Now, please come

over here and let's be civil with each other."

Mercy: Civil? You call keeping me locked up in here civil?

Me: I asked you to come here.

Mercy: You're sick.

Me: I don't appreciate being insulted. But I'll take it.

Because I like your attitude.

She remained glued to the wall.

Christ! She was getting under my skin. "Mercy, come to me."

Mercy: You're gonna hurt me.

Me: I will if you don't

cooperate. Come to me.

She ditched the wall and took careful strides towards me.

She was still dressed in shorts, a black vest with no shoes. The clothes she came in.

She stilled a couple feet away from me. "Closer." She took two more steps but she

wasn't close enough. I

grabbed her and pulled her close until she was standing right at my feet. "You're not my type Mercy but for some reason I'm drawn to you."

She had stopped crying and she was back to her fire breathing self.

"I won't hurt you. I promise you that. I'm not like that monster boyfriend of yours..."

Mercy: I said I don't have a boyfriend. I wasn't kidding you.

Me: Good. Because I want you. I want you as my girlfriend.

She blinked at me looking shell-shocked.

Mercy: Huh?

Me: Be mine.

She narrowed her eye's to slits and furrowed her brows in confusion.

Mercy: You kidnapped me so you could ask me to be yours?

Me: No. I was planning on making you my slave and then I would kill you but then you're no use to me dead.

And I could use a lady friend.

Mercy: No!

Me: Okay. Then you leave me no choice.

I threw her on top of the bed

and she screamed as I locked her under me and removed the towel. I didn't want to have to do this. I reached for the hem of her shorts and pried them down. She didn't fight me. She just stared at me, breathing hard and loud. She was daring me to do this... I stopped. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

Mercy: You promised you wouldn't hurt me.

Argh!

Why did I promise her that?

Me: Fine! Close your eye's.

She did.

I moved back and covered my lower, naked body. She had me where she wanted me and that was in her fucking hands. "Now you have to do something for me."

Mercy: What?

Me: Open your damn eye's and come kiss me before I change my mind.

Her eye's shot open and she frowned at me.

Mercy: Why?

Me: I held my end of the deal. Now I want something from

you.

Mercy: Why that?

Me: Don't make me change my mind Mercy!

She sprang to her feet and hurried to stand before me.

Mercy: Just a kiss?

Me: You want something more?

She shook her head vigorously and then she lent in and pecked my lips.

She moved back. "Hmmm. I want more, come on..." She cleared her throat and closed the gap between us. Another

peck. This time I locked her in so she couldn't move

Mercy: There.

Me: I said a kiss Mercy. Not a peck we're not 1 year olds.

Mercy: Oh my God.

Me: Come on.

She sighed.

I knew she wanted to kiss me. She'd stared at me like she wanted to so I knew she did. She dipped her head and she took my lips into hers like she meant it. I tightened my grip around her as I deepened the kiss, taking her for a ride.

She didn't let go and I didn't want her to. I hadn't given her any reason to want to kiss me like this and yet she was giving me a great lip lock session.

I broke the kiss before my cock tore past the curtain of my towel. I couldn't scare her away like that. I still needed to gain her trust before we reached that stage. I moved back.

Mercy: Now we're even.

Me: Not in the slightest bit.

Mercy: Bu-

Me: Don't test me.

I left her standing there and headed inside my closet.

Immediately after I shut the door my cock sprang through the space between the two flaps. The towel fell off.

Jesus Christ!

=====

I returned home late in the evening and the lights were all switched on meaning the maids had come in to clean the house and restock the groceries. I'd had a pretty long day so I needed to de-

stress by standing under the shower and letting the warm water soothe my aching skin. I found her in my bedroom as always, sitting on the couch with her knees hugged up to her chest. She didn't react when I walked in meaning she didn't miss me at all.

Me: Good evening.

She didn't answer me.

I wasn't shocked either. I just took off my blazer and threw it on the bed. The well made bed. "You made the bed?"

She nodded.

Me: Thank you.

Mercy: Please let me go Eli.  
She whispered but she was audible.

Me: You think this is a game?  
She went silent. "You think I want to keep you here for fun?"

Mercy: I don't know. Why did you take me?

Me: Like I said. I want your boyfriend to come get you. The you'll know exactly why I kept you here.

Mercy: What boyfriend?

Me: The boyfriend you

fucked three nights back. He was supposed to back away like I asked him to.

Mercy: Back away?

I left her there and disappeared into my bathroom. I needed to breathe. She had no business learning the truth about what happened 10 years ago. "Eli! How did you know I was fucking him?" She yelled behind me.

Me: I have my ways.

Mercy: How could you!

I threw the door open and stormed straight toward her.

Me: Because! You were supposed to mine! I thought he was married okay? I'd been watching you for while now. I- I'm attracted to you! I can't deny that. But the business connecting me to your boyfriend is a lot more complicated. You were just a bonus.

She went silent.

It seemed I moved a lot slower because the vulture swooped in and stuck his claws into her. I could by the way she looked at me that

she loved him. She wouldn't change her mind even if I kept her here forever.

Mercy: You were watching me?

Me: Yes. I-

Mercy: You wanted me?

Me: Yes. I want you still.

Mercy: And you watched me suffer? You let those men play me like a fool while you watched?

That shut me up.

I didn't think it was any of my business that she was caught in that triangle. But now that

I see just how much she was seething from it all I felt a pang of guilt.

Me: I'm sorry.

Mercy: You want me?

I nodded. "Do you think you deserve me? Because I know I deserve that man you took me from. He loves me. He cares for me!"

Me: And you think I don't care for you? Why do you think that monster left town? He was never going to let you slip away that easily. That's what obsessed men do.

Mercy: Who, Zak?

Me: Yes. I persuaded him to leave. I gave you time to heal so that when I came in you wouldn't have an excuse not to say yes.

Mercy: You made him leave?

Me: I had to! I had to make him leave. I couldn't-

Mercy: Exactly how long have you been watching me? I let out a long sigh.

Me: Ever since you pushed past me in that store a few years ago. You didn't see me but I got a good look at you.

You never said sorry. I was intrigued by you.

Mercy: You stalked me from then?

Me: I didn't stalk you Mercy. I left after my brother went into the army and went back home. I returned four years ago to find my brother and then I saw you again. You saw me too but it was only brief.

Mercy: Hmm.

Me: You love him too?

She didn't answer me.

Her gaze flickered else

where. "Mercy?"

Mercy: No. I like him. I was getting to know him when...

Me: When you had sex with him.

Mercy: Why am I even telling you this? You kidnapped me.

Me: Any man would want to kidnap you Mercy. You're precious.

Mercy: That's crazy.

Me: Look. I won't stand here and confess to you how much I want you any longer. I will keep you here until I get what I want. Your boyfriends

head on a silver platter.

Mercy: What?

Me: Unless... you want to save him. In which case you would have to agree to my terms.

Mercy: What terms?

Me: Being mine. Only mine.

....

NINETEEN (2)

-Mercy

He didn't move.

He just stared at me the way he always did. I wasn't sure

how to react or if I could react. He was serious about his request which meant I had to really think this through. He said he wanted Bandile's head on a platter or me. I could turn him down and remain locked away from the world forever or I could save Bandile's life and agree to his terms only to turn into one of the women in the portraits in that room.

Me: Your beef is with Bandile and not me. Why do I have to make sacrifices?

Eli: You think this would be a sacrifice?

I already thought he was a psychopath so of course I saw this a sacrifice on my part. I was never present when they became enemies. Why start now?

Me: Yes. Being in the same room with you is a sacrifice within itself.

He chuckled.

I could never get tired of staring at his bun through. His hair was so silky and shiny it looked unreal. He

took good care of it.

