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## **PROLOGUE**

Mr. Price is one of the most loved clothing stores in the country, majorly preferred by the black female youth for its affordable and fashionable clothing. Saturday is usually the busiest and profitable day of the week for business because almost everyone is off from work, running errands, and getting their shopping done. However, not everyone visits the store intending to buy, others visit the shop with the sole aim to shoplift so that they can sell the clothes that they steal for a lower price to other people as this is the only way they can put food on the table and feed their families. South Africa is one of the top five countries with the highest unemployment rates in the world, and stats show that 64.4 percent of South African youth are unemployed.

Tired of living in poverty and misery most have resorted to shoplifting, pickpocketing, prostitution, and selling of drugs and Nyaope to make a living and provide for their families.

Considering the busyness that comes with the weekend and the increased number of shoplifters targeting the store it's almost impossible for a Mr. Price employee to be off for the weekend, depending on the terms of the contract one is serving, each employee is subscribed two days off during the week including one Sunday off every month.

It's the last Saturday of the month, one of the busiest days of the month because it's month-end and everyone has money to spend. The store is brimming with people, and the staff is working diligently to provide customers with the best service while the security is on high alert at the door going through the customers' shopping bags as they leave the store to ascertain that what is written on the slip matches with what's inside the bag.

22-year-old Anzani is at the cash desk working the till sedulously alongside Ellen and Karabo, her colleagues. The young girls are working under Mamohau's strict supervision, the store's assistant manager. Anzani is exhausted, she's been on her feet for hours and her feet are starting to swell and ache

inside the black Tommie sneakers she's wearing. As a BCOM Marketing management graduate, she never dreamt she would one day end up here, and as expected she hates her job, but she never complains because it pays the bills. She just needs to hold on a little while longer until she gets something better- something she studied for.

Feeling her body get weaker with each passing minute Anzani skims her eyes on the queue to see if she can't excuse herself for a few minutes and go to the canteen to rest, she blows out a sigh of defeat when she sees the long queue. She knows there's no way Mamohau will let her go when the queue is this long especially after one of the customers remarked how slow the queue is moving, accepting defeat she calls the next customer.

"Next, please." She says, wearing the biggest fake smile on her face.

A lady steps forward and places the three items in her hands on top of the cash desk

“Masiari vho vuwa hani?” Anzani says keeping the smile on her face intact

(Good afternoon, how are you)

The customer smiles awkwardly not understanding a word Anzani is saying.

“Oh, sorry I was saying good afternoon, how are you?” Anzani repeats her question in English this time when she sees confusion mirrored on the customer’s face.

Sometimes she gets carried away and forgets that she’s in Heidelberg and that most people here don’t understand Tshivenda. She was born and bred in Vuwani, Limpopo, and relocated to Gauteng, Ratanda to her aunt’s house immediately after graduating to search for a Job. After months of searching for any job she could find, she finally found one as a store associate at Mr. Price- Heidelberg, not the best Job there is but it’s better than not having one at all.

“Oh, I’m good and how are you?”

“I’m good.”

“What was that? Is it Venda?”

“Yes, it’s Tshivenda.”

“Nice.”

She starts scanning the customers’ clothes but only after checking the prices, it’s very imperative for her to do so as the prices on some item’s changes- either decrease (which is referred to as marked down) or increase (also known as repricing)

“Hey, can I have a word with you when you’re done?”

Says Gladness, Anzani’s colleague standing next to her with her hand on her hip. Anzani’s heart skips a few beats when she sees the expression on her colleagues’ face, from her flared nose

and the small beads of sweat on her forehead whatever it is she wants to talk to her about is not good.

“Yeah, no problem.” She replies keeping her voice monotone trying to conceal how terrified she is.

Impatience is one of her weaknesses

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she can't wait until the line shortens to find out what Gladness wants to talk to her about, anticipation and curiosity kills her with every second that passes. Her eyes dart the cash desk in search of Mamohau, a sigh of relief escapes her lips when she doesn't see her. This is exactly what she hoped for, she quickly exits the sales screen after handing the customer her slip and change. The next customer steps forwards and puts the clothing basket on top of Anzani's sale screen.

“She'll help you when she's done, I'm going on lunch I'm sorry,” Anzani says directing the customer to her colleague, Ellen.

“Can you please cover for me while I go and talk to G” Her statement is directed at Karabo who is busy putting the customer’s folded clothes inside the shopping bag?

“Sure, but please be quick. You see the line, just make sure you come back before Mamohau comes back.” Karabo

“Thanks”

She scurries off to the man’s department where her colleagues Gladness, Linda, and Boitumelo are grouped in a corner. They have their elbows on top of the trolley, their heads almost touching having a conversation in hushed tones. Knowing them they are probably gossiping about one of the staff members or talking about men or sex, these three ladies are always together leaning against the trolley and gossiping it’s no wonder the store has such a high percentage of stock loss but that’s a story for another day.

“You said you wanted to talk to me.” Anzani

She says standing in front of the three ladies. Linda and Boitumelo size her up and scrunch their noses as though disgusted by her presence.

“Who are you talking to with that attitude of yours?” Gladness spits standing upright and because she’s tall she towers over Anzani.

“I didn’t say it with attitude.”

Anzani replies shaking in her boots. She’s the youngest amongst all the staff, it’s no secret that she’s scared of Gladness. Gladness is your typical ‘phuma silwe’ type of girl from the ghetto who wouldn’t hesitate to smack anyone who disrespects her-especially someone who happens to be ten years younger than her.

“What’s this I hear about you Anzani?” Gladness

“What did you hear?” Anzani asked with a frown, attitude thick in her voice.

“That you told everyone in your neighborhood that you’re the only educated one here, the only one with a qualification- what was it? An honors degree.”

“What?” Asks Anzani in shock

“Yep, that’s what I heard. You told everyone who cared to listen that you’re the most educated at work while everyone else only went up to Grade 8 in school.”

“Me!” Anzani exclaims in shock

“Look Anza I’m not a pretender so I won’t pretend I’m okay with you when I’m not like everyone else is doing, all I need from you is your honesty. If you said it, you can tell me the truth so we can deal with it.”

“Let me guess, Bongwiwe is the one who told you this...am I right?”

“I won’t name and shame, the only thing I want to know is if it’s true or not so I can deal with you accordingly.”

Anzani’s heart races as her hands' sweat, she knows exactly what Gladness means by the words ‘deal with you accordingly’

“I never said that, why would I gloat about my degree while I’m stuck in retail. Whoever it was that told you the news is misinformed; I have a degree, not honors and I never uttered any of those things about the staff to anyone in my hood. I’m not even familiar with most people in my street because I spend most of my time indoors.”

“Hmmm, I’m only checking because that’s what everyone knows about you. I didn’t want to go with assumptions, I had to confront you and hear it from the horse’s mouth.”

“I understand, thanks for confronting me I appreciate it...but I didn’t say any of that.”

All this while Boitumelo and Linda are looking at Anzani with a look of disgust on their faces. It's obvious they believe what they heard about her.

"It's okay then, you and I are okay. I just wanted to get that out of the way, it's fine you can go back to the till."

Anzani nods and heads back to the cash desk.

"Oh, great you're back, do you mind holding the fort while I quickly dash to Woolworths to buy sour milk? It's on sale and my kids love it." Karabo

"No problem, you can go."

Mamohau is still not back, she must be on lunch. Anzani takes a deep breath and looks up fighting back her tears. Her eyes skim the entire store looking at all her colleagues standing in groups looking at the cash desk, after what Gladness asked her, she is certain that they are all talking about her. Her gaze lands on Ellen who is standing a few feet away from her serving

customers, wondering if she also knows what everyone is saying about her- if she does why hasn't she asked her anything? Anzani thought they were friends or maybe Ellen kept quiet because she believes the rumors? Her heart shutters as she wonders what she ever did to Bongiwe for her to hate her so much, this isn't the first time Bongiwe instigates the entire staff against her by spreading lies. Anzani could almost swear Bongiwe was happy when she got this job, she even proposed that the two of them travel to work together since they stay in the same street but now it seems what she thought was a blessing- getting a job where her neighbor works have turned into a curse! She constantly finds herself in the middle of some scandal at work. Why does Bongiwe hate her so much? Unfortunately, her question remains unanswered.

#1

“What happened this time?”

That’s the first thing my aunt asks the moment I walk through the door. I slump on the couch and blow out a heavy sigh.

“Tell me, what happened?” she asks concern mirroring her features.

“I don’t know what to do anymore aunt, Bongiwe is spreading lies about me at work.”

“What did she say this time?”

“She told everyone that I’m gossiping about them here telling everyone that I’m the only one who’s educated at work while everyone else only studied up to grade 8, I never said anything like that aunt. It doesn’t even make sense because matric is the minimum requirement to be hired as an associate.”

“I know you didn’t, you don’t even like it when I tell my friends about your degree, so I know you didn’t do it. Mulanga please go and tell Bongiwe I want to see her.” She says looking at her 16-year-old daughter Mulanga, my cousin.

“Okay, ma.” Mulanga replies and heads to the door

“No man this is getting out of hand. I’ve been quiet maybe that’s why she keeps doing this to you but not anymore. What does she want from you, you’re a child and she is a grown woman for Pete's sake?”

My aunt asks boiling in anger. A few minutes later Mulanga walks back inside the lounge, but she's alone.

“Where is she?” My aunt asks.

“She refused to come, she said “angeke akhone”.”

My mouth drops to the floor in shock, no she didn't disrespect my aunt like that.

"Did you tell her it was the aunt who's calling her?" I ask, unable to believe that Bongiwe disrespected my aunt like that.

"Yes, I told her my mother is calling her, but she refused."

"Yoh!" I'm defeated

"You know what Anza, let's go to her house. I'm not letting this go, she will tell me why she keeps dragging your name through the mud."

My aunt says already on her feet heading to the door. I pick myself up from the couch and follow her

"Where are you going?" I ask when I see Mulanga behind me.

“I’m coming with.” My aunt halts on her step and turns back when she hears Mulanga’s response.

“You’re not going anywhere, stay back. Do you want that girl to feel crowded in her small house? Stay back Mulanga!”

Mulanga turns back sulking, she loves news this one.

Bongiwe stays in a small one-room shack with her fourteen-year-old daughter and honestly, I don’t know how they survive in that tiny room especially because Bongiwe always has a man around. I don’t know if she has sex with the different men she brings to her house in her daughter’s presence, or they wait for her to fall asleep before doing the nasty or maybe she and the men she brings don’t do anything at all. “it’s none of your business Anzani” my subconscious reprimands

“Knock knock!” My aunt says standing at Bongiwe’s doorstep

“Ngena ma!”

(Come in)

Replies Bongiwe in a soft calm voice one would swear she isn't the same person who refused when my aunt called her just now.

She's sitting on a plastic chair next to the door and since there's only one chair in her house, she stands up so my aunt can take a seat. She then lowers herself on the foot of her bed and I'm left standing awkwardly in the middle of her small room.

"Bongiwe I'm here because my niece here has a problem with you, apparently someone told everyone at work that Anza says she's the most educated while everyone else only went up to Grade 8 and since you're the only person from work who lives in the same place as her, she thinks you're the one who told them." My aunt says in a calm manner

"I also heard about it at work, I'm not the one who told them."

I know it's her, there's no one else. She is the only person from work who stays at the same place as me, I mean it's obvious it

was her plus it wouldn't be the first time she lies about me to the staff

"Stop lying Bongiwe I know you're the one who is spreading rumors about me, who else?"

I bellow on top of my voice

"Anza calm down." My aunt says with disapproval on her face

"No, aunt I won't calm down. Bongiwe must stop lying she's the one who lied about me to everyone."

"No, I'm not the one who told the staff, I also heard about it at work yesterday, but it wasn't the first time. Someone once mentioned something like that to me previously so I only confirmed the news when they asked me."

Just as I'm about to ask her to reveal her source aunt beats me to it and asks her first

“Who’s that someone?”

“I can’t tell you her name, I promised her that I wouldn’t rat her out.” Yeah right!

“Bongiwe you’re saying you are not the one spreading rumors about Anza at work, yet you’re the only person from work who stays in the same neighborhood as her then you claim to have heard the news before but you refuse to reveal your source....how are we supposed to trust that you’re not the one who is spreading the lies?” Aunt

“Bongiwe is lying aunt!”

“That’s it I won’t allow you to keep disrespecting me in my house!” She bellows glaring and wagging a finger at me

“Or else what?” I challenge looking straight into her eyes.

“Don’t you two dare disrespect me, you won’t do this nonsense in front of me. I’ll smack the both of you, have you gone mad!”

“Anza you can’t talk to Bongiwe like that, she’s older than you.”

“Anza is a very disrespectful aunt; I was very happy when she started working with us but I’ve started to dislike her because she doesn’t respect me. I’m not her agemate, I’m ten years older than her angaboni ngixoxa naye ngendaba zami zomjolo acabange ukuthi siyalingana asilingani nje.”

(Just because I talk to her about my relationship doesn’t mean me and her are the same age.)

“Bongiwe is right Anza, you were very disrespectful, and I won’t stand for it or condone it.”

“But aunt Bongiwe is always after me, creating trouble for me at work. She wants everyone to hate me.”

I say and a tear rolls down my cheek. It’s not nice working in an environment where you’re hated, especially in retail where you

need each other to do the work you can't say you'll work alone..it's not possible.

“I understand but there are ways to address it without being rude and disrespectful. Bongiwe I want to know who told you that Anza said those things

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we need that person here because I know he/she is lying. Anza is my child and I know her; she would never say anything like that she doesn't like it when I tell my friends about her degree so why would she go around bragging about having a degree while she's still in retail. No, we need that person here”

“No problem, I'll go find her and bring her to your house.”

“Please do that, I don't like the fact that the two of you are constantly fighting with each other. You should be united and treating each other like sisters because you come from the same place but instead of doing that you two are constantly bickering and embarrassing yourselves in front of your colleagues.”

“That’s true, abase Tsakane, Duduza nase vosloorus abalwi yithi nje.” Bongiwe

(Those who stay in Tsakane, Duduza, and Vosloorus don’t fight amongst themselves we are the only one’s fighting)

“You see, next time come to me when you have a problem with Anza I promise I will never take sides.”

That’s true, aunt is fair.

“I will do so.”

“Okay, my child. We are going back home now, please come with the person who’s spreading lies about Anza.”

“No problem ma, I’ll come with her.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Last night aunt and I waited and waited for Bongiwe to come with 'the person' who told her the news, but she didn't pitch, I can't say I'm surprised because I knew she was the one who is spreading lies about me at work, but I guess I didn't expect her to lie to my aunt with a straight face. I've been up since 6 AM getting myself ready for work, I get heart palpitations every time I have to go to work. I hate that place and I especially hate working with Bongiwe, she is making my life unbearable at work. I feel like an outcast, so unwanted and unloved by the staff and it's all because of her and the lies she tells about me.

I've been praying, fasting, and applying asking God to give me a better job but it seems even God is not interested in my prayers because none of the applications I sent out were successful. At this point even that 'we regret to inform you...' email would be better than not getting any response, I'm even demotivated to apply, all my friends from varsity are working now while some are doing their honors and I'm here stuck in retail folding clothes all day long and getting disrespected by customers and receiving the worst treatment from my colleagues, I've got to say it's tough being me. I didn't anticipate things going this way, I mean I was an A student, even made it to the top 15 in my first and second year but here am I looking at everyone who repeated modules and wrote supplementary exams living their

best life working on their careers while mine hasn't even started, now I know that marks don't matter.

“It's 7:30 if you don't leave now, you'll get to work late.”

Mulanga

It's only me and her in the house, aunt woke up early and left for church. They have two services at her church on Sundays, one at 7 am and another one at 10 am and my aunt attends both. She loves church that one

“Eish you're right let me bounce, at least today it's Sunday I'll be back before 5.”

The store closes at 3 pm on Sundays, so Sunday is better than other days plus only a few people shop on Sundays so there isn't much to do on Sundays. Like always I'm the first one to arrive, my assistant manager Mamohau arrives a few minutes later. She opens the store then we sign the register before I head to the canteen to put my bag inside my locker and make myself a cup of coffee before the store opens.

“Wu Anza ave unezindaba umncane kaze uyoba umama onjani njengoba unezindaba kanje wena ngane.” Nontobeko

(You are such a gossip; I wonder how you’ll be as a mother if you’re like this at your age.”

That’s what she says when she walks into the canteen and finds me sitting down drinking my coffee. I understand Zulu and I can speak it but not fluently.

“What did I do?”

“Wena no auntie wakho niye ka Bongiwe nayomsukela azihlelele emzini wakhe, why kanti uthanda ukuhlukumeza uBongiwe kanje? Bongiwe akana ndaba nawe kodwa wena uhambile wayomdelela kwakhe uhamba no anti wakho, mina ngiwu Bongiwe bengizokushaya shem ngeke ngizodelelwa yingane nje. Anzani umdala kuwe uBongiwe, unengane ena 14 kufana nokuthi uyak’zala yekela nje ukumjwayela kabi uzoshawa yimi phela manje.”

(You and your aunt went to Bongiwe’s house to provoke her, why do you like abusing her so much? Bongiwe doesn’t care about you, but you and your aunt went to her house to provoke

her. If I was her, I would have beaten you up, I will never allow myself to be disrespected by a child. Anzani, Bongiwe is older than you, she has a child who is 14 years old which makes her your mother. If you don't stop what you're doing to her, I'm the one who will beat you up."

#2

“We didn’t go to her house to provoke her, my aunt only wanted to know who's spreading lies about me to the staff.”

“Ngithe mina phuma Ku Bongiwe, angeke ngisho kuze Kube kabili”

(I told you to leave Bongiwe alone, I won’t tell you again.)

Nontobeko is a Zulu girl, she hails from Nquthu- KZN. One doesn’t need to wrestle with her to measure her strength because her looks speak for her. She looks like someone who can put up a good fight and judging from how thick and big her hands and fingers are I have no doubt I’d fall unconscious after receiving one slap from her. She’s also tall, big-boned, and quite a blabbermouth. Everyone at work fears her including our management. She’s a bully of note, she wants things done her way, or she'll throw a tantrum and embarrass you. She has verbal diarrhea so if you’re not strong enough, the words that come out of her mouth might crush your confidence and do away with your self-esteem.

I always struggle when I'm working with her at the cash desk because she always wants to go to lunch first even if my shift started before hers, she leaves me to work the till on my own the whole day and demand to be cash up(ped) first come knock-off time and the saddest thing is that management lets her get away with everything because they also fear her. Not that I blame them because this Zulu girl can talk your ear off, even in front of customers. Yeah, she's that crazy! The only person who claps back is Gladness and apparently, the two once had a big fight and told each other off in front of customers but that was before I started working here

"Mantombazane!"

(Girls)

Karabo says walking inside the Canteen with Bongwiwe on her tail, my heart shutters when our eyes meet. It seems this woman has made it her mission to make my life living hell in this place, and unfortunately, she's succeeding.

"Nangena Kahle ngisakhuluma name and esile le!"

(You arrived just in time when I was still addressing this insolent child)

Karabo looks at me and laughs

“What has she done now?” She asks and plugs the kettle before taking out a cup from the cupboard.

“Nami ngicela ungyenzele mzala.” Bongiwe

(Please make me a cup as well)

She says taking a seat next to Nontobeko on the couch

“Use phinde wa jwayela uBongiwe Kabi, uhambe no anti wakhe bayosukela uBongiwe azihlelele kwakhe.” Nontobeko

(She disrespected Bongiwe again, she went to her house with her aunt to provoke Bongiwe.)

“Anza wena hao rate peace man, just yesterday I heard that you told everyone in your hood that you’re the only educated

one here and now this. You just can't help yourself, can you?"  
Karabo

I don't even bother replying because it's clear who she believes and whose side she's on so why bother? I sit quietly and drink my coffee and let them talk amongst themselves.

"Mzala I didn't bring lunch, please accompany me to Checkers I want to buy hake." Bongiwe

She says looking at Karabo. These two used to fight a lot when they were still partners working in the same department, they were always reporting each other to Daniel, our manager. Daniel ended up separating them, Bongiwe is now Ellen's partner, and so far, they seem to get along and work well together. She's also cool with Karabo now, they even call each other 'mzala' it seems to separate them was a good move by Mr. D

"Bambani ningiphatheleni nami." Nontobeko

(Please buy one for me as well)

She says giving Bongiwe an R50 note

“Okay, chommie you also want hake?” Bongiwe

“No, I want sticky wigs. Buy four.”

“Okay, my friend.”

The way she stretches the word ‘friend’ it’s like she’s saying it to make me jealous of their friendship, Bongiwe is such a joke I wonder when she’ll grow up and start behaving like the adult she is.

I sigh in relief when the clock strikes 3 pm, it’s been a long day. Being at work sucks out all the energy I have and depresses me. I wasn’t working at the till today; I was working on the floor- I work in the ladies Oakridge department with Mbali while Bongiwe works at the ladies RT department with Ellen. Ellen was off today while Mbali worked at the cash desk-when one of us is at the till the other one works on the floor. When all the

customers have left the store and the door has been closed, I head to my locker to get my bag, sign out and make my way to the rank.

“Hey, chommie.”

I say taking a seat next to Zanele. Zanele works at some Chinese shop in the mall, we call each other ‘chommie’ but I wouldn’t exactly call us friends because we don’t know each other that well. We started talking because we live in the same section, so we get off at the same stop and walk home together. She’s a nice girl, I like her, and I think we will make good friends as time goes.

“Hey chom’ how are you doing today?”

“I’m exhausted yo, I am so happy that I’m off tomorrow. I’m tired yo.”

Today wasn't busy, so I didn't have much to do that's why I'm so tired. Weird I know but I get more tired on slow days than I do on busy one's.

"I wish I was you shem, thina lama china adlala ngathi angisazi nokuthi ngagcina nini uku off(er)."

(Our employer is playing with us; I don't remember the last time I got a day off)

"How many off days do you get in a week?" She chuckles

"Per week? I only get two days off per month."

What?

"Yoh, I wouldn't survive. Being on your feet the whole day is tiring, the two days I get every week is not enough because I don't exactly rest when I'm off. I do laundry, thoroughly clean my room and run errands so I can imagine how hard it must be for you who only gets two days a month yo that's too much but I'm sure the money is good right?."

“Good where? We earn R600 per week” she chuckles “Don’t even think that they deposit to my account because I receive it on hand, the old school traditional way with an envelope. I don’t have a payslip ungbona nginje. I’m not even registered for UIF.”

“What! No, those people are abusing you guys and here I thought the R3300 I earn was little”

“Tell me about it, sometimes I’m tempted to quit then I think about my daughter. I am doing this for her, yes her father supports her, but I don’t want to be dependent on him for everything...you know how men are, balala bephunduka ngeke uzithembise ngabo.”

“Eish, I’m sorry my friend.”

“It’s okay.”

“What about the school, how far did you go?”

“I have a diploma in Management assistant from Sedibeng College, I have been applying I hope I will get something soon.”

What’s happening in our country is sad honestly, education is no longer the key to success like we were made to believe when we were still growing up. Nowadays to get a job one needs connections, to bribe someone, or to compromise their morals and sleep with someone. It’s so sad that we must do so many despicable things to get the jobs we are qualified for! You don’t know pain if you’ve never spent years in tertiary, had sleepless nights while studying, working hard to obtain good marks so you can be ‘employable’ only for you to come back and work in retail, earn peanuts, and be bullied by your colleagues. Life is hard out here; people are having it hard.

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I’m in my room it’s been five minutes since I came back from work. When I walked through the front door, I found my aunt and her friend Mampho listening to Gospel music while having lunch. I’m not greedy with food or anything but my aunt is way too kind, and all her friends take advantage of her kindness. They only remember her when they need something from her

and distance themselves when things are going well in their lives. Mam'Mampho always eats here but I don't recall her ever inviting my aunt to her house for lunch not even once. The friendship is one-sided her friend only takes but never gives anything in return while my aunt always gives but never receives anything in return. I tried to make her see reason, but she bit my head off and told me to stop complaining about food because we never go to bed hungry. So

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I no longer say anything I just observe and keep quiet.

HEY

A text from brother Kgahliso reads.

Brother Kgahliso and I met in church when I was 16. It was December and that year my mom; little brother and I were visiting my aunt's house for the Christmas holidays. Dakalo, my aunt's eldest daughter used to fellowship at Faith Mission, and I'd go with her to church and that's how Kgahliso and I met. We exchanged contacts and have been chatting on WhatsApp since, at some point, I was convinced that he would ask me out, but it never happened. Eventually, I gave up on the idea of us being a thing as the years went by without him saying anything

and accepted defeat-he doesn't see me like that, I'm just another sister from church to him.

HEY, WHAT'S UP?

NOTHING MUCH. BROTHER MPHOTO IS ASKING FOR YOUR NUMBER, SHOULD I GIVE HIM?

A frown instantly covers my face. What does Mpho want my numbers for, the guy never speaks to me much less greets me, so I'm baffled as to why he'd want my number. I didn't think he even knows my name or that I exist, that guy looks like he's full of himself.

NO, DON'T GIVE HIM. WHY DOES HE WANT MY NUMBER, WE DON'T EVEN TALK?

I DON'T KNOW BUT GIVE HIM A CHANCE, HE'S A NICE GUY.

This confirms it, brother Kgahliso doesn't see me like that! I look at my phone thoughtfully before sending my reply.

OK, YOU CAN GIVE HIM MY NUMBER.

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My alarm goes off waking me up from my sleep, my heart clenches painfully inside my chest when I remember what day it is today. It's Tuesday and that means going to work and I'm not looking forward to it, work is no less than hell for me and sometimes it gets too much that I wish to resign but I can't do it. I need the money, my mother is not working she makes a living from selling snacks, fruits, and vegetables at the local taxi rank, and with the little that I make from my job I assist her and lessen the load on her shoulders. If I were to quit my job, my little brother wouldn't be the only person my mother has to stress about, so I guess I'll have to be strong and take it like a woman because quitting my job is not an option.

After bathing, I wear black jeans, Tommie sneakers, a Mr. Price T-shirt and finish off my look with the hideous Mr. Price red cap.

"Mulanga have you seen my name batch?" I ask

She's awake and getting herself ready for school.

"Please check on top of the dressing table."

"I'm leaving, bye."

I say after putting on my name badge

"Bye sis, have a good day."

It can be done, Bongiwe is off today.

"Thank you, have a good day as well."

The taxi took too long to get full so I'm already fifteen minutes late by the time I walk inside the store. I greet the security at the door and pace to the till to clock in, Grace doesn't play when it comes to short time (short time is the money deducted

from your salary for clogging in late or before the allocated time).

“You’re late.” Mr. D

“Sorry Mr. D it won’t happen again.”

“I’ll let it slide because you’re never late but next time ketlohofa warning Anza.”

(I’ll give you a warning)

“Thank you, sir.”

“Ok, go put your bag inside your locker. You’re working the till with Ellen today, ere Sashni ahofe float number 4.”

(Tell Sashni to give you float 4)

“Alright.”

I rush to the canteen and lock my bag inside my locker before going to Sashni, the supervisor to take the float bag (money bag) and head to the cash desk.

“Hey,” I say greeting Ellen when I reach the cash desk

It’s still early and the store is almost empty, there are just a few people inside the store but there’s no customer at the cash desk so she’s standing a few feet away from the cash desk hanging stock and putting it on a rail. When I’m done putting float, I take another box and start clipping the stock.

“Elly, there's something that has been bugging me since Saturday...”

“What is it?”

“I don’t know if you noticed but I asked Karabo to cover for me because G asked to speak to me.”

“Oh yeah, I think I remember.”

“She confronted me about the rumors going around the store, rumors that I’m telling everyone in my hood that I’m more educated than everyone here and the rest of the staff only went up to Grade 8.”

“Oh yeah, I heard about it and I wondered why you would brag about a degree when you and I earn the same salary it doesn’t make sense.”

“So, you knew and didn’t ask me, I thought we were friends.”

“We are friends Anza but I didn’t ask you because it didn’t matter to me.”

Wow!

“So, did you hear about it from Bongiwe? G didn’t want to tell me who told her about it”

“Yes, Bongiwe is the one who told me about it.”

“Yo, I don’t understand why Bongiwe keeps doing this to me, when my aunt and I went to confront her about it she lied and said she heard it from someone else and only confirmed it to the staff when she was asked. She didn’t admit to being the instigator, instead, she fooled us and told us she will bring the person who told her the news to my aunt’s house, but she didn’t come”

“I don’t know all about that I just know that Bongiwe is the one who told me, to me it sounded stupid for you to brag about having a degree when you’re working here with us that’s why I didn’t entertain it or ask you about it.”

“I hear you, but I would’ve appreciated it if I heard about it from you.”

“Ngwaneso you know how I am, I don’t like drama and I try my utmost best to keep myself out of it but I’m sorry if you feel betrayed that I didn’t ask you about it but nna akerate ditaba and akebatle hoba ditabeng.”

(I don't like drama and I don't want to be in part of it)

“Ok.”

“I used to work at some restaurant at O.R Tambo International Airport and moved to Nandos before I started working here, I have faced many challenges in the workplace and that's why I always remind myself what I'm here for. I'm here to work not to make friends, that's why you'll never hear anyone saying 'Ellen oitse' because I laugh with everyone, but I don't put them in my pocket. The mistake you made when you first got here was being friendly with everyone thinking that everyone likes you and that they're your friends, you should've taken time to learn each person and their characters before starting any friendship and being open to them. My advice to you regarding this whole situation would be to pray every morning before you come to work and ask God to protect you and give you the strength to face everything thrown your way with grace. And ask him to purify you and cleanse you with his blood so that the lies people say about you don't match with what people see when they look at you, when people lie about you it should be difficult for the next person to believe them because at this point every lie Bongiwe tells about you suits you and that's not a good thing...I believe you didn't say what she claims you said because I know you but everyone else believes her so

please pray for yourself ngwaneso, otherwise, this will keep happening ...fight for yourself, I'm not saying be rude and stoop to their level and scream on top of your voice in front of customers as they do, do it with prayer and watch God vindicate and fight battles for you."

#3

I took Ellen's guidance on abdicating everything to God in prayer, but I would be lying if I asserted that things have gotten any easier or better since I started praying because work is still hell for me, and I have lost so much weight as a result. Those who work or have worked in retail formerly know that communication and teamwork are key for one to successfully perform their responsibilities. If you're not on good terms with your colleagues it comes to be difficult if not impossible to do your work competently.

The store receives delivery/deliveries of new stock every week and after the stock has been scanned and recorded into the system the new stock is shared amongst the associates to be hung, clipped, and flat packed. The boxes are divided randomly so most times we prepare clothing for other departments and not just our own, an item of clothing can be hanged, clipped, or flat-packed(folded) depending on what the department owner chooses to do relying on the availability of space in the department and that's why it becomes necessary to ask the department owner for instruction when dealing with their stock.

Bongiwe and I are not speaking terms since my aunt and I went to confront her in her house, my heart sinks every time I open a box and see stock from her department because I can't ask her what to do with it since we don't talk. It's favorable when Ellen is around because I ask her what to do. My situation with Bongiwe drains me and slays my will to get up every morning and come to work, at this point I don't even want us to go back to how we used to be before I just want us to be civil so that we can work well together.

I would do anything for us to be civil even if it means asking forgiveness knowing well that I'm not the one at fault, the beef between us doesn't only affect us it affects our colleagues as well because they feel compelled to choose a side and unfortunately for me most took Bongiwe's side. I've tried to approach her numerous times but I lose courage the moment our eyes lock and I see the disdain reflected in her eyes. I'm not sure why but Bongiwe detests me.

On a lighter note, brother Mpho texted me on WhatsApp a few days after asking my number from Kgahliso, we've been chatting on WhatsApp and so far, the connection is on another

level. He's not arrogant like I thought he is, he's quite humble, soft-spoken, respectful, and a bit reserved but it's still early to know for sure because every guy pretends to be a good person when they're trying to woo you so I told him we should take a few months and get to know each other better before pursuing a relationship. I have been hurt a lot in the past and I'm not sure my heart can take any more heartbreak so I have to protect myself and only allow him into my life once I feel I know him well enough.

"Ok, I like this one. Can you show me other jeans that are on promotion?" Says the lady customer I'm assisting.

"Let's go this side, we have OR jeggings 2 for R250 and RT jeggings 2 for R200."

"Between the two which one do you think I should go for?"

"I don't like Jeggings because they don't have loops but if I were to choose one between the two, I would go for OR, the quality is better."

She sighs and looks at me thoughtfully

“Ok give me the blue one and the black one.”

She says after a few seconds of contemplation

“Okay, size?”

“36.”

“Mr. D is calling you.” Karabo

“Ok, I’m still assisting a customer I will go to him when I’m done.”

“Okay.” She says and walks off

I give the lady the sizes she asked for and ask her if she still needs assistance with something else.

“No, I’m good thank you. I think I’m sorted, take this R50 it’s your tip you’ve been very kind and patient with me helping me with a smile.” A smile embraces my lips

“Thank you but I’m not allowed to take money from you, please give it to my assistant manager when you pay at the till and tell her it’s for me, I will get it from her.”

“Okay, let me get your name then...Anzani.” She says squinting her eyes reading my name from my name badge

“Yes, I’m Anzani.”

“Okay girl.”

I pick up the empty boxes and head to the stock room

“Don’t tell me you’re already done with that box? Wena no Ellen niyasebenza shem. Please don’t change and be like the rest of the girls please” Nathi

(You and Ellen are hard workers.)

“Thanks ntwana and I promise I won’t change.”

“Let’s hope so, bonke bafika basebenza and change when they realize that Daniel is all bark and no bite.”

(Everyone works hard when they’re still new)

“Not me, I won’t change.”

“Hmm”

I drag my tired body to the office and hit my knuckles on the door.

“Kena.”

(Come in)

Mr. D shouts from inside. I swing the door open and walk inside.

“Anzani Munyai!”

He says in a cheery tone causing me to smile. I know this is my first job but I swear he’s the sweetest manager ever.

“Please take a seat, my Venda Yellowbone.”

I wonder why people find it hard to believe that a Venda-speaking individual can be light-skinned. I’ve lost count of the number of times people have asked me how I can be light-skinned and be Venda, honestly, I find the question insulting.

“Please take a seat.”

I lower myself in a chair across him and wait for him to tell me why I'm here

“Unfortunately, I don't have good news for you.”

My heart skips a few beats, my hands sweat and begin to tremble as I change my sitting position readying myself for the bad news.

“Your colleagues have laid several complaints about you. Your partner Mbali is complaining about the way you tidy up, she says you don't tidy correctly and requests that you leave the department how you find it when you return from your day-offs. The others are complaining as well, they say you are cheeky and rude and refuse to take instruction so they find it arduous to work with you.”

Tears prickle my eyes, but I don't let them fall. Lord knows I always do my best but it's obvious my colleagues don't like me and want to get me fired.

“It’s okay Mr. D I’m sorry I will do better from now henceforth. I’m sorry for slacking.” I croak out in a shaky voice

I swipe my hands on my face and wipe my tears before they roll down my cheeks.

“I know you’re a hard worker, I have seen and observed it myself, and Nathi also tells me how you always finish the boxes of stock he gives you on time. I don’t know what’s going on or why they are doing this but as your manager, it’s my responsibility to follow up on their complaints and try to resolve the matter at hand that’s why I called you here. Believe it or not, I’ve been in your shoes before, I know how hard it is to work with people who don’t like you but don’t be discouraged...look at me I’m a manager today, just do your job and pray. People can hate you and wish you ill but they can never stop God from blessing you, and remember the strongest soldiers face the toughest battles, there’s something special in you and they can see it that’s why they’re doing everything in their power to drag you down...don’t lose hope

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keep on praying.”

“I understand sir, thank you.”

This is the second time I’m being advised to pray, if this isn’t God talking to me then I don’t know

“Ok we are done, be strong Anza.”

I nod my head and walk out.

“What’s wrong?”

Nathi asks when he sees my face.

“It’s nothing, I’ll be fine.”

I say and scurry inside the canteen before he can say anything and head straight to the sink to fill my cup with water and gulp it in one go.

“Ya ntombazana ye Venda enezindaba.”

Someone says from behind me, I swivel and come face to face with Nombuso and Nontobeko. Each holding a takeaway plate in hand. I bite my tongue and take a deep breath holding my tears

“This child is very evil, I don’t know why Daniel thought it was a wise decision to hire a Venda in the first place, look now we are stuck with this evil child”

Her words shoot straight to my heart and crush it to pieces.  
Nombuso laughs

“Nontobeko woah, do you want the poor child to commit suicide?” Nombuso

“Angihlangani.”

(I don’t care)

She says and laughs out loud, that's how she is. She says the meanest thing to you and laughs it off like it's a joke, I should be used to her by now but I'm not because the truth is it hurts every single time she says something mean to me.

\*\*\*\*\*

It's Saturday evening and I'm anxious because Mpho is coming to see me for the first time since we started talking, we've been vibing on the phone and the chemistry between us is on another level but a part of me is scared that maybe we won't connect so well face to face.

I'M OUTSIDE

A text from him reads.

I scurry to my bedroom and spritz perfume before making my way outside. It's almost 8 pm so it's a bit dark outside I squint my eyes and look in different directions trying to spot him,

don't tell me the guy lied to me and he's not here. My phone rings snapping me from my thoughts, it's him.

"Hey, I'm outside. I can't see you anywhere." I say

"But I can see you and you look beautiful." I can't help but blush "look to your left-hand side and you'll see me."

I turn my head to the left and the headlights of a grey Polo parked at the corner flick

"I still can't see you."

"I'm in the car, the grey Polo...I just flicked the headlights"

Gosh, I can be so slow sometimes. He climbs out of the car and stands next to the driver's door. I drop the call and walk towards him

"Hey."

He says with a smile on his face. Oh my gosh, his voice sounds uglier in person, and I don't like his rabbit teeth, he looks better with his mouth closed.

"Hey."

He spreads his arms wide motioning me to hug him. I oblige and snuggle in his embrace, he smells good.

"Finally, we meet."

He says when we pull from each other's arms.

"Yeah."

"Let's get inside, it's a bit chilly out here." He says rubbing his arms

I round the car and join him in the backseat. We sit facing each other, he's not the most handsome guy out there but he's not ugly either. He's dark-skinned, with bug eyes and black enticing lips. He looks alluring with the fresh haircut, trimmed sideburns, mustache, and a goatee.

"Finally, we meet. I'm so happy to finally see you, thank you for agreeing to see me."

"It's okay, I'm curious though..you never spoke to me at church not even once, and then out of the blue you're asking for my number from Kgahliso."

He laughs. Damn even his laugh is ugly

"I don't like rushing into things, I like taking my time in everything I do."

"I see."

"Yes, so are you single?"

“Yes.”

“How long have you been single for?”

“It’s been a while now,” I say

“How long is a while, I’m asking because I don’t want to pursue a relationship with someone who just got out of a relationship. Chances are, you haven’t healed, and I don’t plan on being anyone’s rebound. I have been single for a year and some months; I’ve healed and I’m ready to try again.”

Oh wow

“It’s been a year and I’m over my ex.”

“In that case, I’m more than happy to explore what I feel for you, so tell me is anything different from the phone?”

“No, nothing is different. the connection is the same but I’d still like us to give it some time before jumping into a relationship.”

“I’m a patient man, I don’t mind waiting.”

“Thanks, I didn’t know you have a car”

“It's not mine, it’s my mother’s car.”

“I see, so where do you work?”

“I was doing my final year this year so I’m currently unemployed but I sell Honey to make money for myself- for the record I don’t depend on anyone.”

We laugh. It’s early December by the way

“Ok, how old are you if you don’t mind me asking?”

“27”

“Hmm not bad, you’re five years older than me.”

“That’s the perfect age gap, Indoda maybe ndadlanyana.”

( A man must be a bit older)

We laugh

“You are beautiful.”

He says when the laughter ceases looking into my eyes while his finger is on my cheek slowly caressing it.

#4

It's the December holidays, so trading hours have been extended by an hour because almost everyone is off from work and enjoying their holidays at home. Bonuses, profits from stokvels, and investments have also paid out, almost everyone has money to spend including the unemployed because of how overly generous most people are during this time of the year. This means that the store is always filled up and the mall is buzzing with people every day, we are also receiving deliveries of stock almost daily now instead of twice or once a week because things get sold out fast from the shelves. It's a festive season for everyone else but not for us as we work harder during this time than we did the rest of the year, Daniel employed temporary staff (casuals) to assist us throughout the holidays until the first week of January. The casuals are in the same age group as me and I relate and get along with all of them, for the first time in a long while I enjoy my time at work.

Mbali is working at the cash desk today and I'm working on the floor with Itumeleng (one of the casuals). We are in my department, she's doing flat-pack while I'm hanging and clipping the stock.

“The rail is almost full let me go and deliver the stock.” She looks up and cast her eyes on the rail

“Yeah, go deliver it’s almost full.”

“I’m going... I know you’re flat packing but please don’t look down the whole time, look around occasionally until I’m back. We don’t want anyone stealing stock under your watch.”

The rate of shoplifting increases during the festive season because the store is always brimming with people so keeping a close eye on a customer’s every move becomes almost impossible because our responsibilities increase in addition to the packed store, so shoplifters take advantage of this.

“Ok, will do.” Itu

I move from one department to the next delivering stock until only RT ladies’ stock is left on the rail.

“Can you please deliver Bongiwe’s stock?” I ask looking at Itu pleadingly.

Ellen is at the till so Bongiwe is the one working on the floor and I can’t deliver her stock for obvious reasons. When you take stock to it’s the relevant department you don’t just drop it and leave, it’s necessary to ask the department owner where to put it if it’s something that’s not already on the shelf. If it’s on the shelf, you place it with the rest, but this can be time-consuming as you can spend a lot of time looking around especially if you’re not familiar with the department plus the owner can shift the setting as he/she pleases to create space. Asking from the owner of the department is advisable as it saves time because he/she knows exactly where everything is.

“Okay, no problem.” I sigh in relief and thank her.

She leaves with the stock and returns a few minutes later and continues flat packing. I bend and take a pair of jeans from the box to clip it, but I freeze as stand upright when my gaze lands on Bongiwe who's approaching my direction. She’s undoubtedly boiling in anger. Her flared nose and the beads of sweat rolling down her face are proof of this. She’s pacing so

her breathing is ragged, and her short hands are swinging in the air shifting up and down as she trudges towards me. Itu sees the expression on my face and follows my gaze, and we both look at her until she's standing in front of us.

“Yewena Anzani ungafuni nje ukungjwayela kabi why ulahlele ley'kipa noma kuphi lapha e department(ini) yami?”

(Anzani don't mess with me, why did you carelessly put these t-shirts in my department)

She bellows and throws the five t-shirts on my face earning us an audience. The ladies shopping next to us pause and look at me as I shamefully crouch to the floor and pick up the T-shirts. It's the same T-shirts I just hung and asked Itu to deliver to Bongiwe's department.

“You can't come here and accuse me of things without first asking, what if it was a customer?”

There's no way I'm putting Itu in the firing line, she was doing me a favor after all.

“I know it was you!”

“Well, it wasn’t me.”

“Keep this up and you’ll see a different side of me.”

She clicks her tongue and walks off shaking her flat behind. Bongiwe is dark-skinned and very beautiful, but her body disappoints her shame. She’s fat like size 44 kind of fat with a flabby tummy that covers her private part, she has a flat behind and a jelly body. You can see her butt and thighs wriggling underneath the jean with each step she takes.

“What did you do?” That’s the first thing I ask Itu when Bongiwe is out of sight.

“I didn’t find her in the department, and I couldn’t find the t-shirts when I tried to look for them, so I just hung them on the rail I found in her department.” No wonder she was so angry!

“No, Itu we don’t do that here. What you did is called dumping and is not tolerated here, you either put clothes in their correct place or you wait until the department owner is back.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t mean to cause any trouble between you two and thank you for not telling her it was me who left them there, I’m scared of her yoh especially when she wears that mean look on her face my skin instantly gets covered with goosebumps.”

I break into a chuckle. I know exactly what she’s talking about. It’s the same look she gives to the customers who mess up her flat pack, I remember a customer reported her to the manager after she gave him ‘her famous’ look.

“No worries but I don’t think she would have done anything to you, she just hates me that’s why she was so rude.”

“But still, what she did was uncalled for. She humiliated you in front of customers.”

The more we talk about it the more my anger spikes up. Unable to contain it anymore I find myself marching to Mr. D's office in anger. I sigh in relief when I meet him at the stock-room door seemingly on his way out.

“Sir ndikho humbela u amba na vhone”

(Si can I please talk to you)

I'm shaking in anger, so my voice comes out groggy and hoarse. Mr. D is Sotho, but he can hear and speak Tshivenda.

“Okay, what's wrong?”

He asks looking at me with concern. Bongiwe approaches us kicking empty boxes with her foot, she's done with the stock and is now returning the boxes to the stock room.

“Ndina thaidzo na Bongiwe.”

(I have a problem with Bongiwe)

I say when she attempts to walk past us.

“Bongiwe give the boxes to Nathi and follow me to my office, Anza come.”

He says leading the way, Bongiwe and I follow behind him in silence. When we get to the office, he motions us to take a seat and settles on his chair across us.

“Please lock the door.” He instructs

I stand up from my seat and shut the door before locking it.

“Okay Anzani tell me what’s going on.” He says after I’ve taken my seat

“Mr. D I have a problem with Bongiwe, first she was found crying at the canteen and when her friends asked her why she was crying she said it was because of me but refused to tell them what I did to make her cry. Then she told lies about me and said I tell everyone in my hood that the staff is uneducated

and I'm the only one who is educated, when my aunt and I went to confront her, she promised to come with the supposed person who told her the news, but she didn't instead she ran and told her friends that my aunt and I went to her house to provoke her. Today she threw t-shirts on my face in front of customers

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Bongiwe has a problem with me, and I want to know why."

"Okay, Bongiwe you heard what Anza said.. what do you say for yourself?"

"I hate Anzani, I hate her so much." She declares looking at me with so much animosity in her eyes. Daniel gasps and looks at her with his eyes bulging out in shock

"Why do you hate her, tell me?" He asks

"I can't tell you, sir."

“You have no choice but to tell me because your hate for her is affecting your work, and in doing so you have made it my business so I demand to know why you hate her. I’m sure she’d also like to know why you hate her so she can apologize for whatever it is that she did wrong.” She shakes her head in disapproval and her eyes glisten with tears

“No, I can’t sir I’m sorry, but I hate her so much I swear.”

My anger dissipates and worry seeps in like a fog as I wrack my brain trying to think of what I did to her to make her hate me so much, but nothing comes to mind. Before I started working here Bongiwe and I only greeted each other so it can’t be something I did before. We don’t even have the same circle of friends or relate in any way except for work; we are two different people plus she’s older than me so she’s not someone I would befriend.

“Please tell me.” I plead in a gentle tone, gone is the anger I felt a minute ago.

“No, I won’t say anything....just know that I hate you, I hate you so much.”

“No Bongiwe you’re not being fair now, tell the poor child why you hate her so that you two can fix things and work well together.”

“I don’t want to fix anything with her, I’m okay with the way things are between us.”

“So, you’re okay with the discomfort this brings especially in doing your work?” Daniel

I’m sure she’s also finding it difficult to do her work competently because of our quarrel.

“Yes.” She says nonchalantly

“What about your co-workers, don’t you think you’re being unfair on them... this situation between the two of you is uncomfortable for them”

“I don’t care about them, what are they uncomfortable about because I’m the one who’s not talking to Anza and not them so bona bangenaphi?”

(How is it any of their business)

“Yo, I don’t know what to say to you Bongiwe. It’s obvious you don’t want to be helped and there’s nothing I can do to help you.”

“Mamohau knows why I hate Anzani and she advised me not to say anything, she told me to pray about it.”

Wow, it gets deep.

“Then Mamohau should’ve called the two of you and tried to get to the bottom of this but anyway you’re an adult and I won’t force you to talk but if you keep letting your hatred interfere with your work, I’ll give you a warning because I tried to help you, but you don’t want to be helped mos.”

He hisses, visibly running out of patience.

“Why should I say anything because we both know you’ll take Anza’s side like you always do?”

“Wow, okay Bongiwe you can leave I think we are done here. Repeat what you did today, and I’ll give you a warning. You can report me to Albert if you want, I don’t care.”

Albert is our area manager, he’s Daniel's manager and of all the other store managers in the east rand region. We report to him if we’re not satisfied with how the manager does things.

\*\*\*\*\*

I’m finally home after a long stressful day at work, my feet are swollen and aching, I could use a foot massage right now. The first thing I did when I walked inside my room was to undress and throw myself on top of my bed, it feels amazing I tell you being nude that is. Adam and Eve did us dirty by eating the fruit, walking around naked would be normal if it wasn’t for them because being dressed is so uncomfortable at times.

“You and being naked.”

Mulanga says when she walks inside the bedroom and finds me lying on the bed in my birthday suit.

“Being naked is the shit I tell you; clothes are uncomfortable as f\*ck cuz especially undergarments.”

She cackles

“You’re crazy shem.”

My phone chimes next to me and my face lights up when I see that it’s a text message from Mpho. He and I have been talking over the past few days after our meeting and he’s exactly the kind of guy I want to be with. I’m such a sucker for church boys.

I DIDN’T EXPECT THINGS TO TURN OUT THE WAY THEY HAVE, BUT THEY TURNED OUT THE WAY I WAS HOPING. I DON’T LIKE TO RUSH INTO THINGS BUT I CAN’T WASTE ANY MORE TIME BECAUSE OF THE CLIMAX OF OUR FEELINGS FOR EACH OTHER. I KNOW YOU’RE WONDERING WHY I TOOK SO LONG TO COME AND APPROACH YOU BUT I BELIEVE EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON, MAYBE IF I CAME EARLIER, I WOULD’VE FOUND YOU IN LOVE WITH SOMEONE ELSE. MY HEART IS FULL OF

LOVE, LOVE THAT I WANT TO SHOWER YOU WITH, PLEASE ALLOW ME TO LOVE YOU EVERY DAY AND NIGHT.

I'VE BEEN HURT BEFORE BUT I'M READY TO TRY AGAIN AND MY HEART, SOUL, AND BODY CHOSE YOU GIRL. I KNOW IT'S ONLY BEEN A FEW WEEKS BUT I BELIEVE I KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT YOU TO KNOW THAT YOU'RE THE ONE I WANT TO BE WITH, RECEIVE MY HEART AND SOUL I KNOW I PROMISED TO WAIT UNTIL YOU'RE READY BUT THE FEELING IS TOO STRONG TO HOLD ON. I WANT TO LOVE YOU, I WANT US TO BE OFFICIAL, I WANT TO BE YOUR BOYFRIEND. I THINK I LOVE YOU BUT I WANT TO LOVE YOU MORE AND GROW EVERY DAY IN LOVING YOU IN VARIOUS WAYS.

SO, WILL YOU BE MY GIRLFRIEND ANZANI MUNYAI?

Oh boy, my heart is racing and threatens to burst my chest open, this is the sweetest proposal ever. I know I wanted to give it some time, but this feels right so why not give it a chance? I have nothing to lose after all.

#5

One thing I hate about retail is having to go to work on weekends while everyone else enjoys themselves, being at work slaving away and getting undermined by customers who are sometimes younger than you can crush one's esteem to the ground. I don't know why customers have this tendency of looking down on retail employees and treating them disgracefully especially when they feel they are above them, they have this twisted mentality about people who work in retail shops- they think we are all uneducated and good for nothing.

It's a Wednesday morning and it's my day off, I'm so happy that I'm going to work today and I won't have to see Bongiwe. I woke up bright and early and did my laundry, cleaned the house, and now I'm getting ready to go and see my boyfriend.

"Where are you headed to?" My aunt asks when I pass her in the lounge watching TV.

"Going to see my friends."

I've been visiting my aunt's house during school holidays from the age of 16 so I'm not exactly new to Ratanda, I have made a few friends over the years and my aunt knows them. She sizes me up and quirks her eyebrow, it's probably because we don't normally see each other unless we are going out. Yes, our friendship isn't that deep, we can go for months without talking and still be fine with each other when we meet again.

"I didn't know you girls were going out."

"We are not going anywhere serious; we are just going to spend time as friends and have a chat while having bunny chows and soft drink nothing serious."

"Nothing serious when you're dressed like that ...hmm"

I'm dressed in blue boyfriend jeans, a black bodysuit that reveals my cleavage, and black Nike Airforce sneakers. I look too sexy so I understand why my aunt is suspicious.

“Yes aunt, there’s no harm in looking good. I’m always at work on weekends so I never get time to wear my nice clothes so I might as well.”

“If you say so.”

“Don’t cook, I’ll be back in time to prepare supper.”

“Okay.”

I find my boyfriend waiting for me at the corner when the cab drops me off. I climb out of the car and launch myself in his arms the moment I’m next to him taking in his intoxicating scent, damn he smells so good.

“How are you sthandwa sam?” He asks taking my purse from me and intertwining his free hand with my right hand.

“I’m good and you”

“I’m happy now that you are here.”

It’s a short distance from the corner to his house so two minutes later we are walking through the gate, it's a beautiful single storey house surrounded by high walls and aluminum doors and windows.

“Welcome to my home.” He says when we walk inside the kitchen

The kitchen walls are painted in lime causing the white Riley wall chicken unit and the grey Samsung 501lt side-by-side fridge to stand out.

“Thank you.”

“Please take a seat while I make us something to eat”

He puts my purse on the kitchen countertop and pulls out the bar stool for me, I perch my ass on the chair and watch him as he moves around the beautiful kitchen making us something

for us to eat. He takes out four eggs, bacon, sausages, and a pack of cheese from the fridge.

“How do you like your eggs?”

“Sunnyside up.”

He prepares the food and adds two slices of toast and a glass of juice. We are in his bedroom now, I'm relaxed on his bed with my feet up and my back against the headboard eating while watching Night school, it's such a funny movie I don't normally go for comedy but I'm enjoying this one. He has a tv in his room, it's mounted to the wall opposite his bed so we are watching while sitting on his bed.

“Thank you, the food was delicious.”

I say putting our plates on top of the nightstand.

“Pleasure sthandwa sam.”

He looks at me for a while and onslaughts me with a kiss, goosebumps tease my skin at the tinge of our lips. His lips are soft and tender like I imagined them, the kiss is amazing, and I can't help but moan in his mouth. His hands roam all over my body giving me soft caresses, he cups my boobs in his palms and groans inside my mouth

"I love your boobs; they look so sexy in this bodysuit" He whispers in my ear.

His voice is laced with lust and instantly sends signals down south, my bean throbs and twitches desperate for attention. I'm dying for him to put his mouth between my legs and slurp on my juices like a dog slurping water

nothing turns me on more than having a man between my legs eating me up like I'm his favorite dessert.

"Can I?"

He asks looking at me with red eyes meshed with lust while his hands settle on my belt.

“Yes.”

He doesn't waste time; he unbuckles the belt and helps me out of my jeans and shifts my bodysuit to the side before burying his face between my legs. A moan breaks out of my lips when his tongue makes contact with my swollen and throbbing clit, my heart raises and my grip on the covers tightens as he devours my cookie.

“Mpho!”

His mom bellows outside his closed-door snapping me out of my sexual high.

I jump to the floor and cover my nakedness with the fleece that was laid on the foot of the bed. My hand reaches the left side of my chest to steady my hitched breath and fast-beating heart. His mother can't see me in this position, this is not how I

envisioned our first meeting to be. She'll immediately categorize me as a cheap girl who doesn't respect herself and infer that I'm not good enough for her son, Christians are judgemental but his mom is worse she's a self-proclaimed deputy Jesus who judges people like she's perfect.

"Relax, she won't come inside." He whispers

"Mpho!"

"Mama!"

"What are you doing inside there, I'm craving Lindiwe's scones please go and buy them for me."

She shouts still standing outside the door. I don't bother listening to their conversation because all I have on my mind now is how to get myself out of this room without being seen by deputy Jesus. A cold hand on my shoulder pulls me from my reverie.

“What's on your mind?”

“Nothing why?”

“You seem lost in deep thought.”

“I don't want your mom seeing me like this, you know how she is,” I say in a soft voice

His mom fellowships in the same church with us and I know her well enough to discern that she won't be pleased to find me half-naked in her house. She dislikes all the girls who had kids out of wedlock in our church and disapproves of Zodwa's friendship with her son because she wears skimpy and revealing outfits to church so I know she will immediately deem me not good enough for her son if she sees me in this state.

“Relax, she's not here. I managed to convince her to go buy scones at Lindiwe's place so that means you need to get dressed so I can accompany you to the taxi rank.”

“So I need to leave?”

“Yes.”

“I thought we’d spend the day together Mpho, I could’ve slept in and rested but I woke up early and did my chores so we could spend time together before your mom comes back from work.”

“I know my love but I didn’t expect her to come back so early, she normally comes back home after 4.”

“I can’t believe I wasted my time for nothing. Do I really have to go, can’t I stay and leave later?”

“I’m sorry but you can’t be here while my mom is around. I can’t disrespect her like that.”

I admire the respect he has for his mom but I feel like he’s behaving like a teenager at the same time. He’s 27 for Pete’s sake there’s no need to tiptoe around his mom like this

“Get dressed so we can leave before she comes back.”

I don't need him to say it twice, I quickly get dressed and brush my hands on my hair. My hair is messed up after the mini session we just had.

“Okay, wait here I'll go back inside the house and wait for my mother to come back. Please don't move here until I'm back.”

He walks off before I can wrap my head around what he's saying. Two minutes later I'm still at the corner under the scorching sun standing like an idiot waiting for him to come back as he said, my feet are starting to ache from standing still so I lean my back on the wall fence and send him a text.

MPHO WHAT'S GOING ON? I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU

PLEASE BE PATIENT, MY MOM IS STILL NOT BACK PLEASE  
FUTURE

Oh, I forgot to mention that he calls me future. When I asked him why he gave me the name he said he didn't want to use those cliché names like 'baby, love and them' and future felt like the perfect name to call me with because he sees a future with me. You should've seen the gigantic smile on my face when he said that.

“What are you doing here?”

Says a voice behind me. I swivel and come face to face with a man, he's peeping over the fence looking down on me.

“Ah.. ahh”

“Ey Votsek suka la!”

People don't like it when you lean on their walls, so I'm not surprised by his reaction, it does look kind of creepy especially with the high rates of crime in our country. People no longer trust anyone; they always have their guard up thinking you want to rob them. So I walk away and make my way to the taxi

rank, I bump into Mpho's mom and his little sister on my way to the rank and greet them.

I'm inside a cab, on my way home when I receive a call from Mpho

"Hau baby where are you?"

That's the first thing he says when I pick the call

"I left, I couldn't wait at some corner and have people mistaken me for a thief."

"I'm sorry Future."

"Are you ashamed of me Mpho?"

"What?"

“That would explain why you’re treating me like a dirty secret.”

“What no, that’s not what I’m doing my love...you’re the one who said you didn’t want my mom seeing you.”

“Yes, but I didn’t expect you to tell me to hide in some corner a street away from your house. I expected us to walk to the rank together.”

“We were going to walk to the rank together after my mom came back to the house, I just didn’t want to risk us bumping into her on the street. I know how my mom is, she would’ve given you attitude and besides I think it’s still too early in our relationship for me to introduce you to my mom but I can do it if that will make you happy.”

“No, it’s fine you don’t have to do anything you’re not ready for but I didn’t like what you did today...it made me feel like I’m good enough to be seen walking around with you.”

“I’m sorry you felt that way but you are good enough and I love you my future.”



#6

“Mma vhakho u pfala vha songo takala mulandu?”

(Mom you don't okay, what's wrong?)

I'm talking to my mother on the phone, she doesn't sound like the person I know. She sounds sad and troubled I know my mom well, so I know something is bothering her.

“Eish ngwananga ndi kho vhilela, athi divhi uri ndi iteni”

(Eish my child I'm stressed, I don't know what to do.)

Every time my mother says she's stressed I just know that it has to do with money, I hate that I'm not earning enough to cater to all her needs. My heart shudders every time I picture my mother sitting at the taxi rank, getting burned by Venda's scorching sun because she's trying to put food on the table for my brother. God should just bless me with a good job already so I can lessen the burden on my Queen's shoulders, I can't wait for her to reap the fruits of having an educated child.

When will she harvest the benefits of her hard work and sacrifice?

“Thaidzo ndi mini mma? Ndi tshelede, vha kho u toda tshelede?”

(What is mom? Is it money, do you need money?)

“Hayi ngwananga, asi malugana na tshelede hutovha vhutshiloni hanga ahuna tshine tsha khou tshimbila zwavhudi. Ndou lingedza u toda mushumo fhedzi ahuna thandululo, zwi soko fana.”

(No, my child this has nothing to do with money. You know how my life has been like, nothing works out. I have tried everything network marketing, business, and getting a job but nothing ever works out for me where money is concerned.)

That’s true. My mother is not lazy, she’s a go-getter and has tried almost everything to change her financial situation but nothing ever works out for her. I have lost count of the number of times she was scammed by those ‘fly-by-night’ investment schemes that promised her great profits after a short investment period and she always fell for it because of her

desperation to turn her life around, she has also tried going the business route but anything she sells never generates profit. It's either her customers don't pay her on time, or they pay her in installments which knocks the business to its knees. The only 'business' of hers that has worked out is the fruit and vegetable stall she has at the rank but let's face it there's no money there.

“Ndi kale ndi kho u rabela, ndi tshi di dzima ndo lingedza zwothe fhedzi ahu kho Shanduka tshithu. Ndoya u vhona muthu a mbudza uri dzi phathutshedzo dzanga na dza vhananga dzo valeo. Uri zwithu zwi kone tshimbila zwavhudi ndi kho tea u tangedza mbidzo yanga ya vhadzimu, a thi khoutoda ni tshi tambula nga vhanganga langa fhedzi athi kho vhuya ndakona u di vhona ndi maine. Nne ndi divha vhutendi ha tshi kreste fhedzi, zwa vhu maine thi zwidivhi vhathu vhatori mini ngoho?”

(I have been praying, fasting, and doing everything right but nothing changes so I went to see someone, and I was told that my blessings are blocked because of my ancestral calling. The man said nothing will go right in my life and my children's lives until I accept the calling, I don't want you and your brother to suffer because of me but I can't imagine myself as a traditional healer. I can't, Christianity is all I know. What will people say?)

This is a lot to take in, I don't know how to feel about this. I understand where my mother is coming from but at the same time, I don't. Shouldn't she be prioritizing what she wants matter more than other people's opinions of her? At the end of the day, she's the one who's suffering not them, and it seems my brother and I will inherit her misfortune by virtue of being her children, ya neh life is tough!

"Mma I don't know what to say."

"I understand, it's a lot to take in. That man said my ancestors are blocking my finances, that's why everything I do never succeeds. He says the ancestor who is blocking my success will not let me starve but I'll never have enough to lead a comfortable life, if I don't accept my calling, I'll live from hand to mouth till I die."

I'm conflicted I don't know what to make of this, like my mother Christianity is all I know. The bible is all I know and believe in, and it says "For the living know that they will die, but the dead do not know anything; they have no further reward—and even the memory of them disappears. What they loved, as well as what they hated and envied, perished long ago, and

they no longer have a part in anything that happens on earth.” But then how do we explain what’s going on in mother’s life and the maine’s reasons behind it? She’s a woman of God who lives her life according to God’s principles so why can’t God see her suffering and deliver her from her trouble like he said he will in his word? The bible says, “Cast all your anxiety to him because he cares for you” and my mother has done exactly that, but the hasn’t been a change in her situation for years.

“Anza are you still there?”

“Yes, mma I’m still here I just don’t know what to say.”

“I know my child; I think my problem is the reason why you haven’t found a job you studied for.”

Before I found a job at Mr. Price I was called to several interviews and would represent myself so well and the interviewers would be impressed with me and I would believe I would get the job only to receive the email- “Thank you for making time to attend the interview with us, unfortunately, your application has been unsuccessful at this time.” that's why

when Daniel told me I got the job I couldn't believe it, I thought he was bluffing or that something would happen, and he'd change his mind all of the sudden and not give me the job because the disappointments I had encountered in the past wouldnt allow me rejoice. I only celebrated after signing the contract because a part of me found it hard to believe that I was finally employed.

“So, what's the next step?”

“I don't know my child; I don't know. You know I want what's best for you and your brother but being a maine goes against everything I believe in.”

I guess it was easier to believe that my life is not progressing because it's not yet my time, Isiah 60:22 was my daily mantra and motivation to keep trusting in God's promises but after what my mother has told me it'll be hard to keep that mentality.

“I understand mma, take your time and think about your decision. Whatever you decide to do I will support and respect your decision.”

“Oh Anza...that means a lot coming from you my child, I’m blessed to have a daughter like you.”

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it’s been a week since Bongiwe openly declared her hate for me, it’s the 31st of December the last day of the year and everyone at work is in a jovial mood. Amapiano music is blasting through the speakers and customers are dancing while they shop around, Daniel permitted Mbali to play music from her phone by connecting to the store's radio via an Aux cable. What my mother told me hasn’t left my mind

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it’s all I think about as a matter of fact. I have also been thinking a lot about Bongiwe, her hate for me, and how our squabble is affecting my work and stealing my peace, I don’t want to carry that negativity and toxicity into the new year with me, so I have decided to swallow my pride and apologize to her for whatever it is that she hates me for.

Today the store isn't packed probably because everyone is more focused on buying beverages and making plans to celebrate the last day of the year than they are on shopping, I was working the till but Mamohau cash up(ed) me first so I'm in my department helping my partner tidy up the department.

"Mbali I think I should just apologize to Bongiwe, who knows maybe she'll forgive me and put this behind us."

"I think that's a good idea, ai phela lento yenu isisebenzisa kabuhlungu."

(This beef between you two is making the work environment uncomfortable for us)

"True, and I apologize for that."

"It's okay, just go and apologize to her. Maybe that's what she's been waiting for, an apology from you"

"Did she ever tell you why she hates me?"

“No, never.”

“Okay.”

I take a deep breath and walk to her department. She’s moving up and down tidying her department, she halts on her step when she sees me approaching and gives me a look that makes me want to turn on my heels and forget this whole apology thing but my desire for peace is greater than my pride, so I ignore her malicious look and keep advancing towards her.

“Bongiwe can I please have a word with you.”

She flares her nose and releases a dry chuckle

“Talk to me about what? I have nothing to say to you.”

She says and proceeds with what she was doing. I sigh and follow her around like a wet puppy

“Ok you don’t have to say anything, but can you please listen to me?”

She doesn’t reply she just folds her arms and gives me that ‘go ahead’ look. I clear my throat to wet my dry throat and start talking

“I don’t know why you’re angry at me but it’s obvious I did something big that’s why you hate me, I am sorry for what I did even though I don’t know what it is but I’m terribly sorry please find it in your heart to forgive me. I want us to work in peace and be civil with each other, our beef is not only affecting us but our colleagues as well which is not fair on them.”

“I don’t care how uncomfortable this is for anyone else, I hate you Anza I hate you so much.”

“Okay, it’s okay you can hate me, but can we please be civil at work because honestly not talking to you is making my job difficult. It’s the 31st of December and I don’t want to enter the new year with grudges from the past, can we please put this

behind us and start on a clean slate? We don't have to be friends, but can we be civil?" I implore in a soft voice

"Okay, I can do that."

"Thank you. I guess we are cool now?"

"Yes."

A sigh of relief breezes out of my lips, this fight with Bongiwe was draining me and stealing my peace. I'm glad I swallowed my pride and apologized to her.

I'm a church girl so the 31st of December doesn't mean anything to me, it's just like any other day so I don't have any special plans. I will just be home, inside my blankets reading diaries on Facebook. I will call my mother at midnight so we can pray together and thank the Lord for carrying us into the new year. My aunt and Mulanga left for Johannesburg for a night vigil, I wanted to go with them, but the bus left their church at 6 pm and I knocked off at 7 so there was no way I would have

made it so I'm home alone chatting with my boyfriend on WhatsApp.

“So what time are you guys leaving for Carnival city?”

Mpho, his two little sisters, and his mom are spending the last day of the year at Carnival city. They are such a close-knit family, the pride on Mpho's face every time he speaks about his mother is beautiful to see. He loves and respects that woman, she may be what she is, but I respect her because she gave birth to my boyfriend. Mpho is everything I want in a man, he's humble, down to earth and very respectful plus he's a born-again Christian, my past relationships didn't work out because of differences in beliefs. It doesn't matter how much two people can love one another but they'll never be happy together if they don't serve the same alter so it's always better to go for someone who has the same beliefs as you so you can avoid unnecessary fights.

“Around 11, I want to come to see you before we leave. Can I come?”

My heart is doing backflips right now

“Yes, you can come. I’ll change and wait for you.”

“Change what?”

“I was already in my pajamas.”

“Ok future give me ten minutes and I’ll be there.”

I jolt out of bed when he hangs up and run to my wardrobe and pull out a pair of jeans, a T-shirt, and a Black knitted jersey. I slip out of my pajamas and change into the clothes I just took out and slide my feet into my sleepers before heading to the lounge to wait for my boyfriend’s call.

I’M OUTSIDE

A text from him reads exactly ten minutes later.

His mother's Grey Polo is parked outside my aunt's house, I walk to the passenger side and get inside the car. A smile instantly embraces his face when our gazes lock and his arm spread open, I throw myself in his arms and snuggle in his embrace taking in his hypnotizing scent.

"Hey future"

"Hey, love."

I pull myself away from his embrace and lean back on my seat starring at his fresh haircut. He looks charming, his new haircut suits him.

"You look good." I complement

"Thank you sthandwa sam you look beautiful as well."

He takes my hands in his and looks into my eyes.

“I love you and I’m so excited to start the new year with you, surely 2020 will be my year I mean I have a beautiful lady by my side.”

I giggle

“I know what happened on your first visit to my house didn’t sit well with you but please bear me with. I don’t think it’s the right time for me to introduce you to my mom, I know you probably think it’s because I am ashamed of you or that I’m not sure about you, but I promise it has nothing to do with that. You’re a beautiful, self-respecting, and kind woman and I’m lucky you are mine, but I know how my mother is. She’s rude and so unnecessary at times, her attitude and behavior have separated me from people I loved, and I don’t want that to happen with you. My mother has ruined so many of my relationships and separated me from girls I loved...with you, I want to do things differently, I can introduce you to anyone in my family just not my mother because I know how she is. You’ll end up dumping me if she doesn’t like you because she won’t even try to hide it, she’ll treat you bad. It happened with three of my exes and I’m not willing to take that risk with you,”

#7

I'm sleeping with Mulanga when the door flies open and someone walks inside our bedroom, I can't see the person's face or make out their gender but I can feel his/her heavy presence inside the room. Mulanga is sleeping on the right side of the bed, right next to the door and I'm on the left side. The person walks in and rounds the bed coming to my side of the bed, he stands next to my bed looking down on me but doesn't touch me, but his/her presence weighs heavily on me suffocating me and making it difficult for me to breath with ease.

“Fffiii..reee”

My tongue feels swollen and fills my mouth making it difficult for me to speak, I'm screaming but my voice comes out soft almost like a whisper. Even so, I don't give up, I keep praying and casting out demons with my broken speech until I'm able to annunciate the words, the more I pray the lighter the person's presence feels on me.

“ANZANI!”

I snap my heavy eyelids open and come face to face Mulanga, she’s looking at me with her eyes wide open, visibly frightened.

“What? What’s wrong why do you look scared?”

“You were whimpering, tossing, and turning in your sleep. Did you have a bad dream?”

“Yes.”

My heart is beating out of my chest and I can feel sweat trickling between my breasts trailing down to my stomach my sleeping dress is drenched in sweat and sticking on my skin. Damn that dream felt so real. I skim my eyes around the room and see that everything is exactly how it was in my dream.

“Do you want to tell me about it?”

I shake my head in disapproval

“Ok, I understand.”

“I should wake up and get ready for work.”

I say rolling out of bed heading to the bathroom to take a bath. Work is okay since Bongiwe and I fixed things, she is civil like she promised and I'm glad because the drama between us was killing my desire and enthusiasm to do my job. My phone is on top of the toilet seat playing music while I'm resting in the bathtub with my eyes closed thinking about the dream I just had, I wonder what it means. My mother hasn't decided what to do about the Maine thing, I don't want to force her to decide when she's not ready to make a decision but there's a lot at stake. When I got the job at Mr. Price I didn't mean for it to be a permanent thing, I took it as something to keep me going while I search for another job but after knowing that I might never get another job regardless of how much I apply until my mother heeds to her calling depresses me.

The idea of being stuck in retail for the rest of my life because my mother fears what people will say about her if she becomes a sangoma tears my heart to shreds, I had goals and dreams for my future, and they didn't include being stuck in retail while earning peanuts. 20 minutes later I get out of the tub and dry my body with a towel before tying it under my breasts and draining the water out of the tub.

My phone rings pausing my music, I know it's Mpho because I have a special ringtone for him.

"Sthandwa sam"

"Hello."

"Why do you sound so down, are you okay?"

"I'm okay just tired, I don't feel like going to work today."

I love Mpho but I don't know if I can trust him with something so sensitive, not that he'd tell anyone but he's a strict Christian

who doesn't believe in anything other than God so he will never understand the situation my family is faced with...Not that I understand it myself, I'm still trying to wrap my head around it.

"I'm sorry sthandwa sam... I made a lot of sales during the festive season so I have money to spend, let me take you out on Saturday. You worked throughout the festive season while everyone was on holiday, you deserve to be spoiled."

"Ncoah, thank you baby that's so sweet."

"You deserve it my future."

Oh man, isn't he the sweetest?

"What time on Saturday?"

"How does seven in the evening sound?"

“It’s perfect, I’ll hurry to rank after knock-off time. Let me get ready for work baby, I don’t want to be late.”

“Okay, sthandwa sam have a good day.”

“Thanks my love, you too.”

I rinse the bathtub and head to the bedroom to lotion and get dressed in my uniform.

“Good morning aunt.”

I say when I find her in the lounge watching 1Gospel. The way she always wakes up early every morning one would assume she has a job or something.

“Good morning Anza how are you doing today?”

“I’m good aunt how are you?”

“I’m good my child.”

I head to the fridge and take out my lunchbox, it’s yesterday dinner.

“Bye aunt

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I’ll be on my way.”

“Bye Anza, have a good day at work.”

“Thanks, aunt.”

My shift starts at nine, so the store is already open by the time I arrive at work. I greet the security at the door and wave to Mamohau and Nombuso at the till.

“You didn’t put float today?”

I say when I find Boitumelo standing in the fitting room.

“Never, I’m tired yoh. I can’t always be at the till never I already have the second warning which will expire in 6 months if I get another variance, I’m going straight to 12 months. Daniel ha kenye lona le Ellen le clean halena di warning mos”

(Daniel should put you and Ellen at the till you’re clean and have no warnings yet)

Boitumelo is Nontobeko’s bestie but for some reason, she’s nice to me or maybe it’s because she doesn’t fancy Bongwiwe.

“I don’t mind working the till but Sashni told me that I have to do OR CASUAL and Formal VN’s(VN-Visual merchandizing) plus the VN for RedX and Red surf have also changed.”

Visual merchandising refers to how a particular department is laid out; the standard must be the same in all stores in the same region. This includes how mannequins are dressed and the banners that are hanging next to the window in each Mr.

Price store, if you go to more than one Mr. price store you might notice the similarities in the store's layout.

“Then he must put Bongiwe on the till, I don’t understand why the rest of us have to work the till and risk getting variances while she’s relaxing on the floor gossiping and giving customers mean looks.”

“You know Bongiwe doesn’t know the till.”

“So what? you started working here after her, but you know the till. She must just stop being lazy and learn the till angeke sodlalwa wu Bongiwe thina!”

(We won’t be played by her.)

I’m scared to comment because the last thing I want is to find myself in another drama involving Bongiwe.

“Let me go put my bag and make myself a cup of tea.”

“Lea thaba lona ba kenang ka 9”

(Lucky you whose shift starts at 9)

Boitumelo is working on a 45-hour contract unlike the rest of us who work 35 hours each week, she works Monday to Saturday and her shift always starts at 8 till knock-off time every weekday and ends at 12 mid-day on Saturday or starts at 12 mid-day depending on the estimated busyness of that particular Saturday.

I laugh and head to the canteen where I find Ellen sitting with a cup in front of her.

“Ngwaneso.”

“Ngwaneso okae?”

(How are you)

Ngwaneso is a Sotho word that refers to ‘sibling’. I don’t remember how we started calling each other like this but we’ve

been calling each other ngwaneso for as long as I can remember.

“I heard that you apologized to Bongwiwe and patched things with her.”

“Yeah, not talking to her was draining me, to be honest...I no longer enjoyed coming to work.”

“Eish I can imagine shame ngwaneso but I’m glad you became the bigger person and apologized to her even though you knew you were not wrong.”

“Yeah, I had to. I didn’t want to start the new year with useless squabbles.”

“I’m proud of you but I hope now you’ll create a distance between you two, I’m not saying she’s a bad person but for your peace of mind and for you to enjoy working here I think you just create a distance between you two and only talk to her about work. No more discussing personal life with her”

“That’s exactly what I was planning to do, once bitten twice shy.”

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.br/.

NARRATED

Somewhere in Venda, Vuwani Anzani’s mom is sitting under her stretch tent at the rank serving her customers while her phone is trapped between her shoulder and ear.

“I don’t know what to say sis but I think you should do it, forget about what people will say because they will always talk and just do what you need to do. Think about your kids, Anza worked so hard to obtain her qualification it’s not fair that she has to suffer like this.”

“Lufuno I hear what you’re saying and I love Anzani and Lutendo they are my kids I would never want them to suffer but this is not an easy decision to make. I can’t just wake up and

agree to be a Maine, I'm a deacon at church and I have a reputation to protect and so many people look up to me... there's a lot at stake."

"Luvhuwani are you being serious right now? You're thinking about your position and reputation at church when you should be thinking about how much your disobedience will harm your kids?"

"I didn't say I'm not going to do it, I just said I need time to think and make a decision. This will change my life forever, so I need to be sure of any decision I take."

"Okay but don't take too long, this thing is stressing Anza and I don't like seeing her in that state."

"I won't, there's a new pastor who just opened a church opposite to the taxi rank. My neighbor attended his services and has been singing his praises ever since, he is said to be powerful. Maybe I can visit his church and attend his services maybe he will help me then I won't have to be a Maine."

"Okay, I hear you. I just hope he's not one of those fake pastors and prophets who feed people snakes as we have seen on TV."

“No, he doesn’t use anything. Shandu says he only uses water and oil, I haven’t met him yet but I think he’s the real deal I think he can deliver me and set me free from the so-called calling. God is faithful Lufuno and I have no doubt he will help me and set me free, it’s not a coincidence that this prophet decided to open another branch in Vuwani now when I need help the most. This is God's way of telling me not to do it, I can feel it. This prophet will help me.”

“I hope so. Let me not keep you from your work, bye.”

“Bye, thank you once again for taking my daughter in.”

“Don’t mention it, I know you would have done the same thing for Dakalo and Mulanga.”

"Yes, but I still need to thank you. My daughter never complains about being mistreated."

"Anza is like my own child I will never mistreat her."

" You're a wonderful person sis may the Lord keep blessing you."

#8

It's Saturday today and all the staff is at work, Boitumelo and Nontobeko asked for a staff meeting before the store opens so we are all huddled next to the cash desk with our ears peeled anxious to hear what the meeting is all about, I won't lie I have a lump stuck on my throat and my heart is sitting on my knees because I can't help but think this meeting has to do with me. We can't run away from the fact that your girl is always in the center of all the drama that goes on at work.

"Daniel, I want to address the issue of Bongiwe not putting in the float while everyone else puts on float." Nontobeko

A sigh breezes out of my lips, at least this has nothing to do with me. I tilt my head and look at Bongiwe to gauge her reaction, she's frowning evidently pissed off by what Nontobeko is saying.

"Yes, we would like to know why she's not putting on float like the rest of us. What's the reason behind it?" Boitumelo says echoing her bestie's sentiments

“Yes Mr. D we want to know why, none of us enjoys putting float, but we all do it because someone has to do it so why is she sitting this one out? Anza and Mbali take turns at the cash desk, but Ellen is always at the cash desk because her partner doesn’t put float and I don’t think that’s fair on her.” Linda

“Yes, I echo Linda’s sentiments it’s not fair on Ellen or any of us. We have warnings while she’s relaxing on the floor.”  
Nontobeko

Funny how things have changed, I always thought I would be happy and satisfied when something like this happens to Bongiwe after everything she has put me through but I’m not happy. I feel sorry for her matter of fact because I know how it feels to be in her shoes, to have everyone against you that is. Her case isn’t that deep compared to what I’ve been through because of her, but I still can’t help but sympathize with her.

“Okay, I have heard your grievances and I will consider them. Bongiwe you heard your colleagues please start your cash desk training, every free time you have please come to the cash desk and learn the till. You have ten days to learn.”

“Okay.” Bongiwe

“Good, is there anything else?”

Daniel asks his eyes darting between the two ladies who asked for this meeting

“No, there’s nothing else.” Nontobeko

“Anything else?”

He directs his question to the rest of the staff

“Ok I guess there’s nothing else then..let’s prepare to open then, I think today will be busy so let’s all keep our eyes open. No doing of boxes on the floor today, let’s keep our eyes on the stock.”

“Yes sir.” We all chorus at the same time

“Okay, the team get to work.” Daniel

We all disperse in different directions. Since I’m not working as a cashier today, I head to the fitting room, I prefer going to the fitting room in the morning than in the afternoon. At 9 am on the dot the doors open and customers flock in and start shopping and before I know it’s 12 midday and I’m going on lunch, I find Ellen and Nombuso in the canteen when I walk in and by the look of things they’re also on lunch.

“Ngwaneso please accompany me to checkers I want to buy chips.”

Ellen says before I even grab a seat

“Ok, no problem.”

Nontobeko is at the door relieving the security guard who’s also on lunch. Her lips stretch into a conniving smile when she sees

us approaching the door, she wears a naughty glee on her face and I brace myself because I know she's about to say something mean.

“Ellen you're now friends with roasted?” Nontobeko

She says and breaks into a laugh like what she said is funny.

Roasted is me and I'm roasted, that's the name she gave to me because of the scars on my bosom just a few centimeters above my breast. She saw my scars at the Christmas party because I was wearing a top that shows off my bosom, according to her I obtained the scars from being burned by fire. She says I was roasted by the fire so that's why she calls me 'roasted' but she got the wrong end of the stick.

Four years ago, I developed a rash all over my body, had joint pains, lost weight rapidly, and experienced hair loss. That was a very scary and emotionally taxing period in my life, I was convinced that I have cancer when my hair started falling off and breaking whenever I combed it but after numerous blood tests, I was diagnosed with Systemic Lupus Erythematosus

which is a form of arthritis that mainly affects women during their child-bearing years. It is one of the auto-immune rheumatic diseases, caused by a fault in the body's immune system. The immune system normally produces anti-bodies to fight infections, in people with autoimmune diseases, antibodies are produced that act against certain body tissues and cause inflammation. Lupus affects the skin, hair, joints, kidneys, blood pressure, the brain and nervous system, and the heart and lung. After diagnosis I started taking medication- non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and hydroxychloroquine, Lupus is incurable, so the treatment doesn't cure it, but it only makes living with the condition more bearable. After diagnosis and receiving treatment I regained back my hair but unfortunately, the rash left me with scars that look like the one's caused by fire earning me the name 'roasted' from my wicked colleagues.

Living with the condition is very difficult because I'm constantly in pain, unlike normal people I don't have a favorite season because each season comes with its challenges

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but winter is the most unbearable season for me because the pain in my joint's doubles and my hands and feet go blue. In Summer I must stay covered up because too much ultra-violet

radiation can flare both the skin rash and sometimes lupus in the internal organs. I have also had to accept that I will never gain weight, I have tried everything to gain weight from Herbalife to eating junk and exercising, but nothing ever yields the results I desire because of my condition. The only thing I'm grateful for is that at least I'm not too thin, size 28 isn't too bad, or is it?

I have accepted my condition and take my pills religiously and visit a specialist twice a year to survive my condition, but it hurts that I'm being mocked and given names because of a condition I didn't choose nor have control over.

"Who's that? I don't know anyone by that name."

Ellen says feigning ignorance, she doesn't call me with the name but she knows it.

"Anzani."

“Yes, I’m friends with her do you have any issues with that?”  
Ellen

“No, no issues at all but she’s a little troublemaker so beware that you don’t find yourself caught up in some drama because of her.”

“I think I’m old enough to decide who and who not to befriend so next time kindly keep your opinion to yourself because I sure as hell don’t need it.”

“Okay, uzosho kuthi ngasho akugilile um’venda.”

(Don’t say I didn’t warn you)

“Don’t hold your breath.”

Ellen is quiet but she sure knows how to put annoying people in their place, and she does it so effortlessly without raising her voice and with a smile on her face. She avoids drama and gossip but when someone picks on her the lady claps back and puts them back in their place, and it is for that reason that no one

dares to mess with her not even Nontobeko well she does try but Ellen always puts her back in her place.

“Don’t let her get to you.”

She says on our way to Checkers

“Yeah, I know I should be used to her by now, but she gets to me every time she refers to me by that condescending name ‘roasted’. It hurts because I didn’t choose to have these marks on my bosom, it took me years to build up confidence and be brave enough to wear revealing tops and embrace my scars because I was avoiding hearing comments like hers.”

“Then you need to stand up to her, Nontobeko is a bully, and she won’t stop bullying you guys as long as you keep letting her get away with it. We are at work here, young or old we are all equals and you shouldn’t allow anyone to bully you. You don’t have to feel bad or low because of your scars, don’t even hide them because they are part of who you are and are a symbol of how far you’ve come and demonstrate the strength you possess...I mean you fought against Lupus and conquered. You

work harder than most of the 'healthy' staff, that only goes to show how strong you are- you never seek anyone's sympathy you pull your weight on your work just like the rest of us regardless of the challenges that come with having Lupus"

I'm in tears, she has a way with words I'm feeling emotional. Ellen and the management are the only people who know about my condition and how I obtained the scars on my bosom. The rest of the staff concluded I was burned by fire when they saw them.

"She tried it with me when I started working here but I didn't let her get away with it, I responded and defended myself and everyone couldn't believe I stood up to her because they're all scared of her because she's big and apparently mazulu aya shapana! That mentality doesn't work with me, lenna ke Mosotho a slender and lenna ke tshelana thupa"

(Zulu people are good fighters) (I'm a slender Sotho and I can also fight)

Her statement has me laughing my lungs out impelling me to forget that I was in tears a few seconds ago

“Don’t laugh I’m being honest. After that, she hated me for months because I stood up to her, but I didn’t care because I didn’t come here to be liked I’m here to work and make money not to make friends.”

“I wish I could be like you, you’re calm yet assertive and unwavering.”

She laughs throwing her head back

“You’re still young, you’ll soon realize that life is a jungle, and being overly nice to people who don’t deserve it doesn’t pay.”

“I guess so.”

“What I have noticed is that you’re too emotional and sensitive which is not a bad thing but can be because people will always use that against you to break you down and crush your esteem and confidence. You need to toughen up and learn to stand up

for yourself, I'm not saying be ratchet but people must know not to mess with you."

Maybe one day I'll get there

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I'm dressed in a drop shoulder Tie-dye dress and white chunky heeled thong sandals; the dress covers my chest and the sleeves reach my elbows so I'm all covered up and no one will be looking at my scars. Mpho said I should dress casually, and I did just that. I'm not a makeup person so I only fleeked my eyebrows, applied eyeliner, put on mascara and lipstick. My afro is held in a high bun on top of my head, I look good and I smell even better I'm looking forward to the first date with my boyfriend.

I'm standing in front of the mirror obsessing over my body, I might be skinny, but I have such have a good figure. I'm out here dishing out Nandi Mbatha's body goals. My phone rings disturbing my moment with the mirror, it's a call from Mpho.

“Love.”

“I’m outside Future.”

“Okay, I’m coming.”

I grab my white faux pearl beaded twist satchel bag and scoot outside.

Mpho loves Panarotti’s and since I’ve never eaten here before we decided on eating here today. He’s having pizza while I’m having medium-rare steak with a salad. He doesn’t drink alcohol so we’re both having passion fruit to wash down the food, I’m eating with my right hand while the left hand is locked in his which makes eating a bit difficult but I’m not complaining. His eyes only leave mine when he’s going for another slice of pizza. My skin is covered in goosebumps and there’s a zoo of butterflies fluttering inside my belly, this right here feels like heaven.

“Allow me to take pictures of you, you’re so beautiful.”

He says when the waiter collects the dishes from our table. My cheeks hurt from the blushing I've been doing; the man has been raining compliments on me the entire evening. He takes out his phone and starts snapping pictures of me.

"I think that's enough, come this side so we can take pictures together."

He stands up from his seat and settles next to me on the couch. I take the phone from him and start taking selfies of the two of us. After a few snaps, I go through our pictures looking for the best one to post and show off to my friends.

"I love this one, what do you think?"

I say showing him the picture. In the picture, his arm is wrapped around my tiny waist and instead of looking at the camera he's looking at me with eyes filled with nothing but fondness and I'm facing the camera with pouty lips. The picture is just so nunus man serving all kinds of cuteness.

“It’s beautiful.”

“I’m undoubtedly posting this one.”

“You the type that posts their relationship on social media?” he enquires

“Not really, but I do post the person I’m in a relationship with. It might not be every day but I do post him once in a while especially on important occasions like his birthday and on our anniversary.”

“I love my privacy so I don’t post about my relationship on social media. Don’t be offended when I don’t post you, I’m just not a person who posts I prefer keeping my relationship to myself because I think it's easier that way. I have no problem with you posting me but please hide people from the church from seeing your status, you know how it is at church they’ll cut us as soon as they find out we are dating. So let’s keep our relationship private and surprise them with marriage, they’ll never see it coming.”

#9

I have no problem with Mpho wanting to keep our relationship private, people are not the same and there's no way we can all do things the same way. I know people who don't like publicizing their relationships and that doesn't always mean that they are hiding or ashamed of their partners nor does it mean that they love them any less, it only means that they prefer keeping their private lives private which I believe is what Mpho is doing. I have no reason to think otherwise, he hasn't done anything to make me doubt him, so I have no reason to doubt what he says. He is right about the church cutting us off the moment our relationship becomes public knowledge, there are stiff rules followed in our church, and mjolo is not tolerated so once word of us dating reaches the pastor's ears we will be done for! We might as well forget about being included in any of the activities at church or participating in the Sunday program, we will be treated no less than outcasts. I've seen it happening to others and I sure as hell don't want the same happening to me, the only thing that is tolerated is courtship (a period during which a couple develops a romantic relationship, especially with a view to marriage. During this time the couple gets to know each other in a way that does not taint their relationship which God- they do not fornicate, and the church

and the couple's families become aware of their union) not the kind of dating Mpho and I are doing.

"So, baby have decided which suit you'll take for your big day?"

Mpho's graduation is in two weeks, he's been running around getting preparations done for his big day. I'm off from work today and I'm spending the day at his place hopefully his mother won't show up unexpectedly like she did the other day and cut our quality time short.

"Yes, sthandwa sam navy blue is my color so I'm definitely taking that one."

"Okay, it's also nice."

He's putting all the stops for his graduation day; his suit will be tailor-made by a famous designer from Pretoria and of course, his mother is paying for it.

"So, am I invited to your graduation?"

“Unfortunately, nope. I had already invited the three required guests when you and I started dating so I’m sorry love you’ll go on the next one when I get my honors.”

I won’t lie, I’m disappointed I thought I would be one of his guests on his big day but ke I understand. It’s not like I have any choice anyway.

“Okay, so will you throw a party or something?”

“I’m not sure yet but I think my mother will throw one for me.”

“Okay, please help me choose between these two sneakers. I’m not sure which one to buy for my brother.”

I say handing him my phone. It’s a Black Bathu with gold tints and a white Drip sneaker. He takes the phone from me, and a frown covers his face.

“Why do you look like that? Are they not nice?”

“No, it’s not that.”

“Then what’s wrong?”

“Why would you buy an 11-year-old boy something so expensive, you could buy him more pairs of shoes with that money rather than spending it on a single pair of shoes.”

Lutendo, my brother and I are 11 years apart. He’s 11 turning 12 this year and he’s the only sibling I have.

“I get what you’re saying but he’s a boy and you know how boys are they like brands, his friends wear brands, and I don’t want my brother to feel low, so I try to buy him brands occasionally especially when it comes to shoes. He’s a boy, he likes soccer and plays rough so those no-name shoes don’t last on him, he needs quality.”

“There are strong no-name brands Future, I only started wearing brands when I started hustling and could afford to buy them for myself. I fear that your brother will pressure you into buying him name brands and you won’t be able to complain or refuse because you’re the one who introduced him to them. You don’t have money Anza; you earn little there’s no need to get the boy used to brands you can’t afford to keep buying for him- you are too old to allow peer pressure to get to you.”

“Well, Lutendo is my brother, and he always appreciates everything I do for him. He’s not picky, he’s always happy with everything I buy for him. He will never put me under pressure, I only want my brother to be like other kids is that so wrong though?”

“I was only advising you as your boyfriend and partner, it’s up to you to take my advice or not. But a wise person always takes advice, I think we should drop this because I can see it’s getting you upset and that wasn’t my intention. I only wanted to advise you as your boyfriend, Lutendo might not complain now but he’ll grow up and start being picky and demanding I was trying to help you prevent that.”

“I hear you, but I don’t think that will happen, and if it does then I’ll deal with it. My father passed on when Lutendo was still very young, so he has never enjoyed a comfortable life, life was comfortable for us when my father was still alive, he gave my mother and me everything we wanted....at least I got to enjoy it. Lutendo didn’t have a chance to, he’s only been exposed to the life we live now and it’s up to me to provide that life for him or at least try to.”

“Ai okay, I understand. I was only trying to help; I didn’t mean any harm.”

“Thank you, I appreciate your ..”

A knock on the door cuts me short.

“Lelo!” Mpho bellows

“Mpho mina ngilambile.” She says outside the door.

(Mpho I’m hungry)

Nompumelelo is Mpho's younger sister, she's 6 years old and his mother's lastborn. Mpho has two siblings from his mother's side

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both girls the other one is my age. Nancy and Mpho have the same father while Lelo has her father, Mpho's parents divorced years ago and Lelo is the child his mother had after the divorce. Out of wedlock, I might add! so much for being deputy Jesus! Anyway, asikho lapho (We are not there)

It's school holidays so Mpho babysits Lelo when their mother is at work. I don't know where Nancy is or why she's not the one babysitting their baby sister.

"Okay, I'm coming baby ne."

"Okay."

Lelo says then we hear her footsteps shuffling away from the door

“Future let me go make Lelo food I’m coming.”

“Okay, go on.”

I say with a big smile on my face. I love how he takes care of his sister;and judging from their relationship I know he’ll make a good father to our future kids one day.

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I’ve been sending out job applications and hopefully I get something soon but for now, I’ll have to keep working at Mr. Price, there’s nothing more satisfying than making your own money. It doesn’t matter how little the money may be but the fact that it’s yours is satisfying, yall should have the smile on my face when I woke up to the money in the notification from the bank. I didn’t take my lunchbox in the fridge when I left for work because I couldn’t bring myself to carry last night’s leftovers for lunch to work on payday, I’m craving for something delicious today haha you’d swear I earn millions with the way I’m walking on clouds this morning. I told my aunt not to cook tonight because I’m bringing supper, it feels great. To provide that is, it’s a different kind of feeling that makes one

feel terrific. I'm sure this is how blessers feel after blessing their blesses.

"Morning!" I say cheerfully greeting the security at the door.

She chuckles

"Someone is in a good mood today."

She says with a smile dancing on her lips

"I got paid that's why." She laughs

"Okay I see, I know the feeling."

"At least you understand Thobile, I feel good, and I'll enjoy this feeling while it lasts because it doesn't last very long...imali yalana doesn't last, iphela fast ngathi bayayithandazela."

(The salary doesn't last; it dries up quickly like it was prayed for.)

She cackles putting a hand on her mouth to muffle her laughter.

“Anzani mara! You made my day, who's teaching you Zulu ye?”

“My boyfriend. You know I'm telling the truth, next week ngizabe ngikgawula ngathi I didn't get paid and I'll be counting my coins trying to cover transport fees for the month.”

(I'll be broke)

She starts laughing all over again

“What do you do with the money because you don't drink?”

“Ngiyayibhubhudla angidlali nayo ngithenga oncamce angeke phela I work too hard for this money so ngiyayidla!”

(I spend it on nice this) (I chow it)

I have a stop order, I save R500 from my salary every month.

“Uyahlanya wena yazi I can’t believe I thought you are quiet.”

(You’re crazy)

“That’s because I’m quiet vele...Let me go put my bag in the canteen Thobile, I’ll see you around.”

“Sharp Hlanyozi”

I laugh and walk away heading to the canteen. I hear loud voices as I approach the canteen, I wonder who’s inside.

“Good morning.”

“Good morning, Anza”

They reply in haste and carry on with their conversation. It's Mbali, Boitumelo, Nombuso, and Nontobeko.

"I don't know what she's going to do shem." Nombuso

"I think maybe she gave the customers more change, let's face it the girl is kind of slow."

Boitumelo fires and they all laugh.

"You're savage!" Nombuso

"On a serious note. I'm scared for her; I'm still shaking you'd swear I'm the one who's in trouble. I feel sorry for her shem."

Mbali

"R800 is too much, anything over R700 is dismissal at first offense. She'll be dismissed, there's no other way around it. She should prepare herself to be unemployed, let's hope she has savings to carry her for a couple of months while she looks for another job." Nontobeko

“I doubt it, yisdididi sentombazana lesa esizi cabangela  
amadoda ne sex I doubt she was saving.” Boitumelo

(She’s a foolish girl who only thinks about men and sex)

They all laugh

“You know her all too well, that one likes men. This month  
she’s telling you about this one, next month it’s a different one.  
U healer nini ngampela?” Nontobeko

(When does she heal)

“Mina ngiyay’ bona yoku healer, isibindi sokukhumula I panty  
ngaloya Mzimba wakhe usthathaphi?” Boitumelo

(Never mind healing, where does she get the guts to undress  
with that body of hers?)

She says and they all laugh out loud.

“Woah, Boity awume tu!” Nombuso says trying to stop herself from laughing

(Wait)

“She’s brave I’ll give her that. Mara amadoda yisono ngawo shem, babona amanyala!” Nontobeko

(I feel sorry for men, they see despicable things)

It seems someone had a variance of R800 yesterday. My heart skips a beat, I feel sorry for whoever that person is.

“Who are you guys talking about?” I ask

They say curiosity killed the cat, well I’m the cat in this case. I tried to hold myself believe me, but I failed dismally. Like the Zulus say ‘indlebe ayina sivalo’.

The laughter dies down and they all pause and tilt their heads to look at me.

“You couldn’t help yourself, could you Anza? Now look!” my subconscious reprimands

This thing of loving news will land me in serious trouble I swear, why couldn’t I just keep quiet and mind my own business? Why?

“It’s Bongiwe, she put on float yesterday and had a shortage of R800.” Boitumelo

A sigh breezes out of my lips, I expected them to tell me off not this.. wait what? Bongiwe is the person they’re speaking about? Jizoz! Talk about frenemies!

“Yerr!” I exclaim putting my hands on top of my head.

“Yeah, it’s bad shame.” Mbali

I knew Bongiwe had completed her till training I just didn’t think she would start working the till so soon.

“Ibhadi nje leli, first day at the till then boom variance angeke ishwa leli” Nontobeko

(This is black luck.) (It's a curse)

“I agree, it's the women she keeps hurting by sleeping with their husbands knowing very well that they are married. Izinyembezi zabanye abantu aziweli phantsi!” Boitumelo

She did what? Jesu Mlungu!

#10

The dream or should I say the nightmare about a presence weighing heavily on me, suffocating me, and making it difficult for me to breathe has been recurring, I get the same dream at least three times a week now. I pray every night before I sleep but that doesn't seem to help, I tried fasting, but that also didn't help in this case. I won't lie I'm scared because everyone I told about the dream says it's a bad omen to have that kind of dream. I have been through enough already I don't think I can take any more blows coming my way. I'm in the kitchen cooking when I hear my phone ringing from the bedroom, I dash to the bedroom to pick it up and smile when I take a glance at the screen, it's my mom.

"Mma," I say in a cheery tone

"Ngwananga, ovuwa hani?"

(My child, how are you?)

"Ndo vuwa zwavhudi ngamanda ene?"

(Very good and how are you?)

“Nnane ndo vuwa zwavhudi ngwananga, your aunt told me about the dreams you have been having and I’m worried about you...when do you think you can come home?”

(I’m good too my child)

“I don’t know mma, I don’t qualify for leave yet. I haven’t worked for the company for a year, and you know we don’t close so I’m not exactly sure mma.”

“Eish, how many months till you qualify?”

“I’m turning a year in the company in August, so I still have six months to go.”

“We can’t risk waiting for that long; can’t you ask for a few days off? Your dreams are not good and I’m sure Prophet Abara can help you with them. He’s powerful my child, he has helped many people since he opened his church near the taxi rank including me. It feels like a weight has been lifted off my

shoulders ever since I started attending services at his church, I no longer dream about water, beads, and all the other crazy dreams I used to get. I think it's safe to say that he has delivered me from the ancestral calling."

I don't know much about ancestral callings, but I've never heard anything like this before, can one ever be rid of their gift? I heard that one can plead with their ancestors to take on the calling at a later stage or until after they have completed their studies but to be rid of it forever, now that's a first!

"Okay mma I hear you."

South Africa probably has the highest number of false prophets in the world, I don't know if south Africans are naïve or desperate, but we are easily taken by 'miracles' and most of us are unable to discern between a false and a true prophet of God. The prophet calling out someone's cellphone number or ID number is all it takes for us to believe that a prophet is a man of God and flock to his church and believe everything he feeds us, we read the bible, but we do not know the characteristics of a true prophet. I wouldn't be surprised if this prophet my mother is talking about turns out to be another phony.

“Okay my child, talk to your manager and find out what your options are since you don’t qualify for leave, and please get back to me.”

“Okay, I will do that mma. Where is my brother, I miss him so much I am sure he’s grown tall now?” She chuckles

“That one is growing too fast for my liking, he’s almost the same height as you are now, and his height isn’t the only thing that grows with each day that passes he’s also outgrown most of the clothes I bought him last winter and size 3 didn’t fit when I bought him school shoes in January, I had to take 4”

“What? he’s too young to be wearing the same size as me.”

“I know right, and something tells me he’s still going to grow taller than this.” She says

“I will call you when he comes back from school so you two can talk. He misses you too, he’s always asking me when are you coming to visit us.”

“I think about him every day, maybe he should come to visit me during school holidays I’m sure aunt won’t mind.”

“I think that’s a good idea, he’ll be so happy when I tell him about it.”

“Yeah, plus I wasn’t sure which sneakers to buy for him, so he’ll choose the one he wants himself.”

“Oh Anza, thank you so much. I appreciate everything you do for your little brother.”

“Don’t mention it mma he’s my brother and there’s nothing I wouldn’t do for him.”

“Are you still saving for your driver’s license?”

“Yes, mma.”

“Okay my child, that’s good. Bye.”

“Bye mma.”

The front door swings open and my face instantly lights up when I see Kamo, my cousin walking in. My youngest aunt married a Sotho man hence the name Kamo. I fling to her arms and snuggle in her embrace, oh how I have missed her.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were coming?”

I say when we break off the hug and retreat to the kitchen to check on my pots.

“I wanted to surprise you.”

She says making herself comfortable on the couch, no walls are dividing the kitchen and living room so I can see her from the kitchen.

“And it worked, you surprised me. I didn’t expect you.”

“I woke up missing you and thought why not come and see you, though I didn’t think I would find you. I thought you’d be at work or something took my chances but I thought I’d find aunt alone.”

“Ncoah I missed you too cuz. Well, you’re in luck because I’m off today.”

“How’s work anyway?”

“Hectic I tell you; those women are gossips and bullies but I’m adjusting... it’s not like I have any other choice.”

“Yeah, every workplace comes with its own challenges, you’ll never find a perfect work environment.”

“I hear you, but I think that place is the worst.”

“What exactly happened?”

I switch off the stove, take out two plates from the cupboard and place them on top of the kitchen counter. I felt like having Mopane worms, so I cooked them with pap and wild spinach, tasty I tell you.

“I’ll fill you in while we’re eating, do you still eat like a man?”  
She chuckles at my remark

“Yeah, you know me I love my food.” I plate for us and serve Kamo her food with a glass of coke and head to the kitchen to fetch my plate.

“So, tell me.”

I narrate everything that happened, I've lost count of the number of times she has clicked her tongue since I began talking.

"I'm so sorry you had to go through all of that, I know you're soft-spoken and all but you really need to stand up for yourself and stop entertaining those gossips... what will you do if they take the news to Bongiwe and say it was you? You should've left the moment you heard them gossiping."

"Eish, you're right. I didn't think of that."

"I guess you didn't think at all, I'm disappointed by your naivety, especially after everything you've been through in that place...you should've learned your lesson by now."

"I let my curiosity get the better off me."

"I hope it'll be worth the drama and backlash you'll receive once this is pinned on you."

If she intends to make me feel bad then she has succeeded, I feel terrible right now.

“Anyway  
any boyfriend yet?”

“Yes, there is someone...wait let me show you a picture.”

I suck the sauce off my fingers and open his folder on my gallery

“That’s him,” I say handing her my phone

“Wow he looks handsome, where did you guys meet?”

She’s swiping the screen going through his pictures. He knows he has ugly teeth, so he never smiles when taking pictures. He looks charming with a straight look on his face, like I said before he looks handsome with his mouth closed.

“Thanks, cuz, we met in church.”

“Let’s hope he doesn’t play any instrument in the church because those ones are the worst players.”

“No, he doesn’t. He’s a great guy, I know our relationship is still new, but I have a good feeling about him. I think he’s the one.”  
She chuckles

“What’s funny?”

“You, you don’t know boys wena, ngiyabona abakaku hurti shem I feel sorry for you.”

(I see you haven’t been hurt)

I ignore her retort; I am so over people who tell me my boyfriend will hurt me just because they haven’t been lucky in love. Umjolo awusinyisi sonke phela! Some of us are fortunate to find a good men who loves and cherishes us.

We spend the day chatting and filling one another on what we have missed out on each other's lives and before we know it it's 5 pm and Kamo has to go back to her house.

"Where's aunt?"

"I don't know she didn't tell me where she was going when she left in the morning."

"I guess I'll see her next time then, pass my greetings to her. Bye Mulanga."

"Bye Kamo."

"I'll be back now, I'm walking Kamo to the cab."

I inform Mulanga before following Kamo outside the house

"I've been with you the whole day and your phone didn't even ring once, doesn't your boyfriend miss you?"

There she goes again! This is why I don't discuss my relationship with anyone because people who are unlucky in love don't like it when other people are happy in their relationships and will do anything for you to be as unhappy as they are.

"I don't like calls; I prefer chatting on WhatsApp over phone calls."

"Wow that can never be me shame, my man must call me even if it's to say hi and ask how my day is going. You haven't logged on to WhatsApp the whole day, he should have called you by now and found out why. What if you ran out of data?"

"Yoh Kamo, can you stop imposing your expectations on my relationship? Mpho doesn't like calling and I'm fine with that so what's your problem huh?"

She lifts her hands up as a sign of surrender

"I'm sorry cuz I didn't mean to offend you, I was just saying."

“I understand but my relationship is fine as is.”

“Okay, if you say so.”

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I'm in the lounge with Mpho's sisters watching cartoons and the tension in the room can be sliced with a knife, it's a Friday evening and they eat takeaways every Friday in this house, so Mpho drove to the mall to buy dinner and left me with his sisters. His mother went to a work trip that's why I'm here at this time, he asked me to sleepover, and I didn't have a problem with it. I'm not really a fan of cartoons so I'm busy on my phone when I notice a framed picture next to the TV stand-it's a picture of Mpho, his mother, and his two little sisters and they look so cute. I don't know how I missed it but Nompumelelo is the female version of Mpho, the dark complexion, the two incisors that look like rabbit teeth, the black gums, and of course their big eyes. They look like twins, completely different from Nancy and their mother who are both light-skinned and gorgeous, Mpho is handsome but I hope

our daughter will take after his mom or Nancy because their beauty is out of this world.

I feel eyes boring holes into my skin, I look up and my gaze meets Nancy who's looking at me with a deadpan expression on her face, I hold her stare until she drops her gaze to the floor. I wonder what her story is, just then the door opens and Mpho walks in carrying pizza boxes while I'm still trying to figure out why his little sister was looking at me like that. Lelo jumps from the couch and scoots to meet him halfway

"Hey, baby."

He puts the boxes down and whisks her off her feet carrying her in his arms.

"I'm back you can help yourselves to Pizza, I bought a triple-decker and crammed decker in case someone doesn't get full."

He announces darting his eyes between me and his sister. Nancy stands up from her seat and I follow suit. I wait for his

sisters to take their pieces before putting mine on a saucer and heading to his bedroom.

“Hey, are you okay?” He says when he finally joins me in the bedroom

“Yes, I’m okay.”

“No, you are not, talk to me babe what’s wrong?”

I blow out a heavy sigh and take a deep breath looking into his eyes

“I don’t know but I think Nancy doesn’t like me.”

“That’s absurd, Nancy likes everyone why would you think of something like that?”

“Because she was giving me weird looks just before you came back.”

“You probably imagined it, there’s nothing like that. Nancy is a nice person, and she would never treat anyone like that, especially my future wife, she knows how much I love you so she knows not to treat you bad.” He’s right. Maybe I’m reading too much into this

“Come here.”

He cups my face with his palms and looks deep into my eyes as if staring into my soul

“I love you.”

I never knew I was capable of experiencing all these amazing feelings from just hearing these three simple words

“I love you too.”

He leans in and I shut my eyes at the tinge of our lips, he tenderly sucks on my bottom lip while I place my hands on his chest kissing him back. When we break the kiss, my heart is beating fast, my hands are sweating, and my panties are drenched in my juices. My clit is throbbing and swollen anticipating his tongue on my lady parts, there's nothing I love more than being muffed. It's safe to say I've had more oral sex in my life than penetrative sex.

"What do you want?" He asks staring into my eyes. I swallow and bite my lower lip looking down feeling shy

"Come on don't be shy, tell me what you want."

I can't bring myself to say it so I look down and twiddle my thumbs causing him to chuckle.

"You love being muffed, don't you? Well, you're in luck because I happen to give the best muff."

He pushes my dress to my tummy, pulls down my soaking panties, and spreads my legs apart.

“Wow, you’re beautiful.”

He says before delving between my legs and slurping his tongue on my wetness. It feels nice but not nice enough to get my heart racing, have my stomach tied in knots, and give me that feeling that makes me want to cry out in pleasure and grind my part on his face while fighting the urge to release like it always happened when my ex muffed me. He’s the reason why I’m so obsessed with being muffed because I’m chasing that amazing unexplainable feeling that I got every time my ex-Thabo went down on me, this is nice but nice won’t make me reach my climax.

“How was it?” He asks settling between my legs

“Amazing.”

I say lying through my teeth wearing the biggest fake smile on my face

“I told you I’m the best.”

He says and kisses me making me taste myself. I push him off when he attempts to push his hard dick inside my cookie

“What?” he asks with half hooded eyes

“Condom.”

“I don’t use a condom. I don’t even keep any in my room.”

“What? I don’t want to fall pregnant or contract diseases so I think you should buy them.”

“I don’t use condoms and I won’t start now, we can go test for HIV and STIs for your satisfaction and regarding pregnancy, I’ll pull out but there’s no way I’m using condoms with you. It’s either we do it raw or we have no sex at all, it’s all up to you.”

#11

“What do you mean no sex if there’s no condom?”

“I personally don’t prefer condoms because they deny one the full sexual experience, it’s like eating candy inside its wrapper.”

Wow, that’s the dumbest excuse I’ve ever heard not to use a condom.

“You can’t be serious!”

He blows out a heavy sigh, sits on his butt, and takes my hands into his.

“Look, Anza, I would never force you to do anything you’re not ready for or comfortable with. I just don’t like condoms but that doesn’t mean I’ll force you to sleep with me unprotected if that’s not what you want.”

“I don’t get it, what’s wrong with condoms? And please don’t give me the candy and wrapper excuse.”

“I’ve never used them with any of my ex’s so I’m used to raw sex so moving from that to using protection will be very difficult for me.”

“What about diseases, are you not scared of those? You can’t just dip your dick in any vagina without knowing people’s statuses or who they have been with.”

“Like I said we can go and get tested together, I’m clean.”

“You don’t know my status Mpho, but you were ready to sleep with me without protection.”

“I know you’re negative, it’s obvious.”

Wow! Now I understand why South Africa has the highest HIV infections in the world, it’s because of people like Mpho who think they can detect HIV from just looking at someone with

their eyes. It's utter foolishness to expect someone positive to have a certain look, at this day and age? I'm disappointed in him, I thought he was responsible.

"Are your eyes perhaps HIV testers? You don't play with your health like that yoh."

"I understand where you're coming from, but I promise I've never done anything like this before, I always go for HIV testing with my partner before we can engage in coitus but with you it's different. You are kind and honest so I know you would never let me go all the way if you were positive."

"Ok but I still won't sleep with you without protection, negative or not. I want us to use condoms."

"I love you Anza and your happiness is my priority so it's okay my love, you and I will use condoms."

"Thank you."

We didn't have sex because he didn't have any condoms in his room, so he held me in his arms and we cuddled the entire night, I woke up still caged in his arms this morning. The way he was holding onto me locking me in with his arms and legs you'd think I promised to run away during the night; he's sleeping on his side with his hand under his chin watching me get ready for work. It might be the weekend for everyone else, but it's still a workday for me.

"What?" I ask looking at the enormous smile on his face

"You're beautiful you know that? I love everything about you including those scars on your chest, you make anything look beautiful even those scars are beautiful because they are on your body."

How can I not be crazy about him? He makes loving him easy.

"Thank you, baby."

“No thank you for spending the night with me, it’s been ages since I slept so peacefully and all because I had an angel in my arms.”

“You’re quite a smooth talker hey, I’m glad you slept well because I also slept like a baby. I didn’t get that weird dream last night.”

“About that sthandwa sam there’s a PDF I’ll send you on WhatsApp by John Eckhardt, it has scriptures and prayers that will help you rout the demons attacking your life.”

“Thank you, baby, I would really appreciate that a lot.”

“No problem it’s a pleasure my love, the love of reading is one of the things that you and I have in common.”

“Yes, even though I only read novels.”

“There’s nothing wrong with reading novels but you also need to feed the spirit, I’ll send you Gloria and Kenneth Copeland’s books they are really good. They will help you grow spiritually.”

This is why I love him, his love for God is the main reason why I’m so in love with him. I don’t know what I did to be blessed with a guy like him, a kindhearted God-fearing man who prioritizes my relationship with God that is.

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NARRATED

Saturday equals a busy day in retail especially and since it’s one following the 15th day of the month, some people got paid and have money to spend so it promises to be a busy day for Anzani and her colleagues. Daniel scheduled them an hour before the store opens so they push the boxes and fill the shelves with stock, what good is it to have a store full of customers while the stock sitting in the stock room? All the associates are huddled next to the fitting room each with his/her boxes hanging stock

and putting it on the floor so that customers can have a variety to choose from as they do their shopping.

“What should I do with this one?”

Anza asks holding a pair of shorts for the toddler boys. Her question is directed to Nombuso, the department owner.

“Flatpack and put them next to the denim ones.” Nombuso

“Let me see.” Mbali

Anza swivels and holds up the shorts showing them to Mbali

“They are so cute please give me size 3-4 my boy will look good in those.” Mbali

“Let me see?” Nontobeko says

Anza huffs and shows her the shorts.

“Yeah, you’re right Mbali they are so cute. Give me size 1-2.”

Nontobeko

“I also want one give me 4-5.” Boitumelo

The ladies each take a pair of shorts and put them aside to add them to their keep asides. A keep aside is an item/items of clothing that an employee puts aside from the stock to buy month-end, and this is why customers sometimes struggle to find sizes of the clothes they want because they would be taken by associates and not make it to the store shelves. The staff is only allowed to keep aside less than ten clothing items and for the duration of seven days, but these ones keep a box full of clothing for months waiting for it to be marked down, of course

Daniel doesn’t know about this.

“What should I do with this?” Nontobeko

She's showing Anza a black knee-length formal dress with a thin gold belt.

"Don't hang it, those dresses are not selling. I have many of those already on the floor and they are not selling at all."

Anzani

"So, what must I do? We can't keep returning boxes to the stockroom, they need to be done." Nontobeko

"I understand but those dresses are not selling, they'll only take up space because no one is buying them." Anza

"You're lazy to think that's why you're always returning boxes to the stockroom claiming that they are not selling, I'm swinging them uzabona iplani ukuthi uwabekaphi!"

(You'll make a plan on where to put these dresses.)

"Nontobeko I'm telling you not to do it, it's my department and I'm telling you that I don't need those dresses on the floor."

Nontobeko

Why is Mbali quiet? She knows these dresses are not selling so why is she not defending her partner?

She takes hangers and stubbornly starts hanging them, Anza pauses what she's doing and observes her waiting to see where Nontobeko will put the dresses. To say she's angry would be an understatement, she's boiling in anger tired of being undermined by her colleagues because she's 'young'.

“Uyavilapha nje wena awufuni kusebenza into oyaziyo yizindaba.”

(You're lazy, you don't want to work all you know is gossip)

Nontobeko says trying to impress her minions by talking down on Anza and just like the foolish clowns they all are, they break into giggles you'd swear she just tickled them.

“Wazini chommie wazi izindaba kphela?”

(What does she know friend, she only knows gossip?)

Says Nombuso pouring petrol into the fire, she gets off drama this one. She's always instigating people against each other, especially Nontobeko, she knows just how to stroke her ego and get her talking.

“Yes, into ayaziyo yizindaba kuphela ayikho enye wu mmaditaba.”

(She only knows gossip nothing else)

Nontobeko says tickling her colleagues with her statement and they start laughing all over again.

“From today we will no longer refer to her as roasted; her new name is Mmaditaba. I think it suits her better.” Nontobeko

Anzani gapes as her colleagues break into a fit of uncontrollable laughter. Bongwe is stomping her feet and waving her hands in the hair high fiving with Linda, Nombuso is laughing breathlessly while tears roll down her cheeks and the rest are cackling like little kids. You know something is funny when someone is laughing with their whole body, tears prickle Anza's eyes this is what she has turned into a joke! Feeling proud of

herself for playing the comedian, Nontobeko takes the dresses and puts them in Anza's department.

Anza paces to her department to see where Nontobeko put them only to find them dumped in between blazers and denim jackets, anger burns Anza's throat like an inferno, and all the fear she had for Nontobeko flies out the window as she paces behind her calling out her name.

"Nontobeko!"

She bellows grabbing the attention of everyone in the store, including Mamohau who's busy with paper work at the cash desk

"Ubiza bani kanjalo wena ngane?"

(Who are you calling like that you chile.)

She replies turning around to face Anza, she looks at her with a frown and a flared nose, a look that was meant to scare her off,

but it does nothing to the fed-up Venda girl who approaches Nontobeko wearing a menacing look on her face.

“Ndi ngani ni tshi dzulela u dzhenelela kha mafhungo anga?  
(Why do you like sticking your nose in my business)

Nontobeko doesn't understand what she just said but she knows whatever she said isn't good.

“What did you say?”

“No mpfa!”

(You heard me)

“What?”

Asks Nontobeko not believing her ears. Mouths are hanging to the floor in shock, the staff can't believe what they just heard. No, it can't be Anza didn't just talk to Nontobeko like that!

“Yewena Anza, who do you think you’re talking to like that?”

“You, do you see anyone else?”

They are standing a few centimeters apart looking at each other with fury written all over their faces, their chests wheezing. Nontobeko is tall so she’s towering over Anza but at this point in time Anza doesn’t care about how tall or big she is, she’s fed up!

“He nayi ingani ingijwayela ums\*nu yewena Anzani ngizokubhibhiza!”

She says shaking her head in disbelief

“You and I don’t know each other outside work so please let’s not get used to one another, I’m not afraid of you Nontobeko bring it on. Do your worst.” Anzani

Their colleagues gasp in shock unable to believe that tiny Anzani is standing up to Nontobeko. Feeling mortified like she's been stripped naked for the whole world to see, Nontobeko attempts to slap Anza to salvage what's left of her 'reputation', but Daniel gets between them and holds her arm mid-air.

"Ngiyeke Daniel ngishaye le ngane!"

(Let me beat up this child)

She's acting crazy trying to free herself from Daniel's hold.

"Stop it! Keep this nonsense up and I'll be forced to fire you!"

Daniel warns sternly

"Of course, you'll take her side, yini do you want her is that why you are always defending her? You can't expect me to keep quiet and not react after being disrespected by this kid."

"I don't care about all of that, touch her and I'll get you fired. We all heard and saw you provoking her." Daniel warns

Nontobeko clicks her tongue and glares at Anza

“Wena Anza don’t think you’ll get away with this, tomorrow I’m off from work but I’ll come to work for you. it’s a pity I can’t beat you up in my uniform so tomorrow I’ll come wearing casual and wait for you at the rank and then my dear no one will be able to save you from my wrath, not even your precious Daniel.”

“I’ll be waiting for you.” Anzani

Anza is shaking in her boots, but she won’t allow Nontobeko to bully her any longer, she doesn’t know how to fight but she’s prepared to fight Nontobeko tomorrow. Enough is enough, she’s tired of being bullied.



#12

NARRATED

A frown mirrors Mulanga's features when she walks into the bedroom and finds her cousin kicking and punching in the air seemingly imitating moves from a youtube video she's watching from her phone.

“ And then?”

Mulanga asks narrowing her eyes on the screen.

“Anza what's going on, why are you watching Mike Tyson's videos.”

“I have a big fight with Nontobeko tomorrow so I need to be prepared and who better than Mike Tyson to learn from.”

Anza replies throwing punches in the air imitating Mike in the video

“I don’t get it, what big fight?”

“I stood up to Nontobeko today and she promised to wait for me at the rank tomorrow, she said she’s going to beat me up.”

Her speech is incoherent because she's talking while jumping up and down imitating the moves on the video so her breathing is ragged due to the exercise.

“What?”

“Yes, I honestly don’t know what I was thinking cuz. You should see her hands, she’s going to squash me.”

Anza says putting her hands on her face, wishing she could turn back the hands of time and ignore Nontobeko like she always does.

Mulanga breaks into a fit of laughter seeing the expression on Anza's face

“What?”

Anza asks wiping the sweat rolling down her face, her mini session left her sweating.

“So you think you can learn to fight in one day?”

“The least I can do is learn one move to defend myself with tomorrow, I can't be another slik talk. I know people will record our fight so I don't want to embarrass myself I hope someone out there will acknowledge that at least I tried to fight when others laugh at me for being beaten up.”

Her statement sends Mulanga into another fit of laughter

“So you’ve already concluded and made peace with the fact that she’s going to beat you up?”

“That’s not even a question cuz, that Zulu girl will break my bones. I’ve never seen her so angry as she was today, she’s going to snap my neck with those big hands of hers..what was I thinking? Maybe I should miss work tomorrow.”

Mulanga chuckles

“Running away is not an option, you need to face this head-on to gain her respect and that of your other colleagues. I’m proud of you, you finally stood up for yourself.”

“Eish, cuz I wish I could say I’m happy but I’m not I regret it honestly, now I’m going to be a laughing stock of the entire township. Everyone will refer to me as that girl who was beaten up at the rank.”

“I'm sure Nontobeko doesn't know how to fight so please stop stressing, if she comes tomorrow sink your teeth on her boobs and don't let go until she's bleeding.”

“What?”

“You won't learn how to fight in a day so the best option you have is to use your teeth, let me see,” she says taking Anza's hands and looking at her fingernails “Great, you have long nails, scratch her face cuz teach her not to mess with kids.”

“That's a good idea cuz thank you.”

She excitedly approaches the mirror, parts her lips, and eyes her teeth in the mirror.

“My canines are a bit sharp so biting her shouldn't be too hard.” She puts on her best mean face and glares at the mirror “Nontobeko prepare yourself for Anza the vampire.” She says and jumps up and down throwing punches on the air

" That's the spirit wuuhuuuu!" Mulanga says cheering her on

She swivels to face Mulanga

"I'm going to bite those big boobs of hers."

"Please do, that bully needs to be taught a lesson. Bite those boobs cuz." Mulanga says

"And play cat woman and scratch her face so bad that she'll need plastic surgery afterwards"

Anza says and meows like a cat causing her cousin to laugh.  
Anza takes a comb and puts it on top of Mulanga's lap

"What?"

"Please renew my lines, my hair must look neat in case the weave falls off during the fight."

“Are you serious?”

“Like a heart attack, please plait my hair. I need to look neat, people will take videos I have a boyfriend I can’t embarrass him and look like a homeless person when my weave falls off”

Mulanga has no choice but to do as her cousin says

“Ok sit down.”

30 minutes later Anza is standing in front of the mirror admiring her three neatly plaited lines.

“Thanks, cuz. Now I'm ready for tomorrow.”

“Don’t mention it.”

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ANZANI

I'm been up for hours when my alarm clock rings, I take my phone under the pillow and switch it off. A sigh breezes out of my mouth when I think about what's waiting for me today at work, I won't lie I'm scared of Nontobeko and I can't fathom the thought of fighting her physically there's no way I'll win against her. A part of me is satisfied that I finally dared to stand up for myself and put that bully in her place but I would be lying if I said I don't regret doing it, if it wasn't for my big mouth I wouldn't be shaking in my boots now contemplating missing work because I'm scared of getting a beat down.

"Won't you get out of bed?" Mulanga

Her voice startles me because I didn't realize that she's awake

"You scared me."

I say with my hand on my chest to steady my breathing

“I'm sorry, what's on your mind?”

“Today's fight what else.”

“Come on cuz you can't still be stressing about that, we spoke about this..you bite her and scratch her with your nails, and if that doesn't work pick a stone or something to defend yourself with. Just don't allow her to beat you up.”

“Yeah, you're right to let me prepare myself lest I run late to work.”

I roll out of bed, head to the bathroom, and fill the tub with water, I take my phone and go to youtube and watch boxing videos while the tap is running. I hope I'll remember at least one defense move from this, I can't let that girl beat me up. Once the tub is filled with water I pour foam bath inside the water, play music on my phone, and put it on the toilet seat before getting inside the tub.

I try not to think about the fight but it's the only thing on my mind, I'm so nervous I can't help it. 20 minutes later I'm done, wrapped in a towel and draining out water from the tub.

“Good morning aunt Lufuno”

I greet her when I pass her in the lounge listening to Gospel music

“Good morning Anza

Advertisement

did you get that dream again last night?”

“No, I didn't.”

I read one of the books Mpho sent me yesterday and prayed using the Bible verses quoted in the first chapter, I slept peacefully so I think it helped.

“That’s good, I’m really worried about you.”

“Don’t be, nothing will defeat me because God gave me the power to trample over snakes and scorpions and over all the powers of the enemy which means that I have the power to overcome any situation that I face In my life.”

“Amen to that, greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.”

“So you see that there’s nothing to worry about?”

A smile tugs on the corners of her lips

“Keep praying my child.”

“I will, I should go and get dressed.”

“Yes, you do that.”

I head to my room to lotion and then get dressed. I'm wearing jeggings because they stretch so it'll be easier for me to run should there be a need, I have black Reebok running shoes on my feet out of all my shoes I picked these ones because they are super comfortable especially when I'm running. They feel so good and light that I sometimes forget that I'm wearing takkies when I'm running in them, I'm not wearing any earrings today the last thing I want is to come back with a bleeding ear because Nontobeko pulled my earrings during the fight. I won't take my lunchbox nor carry my handbag because I don't want anything weighing me down when it's time to run for the hills.

I thought about it while in the tub and running seems like the best option, I'm no straat mate I can't be seen fighting in the streets like ever! There's a Zulu proverb that says 'Khabo gwala akakukhalwa' which loosely translates to 'Cowards don't get hurt'

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As usual, Sundays are slow and there's not much to do, if it was any other day I would be relaxing enjoying Wi-Fi, but I can't afford to be engrossed on my phone and have Nontobeko catch

me off guard. My heart jumps to my throat every time a customer with the same body structure as hers walks through the door thinking it's her, it's 11 am now I don't think she's coming but I won't relax until knock-off time and I'm home safe.

Who knows maybe she is waiting for me at the rank like she said she would so I can't celebrate yet, I can't count my chickens before they hatch

"Lunch."

Linda says looking at me.

"Okay, who's going to stand here?"

I'm at the fitting room and someone needs to come to relieve me before I can go to lunch

"Karabo, she's coming."

Just then Karabo emerges from the corner, we count the number of discs and check each fitting room together. I head to the canteen for my thirty minutes lunch once she's satisfied with everything. I'm nervous so my stomach is tied in knots, food is the last thing on my mind so I'm going to spend my 30 minutes lunchtime chatting with my boyfriend. Lunch is 30 minutes on Sundays

"Aw Anza!"

Bongiwe says smiling ear to ear the moment I walk through the canteen door, and then?

"What's going on? Why are you so happy to see me?"

"Ngena la, ay' uyinja shem. You stood up to Nontobeko, a whole Nontobeko! she couldn't believe it neither did we."

(You are the best)

She says sticking out her hand out to me. I ignore her hand and take a seat on the couch and put on my headphones avoiding conversation with her, snake this one! Once bitten twice shy

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MPHO

After the reviving sermon by Pastor Bhuda Mpho and his best friend Quinton are walking to Mpho's house for the Sunday lunch.

“Bishop, how did you find the service?” Mpho

Unlike normal guys who call each other ‘ntwana’ or ‘Dawgen’ these two call each other ‘Bishop’.

“Great as always, how’s Anzani?”

A smile embraces Mpho's lips

“She's good, we are good.”

“I'm happy for you Bishop, I don't know her personally but I can see that she's a good girl please treat her well, respect her, and love her. If the relationship fails let it be on her not on you, don't mess up.”

“I won't mess up, she's a good girl and I love her.”

“Yes, she's beautiful and kind-hearted. I mean she agreed to be in a relationship with you while you're not working, she's rare not many girls can date a broke man at this day and age not even one's from church. “

“That's true, I won't mess it up.”

“Good, does she know?”

“What?”

Quinton halts on his step

“Don’t tell me you haven’t told her?”

Mpho's silence confirms his suspicions

“Wow! I can’t believe you.”

“I’ll tell her, just not now I don’t want to scare her off.”

“So you’d rather she leaves after you’ve dated for months or years rather than now?”

“No, of course not. I just haven’t found the right time to tell her.”

“Tell her Mpho, you can’t start a relationship on lies. Tell her and let her decide if she still wants to be with you or not.”

“I will.”

“When?”

“Today, are you happy now?” Mpho says sarcastically

“Ecstatic.”

“Ok, can we resume walking now, the sun is hot?”

Quinton chuckles and resumes walking

#13

Turns out Nontobeko is all bark and no bite, she didn't pitch like she said she would. Imagine all that preparation, training, and strategizing I did was all for nothing, I didn't even sleep properly trying to memorize Mike Tyson's moves all for her not to show up. Lol I'm kidding I'm so happy she didn't come yoh, she was going to beat me that one because your girl doesn't know the first thing about fighting and the last thing I want is to trend on social media for fighting. Mr. Price isn't my final destination I'm still looking for another job and I'm sure prospective employers would not hire a person who gets herself involved in fights, it wouldn't look good, especially for a Christian.

I'm off today so I woke up early and did my laundry now I'm hanging it on the washing line while narrating what happened between Nontobeko and me to my aunt, she's been laughing since I started telling her the story.

"You're crazy Anza, so you were ready to fight?"

“What choice did I have aunt, it was either that or I run for the hills.”

“Yeah, that’s true, but I’m glad you stood up for yourself.”

“They respect me now; they have no choice because I defended myself against the biggest bully. The one they fear the most so her minions know not to mess with me now.”

“People who talk too much are less likely to know how to fight, I wouldn’t be surprised if that that Nontobeko doesn’t know how to fight and that’s why she didn’t come.”

“At this point, I don’t care why she didn’t pitch, I’m just grateful that she didn’t. fighting is a lot of work plus I’m sick I shouldn’t be fighting in the first place.”

“Yeah, that’s true, so are you going anywhere today?”

She asks with a quirked eyebrow

“Yes, I’ll go see my friends. Why do you ask, do you need me to do something for you before I go?”

She chuckles

“You must think I was born yesterday, you never used to visit your friends before. You spent all your off days with me in the house but now you’re suddenly visiting your friends every week and even going for a sleepover? Who is he?”

Mortification covers me like a blanket, I move my eyes away from her intense gaze.

“Who?”

“I don’t have time to play Anza, who is he?”

I have no choice but, to tell the truth, my aunt won’t let this go. I hang the last pair of jeans, wipe my damp hands on my

trousers before pulling a bucket and sitting next to my aunt under the peach tree.

“His name is Mpho Moloji, he’s 28 turning 29 this year.”

“Where did you meet this guy?”

“We met at church, he’s a Christian and he loves the lord. He’s a good person and he treats me good, I’m happy with him.”

“Hmmm if you say so. Anza, you’re almost twenty-three so I can’t stop you from dating but please take of yourself, you know how things are here at home so please don’t fall pregnant.”

I’m so uncomfortable right now I can’t even look my aunt in the eye, all I want is for the ground to open and swallow me.

“I won’t.”

“Good then.”

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I just got off a cab and as expected I find my boyfriend waiting for me at the corner, he takes my bag as soon as I reach him and gives me a warm hug.

“Hey, future.”

He says when we break the hug.

“Hello love, how are you?”

We walk to his house with our hands intertwined.

“I'm good and how are you?”

“I'm great.”

“That’s good.”

“I told my aunt about you today,” I say

“What did she say?”

“She didn’t say much, she only said I should protect myself and not fall pregnant.”

“She has nothing to worry about, I’ll not make you pregnant until we are married. I want to be there and experience every stage of your pregnancy and the birth of our child with you.”

“Ncoah, you’re so sweet.”

“Not more than you, my love.”

“No, you’re the sweetest and most loving boyfriend in the entire world.”

“No, you are the humblest, caring, kind and loving girlfriend in the entire universe.”

I look at him and smile

“Ok let’s agree to disagree then.”

“Better, because you’ll not win this argument.”

He opens the front door and I walk in first, pull a barstool, and make myself comfortable putting my feet up.

“Today I’m not making any food, there’s this bunny chow Quinton and I bought last week it’s so delicious and I want you to taste it.”

“I already can’t wait.”

“Ok let me go put your bag in my room and get my wallet so we can leave.”

“You’re always buying food for us, please let me buy this time.”

“Ngicela singaphaphelani sisi tu, I will buy.”

He’s such a ‘man’ this one, he never lets me pay for anything. He pours me juice in a glass before disappearing to his room. I keep myself busy on my phone until he comes back

he has two caps in his hands and asks me to choose one because the temperature is slightly hot outside and he knows how sensitive my skin is to the sun. He’s so thoughtful!

“Give me the black one.”

He gives me a black cap and wears a navy one. He locks the door and off we go to the Kota place, we bump into brother Tshepo from church on our way and he honks his bell to show us that he saw us. I look at Mpho to gauge his reaction since he

didn't want anyone from church to know about us, but he looks unfazed.

"Do you think he will tell people about us?" I say

"I don't know but I think so, he's hyper that one"

"And how does that make you feel?" He raises his eyebrow in confusion

"What exactly are you asking me Anzani?"

"You said you don't want people knowing about us and now Tshepo has seen us together."

"I didn't say that you make it sound like I'm hiding you or something. I just said I don't want anyone from church knowing about us because they'll report the whole thing to the pastor, those who are important to me know about you."

“Oh really? Like whom?”

“My friends and siblings know about you; my mother is the only one who doesn’t know about you, and you know the reason why.”

“Okay, so how delicious is this Kota?”

I say changing the topic to a lighter one.

After waiting for more than 30 minutes our order finally comes out, we buy a two-liter bottle of Coke to wash it down and head back to his house where we munch on our food while watching a movie. In the middle of the movie his phone rings disturbing us, he pauses the movie and picks up the call

“Mpho Moloji speaking hello,” He says with that gruff voice of his.

“Yes, I’ll be there thank you.”

I can't hear what the person on the other side of the line is saying but judging by the wild smile on his face, it's definitely good news.

"Thank you, sir bye." He says and drops the call

"Future!" he bellows excitement almost palpable in his voice

"Love!" I reply trying to match his exhilaration

"Guess who's got an interview on Friday?"

"What? congratulation baby!"

I throw myself in his arms and hug him bouncing in excitement

"Wow, I can't believe it sthandwa sam."

“You best believe it, it’s happening, and that job is yours.”

“The way I’m going to spoil you girl.”

He says making me sit on top of him with my legs on either side of his waist and strokes my chin with his thumb

“Well, I can’t wait to be spoiled.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yes.”

He smashes his lips into mine and our tongues fuse in erotic passion, my nipples harden underneath the tank top I’m wearing as my clit throbs inside my panties.

“I want you.”

He whispers in my ear. His warm breath on my neck ignites sparks all over my body

“Take me, I’m yours.”

He flips us over so that he’s on top of me and helps me out of my clothes, he then jumps to the floor and slips out of his clothes.

“Condom.”

I say when he attempts to climb the bed without grabbing a condom first

“Oh yeah.”

He goes to his wardrobe, takes a condom, and tears it off with his teeth. I sleep on my side and watch him as he rolls the condom on his hard meat, his dick is short and thick. When he’s done putting on the condom, he climbs the bed and settles between my thighs

“Are you sure about this?”

He asks looking into my eyes. I swallow saliva and nod my head in agreement.

“Okay, it’s going to hurt a bit at first.”

I’m no virgin but I’ve only had sex once, it was on my second year of varsity. I had planned on being a virgin until marriage, but my ex didn’t want to understand when I said I wasn’t ready for sex and threatened to break up with me if I didn’t do it, I was so desperate for love that I gave him my virginity even though I wasn’t ready to and I hated myself and him afterward because I felt like he violated me. Yes, I may have consented to the sex, but I wasn’t ready, and he knew but still went ahead and slept with me and took away my purity and innocence.

I hadn’t planned on losing my virginity in that way, so I started hating him after we had sex and broke up with him, I dated Thabo a year after him, but we never had sex we only had loads

of oral sex because after my first experience I promised myself that I would never have sex with anyone unless I want to do it.

He's the first and only man to make me cum, we had such amazing sexual chemistry. He knew exactly where to touch and kiss me to get my body fired up and greedy and begging for him, he was a player before we got together but he had 'changed' for me and even started going to church to prove that he was good enough for me, but I couldn't trust that he really changed for me, especially because of how handsome he was. I thought he'd smash and go back to his old ways that's why I didn't let him tap regardless of how much I wanted him to and even after he waited for months and only stuck to muffing me, I know ours would have been the most amazing sex I could feel it. We ended up breaking up because I was insecure and couldn't trust his love for me regardless of what he did, I was always accusing him of one thing or the other because deep down I couldn't believe someone as handsome as he was could love me and accept me with all my flaws I expected him to cheat on me. Sometimes I ask myself what would've happened if I ignored all the negative outcries in my head and just followed my heart and allowed myself to be loved by him and believe in his love for me. Would we still be together?

“Okay.”

Seeing how nervous I am he kisses me to distract me and penetrates me while I’m still lost in the kiss, a scream breaks out of my lips, and I move up.

“Relax baby, you’re not relaxed that’s why it’s painful. Relax your body.” I release a sigh and nod

“I’ll try again.”

He pushes his dick inside my slit and I feel great pain down south, but I take it as a woman and endure his painful strokes. My cookie gets wetter and wetter with each thrust, and Mpho starts groaning and making weird faces on top of me while biting his lower lip and sweating.

“Damn you taste so sweet!”

He whispers lost in the moment. I start moving my body up and down meeting his strokes halfway as I anticipate the pleasure that everyone raves about when talking about sex, but it doesn't come, after what feels like forever he growls like a wild animal and ejaculates inside the condom.

“Wow, that was amazing. Umnandi baby.”

He says dropping his head between my boobs. The only thing I felt was pain and no pleasure, and now I'm left with a throbbing cookie still trying to figure out what the fuss about sex is. Maybe I'm lesbian, that would explain why I didn't feel any pleasure from sex? But that wouldn't make sense because I'm attracted to males, not females. Okay maybe I'm asexual.

#14

Mpho and I are spooning on the bed, he's sleeping behind me and his arms are locked around my waist while his face is buried on my nape planting wet kisses and turning me on. I guide my hand to his pants and grab his erect member, it's so thick and can't fit in my small hand. A groan leaves his mouth as I stroke his dick with my hand and smear the mushroom head with precum, his hands softly caress my waist and slowly trail down to my thighs, his hands disappear between my inner thighs, and he pushes my thong to the side.

"Please allow me in."

He says in a gruff whisper, his voice laced with lust. I'm so turned on that I can literally feel my clit pulsating with need so I lift my right leg allowing him in, he guides his meat to my entrance, and I bite my lip anticipating the first thrust, but I wake up before he can push himself inside me and realize it was nothing but a dream.

I'm in my bed sleeping beside Mulanga, my heart is beating fast and I'm breathing heavily I swear that dream felt so real...I've never been so aroused in my entire life, for some weird reason I guide my hand between my legs and put my hands inside my damp underwear, Jesus, I'm so wet! Did I just have a wet dream, or this is something else?

I sigh and roll out of bed and toddle to the bathroom, the first thing I do is remove my underwear and freshen up. I've never had a dream like this before and it doesn't help that I can't even tell my mom or aunt about it, where will I even begin?

It's been three months since Mpho started working as an intern for an investment company, for an intern he's earning a decent amount- way higher than the peanuts I earn as a permanent employee. He has moved to Germiston to be closer to work. He's renting an apartment and we see each other on some weekends which is quite tricky because I always work on Saturdays so we only see each other when I'm off on Sunday or when he comes to Ratanda to visit his family, so far, the distance hasn't put the strain on our relationship. Nothing has changed, he's still the lovely Mpho he was when he was still unemployed and yeah, he does spoil me as he promised me he would.

Mpho was working yesterday and only knocking off late, so I didn't go to his place even though I'm off from work today. I was sad that I wouldn't see my baby after not seeing him for so long, but I decided to go to church, it's been long, and the service was exactly what I needed. I read the bible and pray at home but there's just something sacred and soul-lifting about being in the presence of other Christians fellowshiping together, I'm no good dancer but yall should see me in church the way I dance and sway my hips and the joy I feel in my heart during praise and worship is out of this world. I feel at peace and I'm filled with so much joy and there's nothing in this way that can compare to the peace and joy I feel when I'm in church.

"Hey, you it's been long."

Says sister Ivy giving me a hug after church. Sister Ivy is one of the leaders of the young adults

"I know right, work keeps me away."

“I understand, it’s good to see you. You look beautiful.”

“Thanks, sister, you look beautiful too.”

We share one last hug before she walks off to join her friends.

I share hugs with a few church mates I sometimes chat with when I’m at church and take my bag preparing to leave.

“Mfazi ka Mfwethu.”

(My brother’s wife)

Someone says behind me, so I turn around and come face to face with brother Quinton, Mpho’s best friend. Between you and me, he’s the hottest brother at church and I’ll admit I had a crush on him at some point, but I got over it when I started dating his friend. He’s not dark nor light-skinned, he’s tall, with broad shoulders and a buffed chest, and has strong veined arms and big sexy hands. He has a perfect set of straight pearly whites and slightly thick lips. I’ve never met anyone who rocks

bald head like he does, I've never seen him with hair- he always bald.

"Brother."

He hugs me; you know that two-second hug we give each other in church? Yes, that one.

"I'm guessing you're on your way."

"Yes, I am. I need to prepare for tomorrow it's back to work."

"Okay then allow me to walk you home."

He says already taking my bag and gesturing me to walk out first. I guess this is not up for discussion. I lead the way to the door, and he follows behind me, I feel somehow, I don't know the word to describe what I feel but I feel uneasy but not in a bad way.

“You’re a great girl Anza and I’m really happy you’re with my friend, you guys better make it work because I can’t wait to buy a suit to attend your wedding.”

A giggle breaks out of my lips

“I love your friend Quinton and he makes me happy.”

He smiles in response.

“I’m happy for you two and please continue making each other happy. Intimacy and communication are key to a successful relationship, when I say intimacy I’m not referring to sex...I’m talking about emotional intimacy, being able to be bare and let each other on your insecurities, feelings, secrets, and your deepest fears. Being able to open up to your partner knowing that they will not judge you but they’ll support you and offer you a shoulder.”

I don’t think Mpho and I are there yet but it’s something we are working towards.

“That’s deep”

He laughs

“Yeah, maybe I take relationships too seriously.”

“No, you’re right. I would love to have something like that with Mpho.”

“And I believe that you guys will get there, Mpho is not an open person be patient with him he’ll learn to trust you in time and allow you in.”

“I see.”

“Will you walk in those or you’re getting a cab?” He asks glancing at my high heels

I was going to get a cab, but that was before he offered to walk me home. So I'll walk plus I'm learning new things about Mpho from him so I might as well take advantage of this opportunity to learn more about my boyfriend and who better than his best friend to tell me about him.

"They are not that high I will manage."

"Okay."

"Like I was saying, Anza

my friend really loves you, he's just not a vocal person about his feelings but he really adores you."

"Of course, you'll say that he's your friend, so you'll obviously speak for him."

He laughs

"Not even, I have no reason to lie to you. He really loves you."

He sounds genuine but don't they all?

"Ok, I'll take your word for it."

"I know you don't know me well, but I swear I'm a fair person, I always call him out when he's wrong, he knows that as well."

I give him that yeah right look

"I don't believe you."

"Just the other day I was confronting him about why he always refers to you as FUTURE instead of using the name when he puts those statuses on his WhatsApp, I don't get what's so difficult about addressing you as Anza. I mean you're a beautiful, caring, self-respecting woman who's God-fearing and humble I just don't get why he's not telling the whole world about you. I noticed it a couple of times and asked him about it, he said Future is your other name. Is that true?"

Mpho sometimes puts up status talking about how he wishes he was with his girlfriend or about missing the love of his life and captions them 'Future❤️'

"Yes."

I lie through my teeth, shame mocking me. Why did Mpho lie to his friend? And here I thought he doesn't lie, but it is technically my name because he gave it to me, right?

"I also told him that I don't like how you guys stand on the street when he comes to see you, you guys are grownups and shouldn't be meeting in the streets like scholars. He says he intends to marry you, he's working now so he should just do the right thing akhiphe okuncane so your family accepts and acknowledges him as your boyfriend so he can be allowed inside the house. I personally don't support the idea of standing in the street, ay azikhiphi!"

Mpho and I have only been dating for less than a year I think it's too soon for him to pay lobola, but I understand where Quinton is coming from, I also don't like standing on the street

when he comes to see but it's the only option we have for now. It's better when he comes with his mom's car but it's not his car, so she only borrows him the car sometimes.

"I hear you."

"Anyway, how is work?"

"Work is good but I'm tired of retail, I just want to get a job I studied for."

"Don't worry you'll definitely get the job you studied for, keep trusting the Lord, and one day he'll definitely answer your prayers. He's not a man he shall not lie, please don't be discouraged by what you see but hold on to His promises. When we focus on the negative, we tend to lose sight of the good things we have, you might not have the job you studied for, but you have a job. Some people have never been employed in their lives; someone somewhere is praying for a job like yours so learn to appreciate the little you have so that you can be trusted with more. Everything happens for a reason;

at the right time you'll get the job you want please don't lose faith."

"Thank you so much."

"I'm not just saying it but I'm speaking from experience, it's been five years since I graduated and obtained my Electrical Engineering qualification and I'm still unemployed, but I haven't lost faith I'm still waiting on the lord trusting in his promises because I know the one I serve is faithful. Be patient and don't stop applying, one day you'll knock on the right door, and you'll understand why you had to wait for so long."

Wow, this man is full of wisdom

"And please don't compare yourself with others life is a marathon, not a race, someone might get the job before you only to lose it after a year so don't feel pressured because of what other people are achieving or have achieved. Be happy when you see God blessing people around you because it means the line is moving and you are next in line to receive blessings."

“Thank you so much, brother.”

“Pleasure, this is where my journey ends.”

He says giving me my bag, we are standing outside my aunt’s house. I didn’t feel the walk coming here, that’s how much the conversation was flowing between us, and I intend to take every word of advice he gave me and use it.

“Thanks again for walking me home.”

“Anything for my best friend’s woman, bye.”

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“This is why I don’t want friends in my business, he’s too forward why the hell did he walk you home? You should’ve taken a cab.”

That's what he says after I confront him about lying to Quinton and saying Future is my second name.

"He didn't mean it in a bad way."

I feel bad, maybe I shouldn't have asked him. I don't want best friends to fight because of me, the only thing I want to understand is why he lied about Future being my name.

"He did, why did he even tell you that? what was he hoping to achieve by asking you if future is indeed your second name?"

"He only wanted to verify since he knows me as Anzani."

"Quinton uyaphapha he likes acting perfect and giving relationship advice like he's in a successful relationship himself. He can't even keep a relationship because girls don't want his broke ass, I always get in trouble with my mother for giving his selfish ass a plate of food every Sunday but he goes and does this!"

“What?”

To say I’m shocked would be putting it lightly, how can Mpho be so vile

“Don’t be confused by his good looks Quinton is the breadwinner in his family yet he’s not employed, his family survives from his hustle and sometimes they go to bed hungry. Uyalamba loyo, don’t be fooled by his good looks he was probably hungry that’s why he said all those lies about me. I never said that, I said I call you future because I see a future with you. Today better be the last time you let him walk you home, he’s my friend, not yours there’s no need for you to get friendly with him.”

At this point I’m glad I didn’t tell him about the lobola thing, maybe I shouldn’t have asked him but how could I not ask when I want to know why he lied about my name. He’s denying it but I know it’s true, Quinton has no reason to lie

#15

I know for certain that Mpho lied to his friend about my name being future and him being defensive and so vile when I asked him about it gave it away, and that has made me wonder about a lot of things, especially about why he's so adamant on keeping our relationship a secret. Almost everyone around me is in a long-term relationship then there's me who gets into a new relationship every year, I may have not slept with many guys, but I sure have many exes for a girl who started dating after matric. I don't even understand what I could be doing wrong for my relationships to flop because I'm such a sucker for love and I give the best of myself to everyone I get into a relationship with, maybe my mistake is that I fall in love fast, and when I do I fall hard. I have a lot of love to give, I don't date for money nor looks and I always love and accept people for who they are not what they have then tell me why it is so hard for me to find someone who loves me just as much as I do or is it my karma for rejecting the one who did in the past?

I've been seeing the signs and purposely ignored them because I wanted the relationship with Mpho to last, I am tired of being that girl who has a new boyfriend every year in my circle of friends. I'm sure my friends are tired of my mantra 'I met

someone and I think he's the one' they probably think I'm loose or something. I want to celebrate anniversaries and create memories with my boyfriend, I know a relationship isn't everything nor is it an achievement but I'm that girl who dreams of a perfect Cinderella love story maybe I'm influenced by the novels I read and that's why I'm so obsessed with being loved and having a relationship. I'm part of the few people who still believe in true love regardless of the number of times I've been hurt and disappointed by people who claimed to love me. I can never be that girl who dates for benefits or money, or who has a friend with benefits. I want to be loved and feel loved.

I've been burnt so many times and I always make a vow to myself after each failed attempt at a relationship thinking that I have learned from my mistakes promising to put myself first in the next relationship I get into but that never happens as I always go and repeat the same mistakes-loving the guy more than I love myself. Once someone shows me a bit of affection, I desperately hold on to it and think that no one will love me as he does, or maybe I don't love myself enough to put myself first and that's why I always settle for less in relationships.

All I needed was someone who'll love me, value me, and put me first not someone who makes me feel like I'm not good

enough to be known by his mother. There's a joke making rounds on social media about not being posted by the person you're in a relationship with, it's a laughing matter to others but I take it personally because it hits home. Am I not beautiful enough to be posted, loved loudly like other women are being loved? Is it my condition, the marks on my bust, my background or perhaps being a Venda girl that makes it so hard for people to truly love me? I was sure that this would be my last relationship, I thought he'd be my husband and the father of my kids..maybe it's time I get over all this nonsense and accept that maybe relationships are not for me.

Sometimes I ask myself why I had to be born, did I come to this world to suffer? Nothing goes well in my life nothing! I'm not getting the job I studied for, I'm living with an incurable condition that's hard to live with, my relationships never work out, and nothing works out for my mother ..everything in my life is just a mess. If I wasn't so afraid of the thought of going to hell and burning for eternity, I would have long taken my life, but I won't do it because I'm a coward. I'm not brave enough to find out when I'm already on the other side if hell really exists so I'd rather not, but I maintain I didn't need to be born, I honestly don't see the point. I wonder why God saw the need to give me life if it was to make me suffer all my life.

I pull the covers over my head when I hear the door creak open, I can feel someone pressing the switch next to the door before light illuminates the dim room penetrating through the thick covers. A second later I hear footsteps approaching my bed

“Cuz.”

It’s Mulanga. She’s trying to uncover my face, but I cling to the blankets because I don’t want her seeing my tears, I know she’ll tell aunt who’ll tell my mother and I really don’t want to bother my mom or anyone about this.

“Come on Anza, I need your help with accounting. Please wake up I know you’re not sleeping.”

Mulanga is doing commerce at school

“Mulanga please respect me, you can’t just come here and disturb my sleep. I’m not your friend!”

I lash out at her

“Woah what’s going on? Are you okay?”

She asks, her words laced with concern and worry.

“I’m okay, just let me sleep.”

“Wait why does your voice sound like that, are you crying?”

“No, it's my sinuses. Can I sleep now?”

I say not even trying to mask my irritation.

“Okay sorry.”

She says in a low voice and leaves the room

She's hurt I can hear it in her voice, and I feel terrible for how I spoke to her, but I had to do it because she wasn't going to leave me alone and I need to be alone right now. Just when I think I have found peace my phone rings, it's Mpho. I take a deep breath and take the call.

"Hello"

He says and I don't reply

"Future.... are you there?"

"Why is it about me that's so hard to love?"

"What?"

I can hear that he's taken aback by my question

"You heard me

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why is it so hard for you to love me”

“What do you mean? I love you.”

“No, you don’t, if you did you wouldn’t have hidden me that day your mother came back while I was in your room, you would want people to know about me, you wouldn’t have lied to your friend about future being my name. You’d post me and you wouldn’t have acted like you didn’t know me on the day of Portia’s funeral.”

A month ago a girl from church named Portia passed on, her funeral was on Thursday so I was able to attend since it was during the week. Mpho saw me during the funeral service and smiled at me, but he completely ignored me and pretended I didn’t exist when it was time to go to the cemetery. I expected him to talk to me and ask if I’m going to the cemetery and what I’m going with or propose we go together like any normal boyfriend would but the boy had no time for me he was with his friends and from how he was acting I knew I’d embarrass myself if I tried to talk to him, so I tucked my tail between my legs and went back home. I assumed he’d notice that I wasn’t

there and send me a text or call to find out where I was and ask what time I left like any caring boyfriend would, but he didn't he only called me later asking to see me.

When I confronted him about it he gave me a stupid excuse about being too sore and heartbroken about Portia's death to talk to me or think about me- they were friends. I knew he was bull shitting me because I saw him and he didn't look broken at all, he was chatting happily with his friends, but I let it slide as I did with the rest of the shit he did to me in the past.

"I don't get it, where's all this coming from. I thought we spoke about all of this and got through it so why are you bringing it up now? Why does it seem like you have grudges?"

"Because I'm not over it and I want to understand why you did what you did."

"Mina angazi ngithini because I explained why and you said you understood but now you want us to go back to the same issues we spoke about. It means you'll still be reminding me of this in

five years to come, I apologized and you said you forgive me so why don't we move on?"

(I don't know what to say)

"I only want to know why you're hiding me, do you have someone else?"

"Wow, so you think I'm cheating on you?"

He says pretending to be offended by my question

"That would explain why you're not posting me on social media or allowing me to leave my things at your place!"

"Anzani I don't get where this is suddenly coming from, I told you that I won't post you when we first started dating and you said you understood so what has changed suddenly? And you know my place is small that's why I don't want you leaving your things plus my mother opens my closet every time she comes to my place so you should take your things because I don't want her thinking I'm cohabiting or something."

Not his mom again, how old is he again? Twelve

“Your mom will think you’re cohabiting when she sees one pair of shorts that belongs to me at your place?”

I didn’t want to leave my entire wardrobe at his place I only wanted to leave a few things just so I don’t carry huge luggage every time I visit his place, I didn’t know he had a problem until I tried to leave my denim shorts at his place. His face immediately changed and sternly told me not to leave my things at his place, I was hurt and couldn’t understand why he’d have a problem with that and that’s when I started to suspect that there is someone else in the picture because I felt like his side chick.

“Yes.”

“Wow, I don’t know what to say. You are so inconsiderate; it has to be your way or the highway you never compromise or put me first. You are so selfish!”

“Is this how you talk to me now, you’ve lost respect for me?”

“I’m telling you the truth; I’m not disrespecting you.”

“Your problem is that you’re a Christian yet you want to date the worldly way, you’ll get posted and everything else you are demanding when you’re my wife. We are Christians we can’t do things the way other people do them.”

“Oh wow, so having sex before marriage is godly?”

“We can wait for marriage I don’t mind.”

“That’s not the point, the point is why you don’t want your mother knowing about me?”

“What’s that going to change? I told you I’m not ready to tell her about you, please be patient I’ll tell her about you when I’m ready.”

“What are you not ready for? You’re not ready to tell her about me but you’re ready to sleep with me unprotected what if I fall pregnant huh?”

“As I said, we can stop having sex.”

This guy doesn’t care the least about my feelings and coming to terms with that hurts like hell, I can’t believe I’ve been so stupid and naïve! I’m officially done with men!

“You know what Mpho let’s break up, you’ll never put me first. It will always be you then me, nakhone nangabe ngiyafuna.”

(If I choose to)

“You’re mistaken, I love you very much and I can do anything to make you happy but I can’t compromise on this. I’m not ready to introduce you to my mother.”

“I’m not saying introduce me to your mother dammit!” I say and tears roll down my cheeks “ Tell her about me, she must at

least know there's someone called Anzani somewhere who is in a relationship with her son like my aunt knows about you."

"Me and you don't do things the same way, I'm not ready to tell my mother about you. Please be patient with me then you'll see ngizovela sengilobola."

(I'll pay your Lobola)

I chuckle. Mpho must think I'm desperate for marriage shem

"Let's just break up Mpho, this is not working out."

"No, I can't lose you please don't leave me. I love you so much baby please, I'm asking you to be patient with me please my love. I will change, I will introduce you to my mother and post you as you want but please don't leave me. I wouldn't survive it if you left me."

He beseeches in a breaking voice. It's in times like these when I hate having a soft heart like mine, why am I falling for his nonsense?

“Okay, I’m giving you one last chance. If you mess it up I will leave you and it will be for good this time.”

I'll feel better knowing that I gave the relationship my all

“I swear I won’t, I promise.”

Am I stupid for believing him? There’s a part of me that doesn’t want to believe that he doesn’t love me, a part that believes he loves me and believes all the excuses he’s been feeding me.

#16

Today is a day we call 'mothers day' at work because it's a day in which most mothers receive grant payment for their children, grant is a sum of money paid out by the South African government to pensioners, disabled citizens, or those living with chronic medical conditions, orphans and children whose parents are unemployed to cover their basic needs but of course even employed parents apply for this grant some even commit fraud and continue to receive the grant even after the child/children in question is deceased but that's a story for another day. For now let's get into why we call this day mother's day, it is because most women use this money on themselves and not on the children the money is meant for.

On this date, every month the store gets flooded with women so we know as staff that today is going to be a busy day and have prepared for it in advance by filling the shelves with stock days prior to today. Since I'm working the till today it means I should be extra careful and keep my eyes peeled as it's likely to make a mistake on a busy day like today because you put pressure on yourself wanting to serve customers as quickly as you can to circumvent complaints.

I'm working alongside Ellen and Karabo, unfortunately for Ellen, it's back to working the till almost every day when she's at work because Bongiwe had a variance and was given a 12-month warning(the final strike) after attending a hearing. They didn't fire her like Nontobeko and her entourage thought and according to Bongiwe, it's because she went to ZCC for help and they helped her win the case. Because Mr. D is a kind man, he knows Bongiwe doesn't know the till well and is likely to have another variance if put on till again he decided not to put her on the till again until her warning expires much to Nontobeko and Boitumelo's disapproval those two still want her on the till.

I'm busy with a customer when Nontobeko comes to the cash desk running, oh by the way she didn't mess with me again after I stood up for myself she didn't talk to me for a few days after our verbal fight but she got over it eventually. She no longer calls me roasted or Mmaditaba she now calls me 'isdeleli sengane' ( a disrespectful child) because according to her she's never been disrespected by a child as I did so she says I'm the most disrespectful child she has ever met and I couldn't care less at least now she knows not to mess with me. I raise my head and look at her, she bends and puts her hands on her knees trying to catch her breath.

“Nontobeko keng wahemetsela je ke eng?” Karabo

(Why are you breathing heavily)

“Who among you three sold an extra plastic to a girl who bought a black bodycon skirt from RT ladies?”

She asks looking at the three of us.

“It was me why?” Ellen

“That girl stole a pair of jeans and put them inside the plastic you sold her, Thobile caught her at the door. Why would you sell someone an extra plastic when she only has one item of clothing?” Nontobeko

“Ska mbora tu Nontobeko, was I suppose to question her, how would I know what she’s up to?” Ellen

(Don’t bore me)

“Ave udelela wena nemicondo ewonde ngathi yizinduku ze snooker. Mamohau is calling you in the canteen ngifuna ukubona uzophendula uthini because they suspect you were working with this girl helping her to steal.”

(You're so disrespectful with skinny legs that look like cue sticks ) ( I want to hear what you'll say when she questions you)

“Menoto ke yaka aketsebe wena okena kae”

(The skinny legs are mine I don't know why you are bothered about them)

“Whatever, they are waiting for you big mouth”

This one needs someone to beat her up so she'll stop being so condescending, this girl has no filter I swear. Someone needs to beat that disrespect out of her.

She walks off before Ellen can respond. Ellen huffs and exits her sales screen

“Let me go hear what they are saying.”

She says looking at me, she's scared I can see the fear in her eyes and I'm scared for her too.

"Good luck babe."

I say patting her shoulder

"Good luck Elly!" Karabo

She nods and we both watch with sympathy as she walks away

"Is someone going to help me or you're just going to stand there with your mouths hanging the whole day!"

A customer hisses in irritation snapping us back to reality.

"Tell them!" The customers waiting in the queue behind her chorus echoing her sentiments

“I'm sorry ma'am, please forgive us,” I say

She clicks her tongue and rolls her eyes putting clothes on top of the cash desk for me to scan, I scan and keep my apologetic look intact. A few minutes later Ellen comes back looking relieved.

“How did it go?” Karabo

“The girl told Mamohau and Daniel that I am not involved in her theft.”

“Thank God, I was scared for you.”

I say breathing a sigh of relief

“I'm glad too.” Karabo

“Yeah, anyway it’s 11 who’s going to lunch first?” Ellen

“Anza put in the float first, she should go.” Karabo

“Ok go, Anza, we should take our lunches now I have a feeling it’ll get busier later.” Ellen

“Ok let me wrap up this sale and go then.”

I finish scanning the customer's clothes, pack them into plastic and tell her to insert her pin.

“Thank you.”

She says when I give her the plastic. I offer her a small smile and exit the sales screen making sure to lock the cash register.

“I'm out”

“Bye”

I saunter to the canteen, a frown covers my features when I walk into an unfamiliar face.

“Hi,” I say

“Hi.”

She says and bows her head avoiding eye contact. Ok, what’s going on? The door opens while I’m still wrapped in confusion and Mamohau walks in

“Anza are you on lunch?”

“Yes”

“Great you’ll watch over this criminal until the police get here, don’t let her get away.”

So she's the culprit.

The girl looks up with bulging eyes at the mention of the word 'police' and the fear lingering in her glossy eyes tears me apart, I know she stole but I feel sorry for her.

"Please don't call the police I'm asking you please, I'll pay double for the jeans but please don't call the police. My mother is sick, she's grieving the death of my father and she has heart failure she'll die when she finds out I'm in jail. I have two kids and one is breastfeeding please let me go."

She pleads with a quavering voice while swiping her hands on her face making unsuccessful attempts at wiping her tears

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they are relentless.

"I won't fall for your sappy speech, you wouldn't have stolen if you cared so much about your kids and your widowed mother."

Mamohau

“Please...I'm begging you.”

She says with her hands clasped together like she's praying desperate for Mamohau to give in to her plea. My heart breaks for her, I hope Mamohau will reconsider.

“Do you know we can lose our jobs because of selfish people like you, we also have families that we support with the salary we make here but you guys steal and do not consider us. You're only sorry because you got caught, you planned this and even bought another plastic to implement your plan well you're sleeping in a cell tonight for being a thief!”

She spits and walks out of the room. I take my lunchbox from the microwave after warming up my food and join her on the couch. She's crying hysterically she even has hiccups

“Why did you do it?”

I ask after a few minutes of enduring her painful sobs, she looks up and wipes her tears with the sleeve of her jacket, and draws heavy breath looking into my eyes.

“I don’t know to be honest with you.”

I think I know this girl, I can’t remember from where though. You can blame Lupus for that, it messes with my brain. I can be so forgetful at times.

“I think I know you, do you know me?”

She squints her eyes studying my face

“Yes, I know you too I just don’t remember from where.”

Then it hits me, I know her from church.

“Do you fellowship at Faith Mission?”

“Yes.”

“That’s where I know you from, why did you do it Thandiwe, that’s your name right?”

She wipes her nose and nods

“I don’t know I just got tempted, this is my first time. I have never stolen anything I swear.”

“Eish you shouldn’t have looked now you’ll go to jail and ruin your life with a criminal record you could have avoided.”

“I know right, will the police really arrest me?”

“Yes.”

Tears trickle down her face after my confirmation

“This will kill my mother”

She says in a low voice. Shem I feel sorry for her, a while later the door opens and two police officers walk in followed by Mamohau and Daniel. It's a white man and a black female, terror torrents Thandiwe's eyes when she sees them, her hands tremble and tears pour down her face.

“So she’s the one?”

Asks the female officer holding something that looks like an exam pad and a pen in her hands

“Yes, she’s the one.”

I know I’m not the one who stole but I’m nervous there’s just something extremely terrifying about police officers in their uniform, seeing a gun up close intimidates the shit out of me. I glance at my screen and sigh in relief when I see that my lunch

hour is almost over, I immediately jolt up from the couch and scurry out of the room.

A few minutes after leaving the room I see Thandiwe leaving the store in handcuffs while weeping like a widowed woman and of course it wouldn't be the 21st century if people didn't have their phones out and took pictures and videos of her- people capture everything and before you know it you're trending on social media. Yeah neh, just one stupid choice has ended her life. We all know how hard it is for convicts to get a job, her credibility will always be in question her life might as well be over. I'm sure this is what they mean when they say crime doesn't pay because wawu!