Eli: That hurt.

Me: If you want Bandile so much I could take you to him.

Eli: No you won't.

Me: I give you my word.

Eli: I said no. You won't. That was an order. I want him to come to his death.

Me: You're sick Eli. A sick, twisted bully who can't do his own dirty work.

He laughed.

Eli: I've heard worse. So, what's it going to be sunshine?

Me: You can do to me whatever you please, Eli. I will never be yours. I don't want to be yours.

Eli: That's good to know.

He lowered himself onto the edge of the bed and untied his shoes. I've only even seen him wearing combat boots and the man had a closet full of suits. He was never the formal guy when he was here. When he was done he stood up and undid his buckle and then took off his pants. He carried those along

with the shoes inside the closet.

When he returned he had his gown in his hands and no top. I knew he would stay in there for while.

Eli: There is no of escaping, Mercy. The house is locked. And even if you do get to the door and manage to get out my dogs will chase you down and they will kill you.

He didn't bother looking at me.

Me: What am I supposed to do around here then?

Because I'm bored.

Eli: You could join me in the shower for starters. Or you could go find the TV room downstairs.

Me: You're really keeping me here?

Eli: Not just that. I will bed you. Soon. That's another promise...

He entered the bathroom and shut the door behind him.

He had dogs?

I left the couch immediately after the shower went on

and I ran out of the bedroom. The house was dark. Why would he switch off all the lights like this? Did he not like feeding his "guests?" I've been here for almost three days and I ate once!

I had to try and escape. Even if it means getting eaten by the dogs. At least I would die having tried to fight for my freedom. I couldn't depend on Bandile for my reprieve. It couldn't work like that. I had to find the remote he spoke so highly of.

But first!

Ukudla! I need to refuel my system. I was starving.

I found leftovers in the fridge. This guy! What the hell was this? I rummaged through the fridge and found bacon too. There was so much food in here that I couldn't decide on what to eat exactly. There were no pots on the stove either.

When did he eat?

I probably also stank.

I hadn't taken a bath in three days!

Sies Mercy!

I ditched the food idea and hurried back upstairs to get my shoes. Where exactly would I take this shower?

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I exited the bathroom in one of the many guests rooms with a towel wrapped around my body. There were no feminine products in this house meaning I would have to swallow my pride and ask him for his.

Argh!

Why did he have to exist?  
I almost screamed when I  
heard him groaning from the  
door. How did he find me?

Eli: Wow.

I had placed a chair under the  
knob like I did in his bedroom.  
How in the hell did he get in?

Me: Are you kidding me?

Eli: I thought you knew this  
sweetheart. I can get into any  
room in this house.

Me: Some privacy would be  
nice.

Eli: I made you something to  
eat. Hurry up.

Me: I can make my own food  
thank you.

Eli: You're still in my house  
and you're being held  
captive. You don't have any  
freedom as yet.

Me: I thought we'd  
established that an hour ago.

Eli: Not until you agree to my  
terms.

Me: I said no! I won't agree to  
your stupid terms!

Eli: You're one brave girl  
Mercy. Really brave and I  
must commend you for being  
so brazen.

That sounded like a threat. I hate threats. He'd been dishing them out ever since I woke up in this place and they're crawling under my skin now. Now I couldn't help but wonder how I would run from this place.

Me: I thought I wasn't your type.

Eli: I thought so too.

I really could never get over how gorgeous his hair was. I don't know how man this wild and feral had such beautiful hair. It was well

nourished and healthy. The strands spoke for themselves.

Me: You have beautiful hair. Pity it doesn't suit you.

Eli: Yeah?

I rolled my eye's at him.

Me: I'll be there shortly.

Eli: I thought you might need some feminine products so I got you these from the maids quarters.

He pointed at them on top of the dressing table.

Me: Oh. That's very thoughtful of you, thank you.

He gave me a salute and then he left. I made use of the little time and moisturized my skin. I slipped back into my shorts and vest with no underwear this time. I collected the products and I slipped my underwear into my pocket.

I took these with me to the kitchen where I found him eating silently. I placed the toiletry bag in the middle of the table.

Eli: You're going to need these so I suggest you keep

them. And you did good by using the other bathroom. I don't like sharing mine.

Me: You have two showers.

Eli: The other is a steam room slash shower. Two in one. I use it to de-stress after listening to you yell at me.

Me: Mxm.

He outstretched his hand towards me and gestured for me to pass it on. But I didn't know what he was referring to.

Eli: Give it.

Me: Give what?

Eli: Underwear.

I was appalled!

I let my mouth hang at the statement. Did he really just demand I hand over my underwear?

Me: Excuse me?

I was never ready for what he did next.

He pushed his chair back, reached for me in a few steps and yanked it out of my pocket. I jumped out of my skin at the sudden gesture. He moved backwards and placed it on his nose, taking a

long whiff.

Ewe!

Eli: Good God!

Me: That's disgusting.

Eli: Shut up and eat your food.

He backed away and fell back into his seat with my panties still in his hands. He stared at them in awe.

Eli: These are really yours?

I didn't answer that.

He chided me.

So I would obey him and eat my food. He spread them and went straight to the fabric

that covered the pee whole.

He stared at it.

I was shook!

That rang so many alarms  
and I was tempted to make a  
run for it. What was the  
meaning of this exactly?

Me: I think I just lost my  
appetite.

Eli: Eat your food Mercy so  
we can go to bed.

Me: I'm sleeping in the same  
bed as you? Why?

Eli: Because that's how I like  
it.

Me: Do I have a day in this at

all?

Eli: No. You don't.

I swallowed the ball of spit that had accumulated in my mouth. My life was over. "I won't do anything to you, Mercy. You can count on that."

Me: I don't trust you.

Eli: I don't trust you either but look at me, volunteering to keep you warm in bed because a beautiful woman like you doesn't to sleep alone.

Even when he was being nice

he sounded so cold and callous.

I was officially terrified by this guy. His baritone made it all worse. He sounded like a serial killer.

Vin Diesel had nothing on this guy.

Me: You terrify me.

Eli: You terrify me. I should've tied you up by now but something keeps pulling me back.

Me: What is that?

Eli: Your innocence.

Me: My what?

Eli: You heard me. I have this soft spot for you Mercy when all I should be doing is fucking your cunt until all you do is ooze cum. But I can't bring myself to do that to you.

He was so blunt and straightforward. He called a spade and spade. Why would he say that he wants to fuck me in the cunt? What is a- Oh God. Cunt is pussy? He made it sound so normal.

Me: Please don't.

Eli: You'll enjoy it.

Me: No. I won't. I know I won't.

His accent made everything sound so good. Even threats. He had a real talent.

Eli: Enough about my fantasies. Eat up quickly.

He took my underwear and shoved it into his pocket. And I only noticed then that he was in his gown. He continued eating after sniffing my three day old panty.

\*Gag! Gag! Gaaaaaag!\*

I think I liked him better when

he was mute. Because then he wasn't this manacing and terrifying.

The food was good. I ate everything on my plate and then he collected them, washed and rinsed them then he dried them and put them back.

He went the extra mile to wipe the sink and the counter tops. He was indeed a neat and clean freak. He took my hand in his and dragged me with him upstairs.

As we climbed up the flight of stairs the lights went off on their own. He knew his technology. He opened the door, shut it and locked it. Then he let go and took off his gown. All this time he was silent. It made him look so sexy and harmless. He remained with the boxers and then he took my hand again and dragged me to the large bed. I didn't have to wait for instructions. I climbed in. He followed behind me and the lights

went off. I felt the pull right on my waist as he brought me closer to him. I had never been so uncomfortable and comfortable at the same time.

He didn't say much.

I didn't feel safe at all in his arms. I was expecting anything really. But he just drifted off to sleep and I stayed up staring at him.

How could such a peaceful man like him be so cunning and deranged? It's like he had some sort of personality

disorder.

=====

I peeled my eye's open and he was awake, staring at me. I was still within cuddles. He didn't speak and that was creepy even for him during this time. He always had something to say.

Me: You can let go now.

Eli: Good morning.

Me: Hi. Let go please.

Eli: You're scissoring me. You been grinding the sweet bean against my crotch all night.

And he wasn't lying.

I had my leg in between his and the other draped around him. He had his left hand resting on my right thigh, holding it in place.

I was about to jump away from him.

Eli: Don't move. Please.

I went against his plea and tried to move my leg away from him but he locked me in with his strength.

I was heaving a wet dream last night. About Bandile.

Eli: I came. Twice. My cock

hasn't recovered from that.  
I made him cum?

What the fuck was Bandile  
doing to me in that dream  
exactly?

Me: Let me go.

Eli: Let's stop pretending now  
sweetheart. I want you. You  
want me. We should just put  
our differences aside and  
have sex.

Me: I'm not that desperate.

Eli: Did i mention you were  
clawing onto me? I could  
show you my arms and back  
if you don't believe me.

Me: Jesus Christ!

Eli: You should hold you in your sleep more often.

And I gave him what he wanted.

Just what he wanted!

Me: I need to pee.

Eli: Hold it in. I'm not ready to let go of you right now.

Me: Eli!

Eli: Yes sunshine?

Me: I'm pressed! I need to pee.

Eli: You better come right back to bed sweetheart or else...

He let me go. "Take off those shorts while you're at it.

They're making me uncomfortable in sensitive places."

Me: Don't push it.

I ran to the bathroom and took my time. I went as far as washing my face and rinsing my mouth. It tasted sour. He fetched me!

Scooped me up and escorted me right back to bed. He held me close.

Eli: I like having you here.

Me: You know, I think I liked

you better when you were silent.

Eli: I'm glad you feel that way. Because I'm about to go back to being silent. You're better off not knowing my next move.

Me: Huh?

And he was silent again.

I just felt him press himself against me, hard. Like if he didn't press hard enough he would die. I could feel him breathe through his member.

Me: Umm. Do you mind?

Eli: Yes.

Me: I can't feel my legs.

You're digging a whole into my thigh with your cock.

He chuckled softly.

What was so amusing about this?

Even squirming did nothing to warn him from digging any further into me. He moved back and I breathed and then shortly after he pressed his dick against me again.

Me: Stop it!

Eli: I'm just getting started.

Me: You're hurting me!

He stopped.

I could still feel the warmth of his dick print on my thigh. He was determined to mark me with it. I thought he would stop being weird but he did worse.

Eli: Be careful what you wish for.

Me: You can't keep treating me like this and then claim that you want me, Eli.

Eli: I can do whatever I want. You're in my territory now. His word was final.

Although he stopped bucking his hips at me. He still held

me in place.

He really wouldn't let go.

\*

I woke up to his dick on my stomach. His boxers were taken off and he had my leg draped over his again. To make matters worse, my hands were tied. He his was in between then and too close to my face for comfort. The rope was then held in place by another rope that was tied securely onto one pole of the headboard.

Eli: You're awake.

Me: What is this?

Eli: This is me upping the stakes dear sunshine. Since you won't agree to my terms. I might as well show you what I'm capable of.

My heart betrayed me, assaulting my chest. He had his hand down south, buried between my thighs. My bare thighs. It seemed I was naked just as he was.

Me: Oh lord.

My voice broke.

I tried swallowing the lump in my throat but it was too big

to slide down my trachea.

Eli: You know, your choice is pretty simple Mercy. You say yes and allow me to treat you like a queen. I will make you forget about that boyfriend of yours and show you what a real man can do.

Me: I preferred you when you were silent. When you open your mouth you sound like a psycho.

Eli: Maybe I am a psycho. Maybe you're the Harley Quinn to my Joker. Who knows?

Me: Let me go!

Eli: You're in no position to make demands, Harley!

He moved his hand to the opening of my vagina and touched it. "Oh!" He slid one finger over my mound and retracted it. "You're dry. But worry not for I will help you with that." I shut my eye's tight.

Me: Fine! Fine. I accept.

Eli: Huh?

Me: I accept your terms. I will be yours.

I said that in such a haste

that it sounded like something else.

Eli: Firstly, open your eye's.

I peeled the open slowly and met his ocean blue gaze.

"Secondly, repeat that.

Slowly so I can hear you."

I breathed out slowly and cleared my throat.

Me: I said I accept your terms.

I will be yours.

Eli: Only mine.

Me: Only yours.

Eli: Good!

He parted my arms and moved away and then

reached out to untie my hands.

By the grace of God they hadn't started bruising which meant they weren't tied up for long. He threw the rope on the floor and then he shifted off me. He gave me space and I used that time to breathe.

Eli: Now. We just have vanilla sex.

Me: What?

Eli: I'll be right back with the lubricant. Don't move.

He headed straight towards

the room with the whips and ropes and he was buck naked on top of it all. I couldn't stay in here!

I jumped off the bed and ran straight for his closet. At least here there was more hiding space than in his bathroom. And more weapons to use against him.

....

TWENTY

-Mercy

I don't know how he figured it out but he waltzed into the

walk-in closet with the lubricant in his hand. I had the belt in my hand and a shoe. He rested his free hand on his hips and sighed as he made me behind the watch drawer.

Eli: Not this again.

Me: Just because I said I'd be your doesn't mean you get to have sex with me right away. We need to establish a mutual trust first and then a bond.

Eli: We've bonded plenty over the few hours we spent in

bed together.

Me: Then this won't work.

And coming out from behind the drawer wasn't optional. I didn't trust him and I told him as such. He wasn't bothered by that one bit.

Eli: Okay, okay.

He placed the lube on the chest of drawers that housed his watch collection and he raised his hands in the air, backing away from it.

Eli: It's safe to come out now.

Me: It's only safe when I say so.

Eli: Sweetheart. You're wasting precious time just hiding back there. I could have you begging for me to fuck you harder against the mattress by now.

He had no shame.

And he spoke his mind like he didn't know I was sensitive to his use of vulgar language.

Me: I have no desire to be fucked against the mattress  
Eli. Thank you.

Eli: But it will be for own pleasure. Believe me.

Me: No. I said no.

He washed his hand over his face and sighed. Clearly bored by my reaction to his spontaneity.

Eli: Fine. Then let me eat you out.

Me: Eli!

Eli: Yes sweetheart.

Me: You never listen. I said NO.

He gave up playing nice and approached the side of the drawer I was hiding behind. He was dressed in black slacks.

I didn't have to hide my face

or close my eye's at his stark nakedness. He reached over and sank down to my level. He sat his ass on the floor and pulled me in kind. I joined him against my will.

Eli: You're too sensitve.

Me: You're coming on too strong. Did you stop to think of that?

He let out a long breath and then turned his face and glanced at me.

Eli: I'm sorry. I'm just too overwhelmed by you being here and agreeing to being

mine. I just... I haven't had a woman in this house for years. Apart from the maids.  
Me: I could tell by the poor treatment you gave me.

Eli: Okay. I was a jerk. I admit that. But I just... I want to fuck you. I really want to sink deep into you and remained buried in there until I feel satisfied. Which would be impossible seeing as I'm an insatiable being with an equally insatiable hunger.

Me: Such passion!  
He laughed.

Eli: Then there's you. Driving me insane with your indecisiveness and your uncanny ability to change my mind with just the flick of an eyebrow. Such a rare talent.

Me: I thought you didn't like speaking.