\*\*\*\*\*

After the Thandiwe drama, it was work as usual and just like Ellen predicted it got busier later in the day than in the morning, my feet are swollen and aching. I'm sweaty and tired, I probably look ugly and all shiny because of the heat in this place. I jump for joy when Mamohau tells me she's cashing me up first, the lord is good!

A chuckle escapes my lips when I look at the cash-up screen as I'm counting the notes. I'm in disbelief, no this can't be happening to me.

"What's wrong?"

Mamohau asks seeing the expression on my face. I motion to the screen with my eyes

"Keep counting."

I resume counting with trembling hands and a pounding heart, I suddenly have a throbbing headache and I can't see clearly because my vision is blurred by the tears in my eyes I feel dizzy and I suddenly can't stand straight. Mamohau notes this and takes the money from my hands and continues counting until there's nothing left in the cash register, I almost faint when I see the final numbers on the screen. This is after Mamohau counted the money multiple times.

"What do you think happened?"

“I don’t...I don’t know.”

At this point, I’m in tears and I’m grabbing everyone's attention but I don’t care!

“Relax breath in, I’m sure there’s an explanation for this. I’ll conclude this and we'll investigate this okay?”

I nod my head vigorously putting my hand on my chest because my chest is tightening making it difficult for me to breath

“Breathe please”

She says in a panicky voice rubbing my back in circles

A loud sob finally breaks out of my mouth and she pulls me into her arms. I have a variance of R1300, I can’t think of any reason to explain this outrageously high variance I have no explanation. Mr. Price is not a premium store no one pays with large amounts of cash that I can get away with robbing them a large sum of change without them noticing it, I don’t know what happened. I was careful when taking money from customers and when giving them back their change, and I know I didn’t rob anyone so I don’t understand how I have an extra 1300 in my till

#17

“Father God, we humble ourselves before you today asking you to go with your child, protect her and be her advocate where she’s going, touch the hearts of the people handling her disciplinary hearing and let them see her innocence and give her another chance. Please vindicate her and be gracious to her, in Jesus’ name we pray amen.”

“Amen.”

“Don’t despair you’ll win this case my child, I can feel it in my heart I have faith in my father in heaven. He never disappoints those who put their trust in him.”

My aunt has an imperturbable faith in God and it’s so amazing to see.

“Let me get going before I run late.”

“Okay my child but please have a fruit or something since you didn’t want to eat the breakfast I prepared for you.” She says giving me an apple

I don’t intend to put anything in my mouth until the hearing is over, but I know my aunt won’t let go until I take the fruit, so I take it and put it inside my bag.

“I’ll eat it on the way.” I say when she gives me a look

“Anza!”

“Bye aunt, I love you.”

I peck her cheek and run out the door before she can say anything.

“Go well my child the lord is with you!” She bellows behind me

Today is the day of my hearing and to say I'm nervous would be an understatement but I am hopeful that I'll win this case, I mean I don't have any till warnings and the money was extra not less so I don't think they would really fire me for making them extra cash. The worst that can happen is getting a final written warning, one that will expire after twelve months.

Daniel and Mamohau did everything in their power to find out where the money came from, they checked paperwork from the bank, my transactions, my pick up's and account sales hoping to find an errata but they found none everything checked out. In other words, there's no plausible explanation for why my cash register had an extra R1300 especially since none of the customers I served on the day in question came back and claimed that I robbed them change.

I wish I could point fingers and accuse Bongiwe or Nontobeko of having put the money inside my cash register, but I can't do it because I always make certain to lock my padlock every time I shift from the cash desk, and I had the key around my wrist the whole time wearing it like a bracelet using an elastic band so I can't accuse anyone of stealing the keys either. I've been wrecking my brain for days trying to remember something that can help explain the cash variance, but my mind always comes back empty.

My anxiety shoots up and nerves starts to kick in when the taxi drives into Springs-where my hearing will be held. I must say I'm scared of the place because I'm not familiar with it so I'm afraid I might get lost and be late for my hearing or worse get mugged. From what I've heard from people, Springs is like a mini-Johannesburg CBD it is well known for mugging and I pray I won't be a victim.

"Ngicela I five driver." Shouts someone from the backseat.

I sigh in relief because that's where I'm supposed to get off, I know I'm not the only one who hates shouting their stop in a taxi so the person has saved me from the trouble of doing so. A minute later the taxi comes to a halt on fifth street, I get out first followed by the lady from the backseat. We stand side by side at the green traffic light waiting for cars to pass so we can cross to the other side.

"Hey." I say

"Hi." She replies with a smile

“I’m going to Mr. Price do you know where it is?”

“In the avenues.”

“And where exactly is that? I’m sorry but I’m not too familiar with Springs, I think I came once or twice before and that was years ago.”

“Alright, no problem I’m also going that side, so we’ll walk together.”

We cross to the other side of the street and walk in comfortable silence until the lady breaks it.

“So, first day at work?”

I’m dressed in my full work uniform, so I understand why she’d assume it’s my first day at work.

“No, I work at Heidelberg mall I’m attending my disciplinary hearing this side.”

“Woah, what did you do?”

“I didn’t do anything...”

I explain what happened and by the time I’m done narrating her mouth is left hanging in shock.

“That’s strange but I don’t think they will dismiss you; I mean you didn’t cost the company any money.”

“If only they would see it that way, no one has said anything to me, but I’ve heard rumors in our store that my assistant manager thinks I was pushing my own business on the side and forgot to take out the money from the till.”

“What? Maybe the system made a mistake or something.”

“Apparently the system never makes a mistake.”

“Amen I give up, good luck girl.”

“Thanks”

\*\*\*\*\*

I arrived an hour before the scheduled time for my hearing so I’m sitting in the Canteen with three other ladies waiting for my turn, I’m not sure how many of them are here for the same reason as me but I heard that there’s quite a few of us who are scheduled for a hearing today. Dikeledi and I, the one inside right now had a chat a few minutes before they called her inside, she works at the Mr. Price at Carnival Mall and she’s here because her manager reported her for suspicion of theft after she saw her accepting a R20 tip from a customer on the sales floor, which is quite ridiculous if you ask me, who would risk their job by selling stock for a mere R20?

The door creaks open, and a white lady peaks her face inside.

“Is Anzani Munyai here?”

My heartbeat accelerates, my throat dries up and my armpits sweat.

“I am Anzani.” I croak out in a low voice

The lady fixes her spectacles and says

“Come with me, you’re next”.

I feel my insides turn and my heart beating in my ears. I stand up and follow her with wobbly legs

“Please take a seat.”

One of the gentlemen inside the room says showing me to my seat with is set in the middle of the long table, there are two gentlemen on both ends on the table, one on my right and the another one on my left-hand side.

“Hi, my name is Carl Mazibuko I am the manager at Mr. Price East Rand mall, and I’ll be chairing your hearing today.”

He introduces the other gentleman as Sipho Mngomezulu and he will be representing the company’s side on my case. Carl explains the rules and how the hearing will proceed and gives me an exam pad to write my surname, initials and signature when I say I understand the rules. I am asked to plead before the hearing starts and I plead guilty hoping that they will see that I have acknowledged my mistake and be lenient on their judgement. I feel like I’m in the witness stand standing before the judge, this feels no less than the court proceedings I have seen on Television, Mr. Mngomezulu is like a vicious prosecutor who wants to see me behind bars well dismissed in this case. Carl doesn’t say much he only asks questions and writes down everything me and Mr. Mngomezulu say.

“We are done Anzani Munyai you’ll hear the decision from the head office after they have listened to yours and the company’s side, I will come to your store on Tuesday to personally deliver the news to you.” Carl

“So, what happens in the meantime, do I stay at home or go to work?”

“You will follow your work schedule starting from tomorrow until I tell you otherwise.”

“Okay, thank you.”

“You can call Vuyiswa in”

Carl says to the white lady who’s been seating silently throughout my hearing. I guess her job is to call us inside

I don’t feel the walk to the rank because I’m going through the hearing again in my mind, maybe I shouldn’t have pleaded guilty because I don’t know where the money came from so by pleading guilty, I might have dug myself deeper inside a hole. You’d swear Mr. Mngomezulu knows me personally with the way he was gunning for me, but I guess he was just doing his job, the man says I should be fired because many people have been fired for the same reasons so it would be unfair for the

company to pardon me because it was my first offence. He says rules are rules and punishment for any amount above R700 is dismissal at first offence, he also said I've been to the till so many times and have experience so there's no excuse for my carelessness. I really don't know what to think about the hearing but I'm hoping for the best.

My phone rings in my pocket snapping me from my thoughts

"Hey."

"Hey Future, how did it go baby?"

I take in deep breath before I reply

"I don't know, it can go either way. It was hectic, I felt like I'm some criminal in front of the Jury in court."

"I'm sorry to hear that sthandwa sam but I'm confident that the verdict will be in your favour, you're not capable of stealing and anyone who looks at you can see that."

I hope he's right

"I hope so."

"Don't be scared Sthandwa sam, you'll be okay they will not fire you."

"Thanks."

"Ok let me get back to work, I'll call you later."

"Okay bye babe thanks for calling."

He's been trying his best to be the best boyfriend since our last confrontation, he hasn't introduced me to his mother or posted me on his status yet, but he's been calling more and being more attentive to my feelings and my needs. There are no taxis going straight to Heidelberg from here, I need to go to Duduza first to get taxi's to Heidelberg.

“Sawubona ngicela ukubuza akuphi ama taxi aya eDuduza?”

(Greetings, where can I get taxi's to Duduza)

Thanks to Mpho for helping me sharpen my Zulu otherwise I would be in big trouble now, these taxi drivers don't like it when you speak to them in English. They will just ignore you or say 'Uzoshomase ufuna ukukhuluma' (You'll tell me when you're ready to talk)

“Yileya Quantum e layishayo.”

(It's that Quantum)

“Ngiyabonga.”

(Thank you)

I say and head to the taxi. I take a seat next to the window, snack on my apple and look out the window waiting for the taxi to get full. Right on cue my phone rings and I frown looking at the unsaved number on my screen

“Hello.”

“Hi, is this Anzani?”

Asks a feminine voice behind the speaker

“Who’s asking?”

“Oh sorry you’re speaking to Nancy.”

The only Nancy I know is Mpho’s sister and that one doesn’t like me so she has no business calling me

“Nancy?”

“Nancy Moloji, Mpho’s little sister.”

Okay!

“What can I do for you Nancy?”

“I urgently need to talk to you I understand you have two days off every week, please meet me on one of your day off’s this week. There’s something I need to tell you.”

“Something about what?”

“Your boyfriend, you are a nice girl, and you deserve to know the truth.”

“What truth?”

“About your boyfriend, Mpho.”

“What?”

“Yes, please call me on this number when you’re off bye.”

“Wait, Nancy... “

I pause when I hear a beep the girl just dropped the call on my ear; I wonder what truth she wants to tell me about Mpho.

#19

I'm out of words I can't believe what Nancy told me, I knew it was something big, but I didn't expect it to be this big. How sick is that woman to sleep with a boy young enough to be her son? Worse his mother and her were supposedly best friends? I'm utterly disgusted by those two and I'm sure they are still sleeping together that's why Mpho didn't want his 'mother' knowing about me and here I thought it was because he respects her only to find out that he was protecting his lover's feelings, how could I have been so fooled to miss all the signs? Then there's that unashamed Quinton who looked into my eyes and told me how much his friend loves me when he knew he was sleeping with his mom, how shameless are those two? I'm done with relationships they are not for me.

I passed by my friend's house and washed my face before I came back to my aunt's house, I didn't want my aunt seeing my tear-stained face and asking me questions I'm not ready to answer. A delicious aroma tantalizes my tastebuds as soon as I walk through the door, she has already started cooking thank the lord because I couldn't imagine standing behind the stove with all that's going on, all I want to do now is cuddle my teddy bear and cry my eyes out mourning this sham of a relationship.

What a joke of a relationship it was! I can't believe I've been sharing dick with deputy Jesus sies, thank God I never agreed to go raw with him.

"Anza not so fast my girl." Aunt Lufuno

She says when I pass her in the lounge. I stop in my tracks, but I don't turn around.

"Where are you going?"

"To my bedroom."

"What for? Take a seat food is almost ready."

"I'm not feeling well aunt."

"Why what's wrong?"

“I’m stressed about the results of the disciplinary hearing.”

“Oh, my child, don’t worry it’ll work out in your favor I trust my God.”

“I know aunt, can I please go to my room? Mulanga will call me when you dish up.”

“I’ll only allow it because you had a rough day, but don’t get used to it. I don’t like this thing of yours of locking yourself in your room, this is how people get depressed and end up killing themselves.”

“I would never take my life aunt so relax.”

“Hmmm, it’s fine you can go.”

I walk inside my bedroom and strip out all my clothes, get under the covers and release all the pain trapped inside my chest. This is it; I’m done with love and relationships it never works out for me, so I’m done trying, I’m tired of heartbreak

and tears. My phone rings and I feel a painful pang in my heart when I see Mpho's name flashing on my screen.

"What?" my voice is laced with venom

"Woah Future what's wrong? First, it was Quinton now you, what's going on?"

"Don't call me that, just don't!"

I say through clenched teeth

"Baby kwenzakalani I am confused we were okay this afternoon what happened suddenly? Don't tell me it's Quinton again, I told you to stay away from him. That pauper is jealous of our relationship, he'll do anything to separate us."

Why am I pained by him calling Quinton a pauper? I shouldn't care about him because he's not better than Mpho, but I can't help it, I'm offended.

“Don’t call him that. It has nothing to do with him, it’s all on you. I don’t know how long you thought you’d keep your secret for?”

“What secret, I’m not hiding anything from you sthandwa sam and I’m quite offended that you’d believe Quinton over me, your boyfriend.”

Here comes the emotional blackmail

“Oh, please Mpho stop pretending your game is up, I know about Lelo being yours and about you having a sexual relationship with your so-called mother!” He gasps in shock

“What, cat got your tongue?”

“I was going to tell you about my adoption I just wasn’t ready to do it, I’m sorry that you didn’t hear this from me, but I was afraid you’d leave me once you found out the truth. It happened once and I’m not proud of it, but I promise nothing is

going on between us now, I love you and want to be with you please don't leave me over something that happened in the past. I was young, stupid, and naïve I allowed the person who I thought was my mother to manipulate me, but I promise it only happened once and that was it." I scoff

He expects me to believe that when he's always going on and on about 'my mother this' ' my mother that.'

"You must think I'm a fool, I know you're still sleeping with her that's why you treat me like a hidden secret. You have done nothing but make me question my worth ever since we started dating, you've made me feel I was not good enough to be loved loudly and made me think that my expectations are unrealistic."

"That's not true, I love you. The last time we spoke and you expressed everything that made you unhappy in our relationship I was in tears because I knew I had lost your love and trust which was the foundation of our relationship and I told myself that I can't lose you that's why I have done everything in my power to ensure that you're happy these past few days but I guess I have finally lost you because of

something I did in my past. I always knew that my past would one day come back to bite me in the ass. I'm sorry for blaming you, I'm sorry for keeping my daughter a secret and I'm sorry for everything I did wrong...I take all the blame, I took too long to introduce you to my mother or rather let her know about you...but I love you woman I love you from the depths of my soul but I understand I let it fall and please don't feel guilty for leaving me Future, indeed that's what I saw when I saw you for the first time."

He croaks in a quavering voice that I end up feeling sorry for him, what if he's being sincere and he really loves me?

"Stop being stupid Anzani he's manipulating you again." My subconscious reprimands

"All the best for the future Mpho."

"All the best to you too, please never feel bad for leaving a relationship that never made you happy. I love you and I tried my best to make you happy but I failed to give you what you want."

“Bye Mpho.”

I cut the call and bury my face on the pillow bawling my eyes out, I loved Mpho..who am I fooling? I still love him even now. I saw a future with him I was almost sure he was the one for me and it hurts that it's over, but I need to put myself first because it's clear I'll never come first to him.

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NARRATED

“Quinton!”

" Quinton!"

His mother shouts standing outside his door, but Quinton doesn't reply.

“Quinton I’m walking in”

The mother warns before she pushes the door open and lets herself inside, worry masks her features when she finds her son lying skyward on the bed with eyes wide open staring at the ceiling seemingly deep in thought

“Aw mfanam’ what’s going on?”

(My son)

His mother says in a low voice before taking a seat next to him on the bed.

“I don’t want to talk about it, mom.”

“Then you need to talk to someone because I can see whatever it is weighing you down.”

“I’ll be alright mom.”

“What is it, is it this issue of you not finding the job you studied for, or is it our expenses? I told you to let me help you.”

He sits on his butt and takes his mother’s hands into his

“No mom of course that’s not it, you know I don’t mind taking care of you and my siblings. I don’t want you doing anything especially at your age.”

" Stop making me sound so old."

"Sorry but I don't want you overworking yourself."

“Then it’s the job thing?”

“No mom I know I’ll get a job at the right time. I know my turn will come.”

“Then what is it? I’m not leaving this room until you tell me what’s bothering you.”

“Mom please.”

“You’ll tell me when you’re ready.”

His mom says and puts her feet on the bed and sleeps skyward. Quinton looks at her in disbelief and finally lies skyward next to her when he realizes that the woman is not going anywhere.

“So, are you ready to tell me what’s bothering my handsome son?”

He smiles and blows out a heavy sigh

“I’m in love with someone....well I’ve always loved her, but I have never approached her because I have always known that she deserves much better than me.”

His lips spread into a smile as if picturing her face

“You should see her ma, she’s so beautiful, with pretty doe eyes, a cute little nose, and beautiful sexy lips.”

“Hey watch your mouth, I’m still your mother.”

His mother says smacking his hand and the pair erupts into a belly laugh

“Sorry ma but yeah she’s beautiful and kind.”

“Why do you say you don’t deserve her?”

“I have nothing to offer her, she deserves better than me. She deserves someone who will treat her like a Queen and give her everything her heart desires, so I made peace with loving her from a distance, but things took a turn when my friend fell in love with her.”

“Who, Mpho?”

“Yes, he asked her out and she agreed to date him. It broke my heart having to watch my friend loving the woman I love but I consoled myself with the fact that Mpho was better than me and would definitely give her the love she deserves.”

“Did he?”

“No, he didn’t. He doesn’t treat her like I know she deserves; he says he loves her, but I know you don’t treat someone you love like how he sometimes treats her, and it hurts me so much because I love her and seeing her being treated like that shatters my heart and soul. He made her cry today; I don’t know what he did to her, but she was in tears, and it left my heart crippled I swear if Mpho wasn’t in Germiston I would have beat him up. I don’t know what he told her about me, but she hates me, she told me she’s disgusted by me, and I won’t lie it hurt to hear those words coming from a woman who I love with every beat of my heart.”

“You really love her ne?”

“I do ma I do but I know I can never have her; she wouldn’t date someone like me.... look at me mom I have nothing to offer her and besides she is dating my friend so if there was a chance that she would date me in the past now there’s no hope

of her ever dating me even if she breaks up with my friend. She will never believe in my love for her; she'll think I'm lying to her."

"I hear you, my son. As much as I don't want you and Mpho fighting because of a girl because you two have been friends for as long as I can remember but I can see that you really love her so I'll advise you to not give up on her, fight for her since you can see that your friend doesn't love her or treat her like she deserves and if she's yours she'll love and accept you as you are. Your father used to wear torn underwear when we first started dating but I loved him like that so if this girl is meant to be yours, she'll love you and accept you as you come."

"That was back then, it's the twenty-first century now and things have changed. No girl wants a broke guy."

"No you're wrong, no girl wants a broke guy with no ambition, vision, or direction. Women don't want someone who's comfortable with living in poverty, and there's a difference between someone like that and someone who's broke and trying his best to improve his situation."

#20

“So how did the hearing go?” Karabo

This is the question I’ve been subjected to since I walked through the door in the morning, suddenly everyone is pretending to be my friend and wants to know how my hearing went. I’m annoyed by their fake concern because I know most of them would celebrate if I got fired.

“It was okay.” I reply and take a seat putting an apple and a banana in front of me.

“Do you think you’ll get final warning like Bongiwe?” Karabo

“I don’t know but I hope so.”

“Hmm, so is that all you’re going to eat?” She asks looking at my fruits

“Yes.”

Food is the last thing on my mind, my heart is sore it hurts more today than it did yesterday. Hearing Mpho confirm what Nancy told me cut my heart into a gazillion pieces, I don't know who I hate more between him and myself, him for lying to me and taking advantage of my love and myself for being so desperate for love and validation so much that I ignored all the signs in front of me and allowed him to treat me like trash. I'm disgusted with myself because I helped him treat me like a secret, an unworthy and underserving girlfriend because I didn't know my worth.

“No wonder you're this thin, you don't eat.”

“That's offensive.”

“No, it's not, everyone wants to be slim.” For the sake of peace, I ignore her statement and keep myself busy on the phone.

I log into the green app and it's so dry, the only new messages I have are from my WhatsApp groups. I don't know if it's just me but the older I get the less I communicate with my family and friends on WhatsApp, everyone seems to be busy with their own lives and the only way we stay updated about what's happening in each other's lives is by viewing one another's WhatsApp statuses. I have 185 WhatsApp contacts and I can't even remember when last I spoke to 90% of them, we only talk on Christmas and New years' day when we send each other those WhatsApp chain messages that have been forwarded many times. I log on to Facebook to check if my favorite author hasn't posted a new insert, I'm so obsessed with Sabelo and Ndalo's love story the storyline is different from the many books I've read it's refreshing honestly and I'm so intrigued.

I'm in the middle of an insert when a message pops up on top, it's an inbox from Mpilenhle Quinton Ndlovu I wonder what this one wants from me. I ignore it and resume reading but my curiosity won't let me be I end up logging into messenger and read his message

Him: "Good afternoon, I hope you're having a better day today.

I know you said I should stay away from you, but I need to talk to you about something important and unfortunately, it's not something we can discuss over the phone, it's something we need to talk about face to face. I know you're angry at me ....for a reason unbeknownst to me but please give me just one chance to talk to you and if you choose to never talk to me again after that I promise I will respect your decision and stay away from you.

You can call or send me a text on WhatsApp on this number 0619092876.”

I wonder what he wants to talk to me about, I broke up with his friend so there's nothing connecting us now, but it won't kill me to hear what he has to say and besides after today I never have to talk to him again.

Me: “I knock off at six, I'll be home by half past six you can come anytime between 6:30 and 7”

He's online so he instantly begins typing

Him: “Thank you for agreeing to see me, text me when you get home.”

I ignore his text after reading it and log out of messenger.

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QUINTON

I listened to my mother's advice and asked Anzani to meet with me and thank heavens she agreed to meet with me today when she comes back from work, I'm nervous about our meeting I won't lie but I'm also excited because I'll finally get an opportunity to tell her how I feel about her. What she decides to do afterwards is completely up to her, as long as I'll be set free from this secret. It's not easy seeing the one you love, love someone else it's even harder if that person is your best friend who's been there for you through the darkest times in your life that's why I took a step back and let them be hoping that what I feel for her will eventually go away but I was lying to myself because that didn't happen it grew instead.

It would be easier to stay away if Mpho at least loved her the way I know I would, but he doesn't, he says he loves her, but

his actions don't match his words and it hurts seeing her get treated that way when I know I can love her better. Mpho might be a douche to Anza, but he's been nothing but a good friend to me always there at my lowest offering a helping hand and never looks down on me. He doesn't deserve what I'm about to do to him especially because he didn't know I'm in love with Anzani when he asked her out, maybe he wouldn't have pursued a relationship with her had I told him I love her when he told me about his intention to ask her out. I tried to hide my feelings and sweep them under the carpet, but I failed because the heart wants what it wants and mine wants Anzani, and only her.

What I'm about to do is about to do will ruin our friendship but we don't choose who we fall in love with, I take a deep breath and ring his number.

"Bishop." He says picking up on the second ring

"How are you, my bishop?"

"Not so good my man, Anza broke up with me yesterday."

Why do I feel guilty, shouldn't I be happy that they are no longer together?

"I'm sorry to hear that...what did you do to her?"

"She found out about Lelo being mine, I should have listened to you and not keep the secret from her."

"Did you tell her your adopted mother forced herself on you? it wasn't your fault; you were taken advantage of."

"I did but she didn't want to hear it, she says it's an excuse men don't get raped. She even went as far as asking me how did my pen\*\* erect if I didn't want it?"

"That doesn't sound like Anzani Mpho, not the same Anza who allowed you to sneak her out of your house like a side chick and believed your lame excuse. Not the Anza who forgave you after you pretended like you didn't know her in front of people on

the day of Portia's funeral, why would she crucify you for something that's not your fault...it doesn't make sense."

"I'm telling you what happened, it's up to you to take it or not."

"I don't believe you."

"So, you'll believe Anza over your best friend? Wow have you forgotten everything I've done for you, it's true what they say ...people forget easily."

"I didn't think you were helping me only to remind me about it one day, I thought you were doing it out of the goodness of your heart. Don't worry I'll repay every plate of food I ate at your house."

"No, I didn't mean it like that man..."

"Save it, I called you to tell you something important."

“Okay I’m listening.”

“I’m in love with Anzani, I’ve always loved her and I’m going to pursue her. I loved her before you even noticed her

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but I know that doesn’t excuse that she’s your ex and that I’m breaking the bro code, I tried getting over her, but I failed, I promise I wouldn’t break the bro code if my feelings for her were not immense. I love her so much, with every beat of my heart. I love her with my soul and every bone in my body, I love her so much that I resented you every time you treated her like a scum, I respect you and our friendship that is why I’m telling you before I confess my feelings to her. I know I have betrayed you so please find it in your heart to forgive me, if I could stop loving her for the sake of our friendship, I promise I would, but I love her so much I don’t think I will ever stop.”

“Bishop did you hear what I just said?” I say when he doesn’t reply

“Mpho man, please say something.” He starts laughing, a full-blown belly laugh

“Wow you’re so ambitious I’ll give you that. So, you honestly think a nobody like you will replace me? wow what a joke. You’re not Anza’s type, you have nothing to offer her I hope she laughs in your face when you confess your stupid feelings for her. No girl will want your pauper ass, wow you’re ambitious to think you would go after the same woman I was with please know your types ...we are not in the same caliber, so we don’t have the same type, try one of those girls who play cards in dirty gowns all day long in your street they are the ones who are better suited for you not Anza she’s too beautiful for a pauper like you. Do yourself a favor and don’t embarrass yourself by confessing your nonsensical feelings to Anzani.” He says and cuts the call.

If his aim was to shutter my confidence as a man, then he has succeeded. I never knew Mpho could be so spiteful.

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ANZANI

The meeting with Q has been the only thing on my mind since we spoke on messenger, I feel so anxious because I don't know what he wants to talk to me about. Mpho tried calling me earlier, but I cut the call and blocked his number. I'm not over him so the last thing I need right now is to have him sweet talk me into taking him back, he's quite a smooth talker that one so for my sanity it's best if him and I don't talk at least not soon.

I sent Quinton a WhatsApp text over thirty-five minutes ago telling him I'm back home and he hasn't replied yet he's online, you'd swear I'm the one who wanted to meet up because wawu moguy be twerking like I'm the one who asked for the meeting. I'm giving him five minutes to respond then I'm blocking his number and never speaking to him again, I open his chat to see if he's still online. His last seen says "1 minute ago" I sigh in disbelief and press the three dots on the right-hand corner to block him, I receive an incoming call from him just as I'm about to press 'block'.

"Hello"

"Hi, I'm outside please come out."

“Okay give me a sec.”

“No problem.” He says and hangs up.

I take a quick look at myself in the mirror and apply lip-gloss before making my way outside. I spot him at the corner, he’s wearing black jeans, a navy hooded jersey and black All stars and he has his back facing me giving me a chance to admire his beautiful body. He’s so tall I love how I have to look up to see his face, I love how his butt looks inside of those jeans and how those toned thighs and legs of his are filling his jeans. Damn my dirty mind!

“Hey.”

I say standing behind him. He turns around and flashes me that beautiful smile of his causing an involuntary smile to embrace my lips.

“Hi.”

He says and pulls me into a hug. This one is different from the one he gave me in church, this is the 'I've been dying to hold you in my arms' kind of hug the 'where have you been all my life' kind of hug. Okay I'm kidding but the hug isn't just a normal one, this one has soul and meaning.

"How are you?" He asks studying my face.

"I'm okay and you?"

I'm so cross with myself right now, I'm supposed to be angry at this man not speaking softly like a new bride, smiling ear to ear like a fool and writing on the ground with my feet like a love-struck teenager! Urg, I hate myself I'm so weak. I'm such a hoe shem, it hasn't even been a day since I broke up with my boyfriend yet here I am dying to taste his best friend's lips.

"I'm good too. Anzani I need to tell you something but I'm not sure if now is the right time to tell you, I don't want you thinking I'm taking advantage of you or the situation you're in."

“What situation?”

“Your breakup with Mpho.”

“Oh that?”

“Yes, that. I think it’s best we have this conversation another day when you’ve healed from the breakup.”

This one better be kidding me, he thinks he’ll just spike my curiosity and leave me hanging aibo angeke I want to know, and I want to know now!

“No there’s no need to wait, I want to hear what you want to say now. Speak now or forever hold your peace.”

Yes, I’m blackmailing him, and I hope it works. He looks at me for a while and huffs

“Okay, I’ll tell you even though I don’t think now is the right time.” he takes my hands into his and looks into my eyes

“Anzani, I am in love with you.”

What?

“Yes, I love you so much it hurts to see you loving someone else who isn’t me. I have loved you for years now, I still remember the first day I saw you” he says and chuckles “You were wearing

a purple dress with pink heels, and I said to myself someone better call the fashion police!" I punch his chest and we both laugh "You looked even more hideous with colorful braids but you made my heart skip a beat and I told myself that's my wife..yes she can't bath properly yet and her face is shining with Vaseline but that's the one I want. I watched you grow up to be this beautiful woman in front of me and I loved you more with each day that passed, at first my excuse for not asking you out was that you're still young then it was because I felt you deserved better than what I could give you. I made peace with loving you from a distance and it was easier to do so when I didn't know what was going on in your love life, but that changed when you started dating my friend. At first, I consoled myself because I thought that you're with someone better than me but seeing how he treated you broke me because I knew you deserved better....Forgive me for being a coward and not professing my feelings for you before Mpho did because he has probably changed your perspective on relationships and it will be hard for you to love with your all without doubts or fear of being let down by the one you love from now henceforth. You'll probably start to overthink and expect the worst because of what you've been through but I'm willing to love you until you believe in love again... I love you my Venda Queen, uyi thembalani and the only one I want to be with. My heart beats for you but I'll accept it if you don't feel the same."



#21

“So, what do you say Thembalami?”

He says barely audible linking our foreheads. Being so close to him has me feelings things I never knew possible, there’s this warmth I feel in my heart and a strong sense of calm and peace even though my heart is racing. I think I love him.

“I think I should take some time and get over what happened with Mpho before answering your question, the last thing I want is to make you a rebound...you don’t deserve that because I can see that you truly love me and if I’m going to love you then I want to be all in.”

He cups my face and caresses my cheeks with his thumbs

“I understand and I will wait for you as long you need me to wait, I just have one request.”

“What?”

“Please let me kiss you, just this once.”

Judge me all you want but I've been dying to taste his lips since I got here so I stand on my tip-toes and brush my lips against his. His hands slowly move down to my waist, he snakes them hands around my waist pulling my body close to his and as if in tune our lips part at the same time and he skillfully sucks on my bottom lip. I feel moisture between my legs as he devours my lips, I lock my arms around his neck and deepen the kiss feeling my heart jack hammering inside my chest. We kiss until we both run out of breath, he plants his soft lips on my forehead and tightens his arms around my waist.

“I love you so much Anzani, whatever happens I want you to know that I love you.”

I don't reply I just snuggle in his broad arms drinking in his scent. We hold each other for a good ten minutes before finally letting go of each other.

“I should go.”

I don't want him to go yet but he's right, it's getting late.

"Yeah."

"Please take your time Thembalam' I will wait for you, okay?"

I nod my head vigorously.

"Now let me take you home."

"You're dramatic Mpilo, my aunt's house is two houses from here."

"Nope, I am not taking chances I want to see you getting inside the yard."

"Okay then let's go."

We walk towards my aunt's house holding hands

“Goodnight. Ngiyakuthanda yezwa?”

(I love you, okay?)

He says kissing my knuckles

“Goodnight Mpilo.” He chuckles

“Yaphapha konje.”

“What? it's your name mos.”

“Ok Gladys.”

What? where does he know my other name from?

“Didn't think I knew your other name?” he says smiling

“Mxm just go.” I say pouting my lips

“Hug me one last time then I’ll go.”

He says with his arms spread open, I throw myself into his arms, he picks me up without a warning. I giggle and tell him to put me down, but you and I know that’s not what I want right, I’m just acting.

“You’re so portable thembalam’ ngiyohlezi ngikugcogcoshile.”  
(I’ll always carry you in my arms.)

I love the sound of that but ke for now I have to act like I don’t phela I’m still giving him the run around I can’t be too easy

“Put me down Quinton.”

“Okay.”

He puts me down and I run inside the yard. He laughs and taps his chest making a heart sign with his fingers showing me that his heart beats for me, oh my word is it too early to say thungisani?

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It's been a few days since Q promised to wait for me. I like Quinton but yoh dating Mpho's best friend ai that's savage what will people think of me? Forget people because no one knew about us except Q and his siblings, I know I don't want to get between friends but yoh sana what if I refuse and regret it for the rest of my life? What if I never find someone who will love me like he does? So I'm doing me this time around people always talk either way!

I don't want to rush into this relationship I want to take my time and get to know him better and get over Mpho fully, but Quinton makes it hard for me to resist him. That passionate kiss we shared the other day is all I think about every day, damn that man can kiss! I can't wait until him and I can kiss every day. We haven't seen each other since that day, we only talk on the phone-I want to see him, but he says he won't be able to hold

himself once he's next to me he'll kiss me, and he doesn't want to coerce me to make a decision or rush my healing process and I love him for that.

It's Tuesday today, the day I'll finally get the results of my hearing. I'm scared because I don't know what to expect, it can go either way really and I sure as hell not ready to be part of the statistic of the black unemployed youth but I guess I have no choice to accept whatever today brings.

"Don't worry my child, I have prayed for you the verdict will be in your favor."

"I hope so aunt."

I take my lunchbox inside the fridge and put it inside my bag

"Goodbye aunt, I'm leaving."

"Bye my love."

Fortunately, I find the Heidelberg mall taxi short of one person when I get to the rank so I'm at work 20 minutes later. I greet the security at the door and head to the canteen to put my bag inside my locker, Sashni walks in carrying an iPad

"Just the person I wanted to see."

She says swiping her finger on the screen

"Oh yeah? What's going on?"

"The VM's in your department have changed."

"All of them?"

"Yep."

"Ok, lend me the iPad so I can see if we have the stock."

She smiles

“This is why I love you; you never complain. You always do your job.”

I laugh

“Yeah right.”

I take the Ipad from her and start looking around in my department to see if I have the clothes shown in the VM.

“Nathi!”

I says when he walks past me heading to the door

“Sure ntwana.”

“Do you have these shirts at the back?”

I ask showing him a black lace formal shirt with white polka dots

“Yes.”

“Ok please take them out, including these jeans and dresses if you have them. The rest are on the floor.”

“Ok ntwana I’ll look for them and bring them to you when I find them.”

“Thank you.”

I hang the iPad string around my neck like a noose, fetch the step ladder and rail and begin working. Two hours later I’m sweaty and tired from moving things around trying to copy what’s shown on the iPad, my heart almost stops beating when Carl passes my department shooting straight to the office.

Damn it, it's time. A minute later Nathi emerges from the corner

"They are asking for you in the office."

"Alright."

I climb down the ladder and toddle to the office, once I'm at the door I knock once and a bold "come in" booms from inside. I take a deep breath and turn the doorknob.

"Greetings." I say

"Please close the door and take a seat." Daniel

I close the door and pull the plastic chair and seat down holding my breath.

"You still remember the gentleman, right? His name is Carl Mazibuko, he was chairing your hearing."

I nod and swallow nothingness

“Okay then, over to you Mr. Carl.” Daniel

“Thank you, D, Anza I’m here to give you your results like I promised.”

He grabs a document and starts reading everything that happened in the hearing, what I said and what Mr. Mngomezulu said in defense, and he concludes his speech with the words “Therefore Anzani Munyai is found guilty and is dismissed with immediate effect.”

And in that moment, I want to curl myself into a ball and cry my eyes out

“I’m sorry Anzani.” He says

“It’s ok.” I say with a shaky voice swallowing the lump on my throat.

“Askies nana ne”

Mr. D says rubbing my back in circles. Carl gives me a document to sign and then gives me my copy of the document he was reading.

“So, do I have to go now, or do I wait until after work?” I ask

“You have to leave now.” I nod standing up

“Please give back your staff discount card.” Carl

I nod and take it out from my card holder, give it to him and head to the canteen to fetch my bag from the locker. The conversation dies down when the ladies see me walk in and their eyes follow all my movements as I take my bag from the locker and walk out without saying a word, I’m sure they are laughing at me now. I don’t explain myself to anyone, I just

walk out the main door without saying a word I'll leave Daniel with the responsibility to confirm what they already know. It feels weird to be going back home at this time of the day, I am still in disbelief and surprisingly my eyes are dry as a Kalahari dessert tears are no where to be found.

I don't feel anything for now, I'm like a zombie walking straight without looking on my sides. I get off extension 7 at the clinic instead of my usual stop and ring Quinton's number, he answers on the third ring

"Thembalam"

"I'm at the clinic please come and get me."

"What?"

"Please."

"Okay, I'm coming."

I hang up and wait for him.

“Anza what’s going, why are you back so early?”

He says approaching me pacing with worry all over his face. I half run meeting him halfway and throw myself in his arms. Although confused he holds me tight

“What’s wrong nhliziyo yami?”

(My heart)

“I was dismissed.”

I say and a loud sob breaks out of my lips. His hold tightens around my body as he repeatedly whispers “I’m sorry” in my ears. Just like that I lost my job!

#22

TWO WEEKS LATER

“I woke up early and prepared this for you, my child.”

My aunt says giving me a heavy Tupperware that is filled to the brim with food.

“It’s beef stew and dumplings, your favorite.” She says with a smile

“Thank you so much, aunt.”

I put the Tupperware container inside a plastic so that when the gravy spills it doesn’t spill all over my things before putting it inside my duffel bag then I give my aunt a tight hug and peck on the cheek.

“Have a safe journey, my child.” She says when we break the hug

“Won’t you give me a hug?” I ask looking at Mulanga who’s sitting on the couch wearing a long face seemingly sulking.

“Mulanga stop being a baby ... give your cousin a hug so that she can leave, I don’t want her to arrive in Venda late.” Aunt

“Come”

I say with my arms spread open. She jolts up from the couch and throws herself in my arms and sniffles, oh my sweet Mulanga.

“Shhh don’t cry cuz I’ll be back before you know it,” I say rubbing her back in circles

“I’m going to miss you so much.” She says in a breaking voice

“I know, I’m going to miss you too.”

We break the hug after a while. She wipes her tears with the sleeves of her dress.

“How long will you be in Vuwani for?” Mulanga

“I don’t know, I’m not sure but I promise I’ll be back soon to start with job hunting.”

The probability of finding a job in Gauteng is greater than back home in Limpopo so whether I like it or not I need to come back.

“I’ll sleep with mma until you come back, I won’t be able to sleep in that bedroom without you.”

“Stop making Anza feel guilty, she needs this time out and besides Lutendo and her mother haven’t seen her in months I’m sure they miss her a lot.” Aunt

True, I also miss them so much and I can’t wait to see them.

“Let me get going, aunt.”

“Are you sure you don’t want me to accompany you to the taxi rank at least?”

“Yes, I’m sure aunt, I’ll be fine Mulanga will help me.”

Q is outside waiting for me that’s why I don’t want my aunt walking me out.

“Okay then have a safe trip.”

“Bye aunt”

Mulanga walks out first pulling my luggage bag and I follow behind her with the duffel bag hanging on my shoulder. Quinton brisk walks towards us when he sees us approaching, he takes the luggage bag from Mulanga after I’ve introduced

them. They know about each other, but this is the first time they meet in person.

“Bye cousin have a safe trip.” Mulanga

We share a hug and baby kiss before she goes back inside the yard.

Quinton and I flag Johannesburg taxi, can you believe that he insists on going with me to Jozi because he says the CBD is not safe, apparently, I could get robbed or stolen- like anyone would want to steal me! He says he'll only be at peace after seeing me get inside the taxi to Venda, he's dramatic but I'm not complaining I'm enjoying the treatment matter of fact. I have never had anyone care for me and love me as he does, it feels amazing to finally have someone who puts me first without having to ask for it, someone who would do anything to make me happy, someone who treats me like I'm the most important person in his life oh I'm so in love with Quinton and I plan to give our love a chance when I return from my mini holiday at home. I think I'm ready to love and be loved by him. We are sitting on the first seat behind the driver, his left arm is

hanging over my shoulder while my arms are wrapped around his waist and my head is resting on his shoulder blade.

The driver and the two passengers sitting next to us have been giving us weird looks since we got inside the taxi, but I couldn't care less about them, I'm going to make the most out of these last moments I have with him seeing that I won't be seeing him for a while, and I know I'll miss him dearly because I already miss him.

"I'm going to miss you so much thembalami"

He says as if reading my thoughts and kisses the crown of my head. I close my eyes savoring the moment.

The drive from Heidelberg to Johannesburg is approximately 38 minutes but we took longer because of traffic on N3, most passengers were sleeping by the time we reached Johannesburg. Quinton and I got off at MTN rank and walked to Noord taxi rank where I'll take a taxi to Venda.

“Sawubona bhuti kunjani?” Quinton

(Greetings brother how are you)

He says greeting the queue marshal

“Ngiyaphila kunjani mfo”

(I’m well and how are you.)

“Nami ngiyaphila bhuti.... bengisacela ukubuza ukuthi ama taxi aya e Vuwani, eVenda ngingawathola ngakuphi?”

(I’m good. May I please ask where I can find taxis to Vuwani in Venda.)

“Yileya but it’s mix, you’ll get off at Zwikwengani just before Thohoyandou and take a cab from there to Vuwani”

(There it is)

He says pointing at a black Quantum taxi with three passengers inside

“Thank you so much, let’s go sthandwa sam.”

When we reach the taxi stall, he wraps his big muscular arms around me giving me a tight squeeze, and we share a long passionate kiss before I climb inside the taxi with my bags.

“Ngiyakuthanda yezwa?”

(I love you, okay?)

That’s the last thing he says before he walks off, tears burn my eyes as I watch his retreating figure disappear into the rowdy Joburg crowd. I feel empty without him, and I’m tempted to get off this taxi and run after him, but I need this time out from Gauteng. It hasn’t even been five minutes since we parted ways, but I miss him already so much that I feel like crying, I take out my phone and send him a text

Me: “I miss you already Mpilo wanga 😞.”

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MPHO

“Let me refill our glasses,” I say

It’s a chilled Saturday afternoon, I’m with my friends playing FIFA in my apartment.

“Yeah, do that while I beat Thato's ass again and again until he admits that he’s no match for me when it comes to this game”  
Zweli

“Dream on,” Thato says in response causing Zweli and me to laugh.

Thato is so in denial; he’s been beaten multiple times but he still doesn’t want to admit that Zweli is king in this game. I get up from the couch, take our glasses to the kitchen and refill them with Coke before going back to the lounge to join my

friends. I set the glasses on top of the TV stand and settle on the couch going through my phone viewing WhatsApp statuses, my heart almost stops beating when I view Quinton's status. He posted a picture of Anza and captioned it 'I'm going to miss you so much Thembalami♥, it's only been a few hours since you left but it feels like years. I don't think I'll survive sthandwa sam please come back☹.'

So, he went ahead and asked her out after I told him not to? and that easy bitch agreed to date him knowing very well that he is my friend? Wow so much for loving me! I mean no self-respecting woman would move from one friend to the other unless she's a bitch with no morals and values. I put my phone down and try to focus on the game, but my mind keeps harking back to Quinton's status, so I send him a text.

Me: "Wow, I have always known that you are envious of me, but I never really entertained it because I didn't think it was this bad, I didn't know you envied me to the extent of being attracted to trash just because it happens to be my leftovers but I'm not surprised crumbs are what you're used to aftercall. That's why you went after that b\*tch Anzani knowing very well that she's trash, have you seen her disgusting body yet? She has ugly scars on her chest just above her breasts, they look so

disgusting I almost threw up when I saw them for the first time, I wonder how you survive but ke you're both trash so I'm not surprised that you can handle each other. Have you slept with her yet, but I guess not because I know you'll definitely run after your first time with her, she's so wide down there so be prepared to drown inside that ocean she calls a vagina. I'm glad that I never posted her pictures anywhere just imagine the shame of people knowing that I once dated someone who's now dating a pauper like you."

I log out of WhatsApp after sending the text. Feeling better than I did when I saw Quinton's status.

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.br/.

QUINTON

I have a BEng degree in Electrical Engineering, so I know a lot about electricity and fixing electronics and appliances and that's how I make my money by fixing broken appliances and electronics for people around the neighborhood that is, I'm good at what I do so people always refer their friends to me. I

don't make much from this hustle, but I make enough to cover some of the expenses at home and I've also started selling Herbal life products to make extra cash so things are no longer that bad at home.

When I came back home from Johannesburg from accompanying my lady, I found a customer waiting for me, she had a problem with her phone it was no longer charging so I had to replace the charging system. I asked her to come back around 5 to fetch her phone, I prefer working inside my room and I can't exactly bring customers into my room, so they always drop off their things and collect them later. I was busy with her phone for a while but now I am finally done, the only thing left to do is to test if it's fixed by charging it, great it's charging. I gather my tools and put them away before making my way to the main house.

“Ma uphi u Nobuhle?”

(Ma where's Nobuhle)

I ask when I find my mom in the lounge watching Days of our lives.

“I don’t know, did you look for her in her room?”

“Yes, but she’s not inside.”

“I don’t know where she is then, what do you want from her?”

“I want her to take this phone back to the owner, I’m done fixing it.”

“Didn’t you say that girl should come and fetch it later?”

“I did but I’m done now so I wanted to return it.”

“Okay, give it to me I’ll tell your sister to take it to her when she comes back.”

“Thanks, ma.”

I give it to her and head back to my room. I take off my shoes and hop on my bed, laying on my back, and reply the many messages on my WhatsApp, most people are commenting on Anza's picture congratulating me for having such a beautiful girlfriend lol if only they knew that I'm still waiting for her to say 'yes' while others are shocked that I'm dating.

Gift: "Aw Nceku mase kujola nawe kusho kona kuthi umhlaba uyaphela, phela wena uyi nceku awuzwani nento eziphume ndleleni. Lihle iThembalakhó mfethu siyakubongisa, umphathe kahle ubukeka nje ngomuntu oright. There must be something special about her for her to grab your attention, the Quinton I know doesn't have time for women."

(Man of God the world is really ending if you're in a relationship because you're a man of God who doesn't like to stray from the path of righteousness. Your girlfriend is beautiful congrats man, take care of her she looks like a good person)

I laugh reading his message. Most people at church think that I'm scared of women because I've never approached any of the ladies in the church, I always tried my chances outside of the church, plus I'm always sharing the word so to them I'm brother Quinton who wants nothing to do with mjolo.

I feel a strong feeling of vexation and annoyance as I read Mpho's message, the things he says about Anzani make me wish I could fly to Germiston and beat his ass. I have no problem with him calling me names, but I won't accept this level of disrespect where Anzani is concerned, he seems to have forgotten me I see. I don't have the energy nor time to be exchanging insults with him via texts like a hood rat, so I block his number and delete his message, I'm going to break his neck the next time I see him he'll stay in Germiston, and not come to Ratanda if he knows what's good for him.

#23

Now I understand phenomenons like 'there's no place like home' and 'home is where the heart is.' Living with my aunt and Mulanga is good, amazing really, but nothing compares to being at home with my mother and little brother, I'm at my happiest my heart is full and at peace. This is exactly what I needed after everything I've been through in the past few months, I needed this break, a change of scenery and a pause from the chaotic Gauteng life after losing my job within a blink of an eye. Home is different from Gauteng, there's peace, calm, and serenity here and I can catch a breather. Vuwani is not overpopulated like most townships in Gauteng are, even the way of life here is somewhat different from Gauteng.

I'm sleeping when I feel the door creak open and footsteps shuffling inside the room, I flutter my heavy eyelids open and notice my mother's blurry figure opening curtains and windows.

"Wakey wakey!" she says in a high-pitched voice

“Mma!”

My little brother whines pulling the covers over his head. Yes, you guessed it, he slept in my bed. He asked to sleep with me last night and I couldn't refuse, my little brother and I have a very close relationship. He's my baby this one and is so attached to me, he's also my number one cheerleader the boy never misses an opportunity to tell me how beautiful I am. He's also the first person to notice when I have a new hairstyle on or when I'm wearing something new before my mom does, in his eyes I'm the most beautiful girl in the world I swear no one strokes my ego like he does and I love him to bits.

“It's Sunday there's no time for sleeping in, it's time for church.” Mma

“I thought I'd miss church today and go next week.”

“Why?” she asks with a frown on her face

“I'm still tired from yesterday's travelling I want to rest.”

“You’ll rest when you come back from church, there’s no excuse church only takes a few hours and besides I want you to see the prophet. That money didn’t grow legs and walk to your till, someone put it there because they wanted to get you fired and I want to know who it was.”

“What good is that going to do mma, I’ve already lost my job and knowing who set me up will not change anything nor give me my job back.”

“But you can’t just ignore it and pretend it didn’t happen, you need to know so you can be aware of who your enemy is.”

“I guess you’re right mma, I’ll come with you to church.”

“Good don’t forget to bring the R300 fee for one-on-one consultation with the prophet.”

“He charges R300 to prophesy people?” I’m shocked, I thought it was free

“No, he only charges for the one-on-one sessions because you’ll be taking time from his personal time, time he should be spending with his family. He prophesies for free during his services, but I prefer one-on-one because all his time will be dedicated to helping you.”

“Hmm.”

I normally wouldn’t pay for consultations with a prophet because South Africa is a hotspot for fake prophets so you end up not knowing who’s fake and who’s a true prophet of God, but my mother seems to trust this one, she’s been singing his praises since I arrived so I will take her advice. I trust her judgement.

“Okay get ready the service starts at 10am.” She says and leaves the room

“How are you big boy?”

“I’m good, I’m just happy that you are home...I missed you a lot Anza.” He says and wraps his arms around me, I hold him back and squeeze him in my embrace.

“I missed you too, I was so sad when you couldn’t come to Ratanda for easter holidays. How are things going at school?” He releases himself from my arms and looks at me with excitement dancing in his eyes

“School is good, I’m doing very well do you want to see my term 2 report?”

“Yes!”

I say with a smile matching his excitement. He jumps out of bed and runs out of my bedroom to fetch his report card. I use this time to check on Quinton, my heart swell with joy yesterday when I saw myself on his status, I didn’t expect him to publicly declare his love for me like that. I wonder what brother Kgahliso thinks of me now, he knows I was with Mpho because he’s the one who gave him my numbers. He probably thinks I’m some hoe who came between friends.

Me: “Good morning 😊.”

Him: “Good morning my Queen ❤️👉, can I videocall?”

Me: “Yes, you can 😊.”

He doesn't waste time, he video calls almost immediately. I sit up leaning my back against the headboard and accept his videocall.

“Hey.”

“Thembalami.”

He's still under the covers and judging from how raspy and hoarse his voice sounds, it hasn't been long since he woke up. How does he manage to wake up looking this handsome? I can't seem to get used to how handsome he looks, I get mesmerized everytime I gape at him.

“How are you?”

“I’m not good, I miss you so much Sthandwa sam.” He says and pouts his lips

“I miss you too, my heart literally broke as I stared at you walk away from me at the taxi rank, I was tempted to run after you.” He chuckles

“You should’ve.. anyway how is home, I’m sure everyone is happy to have you back ne.”

“Home is amazing, you should’ve seen mom’s face when I walked through the door, she was beaming with joy. Lutendo was following me around like I will run away and even asked to sleep with me.”

“That’s good my love, I’m happy for you. I know how much you missed them.” I’m about to reply when Lutendo runs inside the room and sets his report card on my lap.

“Check how well I passed.” He’s beaming in fervor completely oblivious to the fact that I’m on videocall.

“Wow this is great I’m so proud of you, keep passing this well until the end of the year I will reward you.”

He passed all his subjects with Level 6 and 7.

“Really? With what?”

“I don’t know yet, it might be a phone or maybe that sneaker you like so much..impress me and I’ll rock your world.”

He screams and starts doing the Thuso Phala dance move in victory or rather what was meant to be one because wawu my brother is such a horrible dancer. Quinton breaks into a hearty laugh, chagrin covers Lutendo like a blanket when he finally discerns where the laughter is booming from.

“Mma!...I think mma is calling me.”

He says and scurries out of the room leaving me and Quinton in stitches.

“That was mean

Advertisement

why did laugh at him like that?” I say still laughing

“I’m sorry, I couldn’t hold myself...I thought I can’t dance but yho Lutendo is worse.”

“He’s a child cut him some slack.”

“Nope he doesn’t know how to dance, period.” We laugh

“I’m sure brother Kgahliso thinks I’m some bitch after seeing me on your status.”

“Why does what he thinks matter?” he asks with a quirked eyebrow

“He knows I was dating Mpho, he’ll think I’m the one who came between you two”

“But you didn’t come between us mos so why stress about what he thinks?”

“He doesn’t know what happened.”

“So you want to explain yourself to him? Come on sthandwa Sam you need to stop giving people so much power over your life, I don’t like it. People like you tend to be obsessed with portraying perfection in front of everyone while they do the most despicable things in the dark or while neglecting their feelings and drowning in a sea of gloom, that’s why we have so many Christians who lead a double life because they fear people more than they fear God. Christians who are more concerned about other people’s opinions of them than what God thinks of them, what good is it to have everyone think

you're perfect and good when God knows how what you really are?"

"I hear you."

"I'm not saying be disrespectful and not care about people around you but don't live your life according to what people say because you'll end up living life to please them and not God, I am sure you didn't think about what God thinks about you being in a relationship me, but you thought about Kgahliso...is Kgahliso your God that you must impress him? God knows you're not a hoe so why bother yourself about other people's opinion of you?"

"I don't know I guess I've always cared about what people think of me."

"Why do you care so much about what they think? Why do you need validation so much...sthandwa sam do you have a low esteem?"

“I don’t know, maybe.”

“Where do your esteem issues stem from?...you can talk to me thembalami.” He says giving me the ‘you can talk to me and I’m here for you’ look.

“We’ll talk face to face when I come back.”

“Okay, don’t think I’ll let this one go. Are you going to church?”

“Yes, are you?”

“Yes, let me not keep you. We will talk after church, ngiyak’thanda yezwa?”

I nod my head vigorously feeling emotional from his little speech.

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The service surpassed my expectations, minus the scorching heat I enjoyed every minute of the service it was amazing. Lutendo went back home after church while mom and I remained behind for my one-on-one session with the prophet. We're sitting outside the room he uses for his consultations waiting for him to call us in, I'm nervous because I don't know what to expect.

"You can come in." he says standing at the door

I stand up and follow my mother inside. He sits on a gold couch set in the middle of the room.

"Please take a seat." He says gesturing towards the black chairs lined parallel to his couch.

"How can I help you today?" I'm anxious so I allow mom to do the talking.

“Prophet, I need your help with my daughter, this is her second year after completing her degree, but she still hasn’t found a job she studied for. She was working at Mr. Price, but she lost her job two weeks ago after R1300 was found in her till. Please help her, I’m worried about her.”

“I hear you mama.” he says then he silently eyes me for a few minutes

“Can you please excuse us mama; I would like to talk to your daughter in private.”

“Okay prophet, Anza I’ll be outside.” She says sheepishly and leaves the room.

“Come closer don’t be afraid.” He's pointing at a chair next to him. I move my seat to the one next to him.

“You have a very big problem, but don’t be afraid I will help you. I have helped a lot of people in the past.” He says with a coy smile

“You have regular pain in your stomach, cramps to be precise ...these cramps become extremely unbearable during your periods, and you think it’s period pains, but they are not, you have something inside your stomach I don’t know what it’s called in your language, but others call it ibala it’s shaped like a tongue, it's moving every time you feel pains in your stomach.”

What he’s saying about the cramps and intense period pain is true

“You have what we call a spiritual husband, do you ever get dreams of yourself having sex with a man?”

“No, I dream of myself about to have sex, but I always wake up before penetration can take place.”

“Okay, maybe you forget. Sometimes we forget our dreams, but you have a blood covenant with an evil spirit...people who have spiritual husbands or wives do not get married, a man might come to you with good intentions and be truly in love you but how he sees you will change after having sex with you

because of the spiritual husband. That's why your relationships don't work out, the man always changes after having sex with you...you need deliverance."

I'm inclined not to believe what he's saying because no one has ever left me or changed after having sex with me, my Virgin breaker didn't change I'm the one who left him because I resented him for manipulating me to give him my purity while I wasn't ready and Mpho also didn't change because of sex. He was a red flag right from the beginning I just chose to ignore the signs in front of me, and those two are the only people I had sex with in my life so I don't believe him or am I in denial?

"I'll give you this oil, I trust it I know it'll help you. Sprinkle a few drops in your water every day when you're bathing until it's finished." He says giving me a small bottle of oil

"Please stand up let me pray for you."

I stand up and raise my hands to the heavens. He prays for me breaking blood covenants with evil spirits and pleads the blood

of Jesus over my body, soul and spirit and over the bed where I sleep and casts out all evil working in my life.

“You are free in Jesus’ name amen.”

“Amen.”

“So do you live around here?”

“No, I moved to Ratanda because of work. I’m only here to visit for a couple of weeks then I’m going back to start job hunting”

“Do you attend church that side?”

“Yes, Faith Mission.”

“Oh I know it, it’s a good church. Give me your number so that you can keep me updated on what’s happening even when you go back to Gauteng.” He says giving me his phone. I give him my number and he immediately calls

“That’s my number, save it. I’m Prophet Abara.” I save his number and give him his R300.

“The money in your till was put by one of your colleagues but don’t fret about them you’ll soon find a job.” Oh wow! I wonder who it was between Bongiwe and Nontobeko

“Can you tell me her name?”

“No, you don’t need to know it won’t help you in any way. You’ll soon get another job, an end to one journey means the beginning of another.”

“Okay prophet.”

“You can leave.”

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“So, what did he say?” Mom asks when we walk through the front door of our house.

“He said a lot, he told me about sexual dreams and having a spiritual husband and spoke about the cramps in my stomach saying I have ibala or something like that and gave me oil to bath with.”

“Hmm didn’t he say anything about the money in your till?”

“He said someone put it there but refused to tell me who it was.”

“Okay, then why do you look like that?”

“I don’t know how to feel about what he said, I’m on the fence I don’t know if I believe him or not.”

“How come, you just said he picked up the cramps in your stomach?”

“But everything he said about my relationships isn’t true...No one has ever left me or changed on me after having sex with me.”

“So, you admit that you’ve been having sex?”

Oh, my goodness I shouldn’t have said that, now I wish I could disappear. I’m so embarrassed I can’t even look my mother in the eye.

“I’m asking Anzani..”Do I reply? Nope!

“Maybe the prophet saw something in the future that was yet to happen but by praying for you he has prevented it from happening.”

#24

I can't put my finger on it but something has changed with Anzani, I can feel her slipping away from me emotionally with each day that passes and the thought of losing her before I get a chance to be with her and love her petrifies me. She always insists there's nothing wrong when I ask her what's wrong but I know I'm not crazy there's something going on, I'm not imagining the distance between us something is off and I don't know what to think anymore. I thought I'd wait until she's back from Venda to confront her about this but I'm afraid it might be too late by then so I'm getting to the bottom of this now. I call her and lay on my back waiting for her to accept my video call

"Hi."

"Thembalami."

I say and gauge her reaction. She smiles but the smile doesn't reach her eyes.

“Anzani what’s going on, please talk to me....did I do something wrong?”

“No.”

“Then what..is it Mpho, did he say something to you?”

“No, I blocked his number. Him and I don’t talk.”

“Then what is it, was it Kgahliso did he say something to you?”

“No.”

“Then what? Please don’t do this to me Anza, you’re breaking my heart. I love you and I don’t want to lose you.”

“You won’t lose me.”

“But I am losing you, I can feel you slowly slipping away from me. Please tell me what’s wrong, I’m begging you.”

She looks at me for a while

“I’m scared okay... I’m scared that you’ll wake up one day and not love me anymore, I don’t want to be too attached to you so that I won’t be too hurt when it finally happens. I’m only trying to protect my heart, I can’t take anymore heartache.” She says and her eyes well up with tears.

“What are you talking about? Why would I stop loving you?”

She bites her bottom lip as tears roll down her cheeks but she doesn’t answer

“Tell me Anzani, why do you think I’ll stop loving you. I’m confused I thought you knew how much I love you, what happened suddenly and made you doubt my love for you?”

“I know you love me I have no doubt about that but you’ll lose interest after having sex with me, it’s not something you can control or change it’ll happen whether we want it or not.”

“Where did you get that from?”

“From Prophet Abara, he says I have a spiritual husband and that my relationships don’t last because of that. ... apparently it makes men lose interest on me after sex. It hasn’t happened to me before but none of my relationships have ever worked out, they all end within a year and that can’t be a coincidence. At first I didn’t want to accept it but maybe he’s right, maybe I have a spiritual husband because I dreamt of myself about to have sex twice, both times I woke up before penetration took place but I would wake up wet and horny. He says I forget the dreams of myself having sex, he said I’ve got a blood covenant with an evil spirit .”

“Who's this prophet Abara and wasn't he supposed to deliver you from this spiritual husband that he says you have?”

“He’s prophet at my mother's new church, he prayed for me and gave me oil to bath with..”

“Please tell me you didn’t use that oil.”

“Wow!” I say when she doesn’t answer

I can’t believe Anza can be so naïve

“Why didn’t you tell me all of this, I thought you and I were transparent with each other. I repeatedly asked you what was wrong throughout the week and you always said it was nothing, why?”

“I’m sorry, I was embarrassed to tell you about this.”

“Tell me everything, how you met this Prophet of yours and everything he said to you.”

She narrates everything that happened and I'm in disbelief when she's done with her narration.

“Thembalami I am so disappointed that you didn't tell me all of this on Sunday when you found out because then I would have advised you not to use that oil, a real prophet wouldn't make you pay for him to prophesy you that's the first sign of him being a fraud. Please stop using that oil, if you think there's any truth to what he said about you then you and I will take a seven day fasting and pray against any evil spirit working in your life. The Bible says we have been given authority to trample on snakes and Scorpions and over all the powers of the enemy, not some but all! This means that you have the power to overcome every challenge and obstacle you face. When Jesus Christ left this earth he said he's not leaving us alone, he's leaving us with a helper which is the holy spirit. Your relationship with God doesn't need to go through anyone, no one can be your WIFI and hotspot you to God it's something that you need to do for yourself, when you have a relationship with him it won't be easy for you to be fooled by fake prophets.” I say

“Like any relationship, a relationship with God needs to be nurtured otherwise it will not grow. You nurture it by praying, reading and meditating on the word of God. Reading your Bible

only on Sunday when you're in church won't suffice, imagine if I only spoke to you on Sundays and ignored you for the rest of the week do you think our relationship would survive, would you believe that I love you?"

"No."

"A relationship with God is no different, it also needs to be nurtured for it to grow. You have the power to overcome anything and everything you can possibly think of but you won't know it if you do not read the word of God. There's no better way to defeat the devil than by using the word of God, but you need to know the word for you to be able to use it. It's like owning a gun but not knowing how to use it to protect yourself, do you think thieves would be frightened to rob you because you own a gun while knowing very well that you don't know how to use it?"

"No"

"In the same way the devil will not fear you simply because you own a Bible, yes he knows how much of a powerful weapon the

Bible is but he doesn't fear you because he knows you don't know how to use the word to defend yourself against him. The Bible says resist the devil and he shall flee from you... So do you agree to take on this fast with me?"

"Of course I agree."

"Good then

do you know how much I love you mara?"

"Yes."

"I don't think so because if you understood how immense my love for you is then you'd know that I would never stop loving you or leave you because of whatever problem you might have. We will face everything together, we will fight and conquer together. There's no way I am letting you go so please get those silly thoughts out of your mind, I'm here to stay there's no getting rid of me."

She laughs through her tears

“Thank you so much, I was so sad thinking of the day you would stop loving me. The thought of you falling out of love with me was daunting”

“Imagine hurting yourself with nonsense. When I tell you that I love you, I don’t say it because it’s a nice thing to say or because I’m trying to woo you, I mean it ngiyakuthanda Anzani. I wish I can open my heart for you so you can see how much I love you, inhliziyo eyami ngeyakho Thembalami akekho omunye.”

(My heart is yours my hope, there’s no one else)

“I love you too, I love you so much.”

I’ve been dying to hear the words from her mouth. I’m the happiest man in the world right now

“Say it again.” She giggles

“I love you Mpilo wanga.”

My God, kuthi mangigiye

“Does that mean you’re mine now?”

“I’ve always been yours silly.”

“Wow, ngiyajola!”

(I’m dating)

She laughs

“You’re crazy.”

“About you, yes I am. On a serious note, I love you so much.”

“I love you too.”

“Now I want you to throw away that oil and block that fake prophets’ number.”

“I will.”

“I no longer trust you not after you bathed with oils and paid three hundred for sessions with prophets” we laugh “I want to see you do it.”

“Okay.”

She stands up and switches to the back camera and shows herself taking out a small bottle of oil out of her toiletry bag and walking to the bathroom before flushing the contents down the drain.

“Good girl, yay I’m proud of you.” She chuckles

“There goes my R300” I laugh

“Don’t worry, I’ll pay you back.”

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ANZANI

At first I didn’t believe what the prophet said because most of what he said wasn’t true but as I kept thinking about it I ended believing it. He wasn’t far from the truth, no one has ever left me after having sex with me but I have never had a successful relationship either. I allowed what he said and my past to fill my head with doubts, I am falling deeper and deeper in love with Quinton with each day that passes and I could already imagine how much it would hurt when he starts falling out of love with me and stops treating me like the Queen of his heart so I started distancing myself to protect my heart from heartbreak, stupid I know.

I wish I told him sooner then none of this would have happened I just hope that oil won’t do anything to me, I should have listened to my gut feeling and not allow my mother to convince me otherwise. Truth is my spirit doesn’t agree with the prophet

and when I saw him for the first time he didn't have that heavenly anointing that makes you discern that one is a servant of God without being told so. That has people who have never met you before call you 'pastor' even when you're rocking jeans at the mall, that undeniable presence of God that can't be questioned...he didn't have that but I chose to believe in what he said because my mother kept insisting that he's the real deal.

I was scared Quinton would judge me or leave me if I told him about the possibility of having a spiritual husband but he did the opposite and offered me his support, I still don't know what I did to deserve someone like him. He is everything I didn't know I needed in my life, now I know why my relationships didn't work out with my ex's imagine if things worked out with Mpho and I missed out on having such an amazing boyfriend like Quinton, I'm glad Mpho broke my heart because then I wouldn't be with this amazing man.

My phone pings with a notification from Capitec, it's the infamous money in notification we all love. I didn't think Quinton was serious when he said he would pay me back my R300, he even topped it with R200 if it was anyone else I'd be happy and getting ready to spend the money but I can't do that

with him because I know how hard he works for his money. I  
ring his number

“Missing me already?” he says when he picks up on the first  
ring

“Quinton, I can’t accept the money.”

“Why not?”

How do you tell your boyfriend that you can’t take money from  
him because he needs it more than you do without offending  
him?

“I'm waiting Anzani.” He says with a stern voice

“I was joking when I complained about the R300.”

“Well I wasn’t joking.”

“But I still can’t accept it, I appreciate what you’re trying to do but babe you don’t have to.”

“So what.. I’ll need your approval everytime I want to do something for you?”

“No, that’s not what I’m saying.”

“Then what are you saying Anzani?”

I never thought I’d be hurt by someone calling me by my own name, what happened to Thembalami or sthandwa Sam at least?

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry...thank you for the money.”

“Sharp.”

He says and hangs up. Yoh!

A WhatsApp message pops up on my screen, I log in to WhatsApp and read the text from an unsaved number

“ Hey Anzani, this is Lebo from church I got your number from the young adults group chat.”

Me: “ Hey Lebo.”

Lebo: “ Are you good?”

Me: “ Yes I’m good and you.”

I wonder what she wants, me and her have never had a conversation before it always ends with a ‘hi’ when we see each other in church.

Lebo: “I'm good....so I saw brother Quinton's status the other day, are you two together?”

Me: “ Yes, why?”

Lebo: “ I’m asking because he has never approached any of the girls from church, even when some made advances on him he rejected them. I’m talking about gorgeous girls you know we have gorgeous ladies in the church right? So I was shocked when I saw that he picked you out of everyone.”

I don’t know what she expects me to say

Me: “Right question, but unfortunately you are asking the wrong person. He’s the one chose me so ask him why he picked me, how would I know?”

Lebo: “There's no need to be rude I only asked because I’m curious, that man is a catch I’m just shocked that he chose you.”

Me: “ I don’t have time for this so bye Lebo.”

I block her number after the message is delivered

#25

My phone rings waking me up from slumber, I fish for it under the pillow and answer the call without opening my eyes hoping that whoever is calling will be brief so that I can get back to sleep.

“Hello.”

“Ntombi!” says Dakalo screaming in my ear

Dakalo is aunt Lufuno’s eldest daughter, she moved to Daveyton with her husband after she got married. She used to fellowship at Faith Mission before she permanently moved from Ratanda, she’s the one who introduced me to the church.

“Hey Ntombi.”

“Ndiyakukhumbula, uthi ndizakubona nini sana?”

(I miss you, when will I see you)

I don't know where her fixation with the Xhosa language comes from because she married in our tribe, Dakalo loves Xhosa shame.

"I don't know cuz, I'm still in Venda I'll tell you when I'm back in the province"

"When do you plan to come back?"

"The plan was to spend a month here, but I think I'll come back sooner than I thought, I miss my boyfriend I can't help myself."

"Wait, hold up did you just say boyfriend?"

"Yep."

"Wow, okay who's the lucky guy?"

“Quinton”

“Quinton Ndlovu?”

“Yep!” I say popping the p

She squeals in excitement

“Wow you’re a lucky woman ntombi Q is a good guy not forgetting that he’s so damn yummy! During our youth days almost all the girls in church had a crush on him myself included, he’s got that thing man. I remember in my matric year him and his friends were running some campaign and asked the congregation for bible donations so that they can give them to people who couldn’t afford to buy them, I donated my favorite pink bible trying to impress him, did he care? No, ngam’bawela ndaze ndancama sana. I can’t believe you’re dating someone my age.”

(I had a crush on him until I gave up)

We laugh

“But I’m happy for you cuz, you got yourself a man there.”

“True, he’s the best. I’m falling more and more in love with him every day.”

“Ncoah, that’s so sweet I’m happy for you.”

“Thank you.”

“Please don’t take this the wrong way ne but isn’t he boring? I can’t imagine Quinton without his bible. He always spoke about the word or maybe he has changed?”

Her question throws me in a fit of laughter

“He’s not at all boring, he loves God and all but that’s not the only thing he speaks about. He’s like any normal boyfriend, but I don’t blame you for thinking like that... you know brother Quinton while I know Quinton the boyfriend.”

“So, there’s layers to him? oooh lala!”

“Precisely.”

“Okay! So, how’s he between the sheets?”

“I don’t know Ntombi we haven’t done the deed yet.”

Dakalo is five years older than me, she’s my best friend and we talk about everything.

“Alright but I can tell from the way you talk about him that you’re drunk in love sana and I’m honestly happy for you, you deserve a guy like Quinton. He’s a great guy and I know you two definitely make the cutest couple.”

“Thanks, I’m crossing my fingers with this one. I almost forgot to tell you, Quinton put me on his status the day I left Ratanda and spoke about how he’s missing me already basically putting

it out there that there's something between us. I think almost everyone from church saw his status because I got a text from Lebo days ago and you won't believe what she said to me."

"What?"

"She said she couldn't believe that out of all the gorgeous girls in the church Quinton chose me as if I'm ugly or something."

She chuckles

"Ignore her, she wanted him, so she's pained that Quinton chose you. Expect the same attitude from the other girls from church, most wanted him and probably thought they stood a chance because he was single all this time. They'll see you as an obstacle instead of accepting that he never wanted them but unfortunately that's how some people are."

"Ai they are annoying, Quinton isn't the only guy in Ratanda."

"Those are the consequences of dating a handsome guy, everyone wants him. That's why I married an ugly guy because I

didn't want to compete with anyone, but I doubt you have anything to worry about- I don't know Quinton to be a ladies' man."

"I don't want drama."

I can't imagine myself beefing with other girls because of a man, that's not who I am.

"So, what are you going to do, will you leave your man because other girls want him? Mjolo is not for the faint hearted cuz you're not ready for a serious relationship if you expect everything to be smooth sailing."

"I know that, but I didn't think dating Q would earn me enemies or whatever Lebo is to me."

"I don't get you; Quinton isn't entertaining the girl so I don't see what your problem is...what's going to happen when he starts working, he's an engineer so he'll obviously earn a lot of money and more girls will start throwing themselves at him

how are you going to handle that if you can't handle a negative comment from one bitter person. Will you leave him?"

"Of course not."

"You need to toughen up if you want your relationship to survive, you're beautiful and I can imagine how many guys ask you out daily does that mean Quinton must dump you because other guys are attracted to you?"

"No."

"Quinton is a handsome specimen and ladies will obviously be attracted to him but that shouldn't bother you because you're the one he chose; he could've picked anyone, but he chose you, so you need to stop being insecure and trust your man because I doubt that he has given you a reason not to trust him."

"I know you're right, but I can't help but be insecure especially when I compare myself to Lebo, she's beautiful, with a round

butt and curves she always looks so beautiful with her perfectly done make up

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manicured nails and her elegant clothes. I always feel inferior to the ladies at church because I'm always repeating outfits, I hardly bought myself new clothes because I was sending money home from the little I used to earn."

Nothing puts one under pressure like being a member of a church that doesn't wear uniform when you don't have enough clothes, sometimes I skip church because I've run out of things to wear.

"If Quinton wanted a thick girl with big bums and curves, who wears make up, he would've gone for someone like that, you need to stop looking down on yourself you're beautiful and have a sexy portable body I don't know how many times must I repeat this to you before it finally sinks in."

I've always had low self-esteem I can't remember a time in my life where I was confident in myself even before I was diagnosed with Lupus and had scars on my bust, I never really

believe it when someone says I'm beautiful I always think that they are lying or just being nice. I guess it has to do with the bullying I experienced during my primary school years, I was teased and called ugly so many times that I ended up believing it.

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QUINTON

Anzani and I on day six of our fast, it's a 12 hour fast which begins at 6am in the morning until 6pm in the evening, every morning when we start our fast we choose a scripture to meditate on throughout the day and discuss what revelations we got on the scripture before we break the fast. There's nothing more incredible than being with a woman who supports you spiritually, let's face the truth most girls love bad boys and find guys like me boring, two of the three girls I dated in the past found me boring because I don't drink or do any of the things they did for fun and that's when I realized the importance of being in a relationship with someone who will be accepting of the kind of life I lead to avoid a conflict in our

interests but nonetheless I still believe that where there's a will there's a way.

It's Anza's birthday on Friday I don't know what I'm going to do yet, but I know I want to make the day very special for her. I can't do that while she's in another province, so I convinced her to come back on Thursday, I want to spend her birthday with her pampering her and making her feel like a Queen that she is. I've been working my butt off fixing people's phones and appliances so I can make enough money to spoil my lady on her special day.

I'm in my room fixing a client's broken heater when my phone rings, I dip my hands inside my pocket to retrieve it. My heart skips when I see that it's a landline number calling.

"Hello."

"Hello, you're speaking to Elaine Morafe from Indigo Engineering solutions am I speaking to Quinton Ndlovu?"

“Yes, speaking.”

“Okay Quinton I’m looking at your CV here and I understand that you've applied for the electrician post that was advertised two weeks ago. Will you able to join us on Friday at 11:30am for an interview?”

“Yes, I’ll be glad to.”

“Perfect, I’ll send you an email with the interview details to the email address you provided on your CV. We are looking forward to having you with us on Friday please enjoy the rest of your day bye.”

“Thank you, bye.”

I jump up and down punching my fists in the air in victory, I know this is only an interview but I’m so excited I can’t help myself. My mother is the first person I tell the news to then I call my girlfriend, both are just as happy as I am. I should finish

fixing this heater so I can do my research and prepare myself for the interview habashwe!

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It's Thursday afternoon, I'm on a taxi to Johannesburg to meet my girlfriend halfway on her way back from Venda, I'm so excited I can't wait to see and hold her in my arms. Oh, how I have missed her I didn't sleep a wink last night anxiously counting down the hours till I get to see her beautiful face again, I can't wait for our first kiss as a couple my heart skips a few beats every time I think about kissing her soft lips.

"Short left driver." I say

The driver looks at me through the rear-view mirror and nods his head. A minute later the taxi stops on Commissioner Street, I climb out and make my way to Carlton Center.

After going to different shops in search of a bouquet of flowers to buy for my girlfriend I finally find ones I prefer at Woolworths.

“Excuse me sisi wami can you please assist me in choosing a beautiful bouquet for my girlfriend.” I say to the shop assistant

“No problem, which one’s does she like?” She asks approaching me with a smile

“I don’t know, this is the first time I’m buying her flowers. I don’t even know if she likes flowers”

“Okay, no problem. You can take red roses; they symbolize love and affection or red Tulips the bouquet of red Tulips is a perfect romantic gesture, they are bold in shape and are said to symbolize true love I would advice you to go for them if you believe she’s your soulmate.”

“I’ll take a bouquet of red tulips.”

“Good choice.”

I’m at Noord taxi rank waiting for my girl with a bouquet of flowers and chocolates- Ferrero Roche. I’m naturally not a shy

person but the looks I'm earning from people walking in and out of the rank make me feel uneasy, I can't wait for Anza to get here and take me out of my misery. 15 minutes later a Quantum drives inside the rank and my heart swells with indescribable joy when I spot Anzani getting off the taxi dragging her luggage bag while darting her eyes around the rank peering for me, a big smile embraces her lips when she finally locks eyes with me, she lets go of her bag and throws herself in my arms. I attempt to hold her back but my hands are full so I can't embrace her properly

"I missed you so much." She says and plants a long peck on my lips.

"I missed you too Thembalami."

She gapes at the flowers and chocolates in my hands when we break the hug

"Are those mine?"

“Of course, they are.” Her eyes instantly light up with joy

“Thank you, baby, they’re so beautiful.” She takes the flowers and cradles them to her chest and sniffs them “Please take a picture of me, these are so beautiful thank you Mpilo wanga.”

I take out my phone from my pocket and snap pictures of her.

“Come on let’s take a selfie together.”

We take a couple of selfies together before Anza asks a stranger passing by to take pictures of us together. I still can’t believe she’s right here with me; I stand behind her wrapping my arms around her small waist and bury my face on the crook of her neck kissing her nape.

“Babe, it’s ticklish.” She says giggling

“Stop laughing, you’re ruining our pictures.”

“But it’s ticklish mos.”

“Okay I’ll stop kissing you then.”

“No, don’t stop.”

“You don’t know what you want.” She chuckles

“I do, I want you to hold me and never let me go.”

“You got it.” I say and peck her nose

“Ncoah, you guys are so cute; you’re making me miss my boyfriend.” Says the lady we asked to take pictures of us.

“Thank you.” Anza and I say in unison

She’s the one for me, I have never loved anyone like I do her.

#26

“Love is it really necessary for me to go home today?” He laughs

I came straight to Mpilo’s house from Johannesburg my aunt has no idea that I’m back from Venda, I don’t know what I’ll do if my mother calls her and asks if I have arrived yet.

“What are you saying Thembalami?”

“I didn’t see you for two weeks, I missed you and I’m not ready for us to part ways. The three hours we spent together since we met at Noord is not enough.”

“I know I feel the same way too.”

“So...”

“What?” We laugh

“You know what I mean.”

“You know there’s nothing I enjoy more than spending time with you, but I don’t know if I can hold myself if you spend the night.” I love Mpilo but I’m not ready to have sex with him and him being the sweetheart he is, he’s willing to wait till I’m ready.

“Fair enough I guess I’ll go home then.” I climb down the bed and straighten my clothes

“But I’m not ready to let you go just yet.” He says standing behind me wrapping his hands around my waist, I lean my back on his buff chest relaxing in his embrace.

“Me too baby.”

“Then spend the night with me, though it’ll be hard, but I won’t do anything to you.” I turn around and look at his face

“Really?”

“Yes, really. So will you stay?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you.” He says and whisks me off my feet without a warning, I giggle and wrap my legs around his waist.

“Kiss me.”

I don't need to be told twice, I lean in and our lips fuse in a French kiss. We allow our lips to communicate what's in our hearts, my heart is pounding and there's a pool forming between my legs as my clit pulsates with need. I'm so aroused I hope I can hold myself and not give into temptation, he slowly walks us to the bed without breaking the kiss and gently lays me down before getting on top of me.

“Hey.” He whispers looking at me with red hooded eyes laden with lust.

“Hi.”

I still want more of his kisses, so I put my arm at the back of his neck pulling him down for another kiss, his hands land on my bust and he cups my perky twins twisting my erect nipples through the cotton fabric of my T-shirt inducing an involuntary moan from my lips, he takes off my T-shirt and unclips my bra before taking it off. I break the kiss and cover my bust with my arms when I recall my ugly scars

“I won’t do anything to you I promise, I just want to festoon your body with kisses.”

“No, I have awful scars on my chest I promise it’s best if you don’t see them.” Mpho sent me a message on messenger the day Q put me on his WhatsApp status, he said some hurtful things about my scars that crushed all the confidence I worked for years to conceive. I didn’t tell Quinton about it because I knew it would upset him, I don’t want to disgust Quinton with my scars like I did with Mpho.

“What kind of relationship will we have if you’re not comfortable around me, and besides I already saw your scars and I promise there’s nothing you should be embarrassed about.” Mpho also said the same thing when we were still dating only to say all those hurtful things after we broke up. I can’t take his word for it

“No.” I say and reach for my T-shirt but he yanks it from my hands and throws it on the other side of the room.

“Anzani what’s your problem, I’m tired of you constantly doubting my love for you. What should I do for you to see that I love you?” he sounds pissed, it’s the first time I see him like this.

He peels my arms from my chest and slowly trails his finger on my scars.

“I love you Anzani, stop questioning my love for you.” He declares in a gruff whisper

He pushes my back on the bed, settles between my legs and plants soft kisses on my ugly scars. I'm in tears, don't ask me why I'm whimpering because I also don't understand why I'm emotional. My body trembles when he puts my nipple in his warm mouth while pinching the other with his free hand, my breathing hitches as he kisses my loins and stomach. His hands find my zip and he look at me as if asking for my approval, he opens my zip and takes off my jeans along with my soaked underwear after I give him a nod. He parts my legs and rubs his index finger on my wetness, he puts my legs on his shoulders before burying his face between them and lapping on my juices like a dog slurping water. My heart is pounding and I'm breathing heavily grinding my mound on his face while fondling with my boobs enjoying having his mouth on my lady parts, he sucks, licks and bites on my clit and labial lips before shoving his tongue inside my greedy hole stimulating my G-spot, my body goes rigid as wave of massive pleasure washes through me. My heart is racing in my chest from the immense pleasure I feel as his tongue delves deeper inside my hole it doesn't take long before my toes curl and my body trembles as a sudden need to pee hits me, I let go and cum creaming his face with my juices.