Eli: I don't. But I can't help it when I'm around you. I want to keep babbling on.

Me: You're just a babbler by nature. You only needed an excuse to speak and now you have it.

Eli: Be that as it may, you

have awakened in me a beast.

He never took his eye's off of me as he spoke these words.

Me: Before we go down this road, who are those women on the paintings? In-

Eli: The dark room?

I nodded. "Those are just paintings. I don't know who the women are. I bought this off some man from Italy at an art auction. They inspired my desire and fantasies."

I furrowed my brows in both shock and confusion. How

could be he so comfortable with sharing such sensitive information.

Me: TMI.

Eli: I'm an honest guy. I need you to know my intentions so that you know exactly where you stand with me.

Me: I stand next to you. I am your other half after all.

Eli: No. You're not. You just said that to get me off you and as much as it frustrates me I will let it go.

Me: It's been three days Eli. Four days today and my son

has been without his mother. It's not healthy for any baby to be away from their mother and to make matters worse, my breasts hurt. They're full. Eli: I noticed a couple of spills on the sheets and I thought it was drool.

Me: It's the milk.

I could feel it hardening around my nipples. It hurt so bad! "I need to milk them out onto something."

Eli: There's a basin in the bathroom. Relieve yourself in there.

I stood up and left him there. He was right about one thing though. I was never his. I would most probably never be his and if he was man enough to admit to himself then we were getting somewhere.

I choked the milk out onto the basin as I whimpered in pain. It was a tough affair but it didn't last long as I rinsed my nipples and wiped them dry. He entered just as I was grabbing my vest.

Eli: Here. Something to keep

you warm in this cold weather.

He handed me his shirt and another pair of grey slacks.

"Wow. Those are beautiful breasts sweetheart."

Me: A knock would've been great.

Eli: Sorry. I'm just not used to having anyone in here.

He placed the clothes on the counter top and shut the door.

Me: Privacy?

Eli: I've seen you naked before Mercy. Nothing to

hide.

Me: I would sti-

He ignored the hell out of me and threw the shirt over my shoulders and helped me get dressed as he buttoned it up.

He helped me out of my shorts, into a pair of neatly folded boxers and his grey slacks and then a pair of thick, white socks. He went as far as typing my hair back.

Eli: There.

He exited afterwards.

My mouth remained open as he was long gone and I was

now staring at the door. He just... dressed me.

I found him lying on his back on top of the bed, his hand underneath his head as he stared at the ceiling.

Me: Thank you for this.

Eli: No need.

I didn't wait for an invite. I crawled on top of the bed and mirrored his actions as I stared at the ceiling. It was silent and peaceful. "Move closer please." I didn't protest. I just shifted close to him and at faced the ceiling

together.

Me: This is nice.

Eli: Yes. When you're not being mean I enjoy your company.

I turned full body to face him.

Me: I'm not mean.

Eli: You are mean. Very mean and impolite.

I slapped his chest. "And a bully."

Me: I'm not!

Eli: You're hitting me again.

I rested my head on my hand as I held my position up with my elbow.

Me: Whatever. I have a question.

Eli: Yes.

Me: Why are you alone in a house that big?

He turned his gaze from the ceiling to my face and then sighed.

Eli: That's personal.

Me: We're way past that stage, Eli. Firstly you've seen me naked against my will.

Eli: I was bound to see you naked.

Me: That's absurd. Just answer my question please.

Eli: Because... I'm the only one that's left in my family.

He shifted his gaze back and forth between my eyes and then turned back to staring at the ceiling.

Eli: My brother and I were the last of the Shepherd family. He was killed and now I remain. I had a fiancée once, Antoinette was her name. I met her in the army in Arabia, where I was born and bred. She was there to visit her father, my commander. We fell in love and I left the army

with only a few weeks left of my final tour when we eloped. I asked her to marry me after inheriting my brother's fortune. She said yes. Three months later she fell pregnant with another man's child. She left me for him because he was more emotionally present than I was. So now I'm alone. Again.

Me: Again?

Eli: Yes. I was alone when she came into my life.

Me: Oh. I'm so sorry.

Eli: No need. I'll be fine.

He shut his eye's.

I know most men could never survive being alone like he has.

Me: Who killed your brother?

He chuckled softly and moistened his lips.

Eli: A man I thought was my mentor and my friend. A man who was like a brother to me. The only other family I thought I had.

He never finished that sentence.

He just remained silent and I didn't want to pry. If he

wanted me to know then he would be blunt about it like everything else.

Eli: And now that I realise my mistake I'm afraid to let you go. I don't want to be alone again. But... that's not really your problem.

I swallowed hard.

Why was he putting me in such a tough position? I snarled.

Me: I feel like you're using that to guilt trip me.

Eli: No. I'm setting you free.

Me: Free? Eli I've been free

from the moment I woke up in this place. You only tied me up once and that was because you thought I-

Eli: I was testing you Mercy.

Me: Huh?

Eli: You could've just pulled the rope tied off. They weren't really tied. I would never do that to you.

Me: But you undressed me. He laughed.

Eli: No. You did that on your own. I didn't know you sleep walk. You went to the loo, took a piss and stripped

naked then you returned to bed.

Me: No! You're lying.

Eli: I have footage of you zombie walking to the loo.

You want to see it?

I shook my head vigorously.

And to think I thought he was about to rape me!

Me: Why did you put your hand on my... you know?

Eli: On your cunt? Sweetheart you should've seen yourself last night. All over me. I woke up to you prying my boxers off.

Oh Jesus!

Not that again...

Me: And you let me?

Eli: You were sleeping. I didn't want to disturb you and I most certainly didn't want you to stop fisting my cock the way you were.

Me: Aghhh God, no!

I have never been so embarrassed in my life.

Eli: No need to be embarrassed about it. We all have our crazy moments.

Me: And you were just testing me for what exactly?

Eli: I don't know. I just found it amusing that you react to everything on impulse. I love watching you freak out and go all crazy lady.

Me: You find it amusing?

Eli: Yes. As you well know that I don't have much to keep myself entertained.

Me: So you just fucked with me.

Eli: Yes. I did.

I couldn't help myself.

I pinched him on the arm and he groaned. "Quit it!"

Me: You asked for it!

Eli: You're being a bully again. I scrunched my nose at me and stuck my tongue out.

Me: Let's go back to the fact that you practically kidnapped me.

He covered his eye's with his hands and dragged them down his face. He blinked at me and then folded his arms across his chest.

Eli: I could take you back. And we can forget about this whole thing.

Me: We can't do that. I can't just forget that you locked

me up in here and held me hostage.

Eli: No I didn't. You were practically a guest here. Sleeping in my bed and bossing me around.

Me: It doesn't change the fact that you held me against my will.

Eli: You like being here though. Not once did you complain about this place being uncomfortable to live in and you agreed to being mine.

Me: You forced my hand!

Eli: No. You're just attracted to me.

Me: No I'm not!

Eli: If so then I will kiss you right now. Your first reaction will determine if I'm right or wrong.

Me: Hmmm. I-

He smashed his lips against mine so abruptly that the force and speed of his action pushed me back and I collapsed while he held and locked our lips together. He followed my body and hovered over me, his knees

pressed on either side of the bed with me in between them. My first reaction was to hold onto to him, grabbing his shoulders and pulled him down until his entire weight was on me and then I locked my ankles on his back. I practically hugged him to me as he devoured my lips, delving his tongue deep inside my throat, provoking mine. I felt him groan from the pit of his stomach all the way to his throat causing the bed to vibrate. He used his

arms to lift himself off the bed and he broke the kiss.

Eli: Wow.

He said while heaving for breath. He stared at me, my chest rising and falling in sync with his. I still had my legs locked around his waist.

"What was that? I couldn't tell if you were head over heels or just crazy about me. But I liked it." His accent was making this worse.

Me: That was me saying "Hey."

Eli: Hey.

He leaned back down and capture my lips after staring at them for 3 seconds. He liked showing off his abs this one. "Hmmm. Stop."

Me: Hmmm.

Eli: Stop.

He moved back and broke my hold around his waist. "I can't do this. Soon you're going back to your boyfriend and I... I can't do this."

He slid off the bed and hurried to his sacred place. His safe heaven. The walk-in closet and shut the door.

Me: Eli!

I followed him.

Me: Eli... open up.

Eli: Stay away from me.

Please.

Me: Eli. I'm sorry.

Eli: It's not your fault  
sweetheart. It's just me... I  
don't think I can handle  
having to let you go. I-

Me: Then don't.

There was a brief palpable  
silence before he opened the  
door. He left a small space  
between the wall and the  
door.

Eli: I took you. I have to give you back.

Me: Yes. But you can always be my friend. I would lo-

Eli: NO! No sweetheart. I don't want to be your friend. I can't settle for friend. It would kill me. It's killing me now as we speak. I can't imagine a life with you as my friend.

Me: Eli!

Eli: I can tell that you love him. I can see it in the way you look at me... your eye's glisten with hope.

Me: You will find your happily ever after Eli. It just isn't me.

Eli: The stop kissing me like that.

Me: Okay.

=====

-Bandile

Zakhele had finally located her.

They weren't very far. This guy was situated in Houghton. I knew he was rich I just didn't peg him as wealthy and well off at his age. He was 10 years my junior and the thought of him

holding Mercy hostage like this only riled me up.

Zakhele: We're going in today!

Me: You said his place was a fortress, highly secured and protected.

Zakhele: There are many of us as well Bandile.

Me: Just be careful. I don't want her to get hurt.

Zakhele: I will make sure.

I nodded and then headed to the bedroom to check on Thulani. He was still asleep as I'd put him an hour ago. He

hasn't been well and we took him to the doctor today.

Zakhele refused to treat his own child because he's work was with the human brain.

He knew too little about children. The doctor said he couldn't see anything wrong.

But he would wake up and cry for hours. It made me

want to run with him and

find his mother because only

she could help him. Only she

know how to make the crying stop.

My phone vibrated. I drew it

out of my pocket and  
checked it.

Me: Hello?

Mercy: Bandile.

My breath caught in my  
throat.

Me: Baby?

Mercy: Hey. It's me...

Me: Oh lord! Baby! Are you  
okay? Where are you? Did he  
hurt you? Are you safe?

Is said breathlessly

Mercy: Bandile... I'm okay. I'm  
safe. He's been nothing but  
good to me.

Me: But where? Can I come

get you?

She was silent.

I detected some hesitating.

Was she... falling for him?

Mercy: I will come to you

Bandile. When I'm ready and willing.

Me: Huh?

Mercy: I'm not ready to come back Bandile. I want to stay here and take some time out. But I will come see you to get my son and a few things.

Me: You'll be staying with him?

Mercy: No. I will be staying by

myself but in a secret and remote location with his help. Oh God.

She was leaving me too.

Me: Baby...

Mercy: I love you Bandile. But I needed some time. A few months maybe just to think. I need time.

Me: I love you and I want to be there with you.

Mercy: I still haven't gotten over your brother. Allow me the space to do so... please. She had a point.

I couldn't just leave Grace

and jump over to her while she was dealing with her own stuff.

Me: I hear you.

Mercy: We will come over tomorrow to pick up the stuff. And we'll get a chance to talk.

Me: Okay.

Mercy: Bye.

Me: I love you. And I mean it baby. I will wait for you.

Mercy: I love you too.

She hung up and I held on. I wanted to drag on the phone call, hear her voice more and

cling on to her. But she was gone in that very moment.

Me: I love you.

...

TWENTY ONE

-Mercy

He allowed me to call Bandile and tell him that I was okay. I wasn't ready to

communicate with him yet.

Hearing his voice had waned all my restraints. I wanted to go home and be with him. Eli saw that and it didn't sit well with him at all. He stopped

talking to me and headed out to the other side of the house that I could not reach because he didn't want me to. I thought he understood that I loved Bandile. I thought he was okay with the fact that I would go home to him soon. It seemed he hadn't really been true to himself. He thought he would be able to let me go but when the time came he couldn't. He was hoping that by now I would've fallen head over heels for him, so much so

that I wouldn't want to leave.  
He misread the situation.  
Eli was gorgeous. He looked  
inhumane but my eye's and  
heart were already set on  
someone else.

I was sitting on the barstool  
having cereal. Last night  
when we finally got to speak  
he had made peace with  
most of the things I  
mentioned.

I waited.

For hours. The chair grew  
uncomfortable so I vacated it  
and headed to the couch

instead and waited there.  
With him this angry I sure as  
hell wouldn't leave this place.  
My only option was to talk  
him down. He was a great  
listener when he needed to  
be so I was counting on him  
being the good ear that  
would listen and hear my  
plea.

.

He returned.  
Only it was midnight and he  
was dressed differently. He  
had on a charcoal black suit  
and his hair was left untied.

He looked even better this way, his beard trimmed perfectly. He filled out the suit and it hugged his body snugly. It looked like his second skin. Did I mention that he had an impeccable dress sense? The suits he wore were nothing like I'd seen before. He ran his hands through the silky strands of hair, causing the it to fall back into a curtain on his face. He stared at me for a second and then took the stairs. I wasn't about to

follow him.

I waited for 9 hours and he never bothered to acknowledge me.

I felt like his wife.

The pathetic wife who waited for the husband to return in the wee hours of the morning.

I stayed on the couch. I was covered up to my waist by the shawl that hung on the headrest of the couch.

He came back 30 minutes later dressed in slacks. He loved his slacks. His hair was

tied up and all his facial features were all visible. He plopped right next me and let out a sigh. I ignored him. He reached over and kissed me on the cheek and then underneath my chin.

Eli: Hi.

He continued to lay this foundation of kisses until he reached my lips and paused. This caused a reaction in foreign places but I ignored that. He brushed his warm lips on the surface of mine. "Are you at me?"

He murmured against my lips.

Me: No.

Eli: Good.

He cupped my face and initiated the kiss. It was slow, sensual and yielding. He was making love to my face basically. I responded in kind after feeling his gentle tug at my waist and he pulled me forward. He squeezed my waist as he drew in a long breath. "Hmmm."

He broke the kiss.

Me: I thought you were

against these sort of kisses.

Eli: I changed my mind.

He said this licking his lips. He savoured the succulent taste of my lips. "I've change my mind about a lot of things.

Because I realised something." Just as I thought he would continue this conversation he snaked his other arm around my waist and he pulled me on top of him, making me straddle him. I placed my hands on his shoulders.

Me: And what is that?

Eli: That I deserve you. I  
deserve a chance at  
happiness and you're it for  
me.

Me: Eli... we talked about this.

Eli: No. You talked. I listened  
yes but who's to say I  
understood your reasons?

Me: Eli-

Eli: Sweetheart. If he  
deserves you then he will  
fight for you. Just as I am  
prepared to face any dire  
consequences. Because I  
realised that my life has  
meaning when you're

around.

I was getting tired of explaining to him that my heart belonged to another man. I was tired of telling him that I cared about him but that was it. I would have to show him just how much I meant it when I told him I wasn't his. I couldn't be his.

Me: Let go of me.

Eli: I'm still talking to you.

Me: I'm done talking Eli. You gave me your word.

Eli: I never gave you anything sweetheart. I gave you my

heart. You're rejecting it.

Me: Eli that's enough.