"How was that?" He takes off his T-shirt and wipes his face.

“It was amazing.” I say trying to catch my breath.

He throws his T-shirt on the laundry basket, sleeps on his back and carries me making me lie on top of him wrapping his arms around my waist

“I’m glad you enjoyed it Thembalami.” He says and plants a long peck on my forehead

“Thank you.”

“Please never hide yourself from me again Thembalami, you’re beautiful and I love every part of you.” I doze off to him tracing his index finger on my scars.

When I wake up the next morning he’s nowhere in sight. I notice that I’m alone inside the bedroom after skimming my eyes around the room. I fish for my phone under the pillow and find a text message from him

Love: "I'm sorry that I won't be there when you wake up, but I couldn't bring myself to wake you.

Happy birthday Mrs. Me I'd like to thank you loving and accepting me when I didn't deem myself worthy of your love, for trusting me with your heart, secrets and your insecurities. You're the most loving, sweetest and caring person I know, and you deserve to be treated no less than a Queen, thank you for accepting me as I am and for upholding my pride as your man- I have never felt so loved and appreciated in my life. May you grow in loving God, in wisdom, in riches, in strength, beauty, excellence, intelligence and in loving me. I'm honored that I get to celebrate your special day with you, I love you more than you know, and I will always love you no matter what. Happy birthday Thembalami, I'll call you after my interview."

Me: "Thank you so much love, all the best on your interview."

I spend half my morning responding to birthday wishes and answering calls, one would swear that I'm celebrity with the way I'm on everyone's status today, but it is my day today, so I guess I'm a celebrity for the day. When I'm done on my phone I get up, make the bed and linger inside Q's bedroom watching a movie on his laptop. No one from the house saw me when Q

and I arrived yesterday so I don't want to go out and risk them catching sight of me, it'll be awkward especially with Q not around.

It's three minutes to 11 when I hear a hard knock on the door, my heart pounds hard in my chest as I momentarily stop breathing hoping that whoever it is will eventually give up and go away but that's just wishful thinking

"Anzani sisi please open the door

I know you're inside." The silken voice belongs to an elderly woman so I'm guessing it's Q's mother, I have no choice but to open the door.

"Sawubona ma." I say sheepishly sweeping the floor with my lashes.

(Greetings)

This is the first time I meet my boyfriend's mother; I honestly don't know how to behave. In-laws can be so judgmental at times.

“Yebo sisi kunjani? I’ve been waiting for you to come to the house, but I realized that you weren’t coming when 10:30 passed without the door opening, I’m Nomonde umaka Mpilenhle. Please come with me, you must be starving.” She says and leads the way to the RDP house. She’s a short light-skinned beautiful woman with a slightly chubby body. The scent of her lavender body lotion lingers in the air, so I’m convinced she just took a bath.

“Please take a seat my dear.” She says and starts moving around her kitchen making me something to eat. The house is spotless the floors are gleaming I wouldn’t mind eating off the floor, and the pot on the stove is shimmering and could easily be used as a mirror. The woman is tidy, the condition her house is in is testimony to that fact.

“I made sour porridge; do you eat it?”

“Yebo Mrs. Ndlovu.”

“U Mpilenhle ungitshelile that it’s your birthday today, happy birthday ntombiyam’ may the good lord fulfill all the desires of your heart. If I knew about it sooner, I would’ve baked you a small cake.” She says placing a tray in front of me, the tray is lined with a bowl of hot porridge and a sugar pot.

“Thank you so much Mrs. Ndlovu.” She offers me a small smile in return

“The tap is over there you can wash your hands; I will be in the lounge I can see that I make you uncomfortable.” She’s a pleasant woman but she’s right I’m not comfortable around her at least not yet.

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QUINTON

The interview went well I was well prepared and answered all the questions confidently, I really did my best everything else is in God’s hands now. Due to financial limitations I had to make a

choice between buying Anza a gift and doing something special for her and I chose the latter, the taxi just dropped me at the gate of my house I feel slightly tired because I passed at the shops on my way back and bought a few things to make the day special for my lady and the queues at the shops were just too long.

“Ma.” Like always I find her in the lounge sitting in front of the TV having a cup of tea. Her lips curve into a smile when she sees me, she stands up from the couch and trudges to meet me halfway

“Wu fana I saw her, she’s so beautiful she’s going to give you beautiful babies.” She’s beaming like a kid seeing candy

“Thank you, ma, I hope you didn’t make her uncomfortable.”

“Mina? never I only called her to come and eat. The poor girl was locked inside that small room of yours probably scared to go outside I had to go and talk to her so she can be free.”

“Thank you, ma I appreciate it.” She glances at the shopping bags in my hands

“What’s inside?”

“Ma you haven’t even asked me about my interview.” I digress

“Oh, I’m sorry fana I’m just too excited, I was beginning to get worried about you wondering if you will ever find someone who’ll love and accept you as you are. I’ve been praying for you asking God to give you someone who will love, respect you and accept you as you are, so I’m happy to that you finally found the one for you.”

“Haw’ ma ihaba you make it sound like I’m old.”

(You’re exaggerating)

“Ugugile vele Mpilenhle wake wambonaphi umtwana ona 28? You’re too old to be single, you don’t know how much it hurt me as your mother to see you getting closer and closer to 30

without a partner. We all need someone to love and to love us in return.”

(You are old Mpilenhle where have you seen a 28-year-old child.)

I didn't know that this is how she felt about me being a bachelor, she never mentioned it.

“Serious ma? I didn't know.”

“Akekho umzali ongafuni ukubona umtanakhe aganiwe Mpilenhle, nami bekuyisifiso sami njengo mzali ukubona umfanami ajabulile anomuntu amthandayo.”

(There's no parent who doesn't want their child to get married Mpilenhle, it was also my wish as your mother to see you happy with someone you love)

“Thank you, ma, I am happy...Anzani makes me happy and I'm glad you accept her.”

“I will never choose who you should or shouldn’t be with, I was going to accept any girl you brought home to me if you love her then I’ll be happy for you. The only thing that matters to me is your happiness so I will accept whoever makes you happy.”

When God gave people mothers, he gave me the best one. Call me a mama’s boy I don’t give a hoot, but I love my mother.

“How was the interview?”

“It was great ma; I’m hoping for the best. Let me leave this here and go see uMakoti wakho and please ma don’t go through these bags.”

“Haw’ mina? Angeke ngiyenze intwenjalo. You bought this for Anzani right?”

(I won’t do anything like that)

she asks with a lopsided smile

"Ma!"

" okay okay." She shuts her lips and pretends to be zipping them

I'm wasting my time telling her this I know my mother will look through those bags, she's so inquisitive.

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ANZANI

Quinton kept his promise and called after his interview, he told me to get ready because we had somewhere to go when he comes back. He has a kettle in his room, so I plugged water and used a dish to bathe, I was ready by the time he came back dressed in my white lacy peplum short dress and maroon stiletto heels thank God I didn't go to aunt's house yesterday, so all my luggage is in Q's room. He looked so charming in his suit I couldn't resist the edge to snap pictures of him, but I got

so disappointed when he changed into cargo shorts, a tank top and slides and asked me to change into comfortable shoes.

He took me to a salon at the mall and told me to do my hair and nails then he left leaving me with his wallet and said he had somewhere to be, I'm done now, and I look so beautiful. I know my man has responsibilities, so I didn't choose an expensive hairstyle I braided passion twist and put on long nude coffin shaped acrylics. I'm waiting for him to come and fetch me now, he said he's almost here.

"WOW!" He says when he walks through the door grabbing everyone's attention.

"Waze wamuhle Thembalam"

(You look beautiful)

Why is Quinton like this ye? Why is he putting me on the spot, now everyone is looking at me and I can't help but feel shy. All the ladies inside the salon are swooning leering at him with dreamy eyes, hold up b\*\*\*es he's mine!

“She’s beautiful, isn’t she?” Comments the lady who did my hair

“Very beautiful, asambe Ndlovukazi yami.”

(Let’s go my Queen)

He says stretching out his hand like man in movies do when asking a lady for a dance. I’m sure my cheeks have turned crimson from all the blushing I’ve been doing. I take his hand and we make our way out of the salon

“Wow Mpilo did you have to be so dramatic in there?”

“I was only appreciating my lady’s beauty; you look so beautiful sthandwa sam.” His statement is accompanied by a peck on my forehead, at this rate I’m scared I’ll end up screaming “yes I do” without being asked the magic question because wow!

“Wow baby this is so beautiful”

That's the first thing I say when we walk inside his bedroom. No wonder he took me to the salon, he wanted to get rid of me so he can do this. There's a pallet on the rug and on top of it there's a black tablecloth dressed horizontally, a bouquet of red and white roses, scented candles, two wine glasses, a bottle of champagne, gold under plates and two covered plates, a fruit and snacks platter in the center of the wooden pallet and a woolies Tiramisu cake with the number 23 candle in the center. The tiled floor is adorned with red flower petals, black and white balloons. There are two cushions on either side of the pallet.

"I thought you didn't drink." I say picking up the bottle of champagne from the ice bucket

"It's non-alcoholic. You can drink it right?" he's asking because of my condition

"Yes.... Wow this looks beautiful ndo livhuwa Mpilo wanga."

(Thank you)

I put the champagne bottle inside the bucket and fling to his arms giving him a tight squeeze.

“Pleasure, you deserve more than this.”

“Thank you, this deserves to be posted please take a picture of me.” I sit crossed legged on the cushion and grab some fruit from the platter pretending not to be aware of the camera. I expect him to be taking pictures of me not to laugh.

“What’s funny?”

“Waqinisa intamo kangaka kuyabonakala kuthi uyazenzisa just relax and forget that I’m taking a picture of you.” I take his advice and enjoy the delicious fresh fruits

“Wow, they look beautiful now I want one with you.” I say going through the pictures he just took

“Okay.” We take countless pictures together then I sit down uploading the pictures Facebook and on my WhatsApp status. I don't know when I'm going to aunt's house but I'm sure it won't be today.

#27

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Unedited excuse errors

“No one will show up for you like a man who has decided to love you, some people come into your life and show you why it didn't work with your exes . You once told me that you'll love me until I believe in love again and you've done exactly that, I love you so much Mpilo wanga❤️ thank you so much for choosing me mufunwa wanga.”

Tshiamo says reading Anzani's caption, she posted several cosy pictures of herself and Q on Facebook. They've been shared by numerous people and have received so many likes and comments. Most people are calling them couple goals \*eye roll\*

“Didn't he reply or something?” I ask

“Oh he did, he said 'I'd choose you in all the lifetimes I find you in, you're the best thing to ever happen to me and loving you is

one of my favourite things in the world. Uyathandwa wu muntu wakho Thembalami, eyami inhliziyo nge yakho akekho omunye sincandamathe sami' ai he's so in love ngiyak'tshela he even updated his profile picture with one of their pictures.” Tshiamo  
(You are loved by me, my heart only belongs to you my love)

“Yo kuthi mangiphalaze yuck!”

( I feel like vomiting,)

I say and pretend to gag causing my friends to laugh

“Isn't it too soon in their relationship to start posting each other on Facebook?” Zoleka

When did they even start dating? But they are still on their honeymoon phase, that is for sure.

“Too early bruh!” I say

“It’ll end in tears shem, there’s no way that relationship is going to last.” Tshiamo

“Ngeke vele umlilo wamaphepha nje I know people like them, Quinton is unemployed soon Anzani will get tired of playing the understanding girlfriend and break up with him.” I say

“Yeah.” Tshiamo

“But truth be told they look good together shem, they make such a cute couple.” Zoleka says swooning while going through their pictures

“What? Stop lying...Quinton is tall, muscular and incredibly handsome he needs a curvy thick woman not that skinny chick.”

They both laugh

“Ah Lebo Anzani has a nice body, uyi slender esime kahle, I love her body it’s so portable and everything she wears suits her.”

Zoleka

“True, but I love her more in pants because they expose the gap between her thighs and her slightly bowed legs. That girl has a ncaah body shem” Tshiamo

I scoff

“I honestly don’t see what you guys are raving about, I don’t like her body. A woman must have some meat especially if she’s with a man built like Q.”

“Q isn’t too buffed up though..I think they look good together.”

Zoleka says with a shrug

“Whose side are you on anyway?” I feel the need to ask because wow the girl only has been singing Anzani's praises she’s starting to sound like her groupie

“I didn’t know there were any sides.” She says

“You know how I feel about Q, you’re my friends so you can’t compliment Anzani. My enemy should also be your enemy.”

“That’s unfair Lebo your hate towards the girl is unwarranted she didn’t do anything to you, it’s not her fault Quinton chose her and not you.”

“But you can’t keep complimenting her like this, the next thing I know you’re friends with her.”

“You know I would never do you like that.”

“No I don’t, you’ve done nothing but compliment her. You are my friend we should be bashing the girl not dishing compliments. Your loyalty needs to lie with me.”

“I hear you, I’m sorry.”

“She could have bewitched him for all we know, I mean it doesn’t make sense how he'd choose her over me.”

“You might be on to something plus she’s from Limpopo and we all know how dangerous people from the rurals are.” Zoleka

“Yep, it makes sense I mean think about it why would Quinton go for that girl? Have you seen her chest, she has some ugly burn marks.” Tshiamo says with grimace on her face making us laugh

“Yeah, there’s no way he'd choose that over this. She bewitched him.”

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ANZANI

“Wu ntombi you are basking in love ne entlek you’re swimming in happiness ai I’m happy for you sana.” Dakalo says with jubilation palpable in her voice.

“Ey sana I’m happy andifuni ukungasho brother Q makes me very happy.” She laughs

“You deserve it cuz.”

“I almost forgot to tell you, he went down on me for the first time a day before my birthday yerr the man knows how to use his tongue I felt like I was having a stroke the pleasure was just too much I felt like my heart was about to burst in my chest.” She cackles

“I’m so happy for you, you deserve everything that’s happening to you. I hope you guys last.”

“We will Dakalo, I’m going to give it my best and if this one doesn’t work out then I’m done with relationships for good.”

“It’ll work, a relationship needs equal effort to work. Learn to apologize when you’re wrong and understand that ‘I’ doesn’t exist it’s ‘we/us’ and you also need to compromise, it can’t

always be about you. You can't always be at the receiving end, you need to give as well. He went out of his way to make you happy on your birthday

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you need to do the same on his birthday. Most women are entitled they expect their man to make them happy and feel special on their birthday and on Valentines yet they do nothing for their boyfriends/husbands because they think they are superior ones in the relationship. Make your man feel loved and appreciated but most importantly you need to respect him, men need respect more than love, so respect your man girl. Men love where they are respected and women respect where they are loved."

"Thanks cuz."

"Otherwise I'm happy for you Anza you deserve every good thing coming your way, Mjolo has been showing you flames now it's your time to shine."

"Thanks hey, I even met his mom and she was so nice and welcoming."

“Ncoah man I’m happy for you.”

“Thank you cuz, let me get started with cooking, you know how your mother is she will shout at me if she comes back and finds me on the phone while I haven’t started cooking.”

“Okay love let me also cook for my man sharp.”

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NARRATED

“I can’t believe Q did this to you man especially after everything you’ve done for him.” Kgahliso

Mpho, Kgahliso and Gift are on a group WhatsApp video call talking about Quinton's ‘betrayal’.

“People are so ungrateful shem.” Mpho

“I still can’t believe he snatched the girl from you wow and here I thought Q was the good one out of all of us.” Kgahliso says in disbelief

“I didn’t know Mpho dated Anzani first I can’t believe I even congratulated Q when he put her on his WhatsApp status.” Gift

“I don’t know how I missed that status but I didn’t see it, and to think I’m the one who hooked you up with Anzani because I thought she was a good girl kanti she's nothing but a b\*\*ch.” Kgahliso

“Wait until she leaves him for someone better because I know she will.” Gift

“You lose them how you got them, I was so in love with that girl bafwethu had our entire future planned out in my head and had already started thinking about the names I would give to

our children.” Mpho says with a broken voice and looks up feigning hurt

“The way you and Q were tight I never thought anything would come between you two much less a girl.” Gift

“I still can’t believe Q did that, the nerve to snatch your girl from you and have the audacity to post pictures of her throwing it on your face that he took her..wow!” Kgahliso

“That’s why he hasn’t found a job it’s because he’s evil busy hiding behind the Bible but unfortunately God can see his heart. He managed to fool all of us into thinking that he’s a good guy but he couldn’t fool God.” Mpho

“True, God sees what’s in our hearts and Q's heart is dark.” Gift

“Very, and the worst part is that you won’t see him coming.” Mpho

“Alright man we will talk I need to go to the salon, I need a haircut.” Gift says running his fingers through his uncombed hair

“Yeah I also need to finish my laundry we will talk later, I’m sorry about what Q did to you. You’ll find another girl clearly Anzani wasn’t the one for you.” Kgahliso

“Eish man it’s hard to accept because I love her with all of my heart and had already envisioned our future together but you’re right I’ll find the one for me.” Mpho

“Yes, that’s the spirit. I don’t know about you K but I don’t think I can continue being friends with Q he’s clearly a snake and can’t be trusted, I won’t wait until he snatches my girl like he did to Mpho before I sever all ties with him. “Gift

“That’s not even a question, I’m no longer friends with that punk.” Kgahliso

“Thank you so much bro's I really appreciate your support.”

“Don’t mention it, we are brothers for life sharp.” Gift says and disconnects leaving Mpho and Kgahliso on the line

“Like Gift just said man we are brothers, when are you coming to Ratanda?”

“Not sure why?”

“I want to take you out get your mind off the Anza thing you know.”

“Oh man I appreciate it.”

“You'll tell me when you’re coming this side then don’t be sad over Anza be grateful that at least she showed you her true colours before you got married to her, sharp man ”

“Sharp.”

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## QUINTON

I'm in my room with Buhle helping her out with her assignment, my mother and dad had three kids together me and my two little sisters Nokwazi and Nobuhle. Kwazi is in varsity doing her first year in Nursing while Buhle is in grade 11, dad passed when I was doing my first year in Varsity I was 18 at the time. He was the bread winner and sole provider at home so things took a turn for the worst at home when he died. I had to learn how to hustle because I didn't want my mother to worry about me and only focus on my siblings.

I've been helping my mother take care of my siblings since then until now, I hope I'll get this job so that I can do more for them and my girlfriend. I love my mother and siblings with everything in me and I would do anything for their happiness.

"Do you get it now?" I ask Buhle after showing her how to find  $x$  using the simultaneous equation

“Yes but please do it for the last time.”

“Okay, watch carefully then because I’m doing this for the very last time.”

“Okay.”

She says and puts her palms on her face and focuses her gaze on what I’m doing, my phone rings disturbing us.

“Keep practising while I take this.”

“Ok buti.”

I get up from the bed and take the call while heading towards the door as to not disturb Buhle

“What a pleasant surprise.”

“Unfortunately I can’t say the same thing about you.” Kgahliso

“Okay man what’s going on?”

“Stop pretending like you don’t know what you did to Mpho!”

I’m so confused right now

“And what did I do to him?” He scoffs

“Didn’t you lie about him to Anzani in order to snatch her from him? I didn’t expect something like this from you Q man, I always thought you’re better than all three of us combined. How could you do something like that to Mpho of all people? He’s done nothing but love and support you, he’s been a great friend to you and you repay him by snatching the girl he loves and saw a future with, you used your good looks because apparently no girl seems to resist your charm.”

“Wow that’s loaded statement I don’t even know where to start or what to say.”

“That’s because you have nothing to say, you f\*\*\*ked up! I’m going to tell the pastor and the leaders about this, break up with Anza or suffer the consequences.”

“You didn’t even bother to listen to my side of the story, you just took what Mpho said and ran with it. You can do whatever you want Kgahliso, the leaders and the pastor are not my God so I’m not scared of them. I won’t break up with my girlfriend because of you or anyone else for that matter...do me a favour and tell tell Mpho to run whenever he sees me.”

Mpho couldn’t appreciate Anza when he had her and now he’s making things up and putting everyone against me by playing the victim how pathetic

“Get ready to be removed from your position then, you know the church doesn’t tolerate the kind of dating you’re doing with Anza, you should’ve told the pastor before you went to her.”

“Bye Kgahliso”

I cut the call before he can say anything.

#28

Today is the first time Quinton and I are in church together ever since we started dating, we came together but didn't sit together. I don't know if I'm imagining it but people have been giving me weird looks ever since I walked inside the church, I don't know if it has anything to do with the pictures I shared on Facebook on my birthday or it's something else. I love God and I always enjoy myself whenever I'm in his presence but not today, I feel unwanted like an outcast... no one said anything to me but how most of the ladies keep looking at me like I stink speaks volumes.

This is the reason why I'm the first one out of the door when the person who was saying the last prayer says amen.

"Anzani!" A voice calls out behind me and I halt on my steps

"They are calling you inside," Tshiamo says

"Who?"

“Sister Ivy.” Sister Ivy is one of the young adults' leaders

I swallow nothingness and nod my head before walking back inside the church, I find Q and sister Ivy seated next to the alter seemingly waiting for me. I think I have an idea of what this meeting might be about

“Sanibonani,” I say pulling a chair and taking a seat next to Quinton.

Sister Ivy doesn't reply she just looks at me with a straight look on her face undoubtedly unimpressed with me.

“Quinton I'm so disappointed in you, I don't know what to say you have always been a good boy. You have a special gift, even the deaf can hear the word of God when you speak. You know how to elucidate a scripture in a way that makes it easy for anyone to understand, we get healed every time you take a mic and stand in front...you're definitely called to the alter most of us expect you to end up as a pastor one day, because you my

boy are called to win souls for the kingdom of God so why are you allowing the devil to destruct you from your purpose?"

"I'm not sure I understand what you are saying my leader"

Quinton

Sister Ivy shoots me an evil eye before looking at Quinton with soft eyes

"I heard about your relationship with this girl and how she dated Mpho before you, I'm so disappointed in you Quinton how can you allow a woman to come between you and your best friend like that? How can you allow her to come between you and God, didn't you learn anything from Adam and Eve? What about Samson and Delilah, out of everyone here I never thought you'd be the one to allow a woman to come between you and God. Fornication will do nothing but draw you away from God"

I'm at the brink of tears, tears are burning my eyes fighting for an escape and there's a painful lump on my throat, so I'm the devil who's coming between Q and God?

“Sister Ivy with all due respect I won’t allow you to speak about my girlfriend in that manner, I’m also disappointed in you because you didn’t care to find out the facts you just believed whatever you heard.” He looks at me and takes my hand into his earning a scowl from sister Ivy

“I understand that you are at that age where you want to have a girlfriend but couldn’t you take someone else? Someone who has a good reputation maybe, someone who hasn’t slept with your friend someone who actually respects her body and knows that it’s a temple of God and treats it as such. Someone who knows that sex is for married people, do you even know about soul ties Quinton? Do you know how many people she has slept with before sleeping with you? Couldn’t you get a virgin who is on the same level as you spiritually? Do you think people will take you seriously if you become a pastor who’s married to a loose girl?”

At this point, I can’t even see clearly because tears are rolling down my cheeks shamelessly. I try to let go of Quinton's hand but he tightens his hold.

“Out of respect I will not say anything but I will not sit here and watch you call the woman I love names sis Ivy, I love Anzani, and nothing and no one is going to change that. I will not be a part congregation that looks down on other people and condemns them without even hearing their side of the story. You have already decided that Anzani is guilty and have labeled her the devil who’s coming between me and God so there’s nothing I can do or say that will change your mind or make you think otherwise. “

He stands up pulling me up with him

“Goodbye sister Ivy it was nice knowing you.”

With that said he strides to the door making me half-run next to him. We are silent the rest of the walk home until we walk inside his room, he undresses and slips into a short and a tank top then starts doing pushups on the tiled floor visibly angry

“Love we need to talk about what happened?”

I say breaking the silence. He doesn't spare me a look nor answers me. I take off my heels and crouch next to him setting my hand on his shoulder

"Mpilo you can't stop going to church because of me, there must be another way."

I know how much Mpilo loves church and serving in the house of the lord, I don't want to come between him and God.

"How do I continue going to a church where you'll constantly be insulted and called names? Don't think I didn't see how those girls were looking at you when we walked in."

"I know but we can ignore them there's no need for you to quit church."

He chuckles and it's not a pleasant one

“Oh please Anza stop lying to yourself you are too sensitive you won’t survive it, next thing I know you’ll be breaking up with me because everyone is against our relationship.”

“I won’t, I promise.”

“Stop lying to yourself and stop trying to convince me, my mind is made up. We will find another church but I can’t risk losing you, you don’t get it to do you? You are my peace, I won’t risk losing you.”

“You won’t.”

He stands up and palms my face looking into my eyes

“You already have esteem issues, if we keep going to that church they’ll crush what’s left of your confidence and make you think you are not worthy of me. They’ll make you doubt yourself, our relationship and you’ll eventually leave me. I don’t want to wait until that happens, I love God you know this and nothing will ever separate me from his love but God isn’t only

in that church my love. We can find another church and fellowship there.”

“But you basically grew up in that church, I don’t want you to resent me because of this a few years down the line. Don’t make decisions in haste, think about things calmly.”

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QUINTON

It took Mpho spreading lies about me to realize that our church is filled with hypocrites who are just going to church but they don’t even know God much less have a relationship with him. To say I’m disappointed would be putting it lightly

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I’m disgusted matter of fact. The final nail on the coffin is everything sister Ivy said about Anzani without even trying to get her side of the story, she basically insulted her and called her loose. My blood was boiling I was tempted to tell her off

but I was raised better than that, I'm glad God revealed the kind of people they are to me so that I can find another place to fellowship.

The church is not meant for the perfect, if everyone was perfect then there wouldn't be any need for salvation and forgiveness of sins. People are meant to feel safe and loved at church not to be judged and condemned like I saw sister Ivy doing yesterday, she didn't even bother asking for our version events she just concluded that Anza was the devil who is tearing me from God if only she knew that she's my gift from God.

I prayed for someone like her for years, she's everything I have ever wanted and needed from a woman and I won't allow unconverted Christians to take her away from me, they were supposed to be happy for me that I finally found someone I love someone I want to share my life with not judge my choice and call her names especially for something she didn't do.

I'm with my mother telling her everything that happened yesterday at church.

“That’s why I stopped attending church shame, the vilest and judgemental people are found in the church. They were gossiping about me calling me poor and everything you can think of after your dad passed, then the same people who were alienating themselves from me and treating like I'm scum climb the alter and talk about God? There's too much pretence in church. How can Ivy say that about Anzani, she was totally out of line?”

“Exactly ma I was so angry I was tempted to slap her.”

“I’m glad you didn’t....I can’t believe that Mpho, he’s so conniving and evil, how can he lie and play the victim while he’s the biggest snake”

“What annoys me the most is that he had Anzani but failed to appreciate her now he’s lying about us and making us look like the devils because he can’t stand to see another man love Anzani the way he should’ve done.”

“He's jealous.”

“He has the nerve to tell lies about me and instigate everyone against Anzani and myself knowing very well that there are things I know about him, things that could tarnish his reputation for good.”

“Why didn’t you say anything to Ivy vele?”

“I'm not that person ma, one day the truth about him will finally come out I know nothing stays hidden forever. I just don’t want to be the one who reveals his secrets, I’m not petty and I won’t let him drag me down to his level imagine me revealing someone's secrets out of spite like I’m some gossip Queen. Indaba iphume bese kuthiwe iphume ngami? Asoze!”

My mother laughs

“Yeah you’re right, you’ll lose your dignity as a man. You're very wise my son, I’m such a proud mother I raised a man!”

We laugh

“The credit belongs to the woman who raised me.”

“The credit belongs to God, so many kids are raised well but they turn away from everything they've been taught by their parents, it's by the grace of God that you turned out the way you did.”

"Stop being modest Nomonde just take the compliments."

She smacks my arm

"Ubiza bani ngo Nomonde wena mtwana osile?"

(Who are you calling by name you disrespectful child)

"Isphalaphala sika baba, ismomondiya esimhlophe nje ngezihlabathi zolwandle, intwe mhlophe madoda ngathi igeza ngo bisi."

Her cheeks turn crimson as she tries so hard to hide that she's blushing

"Uvele ubemuhle kakhulu umusu moyizela Nomonde."

(You look more beautiful when you blush)

She smacks my arm and laughs

"Hlukana nami Mpilenhle angiyena u Anzani mina "

(Leave me alone Mpilenhle I'm not Anzani)

"Okay girlfriend ka baba."

"Mxm so what are you going to do now?"

"I'll find another church, I swear if I continue going there I'll end up in jail for beating someone up"

"Haibo kahle Mpilenhle!"

"Stru nasi I won't tolerate people disrespecting my woman  
angeke shem isigcino ngizoshaya umuntu shem uzezwa bathi  
nangu u Quinton uboshiwe ushaye u Ivy."

(The next thing you'll hear is that I got arrested for beating up  
Ivy.)

"Mpilenhle ngiyakukhuza njalo..."

(I'm warning you)

My phone rings cutting her short

"Quinton hello."

"Hi Quinton you're speaking to Lerato Morafe from indigo  
mining solutions" my heart starts beating fast "congratulations  
Quinton your interview was successful the job is yours."

"What?" I ask not believing my ears

"The job is yours, congratulations." She repeats

“Are you sure? Is this some prank or some sort of a joke?”

“What?” Lerato says on the other side of the line

My mother snatches the phone from me and puts it on  
loudspeaker

“Hey you’re speaking to Nomonde, I’m Quinton's mother he  
seems to be trapped in shock at the moment can you kindly  
repeat what you said.”

“I said Quinton got the job.”

“Thank you, Jesus.... thank you so much ma'am may God bless  
you.”

“Thank you ma'am but your son deserves the job, he did very  
well in his interview. I’ll send an email with the contract for him  
to go through it and sign if he’s happy with it. Bye.”

“Bye.”

My mother cuts the call and drops to her knees and sings praises with her hands raised to the heavens while tears roll down her cheeks. I heard the conversation and I can see my mother celebrating but I still can't believe I got the job, it feels surreal. I've been waiting for this moment for years and I don't know how to feel now that it's happening, it feels like a dream I'm afraid to be happy because this might just turn out to be nothing but a dream.

“I'm so happy for you my boy.”

My mother says hugging me. She's done praying now

“I still can't believe it's true.”

“Well it's true my son, the lord finally remembered you. Your faith and patience in him have finally paid off my son, your

prayers have been answered.” she says looking at me with teary eyes

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I don't know how many times I have checked the salary stipulated in the contract and I still can't believe that this is how much I'll take home per month after deduction at an entry-level, electricians earn plus-minus R16k a month but the salary written on my contract is bizarre, especially for someone without any experience. Formal experience that is

Thembalami: “Yes, that amount is correct you are not seeing things love. Congratulations my love you deserve it”

A message from my lady reads. I had to take a screenshot and send it to Anzani so that she can tell me whether I'm seeing things or not, I always thought I understood the meaning of “when God shows up he shows off” until today. Lord, you are wonderful!

#29

I was so happy when Quinton got the job so happy that one could have sworn that I was the one who got the job but that's what happens when you're truly in love with someone, their accomplishments becomes yours as well as their anguish. His unwavering faith in God and his promises have finally been rewarded, no one deserves this breakthrough like him he's been suffering for way too long and deserves every good thing coming his way. It's been a month since he started his new job, the company he works for is based in Johannesburg, so we hardly see each other because he leaves home early and comes back late, he'll be moving to an apartment in Braamfontein month-end because traveling is starting to take its toll on him. My poor boyfriend is always tired whenever he's off on weekends, but he tries his utmost best to make time for me which I really appreciate.

"I'm about to leave aunt, is there anything you want me to do for you before I go?" She runs her eyes on me from head-to-toe gaping at my outfit before shaking her head in disapproval

"Okay, I'll see you when I come back then."

“Bye.” She mutters under her breath; I wouldn’t have heard what she was saying if I wasn’t looking at her lips.

I swallow past the painful lump on my throat and make my way out of the house. Things have changed a lot in the past month, aunt is no longer the same ever-smiling person she was before. Nowadays she’s always angry and looks like she is annoyed with me, everything I do seems to upset her. I’m even thinking of going back home to my mother’s house because my stay here is no longer pleasant, aunt complains about everything I do I’m even scared to touch her pots without her permission because of the gazes she dishes every time she sees me eating.

Quinton wanted to meet me halfway, but I know he’s tired, so I told him not to, I pluck my earphones and listen to music which makes the walk to his house seem shorter. As I walk inside the yard, I notice that the front door to the main house is open, so I have no choice but to pass and greet Q’s mother before going to his room at the back.

“Knock knock.” A smile embraces her lips when she sees me. She’s such a sweet soul this one

“Haw’ makoti wami ngena sesi.”

(My daughter in law, please come in)

A tantalizing aroma teases my nostrils as soon as I walk inside the kitchen, there’s a pot cooking on the stove and she’s standing behind the kitchen counter grating carrots. I hug her before pulling a chair and perching my behind on the seat next to her.

“It smells delicious in here.”

“Aw thank you nana, I’m making samp I’ll plate for you when I’m done cooking.”

“I can’t wait.”

The woman is a great cook, she always plates for me every time I’m here. She is one of those people who don’t allow you to leave their house without having something to eat.

“Where is Nobuhle?” I ask skimming my eyes around the house

“She’s at school attending extra classes.”

“Okay, ma let me go and see Mpilo.”

“Alright, nana.”

“Thembalam” Mpilo says flashing me that panty-dropping smile of his when I walk through the door of his room.

I can’t help myself I run and throw myself in his arms, I’ve missed him so much. I haven’t seen him since Sunday and it’s Saturday today so you can imagine. He picks me up and spins me around causing me to giggle

“I missed you so much wena nobubi.” He says rubbing his nose against mine giving me an Eskimo kiss

“I missed you too skobo,” I say leaning in for a kiss, he tightens his arms around me pulling my body closer to his, and deepens the kiss. We kiss until we both run out of breath

“I love you.” He whispers looking at me with half hooded eyes laden with lust.

“I love you too,” I whisper back and wrap my arms around his neck hugging him. He holds me back and slowly walks us to his bed and gently lays me on the bed before settling next to me. He takes my hand and rubs my fingers against his lips and the stubble on his chin.

“Please tell me you’re spending the night with me.” He asks in a pleading tone

“I wish I could, but I can’t, aunt complains about everything I do lately so the last thing I want is for her to think I’m disrespecting her by sleeping out.”

“It’s okay, I understand. I just missed you and was hoping that we would spend the day together, I miss sleeping with you in my arms and seeing your face first thing in the morning when I wake up, but I don’t want you getting in trouble with your aunt, so I’ll make the most of these few hours we have together.” He says and buries his face between my boobs.

We fall in comfortable silence for a while until I break it

“I’m considering going back to Venda.” My statement has him raising his head from my bust and staring at me with confusion on his face

“What?”

“Things are no longer the same at my aunt’s house since I lost my job, I don’t know but it’s like she’s irritated with me or something.”

“What do you mean?” he questions with an arched brow

“She snaps at me for everything I do, she gets irritated when she sees me eating or even cooking. I’m even afraid to touch her pots, I always wait for her to dish up for me. She only cooks at night; we eat cereals in the morning, so I get hungry during the day. I think it’s because I didn’t contribute towards groceries this month. I used the last money I had to travel when I was putting in CVs’s”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I didn’t want to stress you; you just got a job, and you haven’t been paid plus you’re spending a lot on transport I just didn’t want to burden you. I have some money I was investing while I was still working, the investment hasn’t matured that’s why I didn’t want to touch that money because I’m going to suffer a loss if I do, but I guess I have no choice but to use that money now. I thought my UIF would’ve paid out by now but it’s taking time, I invested that money to do my license.”

“Thembalam’ you can’t suffer like this while I’m here, you should’ve told me I would’ve made a plan.”

“I just didn’t want to bother you; you already have a lot on your plate.”

“I’m a man I would’ve made a plan for you, I won’t let you suffer under my watch.”

“I appreciate your support my love, but I think it’s best if I go back home, I’ll apply from that side. I don’t blame my aunt, no one would be happy to feed a grown woman. I should just go back home, I’ll survive.”

“No, baby you can’t go back to Venda. I can’t have you so far away from me, I already can’t handle the fact that I only see you on weekends what more when you’re in Venda. When will I see you?”

“I’ll come and visit you once a month I don’t know, we can make it work.”

“No, Anzani I can’t be in a long-distance relationship with you Thembalam’. Our relationship is still new, we are still building

the foundation we won't survive being in a long-distance relationship. I don't want to lose you; I can't risk it." I get his point; I also wouldn't think of going back to Venda if I had another choice.

"What are we going to do then?"

"You don't have to worry about anything. I'll take care of you Sthandwa sam' I will give you money to help your aunt with groceries, for your hair, and everything else you need."

"No baby I won't allow you to do that, you have a lot of responsibilities already I can't allow you to support me."

"Anzani I wasn't asking for your approval I was only telling you what's going to happen

you're not moving back to Venda I won't let you. I don't know if you forgot but I'm working now and I can afford to take care of you, angeke unghlule."

“What if it takes longer for me to get a job and you get tired of taking care of me?”

“Your negativity is starting to annoy me; I understand that men have disappointed you a lot in the past, but I can’t keep reassuring you of my love for you. You need to know and trust that I love you and that I’m in this for the long haul, I’m not going anywhere. You can see that many are against our relationship, we won’t win if I’m the only one fighting for us.”

“You’re right I’m sorry babe.”

“Please try to have faith in us and in our love, I can’t keep fighting alone we need to do this together for our love to win.”

“I know, I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay, keep applying it doesn’t matter how many times your application gets rejected but I believe that one day your prayers will be answered. It doesn’t matter how long it takes; I’ll always be here holding your hand supporting you through it

all. Who knows maybe you'll get a job when you're already Mrs. Ndlovu because I'm wifing you girl and there's no way I'll hold up on making you my wife because I'm waiting for you to get a job , as soon as I'm done building my mother a house I'm sending my uncles to Venda."

"What?"

"Why do you look so shocked, did you think I'm playing house with you? I'm serious about you woman, I'll make you my wife and mother to our beautiful babies."

Y'all should see the gigantic smile on my face right now.

"So, stop being crazy awuyi eVenda unless you're going to visit, proceed with your license plans with the money you saved I'll handle the rest."

(You're not going to Venda)

My lord, how did I get so lucky?

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## LEBOHANG

Tears keep pouring down my face as I scroll down Quinton's timeline, it's filled with Anzani's pictures accompanied by captions where he confesses his undying love for her. I've known him since we were kids before his father passed away and I always thought that we would end up together , I've tried to convince myself that he doesn't love her that he's only with her because he was desperate, but the truth is that he's in love with her I've never seen him like this before and it hurts to watch someone I love with every fiber of my being loving someone else. He loves her so much that he chose her over his best friend Mpho, the church, and everyone else.

He was always so sweet with me, always lending an ear when I needed someone to talk to and always encouraging me with the word of God. I was convinced that he had feelings for me that it would only be a matter of time before he asks me out, I have lost count of the number of times I've fantasized about him professing his undying love for me, our wedding day, and the beautiful kids we would have together. The icing on the

cake was that my parents liked him, like most parents in the church they wanted to have him as their son in law and it hurts so bad seeing him loving someone else who's not me. I wipe my tears with Pajama top and dial his number

"Hi" My heart swells upon hearing his raspy alluring voice

"Hey," I say and sleep on my back

"What can I do for you Lebo?" Wow this is rather cold

"Nothing I just wanted to greet you; the church is not the same without you." He clears his throat

"What do you really want Lebo? We no longer attend the same church so we have nothing to talk about and you know I have a girlfriend so you can't call me at this time of the night, it's unacceptable." I gulp pain choking me

"Is she there?" It's 20:00hrs now she shouldn't be there unless she is sleeping over

“Lebo I won’t ask you again, what do you want? Why did you call me?”

“No, it’s okay. You are right I shouldn’t have called at this hour, I’m sorry it won’t happen again.”

“Thanks, but I would really appreciate it if you never call me again.”

“Okay, I won’t bye.”

I cut the call and cry into my pillow. Damn it hurts! No, I can’t accept defeat I need to find a way to make Quinton mine, Quinton belongs to me.

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MPHO

I'm scrolling down my news feed when I come across Quinton's post, he posted a picture of Anzani and wrote a long caption about how much he loves her. I zoom the picture and stare at her features, her beauty is mesmerizing she looks like a dream I move down and marvel at her beautiful body. I can't believe I had this and lost it. I admit that I was wrong for lying to her and keeping my baby a secret, for being with her while I was still with my stepmother, but Quinton shouldn't have gone for her, he was my friend my best friend he was supposed to be loyal to me and our friendship. It hurts seeing them so happy together, constantly throwing how happy they are in my face by posting each other on social media. I thought turning everyone at church against Anzani would separate them, but it didn't Quinton quit the church instead, he has a job now, and knowing him it'll only be a matter of time before he marries her.

Quinton values commitment and treasures relationships and judging by how much he loves Anzani I know it won't be long until he gets married to her. I thought I could get used to the pain of seeing them together, but it hurts every time I come across their posts, I will not let them be happy while I suffer. They betrayed me, Anzani shouldn't have dated my friend and Quinton shouldn't have dated my ex.

“Hey give that back!” I bellow when Thato grabs my phone from my hand

“I need to see what’s stealing your attention.... Damn, who’s this hun? She’s fiiiiine hey, I don’t like petite women but for this one, I would make an exception she’s got a banging body.” He says drooling over Anza’s picture, I yank my phone from his hand and press the power button dimming my screen.

“You’re so jealous..so who is she?”

“My ex.”

“What? stop lying that girl wouldn’t date someone like you. No offense bro”

“Why not, what’s wrong with me?” I ask

“Show Zweli the girl and see if he’ll believe you dated that hot hun”

“Yeah, let me see her.” Zweli

“Nah.”

“Come on man, what harm will it do? Show Zweli the girl and let’s see if he believes that you dated her.”

“Yini usabani?” Zweli

(What are you afraid of)

I reluctantly put in my fingerprint and hand Zweli the phone. He stares at the picture and whistles

“Damn she’s fine, stop lying man you never dated her.” He says

“Exactly what I told him,” Thato says laughing

“She’s my ex.”

“Unamanga!” Thato says and the pair start laughing at me making me feel like the biggest fool

(You’re lying)

“Imagine him dating someone like this with those rabbit teeth of his, angeke!” Zweli

If only I had a picture with Anzani but stupid me deleted all our pictures and hers on my phone when she broke up with me.

Lerato fela❤️

#30

It's a Tuesday afternoon Mulanga hasn't come back from school making my aunt and me the only people at home. There's an awkward tension between us because she's still in a foul mood, unable to bear the tension I take a walk and stretch my legs going to my friend's house. I buy myself a cool time to nibble on my way to Sonto's house, I'm sure she will be shocked to see me, like I said before my friends and I hardly see each other much less visit one another. A White Toyota Venza drives past me and stops a few meters ahead of me.

"I was actually waiting for you." Says the driver of the luxurious car when I walk past his car

"Why would you wait for me?"

"Because a beautiful lady like yourself shouldn't be walking in this heat allow me to drop you off."

“Thanks, but I have my umbrella, so I’ll be fine,” I say and keep walking.

“Please.” He says driving slowly next to me

“No, I am fine. I need the walk I would’ve taken a cab if I wanted to ride in a car.”

“Can I at least get your number then?” He says and holds out his iPhone 13 through the window

“No.”

“Okay then, bye beautiful,” he says and drives off.

Fifteen minutes later I’m walking through Sonto’s gate pinching my ass that I find her home because I didn’t notify her that I’m coming. I hit my knuckles on the wooden door and take a step back closing my umbrella, the door opens revealing Sonto’s mother she narrows her eyes at me as if trying to remember who I am.

“Sawubona ma, is Sonto home?” I ask wearing a smile on my face

“Konje uwubani?”

(Who are you again)

“Anzani ma, I’m friends with Sonto.”

“Oh, you’re the Venda girl, right?”

“Yebo ma.”

“Okay come in.” She says opening the door wider for me to get in.

“She’s in her room you can go in.”

I make my way to Sonto's room and knock on the open door. She's lying on the bed engrossed on her phone, she looks up from her phone and smiles when she catches a glimpse of me

“Aw' ntwana ngavakashelwa wuwe namhlanje zikhiphani.”

(To what do I owe the pleasure of your visit today?)

“I'm good and you Sonto?” she laughs

“Urg stop with the sarcasm. You look beautiful, ungiphe le roko.”

(Please give me this dress)

“Thanks, I'll give it to you babe don't worry.” I climb the bed and lay next to her

“Ey ngiyak'bona lapha ku Facebook naku WhatsApp uposter i creation.”

(I see you posting a creation on your Facebook and WhatsApp status.)

Creation is a name my friends and I came up with to refer to a handsome/beautiful person.

“Oh please not you too, can't I go anywhere without being asked about my boyfriend.”

“Stop acting like you don't enjoy it, I'm sure uyachazeka masilibe sik'tshela kuthi muhle.)

(I'm sure you enjoy it when we keep telling you that he's handsome)

“Nix kanjani”

(Not really)

“Whatever but he's really handsome and you two look so cute together but akasi yi player nje mina ngibasaba kabi abo bhuti abahle kakhulu.”

(Isn't he a player, I don't trust guys who are too handsome)

“Looks can be deceiving he’s anything but a player, he’s actually the best boyfriend I have ever had. He loves me so much and treats me like a Queen. I still can’t believe how blessed I am to have him in my life.”

“Ncoah, I’m happy for you Anza you deserve it.”

“Thanks.”

“I have R50 let’s go and buy bunny chows.”

“Ok let’s go, I won’t say no to food.” She laughs

“And I wonder where the food goes to because wow girl your body.”

“If only you knew how much I wish I had your curves, I don’t like being skinny.”

“No, you’re crazy, your body is perfect big bodies make one appear older than their actual age. You should be happy because you’ll forever look young, look at you...you look 16.”

“Staaap it! I’ll contest for Miss South Africa if you keep this up.”

“Lol, why don’t you, you’ve got the body, the face, and the brains so go for it.”

“And have everyone bash me for my scars? Never!”

“That’s who you are Anza, you can’t keep hiding them just embrace them and let everyone else adjust.”

“You’re actually right to hell with what people say!”

“Yes, baby that’s the spirit”

“But I’m still not contesting.”

We laugh

“What a waste of my energy, imagine after hyping you up so much.”

“Sorry.”

“Mama siyabuya ne sisaya emakoteni”

( Mom we are coming back, we are going to buy bunny chows.)

“Bamba nami ungphathele.”

(Take and buy for me as well)

Her mother says giving her money. On our way to the shop, we bump into Nancy

“Anzani hey.”

“Hey, Sonto this is Nancy. Nancy this is Sonto, my friend.”

“Nice to meet you.” They say at the same time

“Can I talk to you privately?” Nancy

“Let me excuse you two,” Sonto says excusing herself leaving me with no choice but to agree to Nancy's request.

“What's wrong?”

“Nothing, I just wanted to apologize for telling you everything like that. It wasn't my place, I should have waited until my brother told you about everything himself

he really loved you and he's been a mess since you broke up with him. He hasn't even come to Ratanda to visit ever since you guys broke up, is there any chance that you can forgive him and take him back? He really loves you.”

To say I'm confused would be putting it lightly, what's Nancy playing at?

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NARRATED

What Zweli and Thato said to Mpho about his teeth hasn't left his mind, he's been googling dentists around Gauteng maybe it's time he removed his incisors and replaced them with artificial ones maybe that will help make him look more appealing than he already is. His phone rings on top of his desk disturbing his search, he stops typing and takes the call from his friend Kgahliso.

"Hey K." He says leaning his back on his office chair

"Mpho my man, when are you coming to this side? We haven't seen you in a while."

“I don’t know man I guess I will see.”

It’s actually not a bad idea, he could do with some steamy sex right now. Mommy knows how to get him there, his member tightens inside his pants as he pictures her naked chubby body with the stomach rolls and her fat cookie.

“Mpho are you still there?”

“I am...I’ll come this weekend.”

“Okay then, I’ll tell Gift then we’ll agree on where we are taking you to on Saturday.”

“Okay sharp man.”

“Sharp.”

He skims his eyes around the office to see if anyone is looking but everyone seems to be minding their own business. He

unbuckles his belt and slowly lowers his pants to his thighs and puts his hands inside his cotton boxers freeing his stiff member, he holds it under the table with one hand and holds the phone with the other, and gives himself a hand job. Mommy will appreciate the video plus she's been complaining about being deprived, going to Ratanda will not only help him release the tension in his body it will also help him come up with a watertight plan to deal with those two betrayers.

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QUINTON

I'm still in awe by the blessings God has blessed me with, he didn't just give me a well-paying job, he gave me a permanent job that comes with so many benefits. I'm not about to pay rent till I die that's why I went for a 'rent to own' two-bedroom apartment in Braamfontein, in a few years the apartment will be in my name. I'm so glad that God blessed me while my mother is still alive so I can spoil her and show her appreciation for raising me into the man I am today, I want to build her a beautiful single-story house and buy her a car so she can drive

around running her errands instead of riding in taxi's and getting burnt by the scorching heat.

The only people who will love you through thick and thin are your immediate family members, everyone else will only love you as long you have something to offer. People get quickly tired of helping someone that's why it didn't shock me to hear about what Anza's aunt has been doing to her because I know just how nasty extended family members can be, when my dad passed on my uncles stood in front of everyone at his funeral and confessed to everyone that they will not let us suffer while they are still alive they spoke about how they'll take care of us and ensure that we finish school but not even one of them kept to their promise or even picked up the phone to call us and ask us how we are doing. I had to step up and help my mother with the household expenses, young as I was, I had to man up because I couldn't sit by and watch my siblings suffer. Taking care of Anza is nothing compared to what I've endured in the past more especially since I'm working now and getting paid well, my phone rings snapping me from my reverie

"Gatsheni,

Boya benyathi, obusonga busombuluka,

Mpongo kaZingelwayo,  
Nina bakwaNdlovuzidl'ekhaya, ngokweswel'abelusi,  
Zaze zeluswa intombi uDemazane,  
Nina bakwaKhumbul'amagwala,  
Nina bakwaDemazane Ntombazana,  
Nina bakwaS'hlangu sihle,  
Mthiyane,  
Ngokuthiy'amadoda emazibukweni,  
Nina bakwaMdubusi!!" it's my uncle, dad's little brother

"Babomncane."

(Uncle)

"How are you son?"

"I'm good and you uncle."

The last time I heard from him was when I called him asking him to help me pay for Nokwazi's registration fee, Nsfas replied

late- exactly three weeks after registration had closed so I had to pay for her registration out of my own pocket because I couldn't risk her spending the year at home taking an involuntary gap year. He didn't help, he blatantly refused to help.

“UNokwazi uyisani e nyuvesi? Sekamdala manje mele athole indoda agane. I don't have money to waste, look at you...you went to university, but you've been unemployed for years so what good will it do to send Nokwazi to school, she has matric she can get a job in Retail or something and start pulling her weight around the house.”

(Why is Nokwazi going to university? She's old enough to get married)

Those were his words when I asked him for help.

“Not so good I have some financial crises, I heard from your aunt that you got a well-paying job. Can you please lend me R5000 I'll give it back next month end?”

The nerve of this man.

“I would love to help uncle but unfortunately I can’t, traveling is costing me a lot of money so I’m moving closer to work and I have to pay rent and the deposit so I don’t think I will have that kind of money after covering all my monthly expenses.”

“How much can you afford?”

“I will be left with R1000 which I’ll give to my mother to pay for funeral policies and her societies.” I lie through my teeth

“You are spoiling Nomonde no wonder she’s gotten so chubby, you do everything for her. Let her work like other women do.”

“With all due respect uncle that’s my mother you’re talking about.”

“Haisuka you’ve spoilt her, I know you have the money you just don’t want to help...you better pray Mpilenhle that you don’t lose your precious job and need my help one day because I will not assist you. I swear to you!” he hisses and drops the call

#31

Quinton got paid yesterday and transferred money to my account, I was so happy when I saw the message from the bank. I'm so blessed to have that man in my life, I've never had anyone love me as much as he does so I still find it hard to believe that I'm in a relationship with such a loving and thoughtful man. It's a sunny day so I decide to go casual with a Tie dye drop shoulder top and matching biker shorts and pair my outfit with white Airforce sneakers. I have my afro held into two cute bunnies on top of my head, I put on stud earrings and applied gloss on my lips.

"Damn you look beautiful Anzani." I say to my reflection in the mirror. Just then the door opens, and my aunt walks in

"Where are you going?" she asks sizing me up

"To the mall, I want to buy a few things to add to the grocery you bought." Her eyes light up and a smile tugs at the corners of her lips

“Did your UIF pay out?”

“No, I’ll use my savings.” I can’t tell her I got the money from my boyfriend now, can I?

“No, my child you didn’t have to.” She says with a silken voice suddenly back to the sweet aunt I know and love, wow!

“No, it’s okay aunt, I want to.”

“Okay if you insist then, can I write you a list of what’s missing in the house?”

“No problem I’ll wait.”

While she scurries out of the room to jot down the list, I continue getting myself ready for the road. A few minutes later she is back in the room holding a piece of paper in her hand.

“You don’t have to buy everything on the list.” She says when my eyes widen in shock staring at her lengthy list

“Okay I’ll be on my way then.”

“Bye my child.” And just like that I’m back to being her child, ya neh! I respect money.

It’s during the week so Checkers isn’t too packed when I get to the mall, I’m moving aisle to aisle going through aunt’s list when I feel a tap on my shoulder. I turn around and come face to face with a dark-skinned tall man grinning at me like we are old friends. His face drops when he sees my confused expression.

“Come on don’t tell me you don’t remember me?” he says

“I don’t.”

“We met last week, I offered you a lift and you refused remember?”

“Oh! I think I remember.”

“I never got to introduce myself, I’m Shaun. Shaun Mayeni.”

He says handing me his business card. I take it and skim my eyes through it, he’s an advocate at Mayeni and partners law firm.

“And you are?”

“Anzani.”

“Anzani it’s not every day I meet an Anzani, which tribe are you from if you don’t mind me asking?”

“I’m Venda.”

“Oh wow, you’re beautiful.”

“Thanks, I’d like to get back to my shopping if you don’t mind.”

“Of course, I don’t.” He says and pushes his trolley to the next aisle. I take his business card and shove it inside my purse, who knows maybe one day I might need legal advice so the card will come in handy.

After buying some of the things on aunt’s lengthy list, things I’ve never seen her buy if I may add I head to Debonair’s and buy pizza and a 2-liter bottle of Sprite to wash it down.

Mulanga loves Pizza, especially one from Debonair’s so I know it’ll make her happy to find it at home when she comes back from school.

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NARRATED

Lebo is pacing up and down in her bedroom anxiously waiting for a phone call. She instantly picks when she receives the call she's been waiting for.

"Talk to me." She says and the man on the other end of the line chuckles

"Stop being so impatient."

"Tseko man... tell me what happened."

"Nothing so far, you can't rush these things. You need to be patient; it'll take some time."

"I don't have time; I need this done as soon as possible."

"Lebo don't forget that I'm doing you a favor here." He says with a firm tone.

A sigh breezes out of her lips and she takes a deep breath calming herself down, she can't afford to make Tseko angry he's the best in the game. If there's anyone who can pull this off, it's him.

"Okay, I'm sorry I will be patient but you sure you can do it?"

"I know what I am doing, I need you to stop pestering me and allow me to do my job okay?"

"It'll be hard, but I'll try."

"That's all I ask."

"Do your job then I promise I'll reward you if you know what I mean." She says in a sultry tone.

"That's motivation enough to get the job done, I won't let you down."

“Please don’t.” She drops the call and throws herself on top of her bed and begins imagining herself and Quinton together, how cute they would look together. Her thoughts go as far as their wedding day.

“Ooooh, Q I can’t wait for you to finally be mine.” She coos

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In Vuwani

Livhuwani is sitting on top of a bunk stool under the tree soaking her feet inside a basin with warm water and gruff salt, Lutendo is sitting on the grass next to his mother with a bowl of pap and sugar water.

“Will you eat, or you’ll keep stirring the food with the spoon?”  
he replies with a scrunched nose

“Mma I can’t eat this; it doesn’t taste nice.”

“I know my son but that’s the only thing we have right now, you know my feet have been swollen for a while and I couldn’t go to the rank to sell. I don’t have money to buy food and we’ve eaten all the stock I had. This is the only option we have.”

“Can’t you call Anza and ask her to send you money? She will never refuse.” Livhuwani sighs and sets her palm on top of her son’s shoulder

“Anzani is no longer working my son, I don’t want to stress her.” The boy nods his head in understanding and shoves a spoonful inside his mouth and pinches his nose bridge forcing the food down his throat.

Livhuwani looks away hiding her tears from her son. It hurts seeing her son suffering like this, no mother wants to see their child suffer but it’s not easy for her to accept the ‘calling’. One of her friends told her that her swollen feet are result of her resistance to accept her calling

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the friend told her that more is still coming but even so Livhuwani can’t bring herself to accept this. It goes against

everything she knows and believes in; she believes in God and his word, and his word says 'you cannot partake in a table of the Lord and the table of demons', and according to her knowledge the act of worshiping ancestors is wrong because it is said in the bible that the dead have nothing to do with the living. It also says one cannot serve two masters for you will hate one and be devoted to the other. How will she serve ancestors and God at the same time? Her phone pings pulling out of her thoughts, it's a bank notification, Anzani just deposited money into her account.

"Thank you, Jesus! I knew you would make a way for me, thank you!"

"What happened mma?" Livhuwani smiles and shows her son the message.

"Yes!" He jolts up and starts dancing in excitement.

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MPHO

“So, what did she say?”

“I can’t believe you made me do this, why do you keep hurting me like this Mpho? What did I ever do to you for you to hate me so much?” She says with tears shamelessly falling down her face.

“No, don’t do this. You’re hurting me.” I regret calling her with Videocall, I wouldn’t be seeing her tears now.

“Is this the price I pay for loving you?” she says in a breaking voice

“I’m sorry I know it hurts, it hurts me too not being able to love you freely and loudly like you deserve but you know it’s not morally acceptable for us to be together.”

“But I love you Mpho, what should I do with all the love I feel for you? you can’t keep sleeping with me raising my hopes up

making me believe that there's a chance for you and I to be together and expect me to be okay with you wanting another woman, it's not fair."

"I know and I'm sorry, I love you too and I'd be with you under different circumstances, but you know we can't be together it's not right. I'm your little's sisters' father and your mother's baby daddy, think about it Nancy it's not morally correct for us to be a couple, it would break your mother....Is that what you want, to hurt your mother?"

"You know I didn't plan this; I can't control how I feel about you."

"I know but it doesn't make what you feel right, what we feel for each other is forbidden."

"But is it okay for you to make me go to your ex and plead with her to take you back knowing very well how much I love you?"

“Well, you have yourself to blame for the sweetheart you shouldn’t have run your mouth in the first place, you ruined my relationship with Anzani and you need to fix it.” She scoffs

“Why are you still going after her, she’s with Q now...she doesn’t want you anymore, give it up!” she snaps

“I didn’t ask for your opinion, my relationship with Anzani is none of your business!” She gasps at my retort

“Wow...you’re sick really sick! Why are you still going after Anzani because I know you’re still busy with my mom?” She spits and snickers

“Yet you don’t mind when you’re the one sharing my d\*ck with your dearest mother, now who’s the sick one between us?” I counter. She scoffs and drops the call

With or without Nancy’s help, the plans I have for Anzani will succeed.

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QUINTON

I have finally moved into my apartment, and I can't wait for the week to end so Anzani can come and spend the weekend with me, this will be different from back home. Here it'll be just the two of us spending time together with no one to disturb us, the pride and satisfaction that comes with finally owning something can't be compared to anything it feels amazing to finally be independent and in charge of my future. I'm at peace, everything is falling into place and my heart is full of praises for the man above, he's a wonderful God!

On Sunday after moving in I took a walk around the block and familiarized myself with the place and looked for a church to visit on weekends that I don't go back home but unfortunately, I haven't spotted one I like or rather would feel comfortable visiting, so the search goes on. The apartment is fully furnished so I didn't have to buy a lot of furniture, I only bought a bed and some small necessities like pots, dishes and cutlery.

“Come in.” A frown covers my face when a lady walks in carrying a pink Tupperware container in her hands

“Hi.”

“Hey, I’m Nolwazi I saw you moving in on Sunday, but I was on my way out that’s why I didn’t get a chance to come and welcome you. I’m one of the tenants here. I’m renting the apartment opposite yours.”

“Oh okay, nice to meet you Nolwazi I’m Quinton.”

We shake hands

“I baked scones for you, welcome I hope you’ll enjoy your stay with us.” she says giving me the Tupperware

I look at her unsure what to do

“Please accept them.” She says probably seeing the hesitation in my eyes

“Thank you.” I say taking the container from her hand

“I’ll be on my way then.”

“Sure.”

I open the container when she shuts the door close, the scones look delicious but I’m not sure if I should eat them. I only accepted them because I didn’t want to be rude but I don’t like taking food from strangers

#32

“I don’t know what the universe is trying to communicate to me by doing this.” Someone says behind me, I turn around and see Shaun approaching me with a smile on his face.

I halt on my step and wait for him to catch up with me

“Hey.”

“Maybe it’s time I stop being ignorant.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m talking about this; I keep bumping into you everywhere I go who knows maybe it’s the universe’s way of telling us something.”

Shaun and I have been bumping into each other a lot in the past couple of weeks, at first, I was cold because I thought he

wanted to ask me out or something, but I soon realized that he didn't see me like that. I doubt I'm his type, a guy of his stature wouldn't go for someone like me anyway.

"Something like what?"

"That you and I are soulmates." He says and we both laugh

"Forget it, I'm with my soulmate you should look for yours if you haven't found her already." He chuckles

"Relax, I know how much you love your man, and I would never do anything to jeopardize what the two of you share. He's very lucky, girls like you are rare nowadays."

"No, I'm the lucky one Mpilo is the best boyfriend any girl could ever ask for. I'm blessed to have someone like him honestly, I thought I would have found a job by now his birthday is approaching and I wanted to take him on vacation to show him just how much I appreciate him and all he does for me."

“Why didn’t you tell me you’re looking for a job...what qualifications do you have? I can help you look but I am not promising you anything, I have connections I can try to find something for you.”

“What? really?”

“Yes, why not.” I jump up and down in excitement and hug him

“Thank you so much,” I say breaking off the hug

“Wait, hold off on the ‘Thank you’s save them for later when I find you something but keep in mind that I’m not promising you anything.”

“I know but thanks for offering to help me look, I really appreciate it. God bless you.”

“Thank you, so what do you have?”

“A Bcom Marketing management degree.”

“Nice you did marketing; now I know it won’t be hard to help you find a job. My firm has several clients who own advertising agencies and marketing companies, I’ll speak to them on your behalf and find out if they’re not taking any interns.”

“Thank you so much.”

“Yeah, send me your CV, qualifications, and academic transcripts so that I can talk to them while holding something on hand.”

“No problem I have the documents on my phone, I can send them to you now via Bluetooth.”

“Come on Anza who still shares documents using Bluetooth? Take my number you’ll send them to my WhatsApp.”

“Can’t I email them to you instead?”

“Why, it’s just business nothing personal. I won’t try anything I know you have a boyfriend, and I know how much you love him you have told me about a hundred times already so relax.”

“I don’t think it’s a good idea.”

“Psssh get over yourself Anzani I’m not trying to hit on you, no offense but you’re not my type. I just prefer WhatsApp over Email, but you can send your documents to my email address if that’s what you’re comfortable with.”

He looks bored, I shouldn’t be ungrateful I should do what he wants.

“No, it’s fine I’ll send them on WhatsApp....so it’s that number on your business card, right?”

“What? you have my business card?”

“Yes, why are you surprised? You gave it to me”

“Because you’ve had it for weeks now, yet you never called me, so I thought you threw it in the bin or something.”

“I had no reason to call, I was going to call you when I need legal advice” he laughs

“I see, don’t use the number on my business card it’s for business...I’ll give you my personal number give me your phone.”

I fish for my phone inside my pocket and hand it to him, he dials his number and saves it on my contact list before buzzing himself.

“Why are you buzzing yourself?”

“To get your number so I know who you are when you’re sending me the documents.”

“Hmm okay.”

“I’ll leave you to your shopping then.”

I nod and watch his tall frame retreating out of the shop before resuming with my shopping, well that’s if I can call it that. I’m buying a couple of things for Q’s apartment because I noticed a lot is missing when I went there for the first time two weeks ago, when my UIF paid out three days ago the first thing I thought about was buying things for bae’s apartment to make it look more like home. I also want to buy him a pair of sneakers because I noticed that he only has two pairs of sneakers, to be honest, Quinton doesn’t really have many clothes you’d swear he’s not working, he’s so selfless that he takes care of everyone and forgets to take care of himself. He’s always looking out for others it’s about time someone else looks out for him. He brushes me off every time I tell him to buy himself clothes. He only bought a few formal outfits when he started working and it was only because he needed them for work either than that I doubt he would have bought himself anything.

Aunt is back to her old self all sweet and loving like she was before I lost my job but we all know it's because my UIF paid out and I have money, after seeing that side of her I'm no longer comfortable staying in her house despite her being nice to me I really hope Shaun will get something for me from one of his clients who are in the marketing field so I can move out of her house and rent a room somewhere. I've been applying and getting nothing but rejections back so maybe using a connection will work out for me, I'm tired of being unemployed.

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QUINTON

"Let's go out for drinks tomorrow after work?" says Kabelo, my colleague leaning next to my credenza

"I don't drink alcohol, I told you this already."

“I know but you don’t have to, not everyone who goes to clubs consumes alcohol some just go there for the vibe.”

“Thanks

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but clubbing is not my thing.”

“Let’s go to a pub then, they are more chilled than clubs.”

“No, my girl is coming tomorrow.”

“You can come with her, I don’t mind.”

“No, I want a quiet evening with my lady I haven’t seen her in a week.”

“Ai I give up, udlisiwe wena the way you’re so clingy haikhona!”

(She fed you love portion)

“Akangidlisanga ngizidlele.”

(She didn't force me I ate it willingly)

He throws his head back laughing his lungs out

“You really love her that much is evident, all the best on your relationship man. You guys should keep loving each other like this then who knows maybe you'll give me the courage to try again.” He says in a sad tone

Kabelo has been hurt a lot in the past, he doesn't believe in true love. He says true love ended with our forefathers

“Don't worry man, you'll find the one for you. I've been there before and I know how it feels but I'm glad I never stopped believing in love, I was unemployed for years and making a living by fixing people's appliances and electronics nobody wanted me. Some would agree to date me only to hide me from their friends because they were ashamed of me, then Anzani came along and accepted me the way I was she loved and was proud of me poor as I was and restored my pride as a man...just like I found the one for me I'm confident that yours is

also on the way, true love still exists and I'm living proof. I love that girl Kabelo, I would be lying if I told you that I don't see beautiful girls out here because I do but Anzani has my heart man."

"Wow, that's beautiful man I almost teared up," he says and pretends to wipe his tears then we both laugh

"I'm trying to be serious here."

"I know, I'm sorry but for real man what you two share is beautiful don't lose it. I've never met Ithembalakho but from everything you told me about her she sounds like a really good person, treat her well and love her. Good women are rare in this day and age, you have found one hold on to her."

"Thanks, man, I will do that. I don't have time to mess around I'm getting old, I'm ready to have my own family."

"Nyala monna ore meme retloja dikuku."

(Marry her and invite us to come and eat cakes.)

“I will marry her, as soon as I’m done with my mother’s house, I’m sending my uncles to Venda.”

“I have a lot of respect for you man, I admire the love you have for your family and your girl.”

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I tried to remain positive, but I can’t help but think something happened to my lady, I’ve been waiting for her at the robots on corner Plein and Bree Street where she’s supposed to get off for over two hours now and nerves are starting to kick in. A taxi from Ratanda to Johannesburg doesn’t take this long, it was 5 pm when she told me the taxi is leaving the rank, she should have been here over an hour ago and it doesn’t help that her phone is off. I’m going out of my mind with worry, I don’t know what I’d do if something happens to her. It’s winter and sunsets come earlier than they do during the summertime, the streets are becoming desolate with each passing minute, it’s dark and freezing cold and the probability of getting robbed is increasing by the minute but I’m not leaving here without my girl.

“Who are you waiting for? You’ve been here for almost two hours now; I’m leaving now you should also go home before criminals try their luck on you. It’s not safe” Says one of the hawkers loading his things inside the back of his bakkie

He was the only one left, the others long packed and left.

“I can’t leave, my girlfriend is on her way ....she was supposed to be here a long time ago, I don’t know what happened to her,” I say and try to swallow the painful lump sitting on my throat while tears well up in my eyes

“I shouldn’t have listened to her, I should have insisted on ordering an Uber for her....I would die if something bad happened to her.” I say and look away wiping the tear that just escaped my eye

“I’m sorry, did you call her?”

“Yes, her phone is off.”

I answer without looking in his direction, I can't let him see my tears it's already embarrassing enough that I'm crying in front of another man.

"Can't you call her friends or someone maybe she went to them or something?"

"She doesn't have friends here," I say and blow my nose

"Don't panic just yet I think she's fine wherever she is, be positive I'm sure she wouldn't want to find her boyfriend in tears." He says and chuckles

I appreciate what he's trying to do but it won't work because something is wrong, I can feel it.

"I will wait with you, I have a knobkierie in my car in case those criminals attempt to do something. Get in the car it's cold out here."

“Thank you.”

I round the car and get in the passenger seat. I take out my phone and try her phone for the umpteenth time, but I get the same result. I sigh and cover my face with my hands, if only there was someone I could call and ask oh God please don't let anyone happen to my girlfriend, I just got her I can't afford to lose her now.

#33

“I’m sorry man but I need to leave, it’s getting late.” He says glancing at his wristwatch

“It’s okay I understand.”

It’s 21:13 so I understand why he wants to leave, it’s not safe to be here at this hour.

“Where do you stay maybe I can drop you off on my way home?”

“Braam but I’m not going anywhere without my girlfriend.”

“I understand that you’re worried about her but come on this is crazy you’ll get yourself killed, look around you there’s no one in the streets except us and the nyaope boys sleeping on the sidewalk. It’s cold you need to go home; you’ll resume your search tomorrow.”

I know he's right, but I still can't leave without Anzani, what if she comes here and doesn't find me? No, I must wait. I get out of the car when he starts the ignition

"Do you have a death wish? Get back in the car!" he roars glaring at me

I ignore him and lean by the wall next to KFC. He looks at me and sighs

"Get back in the car I'll wait with you but at ten I'm leaving." A smile embraces my lips and I chant endless thank you's before climbing back inside the bakkie.

"You're so stubborn." He says rubbing his hands together to generate heat, it's super cold.

"I can't just go what if she gets here and doesn't find me." He eyes me for a while then his lips break into a smile

“You love her.”

“I do, I don’t know what I would do if I lost her....I can’t lose her, she...”

“Nothing will happen to her, be positive.”

He’s right I shouldn’t be thinking like this. Where’s my faith in God? he’ll never allow anything to happen to Anzani. She’s fine her taxi probably got delayed or something, she’s on her way to me.

“Take” Given says giving me an orange and starts peeling his.

“Thank you.” Food is the last thing on my mind right now, so I put it on my lap.

A few minutes later a taxi parks behind us and its headlights brighten Given’s bakkie. My heart skips a beat, and cold chills run down my spine already imagining the worst-case scenario, from the fear reflected on Given’s face I know he’s thinking the

same thing. I shouldn't have dragged him into this look now I'm going to get us killed. His hand fishes on top of the dashboard in search of his weapon, when he finds it, he slowly grabs the knobkierie with trembling hands readying himself to attack. With heavy breaths and fast-beating hearts, we listen as the door slams open.

"It's so late, where are we going to find transport at this time?" A voice says

"This is not fair driver you can't just leave us here what if we get killed? At least wait until all of us gets transport" Another adds

"Phumani umlungu ulinde I taxi yakhe!" Says who I assume is the driver of the taxi

(Get out, my boss is waiting for his taxi)

Oh, my goodness could Anzani be one of the passengers? I bolt out of the bakkie, and a half run to the Quantum.

“Excuse me, where’s this taxi coming from?” I ask one of the passengers

“Heidelberg.”

“Thank you,” I say and skim my eyes inside the Quantum searching for my woman, a heavy sigh breezes out of my lips when I spot her inside.

“Thembalam”

“Baby.” She says sounding exhausted. I climb inside the taxi and pull her in my arms

“Where have you been? I was so scared, I thought something bad happened to you.” I break the hug, place my hands on her shoulders and look into her eyes.

“I’m sorry my phone ran out of battery and the taxi broke down on our way here, we had to park on the side of the road and wait for the mechanic who was driving from Ratanda. He took

his sweet time because of traffic on N3, you know how it gets around 6 in the evening. I'm sorry for worrying you, I didn't mean to I was scared I thought I wouldn't find you when I get here because it's late."

"There was no way I was going to leave here without you."

"Thank you sthandwa sam you're the best, are you not feeling cold?" She says eyeing the thin sweater I'm wearing

"It's okay you don't have to worry about me, I'm just glad you're here," I say with my hand behind her neck rubbing my nose against hers.

"Let's get out of the taxi. The driver is complaining." I didn't even hear him complain because Anzani has all my attention.

I grab her heavy luggage bag wondering what she has inside, she doesn't need so many clothes for the weekend plus she left some of her clothes in my closet the last time she was here.

“What’s inside?” I ask gesturing to the suitcase with my eyes. She smiles, smacks her lips together, and zips them with her fingers. I wonder!

“Okay.” I wrap my left hand around her waist and drag the luggage bag with the other hand and lead the way to Given’s bakkie.

“Thank you so much for waiting with me man, I really appreciate it.”

“It’s a pleasure man” he smiles as he looks at Anza “My name is Given, it’s nice to meet you, gorgeous lady.”

“Nice to meet you too, thank you for waiting with him.” She says shaking his hand

“I had no choice; your man was a wreck you should have seen him bawling his eyes out”

“I don’t believe that ...Mpilo would never cry.” She says looking at me, Given chuckles

“Tell him sthandwa sam.”

“You don’t know wena, he was so devastated and a mess...please never do what you did again because next time he’ll have a heart attack and die.” We all chuckle

“Don’t listen to him wena baby he’s lying.”

“More like telling the truth. Get inside I’ll drop you off.”

“No, it’s okay man

I will call an Uber you’ve already done so much for me.”

“Quinton, I command you to step inside the car now.” He deadpans

I have no choice but to relent. I put Anza's suitcase at the back of the vehicle and climb inside the car first so Anza can sit on my lap, the car is relatively small for the three of us. It's a Ford Bantam

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ANZANI

Quinton was so happy when he saw everything I bought for his apartment, he couldn't stop thanking me, but he wasn't impressed with the sneakers I bought for him. He gave me a whole lecture about how I should be using the money wisely not squandering it on him, I kept quiet and pretended to be listening, but the truth of the matter is that I don't regret spending the portion of the money I received on him because he deserves it. He wanted to take me out on a date today but it's too cold I can't go out, especially in the condition I'm in, my hands and feet have turned blue and I have joint pains I took my medicines but still so I'm under the covers while he's in the kitchen preparing something for us to eat. My heart leaps to my throat as I receive a call from an unsaved number

“Anzani speaking hello.”

“Hello Anzani, you’re speaking to Dimpho Khumalo from Coca-Cola company, you applied for a packaging leadership with us am I correct?”

“Yes, you are correct.”

“Congratulations you’ve been shortlisted for an interview on Tuesday but because of COVID your interview will be a telephone interview at 11:30 am, will you avail yourself?”

“Yes, ma’am I’ll avail myself.”

“Okay then, I’ll send you an SMS with the interview details shortly enjoy the rest of your day bye.”

“Bye.” I momentarily forget about the pain I’m in and jump out of bed and sprint to the kitchen immediately after ending the call

“Why did you get out of bed?” He questions looking ready to bite my head off, but I ignore him

“Babe guess who has an interview with Coke on Tuesday?”

I watch as the anger on his face slowly dissolves to happiness and his lips spread into a gigantic smile.

“Yo Thembalam’ usho ukuthi sizofa I cold drink nje?” he says and we both laugh

“Congratulations Thembalam’ I’m proud of you, I know you’ll get it.” He says hugging me

“I was beginning to lose hope in ever finding a job.”

“You’re impatient that’s your problem, the bible says, ‘when the time is right, I will make it happen’. It wasn’t the right time that’s why you didn’t get the job when you wanted to, maybe

God saw that you're not ready for the job that you want, and I believe you had to go through everything you went through at Mr. Price so it can prepare you for the next job. Not every bad thing that happens to us is meant to break us, some things are meant to teach us and mold us to what God wants us to be. There's a lesson in every challenge you face it just depends on how you choose to look at it." My man is very wise Nina!

"Yeah, that's true love, Mr. Price taught me a lot I don't think I'll ever make the mistake of being overly friendly to my colleagues before taking time to learn their personalities. One bitten twice shy!"

"I'm glad you've learned your lesson, being kind is not bad but you need to be careful who you trust and share your things with. There's a lot of hate in the workplace."

"You're a right babe."

"Let's eat and then I'll help you get ready for your interview."

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MPHO

It feels good to be back in my hood after such a long time not forgetting the warm welcome I received from mother dearest last night, my dick tightens in my pants every time I think about everything we got up to. Damn I can't wait to see what she plans to do to me tonight! Nancy is still sulking so she refused when I tried to hit it this morning but that's only because I wasn't persistent enough, my appetite was still sated from what her mother gave me there's no way she can resist me when I really want her, and she knows it too.

I'm with Gift and Kgahliso we met this morning and drove to Spi-kos, a fast-food outlet in Tsakane because I was craving chicken dust, I love the ambiance around this place it's chilled that's why we opted to sit and enjoy our food here while listening to music. It's cold so the place isn't too packed.

"I forgot to ask, who told you about Q's new job because I thought we all cut him off," I ask looking at Gift

“Ask him, how did you know. Are you still in contact with Q?”

Kgahliso

“No of course I’m not, Nokwazi is the one who told me.”

“Q’s little sister?” Kgahliso

“Yep, you know she’s always had a crush on me, so she tells me everything I need to know plus I don’t think Q told them about our fallout. She thinks we are still friends with her brother” Gift

“He didn’t tell them, I know Q,” I say

Maybe we can use his sister’s crush on Gift to come between Anzani and Quinton and end their pathetic relationship for good.

“I think you should tell her about Anzani and how she came between Q and me.”

“I already did that; she was so disappointed when I told her about it because she was excited about her brother finally getting a girlfriend who loves him. Now she hates her, and you know how stubborn Kwazi is, it’s going to take a miracle for her to like Anzani again.”

“Good, I know how much Q loves his sisters I don’t see him dating anyone who is hated by them,” I say

“I don’t think so, Q seems to really love Anzani who would’ve imagined that he’d leave our church? Yet he did it because of Anzani.” Kgahliso

“I agree with K plus Kwazi says her mother and Nobuhle adore Anzani I don’t see them breaking up because of Nokwazi.” Gift

“It’ll work trust me; I know Q better than the two of you combined. He adores his little sisters; he’ll definitely break up with Anzani as soon as he realizes that Nokwazi doesn’t like her you’ll see.”

I hope I’m right!

#34

NARRATED

Nobuhle is in her brother's room studying, Quinton gave her permission to use his room to study because it has a study table which makes it easier to study than on top of the bed in her bedroom. He told her to take it to her bedroom but she refused, it's nicer to study here-alone with all the peace and quiet. Her phone rings disturbing her, it's her big sister Nokwazi she smiles excitedly and picks up the call.

"Hey, sis."

"Nobuhle."

"What's wrong, why do you sound so down?"

"Because I heard that Venda girl was dating Mpho before she dated Quinton, what self-respecting woman would do that?"

She's a hoe who separated two best friends." Buhle gasps in shock

"That's a lie Anzani is nice, who lied to you?"

"Gift is the one who told me."

"Kwazi why are you still talking to Gift didn't bhuti warn you to stay away from his friends? Why do you like disrespecting him so much?"

"Woah awume kancane wena sthenjwa, Gift and I just friends."  
She says rolling her eyes

"Why would you befriend our brother's friends, they are older than you Nokwazi."

"Ey awungimele nge'scefe! That girl is not good for our brother."

“Gift is lying sis’ Anzani is a good person.”

“Come on Buhle stop being naïve, will you trust a stranger over someone we’ve known for years?”

“No Kwazi I won’t allow you to manipulate me, it’s easy for you to trust Gift because you’re in Northwest and you don’t see how much our brother loves Anzani. He loves her and she’s nice to mom and me.” Nokwazi rolls her eyes in boredom

“Don’t tell me about Quinton he’s pussy whipped and can’t think straight why else would he allow a girl to come between him and his best friend? I hate that Venda girl and I’ll never accept her as my brother’s girlfriend.”

“Wow Nokwazi I can’t believe you just said that about our brother, will you trust Gift over your own brother? The brother who loves you and would do anything to give you a comfortable life, why can’t you be happy for him? He finally has someone in his life.”

“Pssh please stop I won’t let you emotionally blackmail me Quinton isn’t doing anything special, he’s my brother he has to provide for me, and about him being happy with that Venda girl he’s been bewitched I don’t know why you and mom can’t see it. Quinton loves his church why would he leave it unless he’s being controlled by muti, I don’t like that girl she’s pulling our brother by his nose and controlling him don’t be surprised when he starts coming up with excuses when you ask for money.”

“You’re wrong about her and I know you’ll realize that after spending time with her, you only saw her once or twice that’s why you’re saying this. Mom wouldn’t love her if she was bad.”

“You and mom are too kind that’s your weakness, too bad for her she won’t fool me because I can see right through her.”

“Ai okay let me get back to my books, I promised bhuti that I would get good marks this term.”

“Okay you do that little sister we’ll talk again tomorrow bye.”

“Bye I love you.”

“I love you more, please stop posting that Venda girl on your status and calling her your sister I’m your only sister.”

“Bye Nokwazi.”

She tries to go back to studying but she can’t, what Kwazi said is bothering her. She stands up and heads to the main house where she finds her mother in the kitchen cooking up a storm

“What's wrong my baby?” her mother asks when she sees her long face

“It's Nokwazi, she called and said some bad things about my brother and sis Anzani.” Her mother frowns

“What did she say?” she narrates everything to her mother

“Ungenwe yini u Nokwazi kodwa? Don’t worry my love I’ll talk to her, go back and study.”

(I wonder what got into Nokwazi)

“Ok, mama.” She says and turns on her heels

“Buhle?”

“Ma?”

“Please don’t tell your brother about what Kwazi said, I’ll handle this.”

“I wasn’t going to tell him.” She says smiling shyly

“I know you, you can’t keep anything from your brother. It doesn’t start now you’ve always been like this from a young age, he was the first person you told when you started your periods hai mara Buhle I want to see if you’ll also tell him when you start having sex.”

“Hah, mama!”

“Haisuka ngiyacala ukubona intombazana angana secret nje ngawe, I can’t gossip about your brother with you because I know you’ll tell him.”

(I’ve never seen a girl who doesn’t know how to keep a secret like you.)

“Vele ma ngo bhuti wami angfuni nex ngingalwa ngibe bovu.”

The two women share a chuckle before the younger one retreats back to her brother's room leaving her mother deep in thoughts

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MPHO

Mom is stark naked waiting for me in bed when I walk inside her bedroom, my member twitches as I pronto turn and lock the door. I don't want any disturbances; she smiles and parts her legs then she flicks her clit with her fingers driving me crazy with lust

"Future stop it you're killing me here," I say gesturing to the tent in my pants

A glorious giggle escapes her lips, and she starts circling her finger around her glistening hole. I hurriedly discard my clothes and jump on the bed next to her

"Ouch!" she says when I smack her butt

"You're a naughty girl how dare you to tempt me like that."

"Please punish me, daddy." She says giving me handcuffs

Damn mommy is so wild in bed, sex with her is amazing. She likes to be punished and called by all these dirty names; with

her, I can live out all the fantasies I have without feeling bad.  
That's why it's so hard for me to stop sleeping with her.

“Ok my b\*tch but first I need you to suck my dick as if your life depends on it, like the b\*tch you are..get it?” she nods vigorously

She smiles and lies on her back opening her mouth wide. I guide my hard member inside her mouth

“No hands,” I say slapping her hands and shoving my dick in her warm mouth

She sucks my dick sucking in her cheeks giving me immense pleasure and shoves her manicured fingers inside my chocolate box, now tell me why would I leave someone like this?

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ANZANI

Quinton and I are spooning in bed, his hands are underneath my Pajama top squeezing my boobs and tweaking my hard nipples. His face is buried on the crook of my neck giving me soft kisses. His hard crotch on my ass and his hands on boobs are torture my clit is twitching dying for him to be inside me, Q and I have never had sex. We only have oral sex and that's it-remember your girl wasn't ready! I'm ready now and I don't know how to tell him maybe I should just show him, I turn around and face him

"Hey." He says and pulls me in for a kiss

I've been kissed before

but I've never met anyone who gives kisses as Q does. His kisses are slow and sensual they carry meaning as if he's relaying his feelings through every kiss he gives to me. They are an affirmation of his love for me.

"I need to taste you." He says wiggling his tongue and I know exactly what he means

He helps me take off my Pajama pants along with my underwear and I sit on his face holding on to the headboard, he likes it when I'm riding his face. He spreads my butt cheeks and I feel his warm breath on my mound before I feel his tongue and lips on my wet cookie, my body trembles as he eats me up like I'm his favorite dessert. My heart threatens to burst out of my chest from the fierce pleasure I feel, my toes curl and my grip on the headboard tightens as I feel my orgasm coming.

"Please go faster baby!" I say in a crying voice feeling my body go rigid

He obliges and a wave of pleasure washes through me and I cum on his face.

"Yoh!" I say trying to catch my breath and settle next to him as he wipes his face with a tissue.

"I also want to suck your d\*ck," I say out of the blue

I don't particularly like giving a blow job, I used to find it disgusting as a matter of fact but I want to suck Q's d\*ck, I'm dying to.

"Are you sure? You don't have to feel pressured."

"Yes, I'm sure my love."

"You look scared, do it while I suck on your cookie maybe it'll help you to relax."

He slips out of his boxer shorts freeing his hard meat and I get on top of him with my back facing him and slowly lower my chest on his stomach and put my legs on either side of his shoulders so that my cookie is wide and ready to eat.

"Relax." He says and buries his face on my cookie and starts eating me up. My boyfriend knows how to please a woman with his tongue, you guys!

His member is long and thick, I'm scared it won't fit inside my mouth. I hold it with both hands and slowly put it inside my mouth, the tip tastes salty because of precum. I use everything I've learned from the novels I read on Facebook and judging by how he's stopped eating me up and his hitched breathing I know I'm doing the right thing and it gives me the confidence to push more of his member inside my mouth. It's difficult to suck him with my mouth stretched open but I try my best, a loud groan escapes his lips and he put his hands on my waist aggressively pulling me down to his face, I momentarily run out of breath when I feel his tongue on my asshole. He circles his finger on the wrinkles around my ass while his tongue is plunged inside my ass, my body convulses and I squirt on his face.

I suck on his member like a lollipop twirling my tongue on his mushroom head and playing with his balls, I take him out of my mouth and run my tongue on his length, and put his balls inside my mouth.

“Oh, f\*\*\*ck that's so good baby!”

I put him back inside my mouth and suck my cheeks in, it doesn't take long before he shoots up his load deep in my throat, I try to swallow but I gag and run to the bathroom to spit.

I'm rinsing my mouth on the basin when he walks inside the bathroom

"I'm sorry love."

"It's okay," I say looking at him through the mirror

"Mpilo."

"Yes, love."

"I'm ready." He knows what I'm talking about

"Are you sure?"

“100%.”

He doesn't waste time; he bends my back over the basin and slowly rubs his mushroom head on my entrance

“Babe stop teasing put it in.”

“I don't want to hurt you.”

He slowly plunges in and out of me until the head pops in and I feel my cookie stretch to accommodate him. Tears roll down my cheeks as he keeps thrusting in and out of me, I thought it would be painful because he's bigger and longer than Mpho but it's so sweet I can't help but cry. There's a bit of discomfort as he puts more of his length inside of me but it's nothing I can't bear, the sweet pleasure I feel makes it all tolerable, I raise my head and look at him in the mirror as he keeps plunging inside me. He looks so sexy with all the sweat trickling down his face, he looks at me and his thrusts get deeper and faster as our eyes lock on the mirror.

“You’re so sweet Thembalam’ .....sooo sweet... mamayooo!”

“Faster,” I say when I feel my third orgasm coming

It only takes two strokes before I feel a mixture of our cum running down my legs

“I’m sorry.” He says wiping my tears

Damn, I’ve never felt so much pleasure in my life, I thought sex is not ish and mufftown was the sh\*t well that was until I met Quinton.

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QUINTON

I wake up and turn to look at Anzani snoring in my arms, she slept immediately after our sexercise. The second round was longer than the first and allowed me ample time to please my woman and learn all the corners of her body, I've had good sex before but what I just had with Anzani was out of this world or maybe it's because we love each other. Sex is more meaningful with someone you love, not that I've slept with anyone I didn't love before but it's different with my Venda Queen. She owns every beat of my heart; I plant a long peck on her forehead before rolling out of bed and slipping into my clothes that are scattered all over the rug on the floor.

I'm going to the pharmacy to buy her morning-after pills because we didn't use any condoms, as much as I would love for her to fall pregnant for me now is not the time. I want to do things right with her, I want to marry her first before giving her kids. It's already bad enough that we are having sex before marriage the last thing I need is for her to walk around with the proof of our fornication. I know women get judged more than men for having kids out of wedlock in society and even worse in church, I don't want to put my lady through that.

"Hey," Nolwazi says climbing inside the elevator

“Hi.”

“I hardly saw you this weekend why are you hiding?”

“I’m not hiding my lady is around, so you won’t see much of me.”

“You have a girlfriend?”

“Yes, I thought you saw her two weeks ago when she was here.”

“The yellow bone slender one?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, I saw her but I didn’t think she was your girlfriend, she looks young.”

“Well, that’s her, my wife to be. See you around.”

I say and get off as the elevator stops at the ground floor. Nolwazi has been beckoning for my attention ever since she gave me scones. I’m old enough to see that she wants me, I won’t lie she’s a beautiful curvaceous woman but I’m more than satisfied with my slender portable woman.

#35

The telephone interview with the Coca-Cola people went well, they sent me an email after the interview with a declaration form for me to sign and state whether I have relatives who work for Coca-Cola or not then I had to complete online assessments and go for a fingerprint check at Benoni. I checked their recruitment process online and what follows the fingerprint check is a drug test then they will invite me and other successful candidates to their offices for team building activities to scrutinize if we can work well with other people, I'm hopeful I'll get the job because I know I'll pass the fingerprint check and the drug test plus I'm good with teamwork so the job is definitely mine. Finally, my breakthrough is here, and I couldn't be more pleased at first, I was doubtful because of previous disappointments but now all my doubts have been cleared this job is mine, I can feel it.

I'm in my bedroom talking to my boyfriend on the phone.

"U Nobuhle asked me to speak to you on her behalf." I'm curious what would Nobuhle want from me?

“Okay, I’m listening.”

“I wanted to send my mother money for her winter clothes, but she asked me to give it to you instead, then she asked me to ask you to accompany her when she goes shopping apparently my mom doesn’t know the latest fashion trends. Do you mind going with her?”

“No, I don’t mind. I’ll be happy to accompany her as a matter of fact. When is she going there?”

“Thanks for agreeing to thembalam’...she’s attending SSIP on Saturdays, so she said on Sunday.”

“Okay, no problem I’ll go with her.”

“Okay, I’ll send the money to your account then.”

“I’m curious though, why didn’t she ask me herself?”

“She said she’s scared you’ll refuse when she’s the one asking.”

“Nobuhle is crazy why would I refuse?”

Nokwazi spends most of her time at school in Northwest so I don’t know her too well, Nobuhle is the one I see often, the girl is so sweet and soft-spoken like her mother but we never really say much to each other because she is shy around me so I’m shocked that she would ask me to accompany her but I’m flattered at the same time.

“Uyakuthanda umtanasekhaya shem thembalam’ she’s just shy around you because she’s not used to you yet, but she always steals your pictures on my status and posts them on hers.”

(My little sister likes you)

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“Wow I love her too, please give her my number so we chat and make arrangements for Sunday.”

“I’ll do that, it warms my heart seeing my two favorite people getting along. Nokwazi also likes you, my siblings love anyone who makes their brother happy and they can see that I’m happy with you that’s why they like you.”

“I like them too, ba sweet abantwana bakini shem.”

(Your siblings are sweet)

“Yeah, just like me, right?”

“Yes, babe just like you.”

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NARRATED

It's Sunday morning Anzani and Buhle agreed to leave for the mall at 9 am so they can have ample time to move from shop to shop choosing the best outfits for Buhle, Anzani woke up early and cleaned her aunt's house then she went to Ext.7 to fetch her boyfriend's little sister.

“Nihambeni kahle bantwana bami.” Nomonde waves standing at the door looking at the girls as they walk out of the gate.

(Have a safe trip, my children)

“Thank you, ma bye.” The girls say at the same time and flag a taxi to the rank.

“I was thinking carnival mall is that fine with you?” Anzani says as they settle on their seats inside the taxi. Nobuhle smiles shyly and nods her head then she fixes her gaze on her nails avoiding eye contact with her.

“Ha mara Buhle sizohamba kanjani usaba nokungibheka emehlweni?”

(How are we going to go together if you're afraid of looking into my eyes)

The teenager doesn't reply she only smiles in return.

"So, how's school?" Anzani says making conversation as an attempt to make her comfortable

"School is challenging but my grades are good."

"That's good nana so when is your matric dance? I'm sure you're looking forward to it"

"The date hasn't been confirmed yet but I'm not excited about it, I don't think I want to go."

"Why?" Asks Anzani

"I don't have any close friends and I don't think anyone will ask me to be their date."

“Why do you think so?”

“Boys in my school call me a nerd and say I’m boring, I think it’s best I don’t go because I will be bored anyway.”

“You can take your brother; he can be your date,” Anzani suggests causing the teenager to laugh

“I love my brother ne, but I can’t take him to my matric dance he’s old.” Anzani throws her head back laughing

“Haibo did you just call my very handsome boyfriend old?” The teenager giggles

“Please don’t tell him I said that.”

Anza’s strategy to get Buhle comfortable around her worked, she’s comfortable, initiating conversations and sharing jokes

with her brother's girlfriend by the time the taxi drops them at the entrance of the mall.

"What, why do you have that look on your face?" Anza asks when Buhle steps out of the fitting room with a black bodycon dress that sticks to her body like her second skin it accentuates her curves and round behind.

"I don't like it."

"Why nana? It looks amazing on you."

"I don't like tight clothing because they reveal my body shape... I just don't like how guys look at me like I'm some meat when I'm dressed in tight-fitting outfits, I wish I had your body. I'm too young to be this fat."

"No, you're not fat Buhle, size 30 is not fat."

"Only because I'm exercising ..I'm only 16 sis'Anzani what size will I wear when I'm 21?"

Anzani sighs, she understands what Buhle is going through because she's been there herself. I'm sure all of us go through this phase at some point in our lives, a phase where we don't like how our bodies look, how light or dark our skin is, the pimples on our face, how skinny or thick our thighs and legs are, how flat our behinds are and how big our bellies are because of societal standards of what a beautiful 'woman' should look like.

"Oh, nana I wish you could see yourself through my eyes, there's nothing wrong with your body. You have a beautiful body and a gorgeous face; the bonus is your humble and sweet personality there's nothing wrong with you or your body... to be honest

Advertisement

I wish I had your figure damn I would be rocking these kind of dresses chile!" Buhle laughs

"But don't take this dress if you feel uncomfortable wearing it. We will look for something else, we are supposed to be buying winter clothes anyway."

“No, I’ll take it. Thank you so much sis’Anzani for boosting my confidence I didn’t believe it when mom told me there’s nothing wrong with my body, I thought she was only saying it because I’m her daughter, but I believe you. You have no reason to lie to me.”

“Your mother is the last person who would lie to you Buhle, believe her when she tells you something because she wants the best for you and would never lead you astray.” Buhle smiles and jumps to Anza’s arms and squeezes her in a tight hug

“Thank you so much, I needed to hear that.”

“It’s a pleasure baby, we’ll take this dress but it’s the last one we are buying. We need to buy jeans, sweatpants, jerseys, and jackets now this year’s winter promises to be cold.”

“Ok, sis let me quickly undress then.”

After spending hours going from one shop to the next the girls are exhausted and famished.

“Where do you want to eat little madam?”

“Spur.”

“Okay then Spur it is.”

Anza says and leads the way to the food court, a waiter welcomes them at the door when they get to Spur and leads them to a table next to the window where they settle down and put their shopping bags on the floor next to them. The waiter hands them their menus before excusing himself giving them a minute to decide

“So, what do you want to eat?”

“I want the Mohawk combo with strawberry milkshake and you?” Buhle

“I’ll have the same but with a soft drink.”

“I think we should also order a takeaway for your mom; do you think you’ll eat dessert?” Anzani says

“No, only if we make it a takeaway.”

“Yeah, me too. Let me call the waiter.”

Anzani looks around the restaurant and snaps her fingers calling the waiter who comes to their table running, he walks away after taking their orders. The girls take countless pictures while waiting for their order to be ready.

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NOKWAZI

My roommate went home for the weekend, so I'm bored all alone in my room reading confessions from the TUKS Confession page on Facebook, some of the things people write here are scary and some sound unreal and made up. When I get tired of reading, I log into WhatsApp and go through WhatsApp statuses to kill time, my heart almost stops beating when I see Nobuhle's status-, she uploaded pictures of herself and that Venda girl at Spur and wrote a lengthy caption about how grateful she is to her for accompanying her and for the great advice she gave her. This Venda girl is slowly but surely coming between my sister and me; doesn't she have her own siblings? What does she want with my sister, she's nothing but a girlfriend, not a wife she has no business getting close to Nobuhle. I can't believe Nobuhle still insists on referring to her as her sister even after I told her to stop, I buy 50 minutes voice bundles and call Nobuhle's number.

"Hey, sis." She says picking on the third ring, she sounds happy.

"Nobuhle what is this I see on your status?"

"What are you talking about?"

“What did you post kanti?”

“Oh, you’re talking about sis’Anzani?”

“I told you to stop calling her your sister!”

“She’s older than me Nokwazi and she’s dating my elder brother so I will keep calling her sis.”

“Mxm, what were you doing with her?”

“I asked her to accompany me shopping and it was so nice, initially I was shy around her, but I ended up loosening up and enjoyed her company. She is really nice, I enjoyed spending time with her.” The fervor in her voice can’t be missed

“I’m not interested in knowing how nice you think she is, stop talking to that girl she’s a snake who came between my brother and his best friend, between him and his church and something tells me she wants Quinton all to herself, so we are next.”

“Nokwazi I thought mom spoke to you about this, please stop what you’re doing it will not end well for you.”

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

“Hmm bye.” She says and drops the call

Wow, I respect the Venda girl’s muti shem. It’s strong, she has everyone in my family eating at the palm of her hand, but I won’t rest until she’s out of my brother’s life.

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NARRATED

“I need you to give me everything on this guy, where he lives, who he talks to, who are his friends, everything including how many times does he go to the bathroom can you do that for me?”

“Consider it done.” Says the man starring at the picture given to him by his “employer”

“Money is not a problem; I need to know everything on this guy.”

“Consider it done boss.”

“Good, now leave I have another meeting in the next ten minutes.” The man stands up from his seat and pulls a black hoodie over his face.

“Use the emergency exit make sure no one sees you.”

“Roger that boss man.”

“I’ll wire half your payment now and the other half when the job is done.” The man says pressing his computer

“Ta.” He says and peels the door open and makes his way outside the office.

The man inside grabs his phone and rotates on his office chair and faces the wall making a call

“Hello.” Says a feminine voice on the other end of the line

“Our plan is coming together nicely.”

“Thank you, I knew I could count on you.” the female says squealing in excitement

“Glad I could assist, I have a meeting in a few minutes we’ll chat later bye.”

“Bye.”

Lerato fela❤️

#36

NARRATED

“Look who it is,” Mpho says grabbing Buhle's hand as she walks past him on the Kota queue

“Oh hey brother Mpho, I didn't see you there.” She says claiming back her hand from his tight grip

“We are not in church, you can call me Mpho.”

“No, brother Mpho will suffice,” Nobuhle says

“You have grown hey.” He says peeking at her round behind filling her jeans and the nipples poking through her long-sleeved top.

“I don't mean to be rude bhuti Mpho but I need to rush back home.” Mpho cringes at the word 'bhuti'

“I told you there’s no need to call me bhuti, you can call me Mpho I don’t mind.”

He says not moving his gaze from her body already imagining how sweet she would be underneath him, he has never slept with a virgin before but he can already imagine the sweetness of being with one. It’s obvious that this one is still sealed. He can almost feel her tiny hole gripping and squeezing his c\*ck, f\*ck!

“You’re my brother’s age so it wouldn’t be right to call you by name.”

“Okay I understand, let me walk you home then.”

“But you’re still in the queue.”

“Don’t worry about that allow me to walk you home.”

“Okay.” Buhle agrees thinking about how this will save her from dealing with the group of boys who camp at the Indian shop in

her street, there's no way they'll bother her when they see her with him.

Buhle leads the way and Mpho follows behind her drooling over her beautiful body, it's amazing how fast children grow. Just yesterday she was a kid running around in her underwear following Q everywhere and now she's this beautiful girl with a beautiful body and the most gorgeous sweet-looking face he has ever seen. Damn!

"So how's school going, you're in matric right?"

"Yes, I'm in matric. School is challenging but it's nothing I can't handle."

"I don't doubt that, you've always been smarty pants like your brother, how old are you again."

"I'm 16."

"So what do you want to do next year?"

“I’ll follow in my brother's footsteps and do engineering, I like mechanical though.”

“Nice, so what do you do think of your brother's relationship with Anzani?”

“Why are you asking me about my brother's relationship?”  
Mpho fakes a laugh

“Nothing I’m just trying to make a conversation.”

“Well, I don’t like talking about my brother’s business with anyone who is not him.” Mpho gasps, just how strict is this kid? He feels stupid for being told off by a kid.

“Okay, I understand.”

He stops two houses away from Q's house and takes out his phone from his pocket and hands it to Buhle, she stares at the phone and gives him the 'and then?' look

“Oh, please punch in your number so we can chat on WhatsApp.” He says putting his hands inside his pockets.

“With all due respect bhuti Mpho, you're my brother's friend, not mine so you and I have nothing to chat about and besides you're old I doubt we have similar interests. Thank you for accompanying me I think I'll be okay from here”

The teenager gives Mpho his phone and walks off without giving him a chance to reply, Mpho claps his hands in disbelief unable to wrap his head around what just happened. Did this little girl call him old?

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ANZANI

I'm on the phone with Shaun and he's telling me about the job he found for me.

"Are you for real?"

"Yes, a marketing internship in Midrand."

I'm confident I'll get the Coke job but it pays less because it's a learnership, a learnership that's out of my field-it's a packaging learnership I only applied for it because I needed a job, a marketing internship is the better option because it'll help me advance my knowledge and experience in my area of expertise.

"Thank you so much Shaun I don't know how to thank you for what you have done for me."

"You can go out to lunch with me."

"As friends right?"

“Yes, Anzani as friends.”

“Okay, I don’t mind that.”

“Great, get ready then I’ll come to pick you up at 2 pm.”

“Okay no problem, so when do I start?”

“We’ll go through the details of your employment during our lunch how's that?”

“Ok, no problem.”

“See you later then.”

I toss the phone on my bed and jump up and down screaming my lungs out and punching fists in the air in victory, aunt bolts into my room and looks at me with worry lines etched on her forehead

“I got a job aunt.”

“What?”

“Yes, aunt I got a job wuuuuu!” She laughs and gives me a tight hug

“Congratulations my child.”

“Thank you, God is good.”

I can't wait to tell my boyfriend about this I know he'll be so excited about this, we have been praying for this day. I dial his number when aunt leaves the room, I look at the time and sigh when it things unanswered he's probably busy with work. I'll call him again later but for now, I need to get myself ready for lunch with Shaun, I wonder where he's taking me.

I take out my outfit for the day and spread it on top of my bed and head to the bathroom with a towel wrapped around my body carrying my toiletry bag and phone in my hands. I fill the tub with water and play gospel music feeling grateful for his unending mercies in my life, he's been so good to me and I can't find the right words to thank him with. I soak myself in the tub until my fingertips look white and wrinkled. I drain out the water, wipe myself with a towel and wash the bathtub while singing along to Dr. Tumi's You are here

It's cold outside and I'm sensitive to cold because of my condition so I wear long leggings underneath, two pairs of socks and sweatpants on top, a long-sleeved top, a big jacket, gloves, sneakers, and a beanie.

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Shaun and I have been on the road for about 30 minutes now, this is the first time I'm inside his car and I've got to say the ride is comfortable, he bought me snacks to nibble on the road and switched on the heater so I'm warm. He's really sweet I wonder why he doesn't have someone in his life, he's handsome, monied

and very caring and thoughtful any lady would be lucky to have him in her life. I can't believe I allowed people like Mpho to change my overall perception of men, good men still exist and Quinton and Shaun are one of them.

"And we are here," he says

I look around the place and see the famous Maboneng Precinct, I can't believe this is my first time here. I've only seen this place from people's pictures on social media, Quinton and I must come here one day plus it's not far from Braam where he lives.

"Why did we have to come all the way to Joburg for lunch?"

"You don't like it? I thought you would be happy to come here but we can go back if you don't want to dine here."

"No, it's not that. It's just that I wanted my first time here to be with my boyfriend." His face drops

“I understand, we can look for another place then maybe Newtown or Rose bank.”

“No it’s fine, we are already here so we might as well eat here.”

“Great, let’s look around then you’ll choose where you want us to eat.”

We step out of the car and walk side by side trying to pick a restaurant to dine in.

“And?” he asks with a smile

“Pata Pata.”

“Great choice my lady.”

“Stop pretending you practically coerced me to choose Pata Pata.” He laughs

“Okay, I’m guilty but that’s only because I know how delicious the food is here.”

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QUINTON

My love for Anzani keeps growing deeper and deeper with each day that passes, I love her more especially after making love and being one with her. During our heated passionate moments, I could swear I felt our souls connect. I love her so much and I can’t wait to make her my wife because the truth is I kind of feel guilty for going against what the word says about fornication I don’t want to be those Christians who preach one thing and do the other. I don’t want to be comfortable living in sin, that will draw me further from God and my relationship with him is most important to me.

“Hey man.” Kabelo says sticking his head on my door

“Is it time?”

“Yes man, it’s time.”

“Okay let me grab my jacket and follow you out.”

Kabelo has a car so we always drive to Maboneng during lunchtime, he enjoys the food there and most of all the ambiance around Maboneng. I still don’t know how he managed me to convince me to go with him the first time but funny enough I like that place plus we go there during the day so it’s not too packed. People tend to misbehave when they are under the influence of alcohol so I don’t particularly like to be in places where people consume alcohol. I switch off my desktop, grab my jacket on my office chair and make my way outside to the parking lot.

“So where are we eating today?” he asks when I get in the passenger seat

“I don’t care where we eat man as long as we eat meat man.”  
My statement throws him in a fit of laughter

“You’re a real Zulu man, y’all are said to love meat.”

“Shut up msuthu and drive. I have a lot of work waiting for me when we get back.” We both laugh. He starts the ignition and drives out of the office building.

I notice a missed call from my girlfriend when I go through my phone, I immediately call her call her back but it rings unanswered.

“What?”

“I had a missed call from my girlfriend but now she’s not picking up when I call.”

“I’m sure she’s busy with something, she’ll call you back relax.”

“I don’t know man I have a bad feeling, like something bad is going to happen.”

“Come on man aren’t you the one who always preaches positivity? Use your advice.”

“You are right, I shouldn’t be negative. I’ll keep trying her number.”

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NARRATED

Anzani's phone is ringing alone inside the glove compartment in Shaun's car while Anzani and Shaun are inside the restaurant enjoying their meal, having a conversation, and laughing like old friends. Shaun convinced Anzani to try a glass of wine, it tasted nice so Anza requested another glass.

“So let’s talk about the job, when do I start?”

“On the 1st of July, I think you’ll need to move closer to Midrand you can’t travel from Ratanda. Transport costs will kill you and you’ll always be tired and therefore unproductive.”

“You're right, I will move in with my boyfriend until I find a place closer to work.”

“Yeah, Joburg is better than Ratanda.”

“Yeah,” Anza says and takes a sip of her wine

Shaun leans back on his seat and peers at her

“Are you sure this wine won’t hinder your medication? I only suggested one glass that’s all.”

“Relax I'm sure it won’t do anything to me, but this is the last glass I’m drinking....So when am I signing the contract?”

“Your new boss will send you an email tomorrow with your contract.”

“Wow, I still can’t believe it. It feels surreal.”

“You better believe it then because it's happening.”

“Thank you for making it happen.”

“Don’t thank me, thank yourself. My friend was so impressed when he saw your academic transcript damn girl you were slaying the course, how are you still unemployed?”

“I don’t know shem I guess these things go with luck.”

“Hold on, I need to take this.” Shaun says and answers the call  
“Hello.”

“Boss his friend's white Gti just parked on the driveway. They are together and are heading towards the restaurants now.”

“Ok, so are you sure he'll come to the right place?”

“Confident boss, I followed him for a week and that's where they always eat.”

“Thank you, I'll wire your balance bye.”

“That was my gardener he's sick so he's sending a friend of his to perform his duties until the doctor gives him the green light to come back to work, let me quickly send him money for the doctor.” He says to Anzani after dropping the call

“Ok, no problem.”

OUTSIDE

Quinton and Kabelo are walking towards the restaurants chatting

“We should really consider carrying a lunch box from next week, this eating out everyday habit, is not it. We'll be broke before the month ends plus it's not good for our health.”

“I have no problem with that, but only if you promise to cook for us.” Kabelo

Quinton laughs and smacks the back of his head.

“Pata Pata again?” Kabelo asks

“Nah, let's try something different.”

“Cool.”

Quinton halts on his steps when he hears Anzani's voice, a voice he would recognize from anywhere but Nah it can't be his Anza

what would she be doing in Joburg it can't be her. He brushes off his thoughts and follows behind Kabelo but Anza speaks again and this time he doesn't only hear her voice he sees her, confusion engulfs him and cold chills run down his spine as he beholds the love of his life cozily dining and laughing with another man. He shuts his eyes and rubs his fingers on them before opening them again and unfortunately the sight before his eyes haven't changed, he's not seeing things his beloved girlfriend the one he wants to marry is in Johannesburg with another man, that too without telling him.

Kabelo stops in his tracks when he realizes that Q has stopped walking, he turns and catches him staring at something with eyes full of hurt and pain. He follows his gaze and his eyes widen when he recognizes Anzani, yes he's only seen her in pictures but judging by his friend's body language his suspicion is correct. The girl before his eyes is Quinton's girlfriend, the one he loves so much and speaks highly of.

"Maybe it's not what it looks like." He says trying to reassure his colleague who looks ready to break down and cry.

“Yeah you’re right, there must be an explanation for this I should go and ask her.”

Shaun who’s been observing them from the corner of his eye sees them approaching, he stands up from his seat and settles on the seat next to Anzani, and pulls her into a kiss without a warning. Q halts on his step and stares with glassy eyes feeling his heartbreaking and air knocking out of his chest as he watches the lips he thought belonged only to him kissing another man.

#37

NARRATED

Anzani lets Shaun kiss her for a few seconds then she pushes him off regaining back her senses and gapes at him in shock

“What the hell dude?”

“Anzani” Her heart almost stops beating when she sees Quinton standing in front of her, she jolts up from her seat and paces towards him

“Sthandwa Sam this is not what it looks like, I don’t know..”  
Shaun cuts her off

“Sthandwa Sam?, Anzani what’s going on here?” Shaun says faking confusion

“What do you mean Shaun, this is my boyfriend Quinton. You know about him so why are you pretending!” Anzani bellows drawing the attention of the patrons dining next to their table

Shaun chuckles in disbelief

“I don’t know what’s going on here man but Anzani is my girlfriend, we’ve been dating for two months now.” Shaun says paging his phone and showing Quinton pictures of him and Anzani together, pictures that were taken every time they met ‘coincidentally’ pictures Anzani didn’t know they exist well until now.

Quinton's throat dries up as pain chokes him, he looks at the pictures and a lone tear runs down his cheek. He turns his face away and quickly wipes it off before Shaun can see it.

“Babe he’s lying I’m not dating him I swear, you know how much I love you and everything I’ve been through in my past why would I jeopardize what we have?” Anzani says palming Q's face looking at him with tears rolling down her cheeks desperate for Quinton to believe her

“Anzani why are you lying?” Shaun asks looking at Anzani with eyes full of ‘pain’, he swallows, and tears roll down his cheeks “I didn’t know about you man, she didn’t tell me anything about you I swear. I have been played before by a woman I loved and saw a future with I would never put someone else through the same pain.” He says looking at Quinton, the sincerity written on his face and pain in his words is convincing, Quinton doesn’t know what to believe

Anzani’s mouth drops in incredulity, why is Shaun doing all this?

“Ask her why she’s here with me if we are not in a relationship, why would she travel all the way to Johannesburg with someone who’s not her boyfriend?” Q looks at Anzani waiting for her explanation, he also wants to know why she’s here with another man.

“He said he found me a marketing internship in Midrand and asked me out for lunch as a way to show my gratitude for the job.” Shaun laughs throwing his head back

“Wow Anzani wow!” he says

“Does that make sense to you bafo? We are in a relationship she’s lying.”

“Shaun why are you doing this to me, why do you want to ruin my relationship?” she questions and burst into tears

Quinton looks at her and his heart cracks catching a glimpse of her in tears but he can’t bring himself to hold her and comfort her, his head is buzzing he doesn’t know what to believe.

“Excuse me.” He says and jogs to Kabelo's car.

Kabelo didn’t follow him inside when he saw Anza kissing the man, he thought it best to give them privacy and wait for him in the car

“Get me out of here,” Quinton says as soon as he climbs inside the car

Kabelo doesn't ask twice he starts the ignition and drives out ignoring Anzani who is running behind the car trying to stop them.

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ANZANI

I drop to my knees and cry my eyes out as I watch the white Gti drive away with my boyfriend inside, a boyfriend who's hurt because he believes I betrayed him. At this point, I don't care about who's watching, or who is recording my heart is in tatters I could lose my boyfriend for good and it's all my fault! I feel footsteps coming from behind me before a feminine fragrance fills my nostrils, the lady crouches in front of me and asks me if I'm okay. What's with people and asking rhetorical questions?

"No, I might lose my boyfriend the only person who has ever loved me because of my desperation for a job," I say and cry into my hands

“Shh, I’m so sorry.” She says rubbing my back in circles

“Here's your phone?” Shaun says standing in front of me

Anger burns my throat at the sound of his voice, I jump to my feet and give him a tight smack on his face, I attempt to give him another one but he grabs my wrist mid-air and squeezes it tightly.

“Don’t even think about it, I’ll beat you up so bad your hand will lose its function. I’m not your boyfriend don’t you think you can put your hands on me.” He deadpans through gritted teeth

“Let go of her!” the lady bellows pushing him off.

I’m left with a red mark on my wrist when he lets go of me.

“Don’t you ever in your life think you can put your hands on me you stupid pathetic girl!” he hisses and walks off

“I’m so sorry.” The stranger says and hugs me, I hold on to her and sob in her arms.

“It’s okay sis, where do you live I can drive you there,” she says when we break off the embrace

“In Ratanda it’s too far, you can’t drive me there”

“Ok do you have money to catch a taxi?”

“No, I only came with my phone. I drove here with that bastard....I can’t believe I was so stupid.”

“I’ll give you transport fare don’t worry.”

“No, I can’t go back home I need to talk to my boyfriend and explain myself. Please drive me to his apartment, it’s in Braam.”  
I say in a pleading voice.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea sisi what if he throws you out?”

“He won’t do that, he loves me.” At least I hope he still does

She eyes me with eyes full of pity.

“Okay let’s go.”

A few minutes later we are parked outside Quinton's apartment

“Thank you so much.”

“It’s a pleasure, my dear, I hope you have learned from your mistakes. You should never be too trusting. Explain yourself to your boyfriend, he might not believe you because everything is against you but the truth always comes out no matter what.” I told her everything on our way here

“Thank you.”

She looks through her purse and hands me R200 and a business card.

“Here this is for transport in case he throws you out and this is my number, you can call me anytime “

“Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it.” I step outside the car and wave when she drives off.

I’m on the visitor list so the security at the gate let me inside the building without a hustle, I saunter to Quinton's apartment, it’s 15:50 he’s still at work so his apartment is locked. He gave me my set of keys to his apartment but I left them at Ratanda. I lower my behind on the cold floor, I’ll sit here and wait for him until he gets back. He knocks off at 16:30 so he should be here soon.

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QUINTON

I don't know what to make of what happened back at  
Maboneng

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my head is buzzing and I haven't been able to get any work done since I came with Kabelo. My heart is shattered, I thought Anzani and I were happy together and that nothing would come between us or tear us apart I was convinced that we were each other's soulmates and that we were content with one another. Why would she bring a third party into our relationship? People say women cheat when they're not happy, does that mean she was not happy with me?

"What's going on man?" says George my supervisor letting himself inside my office.

"Nothing, I'm okay."

“I can see you’re not okay and you won’t be productive in this state, you should go home you’ll come back tomorrow.”

“Thank you”

“Anytime, you’re one of the best in our team so your wellbeing matters man. I hope you get through whatever it is you’re going through.”

“Thank you, sir.”

I pack up my stuff and stop by Kabelo's office to say my goodbyes before I leave. Pain slashes through my heart like a blade when I find Anzani sitting outside my door. She stands up when she feels my presence and looks at me with puffy eyes, a clear indication that she’s been crying. Why does it still hurt me to see her in this state?

I ignore her and open my door and walk inside, she follows me inside.

“Sthandwa sam I know what you think you saw but I promise it’s not true...can you please give me a chance to explain?”

I don’t reply, I leave her in the lounge and head to my bedroom, and start unbuttoning my shirt. She follows behind me

“Okay you don’t have to say anything I will talk and all you have to do is listen, I met Shaun a few weeks ago on my way to Sonto's house and he offered me a lift but I refused then he left. We met for the second time when I went grocery shopping, he gave me his business card that day but I never called him.”

“Why did you take it in the first place?”

“I saw that he has a law firm and thought I could use him in the future when I need legal advice.”

Yeah right, Anzani must think I’m stupid.

“So how did you two end up in a restaurant chatting and laughing like lovers if you didn’t call him?”

“After that day we kept meeting everywhere and then we started talking every time we met, I mentioned to him that I’m looking for a job then he offered to help me find something from one of his clients, that’s when we exchanged numbers because I had to send him my CV and documents.”

“Couldn’t you use an email, did it have to be via WhatsApp?”

“He said he prefers WhatsApp over email.”

“And you believed him? How do you explain the pictures of you two together on various occasions and today’s cozy lunch? Why didn’t you tell me about him, I thought you and I were transparent with each other.”

She parts her lips but nothing comes out

“Look Anzani I desperately want to believe what you’re saying but how do I do that when you never bothered to mention this guy to me not even once? How do I trust you when I saw the shock on his face when you called me ‘sthandwa sam’ let’s not forget how you ignored my calls while you were all cozy with him at the restaurant.”

“I know how it looks but I swear I’m innocent, I didn’t cheat on you, babe. I’m all yours.”

“I don’t know Anzani, you reek of alcohol yet I know you as someone who doesn’t drink alcohol, you were in Johannesburg and didn’t even bother to tell me about it. How do I trust you, tell me?”

“Please babe I’m telling you the truth, I would never cheat on you. My heart, body, and soul belong only to you.” She says in tears

“Just leave Anzani, leave my apartment before I say or do something I will regret.”

“I promise I have never cheated on you, never! I love you so much and you were the best boyfriend ever, I won’t give up on you or our love.” She says and storms off

Tears blurry my vision once she’s out of sight, it hurts it hurts so bad.

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LEBOHANG

“Tell me everything went according to the plan”

“Of course my love, what’s my name Kanti?”

I squeal jumping up and down

“Wow, thank you so much. So he saw you kissing his precious Anzani?”

“Yep and the idiot went along with the kiss for a few seconds not knowing her boyfriend was watching must be the wine I gave her”

“I wish I was there.”

“You should’ve seen my impeccable acting skills, I acted so shocked and showed him pictures of us together.” He chuckles “ you should’ve seen the shock on Anzani's face when she saw the pictures.” We laugh

“Serves her right for thinking she can take Quinton from me, who does she think she is.”

“She loves him shem, she always told me about how much she loves him.”

“I don’t care, I love him too.”

“And now he’s all yours, men don’t forgive cheating and I planted a seed of doubt in his mind trust me it will not be easy for Anzani to convince him of her innocence.”

“Yes, plus the law firm doesn’t exist.” We laugh

“She's so naïve and gullible why didn't she google 'my law firm'? It would have saved her the heartache!”

“Told you she’s too trusting, I’m so happy our plan worked. I almost lost hope when the first plan didn’t succeed.”

The initial plan was to make Anzani fall for Shaun but then the girl didn’t budge, she’s head over heels in love with Quinton.

“I told you to trust me, I know what I’m doing. When should I come to collect my payment?”

“I will tell you.”

“Don’t even think of playing me because I will go and tell Quinton everything we did.”

“I won’t, I’m not stupid.”

“Good then, in that case, I’ll book a hotel on Friday I want you for the whole weekend.”

“Weekend? That’s not what we agreed on!”

“Don’t give me that, I spent my money paying someone to monitor everything Q does. I deserve at least a week with you as compensation.”

“Okay, a weekend it is.”

“Good girl, wear that red lingerie I like so much.”

“Okay bye.”

#38

NARRATED

Guilt gnaws Quinton's conscience two minutes after Anzani left, Joburg is not safe the CBD is worse and that's where Anzani is going to catch a taxi to Ratanda. He's angry with her but he'll never forgive himself if anything happens to her so he quickly dashes out of his apartment and runs to the gate

"Sawubona malume, didn't you see a light-skinned girl who just walked out here about two minutes ago?"

"You mean your girlfriend, the one who left here crying?" The security guard says certainly not impressed with him

"Yes." He says looking down in shame. The man looks at him for a few seconds and scoffs

"She went that way." He says pointing to his left

“Thank you so much.” He says and runs in the direction given to him by the security guard.

Fortunately for him, Braamfontein is not rowdy and overcrowded like the CBD so he doesn't have a hard time spotting Anzani walking down the street. Relief washes over him, Lord knows he would have never forgiven himself if something bad happened to her.

“Don't get the wrong idea I haven't forgiven you, I just need to make sure you get home safe.” He says when he finally catches up with her

Anzani nods her head in understanding chuffed that he still cares about her safety and well-being even in anger. The pair falls in awkward silence and stroll side by side with Quinton holding her hand every now and then when they cross the busy Johannesburg roads.

“Goodbye, tell me when you get home.” He says when they reach the taxis to Ratanda.

“Okay, I’ll do so. Thank you for accompanying me.”

“Bye.” He says and walks off without giving her a tight hug and a passionate kiss like he normally would grinding Anzani's heart in the process if only she could turn back the hands of time.

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ANZANI

The pain in my heart is too great to tolerate, I keep hoping that this is some nightmare that I’m going to wake up from. This is a reality I refuse to accept this can’t be the end of my love story with Quinton. Lord knows I love him so much and would never cheat on him, my only fault was trusting Shaun blindly and not being transparent to him about Shaun but I have never betrayed him or even thought of doing it. I wonder why Shaun went out of his way to hurt me and destroy my relationship with Quinton, how could he be so cruel? He knows how much I love Mpilo, I never led him on nor gave him the idea that he could be with me. So why did he do this to me, what did I ever do to him to deserve so much viciousness?

“What do you want now?”

“I need to understand why you did what you did, why did you destroy my relationship? you know how much I love him. I told you countless times.”

“Look Anzani I need you to stop calling me.”

I’m calling him for the fifth time since yesterday demanding answers for his despicable actions

“Just tell me why then I’ll stop calling you.”

“Because you’re a fool, a naïve stupid fool is that good enough for you? Stop calling me I’ll file a case of harassment against you mxm!” he spits and hangs up

I wipe my tears and check Q's last seen, he's online but he hasn't replied to the text I sent to him last night. Tears roll

down my face as I look at his blank profile picture, his profile picture used to be a picture of me but he removed it last night. I hope this doesn't mean that it's over between because my heart won't take it, I don't want to be his ex-girlfriend. I want to continue being his lady, I want to remain ithembalakhe I want to stay the only woman his heart beats for oh God what do I do with all the pain I feel in my heart? It would be better if I could sleep it off but I can't even do that because sleep has deserted me.

I wipe my tears and call Dakalo. My tears are relentless they keep pouring down my face like a deluge of rain.

"Ntombi." She answers in a jubilant tone

I can't bring myself to speak, I cry into the receiver instead.

"What's going on Anzani, why are you crying?" the worry in her voice is almost palpable

"I have lost him cuz...I lost my boyfriend.."

“What do you mean?”

“He’s done with me.”

“Okay please calm down and explain to me.” I take a deep breath breathing in and out before narrating everything that happened yesterday

“I’m sorry cuz, I don’t think he’ll break up with you I think he needs time to digest everything that happened. Give him some time, he’ll come around.”

“What if he breaks up with me?”

“Then you accept it and move on with your life, there’s more to life than Quinton.”

It’s easy for her to say this, she sleeps next to the love of her life every night. I love Quinton more than anyone I’ve ever been

with and I don't want to stop, losing him would cripple me and I would rather not imagine it.

"How do I continue living without my heart?" she sighs

"Problem with you is that you gave Quinton your heart, I told you a man needs to be respected not loved."

"Dakalo your advice is futile now, I already love Quinton. I love him with all of my heart."

"Then you shouldn't have kept things from him, transparency is very important for the success of any relationship."

"I know cuz I know but what's done is done, tell me how do I fix this?"

"I don't know, give him space I'm sure he'll come back to you. He loves you."

I hope she's right. I can't lose my boyfriend

"But tell me cuz why are you so desperate for a job? Didn't you say Q takes care of you?"

"He does but I don't want it to get to a point where he gets tired of me."

"Anzani you need to stop being negative, some men have no problem taking care of their women and Quinton is a provider cousin trust me he doesn't mind taking care of you believe me I know him well and your man is kind-hearted he gives without expecting anything in return. He's been taking care of his siblings and mother since he was a teenager and I have never heard him complain."

"That's the thing, I'm not his sibling nor am I his mother."

"You see where your negativity has led you to? You'll end up losing him if you keep this up. There's nothing wrong with wanting to be independent but you can't force things because

you'll end up selling your soul to the devil for money, you're putting yourself under unnecessary pressure. Learn from Q, he's the perfect example of a man patient in the lord and his promises, not all of us are destined to be employees maybe you should consider business. Sell something and make your own money if you don't want to depend on him but don't do stupid things to get a job, at this rate you'll end up sleeping with people for a job just stop this obsession of finding a job, you'll not get it because you're impatient."

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QUINTON

I didn't sleep a wink last night because yesterday's events kept replaying in my mind like a broken record. My heart is in shambles, I'm more disappointed than hurt, I guess I never expected anything like this from Anzani. I feel let down and betrayed, I don't know what to think or believe. I need time to myself to put my thoughts into order. I don't know how I got through work today because my mind was occupied with everything happening between my girlfriend and me, I just

walked inside my apartment from work I don't have an appetite so an apple will suffice for dinner. I'm watching TV or rather trying to when I hear a knock on my door I wonder who it is because I don't know anyone in the building well enough to earn a visit from them.

I get up and get the door.

"Hey," Nolwazi says smiling

"Hi Nolwazi

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what can I do for you?"

"I cooked soup and it expanded and filled the pot so I thought I could share with you." She says waving a pink Tupperware

"Nolwazi I think I may have given you a wrong impression by accepting scones from you the first time, I only accepted them because I thought you were trying to be nice. I have a girlfriend and you've seen me with her, don't you think cooking for me is

a bit inappropriate considering that I'm someone else's man?"  
her smile drops

"I know you have a girlfriend and I respect your relationship with her, I didn't actually cook for you I cooked for myself but the soup ended up being more than what I foresaw so I didn't want it to go to waste I thought it would be a good idea to share with you."

"Well I appreciate your kind gesture but you can't share food with me, my girlfriend will not appreciate it. It's inappropriate and totally unacceptable. "

"Oh ok, I understand."

"I'm glad you do, if there's nothing else I would like to get back inside."

"There's something actually, yesterday I saw your girlfriend sitting outside your door and she didn't look good then she ran

out in tears a few minutes after the two of you walked inside your apartment. Are you guys okay?"

I can't believe she just asked me this

"Wow did you really ask me that question?" I deadpan giving her a straight look

"I'm sorry I shouldn't have, I'll leave."

"Yes, you shouldn't have, please take your nose out of my business because next time I won't be so kind. You're getting on my last nerve"

She gasps and scurries off, I bet she didn't expect that from me. I watch her until her figure disappears before closing the door. I hope this was her last time here, this girl is too forward for my liking.

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I miss Anzani, I miss her so much but I'm not ready to talk to her so I'm going through her pictures on my gallery when I receive an incoming call from Nobuhle.

"Nobuhle."

"Bhuti'wam."

(My brother)

"How are you?"

"I'm okay but there's something I want to tell you."

"Okay, I'm listening."

"I bumped into bhuti Mpho your friend the other day and he offered to accompany me home. I didn't like the way he was looking at me though I pretended not to see it, he even asked for my number and said he wants us to chat on WhatsApp."

“How was he looking at you?”

“Like he was undressing me with his eyes, he couldn’t take his eyes off my ass and breasts. I felt so uncomfortable but I didn’t want to disrespect him because he’s your friend, I only allowed him to walk me home because I was avoiding passing the group of boys who sit at the Indian shop on my own.”

My blood is boiling I can’t believe Mpho could stoop so low. How could he do that to Buhle, she’s a child!

“Don’t worry sthandwa Sam I’ll sort this out, please stay away from Mpho don’t ever talk to him...I’m no longer friends with him.”

“Okay, I won’t talk to him again. He also asked me about your relationship with sis'Anzani.”

“What exactly did he ask?”

“He asked me how I felt about the relationship but I dismissed him and told him I don’t want to talk about your business.”

Buhle has always been too mature for her age and I know nobody has my back as she does. I don't mean to have favourites but I'm closer to her than I am to Nokwazi.

“Thank you, baby, I really appreciate it.” She sighs

“Is there anything else you want to tell me?”

“I promised mom that I wouldn’t tell you.”

“Then don’t do it.”

“But I feel like you need to know because I don’t want you and Kwazi to fight.”

“Nokwazi? What are you talking about?”

“Nokwazi called me the other day and told me brother Gift told her that sis'Anzani is not a good person that she came between you and your best friend, I told her he's lying but she doesn't believe me. She said so many bad things about sis'Anzani and even told me to stop referring to her as my sister. She even said you were bewitched with muti, I'm not telling you this because I want you to fight or argue with Nokwazi but I want you to talk to her maybe she'll listen to you.”

Wow, I can't believe the lengths my so-called friends would go through to ruin my relationship with Anzani, first, it was with the people at church, now they want to turn my siblings against Anzani what's next? Then it hits me, what if Anzani is telling the truth and that Shaun guy was sent by Mpho and Co to come between us? But why didn't Anzani tell me about him? I need to pray hard because it is obvious I'm surrounded by enemies who would stoop to any level to eliminate my relationship with Anzani.

“Thank you so much for telling me sthandwa sam, I won't tell mom or Nokwazi what you told me and I'm sorry about what Mpho did I will make sure it never happens again.”

“Thank you”

“Pleasure nunu, how’s school treating you?”

“So far so good.”

“Ok keep it like that, I’ll send mom your lunch money.”

“No, you don’t have to. I still have R200 left from the money you gave to me the last time.”

“How long does R200 last you?”

“Two weeks I take R20 to school every day but I don’t finish all of it, I save it on my piggy bank.”

“That’s good nana when are you taking your ID?”

“Mom said she’ll accompany me to home affairs on Monday.”

“Okay, I can’t believe how fast you’ve grown, I can’t believe you are sixteen.” She laughs

“I still can’t believe it either.”

“You’re still way too young for Varsity.” She laughs

“You were also young when you did your first year mos.”

“I was 18, you’ll be 17. I’m scared for you, I think you’re still too young to be out there on your own”

“To be honest I’m also scared.”

People tend to lose themselves when they get to varsity, I’m worried about Buhle she's young and hasn’t been exposed to a lot of things I’m afraid she will get to varsity, be exposed to many new things, befriend the wrong people and lose herself.

“You'll be fine as long as you don't forget who you are, where you come from and most importantly never stop praying, your relationship with God should...”

“Take first preference I know brother.”

“Good, we'll talk again tomorrow.”

“Bye brother”

#39

I thought I would give it a few days before talking to Quinton, but I've been waiting for this moment for a long time now, I can't afford to keep waiting. What if they talk and make up? I can't take that risk so I'm doing this now before I find myself wallowing in a sea of regret. He told me to never call him again the last time we spoke so I'm kind of scared to call, I could rock up at his apartment because I know where he stays Tseko's guy was following him around, so we know where he lives but Q is not stupid, he'll be suspicious if I show up there. I take a deep breath and summon the courage to call him.

"Hello who's this?" That hurts I won't lie

"It's Lebohang from Faith Mission."

"Oh, I thought I told you to never call me again." He sounds bored.

“Yes, you did but I feel like you were bit unfair to me, I mean we grew up together and we were somewhat close at some point you can’t just shut me out of your life like that because of Anzani. It’s not fair”

“Anzani is not just anyone, she’s the woman in my life and that means to me her happiness takes first priority. I can’t be in contact with anyone who doesn’t like her or talks ill of her.”

The woman in his life? Didn’t he see her kissing Tseko, wow now I’m convinced that she bewitched him. He is supposed to hate her not call her his first priority SMH.

“But I have nothing against her.” Of course, I have everything against that skinny b\*tch but I obviously can’t tell him that

“I’m not stupid Lebo, I’ve seen how you look at her and she told me what you said to her. I don’t get what the big deal is, you and I were brought together by church and nothing else. I’m no longer a member of your church so what is your problem? What’s with the attachment issues?” He can be an \*ss when he wants to.

“To be honest with you Quinton I thought there is something between us, I love you and I thought you feel the same way. You were gentle with me, always giving me advice and how you were there for me when I lost my brother gave me the impression that you care about me more than just as a church mate but as a woman.”

“Are you still there?” I say when he doesn’t say anything after I just poured out my heart to him

“Yes, I’m still here. I feel bad because I didn’t know that everything I did was giving you that impression, from the bottom of my heart I’m sorry. What I did for you was what I would have done for anyone in your place, I was just being me. I was like that with everyone in the church, but I understand why you thought the way you did and for that I humbly apologize for giving you the wrong impression.”

This is not what I wanted to hear, I wanted him to hear him tell me that he loves me too not his fake meaningless apologies. I can’t help but cry, I was so sure that he felt the same way.

“Please don’t do that, don’t cry. You are making me feel bad.”  
He says in a gentle tone when he hears me sniffing.

Tell me that I was not crazy for thinking he felt the same way, how could I not conclude that when he’s ever gentle with me? The softness in his words makes my heart race, he cares about me.

“I’m sorry Lebohang, I’m really sorry I never meant to hurt you, but truth is that I never saw you as anything more than just a sister from church. I don’t love you and I don’t think I ever will, my heart is with Anzani. Please forgive me.”

Hearing him confess this to me hurts more than any other pain I’ve ever felt, my heart is broken.

“How are you so sure that you don’t love me because you have never given me a chance.”

“What?” he asks visibly shocked by my statement

“You heard me; give me a chance I promise you’ll fall in love with me.”

“I can’t do that Lebo, I have a girlfriend and you deserve a man who loves you.”

“But I want you, I don’t want anyone else.” I say and cry into the receiver

“Eish Lebo don’t do this to yourself I belong to someone else, I cannot love you even if I wanted to, I’m in love with Anzani.”

“Okay I hear you, at least give me one round then I promise I will be out of your hair. One passionate round then I’ll never bother you again.”

“Lebo what are you asking from me?”

“Please, Anzani will never know. Just one round then I will never bother you again.”

“No Lebo I cannot give you that, I’m sorry.”

“Okay I understand bye.”

“Please find it in your heart to forgive me.” He says

I cut the call and haul my phone against the wall and watch it break into pieces, Anzani will not enjoy her relationship with Quinton. Not under my watch!

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ANZANI

“Tell me everything that happened, start from the very first day you met him.”

My heart summersaulted when I received a call from my boyfriend, I couldn't believe my eyes, he's not the warm Quinton I know but at least he's giving me a chance to explain myself.

"I was bored and decided to stretch my legs and take a walk to Sonto's house, on my way there a car stopped in front of me, and the driver told me to hop in, but I refused then he left. I met him for the second time at Checkers and he introduced himself and gave me his business card I took it but never used it, from there we kept bumping into each other, but I guess it was all part of his devious plan. I mentioned in passing that I'm looking for a job then he offered to help me find one because apparently, he 'knows people' and I stupidly believed him because I was convinced, he's who he portrayed himself to be. He asked for my documents and refused when I wanted to send them to his email and gave me an excuse about preferring WhatsApp over email, I did what he wanted because I was at his mercy, and I really believed that he would help me find a job."

“Why didn’t you tell me about him, because it seems you guys have been seeing each other a lot why didn’t you think it was important to tell me?”

“Honestly, I have no excuse, I don’t know why I didn’t tell you

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but I wanted to tell you on the day he told me he found me a job because I was excited and you’re the first person I wanted to share the news with. I called you but your phone rang unanswered and when you called back the phone was inside his car while we were inside the restaurant that’s why I didn’t pick up your calls”

“How did you end up going for lunch with him?”

“He told me about the job and I said I didn’t know how to thank him for what he did then he said I could do that by going to lunch with him, I didn’t pay attention to the road until the car stopped moving because I was on my phone sending texts telling everyone the good news. He said I could choose any restaurant of my choice, but he coerced me to choose Pata Pata, thinking about it now he knew you would come and I

think someone informed him when you arrived because he received a call shortly before you showed up and said his gardener is sick so he's sending someone else in his place. He planned this to the last detail, he had always been professional around me that's why it took me by surprise when he pulled me in for a kiss. It took some time for my mind to register what was going on little did I know you were right there watching the whole thing."

"It's obvious he planned this with someone who knows you, someone who knows you well to know how desperate you are for the job you studied for. They used your desperation to manipulate and play you, I'm sorry I didn't believe you when you told me."

"You couldn't have known, he planned it in such a way that it would be hard to believe me."

"There's no excuse, I should've trusted your word over that of a stranger. Please forgive me thembalam' I will never make that mistake again."

“I forgive you, please forgive me too for keeping things from you. We wouldn’t be here if I told you about him.”

“You’re forgiven Sthandwa sam’ but from now on I want us to tell each other everything it doesn’t matter how little or insignificant you think it is, do you promise?”

“I promise.”

“I promise you too. I think Mpho is behind this whole Shaun thing, he’s trying to turn my siblings against you and unfortunately it seems he has succeeded with Kwazi but I’ll have a word with her and make her see reason... he’s also the only other person except for me, your friends and family who know how much you want a Marketing job.”

“I can’t believe this, what does he want from me?” I’m honestly baffled by Mpho’s sudden obsession with me. He never valued me so why is he going out of his way to destroy my relationship?

“I also don’t get it but he won’t succeed because we will not let him, I don’t know any other way of solving things either than prayer. We need to stand steadfast in the lord, Mpho can try whatever he wants but it’ll never succeed.”

“You’re right my love, we need to pray harder than we did before.”

“Yes we will, I almost forgot to tell you. Lebo called me before I called you.”

“What did she want?” My mouth is hanging in shock when he’s done telling me about his conversation with Lebo

“Yoh, I don’t know what to say.”

“I understand, I felt the same way.”

“Do you believe that she’ll just let go? she doesn’t sound like someone who is willing to give up on you.”

“I think so too, we should not cancel her out either. She might be behind this whole Shaun thing; I don’t trust anyone now.”

“Yeah, I’m just glad you and I are okay. I almost died when you didn’t talk to me.” He chuckles

“I know me too, those few days without talking to you were hard. I better not run into that Shaun guy because I swear, I’ll break his bones for putting us through so much.” I giggle

“I know exactly how you feel but at least I slapped him on the face that day, even though he held my hand when I attempted to throw another slap. I was bruised afterwards.”

“He did what? the nerve to put his hands on you! He’ll know me well the day I see him again, him and Mpho will get what’s coming to them. Can you believe that pervert was lusting over my baby sis?”

“What? he’s sick. Doesn’t his stepmother satisfy him anymore now he’s going after little kids.”

“What do you mean, he was raped by his step mother.” I laugh out loud

“What? what’s funny?”

“He wasn’t raped, he has a sexual relationship with his mother that’s why he didn’t want her to see me. Mpho never allowed me to leave my clothes at his place because apparently his mom goes through his things whenever she comes over and he didn’t want to think he was cohabiting I mean what a pathetic excuse for a man his age. I can go on the whole day about everything he did trying to protect his sugar mama, why do you think I broke up with him?”

“Are you for real?” He sounds shocked which surprises me because I thought he knew; they were best friends after all.

“Yes, I thought you knew.”

“No, I knew nothing about this. He told me he was taken advantage of by his mother, and I believed him because he was emotional when he told me about the ordeal. He told me you broke up with him when he told you about his rape, apparently you were insensitive and told him men don’t get raped, but I didn’t believe him. It didn’t sound like something you would say, I knew he lied about that but I never thought he was lying about the rape as well.”

“What? he’s lying he’s not even the one who told me Nancy beat him to it then he had no choice but to confess.” He chuckles in disbelief

“I’m starting to wonder if I really know Mpho, he’s so manipulative and conniving I don’t know why I didn’t see it sooner.”

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NOKWAZI

“Send me your nudes.”

“I’ve never taken nudes before, and I wouldn’t know where to start”

“It’s simple, take off you top and snap a picture of your twins. You don’t wear any bra right?” I flush in embarrassment

“Yes, my breasts are too small.”

“They’re perfect the way they are, come on mommy snap that picture don’t disappoint me.”

“Okay.”

“Send it to me when you’re done.” He says and cuts the call.

I take off my top and lie on my back trying to find the perfect angle to snap a picture of my breasts, this feels stupid and weird taking pictures of my boobs that is, but I can't afford to disappoint him. I've always had a crush on him, and I can't mess it up now that he's finally giving me attention. I choose the best three and send them to him, he calls almost immediately

"Damn girl those are some nice tits you have!" I giggle and bury my face on my pillow, I'm so glad he likes them

"When are you visiting me?" My heartbeat increases, visitations go with sex and I'm not ready for sex.

"I don't know."

"What do you mean you don't know, who must know then."

"Gift I'm a virgin."

"Ok so?"

“I’m not ready for sex.”

“Then what are you doing with me?”

“I thought you’ll wait for me.”

“Wait until when?”

“Marriage, I want to get married a virgin.” He cackles one would swear that I just cracked a joke

“You’re funny, you think I would wait that long without sex? Not just me no guy would wait that long without getting sex”

“It can be done, I’ve heard about it.”

“Well then you’re lying to yourself.” He says and drops the call

I don't get it, he's a Christian he knows sex before marriage is a sin so why is he being difficult. I thought he would understand my reasons but maybe he's right no man would wait for that long for sex. Not in this day and age anyway, I call him.

"What?"

"Would you be willing to wait until I turn 21 at least? Please babe I'm 19 now so it's two years wait."

"You talk as if two years is two days."

"Please do this for me." He snickers

"You'll call me when you're ready to be a woman" He says and hangs up in my ear again, how rude!

#40

“Nokwazi kunjani?”

(How are you)

“I’m good and how are you brother?”

“I’m not pleased with you Kwazi, didn’t I warn you to stay away from my friends?”

“You did.”

“Nokwazi you don’t listen and your stubbornness will land you in hot water one day, I’m hurt I don’t want to lie that my own sister, my blood lo engamshiyela ibele can help my enemies when they conspire against me.”

“What did I do?” she asks with a quavering voice. Nokwazi is such a cry baby you would swear she’s not the same person who was spewing nonsense about my girlfriend.

“What business do you have talking to Gift; didn’t I tell to stay away from my friends?”

“You did but he’s the one who spoke to me first.”

“What did he want to talk to you about?”

“He was asking about you and Anzani’s relationship then he told me Anzani is not a good person, he says she moved from Mpho to you.”

“And what did you do with that information?”

“Huh?”

“Don’t say huh..what did you do with what he told you?”

“I called Buhle and told her what I heard from Gift.”

“Yewena Nokwazi who’s your brother between Gift and me?”

“It’s you.”

“Then where does Gift get the audacity to gossip about me to you, my own sister? Why is he so comfortable to talk ill about me to you wena ungu mntasekhaya?”

“He wasn’t talking bad..”

“Shut up! Ngoba ukhuluma inonsense nje ayikho lento oyikhulumayo! Wena uhlushwa wukuphapha, uyaphapha Nokwazi and awumameli. Mina akekho umuntu ongaba nesibindi sokukhuluma ngawe kimi, I wouldn’t give that person a chance to say anything bad about you to me because you’re my sister and I will always protect your honor and that’s the difference between me and you. When Gift came gossiping about me to you, you indulged him and even tried to hotspot Buhle with your sudden hatred for my girlfriend. You didn’t even bother telling me about it or verifying what you heard, you just hopped on the anti-Anzani band wagon.”

(Because you're speaking nothing but nonsense, your problem is that you're forward. You're forward Nokwazi and you don't listen. No one can have the guards to talk bad about you to me)

"I'm sorry." She says sniffing

"Ukhalelani, yini oyikhalelayo Nokwazi? I'm so disappointed in you shem, ungangibulala wena angisakuthembi. I expected more from you, you're older than Buhle yet you act like the youngest one. Tell me why I should keep sacrificing for you, giving you my money, making sure you have everything you want when you hate me so much that you would laugh with people who hate me. Uyangizonda Nolwazi." A loud sob breaks out of her mouth

(Why are you crying Nokwazi) (You are capable of killing me, I don't trust you) ( You hate me Nokwazi)

"I'm sorry bhuti I didn't mean to hurt you."

"You have hurt me Nokwazi, you have broken my heart and I no longer trust you. I know you have this mentality that because I'm your brother I have no choice but to do everything I'm

doing for you, lalela la Nokwazi mina Quinton Mpilentle Ndlovu angina mntwana and I don't have to do anything for you. I do it out of love not because I'm compelled to, I should be enjoying my money and spoiling my girlfriend but I sacrifice and deny myself nice things so you and Buhle can have everything you need but what do you do in return?... I won't keep putting my needs last for someone who doesn't appreciate nor respect me. I told you to stay away from Gift, but you chose to do the opposite, ngiyakuthanda Nokwazi kakhulu futhi but qhubeka uyenze lododi owenzayo uzozikhipha kimi ngiyak'tshela."

(Listen here Nokwazi, I Quinton Mpilentle Ndlovu am no one's father) (I love you Nokwazi, a lot but keep up this nonsense and see if I won't stop)

"Ngiyaxolisa bhuti wami, it won't happen again."

(I'm sorry my brother)

"And another thing, I'm your elder brother not your friend awungeni ndawo endabeni zami zomjolo. Anzani is my girlfriend, the one I love and chose, and I won't allow you or anyone else to disrespect her or make her feel unworthy. Uzoyeka ukukhuluma inonsense ngaye mawufuna mina nawe

sizwane, sewuyi sangoma manje wena wazi abantu abadlisiwe manje wena... ungijwayezwa wubani ngampela?”

(My relationship has nothing to do with you) (You'll stop speaking nonsense about her if you still want you and I to get along. You are now a traditional healer you can spot people who are bewitched)

“Ngiyaxolisa bhuti.”

(I'm sorry brother)

“Tshela mina wenzani no Gift and don't even think of lying to me.”

(What are you doing with Gift)

“I'm dating him.” the shame in her voice is loud

I don't know who is worse between Gift and Mpho, I'm utterly disappointed in both of them. I trusted them; I thought my siblings were safe with them because I thought they took them as their own little sisters.

“Gift doesn’t love you, he’s no longer my friend so he is using you to spite me. You’re a child Nokwazi Gift is older than you and has lived longer than you, the only thing that he will do is to take advantage of your naivety, use you and discard you like a used pad. You have two choices, to be a local ground where anything and everything with feet comes to kick the ball practicing for big and serious matches, including those who don’t know how to play soccer or to be a stadium where only professional athletes play. Kuphuma kuwe kuthi ufuna kuba yi ntombazana elalwa yibobonke abafana noma ufuna ukuba intombazana bonke abafana abayifisayo

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the choice is yours mntasekhaya uyazi khethela.”

(It’s up to you if you want to be a girl who every guy sleeps with or want to be a girl who every guy wishes they could sleep with, the choice is yours the decision is yours)

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ANZANI

I'm on my phone reading novels on Facebook when a Gmail notification pops up on my screen, my heart leaps to my throat when I see that it's from Coke. I know I'll proceed to the next phase of the hiring process; I don't have a criminal record, nor have I been accused of any crime so there's no way I'm failing this phase of the process but even so I'm still scared to read the contents of the email. I take a deep breath and open the email; I can literally feel my heart breaking as I read the email.

"Dear: Miss Anzani Munyai

We regret to inform you that your application for packaging learnership has been unsuccessful at this time, please don't be discouraged to apply in the future."

My throat dries up, tears well up in my eyes and flow down my face like water from a waterfall. What could've gone wrong? I was sure that this job would be mine, I did everything right, everything! I throw myself on the bed, put a pillow on my face to muffle my sobs and cry my heart out releasing all the pain trapped inside my chest. Will I ever get a job?

I cry until I have no tears left to cry then I take my phone and send Quinton a screenshot of the email I received from Coke, he calls almost immediately

“I’m sorry sthandwa sam, the lord is still preparing your table don’t give up.”

His words add salt to the wound, I’m no longer sure about this God he speaks highly of. He seems to have favorites and I’m clearly not one of them. It’s one disappointment after the other, nothing is going well in my life except for my relationship with Quinton.

“Please don’t cry you’re breaking my heart don’t do that please.”

“But it hurts, do you think I’ll ever get a job?”

“I don’t think, I know you will. You just need to be patient and understand that maybe you’re not ready for what God has in

store for you, maybe there are still a few things you need to learn before God can give you the job.”

I’m tired of hearing this, can’t God see that I need a job? Doesn’t he know that my mother is not working and that I’m all she has? I’m tired of people making excuses for him, it’s clear he’s not a fair God he has favorites, and he doesn’t favor me that is why he gives all the bad things to me. Lupus, unemployment, poverty, family that only loves me when I have something to offer and now an ex-boyfriend who can go to any lengths to destroy my relationship with the only person who has ever shown me love. I’m done with God and his empty promises, the man has never shown me kindness.

“I have a headache can I take a nap?”

“Are you okay?”

“Yes, I’m fine I just need to rest. Bye.” I hang up before he can say anything

I lied I don't want to sleep; I just didn't want to listen to him go on and on about God. I'm done with God.

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NARRATED

"I bumped into Nobuhle the other day yerr imekahle leyangane!" Mpho

(She has a nice body)

"Yes, even Nokwazi has a beautiful body they took after their mother." Gift

"Come on guys are we seriously going to discuss Q's little sister's bodies? They are nothing but kids!" Kgahliso says in irritation

"We were just saying, you know we would never do anything to them." Mpho

Kgahliso scoffs

“After seeing how you two looked when talking about them I’m not so sure anymore.”

“Come on man, what do you take us for?” Gift

Kgahliso looks at them and shrugs

“Come on bruh! I thought you knew us better” Mpho

“Mpho, what really happened between you and Anzani?” Mpho raises an eyebrow

“Why do you ask?”

“Just, I’ve been thinking about it a lot lately, and I realized that I never really asked you about what really happened between you two.”

“We dated and Q told her lies about me then she dumped me and went to him.” Mpho says

“Hmmm, how long did you and Anzani date?”

“A few months why?”

“Just curious, and in all those months you never posted her picture or of the two of you together why?”

“What’s with the 21 questions?”

“Why are you being defensive, I just want to know.”

“Is it a must for me to post her?”

“No, but any man in love wouldn’t hesitate to show off the woman he’s in love with to the whole world like Q and I do. You said you were in love with her so I’m curious”

“Not everyone is the same, some of us prefer to keep our relationships private.”

“Hmm if you say so.” Kgahliso says and leans his back on the chair thoughtfully

“What’s going on man?” Gift asks

“Nothing, I’m just curious.”

Mpho clears his throat and takes a huge sip from his glass. His heart pounds when sees Kgahliso ogling him intently.

“What?” He croaks out in a shaky voice

“Nothing.” Kgahliso replies not moving his piercing gaze from him

Gift’s eyes dart between his friends wondering what’s going on between them.

#41

I haven't been okay since I received the rejection email from Coke, my spirit is low and all the energy I had to apply for a job has disbanded into thin air. I feel like I'll never get a job regardless of how much I send out my applications and how well I do in the interviews I get called for, so I have decided to stop maiming myself by even trying. I also have been avoiding Quinton's calls because I know all he'll do is bore me about patience and trusting in God and I honestly don't want to hear that right now, I'm done raising my hopes and expecting things to work out in my favor because they never do anyway I don't know how long it'll take before Quinton leaves me because a huge part of me knows that he will, good things are momentary in my life they never last and maybe it's time I accept it so that it'll hurt less when it finally happens.

I'm in the lounge watching TV with my aunt. My phone rings and a frown mirrors my features when Kgahliso's name flashes on my screen.

"Hi."

“Hey, Anzani, how are you?” I’m confused, what does he want from me? He got distant when the news of my relationship with Q came out.

“I’m good and how are you?”

Aunt gives me a look, I stand up and head to my room so as not to disturb her TV time.

“Good, look I want to apologize for my reaction when news of your relationship with Q came out. I judged you before I could listen to your side of the story and I’m sorry for doing that.”

“It’s okay, it’s water under the bridge.”

“No, it’s not okay, you and Quinton had to leave the church because of what I did, and I deeply apologize for that.”

“As I said, it’s okay....but I’m a bit curious why now?”

“I’ve been thinking a lot lately and I realized that I never really gave you or Quinton a chance to tell your side of the story I just ran with what Mpho said.”

“I see but I am glad this happened because now Quinton knows what kind of friends you and Gift are, you don’t deserve him. He’s a good person he doesn’t deserve friends like you two.” He clears his throat

“Yeah, you’re right we shouldn’t have taken sides, we should’ve listened to both sides of the story and tried to resolve the matter without being bias....what really happened between you and Mpho if you don’t mind me asking?”

“I think you should ask him that question.”

“I did but he told me Quinton told lies about him to you and you dumped him and went to Quinton.”

“And you believed him? clearly you don’t know Q well enough if you can believe that he could be capable of doing something

like that but unfortunately, I can't tell you why I broke up with him, it's something he needs to tell you himself."

"Okay, I understand, bye."

"Bye."

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QUINTON

It's Friday afternoon and for the first time since I moved to my apartment, I'm going home and spending my weekend in Ratanda. The initial plan was for Anzani to come to my place and spend the weekend with me, but she said her aunt didn't give her permission to come which I suspect was nothing but an excuse. I don't know what's going on with her, but she's been distant lately. She doesn't pick up my calls and takes long to reply to my texts. I suspect the rejection from Coke is the cause of her behavior because she started acting like this after receiving the email from them, I'm going to Ratanda so I can

see her and give her support I know she needs seeing that she doesn't permit me to do so over the phone.

I'm on my way to the taxi rank, I want to pass by Given's stall to check on him and properly thank him for helping me out that day when I thought my girlfriend was in trouble. He didn't have to wait with me because I was nothing but a stranger, he inferred that anything could've happened to us at that hour of the night, but he risked it all for me so I need to show my appreciation. He's busy serving customers when I appear from the corner.

"Hey." His smile widens when he locks eyes with me.

"My man." He helps the last customer then we fist bump and bro hug

"How are you?"

"I'm good and how are you?"

“I’m good man, I just wanted to thank you for what you did for me the other day thank you,” I say giving him a gift bag.

“What’s this? It’s a pleasure man you didn’t have to.”

“You’ll find out when you open it.”

“You’ll do that when I leave, for now, I want to talk to you,” I say when he attempts to unwrap the gift.

“What’s with the suspense.” He says and walks to his bakkie to plop the gift bag inside.

“Going home?” he asks eyeing the duffel bag hanging over my shoulder

“Yes, I am going home.”

“Nice I wish I had the option to go home as often as I could, I miss my daughter.” The despair in his eyes when he speaks about his daughter is hard to ignore

“Oh, wow I didn’t think you had a daughter, how old is she?” His eyes light up, and the gloom that was on his face a minute ago vanishes.

“She’s turning 5 years in two months time.” He says with a proud smile on his face.

“Nice, where is home?”

“Malawi, Likoma.”

“How long have you been in the country for?”

“It’s been a while, a little over four years now.”

“How often do you visit home?”

“Once a year, but I only go there because of my daughter. I wouldn’t go if it wasn’t for her, I think about her every day. She’s the reason I wake up every morning because I want to give her a better life, I want her to have everything I wished I had while growing up.”

The love burning in his eyes when he talks about his daughter, even a blind man can see how much he loves her. He’s a good father, a father I hope to be to my future kids one day.

“Is she staying with her mother, is that why you didn’t take her with you?”

“Her mother said she was not ready to be a mother and gave her to me when she was ten days old

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then she left and never looked back. I raised my daughter singlehandedly until I had to leave Malawi seeking a better life for her, I left her with my grandparents they are the ones who take care of her, but they are the old man who shouldn’t be raising a child her age. I want my princess here with me, I can’t

wait for the year to end so I can apply for Five Years Continuous Work Permanent Residence Permit. Once it's been granted, I will fetch my daughter from Malawi, it'll be easier for her to get permanent residency once I have mine."

"What is the Five years continuous work permanent residence permit? I didn't know permits were different."

"Foreigners can get permanent residency in South Africa using one of seven ways, with me I need to provide proof that I've worked continuously in South Africa for five years under a specific type of work visa and have permanent employment."

"Do you have a permanent job?"

"Yeah, I work at the factory that sews work suits and I have been working there for the past four years. My salary is not enough to cover all my expenses that's why I started selling fruits and vegetables to generate extra income. I have someone who manages the stall for me, I only come here when I'm off from work."

He's such a hard worker, one thing I admire about foreigners is that they are hard workers. They know how to hustle and make money; I think that's something we could learn from them as South African youth. They don't wait for opportunities they create them for themselves.

"Don't tell me you thought I could afford to buy that car from the little I make here."

"I don't know man everything is possible when someone works hard."

"Yeah, that's true, so once I have permanent residence my daughter will qualify for a Relatives Permanent Residence Permit, it's a type of permit that is granted to a biological relative of a South African citizen or a foreigner with a South African permanent residence permit."

"I hope everything works out for you man; I really do."

“Thanks, man, let me give you some vegetables to give to your mother when you get home.”

“No, you don’t have to.”

“Quinton when you will learn not to argue with me. I always get my way and besides I’m older than you man you should listen to me as your elder brother” He jokes and we laugh.

I like Given, I like him a lot and I think I want to know him better.

“Ok then but I’ll pay for them, you’re running a business here...how much is it?” I say already fishing my hands inside my pockets.

“No, it’s a gift from me to your mother don’t get involved in this.”

“Dude, you don’t even know her”

“It doesn’t matter, give her this.” He says handing me the heavy plastic filled to the brim.

“Okay,” I say lifting my hands as a sign of surrender

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“Ko ko!” I say walking through the kitchen door.

Nobuhle drops the cup in her hands and jumps to my arms holding me tightly while her legs hug my waist, I drop my duffel bag and the plastic of vegetables to the floor and hold her back.

“Yini?” Mom bellows pacing from the lounge

She halts on her step when she sees me, sets her hands on her knees, and blows out a heavy breath.

“Aw, fana it’s you.... Ai man Buhle don’t scare me like that I almost had a heart attack thinking something bad had happened to you.” She says and frowns when she catches a glimpse of the broken cup on the floor

“What happened to my cup Buhle?” Mom

We break off the hug then she looks at mom apologetically

“I’m sorry it slipped from my hands and fell when I saw my brother, I didn’t expect to see him. I missed him so much.”

“I missed you too baby,” I say

“Very well then your brother should give you money to replace my cup, I have no problem with you being happy to see him I just don’t understand why my cup had to suffer for it.”

“Stop shouting Nomonde you’ll raise your blood pressure, how are you Ntombi ka Baba?” A smile tugs at the corner of her lips then she smacks my hand.

“Yazi wena, how are you fana?”

“I’m good mama how are you?” I close the distance between us and give her a warm hug, God knows how much I love this woman. She wraps her hands around me holding me back tightly, I close my eyes sniffing in her flowery scent.

“I’m good...I’m happy to see you.” She says caressing my cheek with a finger when we break off the hug

“I’m happy to be home.” She runs her eyes up and down my figure

“Are you eating well, you look so thin.”

“Yes, mom I’m eating well, and look I brought you vegetables.”

“Thank you.” she smiles looking inside the plastic

“Actually, Given is the one who gave them to you.”

“Who’s that?”

“A friend of mine who sells fruits and vegetables next to MTN rank.”

“This is the first time I hear of him.”

“That’s because he’s a new friend of mine.”

“Hmmm, tell him I said thank you.”

“To think I didn’t want to take the vegetables when he gave them to me, I didn’t think vegetables could make you so happy.”

“I appreciate the kind gesture; he sounds like a good young man I think I like him already.”

“Of course, you will angithi he bribed you with vegetables.”

Buhle

Mom and I laugh

“Stop talking too much and put this away.” She says handing

Buhle the plastic

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It was almost 8pm when mom and Buhle stopped hogging me it was already too late to come to Anzani but I couldn't sleep without seeing my girl so I came here, I'm at the corner waiting for her to come outside.

“Hey.” She sounds down spirited and if I didn't know better, I would say she's not happy to see me

“Thembalam” I say going in for a hug

I lock my arms around her waist and whisk her from the ground.

“What’s going on Sthandwa sam’ talk to me?”

“I need to go home, to Venda.”

“Ok I’ll send you money to travel, when are you leaving?”

“Quinton you don’t understand...I’m moving back to Venda permanently.”

So I’m Quinton now...wait, she said what?

“What?” I ask plopping her down so I can see her face under the moonlight

“My mom is not well; she’s been sick for a while now. Her feet are swollen, so she finds it difficult to walk or do things around the house. I need to go back and take care of her.”

I understand where she’s coming from but at the same time, I don’t want her to go because I don’t think our relationship will survive the long-distance, I love her and I don’t want to lose her but I can already see how this is going to end. There’s already a distance between us being provinces apart will kill us.

#42

Quinton was very hurt when I told him about my plan to permanently move back to Venda, I understand where he's coming from. I also don't want to leave but I have no choice but to go back home, my mother needs me and besides there's nothing keeping me here. I don't have a job and I'm no longer enjoying my stay at aunt's house so going back home is for the best. My mother comes first, I can't choose my relationship over my mother Quinton can wake up one day and not love me anymore, but my mother won't she'll always love me no matter what.

The neighbor who called me and told me about my mother said her condition is bad, apparently my mother has been sick for a while now and is getting worse by the day. I speak to her two or three times a week, but she never let out anything about her poor health I'm so hurt because if it wasn't for the neighbor who called me yesterday and told me about it, I wouldn't know that my mother is sick and needs me. I have already packed my bags and I'm planning to leave tomorrow morning. I want to spend the day with Quinton because who knows when I'll see him again, today could be our last day for all we know.

“Anzani can I please talk to you for a minute?” Aunt says when I attempt to walk past her in the lounge.

“Okay.”

“Please come and join me here.” She says patting a space next to her on the couch. I sigh and take a seat next to her

“What’s going on my child, you have changed. You’re no longer the Anzani you used to be before, now you’re always locked in your room and going away on weekends. You avoid being in the same room as me unless I force you to, what’s wrong did I do anything to you?”

How do I tell my aunt the truth without coming off as disrespectful and rude?

“There is something you did I just don’t know how to tell you.”

“You can tell me anything my child.” I clear my throat and try to find the right words to tell my aunt my problem with her without being rude.

“You remember how you started shouting at me and finding fault in everything I did shortly after I lost my job?”

“What? I don’t remember, yes I might have shouted at you but it was because you were wrong not because you had lost your job.”

Wow!

“Okay aunt then I’m sorry for thinking that it was because of my job... I am going back home tomorrow.”

“What? is it because of this? No please don’t do that my child, I hope you didn’t tell your mother about any of this. She would be so hurt, there’s no need to hurt her with something that is not true it was a misunderstanding.”

“No it’s not because of what happened between us, my mother is sick and I need to go back home and take care of her.”

“What? what’s wrong with my sister?” she looks genuinely surprised, I can’t believe my mother didn’t tell us about this.

“Her legs and feet are swollen.”

‘What, and you’re only telling me now!’

“I also didn’t know until yesterday.”

“Wow, I can’t believe this. So you stressed my sister in her poor health and told her I mistreated you when you lost your job? Maybe that’s why she ended up sick!”

“I didn’t tell my mother anything.”

“You’re lying, why didn’t she tell me she’s sick then? Livhuwani tells me everything.”

“I don’t know but I promise I didn’t say anything to her about you.” She looks at me thoughtfully for a while

“It’s fine, you can go to where you were going before I stopped you.”

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I just walked inside Quinton’s gate his mother is outside hanging clothes on the laundry line, a huge smile drapes her face when our eyes lock.

“Angisakwazi!”

(I haven’t seen you in a while)

She says with her arms stretched out for a hug. I walk into her embrace and give her a hug.

“Are you okay?” she says when we break the hug

“Yebo ma I’m okay.”

“I’m glad, Quinton is in his room.”

“Okay thanks ma.”

I leave her to continue with her duties and head to the backroom to find my boyfriend. I find the door is wide open, gospel music booming through the speakers and he’s inside cleaning the room. I knock once and walk right in, he lowers the volume when he catches a glimpse of me.

“Hey.”

“Hi.” His greeting is frigid

For the first since we started dating things are awkward between us, I don’t know what to say to him.

“I’m leaving tomorrow, I thought I should come and spend the day with you.” I say breaking the awkward silence.

“So you’re really leaving?”

“Yes.”

“When were you planning to tell me, you only told me because I asked to see you.”

“I didn’t know she was sick, I found out yesterday.”

“So why have you been ignoring my calls and responding late to my texts?”

“I just haven’t been in a good space lately, I needed time to myself.”