He had his hands steady on my back, holding on tightly and I could feel his fingers digging into my ass.

Eli: Why?

Me: Do I have to spell it out for you? I don't love you. I love him!

Eli: How sure are you?

Me: Elijah!

His eye's widened in shock at that. He let me go and stood up after I had gotten off of him. He stood at a distance

and glared at me.

Eli: Don't call me that. Don't ever call me that again. Ever!

Me: You forced me to. Just like you're forcing me to be blunt and inexorable.

He glared at me for, the silence between us palpable.

Things were already on murky ground as is.

The thunderous look on his face threatened to harm me.

Eli: So you want to leave?

Me: Yes. I've always wanted this.

Eli: Then leave.

I blinked at him in confusion and uncertainty. Would I escape unscathed? Because he threatened me with his dogs the other day.

Me: I don't know where we are.

Eli: Neither do I.

Me: Elija-

His eye's narrowed in hostility.

Eli: I'm not kidding you sweetheart. I'm just as clueless as you. My driver knows the ropes around this city. I don't.

Me: I don't believe you.

Eli: I don't need to convince you of anything. I'm just being honest with you.

He turned on his heels and headed to the kitchen. He left me to wreck my own brain trying to figure out a way to go back home.

Me: Then ask your driver to take me back. Please.

Eli: I can't.

Me: Eli! I have a son. He is barely 6 months old. He needs me. I needed to feed him.

Eli: And who's problem is that?

Me: It's mine. Because I kidnapped myself right?

He returned from the kitchen with his hands in his pockets.

Eli: I said you could leave.

Don't make your problems my problems.

He was testing my patience.

I sprang to my feet and threw him the the glass vase

blindly. It shattered against the wall, missing his face by a few inches. I found another inanimate object and threw

at it, it hit his gut and fell to his knee.

Me: Take me back! TAKE ME BAAAAACK! I WANT TO GO BACK DAMMIT!

I was kicking and screaming as I ran to him crying. I reached him and slapped his face. I landed as many as I can until he caught my hands mid-assault and pinned me against the wall.

Eli: ENOUGH!

Me: LET ME GO! YOU'RE A LIAR JUST LIKE THE REST OF THEM! YOU DON'T CARE

ABOUT ME.

Eli: MERCY! I SAID ENOUGH!

Me: FUCK YOU!

I spat venomously.

I would do any and everything to get him to let me go. I fought his iron grip and tried to kick him in the balls but he had my legs pinned against the wall too.

Eli: Stop it.

He said calmly.

I was struggling to breathe. I had screamed my lungs out and now I was catching my breath as he held me back.

Me: You lied to me!

I said through gritted teeth.

Seething and livid.

Eli: Don't hit me then. I don't appreciate being attacked because I can be quite vicious myself.

His grip tighten around my wrists and if he tightened it any longer I would lose the blood circulating to my hands.

Eli: I will not tolerate this cat attitude of yours. I can't have a woman dictating me.

Me: You don't have a woman

Eli.

Eli: I have you.

Me: You never had me! YOU NEVER HAD ME!

He slid his tongue out to moisten his lips and then he shut me up with a kiss. He still held me firmly against the wall.

Eli: You are mine!

He covered my lips completely.

Even with my indifference he felt the need to stick his tongue deep in my throat.

Me: You can kiss me all you

want Elijah but you will never have me!

Eli: I have you now.

He said breathlessly against my lips. "I will have you in my bed soon. Screaming and sweating against me."

Me: Even so! You will NEVER HAVE ME-

He shut me up.

Eli: We'll see about that.

He picked me up and escorted me to the bedroom downstairs, his lips glued to mine and my legs locked around his waist.

We hit the sheets and he latched onto my neck, sucking and nibbling on it like it was his last meal.

My arousal had started pooling between my legs, causing me to moan in pure pleasure. He locked me underneath him as he took me fiercely, planting hot kisses that had me ravenous and bothered. I locked my hands around his neck and watched as he went down on me like we've been lovers for a long time. Parting my legs

gently and biting softly on the fabric of my pants. I could feel his teeth sinking into my clit through the fabric and I lost it. I lost all sense of reasoning. He wasted no time in sliding then off. He took a whiff of my pussy and groaned in pain.

Eli: Holy hell!

I was shuddering under his touch and he seemed to notice. He missed my mount first, getting some of my slickness on his lips. He ran his hot tongue over my clit

slowly and then took me in.  
He bit my clit softly and then  
started sucking on it.

Nibbling on it and then  
letting go.

He fucked the shit out of me  
with his tongue and middle  
finger while I arched my back,  
fisting the sheets with feet  
on his shoulders for balance.

I screamed as a wave of hot  
sensations and an earth  
shattering orgasm hit me all  
at once. Rendering me  
partially paralyzed.

He didn't stop there.

I felt him at my entrance, no condom no nothing. I pushed him away right on his abs.

Me: Condom!

It came out as a breathy whisper. He pushed my hand aside and sank into me in one swift move. I feel him fit snugly deep inside me. He wasn't as big as Bandile but he would do right now. I needed to release. He fell forward and balanced himself on his hands.

Eli: Gooooooooood! You're really tight.

His voice was thick and heavy laden with lust and need. He needed me just as much. He started thrusting slowly. "We don't need condoms sweetheart. I want to fill you up with my seed. That's how real men do it."

Me: Shut up and fuck me.

My voice came out thick and unrecognizable. I was delirious from all the withdrawal symptoms from Bandile's cock. I needed another fix.

He started pounding into me

better than Bandile could. I understood why. He was making up for the lack of length. Bandile couldn't really fuck me hard because he was too big and long. Eli was fair, average size meaning he had to work twice as hard and so far he was doing a pretty good job.

I sank my nails into his ass, pushing him deep inside me. He seemed to grow in size the more I took him. He hardened even further and went to work, my moans

attested to his talent. He knew how to use that average cock. I almost declared my love for the dick but then I remembered the size of his ego and just how inflated it would be if I were to praise him.

Me: Fuuuuuuuck!

Eli: Yes. I love being so deep inside your cunt.

He bucked his head against me and embed himself deep inside me. Fucking every inch of me until I came so hard, I squirted all over his abs. He

followed suit, fulfilling his promise of filling me with his seed.

So much so that when he retreated his cock I could feel it sitting in there heavy and warm. I clenched my pussy to lock it inside.

Me: I want more!

Eli: I'm glad you asked.

He flipped me over, my ass rising to the air and he sank into me again. This time he sat on the balls of his heels and fucked my ass until I could feel it burn. He gave me

the best time of my life as he sang praises about my beautiful pussy and my ass. He went as far as biting my ass.

He flipped me over again, lifted one leg up and fucked my cunt again.

Eli: I hate vanilla sex but damn that cunt is so good! He thrust into me so hard I thought we would sink deep and become a part of me.

Me: Fuck. You're so good baby.

Eli: You like it?

Me: I love it.

I had my nails deep inside the skin of his thighs. They were firm and strong. Evidence of his working out.

Eli: I love your cunt. My cock loves your cunt.

He was full of compliments.

Before I could come he retracted his dick and went to work with his finger on my clit.

I squirted again. Hard this time and it lasted longer than the first one. He burnt me out completely and then he let go

and fisted himself to completion with my juices. When he came he shoved his cock inside me and deposited his seed deep inside me again. When he was done he fell to the side and held me close, the curve of his torso outlining that of my back. His erection was lodged between my tight, rock hard and ready to go again. I couldn't handle another session. I was already drowsy, my eyes heavy with sleep.

Eli: Don't sleep yet.

Me: I'm tired.

Eli: One more. Just one more.  
His hand his tugged at my thigh and he lifted it up to the air. I pushed my ass towards his crotch and he slid in swiftly and took me from the back. I could no longer scream so I settled for sweet moans the hand him biting the skin on my neck. Flash on flash sounding and echoing through the room.