“Wow! I can’t believe you just said that.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it like that but this whole thing with Coke really messed me up.”

“I see, I love you Anzani I love you so much, but I don’t think you’re ready for me and the kind of relationship I want from you. We are in a relationship Anzani and I expected us to talk and tackle things together but you just pushed me away like I didn’t matter and now you’ve decided to relocate to Venda without even hearing my opinion on the matter.”

“I’m sorry for pushing you away but I won’t apologize for putting my mother first.” I say unintentionally raising my voice.

“I never said you should put your mother last, I just expected us to talk things through like a couple maybe we would have found a solution for your mother that doesn’t include you permanently moving back to Venda. What’s going to happen to us when you move back

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how will we even see each other?”

“Wow, you’re being selfish right now. I can’t believe that you expect me to think about our relationship right now when my mother needs me, your mother is outside healthy and in good health she’s even hanging laundry and smiling widely so I don’t expect you to undunderstand my situation!”

“Why are you raising your voice, couldn’t you talk without shouting at me?”

“That’s the only thing you heard from what I just said, you heard that I’m shouting at you!”

“You know what Anzani, I’m not going to do this with you. You can go back to Venda it’s fine.”

“Vele I’m going back why are you saying it like I was asking for your permission?” His eyes widen in shock before he drops the broom on the floor and budes out of his room.

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NOKWAZI

I've been avoiding Gift since my brother and I had a chat, but he isn't making it easier for me with all his constant calls and messages and it doesn't help that my heart still yearns for him.

"Pick it up or switch it off." Namhla, my roommate snaps annoyed by my ringing phone.

"Hey," I say taking Gift's call

"What's going on Nokwazi why have you been ignoring me?"

I look at Namhla to see if she's listening in on our conversation but I find her peeling vegetables while watching cooking videos on her phone.

"I'm a virgin Gift and I'm not ready for sex so I think it's best you and I separate."

My statement has him laughing lungs out breaking my heart into pieces in the process, couldn't he at least pretend that he's hurt?

"I can't believe you fell for that; I was joking my love. I will wait for you as long as it takes."

"Really?"

"Yes, really you deserve it."

"My brother doesn't approve of our relationship; he thinks you're with me to spite him. Why didn't you tell me that you're no longer friends with him?"

"That's because my friendship with your brother has nothing to do with our relationship."

“Yet you were prying on my brother’s relationship with Anzani, I feel like you were using me how come you’re suddenly interested in me when you’ve never talked to me before?”

“I’ve always been interested in you, but I couldn’t do anything about my feelings for you because I respected my friendship with your brother, but we are no longer friends now I don’t see why we can’t be together.”

“Wow, didn’t you hear me when I said my brother doesn’t approve of our relationship. I love you but I won’t go against my brother.”

“I’m not asking you to, he doesn’t have to know that you and I are in a relationship. He’ll know when you and I are getting married and then he’ll be left with no choice but to accept our relationship because he’ll see how serious I am about you.”

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QUINTON

I don't know what to do anymore, I've done everything in my power to show Anzani that I love her and that there's nothing I wouldn't do to make her happy, but she keeps proving to me every chance she gets that she's not ready for the kind of relationship and commitment I crave from her. I can't believe she twisted my words and made it sound like I want her to choose our relationship and abandon her mother, I would never ask that of her like ever I just wanted us to find another alternative.

I could feel myself getting angry at her accusation and disrespect so I opted to leave the room before I said something I would later regret, there's a lump on my throat and a intense pain in my chest I don't want Anzani to go because I know it'll create a gap between us especially because things haven't been okay between but I won't try to stop her because she has made up her mind the last thing I want is for her to think I'm controlling her.

"Where are you coming from, Anzani asked me about you." My mother asks when I walk through the door three hours later

“Is she still around?” I say ignoring her question

“Yeah, she’s in your room. What’s going on Mpilentle are you fighting with Anzani?”

“No, let me go and see her.” I’m out of the door before she attempts to question me further

“Where have you been?” She asks when I walk through the door.

She’s lying on top of my bed; my room is clean and smells fresh I guess she carried on from where I left off. It wasn’t dirty but some things had a speck of dust on them, I don’t know why Buhle wasn’t cleaning like we agreed. I’m yet to confront her about it.

“Are you really leaving tomorrow?”

My question catches her off guard. She swallows saliva and nods her head.

“What about our relationship, what’s going to happen to us?”

“I’ll visit you once or twice a month, we’ll be fine.”

“That’s what you think but things will change when we live provinces apart, we’ll get used to being without each other and eventually stop missing each other. I don’t want that to happen to us sthandwa sam’, our relationship is still new distance will kill us please reconsider I’m begging you.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“I don’t know we can find someone to clean and cook for your mother then you’ll go to Venda every fourth night to check up on her.”

“Who’ll pay that person?”

“I will, I don’t mind.”

“No, I can’t let you do that Quinton, you’re already doing a lot for me.”

“Babe look I won’t pay that person from my salary, I’ll use the extra money I make from selling herbal life and fixing people’s stuff. Please allow me to help you.”

“No, I won’t let you do that. I must go back home I’m sorry.”

“Anzani please don’t do this to us.”

“I’m sorry Mpilo there’s no other choice, what is meant to be will be.”

“So you’re just going to go back to Venda and expect everything to magically work out because what is meant to be will be? Wow!.....it’s fine Anzani go back to Venda I will not stop you.”

“I feel like you’re being unfair right now.”

“It’s okay Anzani, you can go back to Venda.”

#43

“Mpilentle what’s going on?”

“Nothing ma.”

“You haven’t been yourself for days now, you arrived here on Friday, but I haven’t seen Anzani. Are you fighting with her?”

“Ma, I don’t think discussing my relationship with you is the right thing to do.”

“Why, do you think I’ll be biased?”

“No, I just don’t feel comfortable doing it.”

“So would you rather suffer in silence than tell me about it who knows maybe I can help you?”

It's in times like these where I wish my father was still alive or that I was at least close to my uncles, I'm frustrated, and I need advice, and talking to my mother about it doesn't seem like the right to do. I could talk to Given or Kabelo but after what happened with Mpho, and Co I don't think I want my friends in my business. I don't trust them.

"Talk to me fana."

She's like a dog with a bone this one, she won't let go until I tell her what she wants to know, and I guess I have no choice because I desperately need to vent before I drive myself crazy with overthinking. I sigh and pull a chair perching my behind on it, she also pulls a chair and settles next to me putting her elbows on the table, and looks straight into my eyes steeling herself for what I'm about to tell her.

"Eish, ma I don't know if I'm being unfair or what, but Anzani permanently moved back to Venda and I'm afraid this will be the end of our relationship." She frowns

"Why did she move back?"

“Her mother is sick and struggles to do things around the house on her own, so she went there to take care of her.”

“I understand that you want your woman close to keep the fire burning in your relationship, but you need to understand that at this moment your relationship is the last thing on Anzani’s mind, her mother is her priority she is sick, and needs her daughter.”

“I know and understand that that’s why I suggested that we find someone to take care of her mother then she’ll go home regularly to check up on her.”

“You were being unfair Mpilentle I can’t believe you even suggested that..... that’s her mother and anyone in her position would do the same. I would understand if she had a job this side but she’s unemployed so why should she stay in Ratanda instead of going back home to take care of her sick mother? If I fall sick now, I wouldn’t want a stranger taking care of me when my daughters can do it, it’s not right.”

“I guess you’re making sense, it’s just that I’m so afraid of losing her.”

“I know and understand your fear but stressing about a self-absorbed and selfish boyfriend is the last thing Anzani needs right now, what she needs is your support. She’s already dealing with so many things she doesn’t need to be nursing your insecurities.”

“Thank you, mom. I didn’t see it that way. You are right, I was being selfish and inconsiderate.”

“Relationships are hard my child things won’t always be smooth they require a lot of patience, tolerance, and understanding. Don’t stop praying for your relationship and please don’t entertain negativity, long-distance relationships are already hard enough don’t make things worse with negative thoughts. It’s like you expect the relationship to fail, have faith in love it conquers everything.”

“Thank you, ma. I feel better.”

“Pleasure, now stop sulking and search for lodges and guest houses around Anzani’s place then go visit her next weekend. I am sure she will be happy to see you, you have the means to go there so do it you can’t expect her to be the only one who visits you. She needs your support taking care of a sick person not only drains you physically but emotionally as well so go there, take her out for a massage or something so she can relax she deserves it poor girl is going through a lot.”

“You’re the best mother in the world Nomonde, thank you so much.”

“Ya ya ya whatever.” She says with a smile

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ANZANI

When I left Ratanda things between aunt and I were not good I won’t even mention Quinton, he was so moody and sulking the entire time I was with him I didn’t even get to enjoy my last day

with him like I thought I would. I miss him, I miss him like crazy. Yes, we talk over the phone every day without fail but things are no longer the same between us, they are awkward, and I can feel us drifting further and further apart with each day that passes and it hurts like hell but there's nothing I can do, I can't choose him over my mother that one is something I can never do.

"Anza!" My mother bellows from the lounge

"Mma"

"Please bring me a glass of water."

I take out a glass from the cupboard, rinse it before filling it with water, and head to the lounge to give it to my mother. Tears well up in my eyes as I glance at her legs, she's lying on top of a blanket on the rug and swinging her scarf on her legs to chase off flies that keep pooling on the open sores on her legs and feet.

“Ndo livhuwa ngwananga.”

(Thank you, my child.)

She says pinning her elbows on the blanket so she can sit up, I put the glass on the coffee table and help her sit up. Once she's comfortable I give her the glass, she gulps the water in one go and swipes her hand on her mouth afterward.

“The food is almost ready,” I say taking the glass from her

“Okay, my child.”

“Ndaa!”

We both turn to the door where the voice emanates from and come face to face with Mulalo, he's standing on our doorstep in his tall glory holding several shopping bags from Woolworths in his hands.

A big smile spreads on my mom's lips upon seeing him.

“Come in my son.” Mulalo smiles and walks in, his manly cologne invades my nostrils and fills the entire lounge. He takes a seat on the love seat opposite my mother and respectfully greets her.

“Anza go and make him a cup of coffee and give him the scones you baked last night.” She says with a wild smile on her face.

“No, it’s fine mma I just came to drop these off.” He says as I’m about to turn to the kitchen

“Oh, thank you my son but you didn’t have to.”

“It’s my pleasure mma.” He brings his wrist to his face staring at his wristwatch then dips the hand inside the pocket of his black slacks, the hand comes back with a tube that looks like some sort of ointment.

“Mma I would love to stay longer but I need to rush back to work, I bought you this ointment maybe it can help with the sores on your legs.” He says giving my mother the tube

She smiles taking it from him

“Thank you

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my son God bless you,” she says and swings her scarf on her feet warding off the flies.

“Thank you mma, I’ll be on my way then Anzani please walk me out.” He says standing to his feet

“Bring that here.” My mother says gesturing to the glass in my hand. I give her the glass and follow Mulalo outside

“So how are you, I haven’t seen you in years. You look so grown and beautiful.” He says running his eyes up and down my figure

“Thank you.”

“Are you still working? I think your mother once said something about Mr. Price.”

“I used to work there but I lost my job a few months ago.”

“I’m sorry, what qualification do you have maybe I can help you look.”

“BCom Marketing management.”

“Marketing has jobs I’m sure I’ll find something soon; there’s something I want to talk to you about but I don’t have time for that right now because I need to dash you’re still around, right?”

“Yes.”

“Very well then, I’ll see you next time.”

“Bye.” He steps inside his Black BMWX7 and hoots before driving off.

“Mulalo is handsome right?” That’s the first thing my mother says when I walk back into the house she's smiling like a Cheshire cat

“Yes, he’s not bad.”

“Not bad? come on Anzani such a handsome man and you say he’s not bad!”

He’s handsome yes but I’ve seen better, Quinton for example that man is quite a looker. He is so handsome with smooth glowing skin, thick black lips, beautiful salacious eyes, and a sexy body that makes everything he puts on look amazing.

“He’s kind too.” She says

“Yes, he’s always been kind.”

“He’s a bigshot businessman, he has several cars and I heard that he recently bought a mansion at some estate...eish I forgot the name.”

“Good for him, he’s done well for himself.”

“Plus, he’s kind, respectful, a giver, and a man of God.”

I don’t think I like where my mother is going with this, so I change the topic

“I should check on my pots,” I say and head to the kitchen not giving her a chance to say anything else.

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“So, humans are Omnivores?”

“Yes, Lutendo because they can eat both plants and animals.”  
it's seven in the evening mom is watching House of Zwide while  
I'm helping my little brother with homework

“This is so easy; I wish my teacher could explain like you then  
everyone would pass.”

“Thanks, buddy, are we done now?”

“Yeah, that was the last page.” He says flipping the pages of his  
DBE

“Great because I'm starving let me go and dish up.”

“I'll go and take a bath first,” Lutendo says packing up his books

“Ok, I'll leave your food inside the microwave.”

“Please don't dish too much food for me,” Mom says

“Okay mma.”

I head to the kitchen and take out three plates and plates for us. I take out a bottle of water from the fridge pour it into a 1-liter glass jug and mix it with juice.

“Excellent,” I say after tasting the sweetness with a spoon

“Anzani I don’t know if you’re blind or you’re acting like you are but Mulalo likes you that’s why he keeps doing all this things for us, I like him too he’s a good guy and it would give me peace if you got married to a man like him.” My mother says when we are halfway through our meal

I can’t say I didn’t see this coming; she’s been talking about how good Mulalo is since he left.

“Mma I told you I have a boyfriend.” I can’t believe this woman, I told her everything about Mpilo and our relationship, she seemed happy for me so what’s this?

“The Zulu one you told me about? Come on Anzani you can’t reject a guy like Mulalo for that Zulu boyfriend of yours. Zulu men are disrespectful and treat women like objects, I hear they beat women too I don’t want you to suffer.”

“Those are just stereotypes, Mpilo is nothing like that. He’s a wonderful man and he loves me.”

“But he has too many responsibilities from what you told me; he’ll never give you the life you deserve but Mulalo can. You have suffered for most of your life, you deserve a man who’ll take care of you.”

“Quinton is an engineer; I don’t know if you understand what that means but I’ll never suffer with him.”

“I know engineers earn a lot of money, he will earn more as he moves up the ranks in his career, but you’ll never enjoy that money because he has too many responsibilities, his mother, and his siblings. You need someone like Mulalo who has no one depending on him. His family is well off, and everyone takes

care of themselves, you don't need someone with the same problems as yours- black tax."

"I don't care about materials I love Quinton and he makes me happy."

"I know I used to tell you the story of how your father, and I suffered together and built everything together from scratch and maybe you thought it's romantic and what love should be like but that's not what I want for you, there's nothing romantic about poverty. Love doesn't pay the bills, but money will, not only that it'll also give you the life you deserve. Please don't be foolish and think with your mind, Mulalo wants you and he's loaded forget the Zulu guy with his mountain of problems and take the one who'll treat you like you deserve. You can see I'm constantly sick, I can't help you with the bills anymore. You are 23 Anzani you're not a child, you are old enough to take care of me and your brother."

"I know and I'm trying my best...I will be able to do more once I find a job."

“But you can see that you’re not finding one so you need a man who can take care of me and you until then, he bought us groceries at Woolworths imagine what he’ll do when you agree to be his woman. He will instantly take me to a specialist who can help me with my legs and feet” her eyes well up with tears “Or do you enjoy seeing me like this Anzani is that it?” She croaks out in a shaky breaking voice

“No, of course not.”

“Then take Mulalo, he will take care of us. Forget that Zulu guy, you deserve better. Forget about love and think about your mother’s health or do you want me to die? I’m the only mother you’ll have but boyfriends can be replaced, he can replace you tomorrow and get another girl, but you’ll never have another me.” My lips tremble as I listen to her speak “I know you don’t want me to die but that’s what is going to happen if you don’t take Mulalo, so what is it going to be love or your sick mother?”

#44

“So, what will it be?”

“Do I have to decide now?”

“Anza look at my legs we have no time.”

The thought of breaking up with Quinton negates me peace, I can't picture myself with anyone who's not him. Yes, Mulalo is loaded and would probably pay to get my mother help, but Quinton would do anything for me with the little he has. He loves me and I love him just as much, he's my chance at true love I don't know if I am willing to lose that because of money.

“You don't know Quinton mma, he's a hard worker and he would do anything for me. I'm sure he wouldn't mind paying a specialist for you if I ask him.” She erupts into a belly laugh startling me in the process, I'm shocked she can laugh this hard in her condition

“Did you just compare your boyfriend to Mulalo? What a joke!”

“Mma please I love Quinton, I love him so much and he loves me too. I can do anything for you except this please don’t ask me to do this please.”

“So you’ll watch me rot away when you have the power to help me?”

“Mma please.”

“No Anzani, it’s either you do this, or I will accept that I no longer have a daughter.” She says and wipes her tears

“Lutendo!”

“Mma!” He replies from the bathroom

“Come and help me up.”

“I can help you,” I say already grabbing her hand but she pushes me away so hard that I land on the couch with my butt

“Keep your hands away from me, until you do what I ask you I forbid you to touch me.” She says with so much venom breaking my heart into chunks

I trot to my bedroom and throw myself on the bed crying my eyes out. I’m stuck between a rock and a hard place, who do I choose my mother or love?

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KG AHLISO

I don’t know how I missed it before but there are loopholes in Mpho’s story, it just doesn’t make sense and I’m determined to get the truth. I feel horrible, I lost a friend, a prayer partner, and a brother all because I acted on impulse. I shouldn’t have treated Quinton like I did and I regret it, I take a deep breath

before calling his number. I hope he didn't block me, oh great it's ringing.

"Hey."

"Hi." I clear my throat

"How are you?"

"I'm good K what's up?"

"I'm sorry man, I shouldn't have taken sides. I should have listened to your side of the story."

"It's alright man, it's all in the past now."

"I know but I'm still sorry."

“Thanks man, I am glad you acknowledge your mistake, but I don’t think you and I can be friends again.”

“I understand.”

“Yeah.”

He says then we fall into uneasy silence, I know he’s still on the line because I can hear him breathing. I can’t believe this is what we have turned into, we used to be tight.

“Q what happened between you two, you and Mpho?” I say after a long moment of silence

He blows out a heavy sigh before answering the question

“I’ve always been in love with Anzani but I never acted on my feelings or told anyone about how I feel and that’s why I had no choice but to suppress what I feel for her when Mpho started dating her, I thought I would get over her as time goes but I fell for her deeper instead and it hurt to see Mpho not loving her

the way I knew I could but I didn't want to get involved because I thought she wouldn't trust my love for her and also because I felt that I didn't deserve her.... I would reprimand and show him reason whenever I felt like he was treating her badly, they didn't break up because of me like Mpho made everyone believe they broke up because of their issues that had nothing to do with me."

"Which were?"

"I think Mpho should be the one to tell you."

"Anzani said the same thing, I don't get you two. Shouldn't you be trying to erode Mpho's reputation instead of protecting it after how he tarnished your name and reputation in front of everyone?" It's obvious what they know about Mpho is big, I don't know why they are protecting him after what he did.

"I guess he and I are not the same, I don't find amusement in bringing others down."

“That’s why I have always liked you, thanks for picking up my call even though I’ve been a douchebag lately.”

“Anytime.” He says and cuts the call, how I wish we could go back to how we used to be but I guess this is what I deserve for allowing myself to be Mpho’s puppet.

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ANZANI

“Aa.”

I just walked back from the shop when I find Mulalo kneeling on the rug next to my mother dressing her legs with a bandage.

“Ndaa” Mulalo says responding to my greeting. My mother gives me the evil eye and doesn’t respond.

“Ovuwa hani Anza?”

(How are you)

“Ndo vuwa zwavhudi ene?”

(I’m good and how are you)

“Nanne ndo vuwa zwavhudi ngamanda.”

(I’m very good)

He says and resumes with the task at hand. I would help but mom doesn’t want me anywhere near her since last night after she gave me an ultimatum, I slump on the L-shaped couch and watch what’s playing on TV.

“About the job.. I spoke to several people, and they promised to get back to me should something come up.” He says

After what happened with Shaun I know better than to count my chickens before they hatch, and I don’t think I’m still comfortable with his help since I learned about his intentions.

“Okay, thanks.”

“Add my number on WhatsApp so you can forward me your documents.”

“No, I’d rather you give me your email.”

“Anzani!” mom says giving me a look of disapproval

“No ma it’s fine she doesn’t need to give me her number if she’s not comfortable, it’s  
mulalonetwinga@freedominvestments.co.za”

I type his email address on my notes and save it

“I’ll send you that email later.”

Like yesterday I walk him out when he’s done with my mother.

“So how long will you be in Vuwani for?”

“I don’t know until I get another job or mom recovers whichever comes first.”

“Whats the rush is there anyone waiting for you back in Gauteng, like a boyfriend?”

“Yes, I have a boyfriend.” He swallows

“Are you guys serious?”

“Yes, we are very serious we plan to get married in the next 1 or 2 years.”

“I’m hurt I won’t pretend that I’m not affected by what you just said because I am, remember I told you we have to talk about something? I didn’t want to blurt it out like this

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I wanted to take you out somewhere and make it special but I guess I'm left with no choice but to tell you now, I love you Anzani I have always loved you. Please give me a chance to love you and treat you like the queen you are, please." He says beseechingly

"I'm sorry I can't be with you, I have a boyfriend and I'm in love with him."

He swallows and bobs his head in understanding, thank God he took it better than I expected.

"As painful as it is to hear you say that I understand, he's a lucky man I hope he treats you well."

"He does."

"Okay, what does he do?"

"What do you mean?"

“I’m talking about his occupation.”

“He’s unemployed and still searching for a job.” I lie through my teeth trying to gauge his reaction

“Oh I see, let me get going then bye.”

“Bye.”

“So, what have you decided?” Mom says when I walk back into the lounge. I guess we are back to talking to each other again

“Mma please.”

“I don’t have time Anzani, look at my legs look.”

Her condition is getting worse by the day, she no longer even sleeps in her room. She’s always laying on the living room rug,

the irritating buzz of flies and the horrible stench inside the house mortifies me every time Mulalo comes to our house, he may act normal and unbothered but I know he can smell the awful fume.

“I can see them mma.”

“Make it quick then, I need to see a specialist soon.”

“Mma I already told you that I can’t do what you’re asking of me, I love you so much and I would do anything for you even give up my life for yours but not this I’m sorry.”

“Wow, I guess you are choosing your boyfriend over me then, and in that case, I want you out of my house tomorrow morning.”

To say I’m shocked would be putting it lightly

“And please don’t bother going to Lufuno's house, I’ll call her and tell her not to take you in. Go to your beloved boyfriend

and let's see if he will still love you once you start depending on him for everything"

I drop to my knees and clasp my hands together like I'm praying

"Mma please don't do this to me, I can do anything but please don't throw me out....I have some money that I was saving to do my license and money from UIF I'm sure with that I can pay for a specialist."

"You know what you need to do if you want to keep staying in this house, it's either that or forget you have a mother."

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QUINTON

I've had time to think about what my mother said and I realize just how unfair I was to Anzani for wanting her to stay here while her mother is sick, I'm so ashamed of myself that I'm even afraid to face her. My mother was right, Anzani doesn't

need to be dealing with my nonsense right now she needs my support both emotionally and spiritually. I want to propose that we take up a 3 day dry fast for her mother's health but with her condition, I don't know it's safe for her to engage in that kind of fast. I wouldn't mind doing it alone if it's not safe for her to do it.

I'm on my way back from Ratanda, I just got off the taxi and decided to check if Given is in his stall before calling an Uber and luckily he's around.

"Hey."

"Little brother." He says fist bumping me

Given and I have only known each other for a brief period but every time I'm with him it feels like we have known each other for years, I like him and we connect without even trying hard

"You don't even know my age."

“I don’t have to know it, the fact remains I’m your big brother catch.” He says throwing me a peach

“The way you like sharing I wonder if you make a profit.”

“Stop complaining and wash that peach.” He says giving me a bottle of water to wash the fruit

I put my duffel bag on his chair, fold the sleeves of my shirt to my elbows and wash the peach with water.

“How was home, how is everyone?”

“Home was okay and everyone is good but I was kind of bored because Anzani wasn’t around.....hmmm.” I moan after taking a bite of the delicious fruit

“Delicious right?”

“Very, I’ll buy five more before I leave.”

“Eish I can imagine how you must feel, I know how much you love her. Hang on she'll be back soon.”

I spend the entire afternoon with him, talking and getting to know each other better until he closes shop. I help him pack up and load the stock at the back of his bakkie and he gives me a plastic of fruits as 'payment', he offers to drive me home when I attempt to call an Uber.

“Thank you,” I say when he drops me at my gate

“It's a pleasure, see you around.”

“Sharp.”

He starts the ignition, hoots once, and drives off leaving behind a trail of smoke.

“Hello,” I say to Nolwazi when I find her inside the elevator

“Hey, how are you?”

“I’m good thanks and you?”

“I’m great, I know you said I should stay out of your business the last time we spoke but there’s a lady is sitting outside your door...she's been waiting there for hours.”

“What?”

Could it be Anzani? But she knows Anzani she wouldn’t refer to as ‘a lady.’. I’m the first one out of the elevator when the elevator stops on our floor and the steel doors slide open, I pace to my apartment curious to see who this lady might be. She’s sitting on top of her duffel bag hugging her knees to her chest, her head is buried between her thighs.

I can’t see her face because her long wavy weave is falling on her sides hiding her face from me but from her thick body, I can

tell it's not my woman which spikes up my trinket on who the woman is and why she's here.

"Hey."

She raises her head and I'm shocked to see Refilwe, before I can ask what she's doing here and how she know where I live she jumps to her feet and throws herself in my arms, and breaks into a piercing sob.

#45

“How did you find me?”

We are inside my apartment now; I was able to get her to calm down and stop crying and offered her a glass of water. She’s sitting on the recliner staring at the TV, her luggage bag is on the floor next to her. Thank God she has stopped crying even though she looks a mess- her clothes are wrinkled, her weave is uncombed, her eyes are puffy, and her cheeks are stained with dried-up tears. I’m not that used to her, so this feels kind of awkward and I can see that she’s a bit uncomfortable being here.

“You mentioned it to me once, it was before you moved in. Remember I asked you if you would manage to travel and you told me you found an apartment to rent and you’re moving at the end of the month?”

“Oh yeah, I think I remember, how did they let you in at the gate without my permission?” She looks down and twiddles her thumbs

“I lied and said I’m your sister. The security guard tried calling you to confirm, but your phone rang unanswered, so he let me in and told me to wait outside.”

I take it out of my pocket and see five missed calls from an unsaved number, I guess it’s the security guard. He must have called while I was with Given, we were talking too much there's no way I could have heard it vibrating since it's on silent

“Oh okay, I don’t mean to be rude but why are you here?”

She stands up, takes off her jacket, and pulls up her top, my blood runs cold as I stare at her battered body. She turns around showing me her back and the whip lashes and cuts on her back have my skin crawling, her stomach, arms and back are all covered in scrapes.

“Who did this to you?”

“My boyfriend we got into a fight yesterday and he did this to me, I took what I could and left this morning when he left for work.”

“I’m sorry that he did this to you, but couldn’t you book into a hotel or go to one of your friends? I don’t think it’s a good idea for you to be here, the last thing I need is for your boyfriend to think something is going on between us. I have a girlfriend and I don’t think she will appreciate you being here.”

“He broke my friend’s door and beat up the neighbor who tried to stop him when he was forcefully taking me away and that was the last time I ran to my friend’s place, I don’t want to put my friend through that again. We have a joint account; I can’t withdraw without his approval and the money I have on my personal account won’t be enough to pay for a hotel.”

“I can borrow you money to pay for accommodation but you can’t stay here, unfortunately.”

“I understand, it’s just that I’m scared he will kill me when he finds me.” She mutters and her eyes glisten with unshed tears.

“Eish, don’t you have family or someone who can help you out?”

“No, my family is in the Free state. Please allow me to sleep here tonight I will go book into a hotel tomorrow, I’ve been waiting outside your door since this morning I’m exhausted please allow me to sleep here only for today.” She implores

She doesn’t only look tired but hungry and in pain. I guess one night won’t hurt. Fortunately, my apartment is a two-bedroom

“Okay, you can spend the night but only for today.”

“Thank you, where’s your bathroom I need to bathe and take painkillers I’m in so much pain?”

“It’s that way, I’ll prepare something for you to eat so long.”

“Thank you.” She takes out her toiletry bag and towel from the duffel bag on the floor before toddling to the bathroom

I will never understand women who stay in abusive relationships, Refilwe is my colleague and from what I heard from people at work she’s been in an abusive relationship with her boyfriend for years. Kabelo says sometimes she would come to work with bruises on her face, he also told me that she has lost several pregnancies due to the abuse from her boyfriend. Even with all that she doesn’t want to report her boyfriend, apparently the boyfriend is one of those guys who refuse to be dumped he threatened to kill her if she ever leaves him. I just pray that one day she finds the strength to get out of this toxic relationship because no one can help her unless she wants to, and I hope I don’t get caught up in her mess for helping her. The boyfriend doesn’t sound like someone I want to mess with.

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NARRATED

It's 3 AM, the witching hour- an hour in which is believed that supernatural creatures such as witches, demons, and ghosts are thought to be the most powerful and black magic at its most effective. Livhuwani hasn't slept a wink, she's wide awake scared to fall asleep because she is terrified of her dreams-she dreams of a giant black snake that appears to be angry with her every time she closes her eyes. She doesn't know peace and can't remember the last time she slept peacefully without dreaming of abundant waters or the angry giant terrifying snake, if it's not the tormenting dreams then it's the shadows and whispers of people she cannot see. She's never smoked a cigarette in her life, but she's been craving to smoke one these past couple of days, of course, she hasn't given in to her odd cravings, but she doesn't know how long she can hold on until she gives in to the urge.

Being alive is getting unbearable with each day that passes, she's drained and ready to give up on this life thing. Her heart aches every time she remembers the hurt and disbelief on her daughter's face when she told her to break up with her boyfriend, she hates herself for doing this to her daughter, but she doesn't have a choice in this case because Mulalo wants Anzani and he's not willing to negotiate. She wipes the tear that escaped from the corner of her eye and fishes her hand under

her pillow searching for her phone, once she finds it, she presses the power button, and the screen comes alight. The time is 03:20, way too early for her to call her sister but she can't wait till morning she needs someone to talk to.

“Livhuwani did you see what time it is?” Lufuno answers the phone in a sleepy voice

“I know, I'm sorry but I need to talk to someone.” The dejection in her elder sister's voice has Lufuno instantly sitting up on her butt and rubbing her eyes to ward off the drowsiness she feels.

“What's going on, you can talk to me?” Livhuwani narrates everything to Lufuno leaving her in shock

“Please tell Anzani the truth.” She says after a few seconds of speechlessness

“I can't do that.”

“Then be prepared to lose your daughter, I can’t believe you blackmailed your daughter and even threatened to throw her out of the house her father built for her and Lutendo”

“I already feel horrible there’s no need to make me feel worse.”

“What are you going to do if Anzani leaves in the morning?”

“She won’t leave, I know my daughter. She would never cohabit.”

“I still think you should tell her the truth; I don’t know her boyfriend but from what I’ve seen Anzani loves him. Anzani is her mother’s daughter she will never choose money over love, she’s exactly like you remember how you chose Thilivhali over Muvhuso even though his father was rich? I think maybe you should accept your calling and maybe things will work out for you. Stop being stubborn, Mulalo marrying your daughter won’t solve anything.”

“Lufuno please.”

“You know I’m right, what’s so bad about being a maine?”

“I just don’t want to; I can’t imagine myself as a maine I can’t. If feels like, I’ll be betraying God and turning away from him...I can’t.”

“So, you’d rather your daughter loses the man she loves and gets married to someone she doesn’t love?”

“You know I wouldn’t do this if I had another choice, Mulalo is adamant about marrying her.”

“You have a choice, accept your calling.....what Mulalo is doing is wrong, who helps someone and then turn around and demands to get married to their daughter? He's taking advantage of your helplessness ”

“But I have no choice Lufuno, I don’t have R200 000 in my possession.”

“I still don’t understand how you ended up owing Mulalo so much money.”

“I borrowed money from the bank and mortgaged my house.”

“Why did you need so much money? I just don’t get it.”

“I needed capital to start my business

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I used some of the money to invest in Crowd1 and bought Bitcoins via some trading company. I honestly can’t tell you what happened with the rest of the money, but I’m left with nothing, Crowd1 keep# saying we will get paid on but it never happens, the trading company I bought Bitcoins under turned out to be a scam. The bank wanted to repossess my house, I was stressed so I went to Mulalo and asked him for help then he said he would pay off the loan on the condition that he gets married to Anzani I agreed because she wasn’t dating. She was in her final year at the time, he promised to wait for her, woo her and make her fall in love with him so she wouldn’t feel like she was being sold and I honestly didn’t have a problem

because he's a good man but now Anzani is in love, and everything is just complicated."

"It still doesn't excuse how you sold your daughter to settle your debt, I don't know what you're going to do to get yourself out of this mess."

"I don't know either."

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ANZANI

I didn't sleep a wink last night thinking about what my mother said, I still can't wrap my head around what my mother asked me. It's difficult for me to believe that my sweet mother would ask me to leave my boyfriend for someone she knows I'm not in love with, my mother has never been materialistic I don't understand when things changed. It feels like I'm dealing with a stranger, not the loving woman who raised me with nothing but love, she's the reason I have never dated people for what they

have. She always narrated her and my father's love story and always emphasized the importance of being with a man who loves me for me and respects me, 'money will be a bonus, it's better to start from scratch with someone than to be with a wealthy person who treats you like scum' she said. She looked genuinely happy for me when I told her about Quinton, I don't understand what could have changed all of the sudden.

"So, you're saying you can't accommodate me?"

"I'm sorry cuz but I can't, my husband and I agreed that we would never live with relatives in our house," Dakalo says

"It's okay, I understand."

"I'm sorry, I will speak to my mother I'm sure she won't mind having you...what could've gotten into an aunt, this doesn't sound like her." If only she knew how her mother treated me when I couldn't afford groceries

“I’m just as surprised as you, I don’t know what’s going on with my mother but I’m not getting married to Mulalo he’s handsome and all, but my heart belongs to Quinton.”

“Yeah, don’t allow her to manipulate you. No one chose who she should get married to, I’m so shocked this is so out of her character. Aunt Livhuwani is the sweetest, she’s exactly like you.”

“I know I’m also shocked; I need to start packing bye cuz”

“I’ll talk to mom and aunt Anzadakalo to accommodate you, going to Q should be your last option.” Aunt Anzadakalo is my mother’s youngest sibling, and Kamo’s mother the one who got married to a Sotho man.

Dakalo’s name was taken from hers, mine might sound like hers but it has a different meaning to hers.

“Ok bye,” I say and cut the call

Cohabitation is not in the cards for me, it's something I would never do unless I'm stranded. I know Q feels the same way, he'll probably feel pressured to get married to me once we start permanently living together and I don't want that. I want him to focus on building his mom's house before we can start thinking about marriage, he has already started buying and paying for building materials. The house plan was approved by the municipality building inspector so it's all systems go from here.

With the money I have from my savings and the UIF payout I can find a cheap room to rent in Ratanda but I'll need a job to keep up with rent payments in the long run and then an idea hits me. I sprint to my traveling bag and search for the file with all my important documents, I sigh in relief when I find the business card. I punch her number on my phone and lower my head on the bed as the phone rings against my ear.

"Hello."

"Hello, you're speaking to Anzani I don't know if you remember me."

“Anzani?”

“The Venda girl you met in Maboneng and gave her a lift to her boyfriend’s place in Braam.”

“Oh, wow I remember you, I thought you lost my card or something when you didn’t call.”

“To be honest I never thought I would call but I’m in a dilemma and I need help, you said I could call you if I needed anything does that offer still stand?” She laughs

“Yes, it does. What’s going on?”

“My mother is sick and I had to move back home so I can take care of her, there’s this brother from her old church who keeps coming around the house and helping us with groceries and staff. I haven’t seen this man for years and I don’t know how he, and my mother reconnected because my mother left her previous Church for prophet Abara’s church.”

“Okay go on.”

“I don’t know if he told my mother he wants to marry me or what, but my mother is forcing him down my throat and even made me choose between him and my boyfriend.”

“Damn girl, who did you end up choosing?”

“I can’t marry someone I’m not in love with, so I chose my boyfriend, she flipped and told me to leave her house this morning. I don’t have anywhere to go, and I don’t want to go to my boyfriend’s place, can’t you give me a job or something even if it’s being a nanny or a maid I don’t mind as long as I will have money to afford rent and monthly groceries. I don’t want to be dependent on my boyfriend, men tend to change and treat you differently when they know that you have no one else but them.”

“Oh Anzani, not every man is like that, but I like your attitude. About the job, I have a lady who cleans my house and she’s very good and my kids love her.” My mood drops below 0

“It’s okay I unders-.”

“Wait let me finish, my husband and I own several student accommodations in Johannesburg and Pretoria, and we are kind of looking for a manager in one of them.”

“What? are you saying what I think you’re saying?”

“Yep, are you up for the challenge. Do you think you can manage a building with 17 floors, 1700 students, 8 drivers, 6 security guards, and 4 receptionists?”

Wow!

“I know I said I’m looking for a job, but I didn’t expect something like this, I’ve never been anyone’s manager I don’t know....” She chuckles

“I know but you won’t have to do it alone, we have a manager but he needs help so you’ll be working with him and learning the job from him, the reason I want you is because I want you

to help us market our business in Northwest, we bought a flat that side that we want to renovate and turn into a student accommodation ...so are you keen?" I scream jumping up and down

"OMG yes!" She laughs

"Okay then, come back to Gauteng so we can meet and discuss the terms of your employment."

#46

My heart was so sore when I left home this morning especially because my mother still wasn't talking to me, but it gives me peace to know that from now on I'll be able to provide her with the life she has always dreamt of, now she doesn't need Mulalo or anyone else for that matter. I know I said God what what a few days ago, but I take it all back now. God just prepared a table in front of my enemies and gave me more than I bargained for, I can't wait to share the news with my boyfriend. It's 13:09 when I get to Johannesburg, bae knocks off at 16:30 so I know there's no one in his apartment but the good thing is that I have keys to his place, so I don't have to wait for him to come back for me to get inside. He doesn't know I'm coming I thought it would be a nice surprise to find me here when he comes back from work.

"Sawubona baba," I say greeting the security at the gate

"Yebo Ntombi." He allows me inside the building and helps me carry my bags to the elevator

“Thank you so much baba.”

“My pleasure, let me get back to the gate.”

He says and paces back to the gate. I call the lift to the ground floor and press on my phone while I wait, the elevator dings open and I walk in grateful to find no one inside. I don't know if it's just me, but I hate being in the elevator with strangers, it just feels awkward.

The apartment is squeaky clean when I walk in, wow that's a first. My boyfriend is not untidy or anything, but he's my man and I know he never cleans this neatly. I drag my bags to his bedroom and open the windows for fresh before slipping out of my clothes and changing into hot pants and a tank top then I slide my feet inside his slippers, they are big on me, but I love wearing them. There's just something cute about wearing my boyfriend's clothes, my stomach grumbles cueing me that I haven't eaten anything since I woke up. Lord, I am famished so I head to the fridge to find something to eat. I open all the containers inside the fridge checking what's inside and find some leftover lasagna and a garden salad, baby man he's

experimenting with them pots. I insert the container inside the microwave and switch on the TV

The lasagna is so delicious I can't help but moan as I'm eating, his culinary skills have improved a great deal. The food is quite spicy, and I'm forced to gulp tons of water throughout my meal.

My phone rings while I'm watching dirty dancing on studio universal, I reduce the volume and take Dakalo's call.

"Ntombi!"

"Okay, what's up?"

"I found a job sana I don't want to jinx it so I'll tell you all about it after signing the contract."

"Wow I'm so happy for you Ntombi, I spoke to my mother and she said she doesn't have a problem with you moving back in with her."

“I appreciate your help but there’s no need, I will be working in Johannesburg, so I’ll stay with bae while I look for my own place.”

“Wow, I’m so happy for you hey.”

“Thanks, I’m over the moon.”

“What did aunt say when you told her the news?”

“I didn’t tell her anything, she’s still not speaking to me.”

“Yo, so who’s going to take care of her now that you have found a job? She can’t be alone, she’s just being difficult and Lutendo is the one who will suffer in all of this.”

“I asked Gloria the neighbor to help her with house chores and cooking then I’ll pay her monthly.”

“Oh at least.”

“Yeah.”

We talk about this and that, Dakalo never runs out of things to say my bladder is full by the time we hang up, I quickly rush to the bathroom to relieve myself. I rub my hands on my eyes and open them again when I see a red thong on the bathroom rail, a painful pang shoots straight to my heart and a lump sits on my throat. This can't be happening; Quinton cannot be cheating on me. OMG this explains the clean apartment and the food, something pushes up against my stomach and I throw up on the basin when I realize whose food I consumed.

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QUINTON

Last night the plan was for me to cook for Refilwe but she took over and made some delectable lasagna, she looked so much better after her shower and even better after having a snack to

hold the hunger while the food was getting ready. She looked especially better after eating and that's how she ended up taking over and cooking for us, as agreed she packed her bags and left this morning, and I kept my promise and borrowed her money to book into a hotel for the time being. She didn't go to work because she is afraid her psycho boyfriend might show up at work to look for her, I feel guilty that I didn't tell Anzani about this because I'm the one who insisted on us communicating about everything yet I'm the same person who does what we promised not to do.

"Thanks, man," I say to Kabelo as he parks his car outside my gate

"Pleasure man, so did you tell Ithembalakho about Refilwe spending the night at your place last night?"

"No, I didn't and I feel terrible."

"Why didn't you, it won't look good if she hears from someone else because believe me nothing stays hidden forever."

“She sounded a bit sad when we spoke over the phone last night so I decided not to tell her, I don’t know what’s going on man but I feel like I’m losing my woman. Things haven’t been the same between us since she left for Venda, there’s just this tension between us. She doesn't have time for me.”

“I think it's because her mother is sick so she’s probably stressed about that, things will go back to normal once her mom recovers you’ll see.”

“I hope so.”

“I know they will. I still think Refilwe came to you because she has a crush on you.”

“Nah, I think it’s because she knows her boyfriend would never look for her in my place but I’m glad she’s gone now. I felt guilty allowing her to sleep in my house, it felt like I was cheating on my woman or something.”

“I still think you shouldn’t have allowed her to spend the night in your apartment.”

“True but you should’ve seen her man the state she was in was heartbreaking, I couldn’t throw her out plus it was late.”

“I understand, okay man let me dash.”

“Okay bye”

I step out of the car, he turns the car around and drives away. I use my access card and go through the gate, greet the security guard and take the stairs to my room. I can’t remember the last time I exercised so I could use the exercise right now.

I notice that the door is open when I try to put in my key, strange. I push the door and inspect the lock but it doesn’t look like it was tampered

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did I perhaps forget to lock the door on my way out this morning? I swiftly meander inside the apartment skimming my

eyes around the apartment trying to spot if anything is missing but everything seems to be here, I feel footsteps coming from my bedroom before my woman emerges looking as sexy as ever in a short and a tank top walking barefoot.

“Wow, this is a nice surprise,” I say swaddling her in my arms.

“It’s like you knew how much I missed you I was planning to come to visit you this weekend.” She scoffs and pulls away from my arms

“Thembalam' you don't look okay, what's going on?”

She folds her arms across her chest and gazes into my eyes

“Mpilo are you cheating on me?” the pain her eyes hold confuses me more than her question, what's going on?

“What do you mean, where is this coming from?”

“Stop pretending, your girlfriend forgot her underwear in the bathroom.”

“Girlfriend?.. Sh\*t!” Damn you Refilwe!

“Wow, I can’t believe this.” She tries to walk away but I grab her arm and pull her towards me

“Please let go of me.”

“It's not what you think Sthandwa Sam please give me a chance to explain.”

“There's nothing to explain Mpilo, there’s no use denying it. You brought another girl into the space you share with me, she even cleaned and cooked for you. I hope you used a condom with her because you never use one with me, the last thing I want is to be infected with diseases” She croaks out in a shaky voice

“Sthandwa Sam please let me explain.”

“Leave me alone Mpilentle.” She says and tears roll down her cheeks.

I wipe her tears with my palms and cup her face

“Please give me a chance to explain, I promise I would never hurt you like that. I would never cheat on you I swear, lets go to the bedroom so I can explain....please.” she sighs and leads the way to the bedroom

She sits on the foot of the bed and I kneel between her thighs taking her hands into mine.

“I was home for the weekend like I told you, yesterday when I came back I passed by Kevin's stall and came back here around 6 in the evening. I found Refilwe sitting outside my door, she looked like a mess. I asked her what she's doing here and she said she got into a fight with her boyfriend and he beat up so she ran and came here.”

“Why would she come to you, are you friends?”

“No, we are not. She says she came here because she knows her boyfriend would never look for her here, she spent the night and used the guest room am sure she forgot her underwear in the bathroom in the morning when she was bathing.”

“So how did a bruised person end up cooking and cleaning your apartment?”

“I was cooking and she offered to help then she tidied up after we ate, I’m sorry I know I shouldn’t have allowed her to spend the night but it was already late and I was worried that something will happen to her if I told her to leave at that hour”

“Why didn’t she go to a hotel or her friend's place why come to you?”

“She said she shares her account with her boyfriend and would need his approval to withdraw funds from their joint account,

she only has one friend, and the last time she went to her friend's place the boyfriend broke her friend's door and fought with one of her neighbors.”

“Hmm.” I can tell she doesn't believe me, I

I stand upright and call Refilwe

“Hey.” I put the phone on speaker

“Hi, Refilwe did you find a place?”

“Yes, thanks once again for helping me yesterday. You are so kind”

“Pleasure, uhm you forgot your underwear in my bathroom.”

“Oh sorry, I'm so sorry I hope I didn't get you into trouble with your girlfriend. I'll come and pick it up tomorrow when you

come back from work.” I’m about to reply but Anzani beats me to it

“Theres no need to wait that long come during the day I’ll be home.” Refilwe clears her throat

“Uhm Q who’s that?”

“It’s Quinton to you, I’m Anzani his girlfriend... please come and pick up your THONG tomorrow during the day I’ll be home waiting.” Anzani says emphasizing the word ‘thong’

“Okay, no problem.”

“And please let yesterday be the last time you come to my boyfriend's apartment, he’s not your friend and has no business getting mixed up in your business unless there’s something you want to tell me.”

“No, there’s nothing.”

“Good, then stop coming to his apartment.”

“Ok, I’m sorry I didn’t mean to cause any harm it won’t happen again.”

“It’s okay mistakes happen but let it be the last time you spend the night at someone else's boyfriend's place, it makes you look desperate and prudent.” I’m shocked but a part of me is amused, she looks so sexy right now telling Refilwe off.

“Wow, okay I’m sorry,” Refilwe says seemingly ashamed, and cuts the call.

“This girl wants you.”

“I doubt that.”

“I’m a woman and I’m telling you the girl wants you, “you are so kind” my left paralyzed a\*s this girl wants you. You better

not try me, Quinton, I won't let you play with me. You don't want me to go crazy on you."

I've never seen this side of her and I'm so turned on right now.

"Relax sthandwa Sam I would never think of cheating on you, thank you for coming you look so beautiful." She looks away trying to hide her smile from me

"I've missed you so much."

Staring at her yellow thighs has my member tightening inside my pants, it's been a while and I'm dying to be buried inside her warmth and have her nuna swallow my c\*ck fitting me like a glove. My hands slowly move up and down her thighs caressing her.

"I missed you too."

I pull her up and smash my lips into hers, I can never get used to how sweet her kisses are. I push my tongue inside her mouth

and explore all the corners of her mouth, my breathing is ragged and my hands are on her buttocks groping them. Her shorts have rolled up so her butt cheeks are exposed.

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ANZANI

He's humping on top of me filling me with his thickness, his strokes are slow and sensual. The room is filled with the mixture of our moans and groans and the sounds of our bodies slapping against each other, the pleasure I feel brings tears to my eyes this feels more than just sex. I can literally feel our souls connect and become one, my heartbeat accelerates and my toes curl as my body goes rigid and a wave of pleasure washes through me. My eyes roll back as I reach my orgasm calling out his name creaming his d\*k with my juices. He slips out of me leaving me feeling empty, his lips chase mine in a ferocious kiss then he rams back inside of me without a warning filling me up to the hilt.

The kiss becomes sloppy and sultry as he ravishes my nuna with deep and fast strokes, his member twitches inside of me before he stills inside of me firing all his load deep inside my womb while grunting and groaning like a wounded animal. He lands a peck on my sweaty forehead and then drops his body next to mine, I feel the mixture of our cum running down my ass and inner thighs as his semi-hard meat slips out of me.

“I love you.” He says breathing heavily.

“I love you too.”

He places me on top of him, plants a long peck on my forehead, and wraps his arms tight around my waist before drifting off to sleep. Damn, I’m in love.

#47

“What?” He asks with a stupid grin on his face

He’s getting ready for work while I’m sitting with my back against the headboard admiring his sexy physique, my baby looks good in literally everything. He could wear a sack and still look as alluring as hell.

“Nothing.”

“But you’re staring.”

“Yep, I’m admiring my man. U hot shem baby no wonder girls act out of character vying for your attention. I still can’t believe that girl left her thong here yaay that one isn’t scared of witchcraft, did you tell her I’m from Limpopo?” He cackles throwing his head back

“So, you think she left it on purpose?”

“I don’t think, I’m sure of it. Did you hear her say she’ll come and get fetch it today when you come back from work? Arg she just wanted an excuse to see you again.”

“I don’t know about that; all I know is how sexy you looked when you told her off, I was like yes that’s my baby.” He says leaning in for a kiss, but I tilt my head to the side so his kiss lands on my cheek instead.

“What’s wrong?”

“Morning breath baby.”

He puts his hand on the back of my neck and pulls me in for a deep kiss, tongue, and all.

“I \*kiss\* love \*kiss\* you \*kiss\* so \*kiss\* much \*kiss\*”

“I love you too baby.”

“I love you with your stinky mouth.” I laugh and attempt to smack his arm but retreats backward

“I’ll get you for this.”

“Whatever....so thembalam’ are you sure about Refilwe coming here while you’re alone, are you not scared she’ll do something to you?”

“No, I’m not scared.”

“Alright for her sake I hope she doesn’t try anything or so help me God.”

“Relax baby, I’ve got this.”

“If you say so.” I can tell that he’s worried about me being alone with Refilwe but I’m honestly not scared, I’m no fighter hell I don’t even know how to fight but I will not stand by and

watch another woman or man beat me up that one is something that will never happen.

“How’s mom, you didn’t say anything about her last night”

“As if you gave me a chance to talk.” He seductively bites his bottom lip and winks at me.

“You can’t blame me I missed you.”

“I missed you too Mpilo wanga. I’ll tell you about mom when you get back from work, there’s something I need to tell you, and oh I almost forgot...I got a job.”

“What? that’s amazing congratulations thembalam” He gives me another kiss

“Yo ai Mpilo kunini ungenicabuza uzangiceda i taste.” He laughs  
(You’ve been kissing me; you’re finishing my taste.)

“That’s what you get for making me miss you so much. Where did you get the job and when are you starting?” I tell him how I got the job; he looks skeptical when I’m done with my narration

“What? why do you look like that?”

“Please lend me her business card, I want to check if she’s legit before you and her can meet.”

“You don’t think she’s legit?”

“I don’t want to speculate that’s why I want to do my research first; we can’t trust people blindly, especially after what happened with Shaun. The last thing I want is to lose you to a prostitution ring or worse to death, I would rather be safe than sorry.”

How blessed am I to have someone like him? He makes loving him so easy.

“I understand, we have an appointment for today should I cancel?”

“Please do Thembalam’, I will do some research on her company at work and if everything checks out you can meet with her tomorrow. Come up with an excuse and cancel today’s appointment.”

“What?” He asked seeing the stupid grin on my face.

“I love how you take care of me; you make me happy Mpilo wanga.” He smiles in return

“You also make me happy Thembalam’, let me go I’ll see you when I come back from work ngiyak’thanda yezwa?”

“I love you too.” He gives me a long peck on the lips and another one on my forehead, then he grabs his bag and dashes out of the bedroom.

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There wasn't much cleaning to do around the apartment because Refilwe, in her injured state thought it best to clean my boyfriend's apartment. I couldn't sit and do nothing, so I did my boyfriend's laundry, ironed it, and neatly packed it in his closet. Mpilo is like any other Zulu man, he loves his meat, so I have taken out lamb chops to defrost for dinner, I prefer the natural way of defrosting over the modern way-using a microwave. It's midweek so I'll make a simple meal nothing fancy, I'll prepare pap, meat, and gravy. It's almost three in the afternoon and Refilwe is no show, at this point I doubt she will show up.

I'm constantly eating, I don't know if it's because I'm alone and have nothing to do or it's because I know there are all these delicious things inside my boyfriend's fridge and my greedy self just wants to eat and eat. I don't know how many trips I've taken to the fridge in the last two hours, if I don't gain weight after this, I will know there's no hope for me. I'm standing in front of the packed fridge deciding on what I want to eat, but I'm disturbed by a knock on the door.

"It's open."

The door peels open revealing a beautiful lady dressed in a dusty pink Adidas skirt with a matching crop top showing off her belly button piercing, her outfit is paired with white All-star sneakers. She's curvy with a snatched waist and a relatively small bust, her body reminds me of Buhle Samuels aka Matshidiso from Muvhango. Her blonde weave is elegantly cascading from her shoulders down to her back, she looks beautiful with her well-done make-up and white manicured nails.

"Hey." She says

"Hi, are you Refilwe?" I ask closing the fridge

"Yes, and I guess you're Anzani?"

I didn't expect someone like this, I expected someone who's badly beat up and in pain but what do I know?

"That's correct."

“Wow, I wasn’t expecting someone so..tiny.” She says running her eyes up and down my body.

“I’m sure you’ve heard about David and Goliath’s story, he was also ‘tiny’ when he killed Goliath the giant,” I say with a smile

“Oh, okay!”

“You can come in.”

She struts inside tucking her hair behind her ear, her perfume fills the entire apartment.

“I’m not about to touch your underwear with my hands so follow me to the bathroom and take it yourself.” She chuckles taken aback by my statement

“What’s funny?” I ask stopping in my tracks

“Oya tella leqa nyana ke wena.”

(You're so disrespectful you tiny thing)

"Respect is earned not demanded and so far you've done nothing to earn mine...and oh in the future never pull this stunt again because the next time it won't be a sweet person like me. It'll be someone who will take your underwear and bewitch it

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do you even know what people can do to you using your undergarments, or your desperation for my man made you lose the ability to use your mind?" She claps her hands in disbelief

"I don't want your boyfriend chill, if I wanted him, he would be mine. It's not like anything or anyone is stopping me from taking him." She says looking at me dead in the eye with a flared nose as if challenging me

"It's a good thing to have dreams... now take your underwear and leave," I say opening the bathroom door

My eyes follow her every move as she takes her underwear on the bathroom rail and shoves it inside her handbag. Then I follow her back to the kitchen.

“Bye.”

“Bye.”

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NARRATED

Refilwe is wrapped in disbelief, she still can't believe she let that little girl disrespect her and make her feel so insignificant. She was so confident when she came here, she made sure to look her best so that Quinton's girlfriend would feel threatened by her and see her as competition but the little girl didn't look intimidated by her at all.

“How did it go?” her friend asks as she steps inside the car

“Yo, that girl has attitude for days you won’t believe the things she said to me.”

“You should have slapped her and taught her some manners.”  
Refilwe laughs recalling what Anzani said about David and Goliath

“She kind of subtly told me that she would beat me up if I tried anything.”

“Haibo, kanti how old is this girl?”

“I don’t know but she looks young, she’s tiny but the attitude yerr! You should’ve seen her swaying her butt when she was walking in front of me.”

“I should’ve gone inside with you, you’re too soft that’s why she disrespects you she wouldn’t try that nonsense with me.”

“No, it’s fine. I don’t want Quinton to think I’m some straatmate who fights over men.”

“Yeah, maybe you’re right... so how is she? Is she beautiful?”

“Yes, she’s very beautiful. She’s slender but she’s got a nice body, with a body and face like that she could make a beautiful model.”

“So, you’re saying Quinton didn’t touch you when you were in his house?”

“Nex, he looked so uncomfortable. He was edgy and restless, he locked himself inside his bedroom after dinner .....things were awkward nje.”

“Yoh, I was so sure he’s a player. You know how handsome guys like him are, they sleep with every woman that comes their way. You’re beautiful and sexy I didn’t think he would resist you.”

“That’s what I also thought but not Quinton man, he seems loyal to his girlfriend.”

“Maybe you’re just not his type because I doubt that a guy like that is faithful to one woman, he probably prefers them slender like his girlfriend.”

“Yeah maybe.”

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QUINTON

“Spill the tea already, you’ve been smiling and blushing alone the whole day.” He says walking inside my office

I can’t seem to concentrate because my mind keeps going back to last night, it’s amazing what good sex with the one you love can do to a person.

“I found Anzani in my apartment when I came back from work,”  
I say leaning my back on the office chair

“Wuu that smile says it all, I’m happy for you I know how much  
you missed her.”

“Last night was amazing man, I should hurry up and finish the  
house so I can marry her and sleep with her in my arms for the  
rest of my life. There’s nothing more satisfying than waking up  
with the love of your life in your arms or falling asleep next to  
them and cuddling them the whole night.”

“You’re so in love shem.” He coos

“That I am, I almost forgot to tell you that sneaky Refilwe left  
her thong in my bathroom and Anzani found it and thought I’m  
cheating on her. I had to explain and even call Refilwe for her to  
believe that I’m telling the truth.”

“I told you that girl is into you, but you thought I was crazy, I wouldn’t be surprised if she left her underwear at your apartment purposefully. Who forgets their underwear and not their bath towel? Isn’t it that these things go together?”

“You’re right Yaz.”

“I am, stay away from that girl she will cost you your relationship. This time you were able to convince Anzani but next time it won’t be so easy...Stay away from that girl and her business.”

I’m glad Mpho and Co distanced themselves from me, now I know what real friendship is supposed to feel like. Kabelo is not in a relationship, he has lost hope in love and sleeps with anything and everything that wears a skirt, but he never encourages me to do anything that could jeopardize my relationship.

“True and I’m so glad Anzani told her off. She told her to come to fetch her thong today during the day.” I smile thinking of how feisty and sexy she looked when she told Refilwe off.

“Are you not worried she’ll do something to her? Refilwe is big and she’s already proved that she's not as innocent as you thought.. what if she beats her up?”

“Eish, I thought about that, but Anzani said I shouldn’t worry she can handle her ...eish you’re right what if she beats up my woman? no one will come to her rescue because everyone is at work until after 5 oh my goodness, how did I agree to this! I need to go please tell my supervisor that I had an emergency and had to leave.”

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ANZANI

I’m in the kitchen cooking when the door slams open and Quinton paces inside the room breathing heavily like he was running.

“She didn’t touch you, did she?”

“Who?”

“So, she didn’t come?” He asks skimming his eyes around the room

“Who are you talking about?”

“Refilwe.” If it was any other day I would laugh at how funny he looks right now, he looks genuinely worried. My bae be so sweet though, so he came here galloping to defend me.

“Love I told you I could handle her, but I appreciate your concern.” He perches his behind on the barstool and sighs in relief “She only came and took her underwear; she didn’t cause any trouble.”

“Okay that’s good, I was worried she would do something to you but bengizomshaya shem if she dared to put her hands on you.” The look on his face tells me he’s not joking and that frightens me, so I change the topic

(I was going to beat her up)

“Remember I said there’s something I need to tell you?”

“Yes.”

“Well, my mother...” I tell him everything that happened in the two weeks I spent at Venda, the look on his face when I’m done tells me he’s maimed. I understand why because I know I would be hurt too if I found out that his mother wants him to get married to someone else knowing very well that I’m in the picture.

“So, your mother doesn’t like me?”

“That doesn’t matter because I love you and I’ll never get married to Mulalo.” He gets up from his seat and rounds the kitchen counter and saunters to me

“Come here.” He says with his arms spread open, I put down the spoon and walk into his arms

He squeezes me in his arms and kisses the crown of my head

“Thank you for choosing our love, I promise you’ll never regret it. I love you so much.” He mutters in a hushed tone.

“I love you too sthandwa sam.”

“Your mother will be fine; we’ll pray and fast for her health she’ll be fine you’ll see.” He says tightening his arms around me

I can’t believe he’s talking about praying and fasting for my mother after what I just told him about her, am I blessed or am I blessed?

#47

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I'm constantly eating, I don't know if it's because I'm alone and have nothing to do or it's because I know there are all these delicious things inside my boyfriend's fridge and my greedy self just wants to eat and eat. I don't know how many trips I've taken to the fridge in the last two hours, if I don't gain weight after this, I will know there's no hope for me. I'm standing in front of the packed fridge deciding on what I want to eat, but I'm disturbed by a knock on the door.

"It's open."

The door peels open revealing a beautiful lady dressed in a dusty pink Adidas skirt with a matching crop top showing off her belly button piercing, her outfit is paired with white All-star sneakers. She's curvy with a snatched waist and a relatively small bust, her body reminds me of Buhle Samuels aka Matshidiso from Muvhango. Her blonde weave is elegantly cascading from her shoulders down to her back, she looks beautiful with her well-done make-up and white manicured nails.

"Hey." She says

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"Yes, and I guess you're Anzani?"

I didn't expect someone like this, I expected someone who's badly beat up and in pain but what do I know?

"That's correct."

“Wow, I wasn’t expecting someone so..tiny.” She says running her eyes up and down my body.

“I’m sure you’ve heard about David and Goliath’s story, he was also ‘tiny’ when he killed Goliath the giant,” I say with a smile

“Oh, okay!”

“You can come in.”

She struts inside tucking her hair behind her ear, her perfume fills the entire apartment.

“I’m not about to touch your underwear with my hands so follow me to the bathroom and take it yourself.” She chuckles taken aback by my statement

“What’s funny?” I ask stopping in my tracks

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(You're so disrespectful you tiny thing)

“Respect is earned not demanded and so far you've done nothing to earn mine...and oh in the future never pull this stunt again because the next time it won't be a sweet person like me. It'll be someone who will take your underwear and bewitch it

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“I don't want your boyfriend chill, if I wanted him, he would be mine. It's not like anything or anyone is stopping me from taking him.” She says looking at me dead in the eye with a flared nose as if challenging me

“It's a good thing to have dreams... now take your underwear and leave,” I say opening the bathroom door

My eyes follow her every move as she takes her underwear on the bathroom rail and shoves it inside her handbag. Then I follow her back to the kitchen.

“Bye.”

“Bye.”

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“How did it go?” her friend asks as she steps inside the car

“Yo, that girl has attitude for days you won’t believe the things she said to me.”

“You should have slapped her and taught her some manners.”  
Refilwe laughs recalling what Anzani said about David and Goliath

“She kind of subtly told me that she would beat me up if I tried anything.”

“Haibo, kanti how old is this girl?”

“I don’t know but she looks young, she’s tiny but the attitude yerr! You should’ve seen her swaying her butt when she was walking in front of me.”

“I should’ve gone inside with you, you’re too soft that’s why she disrespects you she wouldn’t try that nonsense with me.”

“No, it’s fine. I don’t want Quinton to think I’m some straatmate who fights over men.”

“Yeah, maybe you’re right... so how is she? Is she beautiful?”

“Yes, she’s very beautiful. She’s slender but she’s got a nice body, with a body and face like that she could make a beautiful model.”

“So, you’re saying Quinton didn’t touch you when you were in his house?”

“Nex, he looked so uncomfortable. He was edgy and restless, he locked himself inside his bedroom after dinner .....things were awkward nje.”

“Yoh, I was so sure he’s a player. You know how handsome guys like him are, they sleep with every woman that comes their way. You’re beautiful and sexy I didn’t think he would resist you.”

“That’s what I also thought but not Quinton man, he seems loyal to his girlfriend.”

“Maybe you’re just not his type because I doubt that a guy like that is faithful to one woman, he probably prefers them slender like his girlfriend.”

“Yeah maybe.”

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QUINTON

“Spill the tea already, you’ve been smiling and blushing alone the whole day.” He says walking inside my office

I can’t seem to concentrate because my mind keeps going back to last night, it’s amazing what good sex with the one you love can do to a person.

“I found Anzani in my apartment when I came back from work,”  
I say leaning my back on the office chair

“Wuu that smile says it all, I’m happy for you I know how much  
you missed her.”

“Last night was amazing man, I should hurry up and finish the  
house so I can marry her and sleep with her in my arms for the  
rest of my life. There’s nothing more satisfying than waking up  
with the love of your life in your arms or falling asleep next to  
them and cuddling them the whole night.”

“You’re so in love shem.” He coos

“That I am, I almost forgot to tell you that sneaky Refilwe left  
her thong in my bathroom and Anzani found it and thought I’m  
cheating on her. I had to explain and even call Refilwe for her to  
believe that I’m telling the truth.”

“I told you that girl is into you, but you thought I was crazy, I wouldn’t be surprised if she left her underwear at your apartment purposefully. Who forgets their underwear and not their bath towel? Isn’t it that these things go together?”

“You’re right Yaz.”

“I am, stay away from that girl she will cost you your relationship. This time you were able to convince Anzani but next time it won’t be so easy...Stay away from that girl and her business.”

I’m glad Mpho and Co distanced themselves from me, now I know what real friendship is supposed to feel like. Kabelo is not in a relationship, he has lost hope in love and sleeps with anything and everything that wears a skirt, but he never encourages me to do anything that could jeopardize my relationship.

“True and I’m so glad Anzani told her off. She told her to come to fetch her thong today during the day.” I smile thinking of how feisty and sexy she looked when she told Refilwe off.

“Are you not worried she’ll do something to her? Refilwe is big and she’s already proved that she's not as innocent as you thought.. what if she beats her up?”

“Eish, I thought about that, but Anzani said I shouldn’t worry she can handle her ...eish you’re right what if she beats up my woman? no one will come to her rescue because everyone is at work until after 5 oh my goodness, how did I agree to this! I need to go please tell my supervisor that I had an emergency and had to leave.”

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ANZANI

I’m in the kitchen cooking when the door slams open and Quinton paces inside the room breathing heavily like he was running.

“She didn’t touch you, did she?”

“Who?”

“So, she didn’t come?” He asks skimming his eyes around the room

“Who are you talking about?”

“Refilwe.” If it was any other day I would laugh at how funny he looks right now, he looks genuinely worried. My bae be so sweet though, so he came here galloping to defend me.

“Love I told you I could handle her, but I appreciate your concern.” He perches his behind on the barstool and sighs in relief “She only came and took her underwear; she didn’t cause any trouble.”

“Okay that’s good, I was worried she would do something to you but bengizomshaya shem if she dared to put her hands on you.” The look on his face tells me he’s not joking and that frightens me, so I change the topic

(I was going to beat her up)

“Remember I said there’s something I need to tell you?”

“Yes.”

“Well, my mother...” I tell him everything that happened in the two weeks I spent at Venda, the look on his face when I’m done tells me he’s maimed. I understand why because I know I would be hurt too if I found out that his mother wants him to get married to someone else knowing very well that I’m in the picture.

“So, your mother doesn’t like me?”

“That doesn’t matter because I love you and I’ll never get married to Mulalo.” He gets up from his seat and rounds the kitchen counter and saunters to me

“Come here.” He says with his arms spread open, I put down the spoon and walk into his arms

He squeezes me in his arms and kisses the crown of my head

“Thank you for choosing our love, I promise you’ll never regret it. I love you so much.” He mutters in a hushed tone.

“I love you too sthandwa sam.”

“Your mother will be fine; we’ll pray and fast for her health she’ll be fine you’ll see.” He says tightening his arms around me

I can’t believe he’s talking about praying and fasting for my mother after what I just told him about her, am I blessed or am I blessed?

#47

“What?” He asks with a stupid grin on his face

He’s getting ready for work while I’m sitting with my back against the headboard admiring his sexy physique, my baby looks good in literally everything. He could wear a sack and still look as alluring as hell.

“Nothing.”

“But you’re staring.”

“Yep, I’m admiring my man. U hot shem baby no wonder girls act out of character vying for your attention. I still can’t believe that girl left her thong here yaay that one isn’t scared of witchcraft, did you tell her I’m from Limpopo?” He cackles throwing his head back

“So, you think she left it on purpose?”

“I don’t think, I’m sure of it. Did you hear her say she’ll come and get fetch it today when you come back from work? Arg she just wanted an excuse to see you again.”

“I don’t know about that; all I know is how sexy you looked when you told her off, I was like yes that’s my baby.” He says leaning in for a kiss, but I tilt my head to the side so his kiss lands on my cheek instead.

“What’s wrong?”

“Morning breath baby.”

He puts his hand on the back of my neck and pulls me in for a deep kiss, tongue, and all.

“I \*kiss\* love \*kiss\* you \*kiss\* so \*kiss\* much \*kiss\*”

“I love you too baby.”

“I love you with your stinky mouth.” I laugh and attempt to smack his arm but retreats backward

“I’ll get you for this.”

“Whatever....so thembalam’ are you sure about Refilwe coming here while you’re alone, are you not scared she’ll do something to you?”

“No, I’m not scared.”

“Alright for her sake I hope she doesn’t try anything or so help me God.”

“Relax baby, I’ve got this.”

“If you say so.” I can tell that he’s worried about me being alone with Refilwe but I’m honestly not scared, I’m no fighter hell I don’t even know how to fight but I will not stand by and

watch another woman or man beat me up that one is something that will never happen.

“How’s mom, you didn’t say anything about her last night”

“As if you gave me a chance to talk.” He seductively bites his bottom lip and winks at me.

“You can’t blame me I missed you.”

“I missed you too Mpilo wanga. I’ll tell you about mom when you get back from work, there’s something I need to tell you, and oh I almost forgot...I got a job.”

“What? that’s amazing congratulations thembalam” He gives me another kiss

“Yo ai Mpilo kunini ungenicabuza uzangiceda i taste.” He laughs  
(You’ve been kissing me; you’re finishing my taste.)

“That’s what you get for making me miss you so much. Where did you get the job and when are you starting?” I tell him how I got the job; he looks skeptical when I’m done with my narration

“What? why do you look like that?”

“Please lend me her business card, I want to check if she’s legit before you and her can meet.”

“You don’t think she’s legit?”

“I don’t want to speculate that’s why I want to do my research first; we can’t trust people blindly, especially after what happened with Shaun. The last thing I want is to lose you to a prostitution ring or worse to death, I would rather be safe than sorry.”

How blessed am I to have someone like him? He makes loving him so easy.

“I understand, we have an appointment for today should I cancel?”

“Please do Thembalam’, I will do some research on her company at work and if everything checks out you can meet with her tomorrow. Come up with an excuse and cancel today’s appointment.”

“What?” He asked seeing the stupid grin on my face.

“I love how you take care of me; you make me happy Mpilo wanga.” He smiles in return

“You also make me happy Thembalam’, let me go I’ll see you when I come back from work ngiyak’thanda yezwa?”

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#48

### THREE WEEKS LATER

Quinton did his research and everything checked out, the lady and her company are legit. I'm starting work in a week and I'm so excited. I've been living with my boyfriend for the past three weeks and I can safely say that now I understand how people end up cohabiting, it's not something you wake up and decide to do but it's something that happens gradually. It's nice to be with the one you love, spending your days and nights with them without anyone disturbing you even though it can get too much on those days where you need space and feel like being alone and he'll be here suffocating me but besides that, it's amazing I won't lie.

The student accommodation I'll be co-managing is in Braamfontein, not far from where Quinton stays which is an advantage but I will move into my bachelor pad at the end of the month, I'll miss sleeping next to my bae every night but the flat I found is 15 minutes walking distance from his place so we can still see each other every day. It's Friday today and Mpilo didn't go to work, he asked for a leave of absence because he's

taking me on a weekend away to Mpumalanga. I'm all for adventure and exploring new things so I'm excited about our upcoming trip, we'll visit the Kruger national park and do all these adventurous activities together.

"Did you pack your teeth brush?" He smiles and pecks my cheek

"You worry too much; relax we have checked our luggage a thousand times already so chill we have everything."

"I hear you, but I just wanted to make sure, I don't want us leaving anything behind." He closes the distance between us and sucks on my lips groping my ass in the process

I don't know what's going on with him lately but he's clingy and always wants to be on top of me but I'm not complaining because I also can't get enough of him, his d\*ck feels so good inside of me. I literally cry tears of joy every time we become one, I swear I will castrate him if he ever thinks of giving anyone who's not me all of this sweetness.

I lock my arms around his neck as the kiss gets heated, he picks me up and I snake my legs around his waist, he kisses me slowly walking us to the bed. He gently lays me down and climbs on top of me, I help him unbuckle his belt and push down his jeans together with his boxers, I lick my lips as his thick veined meat springs up already anticipating his first thrust. I'm wearing a dress, so he just pushes it to my waist and shifts my wet thong to the side before pushing his hard meat inside of me in one swift move.

“Ooooooh f\*ck!”

“Ahhhhhhhhhh!”

We cry out at the same time high in the throes of passion. He bites the hem of his T-shirt with his teeth so it doesn't disturb him and begins thrusting in and out of my horny pu\*\*y

“You feel so amazing thembalam'.” He says breathlessly

I throw my head back squeezing my boobs and pinching my nipples relishing the feeling of having him buried inside of me. I slowly raise my head and gape as his beast disappears in and out of my hole, he's so long and thick I can feel him poking my womb. He stops moving and slips out of me leaving me feeling empty.

"Why did you stop!" I bellow curving my lips ready to burst into tears, Quinton can't do this to me. He cannot deny me an orgasm.

He looks at my face and chuckles then he drops to his knees and pulls me to the edge of the bed spreading my legs apart, he sniffs and blows air on my cookie then swipes his tongue on my wetness.

"Aaaaah!" I moan resting my back on the bed squeezing his head between my thighs

He laps on my juices like a dog slurping water making those annoying sounds old people make when they are drinking hot beverages, then he shoves his tongue inside my greedy hole my

heart almost stops beating from gushes of pleasure shocking my body like electricity. I clamp my vaginal walls around his tongue curling my toes when he teases my G-spot with his tongue, it doesn't take long before I fall apart spraying my juices on his face, damn! That was some wild orgasm, he wipes his face with his hands licking his lips and directs his hard member inside my nuna, I can feel my p\*\*\*y stretch to accommodate him as he fills me up fitting inside of me like a glove it's as if his member was created especially for my nuna. Once every inch of his meat is buried inside of me he shuts his eyes and looks up taking in

the moment, I know he's about to ravish me when his grip on my hip tightens, and as predicted he bangs into me f\*cking me senselessly until feel his balls slapping against my inner thighs as he thrusts in and out of me.

"I love you." He says looking into my eyes with red half hooded eyes laden with lust.

His voice is raspy and hoarse, his breathing is ragged and balls of sweat keep rolling down his handsome face.

“I love you too.” He tugs his lower lip between his teeth and gives me one last deep stroke before shooting up all his cum deep inside my womb groaning like a beast.

The evidence of our sin flows down to my ass and on the bed as he slips out of me. Damn this man knows how to please a woman. Still breathing heavily he grabs the back of my neck and plants a peck on my sweaty forehead, I close my eyes getting overcome by drowsiness.

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QUINTON

My left arm is hanging over Anza’s shoulder while her head is on my chest, her hands are locked tightly around my waist. The driver keeps stealing glances at us in the rearview with a smile on his face admiring our love, we are sitting at the back of an Uber being chauffeured to Manzini Chalets in Marloth Park.

“Wow, this is beautiful.”

Anzani says admiring the Chic African styled chalet with a deck and splash pool. The units come with air conditioning, a sitting area, and a kitchenette with a microwave and a refrigerator. Each Chalet comes with a bed and flat-screen TV with DSTV and WI-FI.

“Thank you so much Mpilo wanga.” She hugs me before taking another tour marveling at the beautifully designed Chalet.

My heart is full, my baby is happy and that’s exactly what I was striving for. I put our luggage next to the bed, remove my shoes and plop my body on top of the comfortable Queen bed.

“Don’t be such a bore baby don’t tell me you’re sleeping.” She says when she walks inside the bedroom.

“I’m tired Thembalam’ it’s been a long drive.”

“No, you’re not sleeping we didn’t come all the way so you can sleep. Come on wear this and let’s go relax inside the pool.”

She throws my swimming shorts next to me and starts undressing, there’s no way she’ll let me sleep so I have no choice but to wake up. I climb down from the bed and slip out of my clothes

“No, Mpilo!” She says when I caress her bare butt.

She’s butt naked looking at the two bikinis spread on the bed not sure which one to wear. I wrap my arms around her from behind and rub my hard c\*ck on her butt.

“Please babe just one round,” I whisper trailing soft kisses on her neck

“No.. \*moan\*.. no Quinton we had sex before we left Gauteng.”

“I know but I can’t get enough of you, you feel so damn good my love”

“No, no.” she pulls away from my arms and wears her marble print underwire shoulder bikini swimsuit

“Dang babe you look smoking!” She giggles shyly

“Thank you.” She wears a summer hat, shades and grabs the bottle of non-alcoholic wine “Come with two wine glasses so we can enjoy this inside the pool.”

My girlfriend is beautiful ninani! I do as she says and follow her to the splash pool, the pool is surrounded by scented candles. Red flower petals are floating inside the blue water, and sensual RNB music booms through the speakers creating the perfect romantic ambiance and mood. The pool is kind of small but good enough because it's only for the two of us, I step inside the pool and sit behind her. Thank the heavens the water is not cold

“Yo Mpilo angeke!” she says when she feels my hard member poking her. I laugh

“What did I do? It’s not me my d\*ck has a mind of its own.”

“Ai angeke phela that’s why I’m not gaining any weight, you’re always on top of me yoh!” I can’t help but laugh because she loves sex just as much as I do, we can’t get enough of each other.

“I swear if you weren’t on contraceptives you would be pregnant with the way we make love”

“Tell me about it.”

I can't wait for us to have our little miracle, I know she or he is going to look so cute. I will make sure to be a good father to him/her and be present in his/her life from the first-day I learn about our pregnancy. I would love for our first to be a boy, I can already picture his cute little face, tiny hands and fingers my very own son. Oh God bless me with a family of my own in future I don't know why but I suddenly have a baby fever but I know now is not the time. I want to marry Anzani before we can have kids

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NOKWAZI

“I still can’t believe you came.” He says caressing my cheek with his thumb

We are lying in bed wrapped in each other's arms, our legs entwined his hands are on my face softly caressing and giving me soft kisses.

“I can’t believe it either.” Our eyes lock then we kiss, our passionate moment gets interrupted by a harsh knock on the door.

“Vula Gift I know you’re inside!” Shouts a feminine voice from outside

(Open)

“Sh\*t!” he exclaims and climbs down the bed and wears his clothes in haste.

“Gift! Open this door!”

“Please put on your clothes,” he says in a silent whisper.

“What’s going on?”

“I don’t have time to explain that right now, please wear your clothes.” He says panicky visibly stressed.

I climb down from the bed and put on my clothes... He goes to the closet and takes out my duffel bag and hands it to me

“Look Nokwazi you have to leave.” My eyes widen in shock

“What?”

“I'm sorry but you need to go, I'll explain later please.”

“Gift open this door I want to see the bitch you're cheating on me with.” She says banging on the door.

I look at him but he looks down running his fingers through his hair

“Please just go, I'll explain later please.”

I feel a lot of emotions right now, confusion, hurt, betrayal, regret, and fear but hurt is the dominant emotion. Tears pour down my face like a deluge of rain as I look into the eyes of the man who promised to love me, a man who swore to never hurt me a man who took my purity and innocence promising to love me forever.

“Please.”

I yank the bag from him and head to the door, he opens the door and holds the girl who has been screaming and banging

the door locking her in his arms as she kicks and screams trying to break free from his hold.

“Run!” He says looking at me

I don't need to hear it twice, I bolt out of the room with a broken heart. Mortification wraps me like a blanket when I notice the spectators standing outside Gift's gate. The neighbors are watching the drama over the fence, while the brave are inside the yard standing a few feet from the door. So this is what I have been reduced into? A cheap girl who gets thrown out while everybody watches.

“Baleka sfebe uthandaze singahlangani ngoba ngizokunyisa nondindwa!”

(Run bitch and pray we never bump into each other because I'm going to beat you up how!)

“Eisan!” Someone from the crowd says while the others laugh

“Umshaye wena Nompoti asekabi lama 2000.” Says someone from the neighbor's house peeping over the fence

I bury my head to the ground and trudge out of the gate, I hear them gossiping about me and calling me names as I trudge down the street and I keep walking without looking back. At this point all I'm grateful for is that no one took a video or pictures of me, I walk without until I reach the street corner. All the emotions I feel overwhelm me, I drop my bag on the ground and weep like a widow in the middle of the street, I should have listened to my brother. I should have listened, I am so stupid I even gave him my virginity why couldn't I see that he doesn't love me. I should have listened to my brother.

My phone pings inside my pocket snapping me out of my reverie, its an SMS from Gift

Soulmate: “Please delete and block my number I will do the same, it was fun while it lasted toodles.”

#49

I place my arm on the left side of the bed expecting to find Anza's warm body but my hand lands on an empty bed, I open my eyes and notice that I'm alone inside the bedroom. The clock on the wall reads 6 AM where could Anza be this early on a weekend? I peel the blankets and roll out of bed sliding my feet inside my slippers

"Thembalam'!" I bellow heading out of the bedroom

"In here!" She bellows from the bathroom and I immediately head there

"What's wrong?" She's sitting on top of the toilet seat looking drained

"I've been vomiting since 5 AM I don't know what's wrong with me." She mutters weakly

“I'm so sorry sthandwa Sam could it be something you ate maybe?”

“I don't know, I didn't eat anything peculiar maybe I need to clean my system.”

“Yeah.”

I pull her up, take a seat on the toilet seat, and pull her to my lap.

“Askies my love.” I kiss her chin and bury my face in the crook of her neck.

“It's okay, I just feel bad that I had to wake up sick on the day we are supposed to visit Kruger national park. You spent so much money on this trip and I'm ruining it with my sudden sickness.”

“It's okay Thembalam' your health comes first.”

“Maybe I’ll feel better as time goes.”

“Don’t worry about that, just focus on getting better. You need to eat something, you look weak.”

“No, what if I vomit again?”

“But you need to eat something Thembalam’ your body lost fluids when you were throwing up.”

“No”

“It's non-negotiable.”

I stand up with her in my arms, carry her to the bedroom and tug her into bed.

“I’ll walk around the block and see if I can’t find a supermarket or somewhere I can buy Mageu for you.”

“Okay.” I peck her forehead and pull the blankets under her chin.

“Get some rest.”

I take my jeans and t-shirt on the dresser and put them on then I look for my sneakers under the bed, when I stand up my eyes meet hers. She has a sad look on her face.

“Please don’t leave me alone.” She says teary-eyed.

These days she cries for almost everything. When she wants sex, when I leave for work in the mornings and sometimes she cries because ‘I’m suffocating her’.

“Babe come on..”

“Please Mpilo, I want you to hold me in your arms.”

I look at her for a while contemplating what to do, she flutters her eyelashes eyes glistening with tears and I know I have no choice but to give in to her demands.

“Okay I won’t leave, I will order something online.” She gives me a goofy smile and peels the blankets for me to get inside.

I sigh and undress before getting under the covers, she climbs on top of me sleeping on top of me. I wrap my left arm around her small waist and press on my phone with the other looking for something to order via Uber eats. Luckily they deliver in this area so I order breakfast from Wimpy, the Chalet we booked into is self-catering they do not provide catering I wanted a place that offers catering but madam here said she will cook for us but between you and me, I don’t think she’ll cook. I see us eating takeaways until we go back home, I don’t even want to remind her of her promise less she starts with the waterworks.