Me: Yes!

Eli: Your cunt is my obsession.

I slid my hand down south and massaged my clit as he went faster and harder.

Me: Fuck me! FUCK ME!!!

Eli: I would love to.

He rotated my head and kissed me. He wanted all of me and he took it. Just the way he liked it as he held onto my leg and on palms covered my breast. He was so warm and hard that I wanted to remain in his embrace forever.

Eli: Don't ever leave me sweetheart.

Me: Call me baby.

I don't know where that came from. But I felt the urge to hear him call me that.

"Fuck! Call me baby Eli!"

Eli: Don't leave me baby.

Me: Fuck me. Fuck me hard.

Eli: I love it when you say that.

....

TWENTY TWO

-Bandile

Grace stepped up to the chair and lowered herself on it. I

had just been served with the

divorce papers and realising that this was really happening it hit differently. A lot harder than I had anticipated. To make matters worse, she happened to have this glow about her. Like she was happy for the first time in her life. I stared at the papers and took a deep breath. I had to ask myself the million dollar question: Do I sign these papers and forget about the life we had built for ourselves for eight years or do I fight for my

family. For the woman I love. The woman who was there when I had nothing at all. She helped me build myself, my company and the man that I am today is because of all the sacrifices she had to make. She supported my dream when it was just that... A dream. She moulded me into the man that I am today. But as I stared into those big, gorgeous eye's of her I saw one thing. One dominant emotion on her beautiful face. Contentment. She was

at peace and she would sign these papers without thinking twice about it.

Grace: Bandile

I nodded at her. She smiled. Lighting up the room with her beauty.

Grace: Where do I sign?

My heart caught in my throat. The pain of seeing the nonchalance in her eye's. She had no time to second guess her decision.

The lawyer showed her where she signs and she placed the pen on the paper.

Me: Wait.

She stopped, taking the pen off the paper. "You didn't even read that."

Grace: There's no need. I know what I want and it's the house. Just the house. You can keep everything else.

And with that she signed the papers. Pushed her chair back and left. I don't know what happened to me but I found myself frozen in place. Immobile and locked inside my own body. I couldn't move as I stared at the chair

she had just vacated without saying another word. I realised then that there really was never an us. She didn't think about the love we shared and the children we had. I was the only one who went as far as thinking this through.

Lawyer: Mr Mdluli?

She wrenched me from my nightmare and looked at me in pity.

Me: Oh. Yes, sorry.

I took a deep breath and then willed myself to sign the

papers in front of me. I guess it was really the end. I slid the papers and pen back to her stood up and straightened my blazer.

Chin up and I sauntered out of that place like a man who had just won a case when in fact I had lost my life. Eight years of my life. I headed toward the parking lot and unlocked my car. Just as I was about to open the door I saw her.

She was crying against the steering wheel of her car.

When she left the office she'd been elated about her decision. What was this I was seeing now? I summoned the courage to ditch my ride and go to hers. I knocked tentatively on her window and she jumped slightly at the shock of my knock. She wiped the tears away and hurriedly slid the window down. She cleared her throat and smiled at me, smudges of mascara marking her beautiful cheekbones.

Me: Hey.

Grace: Hi.

She giggled softly.

Me: Are you okay?

She nodded. I could see right through her and she knew this. She let out a breath.

Grace: Do you... want to grab a coffee? My treat.

Me: Sure. I'll follow behind you with my car.

She nodded and slid her window back up. I watched her backing out of the parking lot and then she drove for the exit. I headed to my car and started the

engine before driving off behind her.

~

I found her waiting outside her favorite coffee shop just before the Centurion estate area. I knew I would find her here because she loved their carrot cake. I parked securely and followed her inside the shop. We found a seat right at the back where she always like to sit, away from prying eyes. I opened the chair for her and asked her what exactly she would like before

heading to the counter to place our orders.

I returned and sat down in front of her and placed my hands, wallet and car keys on the table as well. She had been texting frantically when I sat down but then she stopped and stared at me. Eye's all clean and pretty she she hadn't been crying in the parking lot a few minutes ago.

Me: Is everything okay?

Grace: Yes. It's just Mandy complaining about the kids

sleeping too early. She's bored now.

I laughed.

She always loved hanging out with the triplets. I didn't know how to address her anymore. But I had a lot to ask her.

Me: Are you going to tell me why you were crying back there?

Grace: Yes.

I waited.

She sighed and conceded.

Grace: I just realised that signing those papers meant

the end of our eight years together. I meant the end of everything. The love we shared.

Me: I thought you would be the voice of reason among us. I-

Grace: I know. I just didn't want to drag this on any longer. It was long overdue.

Me: I hear you.

They called our order up. I fetched it and she helped me place it on the table. We shared the coffee among us and she took her carrot cake

whole I took my red velvet cake. We shared these delicacies through lively chatter about us. Our disbanded family and the fact that we've come a long way as individuals and as a couple.

Me: I never thanked you enough for believing in me.

Grace: We believed in each other. That counts the most. We were better people together.

Me: Yeah. We made a great team.

Grace: And I know we'll be good parents to our children.

Me: I want them to grow up surrounded by love and happiness so they never have to wonder what that is.

She smiled at me.

If Pedro made her happy then I had no other choice but to accept this and come to terms with the fact that he would be in my children's lives as well. Even when it killed me inside, I would do it for her.

Grace: Pedro makes me

happy.

Me: I can see that through the glow in your eye's. And I know he'll be a great father to our kids.

Grace: He loves them.

That thrust a knife through my heart. He got to see them and spend time with them almost everyday and I got whatever time there was between my job and Grace's schedule.

Me: I just hope he doesn't take my place in their lives.

Grace: Come on. He would

never do that. I know he respects you.

That may be the case but as a man I didn't appreciate the thought of another man fathering my kids. It gave me all sorts of ideas and I couldn't help but entertain every possibility. It was human nature to be suspicious.

Me: Hmmm.

Grace: Ave usaba bo ukuhlulwa. (You're afraid of competition.)

Me: Yabona ke? (You see

now?)

She laughed.

I don't do very well with  
adversaries.

No man wanted to compete  
for affection. I thought she  
knew that better than  
anyone.

Grace: Ngyadi lala. (I'm just  
joking.)

Me: Musa ke uk'dlala kanjalo.  
Ungaze ung'phathise nge  
stroke. (Don't day things like  
that. I might get hit by a  
stroke.)

She burst out laughing.

Grace: Unehaba futhi usemncane kabi wena for istroke. (You're exaggerating and you're still too young for a stroke.)

Me: Asikwazi lokho (we don't know that.) I might just get one right now. I'm not immune to it njalo. Neither are you.

Grace: Mina ngi ngenaphi ngempela kulesis' balo sakho? (Why do you always feel the need to involve me?)

Me: Ak'sona isbalo. It's the truth.

I winked at her.

She chuckled and took a young sip of her coffee. She never changed the way she took her coffee and just how before every sip she would take a whiff of it and then savour the smell before the actual taste. Classic but old. Even as she ate the cake she first took a whiff and then the bite. Chewing slowly as if locking the flavours on her pellet before swallowing it. It was fascinating to watch her eat.

I was worried that I would look for the same qualities in Mercy and I knew I would be disappointed not to find them. But I loved that she was different even with the whole kidnapping thing and her coming over today to pick her stuff up.

I needed answers to the many questions that flooded my mind whenever her name popped up.

Grace: How is Mercy doing? She didn't know about the kidnapping yet. She also

didn't need to know about it.  
Me: She's been okay. She hasn't opened up to the idea of us yet but I'm hoping that she will soon.