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NARRATED

“Thank you,” Livhuwani says when Gloria gives her a bowl of steaming hot porridge

“Pleasure, I have cleaned the house and washed Lutendo's uniform I will go back to my house to clean and come back during the day to make you something to eat.”

“Thank you so much, Gloria.”

Gloria smiles and walks out of the house. Lutendo walks into the lounge a few minutes later already bathed and changed out of his pajamas, he sits on the couch far from his mother avoiding the nasty smell and begins eating his porridge.

“Mma when will Anza come to visit us?”

“I don't know my son but I hope she'll come soon.”

“Ndaa,” Mulalo says standing at the door.

“Come in my son,” Livhuwani says with a fake smile

“Good morning family it seems I arrived in time- just when you’re still eating breakfast.” He jokes taking a seat across Livhuwani's sponge

Livhuwani fakes a laugh and tells Lutendo to go finish his breakfast in the kitchen, being the respectful boy he is Lutendo takes his bowl and leaves the room allowing the adults privacy.

“I want my money Livhuwani, you failed to stick to our deal so give me my money or I’m taking this house.”

“Please give me some time to figure out how to give you back your money but please don’t take my house, it’s my children's home the only thing that connects them to their late father please don’t do this to them...don’t take away their home.”

“It doesn’t have to be this ugly, give me Anzani and I promise I’ll take care of you and her.”

“She’s in love with someone else, she won’t listen to me. She’s an adult and I can’t force her to do what she doesn’t want to do I tried but I failed.”

“Okay, do you know where her boyfriend lives? I can take care of him.” Livhuwani's eyes widen in shock

“What do you mean you can take care of him?”

“You know what I mean, so can you get me his address or his name and surname.”

“No, Mulalo I won’t let you do this to my daughter” her hands tremble at the thought of Mulalo killing her daughter's boyfriend, the pain she would go through “No, you can take the house then I’ll take Lutendo and move to Gauteng with Lufuno.”

“What about Lutendo's school, what’s going to happen to his studies when you move him to another province in the third term?”

“He’ll drop out and start in another school next year, just take the house and don’t do anything to my daughter or her boyfriend.”

“Okay, I’m giving you two weeks to vacate my house.”  
Livhuwani nods with tears in her eyes.

Losing her home is better than carrying another person’s death in her conscience, she’s already guilty of blackmailing her daughter she doesn’t want another thing weighing on her conscience. She is glad Anzani didn’t give in to her blackmail because Mulalo is not who she thought he was. How can he talk about taking someone's life like it was killing a mere cockroach? she’s happy her daughter chose love over money.

“I'll be on my way then.”

He stands up and walks out leaving the scent of his cologne lingering in the room.

“Hey man, I need you to find someone for me.” He says speaking to someone over the phone

“Who?”

“Anzani Munyai, I want to know everything about her, especially the person she’s in the relationship with.”

“Sure, send me her picture.”

“Ok, I’ll do that. She was living in Ratanda with her aunt Lufuno the last time I checked.”

“Noted.”

“I need you to prioritize this, I need the information in a week.”

“It’ll cost you.”

“Money is not a problem  
just give me results.”

“Consider it done.”

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NOKWAZI

The door opens and my mother walks inside carrying a tray lined with a bowl of oats, a glass of water, and painkillers. Yesterday after crying my eyes out in the middle of the street like a madwoman I took a cab and came home, my mother and sister were so shocked to see me because they didn’t know I was in Ratanda wow I still can’t believe I did that. My mother panicked when she saw my puffy eyes and tear-stained face I

lied and told her I've got intense period pains, I felt so bad for lying to her as I watched her running around like a headless chicken preparing my bathwater and giving me painkillers but I couldn't bring myself to tell her the truth. I can't stomach the disappointment that would be on her face when she learns the truth, she raised me to be better than this.

My little sister missed her SSIP classes because she overslept this morning and didn't hear her alarm, she was up all night comforting me and listening to my agonizing sobs. I feel bad that my foolishness is obstructing her education even though she assured me that she is ahead of her teachers in class so missing one SSIP class is not a train smash.

"How are you feeling my baby." The concern in her eyes gnaws at my conscience and spikes up my guilt

"I feel better mama."

"That's good, I was worried about you. I knew your period pains are intense but I never knew they could get to that level, I've

never seen you cry so much maybe we should go to the doctor I think something is wrong.”

“No mom, I’m feeling better now.”

“No Kwazi, the way you were crying you must have been in gruesome pain and I don’t think it is normal.”

“I promise I’m fine ma, the pain was intense but I may have gone over the top a little with the tears. You know I’m a cry baby.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes mommy I’m sure.”

“Okay my girl, you’ll tell me when the pain becomes too much right?”

“Yes, I will.”

“Okay, I love you,” she says and plants a peck on my forehead

“I love you too ma.” My mother is the best in the world, I hate myself for lying to her

“Nunu wamama uright?” She asks looking at Buhle who’s lying next to me

“Yes mama ka nunu ngiright wena unjani Ntombi ka baba?” my mother smiles

“Yazi u Mpilentle kodwa, ngimkhumbule umfanami.”

(Mpilentle though, I miss my son)

“I know ma, I miss him too.” Buhle

I miss my brother too but I don’t think I can face him after doing exactly what he warned me against, I should have stayed away from Gift like he warned me but I was naïve, stupid, and

thought I was in love. I allowed him to fool me and ignored my brother's advice

“Let’s call him, he'll be so happy to hear that Kwazi is home phela this one hardly visits,” Mom says already dialing his number

“Nomonde smomondiya sa babami” he’s on loudspeaker

Buhle and I laugh, and mom blushes.

“Yewena Mpilentle ngiyak'zala angiyena untanga.”

( Mpilentle I am your mother I’m not your agemate)

“Askies sthandwa Sam kunjani kodwa?”

(I’m sorry my love how are you?)

“I'm okay my son you?”

“I'm good mom.”

“Guess who I'm with?”

“Who?”

“Nokwazi.”

“What? Kwazi!” tears roll down my face listening to my brother call me with love and affection in his voice, how I wish I listened to him.

“Bhuti..”

(Brother)

“Ukhalelani sthandwa Sam, mama nimenzeni?”

(Why are you crying my love, mom what did you do to her)

Buhle pulls me into her arms and rubs my back soothingly, she knows what's going on I had to tell her because I needed someone to share my pain with and who better than my sister.

“Nothing she has period pains and has been crying since last night, you know how much of a cry baby she is.”

“Oh okay, phephisa baby yezwa.” I nod my head forgetting that he can't see me

(I'm sorry baby okay?)

“Askies phela ungasakhali.” He says

(Sorry, stop crying)

“Angisakhali” I croak out fighting back my tears

(I'm no longer crying)

“Where is my daughter-in-law?” Mom

“She's here listening to you.”

“Wu Anzani usile shem awusho ngani kuthi ukhona?” Anzani laughs on the other end of the line

(Anzani you're so sneaky, why didn't you say you are there)

“Askies wena mamami, kunjani sthandwa Sam?” My mother smiles, she likes Anzani

(I'm sorry mom, how are you, my love)

“I'm good nana wena kunjani? Akakuhluphi loyo lapho?”

( How are you? Is that one not bothering you over there?)

“Wow!” My brother exclaims and we all laugh

“Cha ma, he's a good boy.”

(No mom)

“Good then.”

“Sis Anza!” Buhle says in a cheery tone

“Hello, baby,” Anza replies with the same energy

“I miss you, when are you visiting us?”

“I miss you too beautiful, I don’t know my love but you can come to visit me anytime you want I'm moving into my flat month end.”

“Really?”

“Yes?”

“Mom, can I go?” Mom nods and Buhle screams excitedly

“I’ll come when I’m done with my prelims”

“Okay baby, all the best on your exams.”

“Thank you sis'wami.”

(My sister)

I won't lie I feel very uncomfortable not because I don't like Anzani but because she seems close with everyone except for me, and I have no one to blame for that except myself because I let myself be used by Gift and hated her for no reason. I'm even scared to talk to her because I don't know if my brother told her about what I said to Buhle about her.

#50

Quinton and I had so much fun in Mpumalanga after my morning episode on Saturday, like I had hoped I got better as the day progressed, and we resumed our plan for the day which was a private safari full day trip. We met up with the guide at Perry's Bridge trading post in Hazy view. It was a private and exclusive trip, we did not share the Safari vehicle with any other guests, it was just me and my bae. Any number of guests between 1 and 8 can be accommodated on one Safari vehicle, what I loved most about the safari trip is that we were guided by the owner in person and that the trip was tailor-made as per our requirements.

The trip included bottled water, private transportation, and Personal driver/guide, digital images of our sightings. It was both scary and amazing seeing all the big animals in action, I found myself clinging to Quinton for most of the trip because wawu the girl was scared especially when our vehicle passed a pride of Lions I felt my heart beating rapidly threatening to fall off my chest. Seeing an elephant in person was also quite chilling that animal is relatively big.

On Sunday we hired an aerial cable trail in Hazy view and got a brand new perspective on the Southern Kruger National Park area as we glided over one of the last remaining natural forested valleys along the Sabie River, stopping at various platforms along the way. Since it was only the two of us the activity ensured a more personal experience, I enjoyed landscape views from elevated platforms along the route. I enjoyed this trip more than the Safari one because of the food, it included Light refreshments, a Driver/guide, the Use of a helmet, Snacks, Food, and drinks, so you can imagine your girl was eating and eating every chance she got.

There's a lot we didn't explore because of insufficient time so I would love it if we went back to visit the park again soon, it's Tuesday my boyfriend is at work and I'm home alone enjoying my last week as an unemployed person lazing around and eating every second. I really don't know what's going on me with me lately and at this rate, it's a blessing food doesn't make me gain weight because wawu I would be a pig shem.

I miss my brother and the only way to talk to him is through my mother because he doesn't have a phone yet, I have no choice but to call my mother.

“Anza.” Hearing her say my name with so much softness and love in her voice brings tears to my eyes, gosh I have missed my mother

“Mma,” I say and cry into the receiver

“I'm so sorry my child please forgive me.” She says sniffing

“I forgive you mma, you know I can never stay mad at you for long.”

“And I appreciate that, I love you so much my child and I'm sorry for making you choose between love and me it was very unfair.”

“It's okay mma I forgive you, how are you doing?”

“I'm getting worse by the day my child, I am just waiting for my death now.” I clench my chest with my hand

“Mma please don’t speak like that, I forbid you to speak like that. Lutendo and I still need our mom, you’ll be fine Quinton and I are praying for you. He's fasting too, I tried to fast but I couldn’t make it to three hours without eating” I laugh recalling my failed attempt at holding a fast

“Wow really? He’s a kind man thank him for me.”

“I will”

“So are you staying with him, your aunt told me you didn’t go back to her?”

“Yes but not for long, I found a job so I’m moving to my flat month-end.”

“Okay my child congratulations I’m so happy and proud of you, hold on to that man he loves you.”

“Thank you mma this means a lot coming from you, I have longed to hear those words from you.”

“I’m happy for you my child for finding a man who loves you and takes care of you, you are blessed and I’m sorry for almost ruining your happiness with my selfishness.”

“Thank you mma, where is my brother I miss him.”

“He’s in his bedroom let me call him, Lutendo!”

“Mma!” I hear him reply in the background

“Come your sister is on the phone.” I wait for a minute or so before his teenage voice booms into the receiver “Hello.”

“Hi Lu, how are you?”

“I’m good and you?”

“I’m good I just miss you so much, when I move into my new place I’ll invite you to visit me.” He screams my ear off

“I can’t wait, mom and I are pack-“ then there’s shuffling for a while before I hear my mother's voice on the line

“Mma where’s Lutendo? What are you guys packaging?”

“His friends called him and he ran outside, I don't think he wanted to say packing. It was probably something else we are not packing anything.”

Weird, my brother would never ditch me for his friends, it doesn’t make sense because he sounded like he wanted to tell me something but I don’t want to fight with my mom after we just made up so I play along.

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QUINTON

“Look at you glowing and gaining weight, cohabiting is treating you well.” Kabelo says placing his food on the table.

“You can say that again, Anza takes good care of me I will not lie. She picks out my clothes in the morning, when I’m in the bathroom she makes me breakfast, packs my lunch and I come back home to a home-cooked meal.”

“Wow you’re blessed man, nowadays girls no longer do that.”

“I know, I’m blessed to have Anzani wumfazi loya she’s always encouraging me to save or buy something for the house, unlike other women who don’t care what you do as long as you spend money on them. Mine sometimes refuses when I give her money to spend on herself, or she takes the money and goes buy something for the house.”

(She’s a wife material)

“Wow, you have found a diamond.”

“I know, I discovered that she doesn’t own a weave like most women and I thought it was because she couldn’t afford it with all the expenses she has so I gave her money to buy it but my woman refused and told me she doesn’t want a weave it’s too expensive she would rather buy something for her apartment.”

“Are you for real man?” he asks biting into his steak

“I'm telling you I had to put my foot down for the Mpumalanga trip to happen, she was busy telling me to finish building first then we will go on all the trips we want.”

“I will know you’re bewitched if you cheat on that girl.”

“I wouldn’t even dream of hurting her like that, I love her so much man...I love her even when she’s difficult to deal with, I don’t know what’s going on these days but yoh she’s impossible to deal with she cries for everything man like I’d be with her in the bedroom and she’d say I’m suffocating her I’m in her face she wants time to breathe and be by herself wara wara but as soon as I go to the lounge giving her the space she

asked for she'll send a text "Please tell me if I'm annoying you, you don't have to act up and leave me on my own in the bedroom." And I'd be so confused like hebanna!" He breaks into a fit of laughter

"Don't laugh man it's hectic then when I don't give her the space she wants because I'm avoiding receiving those kinds of messages she cries." He laughs even harder grabbing everyone's attention inside the canteen

"Sounds hectic man but I think she's bewitched."

"What?" he laughs out loud

"She's pregnant dumbo!"

"What?"

"She's expecting a baby

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your sperm fertilized her egg and-

“Geez, I get it! I just don’t understand how it happened because she’s on contraceptives.”

“Those things aren’t 100% man, congratulations you’re going to be someone's daddy.”

My God the contentment I feel cannot be compared to anything in this world, so I made a baby? Wow, thank you, lord.

“If what you’re saying is true then I need to take a loan and pay her Lobola.”

“What?”

“Yeah, I don’t want my child to be born out of wedlock. I'll pay her Lobola then we will go sign at the commissioner's office and have a small celebration with friends and family, we will have a big wedding later in life when we can afford it.”

“Wow, you’re serious?”

“You thought I’m joking? I love Anzani and I knew from the first time I saw her that I’ll marry her but I wanted to build first before that happens but now I have no choice.”

“Well, I guess congratulations are in order then because she’s pregnant.”

I’m so happy I cannot wait for our little miracle, hey world I’m about to be a father.

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LEBOHANG

I'm on my phone going through Quinton's Facebook profile hoping for some kind of miracle but no such luck as it is still filled with Anzani's pictures, I hate to say it but they look good

together and so happy filling my heart with jealousy. I zoom at her smile and feel anger surge throughout my body oh how I wish she could drop to the floor and die, now that would be amazing.

I keep browsing and stop at a picture they took inside what looks like a pool, there are red flower petals inside the sparkling blue water Quinton is bare-chested cradling Anzani who's in a sexy bikini in his arms. I hate to admit but Anzani looks so beautiful, she has always been beautiful but I've never seen her look so radiant and glowing she looks like those girls we see on Instagram, particularly with those beautiful sunglasses and the summer hat. I'm so envious I wonder where they were when they took this picture but it's obvious it was some kind of vacation.

Following that picture is a picture of them on the back of a safari vehicle kissing while a giraffe is passing at the back, I hate that they're so happy together I need to do something to separate them Anzani cannot be happy with my man never.

"What's up?" Tseko says giving me a peck and settling on his seat

I show him the screen of my phone, he sighs visibly bored.

“Didn’t we deal with this?”

“Clearly we didn’t do enough to break them apart.”

“Maybe you need to let this rest, clearly these people love each other.”

“No, Quinton is mine.”

“You need to get over this so-called love you have for him, it’s slowly turning to obsession.”

“Please help me one last time.”

“Anzani is a good person, I’m glad they worked things out because my conscience wouldn’t let me be after what we did to her.”

“Since when do you have a conscience? Arg stop pretending you’re just as bad as I am.”

“And I don’t dispute that, all I’m saying is that Anzani is a good person and she doesn’t deserve any of what we did to her. Leave them alone, clearly, they love each other.”

“No, we need to do something extreme this time to finally break them apart maybe get some guys to rape her and film the whole thing and send it to Quinton or get someone with HIV to rape and infect her or even better leave her pregnant and HIV positive.”

“You can do what you want but I don’t want any part in it.”

“Come on, I will make it worth your while,” I say rubbing my heel on his d\*\*k underneath the table

“Sex is not worth ruining innocent people's lives.”

“Mxm you're a chicken!”

“Well, I'd rather be a chicken than be evil to people who did nothing to me, check yourself Lebohang you're slowly losing yourself because of unrequited love, or is it obsession? Anyway bye!” he stands up, ties the button of his suit jacket, and walks away.

F\*\*k!

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NOKWAZI

I'm going back to res after spending the weekend at home, I don't have classes Monday and Tuesday that's why I'm going back today and I must say I feel so much better after spending

time with my loved ones, the agony is still there but just not as intense I deleted all our pictures, videos and texts on my phone and blocked and deleted his numbers as he requested.

Buhle is accompanying me to the rank, she asked me to wait for her to come back from school and I'm glad I did. We are chatting and walking towards the stop sign when two girls approach us

“Yes wuye lo!” the fat one says to her friend.

(It's her)

Then her eyes land on Buhle and confusion dances in her eyes

“Ai angisazi bayafana labantu.”

(I don't know anymore they look alike)

“Yenina which one is Nokwazi between the two of you?” the friend speaks for the first time since they stopped us.

Cold chills run down my spine as I recognize her voice, I didn't take a good look at her that day that's why I didn't think it was her but I would recognize her voice from anywhere

“Ai nabo bayafana but ngathi yilo Nompfi”

(They look alike but I think it's this one Nompfi)

The friend says pointing at my sister

“No, don't do anything to my sister it's me I'm Nokwazi.”

They look at me and look at each other

“She's lying, I'm Nokwazi.”

“Buhle, what are you doing?”

“No, what are you doing? I'm Nokwazi bosisi benithini?” Buhle says looking into their eyes as if daring them

(Ladies, what were you saying)

Nompi chuckles and shakes her head in disbelief

“She’s lying she is my little sister, I’m the one who slept with your boyfriend. I didn’t know he was in a relationship I swear, please don’t beat me. I deleted and blocked his number please let me go.” I say pleadingly

Nobuhle rolls her eyes visibly annoyed by my stunt

“She’s lying, I’m Nokwazi benifuna ukungiyenzani mhlawumbe?” She says darting her eyes between Nompi and her friend

(What do you want to do to me?)

“Beat her, she dared to sleep with your man and now she’s disrespecting you.” The friend says

I stand in front of my sister, if there's anyone who is getting beaten today then it's me. I won't let Nobuhle pay for my sins. This Nompfi looks exactly like her name, she looks like someone who can hold it down she has that Khabonina Khubeka look the 'I can whip a b\*tch' kinda look.

“No, she's not Nokwazi I saw her pictures on Gift's phone. Nokwazi has a mole on her chin, she is Nokwazi.” She says referring to me

“Damn bayafana shem jealous down ngisho ne body but this stubborn one looks younger, manje wena macinasi why uzenza ujesu ufuna ukufela izono zabantu.” The friend says, Buhle clicks her tongue and looks away

(You stubborn one why are you acting like Jesus wanting to die for other people's sins)

I'm surprised when Nompfi laughs

“Kuyangiqhaza loku kune sbindi akusabi lutho, mancanyana!” she says and pulls Buhle's cheek, Buhle slaps her hand off her face causing them to laugh

(I like her, she's brave and fears nothing. Little one)

"I like you yezwa, umuhle nokuba muhle." her smile disappears when she looks at me "you better stay away from my man because next time I won't be so forgiving."

(I like you, you're even beautiful)

#51

Mpilo has been acting strangely for the past week, he cuddles my stomach every night when we sleep, calls me when he's at work, and asks me what I'm craving. He also gives me a foot massage when he comes back from work, refuses when I want to wash the dishes and washes them himself. He's been acting very weird but I'm not complaining I'm enjoying the treatment matter of fact. Today is my first day at work and I'm so anxious because I don't know what to expect but excited nonetheless because I'm starting a new phase, my boyfriend being his amazing self insisted on walking me to work and got inside with me, saw my office and met some of my colleagues before going to work. Hear me well when I say that I'm blessed to have him in my life.

I'm busy with my co-manager touring the building getting myself familiar with the place, how things work, and some of my colleagues. The student accommodation has 17 floors and 10 rooms on each floor, some rooms are shared while others are single rooms. Students and employees access the building using access cards and no one can enter the building without one unless they have their ID or license, there's security 24/7 at the entrance in case something happens. There's always

someone at the reception desk 24/7, the receptionists take turns working day/night shifts that's why there are four of them.

We accommodate students who go to Wits, UJ, and the colleges around Braamfontein and provide buses and taxis for them to commute to and from school. There's not much for me to do as a manager I just have to oversee and authorize payments, make sure that things are going accordingly and people are doing their duties, and resolve conflicts and problems. There's a cleaner allocated to each floor so we have a total of 17 cleaning staff and 3 guys who are responsible for maintenance of the building.

"I think that's that about it, you can go to your office and familiarize yourself with the system we use to record student information." Pogiso, my co-manager says.

"Okay, thanks for the tour and the warm welcome."

"It's pleasure."

I head to my office and unwrap my new Laptop, printer, and other office stationery before packing them inside my credenza and putting some of my things to make the office 'more me'. I'm disturbed by a knock on the door

"It's open." The door peels open and my boss walks in, her rhinestone stiletto heels clicking on the tiled floor.

"Hey, you look settled in," she says skimming her eyes around the room.

"I'm still a bit overwhelmed but I'll get there."

"Don't be too hard on yourself take each day as it comes." She pulls the visitor's chair, lowers herself on it setting her Chanel handbag on the table

"You look beautiful, you're glowing hey."

"Thank you, you look beautiful as always." She smiles crossing her legs and fixing her suit jacket

“Don’t be modest, just take the compliment.”

“But I’m being honest, you always look beautiful.” She really is beautiful with glowing brown skin and pouty lips, she has a slightly big forehead but it looks good on her.

“Well then, thanks. Word on the street is that your boyfriend is hot like a heater.”

“Haibo!” I giggle covering my mouth with my hand

“I can’t wait to meet this handsome hunk everyone is raving about.”

“I’ve literally been here for less than three hours.” She laughs

“News travels fast in this place.”

“Clearly,” I say and we both laugh

I think I’m going to enjoy working here

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NARRATED

“What do you think?”

“Wow, it’s beautiful.”

“Thank you,” Quinton says and closes the small ring box and inserts it inside the pocket of his slacks

“I bought it on weekend, I’ve been carrying it with me everywhere I go because I’m scared to propose man what if she refuses.”

“She'll never refuse, she loves you, man.”

“Yes she loves me but what if she's not ready for marriage? She's 23, I'm 28 and I'm at that age where I want to settle down and have my own family but what if she still wants to explore and enjoy her youth, what she feels that it's too soon?”

Given blows a sigh pocketing his hands

“Stop overthinking, Anzani loves you and she's carrying your baby. She will not refuse to marry you, one thing I know about women is that they mature faster than we do. They want to settle down and commit at an earlier age compared to us.”

“Eish I hear you...she doesn't know that she's pregnant. I wonder if she's going to be as excited as I was when I found out. I didn't want us to have kids so soon but I won't lie man I'm happy about her pregnancy.”

“You should tell her, there are pills she needs to take and she also needs to visit the clinic or doctor to ensure she has a healthy pregnancy.”

“You’re right, I’ll tell her but I don’t know how to do it.”

“Just say babe, you’re pregnant.” Quinton throws his head back laughing

“You’re crazy man, she’d have a heart attack, she literally has no clue that she’s pregnant.”

“it’s her first pregnancy maybe that’s why.”

“Eish I just don’t want to stress her because she has a condition called Lupus and I did my research when I learned that she is pregnant, women with Lupus can have a safe pregnancy but their pregnancy is considered high risk. We need to review her medications with her doctor because although some medications are safe to take during pregnancy. Others, though, can harm the baby. The doctor may need to stop or switch

some medications since she's pregnant. Some drugs need to be stopped months before you try to become pregnant and I'm worried because we didn't even know she was pregnant and she's been taking her medicine as per usual what if something happens to our baby?"

"Nothing will happen to the baby, God will protect that child. He blessed you with him and he'll take care of him, don't stress little brother your woman will give birth to a healthy baby but you need to tell her about the pregnancy so she can start taking care of herself to protect the baby."

"You're right we need to see an obstetrician for high-risk pregnancies because lupus may present certain risks during pregnancy, like induced hypertension and preterm birth that's why we need an obstetrician who has experience with high-risk pregnancies and is at a hospital that specializes in high-risk deliveries. If possible

it is advised to meet with the obstetrician before getting pregnant but we're already pregnant so we need to start seeing one ASAP."

“Everything will be fine stop worrying, congratulations and welcome to fatherhood, you’ll know what true love is when you see your child for the first time. The love is unlike anything in this world man, you’ll love that little person so much that you’d be willing to give them anything and everything.”

“I can’t wait, but I already love my child and I can't wait to meet him and hold him in my arms shower him with kisses, and protect him against all the evil in this world.”

“I’m really happy for you man.”

“Let me get going man I need to fetch Anza from work, she knocks off at 5,” Quinton says glancing at his wristwatch

“I’ll drive you there, help me pack.”

“No problem let me call her and notify her that I’m going to be a bit late.”

“Cool.”

Quinton walks a few feet from Given's stall calling his girlfriend meanwhile on top of the roof of one of the tall buildings a sniper is holding a gun aiming it at him with the red dot directly on Quinton's forehead

"Target spotted." He says speaking to an earpiece connected to his ear

"Take him down."

"Copy" the sniper cocks the gun getting ready to fire. He does a mini count down before pulling the trigger, Quinton moves to the side still talking on the phone and the bullet lands on his neck. He instantly falls to the ground as blood sprays out from his neck.

"Flip!"

"What?"

“He moved and I shot him on the neck”

“Don’t worry he won’t survive, now get out of there before anyone sees you”

Given is packing his stock when he hears people screaming and others running in different directions then he raises his head to observe what the commotion is about, his heart almost stops beating when he sees Quinton on the floor lying in a pool of his own blood.

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ANZANI

Quinton called during lunch and told me not to leave on my own he’ll come to pass by here and fetch me on his way from work, so I’m sitting on one of the couches in the reception area posting our Mpumalanga pictures on Facebook and Instagram while waiting for him. I receive an incoming call from him a few minutes after five

“Babe.”

“Thembalam’.” I can’t help but smile, this man makes me happy without even trying.

“Mpilo wanga.”

“Look sweetheart I’m running a bit late, I detoured to the CBD after work to see my brother because there’s something I had to talk to him about. I’ll be there soon, I’m coming with him.” I don’t know why he calls Given his brother but I love the relationship they have it’s different from the one he has with Kabelo.

He and Kabelo are your typical friends but him and Given are more like brothers, he can be bare and vulnerable with him which is surprising because they haven’t known each other for long and it’s so cute how he can’t refuse whenever Given tells him to do something

“Okay love, I’ll wait.”

“How was your first day at work?”

“Amazing yo babe the building is so bea-“ my rant is cut short by what sounds like a gunshot

“Quinton! ...Babe!” I scream into the receiver while my heart beats out of my chest

He doesn’t reply but I can hear him groaning

“Oh my word he’s been shot!” someone says in the background then I hear screams

“Baby what’s going on, talk to me.” I’m now on my feet pacing up and down drawing everyone’s attention but I don’t couldn’t care less at this moment

“Quinton!.... Sthandwa sam please talk to me.” The line gets disconnected

Dieketseng the receptionist paces to my side

“Babe are you okay what’s going on?”

I ignore her and call Quinton’s number tapping my heel on the floor but it rings unanswered.

“Anzani you’re scaring me, what’s going on? You don’t look good.”

“I think something happened to my boyfriend...I waas talk..oh God Quinton no!” I clench my chest with my hand and kneel down and sob. She goes down with me and holds me tight rubbing my back in circles

“Calm down.” She whispers slowly rubbing my back

“Come on let’s go to your office, everyone is looking at you.” I wipe my tears with my hands, stand up and follow her to my office

“Here, drink this.” She says giving me a bottle of water from the bar fridge inside my office

I take a sip and put the bottle down

“What happened?” I sniff and put my hand on my mouth as tears fall down my face like water from a waterfall

“I was talking to my boyfriend over the phone and I h...I heard a gunshott, I think he was shot because I heard him gr..grooaning and people screaming.”

“I'm sorry but maybe it wasn't him, be positive maybe it was someone else who got shot and not him.”

“I know what I heard, they shot him. They shot my boyfriend.” my lips quiver and loud sob bursts out of my mouth

“I’m sorry.” She pulls me into her arms once again and I cry my eyes out wetting her blouse with my tears.

My phone rings disturbing us, my heart skips a beat as I see “Mpilo wanga❤️” flash on the screen

“Love..”

“Anzani.”

“Who’s this? Please give Quinton the phone!”

“Anzani I need you to calm down, you’re speaking to Given.”

“Given where is my boyfriend and why do you have his phone? Please give him the phone I want to talk to him.” He sighs

“Quinton can’t come to the phone right now.”

“Why?”

“Anzani please calm down, think about the b-...you need to calm down, please.”

“Given please tell me where my boyfriend is, was he shot? It was him right, the person I heard groaning was him?”

“Yes.” A sharp pain shoots straight to my heart and my chest tightens, my head pounds and I suddenly feel drowsy

“Tell me he’s alive,” I mutter desperately

“I’m sorry he’-“ that’s the last thing I hear before I drift into darkness.

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I’m woken up by the sounds of machines beeping and the smell of medicines, I flutter my eyelids and open my eyes but the

bright light forces me to shut them. I try to open them again, gradually this time, and check my surroundings. I'm in a hospital, how did I end up here?

I'm in a private ward and there's a TV screen on the wall so I must be in a private hospital, the door opens and a nurse walks in.

"Great, you're awake. How do you feel?"

"I feel... fine, how did I end up here?" I ask sitting up

She frowns

"You don't remember?"

"No."

"Okay, you fainted at work and your colleague brought you here."

I wonder why no one is here, where's Quinton and this said colleague that brought me here?

"Am I spending the night here?" I ask looking at the drip connected to my arm

"Yeah, your blood pressure is too high and it's not good for the baby."

"The baby, what baby?"

"You're 9 weeks pregnant, you didn't know?"

"No, there must be a mistake I can't be pregnant I'm on contraceptives!"

"You are pregnant."

What am I going to do with a baby? No, I can't be pregnant it's too soon. What if I give birth to a sick baby who has Lupus? I wouldn't want my child to go through what I'm going through no no... my mom! she's going to be so angry.

"I have Lupus won't it affect my baby?"

“Women with Lupus can have a safe pregnancy and deliver a healthy baby, but now that you’re pregnant you need to see an obstetrician as soon as possible.”

My hands gradually go to my flat stomach not believing that I’m carrying a human being inside of me but how? I was faithful to my birth control pills. I’m not ready for this baby, she/he came too soon and I’m nervous but I’m happy because he’s mine and Quinton’s child. Oh my goodness I’m carrying Quinton’s baby, I wonder how he’s going to react when he finds out then the memories come back I remember what happened before I came here. Pain chokes me at the possibility of Quinton dying on me while I’m pregnant with his baby

“Where’s my boyfriend?”

Who?

“Quinton Mpilentle Ndlovu, my boyfriend... he was shot in the CBD today. Is he here?” She sighs and looks at me with eyes full of pity

#52

I had an ultrasound scan and my doctor was happy with my baby's growth, he didn't pick up any irregularities with my pregnancy but he strongly advised me to start seeing an obstetrician soon. My blood pressure has gone down so I'm being discharged today. I'm trying so hard not to stress to preserve the life growing inside of me, he's the only thing I have that links me to Quinton and I cannot afford to lose him.

"I just settled your bill, are you ready to leave?" Kabelo says walking inside my ward

"Yes, I'm ready to leave."

"Let me take that for you." He says snatching my bag and leading the way out of the ward.

The walk to the parking lot is silent, each of us lost in our thoughts. This whole thing still feels like a dream. If it is one then I hope someone wakes me up soon, because I cannot take

any more of this torment. He opens the passenger door for me and I climb inside, my gaze follows him as he rounds the car and settles on the driver's seat.

The drive is filled with aqua silence until my phone rings wrecking the silence

“Hello.” My voice comes out groggy and hoarse

“Hello Anzani, you’re speaking to Tumi. Are you still taking the apartment? I’m asking because I haven’t received the deposit.”

“I’m sorry but I can’t take the apartment this month can you maybe keep it for me until next month?”

“Unfortunately, I can’t. I already kept it for too long without receiving a deposit.”

“It's okay, I understand.”

“Alright, bye.”

“Bye.”

“You are no longer taking the apartment?” Kabelo asks looking at me

“Being in his apartment will make me feel closer to him.”

“Makes sense.”

“Have you told his mother?”

“No, Given thought you'd want to be the one to tell her the news.”

Mrs. Ndlovu is going to be so broken when she hears the news, I hate that I have to be the bearer of bad news but I'm glad they didn't tell her anything. She needs to hear the news from me.

“Okay, does he still have his phone?”

“Yes, do you want me to get it for you?”

“Please.”

“No problem.” He encloses my entwined hands with his palm  
“I’m here if you need anything okay?” I nod with tears glowing  
in my eyes.

My heartache intensifies when I walk inside his apartment and inhale his lingering scent, I put my hands on my face and break into a shrill cry. Oh God please help me to be strong enough for my baby, I cry for a good five minutes at the door before walking inside and heading to the bedroom. The bedroom I shared with him every single night for the past month, memories of him caressing my flat stomach at night, giving me foot massages, and us making love everywhere in the apartment every chance we got torrent my mind denying me peace. It's obvious he knew about the baby I wonder why he never said anything, recalling his behavior from the past week

he was happy about our baby and it hurts that we never got to share our joy.

The grief I feel in my heart is hard to bare, my tears are relentless they keep pouring down my face regardless of how many times I promise myself not to cry. My throat is painful and my chest is on fire, I saunter to the washing basket and take one of his t-shirts and wear it over my head before curling myself into a ball on the rug crying my heart out. I have never felt so much pain in my life, I wouldn't wish it even on my worst enemy.

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NARRATED

“How is she?”

“Broken man, I can tell she's trying to be strong for the sake of the baby but she's hurting man.”

“Eish, this is so sad. Quinton was so excited about the baby, he had a ring and wanted to propose.” Given says

“He told me he wanted to take a loan and pay her Lobola but I didn’t know that he had already bought a ring.”

“This is just heart-breaking man, I feel responsible for this because he wanted to leave but I stopped him and told him to wait for me....maybe if he left when he wanted to none of this would have happened.”

“No, don’t do that. Don’t blame yourself, you didn’t know this would happen. What did the police say, do they have any suspects yet?” Given clicks his tongue

“Don’t tell me about those people, they are useless. They are not even making any effort to try and find the person who did this, they say the case will be hard to solve because no one saw anything and no one had a motive to do this because Quinton doesn’t have enemies. They think he was shot by mistake, that he was at the wrong place at the wrong time. They told me

they will investigate but they doubt the case will go anywhere because no one saw anything and no one had a motive.”

“Mxm those people, I just wonder who would do something like this.”

“I also wonder, Quinton never had a problem with anyone. He was a peaceful person.”

“Yeah, Anzani asked me to bring his phone.”

“Oh yeah, I almost forgot.” Given dips his hand inside his pockets and gives him the phone

“Yeah, let me leave Anzani is waiting for me.”

“Sure man.”

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“What are you saying to me Anzani?” Nomonde asks slowly sinking to the floor tears pouring down her face

“He got shot on Monday, luckily Given was at the scene, he and a few people who were there covered his wound with their t-shirts to stop the bleeding until the ambulance arrived. The doctors operated on him and removed the bullet, he lost a lot of blood so he required an emergency blood transfusion. I was also hospitalized at the time because I fainted when I heard the news, but Given is blood O negative so he donated his blood.”

“Oh thank God.”

“He’s in the ICU now but doctors say chances of him surviving are less than 1%”

“Oh, Nkosi yam umtwanami.”

(Oh Lord my child)

“I’m sorry ma.”

“Which hospital is he in?”

“Joburg general hospital, I asked his friend Given to fetch you. He’s already on his way, he left Johannesburg 15 minutes ago. He's using GPS but he might get lost since it’ll be his first time driving there, I gave him your number so he can call you and ask for directions don’t be shocked when he calls you.”

“Thank you

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my child.”

“Pleasure ma, I’m on my way to the hospital to see him visiting hours start in an hour.”

“Are you going alone?”

“No, his friend Kabelo is driving me there.”

“Oh may God bless his kind friends.”

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ANZANI

“Unfortunately only one of you is allowed inside.”

“She'll go in,” Kabelo says

My heart is racing as I follow the nurse to the ICU where I find my boyfriend lying on the bed with a breathing tube attached to his windpipe, an arterial line to measure his blood pressure and the concentration of carbon dioxide and oxygen in his blood and various other tubes I don't know inserted in his body, seeing him in this condition shatters my heart to shreds.

“Try to talk to him, he can hear you and who knows maybe hearing your voice might give him the motivation to fight this.” The nurse says and excuses us.

I take a seat next to him and stare at his pale face, I seize his big hand and intertwine it with mine and buss it a couple of times unable to utter a single word.

“Mpilo wanga, doctors say they don’t think you’ll wake up but I know you will fight to come back to me, to us. Why didn’t you tell me about the pregnancy? I can’t believe you knew and kept it from me...” I look down and silently cry

“Please Mpilo you need to fight, what will I do with a baby on my own? What will I tell him when he asks me about his father? Please fight and come back to us my love.” I giggle caressing his handsome face with my right hand “Your faith in God has rubbed off on me, I know science and logic say you will not survive but I have faith in God. I know he’ll never take your life when he knows so many people depend on you, what will become of your mother and sisters if you die? What will happen to me and our baby? I won’t let you die, I will fight for your life. You know I’m lazy to wake up at midnight and at 3 AM

to pray but I'll wake up and pray for your life. I will not put anything inside my mouth until you wake up from this bed, if God wants to take you he might as well take me too." I wipe my tears and look up "Did you hear that God? I'm tired of you disappointing me, breaking my heart, and taking everyone that I love away from me but I won't let you take Quinton from me. I will not eat or drink anything until you wake Quinton up, he has so much faith in you so you better not disappoint him. My baby needs his father, Mrs.Ndlovu needs her son, Buhle and Kwazi need their brother Quinton can't die he needs to live."

I slightly bend and plant a peck on his forehead

"I love you so much Mpilo, I will not lose you I refuse. Our baby needs you." I set his hand on my stomach

"That's your baby in there and he needs his father...you need to fight for our baby Mpilo, I will not have this baby alone."

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“Anza.”

“Mma I’m pregnant and my boyfriend is in hospital fighting for his life, someone shot him,” I say between sniffles

“What?”

“Mpilo is in hospital fighting for his life and doctors say his condition is critical and chances of him making it are slim, I will not be able to live if he dies mama I swear I won’t.”

“No Anza don’t talk like that, there is every reason to be alive please don’t talk like that. Your boyfriend will make it, I have faith in God please stop crying think about the baby you are carrying, or do you want to lose the pregnancy?”

“Of course not.”

“Then stop crying my child, you need to be brave and fight for your man. I know it hurts but this is no time for tears, it’s time to wrestle with God in prayer. The Bible says with faith one can

tell the mountain to throw itself into a sea, it doesn't matter what the doctors say or what you see with your physical eyes what matters is what the word of God says and it says we shall decree a thing and it'll be established, exercise your faith my child- the just shall live by faith my child and faith comes by hearing the word of God. Have faith in the promise and overlook what you see with your naked eye because faith is spiritual and needs one to think like a spiritual being for it to manifest."

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NARRATED

"Hello."

"I can't believe that I ever thought you were a good person and wanted you to marry my daughter, you are evil Mulalo evil."

"What's going on mma?"

“Don’t pretend with me, I know you had Anzani's boyfriend shot.” He gasps in shock

“He was shot? I swear I had nothing to do with that.”

“You honestly expect me to believe that?”

“I’m telling you the truth mma, I had nothing to do with him being shot.”

“I’m going to tell the police everything.”

“Be my guest, I had nothing to do with this my hands are clean,” Mulalo says and hangs up

“What?” he asks looking at his friend who's looking at him with judgemental eyes.

“You did it, didn’t you?” he chortles

“Of course not.”

“I know you Mulalo, you wanted this girl desperately I don’t think you gave up just like that.”

“Well, I did.” He says sinking his teeth into his steak

“So, who shot him?” he shrugs his shoulders while chewing

“I don’t know, maybe someone else wanted him dead. I had nothing to do with this.”

In Ratanda Livhuwani is staring at the dim screen in confusion

“Did he admit to it?”

“He says it wasn’t him.”

“I don’t believe him, he did this.”

“I hope this boy makes it or my daughter will never forgive me Lufuno, she said she is pregnant. I couldn't even chastise her because of guilt ”

“I told you to tell Anzani the truth about Mulalo, none of this would’ve happened. I hope you’ll be able to live with yourself for killing your grandchild's father.”

“He's still alive and I pray he makes it because if not my daughter will never forgive me.”

“And I wouldn’t blame her, I told you to tell her the truth. It’s worse now that she’s carrying his child, she’ll hate you for denying her child a father.”

Livhuwani puts her hands on her face feeling like her skull is about to crack into two halves, Lord what has she done? Anzani will never forgive her for this.

#53

NARRATED

The 3AM alarm rings finding Anzani wide awake, she quickly switches it off before the noise disturbs Nomonde who's sleeping in the next room. She rolls out of bed dressed in Quinton's t-shirt and boxer shorts, she kneels next to the bed and starts praying bearing her heart and soul to the man above. Nomonde being a light sleeper is woken up by the sound of sniffles, her heart clenches painfully listening to Anzani's heart-rendering cries, she rolls out of bed, takes her fluffy robe on the foot of the bed, and puts it on together with her sleepers and saunters to the main bedroom.

Arriving there she knocks once and walks inside; Anzani hears the door open and footsteps approaching her, but she doesn't turn to look or stop praying. Nomonde kneels next to her, holds her right hand, and begins praying with her.

“You need to stop crying, it’s not good for the baby,” Nomonde says wiping her tears with her palms. They are done with their prayer session.

Nomonde was elated when she heard the news of Anzani’s pregnancy, and it will kill her if anything happens to her grandchild.

“I can’t help it.”

“I know it’s hard, but you need to try, do it for Quinton. He would be shattered if something happens to his baby.”

“I know.”

“That’s why you need to take care of yourself so he can find both you and the baby in good health.”

“I am taking care of myself ma.”

“No, you’re not, you refuse to eat or drink anything.”

“That’s because I’m fasting, I can’t eat.”

“But you’re pregnant Anzani and in your first trimester the most critical time for a fetus. It’s not safe to skip meals during pregnancy but it’s even riskier to do so in the first trimester as it’s the most delicate. Quinton will be okay, I’m fasting, his friends and his sisters are also fasting for him, you don’t need to risk your pregnancy Anzani. Quinton will never forgive me if anything happens to that baby under my watch.”

“Nothing will happen to the baby ma; he’ll be fine don’t worry.”

“Anzani mtanami please listen to me.”

“Mama please don’t do this; I need to do this.”

“Okay, can you at least fast for a maximum of 6 hours then, what you’re doing is crazy you haven’t eaten anything since I got here.”

“Good night mom, I’ll see you in the morning,” Anzani says dismissing her

Nomonde sighs in defeat and leaves the room muttering a prayer to God to save the baby.

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LEBOHANG

“I’ve never been so shattered in my life; I wonder who would do such a monstrous thing to my brother. Family, I’m asking for your prayers my brother is fighting for his life in hospital.”

Tshiamo says reading Nokwazi’s post on Facebook

“What happened to Quinton?”

“I don’t know but I think he’s been shot or something, there’s a picture circulating on Facebook of someone who was shot in Joburg CBD next to MTN rank. I think it’s him”

I hope nothing happens to Quinton, why didn’t that person shoot Anzani instead of my Quinton?

“He will survive, Quinton is a man of God he’ll survive this,” I say trying to convince myself

“I can imagine what Anzani is going through.” Zoleka

“You always have to kill the mood, don’t you?”

“What, what did I do?”

“You mentioned Anzani” Tshiamo

“But she’s his girlfriend mos, she must feel much worse if we are feeling like this.”

“Mxm, I don’t even know why I try with you.”

“Lebohang this is no longer funny, clearly Anzani is not going anywhere so you need to accept it and move on. You can’t be stuck on Quinton; we all had a crush on him at some point and were kind of sad when he went for Anzani instead of any of us. We said all those bad things about Anzani to make ourselves feel better but we moved on, you need to do the same. Quinton isn’t yours, if he was, he’d be with you.”

“What do you say Tshiamo? Am I losing it?”

“I think Zoleka is telling the truth, you need to forget about Quinton and move on. Many men want to date you, men who are way better than Quinton, but you won’t see that because you’re stuck on Quinton.”

“It’s not easy to just forget about him because I spent years rejecting potential boyfriends because I thought he and I will be a thing, it hurts to see him dating someone else and living his

best life with her while I have waited for years thinking we were going to be together.”

“I understand friend, but you seriously need to move on, he and Anzani love each other they have been together for almost a year now I think you need to start accepting that he was never yours.” Zoleka

“I hear you; I will try.”

“Please do, you are losing yourself all this bitterness is not good for you. You hate Anzani and you’re forcing us to hate her with you but to be honest, Anzani didn’t do anything to you.” Zoleka

I know Anzani never did anything to me but I hate her so much because I feel like she’s living my life but Zoleka is right, I am changing and I don’t like who I am turning into.

“You’re right it’s time to let go.”

“The first step to doing so is by unfriending him and his sisters on Facebook and unfollowing them on Instagram so you won’t see what’s happening in their lives.” Tshiamo

“I will do that, as much as it would make me happy for Anzani to lose Quinton, I don’t want him to die so can we please pray for him.”

“Of course, we will pray for him, brother Q is a good person.”  
Zoleka

“Yeah, he is. We will all pray for him.”

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ANZANI

“I thought I told you not to come to work.” My boss says walking inside my office

“I had to leave the house, being in that apartment was going to drive me crazy so I’d rather keep busy.”

She pulls a chair and takes a sit looking at me with eyes full of pity. Oh, how I hate it when someone looks at me like that

“You look weak

Advertisement

have you eaten something?”

“Yes.” I haven’t eaten anything since I made a vow to God, but my boss doesn’t need to know that

I had to buy sweets because my breath was starting to smell from not eating anything. When I decided to take on this fast, I thought it would be difficult for me not to eat as I was constantly eating something before this but surprisingly, I don’t even get hungry, nor do I feel weak. I’m filled with the holy spirit and feel like I can overcome anything. In my physical hunger, my spirit is full, and I have never felt more closer to God than I do now.

“If you ever need to talk, I’m here for you.” She says putting her hand on top of mine

I nod then she leans back and puts her right leg on top of her left leg.

“My husband had a twin but unfortunately his twin sister was involved in a plane crash on her way to Cuba, she was going to study medicine. She didn’t die from the crash, but she was injured severely and spent weeks in the ICU. My husband who was my boyfriend at the time and I prayed for her life, but nothing changed, during his final exams my husband was shot and because they were twins and could feel each other’s pain his twin sister passed on while my husband was stuck in the ICU for days. It was a very trying time for me because my daughter was still an infant, but she was old enough to discern that her father wasn’t there, they were close, still are so she would cry and cry for him.”

“Sounds hectic.”

“Believe me it was but by the grace of God we made it, your boyfriend will be fine don’t stop praying for him.”

“Thank you so much, I guess I needed to hear this.”

“I know I’m your boss and everything but like I said the first time when we met, I’m here if you ever need to talk.” She says giving me a smile

“Thank you.....I am pregnant.”

“What? Congratulations.”

“Thanks, I didn’t know, I found out on the day he got shot...but he knew I was pregnant; I don’t know how he found out, but he knew. He would give me a foot massage when he comes back from work, call me when he was at work and ask me what I am craving, offer to wash the dishes at night, and sleep with his hand on my belly and stupid me didn’t suspect anything.” We laugh

“He sounds like a gentleman.”

“That he is, I just don’t know why he didn’t tell me.”

“Maybe he didn’t want to scare you.”

“Maybe, he needs to wake up so we can raise this baby together.”

“He will, congratulations once again.”

“Thank you.”

“From what I heard from the ladies about how handsome your man is and seeing how beautiful you are I don’t doubt that your baby will be the cutest.”

“Thanks, you sure didn’t see him that day in Maboneng?”

“No, he had already left when I got there. You were on your knees crying when I saw you and that guy came over.” I still can’t believe that I was so stupid and let myself be fooled by Shaun

“Oh, I remember. I guess you'll meet him someday then.”

“Yeah, definitely.”

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Kabelo came to pick me up from work when I knocked off, now we are on our way to the hospital to see Quinton

“I thought you would come with mom.”

“Given drove her to the hospital at 16:00”

“Oh okay, I thought she would wait for me so we can go together but I guess it makes sense why she prefers 16:00 over 19:00”

“Yeah, how are you?”

“I’m alive and you.”

“I’m taking each day as it comes, glance at the backseat I got you something.” I look and see a paper bag from Mugg ‘n Bean

“Thanks.” I’m not going to eat this food, but I don’t need another person lecturing me about eating so I’ll ‘accept’ the food.

“Pleasure... Quinton loves you.”

Okay! That’s so random

“I know, I love him too.”

“He’ll be okay, he will fight for you and the baby.”

“Thanks, that’s reassuring.” He chuckles shaking his head as if recalling something

“I remember the day he realized you were pregnant he was so happy and couldn’t stop smiling, he told me how he plans to take a loan and pay for your Lobola. He even bought an engagement ring and was going to propose on the day he got shot, he loves you so much. You make him so happy.”

I’m in tears. To me this puts a stamp on his love for me, I always knew he loves me, but I never thought he loves me this much.

“You need to stop crying; your face always looks so puffy and swollen we don’t want Quinton thinking that we were abusing his wife when he wakes up.” I chuckle through my tears

“Okay, I’ll stop.”

When we get to the hospital, Kabelo waits for me in the waiting area while I go inside but a nurse stops me in my tracks as I take the direction of the ICU and tells me that the doctor would like to see me. I won’t lie, I’m scared but I keep reminding myself of the scriptures I was meditating on at 3 AM when I woke up for my prayer reminding myself of God's promises.

“Miss Munyai, I spoke to Quinton’s mother earlier and she’s the one who asked me to speak to you.”

Legally the doctor cannot tell me anything about Quinton because according to the law we are not related, being his girlfriend doesn't count so the doctor is doing a favor by calling me in here.

“Quinton is not showing any signs of recovery, as you know that his condition is not improving but deteriorating, he can no longer breathe on his own and we recently had to put him on life support.”

“Yes, doctor I'm aware.”

“Very well then, my team and I decided to switch off the machines. As you know this is a public hospital; the traffic of patients being admitted daily is a lot and the hospital is running out of beds to accommodate all our patients hence this decision. However, we will not withdraw all at once, we will remove the life support measures one at a time over a period of days.”

#54

I've always heard people say public hospitals don't have any regard for human life but now I have seen it for myself, it's barely been a week since Quinton was put on life support but they already want to switch off the machines and give the bed to 'someone who needs it more', I'm gutted but switching off the machines is not an option.

"What are you up to?"

Quinton's mother asks when she walks inside my bedroom and finds me on the bed busy with a calculator

"I'm calculating the costs of moving Quinton to a private hospital; his job comes with a medical aid benefit, but I didn't want to exhaust it that's why I had no problem with him being in Johannesburg General plus it's one of the best hospitals in the country but now with this life support thing we have no choice but to move him to a private hospital."

“So, his medical aid will cover the fees?”

“He has only worked for the company for a few months so the medical aid will only pay half of his medical bills, I will pay the rest with our savings.”

“No, I won’t let you do that. Why don’t you use the money he saved for the house?”

“No ma, it’s fine. I don’t want us to touch that money, it’s for your house.”

“And I don’t want you to use your savings on this, you have a child on the way and you need to think about his/her future. Money is not more important than my son’s life, Quinton will recover and build me that house when he is ready.”

“Okay ma, let me contact a few hospitals and prepare for his transfer.” She smiles looking at me

“Quinton is very blessed to have you, my child.”

“Thank you.”

“Let me get back to my pots.”

“Okay, ma.”

She leaves the room while I contact Netcare and Duff Scott hospital comparing their prices.

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NARRATED

When Nomonde heard about her son being shot she packed her bags and left for Johannesburg to be by her son’s side during this trying time, Nobuhle is preparing for her preliminary examinations so she couldn’t up and leave with her mother she had to remain behind because of school. This past week has been difficult for her, her brother is very dear to her, and

knowing that he's in hospital fighting for his life hasn't been easy on her. She finds herself crying and wetting her books each time she sits down and tries to study, her heart is sore and she doesn't know what to do to get rid of the pain.

After yet another failed attempt at studying, she picks up her phone and dials her mother's number

"Nunu." Her mother says picking on the third ring

"Ma wami how is my brother doing?" She knows to expect bad news when her mother blows out a heavy sigh before answering.

"The hospital wants to switch off the machines, but Anzani is making the necessary calls, we are moving him to a private hospital."

Tears well up in her eyes as a painful lump sit on her throat

"With what money? Private hospitals are expensive."

“Don’t worry yourself about this my child the lord will make a way.”

“Okay.”

“Are you behaving there?”

“Yes, mom.”

“My heart is not at ease with you being there all on your own, I think I should come back. I will take taxis every day.”

“No mom, there’s no need I’m okay. My brother needs you more than I do plus Mrs. Hlongwane checks up on me all the time.”

“Okay then but Friday you need to come here after school, you can’t spend the weekend on your own.”

“Yes mom, please greet sis Anzani for me.”

“Okay my child, bye.”

“Bye.”

She cuts the call and looks at the time on her phone, it's a few minutes after 8 in the evening. She stands up, walks over to her piggy bank, and takes out a few coins, then she makes her way out of the house after locking the door. She puts on earphones and strolls to the shop with her hands inside the pockets of her hoody

“Please give me Stuyvesant and matches my friend.” She says giving the Indian shop owner a few coins

“Ao maloving sewubhema inkaw'za nawe manje?” Says one of the boys who like camping outside the Indian shop

(My love, you're also smoking cigarettes now?)

Nobuhle doesn't respond, she receives the matches and cigarette from the shop owner and walks down the street. Once she's far from everyone's sight she takes out the cigarette and the matches from her pocket, her heart pounds staring at them. Gosh is she really going to do this? her brother would be so disappointed in her right now. Her mother raised her better than this.

While stuck in her resolve, a few meters away from her three guys who are coming from football practice notice her standing alone.

"Isn't that Nobuhle?" Guy 1 says narrowing his eyes on her face.

"Yes, it's her yerr lomtwana o mooi man!" Guy 2 says licking his lips

(She's beautiful)

"Net uyaqhoma lomtwana." Guy 1

(She's full of herself though)

“Blind, uyasishaya isandla lomtwana.” Guy 3

“And bheka umekahle kanjani.” Guy 2 says and whistles

(She has a beautiful body)

“She needs to be taken off her high horse, look around there’s no one here just us, it’s dark and people hardly come to this side, especially at this time of the night.” Guy 1 suggests

“What are you saying mjita?” Guy 2 asks with confusion on his face.

“I’m saying let’s teach her a lesson, asimshayeni nge nkaw’za one way.”

( Let’s sleep with her)

“Are you suggesting that we rape her?” Guy 3

“Rape is a strong word, so nithini majita?”

(What are you saying)

“You guys don’t have to do anything if you don’t want to but I’m not missing this chance.” He says when they don’t reply

“I don’t want to be part of this, Quinton will kill us.” Guy 2

“Me too, I don’t want to mess with that guy.” Guy 3

“Then go but I’m not letting this opportunity pass me by.” The two boys look at one another as if communicating with their eyes and simultaneously pace back to the direction they came from. He looks at their retreating figures before picking up his pace going after Nobuhle

“Nobuhle mabhebeza.” He says, having caught up with her

“What?” Nobuhle answers with attitude

rolling her eyes.

“Uthi ungiqoma nini?” He asks hanging his arm over her shoulder

(When are you going to agree to be my girlfriend)

“Get your hands off me! I’ll never be your girlfriend stop being ambitious.” Her statement fills him with rage, feeling emasculated he swings his hand on her face giving her a tight slap.

“Oh no, you didn’t!” Nobuhle exclaims with her hand on her cheek and bites her lower lip returning the slap, he is shocked because he didn’t expect her to fight back. He smacks her again, this time a bit harder than the first time expecting her to accept defeat and cry her eyes out like any other girl, but not Nobuhle Ndlovu she ignores the pain on her left cheek and punches him in the face.

With neither of them ready to accept defeat they continue fighting but the guy being older and stronger overpowers Nobuhle and throws her to the ground. He gets on top of her pinning both her arms above her head with his left hand tightly

constricting her wrists and pulls down his shorts with his free hand, and his dick springs out. He attempts to open Nobuhle's zip but she wiggles her body under him fighting hard to free herself from his grip

"Help, Help!" She screams kicking and wiggling under him

He smacks her across the face so hard that she sees stars.

"Shut up!"

He attempts to pull down her zip for the second time but Nobuhle will not let him have her virginity without a fight, she sinks her teeth into his arm.

"Aaaah!" He cries out in pain

Nursing the pain in his arm the grip on her wrists slackens. She uses the opportunity to scour her palm on the ground, and grabs a fistful of soil, and pours it on his face.

“F\*ck!” he says rubbing his hands on his eyes

Nobuhle drags her body horizontally pinning her elbows on the ground and kicks him in his face twice.

“F\*ck! Yewena Nobuhle uzonya yezwa!” He curses swinging his fists in the air temporarily blinded by the soil in his eyes

“Nawe uzonya your swine!”

She says trying to run away but she trips and falls flat on the ground with her stomach, the man grabs her leg and drags her body towards him on the gravel road. Nobuhle cries kicking and screaming at the thought of losing her purity, a car speeds towards them and parks in front of them, the perpetrator attempts to run but the driver doesn't let him get far. He bolts out of the car leaving the engine running and grabs him by his clothes and starts swinging fists on his face mercilessly beating him.

“Stop, you’ll kill him!” Buhle says when the guy loses two of his teeth from the man’s hard punches. His face is covered in blood, swollen and he can barely keep his eyes open, he looks like someone who was stung by a hive of bees

“Put your hands inside my pocket and take out my phone, call the police because this bastard needs to be put behind bars.” He says still holding the bleeding man, his jaws clenched.

“Let him go, they won’t arrest him. They will say you took the law into your own hands so they can no longer take him.”

“What?” The man says looking at Buhle for the first time, despite her being a stranger his heart clenches painfully seeing her bruised face. Their eyes lock for a few seconds before she averts hers and gapes at his Black Air Jordan XXXII Basketball sneakers

“Let him go, my mother will blame herself and think she failed me when she finds out about this. Let him go, I should have known better than to wander the streets alone at this hour” The man turns and looks at Buhle's attacker

“I’m letting you go but best believe I’ll be watching you, get out of here!” He says kicking him in the butt

“Get inside, I’ll drop you off.”

“No, I’ll walk.”

“After what almost happened, you still want to risk your life and walk?”

“Yes, I don’t know you. What if you also want to rape me.”

“I won’t do this back and forth with you, get in the car!” He deadpans

“Ufunani kimi umdala kangaka?”

(What do you want from me old man)

“I want to take you home.”

“No!” The man chuckles and picks her up putting her over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes. Buhle wiggles her body and hits his back with her small fists, but he doesn’t let go, she sinks her teeth into his back biting him but he still doesn’t flinch.

“Please let me go, please.” She beseeches with a quavering voice, tears welled up in her eyes.

“I understand why you’re scared but I won’t do anything to you I swear I just want to get you home safe okay?”

“Okay.”

“So, you’ll get into the car when I put you down?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, I’m putting you down now.”

He gently puts her on top of his bonnet and stares at her cute little innocent bruised face under the moonlight

“Ya malumana.” Buhle giggles covering her face with her hands feeling shy. He slowly peels her hands from her face and studies her face

“That bastard!” he says tracing his finger on her bruises

“I’ll make him pay for this.” He's getting angry all over again.

“It’s okay, I fought back.”

“What harm can you possibly do with your small hands?” he says taking her hands into his.

“Your problem is that you underestimate me wena, I can fight.”  
He laughs

“What? Do you call biting people knowing how to fight? I’m sure you were those toddlers who bit everyone.” She cackles

“I don’t know maybe I was.”

The laughter dies down and they fall into uncomfortable silence staring into each other's eyes.

“Igama lam ngu Ndaloyothando Ngxito kodwa ndibizwa ngo Thando, you are?” he says breaking the silence

(My name is Ndaloyothando Ngxito but people call me Thando)

“Nobuhle Ndlovu, where are you from because I can see that you’re not from around here?” He chuckles, his laughter has got to be the sexiest thing she has ever heard. Who knew laughter could be sexy?

“Haibo, where am I from?”

“Sandton maybe?”

“Well home is Boksburg, I come to this side often because my brother regularly visits my aunt’s house, I’m here to pick him up. His name is Langaletu maybe you know him.”

“No, I don’t.”

“Okay, come down so I can get you home it’s getting late I still have to drive back.” He picks her up and puts her on the ground before opening the passenger door for her, she doesn’t protest this time she climbs inside and says a silent prayer as he rounds the car coming to the driver’s side

“God please don’t let him steal me; I promise I will never attempt to smoke again amen.”

#55

“So, this is it?” He says parking his car outside my gate

“Yeah.”

“I’m so sorry that guy did this to you, you don’t deserve it.” He looks genuinely concerned which doesn’t make sense because we don’t know each other.

“It’s okay.”

“It was nice meeting you Nobuhle.”

“Nice to meet you too Thando.” I know I should get out of the car, but I can’t bring myself to do it, I’m still enjoying his company.

“Worth, Nobuhle worth!” My subconscious reprimands

“Bye,” I say pulling the door handle

“Goodbye.” I close the door and watch as the car drives off disappearing into the darkness.

“Nobuhle who was that?” Mrs. Hlongwane says startling me

“Mama Lethi, you scared me.” I chuckle with a hand on my chest

“I asked you a question Nobuhle.”

“It was my brother’s friend from Johannesburg, he came to drop off some things my mother gave to him.”

“Where are they?”

“What?”

“The things your mother gave you.” Flip!

I can't stomach the disappointment I see in her eyes, so I avert my eyes burying my head to the ground.

“Nobuhle you're a beautiful and intelligent child who has a bright future ahead of her I hope you will not allow a man who has matric and most probably a tertiary qualification to ruin your bright future, I'm so disappointed because out of everyone I never expected this from you.” I look down twiddling my thumbs, she stares at me for a while and snickers.

“What happened to your face?” My face is bruised but it's nothing bad just a few scratches and that disgusting boy's handprints.

“I fell.” She scoffs

“Yeah right, Nobuhle your mother is stressed she doesn't need you adding more stress on top of what she's already dealing

with. Yini is it stage? You've always been a well-behaved child I'm still shocked by what I just saw. You better stay away from that guy, or I'll tell your mother angithi siyezwana?"

"Did I make myself clear)

"Yebo mama."

(Yes mom)

"Ngena endlini ukhiye!" I scurry inside the house and lock myself inside

(Get in and lock the door)

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NARRATED

"What happened?" Livhuwani asks looking at her sister who looks spooked, her eyes are wide open, and her brown skin looks pale. She looks like she saw a ghost.

“How did I end up on the floor?”

“Lufuno, please say something.” Lufuno hasn’t uttered a word since Livhuwani came to, it’s like she’s stuck in a trance.

Livhuwani lifts her aching body from the tiled floor and holds her little sister’s shoulders shaking her.

“Lufuno!” Lufuno snaps back to reality and slowly sinks her behind on the couch with her hands on her face, breathing heavily visibly frightened by something.

“Lufuno please talk to me, what’s going on?”

“We were talking then the next thing you’re kneeling on the floor, head bowed, clapping hands like a maine and growling like a wild animal.”

“What?” Livhuwani asks in shock, she remembers nothing. The last thing she recalls is herself on the couch next to her sister.

“Yes, it was like you’re possessed. You had this look on your face, one I’ve never seen before, and had this bone-chilling aura that made the hairs on the back of my neck stand. You started speaking in a voice I didn’t recognize. The spirit that possessed you was very livid, it was a male voice he said he is our makhulukuku. He told me to tell you that Anzani and her baby will die during labor if you don’t accept your calling and Lutendo will go crazy...” She sniffs looking up “He also said Dakalo will never have kids, and nothing will work out for any of us until you do what’s expected of you, he said you’ll not die but you’ll live in pain and lose everyone around you..... Livhuwani, I know you’re scared but you need to accept your calling because all of us will suffer because of your stubbornness, this doesn’t only affect you. It affects all of us, my daughter has been having a miscarriage after miscarriage being called names by her in-laws because of you please do the right thing.” Livhuwani looks at her shocked

“Please accept your calling. He said you’re running out of time, danger is looming.” Lufuno implores

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Between Thohoyandou and Makhado on the R523 is the Thathe Vondo Forest that surrounds lake Fundudzi. In this area there's Mavhovho waterfall and the often-misty sacred forest where chiefs of the Thathe clan are buried, the sacred forest is so full of spirits that a few Venda people dare to walk through it. The forest's hauntings include the white lion, the spirit of the chief Nethathe, and a lightning bird called Ndadzi. Lake Fundudzi is the most sacred place in these mountains. It is so scary that when you approach the lake your first view should be between your legs.

Permission to visit the Lake is rarely granted to tourists but the view of the Lake can be seen from the roads on one of the surrounding mountains. The lake on the Mutale River was formed by a landslide and it is said that the sacred water of the Lake will not mix with normal water, because there is no known outlet the lake is believed to be bottomless as far as the human world is concerned. Fundudzi is described as the Zombie Lake where buried ancestors are said to come alive during the night and play drums beneath the water, the VhaVenda believe that a corpse has no shadow, and this is how the dead can be recognized. A village submerged there, and the villagers went about their daily business. It is said that if the water in the lake was observed to be rising, the villagers would leave the old and

sick behind and move to higher ground. It is believed that the spirits of the lake were claiming frail villagers for a better existence beneath the waters.

The fish and crocodiles there are inhibited by spirits, at one time the crocodile was white. The sacred python, the bringer of fertility also dwells beneath this water, and sometimes it is also described as being white, the snake sometimes required human wives and it would visit them at night when it could not be seen but one day one curious wife saw it and the snake was mortified and fled to the lake and this caused terrible drought in the Village until the wife walked into the lake to join her serpentine husband. To prevent more drought in the ensuing years more maidens were sacrificed in the same way. Presently, beer offerings are made to the snake, and those who take the offerings are tied by a rope in case the offering is rejected and Zwidudwane tries to pull the supplicants beneath the water.

The bewitched Forest as some call is said to have Zwidudwane- Zwidudwane is half-human, the other half of them is in the spirit world invisible to humans unless you're a priest of the Netshiava clan. To even see their human halves means certain death.

“Are sure nothing will happen to me?” asks a unnerve Mulalo following his Maine further into Vondo forest to perform a ritual at Fundudzi lake

“I told you to trust me, have I ever failed you before?”

“No.”

“Then trust me, that boy will die and Anzani will be yours. After being one with her, all her luck and blessing will come to you. You will be richer than you already are

just trust me and follow all my instructions.” Mulalo swallows and follows him.

The reason Mulalo is so obsessed with Anzani is not love nor is it the deal he had with Livhuwani but it’s the supposed ‘luck’ Anzani was born with, she was born with a ‘veil over her face’ which means that she was born with an unbroken amniotic sac covering her face, for centuries such children have both been feared or revered. This is seen as a lucky omen and such people

are said to never drown in their lives, the child is considered blessed and destined for greatness. Mulalo didn't know about this when he struck a deal with Livhuwani, his maine is the one who told him and told him what this could mean for him.

According to what Maine saw in his mirror, Anzani is a very blessed child, blessed with fortune and wealth, and becomes some sort of 'lucky charm' to everyone in her life. Her blessings are blocked due to her mother's denial of her ancestral calling that's why it looks like things don't work out for her but she is a blessed child.

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ANZANI

I can't remember the last time I had a good night's sleep, I try to, but I just can't do it. I sleep for an hour maximum then I'm up tossing and turning until the cock crows, it's 4 AM and I'm wide awake going through the pictures and videos we took when we were in Mpumalanga. We were so happy and couldn't keep our hands off each other, I don't know how I missed it because thinking about it now it was so obvious that I'm pregnant. The tears, the high libido, Mpilo's clinginess, and my

sudden moodiness when my baby was so understanding of my mood swings that not once did he snap at me nor lose his patience with me, and at the time, he wasn't even aware that I'm pregnant. Quinton is really the best thing to ever happen to me, and I'm grateful that the universe chose him to father my baby. I'm not ready to bring a life into this world but I know it will be easier to do it with him by my side, the situation at hand hasn't discouraged me nor shaken my faith. Quinton will be fine; he needs to be.

"I miss you so much, baby," I say looking at his picture

I play our videos, re-read our conversation on WhatsApp, and play his voice notes repeatedly to push time and before I know it my 6 O'clock alarm rings and it's time to get up and get myself ready for work, I roll out of bed and head to the bathroom to take a shower.

"Good morning ma." I greet Quinton's mother when I pass her in the lounge on my way back from the bathroom

“Good morning sisi.” She runs her eyes up and down my form and her eyes glisten with tears

“You need to stop this fasting thing Anzani, you’re losing weight.”

“Ma please, I thought we spoke about this.”

“You’ve fasted, it’s enough now.”

“I won’t stop until Quinton wakes up, I forgot to tell you Netcare agreed to take him in.”

“That’s great news.”

“Yes, ma.”

I make my way to my bedroom, drop my towel on the rug and stare at my reflection in the mirror. Mom is right, I have lost weight and it doesn’t help that I’m naturally skinny so you can

imagine how I look now but I will not give in until the Lord answers me. I'm like Jacob, I will not let go until the Lord answers my prayers, I'm tired of negotiating with him and accepting all the bad things he keeps throwing my way.

I lotion and slip into a black one-shoulder bodycon dress, but it's loose and ugly so I take it off since it no longer hugs me like it used to. I change into a Dusty pink Satin belted blazer dress and pair it with Clear chunky heeled sandals, I go for a natural look when I apply my make-up and put on red lipstick- Now I don't look like my problems, I look smoking as my boyfriend would say.

"Wow, you look beautiful," Dieketseng says when I pass the reception desk

"Thanks." I strut to my office, chest out like some model on the runway with my head held high turning heads as I go.

"Wow, you look beautiful." Says Pogiso walking inside my office

“Thanks, what do you think about my ideas for the new building in Northwest.”

“Brilliant but I think you should slow down; your boyfriend is in hospital fighting for his life... you shouldn’t be here overworking yourself.” Not this again!

“I swear this comes from a good place.” He says seeing the bored look on my face

“I know but- Aaah!” I yelp as I feel pain in my stomach. No, no nothing should happen to my baby!

“Are you alright?” he asks already standing next to me

“No, I need to see a doctor.”

After several tests and performing an ultrasound, the doctor sighs looking at me

“Your blood sugar levels have lowered to unhealthy levels and this can lead to preterm birth and complications to the baby. Are you eating healthy miss Munyai?” I look down avoiding eye contact with him.

“You do not consume enough calories and your body attempts to break down fats by increasing ketonuria and ketonemia which are ketones in the urine and blood. Your baby is also not growing well because you’re not eating well, I know you’re young and a first-time mother you’re probably scared of picking up too much weight during your pregnancy, but pregnancy does not require eating too many calories but it’s important to eat at frequent intervals keeping in mind the baby’s current and future health. You’re in your first trimester, the most delicate stage of your pregnancy and you need to eat rich nutrient foods, take proteins in the right quantity, and eat enough vitamins and other nutrients or you’ll lose this baby.”

“Yes, doctor.”

“I’ll write a diet plan for you and please follow it to the t and take your supplements daily otherwise you’ll lose this baby.”

Lord, I’m stuck between a rock and a hard place. What do I do? Do I carry on fasting and risk losing my baby, or do I break my vow to God and risk losing Quinton?

#56

“What’s up you’re been quiet?” Esihle asks joining me on the bed

“Nothing.”

“Come on, I know there’s something.”

“Promise not to judge?”

“Pinky promise.” She says giving me her pinky finger

“Okay then, so you remember that I drove to Ratanda to fetch Lethu from aunt Thembi’s house during the week?”

“Hmmm.” She hums

“On my way to aunt house I found some guy trying to rape this little girl on the road and stopped my car, he attempted to run away when he saw me but I caught up with him and f\*cked him up.”

“You did good.”

“Then I told this girl to get in the car so I can drive her home, but she refused and even went to say ngimdala what do I want from her.” She chuckles clearly amused

“Ok and then?”

“I tell her I just want to make sure that she gets home safe, but she still wouldn’t budge you know me I don’t like talking too much I grab her and put her over my shoulder, yoh ndabe ndiyi susile umtana starts punching me and biting my back wiggling fighting to get down.”

“Wow, she sounds feisty.”

“She is, she is probably 14/15 I’m not sure but I found myself weirdly attracted to her and I feel bad because she’s just a kid, but she’s been on my mind since that night.”

“Yo, I hear you, but I think you should stay away from her. She’s too young for you Thando, at least if she was 18 but 14 hai no!”

“I know you’re right believe me, and I feel bad for feeling this way, but I can’t help myself that little girl is all I think about, she’s so cute and feisty. If it was anyone else, she would have been raped that day, but she fought hard.”

“I hear you but please stay away from her unless you want her parents to get you arrested.”

“Okay, I’ll stay away from her.”

“You promise?”

“Yes, I promise.” I always keep my promises but I don’t know if I can keep this one.

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## ANZANI

To everyone else me holding a fast while pregnant seems crazy but the works of faith cannot be understood by a carnal mind, I challenged God and made a vow not to eat until Quinton wakes up and I'm going to do just that come rain or sunshine. When I made this vow I knew it would not be easy, walking in faith is never easy but it needs one to persevere and trust in the lord no matter the situation. I will not break my fast, otherwise all the sacrifices I've made so far- holding a fast while I'm pregnant and risking my pregnancy would all be in vain. I will not eat anything until he wakes up, and nothing will happen to the baby. He will be fine and healthy.

I trust God, he wouldn't bring me so far to leave me. My baby and I will be fine, I have no doubt about that but I don't expect anyone to understand because logic and faith will always clash. Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen, Sarah was 90 years of age when Isaac was conceived and that's impossible according to science and logic

but everything is possible when you believe and that's amazing power of faith and sadly not many know how to exercise their faith. Faith requires you to abandon logic and solely rely on what the word of God says.

I have made all the necessary calls and arrangements and Quinton has been moved from Johannesburg general hospital to Netcare hospital.

It's weekend, Buhle came over to spend the weekend with us, I didn't want her first visit to be like this. I wanted to make it special for her, I had planned to take her out and show her places, but life happened and there's nothing I can do about it. Her mom was worried about her being alone in Ratanda so her heart is at ease now that she's here with us.

"That was the best movie ever, I love Jason Statham I enjoy all his movies." Buhle

It's been raining all day long and we've been in my room under the covers watching movies, she loves action, we were watching Wrath of a man. It's a nice movie I thoroughly

enjoyed it, but I would still choose romance over action anytime. Yes, I'm that girl!

"Yeah, he's good I know a movie is going to be nice if I see him or that guy who acts on Taken....I forgot his name but they are the best."

"Yep, let me go refill this." She rolls out of bed and takes the now empty bowl of popcorns. She has quite an appetite, she reminds me of myself before I took on the fast.

"Okay do that, while I choose another movie for us to watch."

"Not romance please" she says with grimace on her face and makes her way out. I can't help but laugh

I love Nobuhle and I really enjoy her company, having her here has taken my mind off things and helped me to relax. I choose a movie and wait for her to come back

“I come back!” She bellows making her way inside, she hands me the bowl to hold for her and joins me under the covers

“Love and leashes?” She says reading the title of the movie I chose “Don’t tell me it’s romance.”

“What’s wrong with romance?”

“Nothing, it just bores me because almost all the movies are the same. They always fall in love and live happily ever after, borex!” She says with an eye roll.

Missy has some attitude, but I like her because she’s very respectful, I think she’s the only person in my life who calls me ‘Sis’ not even Lutendo calls me that and she’s also quite feisty, I’m honestly here for it.

“What’s wrong with happily ever after?”

“It’s impractical because that’s not how most love stories play out-umjolo uyanyisa, not everyone has a Cinderella love story where you lose a shoe

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meet your prince charming and live happily ever with him.”

Haibo this child

“I didn’t know that you were dating.”

“I’m not dating, and I don’t think I will date, I just want to be an engineer and travel the world with my money. I don’t even think I want to get married and have kids in future, I just want to have money and slay.”

“You’re only saying that now because you’re still young but one day you’ll meet someone who’ll change the way you see life but I’m glad you’re focused on your education, you’re still young for a relationship anyway.”

“Is that how you feel about my brother?”

“What?”

“He came into your life and changed your perspective of life in general?” I can’t help the smile that embraces my face as I think about the day he confessed his love for me.

“Yes, your brother came into my life at a time when I least expected. I had given up on love and thought it wasn’t for me but he came into my life and loved me until I learnt to love myself. He changed how I saw men and relationships in general and proved to me that it’s possible to love and be loved in return, that it is possible for someone to know all your flaws and imperfections and still love you like you’re the most beautiful woman and most precious thing his eyes have ever seen.”

“Wow, that sounds beautiful. How did you know that you love him?”

“When he became the first person I think about when I wake up in the morning and the last one on my mind when I go to bed, his happiness became my own, and I prioritized him over

other things/people in my life. When I'm with him time flies because that's how much I enjoy his company, I share in his pain, in his joys and his worries. I can't imagine myself with anyone else who's not him and I crave his presence when I'm not with him, being with him feels easy and nothing feels forced and spending time with him feels like the best thing in the world I could go on and on Buhle I love your brother so much and him being in hospital is killing me"

"Wow, that sounds so beautiful. Don't worry he will be fine, my brother is very strong."

"Love is beautiful with the right person; you'll meet the one for you and see what I mean when you're older." She averts her eyes avoiding eye contact.

"What?" she looks like she wants to say something but doesn't know how to say it

"Nothing."

“Okay, just know that I’m here if you ever need to talk to me. I promise I’ll never judge you and everything we talk about will remain just between the two of us, okay?” She nods and engulfs me in a hug

“Thank you so much for coming into our lives Sis’Anzani, thank you for loving my brother and being there for him. I don’t know what to say but you feel like part of the family, and I really appreciate everything you do for us, we love you so much. I know Nokwazi doesn’t say it but she loves and appreciates you, thank you for being my big sister and for making me an aunt.” My heart you guys, I don’t know what to say. I’m so touched right now because I can tell that she’s speaking from her heart.

“Ncoah baby, thank you I love you so much.” I say tightening my arms around her

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NARRATED

After what happened the other day Livhuwani knows she has no choice but to accept her calling, knowing that everyone in her family is suffering because of her has been a bitter pill to swallow and it gnaws at her conscience. The pain of being responsible for her children's suffering and everyone else's is too great to bear, she has decided to accept her calling, not for herself but for her family. If she needs to offer herself to the ancestors so her family can have peace then so be it, she's had several more episodes following the first appearance from her great-grandfather, and like the first time she always remembers nothing afterwards. She relies on Lufuno to iterate what the ancestors said, clueless on what to do or where to go she had to go back to Venda to consult with the maine who first told her about her calling for direction and was advised to do a ceremony in which she will talk to her ancestors and tell them she's accepting the gift they have entrusted her with and this ceremony will be held in the next few days at Lufuno's house since her house was taken by Mulalo.

There's one thing that she's been dreading for days now, and that's telling Anzani the truth. She needs to tell her the truth before undertaking her new journey

"Call her." Lufuno says joining her on the couch

“My daughter will hate me.”

“She’ll hate you even more the longer you keep this from her.”  
She swallows nothingness and dials her number putting her on speaker

“Mma”

“Ngwananga how is my son in law doing?”

“His condition hasn’t changed.” The last time they spoke was when Quinton was being moved to Netcare

“He’ll be fine, don’t lose faith. I hope you’ve been taking care of yourself and my grandchild.”

Avoiding another lecture Anzani tells her mother what she wants to hear

“Yes, we are both fine.”

“Your aunt wants to say hi.”

“Anza.” Lufuno says, her voice soft and warm exactly like how she was before Anzani lost her job

“Aunt how are you?”

“I’m good my child, Mulanga misses you so much.”

“I know, I miss her too. I’ll make time to come and visit when this whole things blows over.”

“Okay my child, congratulations on your pregnancy even though I’m not happy that you got pregnant out of wedlock.”

“Thanks aunt, I know I disappointed my mom and you after everything you told me but Quinton will do right by me and our child when he recovers.”

“That’s good to hear.”

“Yes aunt, he’s a good man.”

“I’m happy for you my child...we'll talk again soon.”

“Anzani my child there’s something I need to talk to you about.” Livhuwani says

“Sounds serious.”

“It is, I want you to know that I love you so much and I regret everything I did.”

“Mma you are scaring me.”

“Don’t be scared, two years ago when you were in your final year I borrowed money from the bank and mortgaged our

house. I wanted to start a business but things didn't go as planned and I lost all the money. To be honest I don't know what I did with the money and because I couldn't pay the agreed monthly installments to the bank they wanted to repossess your father's house, that's when I went to Mulalo seeking for help. He promised me to help but it was on one condition."

"What?"

"That he would get married to you."

"What?" The hurt and incredulity in her voice is almost palpable

"I'm sorry my child, I thought he was a good man and you were not dating at the time."

"So, you sold me to settle your debt? Mma!"

"I'm sorry my child but at the time it looked like the right thing to do."

"Wow!"

“I'm sorry my child, please find it in your heart to forgive me.”  
Anzani doesn't reply

“I know I have hurt and disappointed you and I am sorry, I realized my mistakes and told him to let you be when he suggested that he would get rid of your boyfriend. I gave him the house and moved to Gauteng with your aunt, I don't know if he's the one responsible for what happened to Quinton because he denied it when I asked him.”

“Wow mma I can't believe you right now, how could you do this to me?” she sniffles “You are dead to me, I want nothing to do with you and I will never forgive you if Quinton dies. I will never forgive you for putting me through so much hurt and pain, are you happy now that your selfishness can potentially cost me the man I love and deny my child the chance of meeting his father?”

“I'm sorry my child.”

“I will never forgive you if Quinton dies.” Anzani spits and cuts the call leaving the older in tears

#57

I'm in the shower when Buhle bolts in holding my ringing phone in her hands. I open the shower door and stick my head out

“Please answer it my hands are full of soap,” I say switching off the water.

She answers and puts the call on speaker.

“Good morning miss Munyai this is Dr. Patel can you come to the hospital right now?”

“What's wrong doctor, is Quinton okay?” my heart is beating out of my chest and my throat is dry I'm flipping scared right now.