Grace: Oh. Well she will.  
You're a great guy.  
I smiled.

That was surprisingly restorative considering the call I got yesterday and the news about her needed time. I didn't know how to take that.

Me: Yeah. She's a great woman too.

Grace: Then she'll come around pretty soon.

The compliments did soothe my bruised ego and they do so until I got my answers from Mercy and that backstabbing son of a bitch.

Me: Thank you for this.

Grace: Anytime. Buddy.

Me: Weeee kahleni bo! I'm you buddy now?

She shrugged.

Grace: Depends.

Me: I don't even wanna ask.

I'll just take it as it is. Buddy.

I chuckled, shaking my head.

=====

-Mercy

I stood under the cold shower and let the water wash over me.

My life was shit.

After realising the enormity of this situation I managed to get myself into I realised just how much I really needed to get away from everything and everyone. Take my son and just go home to KZN where no one will ever find me. Maybe even start over, leave the house to Sizwe to

watch over while I try and find my way.

This is no way for anyone to live. Honestly.

Eli was a great guy. But he was as toxic as myself and that couldn't be good. It just isn't the right way to go about things.

I returned to the lounge dressed in the warm clothes Eli had asked one of the maids to get for me at the mall yesterday after the amazing sex session and love making that we'd done. He

was avoiding me again. I chose not to entertain him this time around because I honestly couldn't handle him and my own problems at the same time. We just had to go our separate ways.

I stood in front of him and he glanced up from his laptop.

I'd never seen him this engrossed in anything before. He removed the glasses from his eye's.

Me: I'm ready.

Eli: Mercy...

Me: No. We're not doing this

again. I can't do this with you.  
I'll call a cab if I have to.

He removed his laptop from his lap and placed it on the side and then stood up. He took my hands in his, raised them up to his lips and kissed them, letting his lips linger. He let out a heavy sigh and then he nodded.

Eli: I'll take you back.

Me: Thank you.

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So, he drove me home.

I didn't have to direct him. He

just drove in silence and I stay there trying hard not to overthink anything this. I couldn't over think any of it because then I would feel guilty for living my life and I would start making stupid decisions again.

It took us a few hours to get home and by then it was already evening. It hadn't changed one bit and there more than two cars in my yard and outside. He parked a few cars away and then killed the engine.

Eli: Are you sure about this?

Me: Yes.

Eli: So, this is it?

Me: Yes.

Eli: Okay. I guess I'm ready too.

We exited the car and walked into the yard.

We knocked once and the door swung open and he just stood there. My breath caught in my throat as I realised just how long it had been since I last saw him.

Zakhele: Mercy.

I swallowed hard.

Me: Zak.

His eye's strayed toward the man beside me and his expression went from relieved to thunderous in a matter of seconds.

Zakhele: Bandile.

He called out.

A moment later Bandile emerged from inside the house with Thulani in his arms. My heart swelled up.

Bandile: Yes?

He looked up and his gaze landed on me. He stopped breathing for a second and

took me in, making sure it really was me before he covered his mouth with his hand.

Bandile: Baby.

Me: Hey.

I wanted to seal this reunion with a hug and possibly a kiss but with all these three men I'd shared a bed with standing like this I had to rethink my decision.

Me: Can we come in?

Bandile frowned the moment he laid his eye's on Eli. His face turning cold and callous.

"Without any problems please? Just this once."

They both reluctantly moved out of the door and I took Eli's hand and we both entered.

I had so much explaining to do.

I also had some hearts to break and I wasn't ready for such. But it was now or never.

We all gathered around the lounge, everyone taking a seat. Just looking at these couches I remembered the

night I had sex with Bandile and the other night I had sex with Zakhele. They had too many memories, bad and good.

I remained standing.

As the news I would be delivering would either make or break these men sitting around me.

Me: As you all may know I have been through a lot over the past year and 6 months.

That's how I started off.

It made sense that I recounted my steps.

Me: I've made some stupid decisions and some were more crazy than others but at the end of the day they make me who I am and I have to say that I am not proud of the woman I have become.

I took a deep breath and then stared at my son on Bandile's chest. Peacefully sleeping. I had to do this for him. For me and my wellbeing as well.

Me: I have slept with all of you. I have done so shamelessly at first because I thought it was what I

needed. I may have been right. I did need the good sex from all of you. But what I didn't need was the way I went about it. I'm not proud of myself. I just haven't been well. Mentally and emotionally and it has blinded most of my decisions. But most of all it has taught me a good life lesson. That life is unpredictable. It can have you on top one day and underneath the next. So with that being said I just want to lay this down to you as

gently as possible. Thank you for being there for me through this journey I called life. It has come to an end unfortunately but I will always be grateful to all of you. Always and forever. I wiped the tears that had started cascading down my cheeks with every memory of all the things I've overcome throughout my life.

Me: Thank you. I wanted to let you guys know that I will be leaving. For good and I will be starting my life over some

place far away from this one. I don't need anyone judging me for my decision because at the end of the day they affect me. I had a good time but now that time has gone. I want to start over. Turn over a new leaf and get away from all this toxicity. I need to cleanse my soul and myself as a whole.

Bandile: Baby

He protested.

Me: Please. Just let me finish.

I think it's only best that I stay by myself until I have

fully healed. I need that.

Bandile: What about me?

What about us?

Me: There can't be an us

Bandile. Not after everything that I've just told you guys. I need to start on a clean slate. No one else commented until I was done talking. They had nothing to say and I was glad to have it that way.

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3 WEEK LATER

I had successfully left my old life behind, took my son and my belongings and I left. I

asked Sizwe and Nonhle to look after the house as I would return after a few years. If ever I decided to return.

The night before I left I made one last bad decision. I fucked Bandile. I wanted to say goodbye to him properly and it was the only way I could think to do it. I would always hold a special place in my heart for that man. And he deserved the last taste of my pussy.

I know how it sounds and I

don't care. I would start over pretty soon and I would put it all behind me.

It wouldn't matter in a couple of months. I wanted a life with just one man in it. My son.

Also, I would go back to school and study towards becoming a lawyer. My dream job. And I would make something of my life like my father had wanted me to. I would visit his grave more often and cleanse myself.

Turn my life around and then

I would settle down after a few years.

All that would happened in due time. Right now I had to focus on me and Thulani. He is my future now.

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4 YEARS LATER

Thulani was growing steadily. He had become a man to me and a good son to the mother in me. He took his father's features obviously and he reminded me so much about that life.

I had seen Sizwe and Nonhle

a week earlier. They came to visit me and it seemed Sizwe was getting married in a couple of months. Of course he wanted me there and I said I would be honored. Nonhle was a married woman who didn't want anything fancy so she got married at home affairs. I was happy that she was living it up with her man and two beautiful kids. I was happy to say that my life had been great. I hadn't seen anyone in four years and I was planning

on keeping it this way until I had everything I wanted from life and a passport full of stamps from every country in the world. I would have to graduate magna cum laude for that and I was working towards it.

I had taken Thulani to the mall after school to get some supplies for school and a few winter clothes for him because it was fast approaching. We got ice cream as a treat while walking the mall picking out

toys and clothes. He was so excited when he saw Spiderman shorts that he picked those out first..

"Mercy." A disembodied voice said softly. It took me a while to turn and when I did I was shocked beyond imagination. He stood there, a grey beard and his bald head still as shiny as I remembered. He smiled as he stood tall, his suit hugging him snugly. He always loved the suit. Three piece as always. He had aged well. His dark features still

dominant and his eye's still filled with hope.

Me: Bandile.

Bandile: I finally found you.

Me: You were looking for me?

He shook his head.

Then what did he mean he finally found me?

Bandile: I waited for you.

**** THE END ****