“Please come now it's urgent, bye.” And just like that he drops the call on my ear, how rude!

“Don’t panic it’s probably nothing serious,” Buhle says trying to reassure me though I can tell that she’s quite nervous herself.

I rinse my body, wrap a towel on my bosom and scurry out of the bathroom heading to the main bedroom.

“Careful not to trip and fall!” Mrs. Ndlovu bellows when I pass her cooking in the kitchen

I put on the first thing I find when I open my closet and dress without even applying lotion and put on my Nike sneakers and a beanie to cover my sleeping knots

“Sis'Anzani relax please.” She followed me to my bedroom

“Can you please request for me?” I’m asking because she still has my phone in her hands

“Why don’t you ask Given or Kabelo to take you? I’m sure they won’t mind “

“I know but I would rather request. They’ve already done so much for us, we shouldn’t take advantage of their kindness.”  
She presses my phone for a few seconds

“Okay, your driver is five minutes away.”

“Thanks, doll, let me go and wait for him downstairs.”

“Okay, please try to keep calm..for the baby.”

Yoh, it’s the baby this the baby that it’s like I don’t matter anymore. Only the baby does, but I don’t mind because I know my child will be loved especially with what’s going on with my mother. I still can’t believe what she did, if I didn’t hear it from her mouth I wouldn’t have believed it.

“Ma Dr. Patel called and asked me to come to the hospital, I’ll be back soon.”

“Oh my God I hope nothing is wrong with my son”

“Let’s remain positive ma, bye.” I peck her cheek and run out of the house

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NARRATED

“Come here.” His words are low and sluggish

He has his arms spread open on the bed. She’s been frozen at the door for about a minute now, sobbing unable to believe her eyes

“Please.” He implores, his voice is just above a whisper

She slowly toddles to him and throws herself in his arms crying her eyes out, these are tears of joy. Her sacrifice was worth it,

her boyfriend is alive. God is faithful, he woke him up and brought him back to her and their baby.

“I was so scared when the doctor asked me to come, I thought something happened to you.” Her voice comes out raspy and hoarse

“I’m sorry thembalam’ I’m the one who asked him not to tell you anything over the phone, I wanted to surprise you.” He says tightening his arms around her and kissing the crown of her head

After almost two weeks in the ICU Quinton finally woke up last night, the doctor ran a few tests and everything came back clear which is astonishing for someone who relied on machines to stay alive for most of his stay in the hospital, he asked the doctor not to tell his family as yet because he wanted to see his girlfriend first and that’s why the doctor called her in the morning and asked her to rush to the hospital.

When she arrived at the hospital and asked for doctor Patel she was instructed to go to Quinton's ward, scared and confused

Anzani did as she was told. She froze at the door the minute she stepped inside Quinton's ward and found him awake, overwhelmed by many emotions she broke down and wept.

“I was so scared, I thought I lost you.”

“I'm sorry bambolwami...” he scoots to the side and asks Anzani to join him on the bed.

Anza takes off her shoes and gets in bed snuggling herself in his arms, he wraps his arms around her waist and holds her up so she lies on top of him.

“You feel lighter, did you lose weight or it's me?”

“Yes, I lost weight...I was worried sick about you.” She says hiding the real reason behind her weight loss.

“I hope you didn't stress my baby.” His hand is on her flat stomach caressing her, Anzani has her eyes shut enjoying the feeling.

“Why didn’t you tell me about the pregnancy?” she says after a few minutes of silence raising her head so she can gape into his eyes. He leans in and plants a soft kiss on her lips

“I didn’t know how you would react, I didn’t want you to freak out.” He's looking into her eyes while his fingers softly stroke her cheek

“I still don’t know how it happened because I was faithful to my pills.”

“It doesn’t matter, our miracle is here now and we are going to give him all our love and affection. Thank you thembalami, thank you so much for making me a father.”

Anzani smiles with tears in her eyes feeling emotional. Carrying a whole human inside of her is a scary thought but It feels amazing to be pregnant for such a stunning man, he pecks her lips and squeezes her in his arms.

“I love you so much mother of my baby and I promise I’ll take care of both you and our baby, I know we didn’t plan to have a baby so soon but I promise I will be there for you every step of the way. You’ll never have to do anything alone, nothing at all.”

“Thank you Mpilo wanga, gosh I missed you so much.”

“I'm here now and I’m not going anywhere.”

“Let me call mom and your friends, they were all worried about you.”

“You'll do that later for now I want to hold you in my arms.”

“Okay.”

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"It's good to see you back on your feet man." Given

"Yeah, it wasn't the same without you. Everyone at work sends their love, they contributed and bought you this" Kabelo says showing him a basket of fruits, bouquet of flowers and a clear plastic with sweets, chocolates, yogurt, and other sweet treats.

"Thank them on my behalf."

"I'm so glad you're awake, Anzani wasn't eating and I was scared something would happen to the baby. She hasn't eaten anything since the day you got shot" Nomonde says

Quinton shoots Anza a look. Nomonde sees this and immediately regrets ratting out her daughter in law, now there's tension lingering in the room and everyone can feel it.

"I'm so happy you are awake little brother, I will come and visit you again tomorrow." Given says

“Thank you so much for being there for my family in my absence you are a true brother.”

“That’s what brothers do.” The two first bump

“Yeah Q man I also need to dash and give you a chance to rest, I’ll come and see you tomorrow.” Kabelo

“Nawe Kabelo ngiyabonga for everything you did for Anzani in my absence, I’ll never forget it.”

“Don’t mention it.”

“Nathi Buhle masambe and give the lovebirds some privacy. Goodbye fana I’ll see you tomorrow” Nobuhle hugs her brother

“I’m so happy you’re awake  
bye I’ll see you again tomorrow.”

“See you, tomorrow baby,” Quinton says .

Nomonde, Nobuhle, Kabelo, and Given all leave the room leaving the lovebirds in awkward silence.

“Come here,” Quinton says gesturing for Anzani to join him on the bed. Anzani got out of bed and sat on the chair when everyone arrived.

She neatly packs all the goodies Given and Kabelo brought for Quinton inside his bedside drawer and joins him in bed.

“What's this I hear about you not eating and endangering our baby's life?” his voice is monotone but Anzani can hear the anger seeping into his voice.

“I did it for you, I was fasting for your life.”

“By endangering our baby's life?” he asks with a lifted brow

“Nothing happened, the baby is fine and so am I.”

“But what if you lost the baby?”

“But it didn’t happen, I wasn’t going to sit by and watch you die. I had to do something to save your life.”

“And I appreciate it but let it be the last time you do something like that while you’re pregnant, I love my baby and it would hurt me to lose him.”

“You are right, I’ll never do it again.”

“Thanks, and thank you for fighting for my life I didn’t know you loved me so much.”

“I love you so much baby, I would die if I lost you.”

“I love you too, more than you can imagine. I’m sorry for getting you pregnant out of wedlock but I promise I’ll do right by you and our baby.” A smile tugs on Anza's lips at the thought

“I cannot wait to be Mrs. Ndlovu.”

“And I cannot wait to call you my wife, can you imagine me at church standing in front greeting everyone throwing ‘a special greeting to my lovely wife over there in the mix just because I can, yo I cannot wait!” Anzani giggles

“You're so silly.”

"I think we should use this opportunity to have an ultrasound done, I want to see my baby."

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MPHO

Things haven't been the same between me and Kgahliso ever since he started questioning what really happened between Anza and me and I'm afraid he'll soon find the truth, I read on social media that Q got shot and now he's fighting for his life in hospital. I thought I would be happy when something of this sort happens but I'm not, I'm sad. Things might have changed between us but he was a good friend to me at some point in our lives and I would be very hurt if he dies.

I'm in the lounge watching cartoons with my daughter

"Mpho, I want juice."

I look at her and wonder what's going to happen the day she finds out I'm her father, will she reject me or will she love me as much as she does now?

"Okay baby I'll go get it for you."

I find Nancy bending over the cupboard seemingly searching for something, and her ass is sticking out of her leggings the

material is thin so I can see her white panties. I stand and feast my eyes on the perfection before me, she finds what she's looking for and gets startled when she turns and finds me drooling.

"You're such a pervert." She snickers seeing the tent in my pants and the expression on my face

"You've always loved this pervert," I say in a flirty way biting my lower lip

"Mpho I told you to leave me alone or I swear I'll tell everyone the truth about you."

"What happened to us, Nancy? We used to be so good together."

"That was before I realized how sick you are, you don't even feel ashamed of sleeping with both mother and daughter. I'm glad Anzani left you, Quinton is a man you'll never be."

I close the gap between us and put my hands on her neck, I squeeze blocking her windpipe. She tries to free herself from my grip, but her efforts are fruitless.

“Don’t you ever in your life compare me to Quinton again.”

She sinks to the floor, coughing and wheezing with teary eyes when I release my hold on her neck

“You’ll pay for this, I swear!”

“Mxm whatever.”

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NOKWAZI

“Praise the lord I was so worried about him. What would become of us without our brother? Who will take care of us?”

“Seriously Nokwazi? I can’t believe you right now.”

“What did I do?”

“So the only thing you were worried about when our brother was fighting for his life in hospital was what he does for you?”

“No, of course not but let’s be honest Nobuhle he does everything for us if he dies our lifestyle will change.”

“Well prepare yourself for change then because he’s expecting a child now, we can’t expect things to remain the same. His child will be his first priority now.”

“Wow, so Anzani is pregnant?”

“Yes.”

Couldn't she wait till we are financially independent before falling pregnant, they haven't even dated for a year what's the rush?

"Wow isn't it too soon for them to put a baby in the mix?"

"That's their business Nokwazi, you and I enter nowhere."

The way Buhle sucks up to Anzani one would swear she's a celebrity or something, Buhle has turned into her groupie.

"I know but she knew Quinton has responsibilities when she started dating him, why fall pregnant?"

"Aibo Nokwazi you talk as if she's not working, even if she was not working I still don't understand what your problem is. Our brother has never failed in providing for our needs even when he was still unemployed, he's working now so I don't think we will have a problem."

“You say that now but wait until he starts telling you he doesn’t have money every time you ask for money, infants are not dolls little sis they are expensive to maintain.”

How I loathe women like Anzani, women who fail to use contraceptives and think falling pregnant will keep a man. It’s obvious that she fell pregnant to trap my brother with a baby, I mean why else would she fall pregnant so soon? And to think I was starting to warm up to her and then she goes and does this

“Whatever Nokwazi, you can’t expect things to remain the same forever. Don’t squander all the money he gives you, save some and learn to be independent- be like other students, do promotions, get a part-time job, trade with forex, sell hair or model angazi just do something to make your own money. You are not a rich kid with wealthy parents, our brother has been taking care of us for years he needs a break. We can’t be selfish, the man has never enjoyed his money because of us allow him give his little family everything they deserve-he has done his part in raising us to what we are today.”

I knew she’d say this, I swear Quinton is like God to Buhle. He’s blameless and never does any wrong!

58

#58

Doctor Patel kept me in hospital for a few days after I woke up to keep a close eye on me because he still couldn't explain nor understand my miraculous recovery, but nothing changed in the last three days I am in perfect health and he had no choice but to discharge me. Anzani is the one who came to fetch me from the hospital, when we arrived home, I found that my mother prepared a feast and invited my friends over to celebrate my recovery. Anzani and I quickly refreshed and joined everyone at the table. The food was delicious as always, and the company even better. My heart is full, I have all my loved ones under one roof, what more could I ask for? The only person missing here is Nokwazi to complete the puzzle.

"It's good to have you back home man, we were all devastated without you, especially Anzani." Given says and takes a sip from his glass.

"Yeah, she was a mess." Says Kabelo echoing his sentiments

I turn my head and look at Anzani next to me, I then grab her hand and intertwine it with mine.

“God is faithful I still can’t believe that I’m in perfect health after what happened to me; I know I’ve said this before, but I feel the need to say it again. Given, my brother thank you so much for being there for my family in my absence and driving them around using your petrol without complaining. I will never forget what you did for me big brother.” I mean it from the bottom of my heart

“Don’t mention it, man, we are family.” I nod and take a glance at Kabelo beside him

“Kabelo, mfowethu thank you so much. I appreciate you, you’re a true friend.”

“As Given said, we are family.” He says raising his glass, I raise mine and click our glasses then shift my regard to my mother

“Nomonde, smomondiya sa babami.” Her cheeks turn rosy as she blushes, laughter cracks around the table “Thank you for being my pillar, for loving me unconditionally, and teaching me the ways of the Lord. I love you so much.”

“I love you too son.”

“Nobuhle sthandwa sam’ ngyakthanda nawe uyaz’. I hope my hospitalization didn’t interfere with your studies”

(Nobuhle my love, you know I love you.)

“I love you too big brother, I won’t lie it was difficult to focus on my studies while you were on the brink of death, but I managed through the grace of God.”

“I’m glad nana.”

“Thembalam’ thank you so much for fighting for my life even though you risked our baby’s life in the process.” Everyone twitters including her “Izandla zindlula ikhanda maMunyai, ngiyabonga ngothando lwakho you came into my life when I

had nothing when I couldn't even afford to take care of you as you deserve. You loved me when I felt unworthy of your love and restored my pride as a man, I knew I wanted to make you my wife the moment I laid my eyes on you for the first time, and being in a relationship with you only confirmed it. You are the one for me, my missing rib and I don't have to date you for years to know that I want to spend the rest of my life with you. My life is wonderful because you are with me, you make me happy even when I feel sad and low. Your smile lightens up my life and all the dullness fades away, your love gives me hope and the strength to wake up every morning and fight for a better future for us and our little miracle. Not even death can do away with my love for you; I yearn to spend the rest of my days with you. I crave to grow old and grey with you by my side, make me the happiest man in the world and agree to be my wife." She looks at me with teary eyes

(Thank you so much, thank you for your love)

"Of course, I'll marry you silly but where's the ring? and you're supposed to kneel Mpilo!" Everyone laughs.

"So unromantic brother! Angeke guqa" Nobuhle says pulling me up causing all of us to laugh.

I push the chair to the side and go down on my knees

“I had the ring in my pocket the day I got shot but I must’ve lost it because I didn’t find it with the rest of my things, I wanted to wait until I buy another one but now feels like the perfect moment to ask you to marry me. In the presence of everyone, my friends and family, I wish someone from your family was here to share this moment with us but ke ngiyakthanda ntombi yo mvenda ngifuna ukuphila impilo yami nawe. Please do me the honor of being my wife”

(I love you Venda girl and I want to spend my life with you)

“I would love nothing more” I jolt up and put my hand on her nape pulling her in for a smooch, our lips fuse and communicate what's in our hearts we get lost in the kiss and forget about everyone around us. We only stop kissing when my mom complains eliciting laughter from the three bambinos. Anzani hides her face in her hands feeling shy

“Congratulations my kids, it’s nice to see a young couple in love,” Mom says giving each of us a hug

“Thanks, mom.”

“Congratulations brother, she’s a good one.” Given says with a broad smile on his face

“I’m so happy for you man I know how much you love her, congratulations to you too.” Kabelo

Buhle flings to Anzani's arms

“I'm so pleased you said yes, now you’ll be my sister forever. I love you sis'Anzani.”

“I love you too doll.”

It warms my heart to see the people I love the most getting along, Buhle is a bit reserved compared to Nokwazi and takes a while before she lets anyone in so I never expected her to be so

friendly and welcoming with Anzani. I expected that from Nokwazi not her

“I got worried as you grew closer to 30 without anyone woman in your life, like any mother I have always wanted you to meet someone who will love you for who you are and not what you have. You are selfless, and tend to care more about others than you do yourself and a person like you can easily be taken advantage of. I’m so happy for you my son, Anzani is a gem...now I can die in peace knowing my son is well taken care of.” Her eyes are glowing with tears, I know how much this means to her. She has always desired this for me, for me to find true love.

“Thank you, mom, but stop talking about death because you’re not going anywhere, at least not so soon you’ll live long enough to meet my great-grandchildren.”

“He’s right mom, stop talking about death. I still need to make my own money and pamper you.” Buhle adds

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I'm with mom and Nobuhle in the lounge watching a movie, the guys left two hours ago. Anzani is in the bedroom she said she was tired and wanted to take a nap but I know it's more than that. I don't know what's going on but something is bothering her even though she tries to hide it, but I know her and can see right through her façade.

"Mom, Nobuhle I'm heading to bed goodnight."

"Night." They mumble in unison, their response is quick while their attention is fixed on the screen. They don't spare a single glance in my direction, so much for having missed me!

I take slow strides to the main bedroom and find Anzani in bed, she's awake and pressing on her phone. I strip naked, get under the covers, and pull her body towards mine.

"Talk to me, what's going on?" She sets her phone down but doesn't reply

"I can see that something is bothering you, talk to me

## Advertisement

my love,” I say and trail wet kisses on her shoulder blade. She turns over to face me, she gapes at me for a few seconds as if contemplating whether or not to tell me then a heavy sigh breezes from her lips

“My mom called me a few days ago and let out the reason she desperately wanted me to get married to Mulalo, it was because she owed him money.” To say I’m shocked would be putting it lightly

“How much?”

“R200 000, she told me that she borrowed a sum slightly lower than that from the bank to start a business and mortgaged our house as to how the bank agreed to give her that much still baffles me. I assume that she didn’t use the money to start the business because she claims not to know what she did with the money, since she couldn’t pay her monthly installments to the bank, her debt increased and the bank wanted to repossess our home.”

“Sounds hectic.”

“As an attempt to save our home she sought out Mulalo for help, he agreed to settle her debt in exchange for getting married to me. I was in my final year when they made this deal I don’t know why he waited so long before making an effort to get close to me, but unfortunately for him, it was too late when he tried to woo me, I was already madly in love with you so I refused despite the emotional blackmail from mommy dearest.”

“He didn’t take kindly to being rejected and wanted to murder you to get you out of his way, mom gave up our home and moved in with my aunt in Ratanda and begged him to leave us alone. She suspects Mulalo is the one behind your shooting, though he denied it when my mother confronted him. I also think he’s the one behind your attack. I’m more disappointed than hurt, I never thought my mother would be capable of doing something like this, she basically sold me to settle her debt...she may have given up our home and moved in with my aunt to settle the debt, but it doesn’t change the fact she made a deal with the devil and you could’ve died because of her selfishness. My baby wouldn’t know his father. In the same breath, I’m hurt, angry, and feel responsible for what happened

to you because you wouldn't have got shot if you weren't linked to me, I don't think I will ever forgive my mother for this." I plant a peck on her forehead and squeeze her in my arms

"I understand how you feel, but she's your mother thembalam'. No one is perfect, we all make mistakes and do things that hurt the people we love from time to time but it's never intentional. You're a born-again Christian I don't have to remind you what the bible says about forgiveness."

"But you could've died Mpilente!"

"I know but I'm alive, your mother realized her mistake and gave up her house to keep Mulalo away from us. She's not responsible for what Mulalo did, yes, she made a mistake by making a deal with him, but she rectified it by giving up her home which I'm sure was a huge sacrifice on her part but she did it so you can be happy. You can't crucify your mom for Mulalo's sins, everyone needs to be accountable for their actions."

“But my mother is the one who brought Mulalo into our lives.”

“I know but she’s still your mother, the only mother you will ever have. She made a mistake, and she regrets it that’s why she told you about it. She could have chosen to keep quiet, but she didn’t, I’m not angry at her so you have no reason to be angry with her.”

“You’re not? But why not? You almost died” she sounds shocked

“The woman gave birth to you and raised you into this gorgeous woman you are today, she has her fair share of mistakes but she’s a good mother. You are the phenomenal woman you are today because of the values and principles she brought you up with. I can never be angry at her because she raised a wife for me, it’s thanks to her that you’re here, in my arms and carrying my child today and for that, I will forever respect her.”

“You’re too good to be true Mpilo, I’m in love with your heart. I was scared you would want nothing to do with me after learning the truth” She says as a tear rolls down her cheek

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NARRATED

The ceremony was a success, it’s a done deal Livhuwani accepted her calling. There’s no going back, she’s leaving for initiation school soon to complete her training. Contrary to popular belief one doesn’t choose where they want to initiate, Livhu's ancestors are the ones who choose for her, it was in her dreams that she saw the house of the maine who will initiate her. The maine was also expecting her by the time she reached out to her. She’s still at Lufuno’s house, the maine is busy with preparations to receive her. She’ll complete her initiation in Tsakane under Gogo Mahlalentambeni's guidance.

There are various things she needs to take with her to the initiation, Gogo wrote her a list and Anzadakalo took it upon herself to buy everything on the list. She feels it’s the least she

can do for her sister, she knows how difficult it was for her to agree to do this. She's doing it for them and not herself.

"It's been days and my daughter hasn't spoken to me; do you think she meant what she said the last time we spoke?"

"No, of course not. Anzani is kindhearted like you mukomana, I know she'll come around." Anzadakalo

"Anzadakalo is right mukomana, Anzani is still angry and shocked, but I know she'll come around. "Lufuno

"I pray it happens before I start with my initiation, I don't want to go there without informing her."

"She'll come around, have faith." Lufuno

"I don't know how I'm going to do this, the last thing I want is to be stuck in Tsakane for years because my family cannot afford to pay the money Gogo wants to release me."

“Don’t worry, we will never let that happen. My husband and I will do everything in our power to make sure you come back home.” Anzadakalo

“I will also help and I’m sure Anzani will also help.” Lufuno

“Thank you so much, this means a lot to me. I don’t know what’s ahead of me but I’m ready to do this if it will help our family.” She says and embraces her little sisters

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“Makhado didn’t you say the ceremony was successful!”  
Bellows Mulalo budging inside his maine’s hut.

The hut oozes a bone-chilling aura, it is stacked with animal skeletons, countless bottles of muti, and red and black creepy markings on the wall. Has snakeskin hanging on the walls and the dolls we often see in Nigerian movies being used to practice voodoo. If it was any other day he’d be scared to be inside

here, but not today he's angry and thirsty for answers. How is Quinton still alive after everything he had to do in that Lake?

"It was successful otherwise you wouldn't be standing next to me right now, coming back alive from Vondo forest is not a joke." He answers with his head bowed mixing herbs inside a calabash

"Then why is that boy still alive? My guy told me he's alive and was discharged from the hospital."

"Be patient."

"No, don't tell me that! I paid you a lot of money for that guy to be reunited with his ancestors."

"Patience Mulalo, I've never failed you before so you have no reason to doubt me. That boy will die"

"But-"

“But nothing and this better be the last time you walk inside here standing upright, with your shoes on, and think you can raise your voice at me, the next time you do this you’ll lose your manhood.” He says raising his head and looking at him with one eye, the other one looks white-no sign of the pupil and iris only the sclera (The white part of the eye) is visible and as always it's dripping some strange liquid, yes liquid because we can't call whatever it is tears.

“I’m sorry,” Mulalo says with his head bowed, shaking in his boots

“Now leave!” He bolts out of the small hut with his heart beating out of his chest. What did Makhado mean by him losing his manhood?

#59

“She regrets her actions, please call her and talk to her.”

“I will, Mpilo spoke some sense into me last night, and I realized my mistakes.”

“Oh, thank God for Quinton, please call my mmemuhulu she’s anxiously waiting for your call. Call her and free her from the guilt she’s carrying.”

(Aunt)

“I will phone her after this call I promise.”

“Good then.”

“Quinton proposed last night.” I shift the phone from my ear as her screams threaten to burst my eardrum

“Wow, I’m so happy for you muzwala please send me a picture of your ring.”

(Cousin)

“Want to know the funny part? I don’t have a ring, he bought it but it got lost when he got shot. He’s yet to buy me another one. He says yesterday felt like the perfect time to propose so he had to do it with or without a ring.”

“Ncoah man I’m so happy for you, Q is a good man. He’ll take good care of you and your baby.”

“I know...I want your advice on something.”

“Sure, what’s up?”

“Dakalo you know Quinton is the breadwinner in his family right?”

“Yeah.”

“I have no problem with that, it’s what I love the most about him in fact. He’s responsible and that tells me he will take care of me no matter what.”

“So, what’s the problem?”

“His little sister, Nokwazi. Yo, that girl is always asking for money, like there’s always something with her and Q always gives her whenever she wants money because he doesn’t want her to end up dating old men for money. He deprives himself of so many things just so that his family can have everything they need, my boyfriend doesn’t even have enough clothes Dakalo and that girl doesn't see that as she’s forever asking for money. He saves a portion of his salary for his mother’s house, sends money home, buys food for us, pays rent, sends Nokwazi money, and still insists on giving me money even when I refuse, and then Nokwazi will come up with excuses to get money from him throughout the month- there's always something with her. I just don’t get it because she’s funded by NSFAS and it pays her tuition, accommodation, books, and her food allowance I don’t get why she asks for so much money.”

“What does she say when she asks?”

“The last time she said she wanted a Peruvian lace wig then the other time she wanted money to buy sissy boy skinny jeans, then it was Timberland sneakers or she'll tell him she wants to buy textbooks for school and her book allowance has run out. She always wants expensive things like she's from a wealthy family and Q has a thing of wanting to give his siblings everything he never had growing up but ai angeke it's too much. She's taking advantage of Mpilo, and I don't know what to say or how to say it without coming across as someone who has a problem with him doing things for his siblings because I don't, I also take care of Lutendo so I know exactly how he feels but Nokwazi is overdoing it.”

“I hear you; your concerns are valid. You're marrying this guy; his money will be yours and this can't go on forever. There's nothing wrong with providing for his sisters but he's not their father at the end of the day, they need to give him a break so he can spend some of the money he works for on himself and enjoy the benefits of being employed.”

“Exactly, Quinton hasn’t even bought himself a new phone since he started working. He always thinks about others and puts himself last, he does everything with a pure heart ....he does everything from the bottom of his heart and with no complaints whatsoever, he is happy when his mother and siblings are happy, at least his mom and Buhle are not selfish they are considerate unfortunately I can’t say the same about Nokwazi.”

“No Anzani you need to talk to him because the last thing you want is to be accused of refusing with her brother’s money when the two of you are married, you know how in-laws are. They expect things to remain the same even when the person now has a family of his own or you’ll be accused of spending his money like it’s not your right, who should spend his money if not you?”

“You’re right, we are getting married soon and what’s his will be mine and vice versa. He’s transparent and sometimes asks me to send her the money and that’s how I picked up that Nokwazi is overdoing it.”

“You see, I’m sure it rubs her the wrong way that she gets the money from you.”

“Ai she’ll have to be strong, Quinton is her brother, not her boyfriend. He’s my man, she should stop acting like he’s her boyfriend.”

“Chesa girl! But on a serious note, you need to talk to him, he’s not a difficult person I’m sure he will understand.”

“Thanks, muzwala I didn’t know how to go about it.”

(Cousin)

“Glad I could help, now call my aunt and tell her you have forgiven her please.” I chuckle

“Okay, bye.”

“Bye.” I hang up and dial my mother’s number.

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QUINTON

“So, this Mulalo guy is the one who shot you?” Given

We are sitting in his car which is parked outside my building, he showed up to check on me on his way back from work and I used this opportunity to talk to him. I needed privacy to do so, so we came to the car, and I narrated everything Anzani told me last night.

“It looks that way or maybe he hired someone else to do it.”

“Hmm, if that’s true then your life is in danger. He’ll want to come back and finish what he started the moment he finds out you’re alive, we need to tell the police so they can apprehend this guy.”

“I will do so even though I don’t think it’ll make any difference because the law works with evidence, if we can’t prove that he’s the one behind the attack then he won’t be arrested.”

“Yeah, I hear you but it’s worth giving a try. He might not get arrested now but he’ll be the first suspect should anything happen to you”

“You’re right, maybe he won’t attempt anything when he knows the police are onto him.”

“Yes, don’t stop praying brother it looks like more storms are coming your way. It seems many people are against what you and Anzani share so you need to be strong in prayer and the Lord will raise the standard against your enemies, strong walls shake but they never collapse you’ll be fine as long as you have God on your side. Stay rooted in prayer because God is the only friend that sticks closer than a brother”

This is exactly why I wanted to talk to him about this, he knows exactly what to say and when to say it. I’m also human and

sometimes I need someone to be there for me and have my back like I always have everyone's back

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I know I have Anzani and my family but sometimes I can't be bare with them because I know how much they can take. Given is the right person to talk to, I have decided to let go of my insecurities and give our friendship/brotherhood a fair chance and not let it be tainted by past betrayals.

"Thank you so much brother, I will never stop praying."

"Good the-." My phone rings cutting him short, I'm surprised when I see Kgahliso's name on my screen

"Hi."

"You knew didn't you." That's the first thing he says, no pleasantries whatsoever

"What are you talking about?"

“Mpho and his mom?” I clear my throat not sure how to answer

“Come on Q, I know the truth Nancy sent me a message and told me everything.”

“Everything?”

“Mpho and his mother are sleeping together.”

“Oh that, yes I knew.”

“Wow! I can’t believe this, what kind of person is Mpho? Did you also know that he sleeps with both mother and daughter?”  
What?

“No, that’s news to me.”

“Well Nancy confessed everything to me and Gift last night, I can’t believe you and Anzani kept quiet about this and didn’t tell us anything. We have been fools all along taking Mpho’s side and even caused animosity for you in the church while Mpho is the actual villain in this story, I feel terrible and like the world’s biggest fool.” I don’t know what to say

“I’m sorry man, I should’ve listened to your side of your story.”  
He says apologetically

“It’s okay K, I have forgotten about that.”

“Wow, I’m so disgusted with Mpho. What kind of person sleeps with his family members? I know they are not biologically related but still man!”

“I don’t know what to say, Mpho is your friend I think you should have this conversation with him.”

“I know we did you wrong, but can’t we put all of that behind us man? we were manipulated but we are wiser now and it’ll

never happen again. Please give our friendship another chance, please man.” I sigh looking at Given who’s listening to the conversation silently

“I’m sorry man but I don’t think we can continue being friends, I have nothing against you though but I don’t think we can be friends again, but I’ll always be here if you need me.”

“I understand, goodbye man.”

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MPHO

Like every other Sunday when I’m in Ratanda my family and I went to church to worship with fellow Christians and give our savior Jesus all the praise for all the good he has done in our lives, at first, I thought I was imagining things, but I knew I wasn’t seeing things when the pastor summoned my mother, Nancy and I to a meeting after the service. All the church elders and deacons were also in the meeting and from their

reprehensible looks whenever they look at us, I instantly had an idea what the meeting might be about and my suspicion was correct the meeting is about my affair with my mother, damn you, Nancy! I know she's the one who spilled the beans

"I called you here today because it has come to our attention that mother and son are sleeping together." The pastor says in a low voice visibly disappointed

"What?" My mother says feigning confusion

"Don't even think of denying it Selinah, Nancy told us everything. We know he's not your biological son and that Nompumelelo is his daughter." Says sis Ivy wearing a grimace on her face

My mother shoots Nancy a look, she immediately looks down and plays with her fingers

“No, you don’t get to be an immoral woman and want to intimidate the child for telling the truth.” Ivy again, I swear this woman is out to get us.

“Ivy please give me a chance to speak.” The pastor reprimands

“I’m sorry pastor but I’m disgusted by this woman and her so-called son, because of them our ministry lost Quinton who had so much potential. That boy is anointed and called to serve on the alter.”

“I understand but give them a chance to talk.” He looks at my mother “Selinah what do you have to say for yourself?”

“Nancy is lying pastor I don’t know why she would make up such a big lie about my son and me but it’s not true, Mpho is like my own son I would never sleep with him.” The way she said it even I almost fell for it, yeah that’s how convincing she was.

The pastor nods thoughtfully while everyone else shakes their heads in disbelief, Sis Ivy even claps her hands ya neh she's such a dramatic woman. You'd swear she's perfect and without blemish the way she's acting right now; you don't see us making a fuss about her smoking snuff!

"Mpho what do you have to say?"

"I agree with my mother pastor, Nancy is lying. I suspect it's because I rejected her when she made advances at me, she wanted me and her to date but I rejected her and told her I see her as nothing more than just a sister because that is what she is. We may not be related biologically but she's my sister through and through" I say putting up my best performance.

"Wow! Nina amanga niwafundele stru nasi, you're wasting your talent you should be a lawyer or an actor because you surely can act" you already know who it is.

"Okay then, Nancy show them the pictures." The pastor says leaning his back on his seat defeated

Mortification wraps itself around me like a blanket when I see intimate pictures of myself and my mother, I choke on my saliva and cough violently not knowing where to look. I feel stripped naked, I wonder why Nancy would do this to her mother. When did she even take these pictures?

“Cat got your tongue?” One of the deacons asks

“It’s not what it looks like Mfundisi I can explain.” Her voice is low, I know my mother she’s a proud woman who speaks boldly and loudly her sudden humbleness and gentleness are a shocker to me.

“There’s nothing to explain Selinah, I gave you a chance to explain but you chose to lie to me. I’m so disappointed in you, in myself as the leader of this church for not being able to see through you. I’m ashamed that I failed to have the spirit of discernment when it came to you and your son, I ordained you as a deacon and trusted you with a leadership role in the church because I thought you were full of the holy spirit and wisdom to lead the church to Christ. But how can you lead others to the light when you’re in the darkness, living in sin, comfortably so if I may add? I’m ashamed of myself because I

should have seen through you.” The pastor mutters despair seeping into his voice

“You’re the only one who was fooled by her pastor, we were all equally fooled. We thought she’s a good woman who loves the lord, considering how quick she was to judge others we were convinced that she’s perfect, but we were all mistaken.” Sis Ivy says sarcastically

“You are demoted from your position as deacon of this church, I strongly advise you to atone for your sins and give your lives to Christ while you still have time. It’s people like you who give Christianity a bad name, you are blocking others from coming to God because they see what you’re doing and discern that there’s no difference between you and them.” He says with a quiver in his voice

“Mpho you will also not be allowed to participate in the church program, I won’t stop anyone from coming to church because Jesus didn’t come for the perfect he came for sinners, you can come but you will not minister to people.”

“We wouldn’t mind even if they left the church, we don’t need people like them in our church. They will ruin our reputation.”

“Ivy! Please stop.”

“I’m sorry mfundisi.”

“That’s all meeting adjourned.” We all disperse in different directions

“Don’t even think of coming back to my house, I’ll pack your bags and put them outside my gate,” Mom says to Nancy

#60

NARRATED

Thando fought the urge to hop inside his car and drive to Ratanda to look for her till he couldn't, he knows this is wrong, but he can't help himself. He can't control how he feels, she's all he thinks about lately and sometimes he even dreams about her. He doesn't know what it is yet, but he feels something for her, and he can no longer ignore it or sweep it under the rug and pretend it doesn't exist. He thought he would forget about her after a few days of not seeing her but that was just wishful thinking, the more days pass the more the need to lay eyes on her again intensifies. He ended up giving in and asking his cousin about her and fortunately they attend the same school, he was quite surprised when he learned that Nobuhle is in matric. He thought of her as a kid, he didn't expect her to be older than 15 well not that it makes much of a difference because he wasn't further from the truth. She's 16 years old, she is nothing but a child in the eyes of the law.

He's leaning against his car when he catches a glimpse of her walking out of the school gate, he momentarily stops breathing

as he gets hypnotized by her magnificence. She's wearing a white shirt, a navy-blue pleated skirt, and a matric pullover with a blazer on top, she has paired her outfit with Mexican silver stockings and navy-blue green cross three-quarter heels. Her lips stretch into a big smile as she chats with her companion revealing her shallow dimples, her caramel skin glows like gold under the slightly pungent sun he stares in admiration he can almost swear her beauty has multiplied from the last time they met.

"Nobuhle!" He calls out

She stops in her tracks and casts her eyes to the direction where the voice emerged from, her heart skips a beat when her eyes meet his. She must be dreaming; he can't possibly be here. She thought she would never see him again.

"Do you know him?" Her companion asks snapping her out of her reverie

"Not really." She murmurs

“Wow, he’s hot! He looks like Jussie Smollet.”

“Huh?” Her gaze is still locked on the gentleman who’s drifting towards them.

“Jamal from Empire.”

“Hi.” He’s standing a few feet from her, towering over her in his tall glory.

“I should go... I’ll see you tomorrow, bye.” The friend says before scurrying away, but the duo is so lost in each other’s eyes that they don’t heed her.

“What are you doing here?” Buhle says finally regaining her ability to speak.

“I’m here to see you.”

“For what? we are not friends.”

“I know, but I needed to see you again.”

“Awuswabi mara? Ungathi uguge ungaka ulibe ulandelana nengane.”

(Are you not ashamed? Old are you are you're busy chasing after a kid.)

He chortles

“Wow! Ngigugile mina? So uno tatumkhulu olingana nami?”

(Am I old? Is your grandfather who is my age)?

“Yes.” She says boldly staring into his eyes without so much as batting an eyelash. A hearty laugh bubbles from his throat

“I'm glad I didn't make a mistake by smearing chicken poop on the bite marks you left on my back the other day, it's a pity you didn't let me finish what I wanted to say. I came here to see if your teeth have started rotting.”

“What?” the look on her face throws him into a fit of laughter

“So awuhloniphi nje kukho okoyikayo. I’m joking I wouldn’t do that, not to you at least.”

“Was I lying? Are you not old?” the attitude is back

“No, I’m not.”

“How old are you?” he stares at her for a moment before replying

“I’m 23.”

“You see, you’re old. You’re almost my brother’s age.”

“Let’s go to my car I will drive you home.” He digresses

“I didn’t say I need a ride; I want to walk and stretch my legs.”

“I wasn’t asking.”

“I’m not getting inside your car.”

“I see, you like it when I carry you over my shoulder huh?” He says with a lopsided smile rubbing the stubble on his chin

“You wouldn’t dare.”

“Try me.” They hold five seconds staring contest before Buhle gives in and leads the way to his car which is parked on the other side of the road

“Just so you know I’m only doing this because I’m avoiding drawing attention to myself.” She declares climbing inside the passenger seat, he only chuckles in response. After closing her door, he rounds the car to the driver's seat and starts the ignition joining the main road.

“You’re more beautiful when you’re not arguing with me.” He says after a few minutes of driving in silence. She looks away in an attempt to hide her smile from him

“I want to get to know you better Hlehle.”

Buhle looks at him and Mrs. Hlongwane’s speech rings in her ears like a broken record

“I can’t, I need to focus on my studies.”

“I don’t want to derail you from your studies, I know you’re in matric and you need to work harder than ever to pass well. I know you have dreams, and I’m not here to destroy or derail them. I only want a chance to get to know you better, on your terms of course. We can be friends for as long as you want, I know you’re still young and a relationship is probably the last thing on your mind so we can be friends until you’re ready.”

“What if I’ll be ready when I’m 21?”

“Then we’ll remain friends until then, I will never force you to do anything you’re not comfortable with.”

“Says someone who just forced me to get inside his car.” He laughs

“That’s different.”

“Yeah right!”

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ANZANI

Mpho's affair with his mother is everywhere, everyone is talking about it and saying all sorts of things about them. I know I shouldn't feel sorry for him but I do I can imagine how he must feel right now even though he brought this to himself but

I can never rejoice over someone else's misery that's just not who I am and I won't start now.

"It's so good to see you all happy and glowing." My boss whom I recently learned her name is Buhlebendalo says walking inside my office, she comes by frequently.

Today she doesn't look sophisticated like she normally does, she looks simple but beautiful nonetheless. She's draped in a one-shoulder tiger print thigh-split dress that accentuates her small waist, round butt, and curves, it sticks to her body like her second skin and shows off her beautiful thick legs. On her feet, she's wearing white faux pearl décor ruched slides showing off her beautiful, manicured toes. She's rocking her big healthy afro with big hoop earrings with no makeup on. She's so sexy I couldn't believe it when she told me that she's a mother of three.

"What can I say? For the first time in what feels like forever, God heard my cries and brought back my boyfriend to me." She pulls a chair and takes a seat crossing her legs

“God always hears and listens to our prayers but because he doesn’t often answer when we want him to we think he doesn’t answer our prayers but trust me he does.”

“Preach sister!” She chuckles

“I’m glad to see you smiling again, let me treat you to lunch.”

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me, allow me to spoil you. You deserve a break.”

“Wow, I won’t say no to that.”

“I’m glad, pack up so we can leave.” I check the time on my computer

“As in now? It’s only 10 am.”

“Yeah now, we’ll start at the Spa. You’ve been through a lot these past few weeks you deserve to be pampered, a hot stone massage will do.” Jizos!

“Wow! I’m not dreaming right?” She throws her head back laughing

“No, you’re not. Hurry up, I’ll wait for you in my car.”

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We are at the Life Day Spa in Fourways, I swear I feel like one of the rich and famous the place gives out chic, upmarket, elegant, and luxurious vibes. The staff is welcoming and friendly, we were served snacks and drinks when we walked in and then we went to the changing rooms and changed into our gowns now we are sitting side by side receiving foot massage while enjoying a glass of champagne non-alcoholic of course

I swear this is the life I was destined to live.

“So how is Quinton?”

“He’s fine, he is recovering very well.”

“That’s good hey.”

“Can you believe he proposed without a ring? But I swear it was the sweetest thing ever, I’m so in love with him and I can’t wait to confess my love for him in front of God and the church.”

“Ncoah, your love is beautiful bathong I hope I’ll be invited to your wedding.”

“Of course, you will.”

After the foot massage, we took off our gowns and remained in our underwear, and got in the Sonar, I have always wanted to do this it always looks so classy on TV. After the sonar came to the massage, we stripped naked and got a full-body hot stone massage I didn’t know how much I needed it until the masseuse started working her magic on my body. I thoroughly enjoyed the massage I even dozed off during the session, I yearn to do it

again but with my fiancé by my side, oh my gosh this whole being engaged thing still feels surreal.

“Let’s go get our meni and pedi’s done,” Ndalo says after the massage

“I’m so bringing Mpilo here, that man is always thinking about others and never does anything for himself. He needs this, he deserves it.”

“So sweet, you really love him ne?”

“With all of my heart.”

“Ncoah so cute, you remind me of my husband and I.... we used to be so in love with each other.” There’s a glimmer of sadness in her tone

“Want to talk about it?” I say holding her hand. She shakes her head and forces a smile

“No, today it’s your day. I don’t want to taint it with my misery, so which shape and color will you go for?”

“Nude, I’m not sure about the shape.”

“Good choice nude will look good on you.” I feel bad for her, she’s trying so hard to act like whatever that is going on between her and her husband doesn’t bother her but now that I look closely, I can see the gloom resting in her eyes.

I go for nude coffin-shaped nails tinted with Pestel colors and plain nude on my toes, while she goes for ombre nails. Then she coerces me to do microblading- the procedure is irritating and uncomfortable, but the pain isn’t as bad as I assumed it would be, and the results are worth the pain. I look and feel way better than I did when we came here, we drive to Fireroom sushi & Grill for our late lunch.

“Relax sushi isn’t that bad.” I can’t believe I allowed her to convince me to order sushi, I should have stuck to what I know- hake and chips.

“I hope I won’t regret it.” As if on queue the waiter makes his way to our table with our order.

“Thank you.” She says looking at him “Try it.” we ordered a seafood platter.

I take one prawn and put it in my mouth, wow it’s so delicious it tastes like hake okay maybe better but you get the picture. I look at the Sushi and pick up an oyster causing her to giggle

“Why are you avoiding the sushi so much?”

“It looks raw, I don’t want to throw up”

“Look at what I’m doing and copy me.” She takes chopsticks, picks a sushi roll, and dips the roll in soy sauce before putting it inside her mouth and chewing like it’s the tastiest thing in the world.

“Try it.”

I do what she did but I mix the soy sauce with wasabi and put the roll in my mouth and slowly chew, Lord it's so divine I immediately go for the second roll causing her to laugh.

Sushi might just be my new favorite thing to eat, Quinton needs to try it I know he'll love it.

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QUINTON

It was good to have my family with us, but they couldn't stay with us forever, our house in Ratanda can't remain vacant otherwise criminals will take advantage. Mom and Buhle left for Ratanda on Sunday afternoon, I'll miss them but I'm glad Anzani and I finally have the apartment all to ourselves. The doctor booked me off for two weeks so I'm home alone during the day. Anzani was furious the other day when she found me standing behind the stove cooking when she came back from

work, she expects me to sit idle the whole day and stuff my face with food just because I was shot haibo I can't do that mina I need to keep busy or else I'll go crazy.

It's after 6 in the evening when the door creaks open and my lady walks in carrying shopping bags in her hands, her face looks different, but I can't put my finger on what's different about her. I infer she had a good day judging by the big smile on her face.

"Baby!"

"Thembalam'."

"Tell me you see it, the difference on my face." So, I was right, there's something different.

"I don't know but you look beautiful," I say after studying her face for a minute or so

“Aa Mpilo you need to be more observant.” I jolt up from the couch and try to take the shopping bags from her, but she refuses, okay!

“I bought take away I hope you didn’t cook.” She says fixing the takeaway bag on the countertop

“I didn’t.”

“Good then stay where you are, don’t move I’ll be back.” She says with a naughty glee on her face, I wonder. I retreat to the couch and watch football while waiting for her.

After a while the bedroom door opens, then she comes out wearing a dusty pink long satin robe with lace sleeves and black pencil heels.

“Are you ready?” She says and immediately turns around giving me her back, the back is lacy like the sleeves. Everything is out in the open including her sexy butt, leaving nothing to the imagination.

“Fuck!” I exclaim feeling my member get excited and rising to the occasion.

She struts towards me and puts her heel on the armrest and seductively takes off her gown while simultaneously shaking her sexy hips, my cock twitches in my pants as I stare at her beautiful body. She’s stark-naked underneath the gown and her perky tits and shaved nuna are staring right at me begging me to assault them with my tongue and hands.

“Not so fast big guy.” She says pushing off my hands as I attempt to run them on her body

Her heels click on the tiled floor as she struts to the kitchen and holds on to the countertop arching her back so her cookie is out and ready to eat, I can see her clit and the big flaps I love so much. Damn, I could get used to this.

“Do I need to tell you what to do?”

I don't need to hear it twice; I strip and pace towards her and rub my stiff member on her wet slippery folds and circle the mushroom head around her tight hole.

"Please put it in, it's been long." She croaks out in a gruff whisper

I plunge my twitching member inside her warm hole inch by inch until I'm fully in, her p\*\*\*y walls clamp onto my pipe eliciting a loud groan to bubble from my throat. My heart beats rapidly it feels like I'm about to have a heart attack.

"Make sure you f\*\*k me fast and hard Mpilo, no mercy it's been a while I need this."

And like they say, the rest is history.

#61

I took Given's advice and opened a case against Mulalo, and like I suspected it'll be difficult if not impossible to put Mulalo behind bars for attempted murder without evidence. All we have now is Anzani's mother's suspicion which we can't prove true because we don't know if Mulalo sent someone to do his dirty work for him or if he did it himself. I can't even help the police build a case against him because I didn't see the person who shot me nor did anyone who was at the scene or so they claim, it would be better if someone was willing to say something. The sketch artist would draw a composite sketch of him and maybe someone from the public would recognize him and lead police to him, then he would be apprehended and brought in for questioning. Truthfully speaking chances of Mulalo going down for this are very low, it's another one of those 'he said, she said' type of cases that will be difficult to investigate and solve.

The chickens have come home to roost for Mpho and his 'Mother', their dirty secret is out, and everyone has an opinion. They are being dragged on every social media platform and in all this I feel sorry for Nompumelelo, she's innocent but this will affect her the most and some people choose to overlook this

and forget that she's nothing but a kid and drag her along with her parents calling her an abomination and many other despicable names but what I'm grateful for is that she's still young and not on social media, so she doesn't see all the bad things people say about her. I just hope people on the streets won't tell her about Mpho fathering her before her family does, because people can be so insensitive at times.

"Baby, can you talk?" Says Anzani sitting next to me on the couch

I set my phone down and give her my undivided attention

"Yes, what's going on?"

"I've been meaning to talk to you for days now, but I just don't know how to, I can't seem to find the right words."

"You know you can talk to me about anything." She takes a deep breath and begins talking

“It’s about Nokwazi.”

“What has she done this time?” I hope she didn’t start with her nonsense all over again, this time I won’t take it lightly

“No, she didn’t do anything to me.”

“Ok, I’m lost.”

“I don’t know how to say this without sounding otherwise but I think Nokwazi is taking advantage of you, of your kindness rather.”

“How so?”

“When I came into your life, I found you supporting your family members and I don’t expect that to change now that you and I are getting married, but I feel like Nokwazi is a bit inconsiderate. She doesn’t care about anyone but herself and what she wants. She has this irritating entitlement over you and your money, and I’m sorry to say but you’re the one who gave

her the power because you give her everything she asks for. You can love your siblings and give them everything they want without spoiling them, you have spoiled Nokwazi because you never put your foot down, you always give her everything she asks for even when you can see that she's lying to you, you always fall for her bluff." I have no comeback; I don't know what to say

"I made a promise to my dad on the day of his funeral, I looked at him lying inside the coffin and I vowed to make him proud by taking care of my mother and siblings. From that day onwards I promised myself that my mother and siblings would never lack for anything while I'm still alive, yes, my father wasn't wealthy, but he always did his utmost best to provide for our needs. I know if he was still alive, he'd give Nokwazi and Buhle everything and anything they want. Everything I do for them I do with a willing heart, and without hesitation because I promised my father that I would take care of them but I hear what you're saying, and I understand where you're coming from, I will try to be a bit strict with her from now onwards."

"Please tu, because if you don't, I'll have to do it on your behalf and be labeled the evil daughter-in-law who's coming between siblings. There's nothing wrong with taking care of your family,

it's admirable and shows what a great man you are but you can't keep putting yourself and your needs last. Mpilo when last did you buy yourself something or do something nice for yourself? Let's not mention expensive things, when last did you buy yourself socks or a pair of jeans? Nokwazi is being selfish and taking advantage of your good heart, she doesn't care about anyone but herself ...I don't want to say much because at the end of the day she's still your sister, but we are getting married Mpilo, and some things will need to change. You are not rich; you can't keep stretching yourself for people who don't appreciate it while neglecting your own needs. Sometimes you need to be selfish and put yourself first, above everyone else you should matter the most to you. You can't come last in your own life because best believe everyone else will put themselves first."

"I hear you sthandwasam'."

"I'm glad you do then."

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NOKWAZI

“So, what do you think?”

“I don’t know Nobuhle what do you want me to say? That guy probably wants sex from you, you can’t possibly think a hot guy like that wants something serious with you. Older guys are bad news learn from my experience with Gift.”

“But he didn’t say he wants a relationship, he said we can be friends till I’m ready.”

“And you’re supposedly the mature one! Don’t tell me you believe that, of course, he’s lying to you no guy will wait for you that long, in the great scheme of things who are you? Rihanna perhaps?”

“Wow Nokwazi, I can’t believe you’d say that.”

“Sorry but it’s the truth, you’re not special. Block and delete that guy he’s bad news, if you want to date try someone your

age and stay away from the big boys unless you want the same thing that happened to me to happen to you.”

“Ok, maybe you’re right. He can’t possibly be single; I’ll block and delete his number.”

“Good girl, save yourself the heartache or uzakhala ungashaywanga sesi.”

(You’ll cry without being beaten)

“Bye.”

“Sharp baby sis.”

Just then my bedroom door opens and Namhla walks in holding her phone

“Who’s this?” I ask looking at the picture she’s showing me

“Mike’s friend, he wants you. He saw your picture on my status and was enthralled by your beauty and sexy body.”

Mike is her boyfriend or should I say, sugar daddy. Namhla lives the life of a slay queen, her parents are unemployed and she’s NSFAS funded but she wears the most expensive brands and has all the types of weaves you can think of-short, long curly, straight, blonde, red, maroon, blue you name it. She changes her nails every two weeks and uses the latest iPhone; she’s living the dream shem.

“Isn’t he old?”

“Duh! Who cares? This guy is loaded.”

“I know but he’s probably my father’s age.”

“And so, what? he’s rich, loaded, and wants you baby girl he can have anyone he wants but he chose you girl.”

“But Namhla this man will expect me to kiss him and have sex with him.” the thought of it disgusts me

“So, you’d rather let your cookie be ravished by a boy your age for free or sleep with a mature man who barely lasts two minutes during the deed and get exceptionally compensated for it? Come on Nokwazi think about what that bastard Gift did to you. Love is so overrated, forget love and secure the bag. I don’t know about you, but I’d rather be chowed and have something to show for it than have someone sweat on top of me for free asoze sana! Toiletries are expensive.” Her phone pings with a message

“It’s him, he wants to know if you’re coming tonight or not.” She asks looking at me

“Tell him I’m coming,” I say and exhale

“Good choice my b\*tch!” she cheers “Come on I’ll borrow you something to wear for tonight you need to look sexy!”

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## ANZANI

I'm trying to get work done but I'm a bit distracted as my mind keeps going back to Mpilo's reaction when I told him about Nokwazi, he didn't disagree with what I said but from the look on his face I knew that what I told him didn't sit well with him, Quinton loves his siblings and would be willing to lay down his life for their sake and I completely understand that because I would do the same for my little brother but Nokwazi is doing too much and I don't regret expressing my opinion on the matter. It had to be said, I'm getting married to this man and I'm the one who'll have to endure Nokwazi's unrealistic demands, he needs to fix this before we get married. Yay, it hasn't sunk in that I'm getting married who would've thought after all the sh\*t I endured in relationships? This goes to show how much life can change in a matter of a few months

My mother left for initiation school two days ago, to talk to her I need to call Gogo Mahlalentabeni's phone because initiates are not allowed to have their phones for the duration of their

training. I'm glad I called before she left, and we patched things before she left. After how aunt Lufuno treated me when I lost my job, I don't trust her with Lutendo now that my mother is away, I will send her money for food monthly so my little brother doesn't get abused or mistreated.

Lutendo is such a bright little boy, and it saddens me that he had to stop his education abruptly because of our mother's poor decisions. It will be difficult for him to adjust to a new school next year especially because none of the schools in Ratanda offer Tshivenda as a home language, it'll be a big adjustment for him, and I hope it won't affect his academics.

I'm surprised to find the apartment dim on my way back from work, where could Mpilo be and why would he leave the door unlocked?

"Mpilo! Babe are you here!"

I take steady steps inside and switch on the lights, my lips stretch into an involuntary smile as I glance at the lounge area. Our apartment is an open plan so I can see the lounge and

kitchen from the front door, there's a polar fleece laid on the rug and scented candles around it, white and red flower petals scattered all over the lounge area, two cushions, two plates, and a bouquet of fresh flowers. There's also a tray lined with assorted fresh sliced fruits, an ice bucket with a bottle of wine, and two wine glasses next to it. I can't help but tear up when I see the seafood platter and the velvet cake in the center-my new favorites.

"Babe this is so beautiful, where are you please come out, I want to give you a kiss," I say walking further into the lounge

Ngyamthanda by Master KG and Mawhoo booms through the speakers before he emerges from the bedroom wearing a pair of blue skinny jeans that are ripped at the knees, a plain white tee that hugs his muscles just right, and black loafers he looks so sexy I'm forced to squeeze my legs as I feel my juices soaking my thong.

"Yena ngyamthanda muhle impela

Muhle impela

Yebo ngyamthamnda muhle impela

Aw muhle impela

Muhle impela

Sthandwasam siwela amafu svele syekude

Syobonana khona shlale sobabili njengamajuba s'hambe  
sijubalale

Asvele silahleke

Bengicela s'lahleke

We sthandwa ngicela s'lahleke

Ngicela S'lahleke Oh baby ngicela s'lahleke

Oh dali ngcela s'lahleke oh sthandwa ngicela s'lahleke

Uthando lam luningi

Lungihlula nangamazwi

Thatha nalu ucu lwakho ngisethandweni nawe

Thatha nalu ucu lwakho ngisethandweni nawe”

I'm grinning from ear to ear as he sings along and dances to the music, he doesn't move his body too much to the beat he dances like he doesn't want to more like he's swanking and the

expression on his face tells me that he knows that he's killing it. Who knew Mpilo could move his body like this? Now he doesn't look like brother Mpilo from church, he looks like some sexy and extremely bad guy from the club whose only mission is to chow cookie.

Or maybe I'm just too in love with the man and therefore inclined to see everything he does as sexy? Because wow my clit be throbbing right now! When the song ends, he plays another song by Master KG titled Dali Nguwe and pulls me to dance with him, my cheeks hurt from blushing I can't help it I've never seen this side of Mpilo. I'm taken because I never thought he had it in him.

"Angikaze ngalubon'olunjena

Olungshaya ngaphakathi dali nguwe

Uthokozis'eyam'inhliziyiyo

Angikaze ngalubon'olunjena

Olungshaya ngaphakathi dali nguwe

Uthokozis'eyam'inhliziyiyo

Ungijub' unjub' unjub' unjubale (Bale, Bale)

Angikaze ngalubon'olunjena

Olungshaya ngaphakathi dali nguwe

Uthokozis'eyam'inhliziyiyo

Angikaze ngalubon'olunjena

Olungshaya ngaphakathi dali nguwe

Uthokozis'eyam'inhliziyiyo

Njengo mphefumulo ngyak'dinga

Ungalahl'uthando lwethu

Bambelela gulo njengethemba

Webambo lwami

Njengo mphefumulo ngyak'dinga

Ungalahl'uthando lwethu

Bambelela gulo njengethemba

Webambo lwami

Ungijub' ungyub' ungyub' ungyubale (Bale)

Ungijub' ungyub' ungyub' ungyubale (Bale)

Ungijub' ungyub' ungyub' ungyubale (Bale)

Angikaze ngalubon'olunjena

Olungshaya ngaphakathi dali nguwe

Uthokozis'eyam'inhliziyiyo

Angikaze ngalubon'olunjena

Olungshaya ngaphakathi dali nguwe

Uthokozis'eyam'inhliziyiyo"

He takes out the small ring box from his pocket and goes down on his knees

"I've never had anyone love me like you do, I've always been the one protecting others so it'll take time for me to get used to

having someone who has my best interests at heart. Someone willing to protect me even from my own self, thank you for loving me and wanting the best for me. Look Thembalam' I can guarantee that there will be tough times ahead of us and maybe at some point one of us or maybe both of us will want out, but I can guarantee that if I don't ask you to be mine in every sense of the word I will regret it for the rest of my life because I know in my heart you're the only one for me Thembalam'. Ngishade mama ungenze indoda emadodeni."

(Marry me and make me a man amongst men.)

"Yes, baby I'll marry you." Don't ask me why I'm crying because I also don't know

He stands to his feet and slips the ring on my finger, and it fits perfectly

"Thank you baby it's so beautiful, I love it." I'm gushing over my beautiful ring

"I'm glad you love it, only the best for the love of my life. Come here." He says and pulls me in for a smooch.

"Let's eat." He says when we break the kiss

Between you and I, it's not food I'm hungry for.

#62

TWO WEEKS LATER

“You look exhausted.”-Namhla

She’s sitting on top of the kitchen counter guzzling a 440ml can of flying fish. It’s a few minutes after 12 midday and I just woke up, I’m hungry, tired, and hungover.

“That I am, last night was hectic.”

“I know right it was a lot of fun, but I think I went a bit too hard on the booze hangover is killing me.”

“Tell me about it, my head is throbbing yoh.”

I sit next to her and take one can from the five in front of her. I pop the lid, take a huge swig, and then release a loud burp as the cold beverage hits the spot.

“Ew!.... I was waiting for you to wake up so we can go and buy iskopo, I hope the taxi drivers didn't finish it.”

“Good idea, I'm famished yo I could eat a cow. Let me freshen up and change into clean clothes then we'll leave.”

“Before you go, tell me how it was?”

“What?”

“You know what, the deed with Dave?”

“Oh, that! We didn't do anything, we just cuddled while he told me about his marital problems. I don't think he wanted sex, he only wanted to vent.”

“Wow, let me get this straight he didn't touch you, but he still gave you all that money?”

“Yep.”

“You’ve met with him three times now and every time you two meet he gives you R1500 just for spending time with him, you’ve made R4500 in total for doing absolutely nothing? ...girl that’s someone’s monthly salary... how do you do it?” I giggle and take a sip of my liquor

“I know right, Dave is generous.”

“True, I hope you won’t disappoint him when the time comes for you to make it up to him.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t know about Dave, but Mike has some strange preferences when it comes to sex.”

“What preferences?”

“Like he’d ask me to ram him-you know like lick his buttole and put my tongue inside, paddle his toes, and sometimes he’d want to open my mouth wide for him to poop in my mouth.”

What the hell?

“What the fudge?”

“Don’t look so stupefied that’s a little price to pay for all he does for me, I just need you to prepare yourself in case Dave also has the same fantasies as his friend.”

“Well, I hope not because I don’t see myself doing any of those crazy things.” She giggles

“Okay girl If you say so,” she says with a shrug and something tells me when the time comes I won’t have the option to refuse, but I doubt Dave would want me to do any of those weird things. Well, I pray he doesn’t.

“So your fine brother is getting married?” I fight the urge to roll my eyes

“Yeah, he proposed and he plans to pay her Lobola soon.”

“You don’t look or sound happy for him”

“I honestly don’t care; I don’t like that girl I tried to force myself into liking her but ai kuyala angimuzwa tu.” She chuckles

“The look on your face when you speak about her says it all, ai shem you really don’t like her.”

“I don’t and she made it worse by falling pregnant.”

“How so?”

“Things will change now that she’s pregnant, Quinton won’t do everything he used to do for us because he’ll have his baby to

think about but it's whatever it's not like I need his money any way I have my own now."

"Yes bitch, that's why it's important not to waste your time on relationships that don't benefit you financially. With Dave by your side, you don't need to suck up to anyone"

"I concur!"

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ANZANI

"Is everything okay with our champ doctor?"-Quinton

My right hand is locked in his, our eyes are fixed on the monitor as my obstetrician moves the transducer on my belly listening to our baby's strong heartbeat.

"Champ?"

“Yes doctor, we are hoping for a boy.”

“Okay, everything looks perfect to me. I’m happy with the baby’s growth and general health, miss Munyai’s blood pressure is also at acceptable levels so yes sir everything is okay with your champ.”

“Thank you, doc, is it too early to determine the baby’s gender?” I ask

“No, you’re a little over 13 weeks. 11 weeks is the earliest sex determination carried out with an ultrasound. Would you like me to check the baby’s gender?”

“Yes please, doc.” He and I say in unison

“Okay.” The doctor moves the transducer on my belly with all three of us gaping at the monitor even though I can’t see anything

“Right there, can you see that the angle of the genital tubercle is pointing up towards the baby’s head?” To be candid I don’t see what she’s showing us.

“What does that mean doctor?” Mpilo asks, anticipation killing him. I don’t think he’s interested in what the doctor is asking us, he just wants to know the gender.

The doctor’s lips break into a broad smile

“Well, what that means sir is that your wishes have come true, your fiancé is carrying your son.”

“What?” He asks, joy imaged on his features

“Congratulations.” In an instant, he swaddles me in his broad arms and showers my face with kisses.

“Ngiyabonga sthandwa sam’.”

(Thank you

Advertisement

my love)

I'm so happy, I know how much Mpilo wanted for our baby to be a boy. I'm happy his wishes are fulfilled, I hope he will take his father's handsome looks and be the cutest boy ever

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NOBUHLE

It's break time I'm heading to the Tuck Shop to buy fruits when Tumelo stands in front of me blocking my way, I shift to the left trying to ignore him, but he copies my movements. I click my tongue and move to the right, but he still copies my motions blocking my path. I don't have time for this, so I fold my arms across my chest and stare at him. He'll tell me what his problem is when he's ready to talk.

“Why are you doing this to my cousin?” See, that didn’t take long

“What can I possibly do to your cousin who’s way older than me?” I answer making sure not to hide my disinterest in the topic

“You know what I’m talking about, you blocked him.”

“Yeah, so?”

“Nobuhle please don’t do this Thando is a great guy I swear he will never do anything to hurt you, just unblock him because he’s going out of his mind with worry wondering what he did wrong that landed him in the dog box.”

“Of course, you’ll say he’s a great guy because he’s your cousin.”

“But he is, give yourself a chance to know him better. You’re a smart girl, I know you’ll realize that he doesn’t have malicious intentions.”

“Well, I’m not interested, tell your cousin to stay the hell away from me,” I say and shove him out of my way

Nokwazi was right about Thando, he’s just like every other older guy who preys on young girls because they believe we are gullible, naïve, and easy to manipulate, but I won’t allow a grown man to turn my world upside down and leave me pregnant with a fatherless baby. I’ve seen it happen to many girls in the hood and I don’t want it to happen to me before I learn a lesson, not every life lesson should come from personal experience sometimes we learn from other people’s mistakes.

The first step was blocking and deleting his number now I need to forget him and focus on my books because no one can ever take away my education from me, I don’t know how I allowed myself to be destructed from my goal of not dating until I’m 21 but thank God for my sister because she knocked some sense into my senseless head. What was I even thinking? That guy is old, I’m sure my mother and brother would be so disappointed

in me if they ever find out that I was seen getting off his car, I'm ashamed of myself for even considering giving friendship with him a chance.

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MULALO

It's been weeks since I performed the ritual with Makhado at the Fundudzi Lake and nothing has happened, Makhado keeps telling me to be patient and threatens me with making my manhood disappear every time I seek answers. My patience is wearing thin, that bastard needs to die already so Anzani can finally be mine. A knock sounds on my door pulling me from my thoughts

"It's open." The door peels open and my PA, Neliswa walks in and stops a few feet away from my desk

"I'm so sorry to disturb you sir but the police are here for you."

“The police?” I ask with a frown, just then two gentlemen budge inside my office

“Thank you miss, you can excuse us.” The fat one says looking at Neliswa. She nods and walks away

“Gentlemen, how can I help you?” I’m on my feet walking toward them

“Sorry to disturb you Mr. Netswinga, I’m Detective Pandelani and this is my colleague Sergeant More we need you to come down with us to the station for questioning.”

“What for?”

“Quinton Ndlovu opened a case of attempted murder against you, the Gauteng police is the one in charge of the case we are only operating with them to help solve the case. So will you come with us?”

“No problem.”

This doesn't move me at all, the police can't convict me if they can't prove anything.

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QUINTON

"Mpilo! Mpilo please wake up." That's Anzani's voice

I force my heavy eyelids open and look at her, she's sitting on her butt besides me with her back leaning against the headboard

"What's the wrong thembalam'?" I ask rubbing my eyes with my hands warding sleep off

"I want fries from Barcelo's."

“What? what time is it?” I fish for my phone under the pillow and check the time, It’s three minutes to 2 in the morning

“Thembalam’ it’s late Barcelo’s is closed now, I’ll buy you your fries first thing in the morning.”

“No, I want them now.” She’s blinking rapidly getting ready to cry. Not this again, I thought the crying phase of the pregnancy was over!

“But kuvaliwe mos Sthandwasam’ I’ll buy them in the morning, alright my love. Let’s sleep it’s late.”

“No, I want fries Mpilo.” Tears are rolling down her face as she says this, thixo smakade!

“Okay, okay I’ll make fries for you. Please don’t cry, I hate it when you cry”

“Okay I won’t cry...your fries will taste like the ones from Barcelo’s right?” Ngaze ngavelelwa

“No, but they’ll be delicious.”

“Okay.” Yah neh! I roll out of bed, slip my feet inside my slippers, and head to the kitchen to peel the potatoes.

She walks out of the bedroom when I’m cutting the potatoes into chips. I’ve already put the oil on the stove so it can heat up, I can’t believe I’m up and making fries at this hour when I have work in a few hours.

“How long do you think it’ll take before they are ready?”

“Baby go back to bed I will call you when I’m done.”

“No, I get bored when I’m alone in the bedroom.” She says and wraps her arms around me from behind resting her head on my back, now how am I supposed to cook when she’s clinging onto me like this? This is going to be a long pregnancy!

#63

“I think you should take the hint and let go of this girl. You can’t keep groveling at her feet, you like her but she doesn’t so accept it, and leave her alone.”

“I wish it were that easy mntasekhaya but it’s not.”

“It is easy, you’re just making it difficult. Let her go, I have never seen you so hung up on any girl like this before.”

“That's the thing Esihle, she’s not just any girl. She’s different, there’s just something about her that draws me in and makes me feel alive. With her I feel things I’ve never felt in my life. What if I give up on her and never get to feel this way again in my life?”

“But Thando you can’t force her to feel the same way you do, if you keep this up she might file a restraining order against you.”

“That’s exactly the thing sis, she feels the same way I'm sure she does I can't be imagining the connection between us. She feels the same way but she’s young, scared, and probably thinks I’m here to destroy her future.”

“If that’s the case then I think you should give her time to grow and mature before you can pursue anything with her because it’s obvious she’s not ready for what you crave from her.”

“I know she’s still young and that’s why I want us to be friends until she feels comfortable enough to start a relationship with me.”

“Wow, you would do that for her?”

“Yes, I would. Without any hesitation.”

“Wow, if you feel so strongly about her then maybe you should fight for her.”

“Thank you.”

My parents were blessed with three children, me being the first, Esihle the second, and Langaletu the last. Esihle and I are 2 years apart, Langa is 6 years younger than me and 4 years younger than Esihle.

“So, what are you going to do to fight for her?”

“I will drive to Ratanda to try and speak to her one last time, maybe I can convince her otherwise when I’m next to her.”

“Good luck.” I hate the pitiful look I behold in her eyes

“Thanks.”

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“What are you doing here? Can't you take a hint?”

I waited outside her school gate again, Tumelo told me that they are attending SSIP classes today so I had to seize the opportunity since I can't go to her house and park outside her gate. It would be disrespectful to her parents.

“No, not when I don't know why you blocked me in the first place.. did I do something?” she exhales

“No, but I don't want to be friends with you.”

“Why?”

“You're older than me Thando and I know nothing about you.”

“What do you want to know?” she rolls her eyes

“Please don't do this, just accept that I don't want you and keep it moving. I'm sure many girls would die for your attention but unfortunately, I'm not one of them.”

“You don’t mean that.”

“I do.” She says looking into my eyes

“I understand that you don’t know me and you’re not sure of my intentions with you but I promise I will never force you to do anything you don’t want or you’re not ready for.”

“But that's exactly what you’re doing now, I told you several times to leave me alone yet here you are.”

Her words are like a stab to my heart, I care about her and I have strong feelings for her but I won’t force myself into her life if she doesn't want me in it. I glance at her face, appreciating her rare beauty for the last time

“It's okay, I respect your decision. I will not bother you again, all the best on your final exams and in your future. I do not doubt that you’ll achieve all the dreams and aspirations you have set out for yourself, you’re strong-willed, assertive, and agile.

Nothing will stand between you and what you want.” she looks surprised by my statement but she masks it with a fake smile

“Thanks, all the best to you too Thando.”

“Hug?” I ask with my arms spread open, she hesitantly leans into my embrace. Having her in my arms like this feels like the best thing in the world, I’m torn that this will be the first and last time I get to hold her in my arms like this.

“Bye.” She says and walks off not allowing me a chance to respond. I stare at her retreating figure until she disappears between the many bodies of matric learners, so this is it?

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NOBUHLE

I’m pleased when I don’t find my mother in the lounge on my way back from school, I scurry to my room and throw myself on top of my bed crying my eyes out. My chest feels tight and

there's a ball sitting on my throat, my heart is aching like someone dear to me has passed on. I made the right choice didn't I? then why does it hurt so much to let him go? I don't even know him that well but it hurts to know that he won't be running after me anymore, I might have not admitted it but I relished him chasing after me gosh is this what heartbreak feels like? If it is then it hurts like hell.

After crying to my heart's content I wipe my tears and dial Anzani's number, I don't have friends and I can't talk to my mother about this for obvious reasons and Nokwazi has already expressed her opinion on this matter so she's not the right person to talk to.

"Hey, babe." It sounds like she's eating

"Hello, what are you eating there?"

"Caramel peppermint tart."

"Hmm, I wish I was there."

“Yeah, you should come and visit.”

“I will, how are you and my nephew doing?”

“We are fine, I'm gaining weight wena you should see my butt.”  
I can't help but laugh. Sis'Anzani is so obsessed with having a round butt, I guess it's like that- the slender ones wish to be thick and the thick ones yearn to be slim.

“I can't wait to see it.” She chuckles

“I'll ask your brother to take pictures of me and send you on WhatsApp.”

“Alright.”

“How's school?”

“Great, I passed my trial exams really well.”

“That’s good now you need to work extra hard on your final exams, give it your best shot. You owe it to yourself to make yourself proud.”

“Thank you, I will do exactly that.” I don’t know how to start with the Thando topic, she might be friendly and nice but she’s still older than me and I have a lot of respect for her

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and come to think of it she’s Thando’s age.

“How’s mom there?”

“She’s okay... are you busy?”

“No, why?”

“There’s something I would like us to talk about.”

“Oh okay, sounds serious. What’s wrong?” I inhale and hold my breath for a while before discharging it

“I met a guy, he looks like he’s a good person with good intentions. I like him and enjoy his company but he’s a bit older than me plus he’s very handsome and he looks well off so it’s hard to believe that he’s single.” I say and hold my breath afterward

"I see, how old is he?"

“23.”

“You’re right, he’s a bit too old for you. So he wants a relationship with you?”

“Not exactly, he said we can be friends until I’m ready to date.”

“Okay, and you like this guy?”

“Yes, maybe more than I should. I told Nokwazi about him and she advised me to stay away from him and I did, but I couldn’t stop thinking about him no matter how much I tried. Today he came to see me and I told him to stay away from me, he was hurt but he promised to stay away from me. I should be happy that he’ll stay away because this is what I wanted but I’m not, I’m sore and I can’t stop crying at the thought of not seeing him again or of him with someone else, I did the right thing so why does it hurt? Why does it feel like I made the biggest mistake of my life?” she sighs

“I think what you feel for him is stronger than you realize, this is probably the worst advice because you’re still way too young for relationships, especially with a grown man like him but I think you should follow your heart and trust your instincts.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really but I would like to meet this guy of yours first. You’re like my little sister, and you’re way too young and don’t have much experience I need to meet with him and study him. Tell him to meet with me if he wants to be friends with you, if

his intentions are authentic then he'll have no problem meeting with me."

"Really? You'd do that for me?"

"Yes, but I'm not saying date this guy Nobuhle you're still young there will be time for that later. Focus on your studies, if he's truly serious about you he'll wait until you're ready and not pressure you into a relationship."

"Thank you so much."

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NANCY

My mother wasn't joking about kicking me out of her house, I found my clothes outside the gate inside black refuse bags. I had no choice but to go to my father's house, who welcomed me in with open arms. He was stunned to learn that my

mother continued with her relationship with Mpho, the same relationship that led to their divorce.

My mother was an influential person in the community and in the church, many looked up to her as their role model while some envied her. The news of her affair with Mpho and the truth about Nompumelelo's paternity knocked her reputation to its knees, all those who looked up to her and praised her have lost respect for her and are calling her all sorts of names you can think of. Relatives from her side of the family have expressed their disapproval of what I did and now that I'm calm and not driven by my emotions I realize how inconsiderate I was of my mother's reputation, feelings, and honor when I uncovered the truth and I feel terrible.

"Do you think she'll ever forgive me, papa?"

"I don't know my child, the Selinah I know is very stubborn and can hold grudges unless she has changed." I don't think she has

"I shouldn't have told the pastor and the other members of the church the truth, it wasn't my place."

“Then why did you do it?”

“I was hurt and angry, Mpho has toyed with my feelings for years so I just wanted to do something to pay him back for all the pain he has caused me.”

“What did he do?” I look down avoiding his gaze

“I can’t help you if you don’t tell me the truth.”

“He lied to me and made me believe that he and I would someday be together, he made me watch him sleep with my mother and dating different girls while making me feel like I’m whining and spineless every time I complained.”

“I can’t believe this.” He looks nauseated by what I have just said

"How could you do this Nancy, sleep with a man who's sleeping with your mom?"

"I'm sorry papa I know I let you down but I was foolish and thought I was in love." He stands up from his seat and walks away from me, great just great! I may have just lost the only person I had on my side.

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MPHO

I have never hated anyone as much as I hate Nancy, she destroyed my life and my daughter's life before it even began. Now Lelo has to carry the cross of being the child conceived from an 'immoral relationship' as the public calls it, I hate that this will taint her childhood and rob her a chance of being a child. A chance to be carefree and have nothing to worry about.

I can't walk around in public without hiding my face under a cap or with a hoodie because people stare and call me names, I feel

like a prisoner in my own life. Everyone who I thought are in my corner have turned their backs on me and the sex with mom doesn't feel as good as it used to before everyone found out about us. My life is a mess and I don't see people forgetting about this scandal anytime soon. I can't log in to any of my social media platform without coming across a post of someone who is dragging or saying something ill about me.

I'm overwhelmed and tired of living, a huge part of me just wants to take my own life and put an end to all the suffering and pain but I have a daughter to live for. It's hard growing up without parents and I don't want to put my child through the same pain, she's the apple of my eye and the only person I truly love in this world and so for her I'll suck it up and endure the humiliation and ridicule from the public for as long as it takes.

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QUINTON

"The loan was approved?"- Kabelo

“Yes.”

“So, what’s next?”-Given

“Sending a letter to Anzani's family asking for her hand in marriage.”

"You look worried what's up?"

“I don’t have a good relationship with my uncles I don’t know if they’ll agree to represent me.”

“It can’t be that bad,” Kabelo says

“Trust me it is, those people only loved us when our father was still alive.”

“But it’s not like you’re asking for help to pay the lobola, you only need them to negotiate on your behalf.” Given

“I know but I don’t trust them what if they intentionally sabotage the negotiations to spite me?”

“That’s a bit extreme I don’t think they would do that.”

“You don’t know my uncle's wena, the youngest one called me months back asking for money and indirectly implied that I should never seek him out if I ever needed help when I told him I don’t have any money.”

“So what are you going to do?” Kabelo

“I have no choice but to call them and pray that they’ll agree otherwise I’m screwed because they are the only uncles I have.”

“Don’t put it off any longer, call them now.”

Given is right, I should call. I punch uncle Cebo's number and put the call on speaker as I'm waiting for him to answer.

"Hi." His tone is cold and unwelcoming

"Babomncane you're speaking to Mpilentle."

"I know, I can read and my eyes can still see." Wow!

"Uncle I need your help-." He doesn't let me finish my sentence, he erupts into a belly laugh. I knew this would happen so I can't say I'm surprised

"Wena Mpilentle ucela usizo kumina? Ngathini kuwe Mpilentle, azange ngisho kuthi uzangidinga ngelinye ilanga?"

"Washo Babomncane."

"What do you want?"

"I'm ready to take a wife... I need you to negotiate her lobola for me."

"Okay, no problem I will do that for you." That was easy, I thought I would have to grovel and kiss his feet before he agrees

"Thank you so much Babomncane."

" Wait, let me finish. I will do that for you only if you give me R10 000."

"What?"

"Is it too little should I add more? Okay R15 000 then."

"Babomncane-."

"That's my final word Mpilentle, take it or leave it." He says and hangs up leaving me gob smacked.

#64

The day I've been dreading for a week is finally here and I don't know how to feel about it, at first, I was excited that Thando easily agreed to meet with sis'Anzani. I didn't expect him to agree so handily after I made him beg and run after me for weeks only to turn him down. That made me delighted because it kind of highlighted how earnest his wish to be friends with me is but now I'm anxious, and my head is filled with a bunch of what-ifs. I didn't sleep a wink last night inventing possible scenarios in my head of how today's lunch will play out, while I'm deep in thought my phone buzzes snapping me back to actuality.

"Hi."

"Good morning Hlehle." I get a warm and fuzzy feeling in my chest every time he speaks, my heart skips a few beats and pumps faster than usual at the sound of his voice.

"Morning Thando."

“How are you?” a sigh breezes from my lips

“The truth?”

“Yes, please.”

“I’m nervous because I don’t know how everything will play out.”

“Relax don’t think about it too much, I’m the one who should be nervous-I’m meeting your big sister after all”

“Aren’t you scared?”

“No, I’m not.” He says and chuckles “Okay, maybe just a tiny winy bit.” His confession has me babbling because he looks daring I didn't think meeting my sister would intimidate him.

“Wow, uyandihleka?”

(You're laughing at me)

"Ewe."

(Yes)

"Wow!" He exclaims, and we both boom into roaring laughter.

When the laughter ceases a moment of silence befalls us, he breaks it a few seconds later.

"Hlehle let me prepare myself, we'll chat later alright?" There's this softness in his voice every time he calls my name that makes my insides melt, kuvele kuthi mangi shishilize nge gqe phantsi.

"Ok Thando, bye." I hang up and lie on my back putting my phone on my chest and shut my eyes. If there's anything I'm looking forward to today is seeing his handsome face.

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NARRATED

Quinton is in the lounge watching an old game between Orlando Pirates and Mamelodi Sundowns on Supersport when Anzani and Nobuhle walk out from the bedroom

“Where are you guys off to?” he asks darting his eyes between the two ladies who are dressed to the nines.

Nobuhle is dressed in a multicolored marble print tube top with matching slit hem leggings, her outfit is paired with white Air force sneakers. Anzani is draped in an apricot off-shoulder layered sleeve bodycon dress that nuzzles her small pregnancy bun in a titillating way with rhinestone décor slides showing off her white manicured toes with toe rings. Anzani’s afro is held in a high bun on top of her head while Nobuhle is rocking her thin and neatly plaited cornrows showing off her beautiful face.

Nobuhle looks at Anzani waiting for her to reply to Quinton’s question.

“I’m treating Nobuhle to lunch, she deserves a treat...her third term marks are impressive.”

“Oh! That’s so thoughtful of you thembalam’, Buhle I’m so proud of you baby you worked very hard.” He stands on his feet and fishes his hands inside his pockets in search of his wallet. Having found his wallet, he takes out his bank card and hands it to his girlfriend

“Please use my card.” the pair looks at each other and enormous smiles embraces their lips. Anzani steps closer closing the distance between them and cheerfully takes the card from him.

“Thank you, baby. You're the best” she says dropping a wet kiss on his lips

“Thank you bhuti.” -Buhle

“Pleasure, please enjoy yourselves.”

"We will, please don't cook we'll bring take out."

'Okay"

"Sis' Anzani our Uber is downstairs, goodbye bro," Buhle says already taking big strides to the front door, Anzani gives Quinton a goodbye kiss and follows her outside.

A few minutes later the white sedan parks outside the smokehouse and Grill restaurant, Buhle knows Thando is already here when she spots his black Audi q5 in the parking lot. This is it; it's ensuing and there's no turning back. She draws in a deep breath and holds it in for a few seconds before exhaling, discerning her distress Anzani holds her hand and gives her a reassuring smile.

"Relax. I won't be too hard on him." The younger nods her head vigorously and climbs out of the Uber, the older follows behind and the pair makes its way to the entrance of the restaurant.

A tall light-skinned man dressed in a waiter's uniform and a big smile on his face welcomes them as they make their way through the door.

“Welcome to the steakhouse and Grill, my name is Tshepo. Table for two?”

“No, we have a reservation under Mr. Ngxito can you please escort us to our table,” Anzani says

Thando made a reservation two days ago and gave Buhle the name of the restaurant, seeing that Anzani lives in Braamfontein he had no choice but to drive all the way to meet her.

“He just walked in, please follow me.” Thando sees them approaching and jolts to his feet, his anxiety shoots to the roof as he beholds the stoic expression on Anzani's face.

"Good afternoon." His voice comes out soft, Anzani wouldn't have heard him if she was not looking at his face.

"Afternoon." She replies running her eyes up and down his form

The waiter takes the drink orders and gives them the menu before excusing himself

"Thando... it's a pleasure to finally meet you." He says with his hand stretched out for a handshake, his voice comes out a tad bit higher than the first time.

"Anzani, Nobuhle's elder sister. Pleased to meet you too." Anzani says shaking his hand.

"Hi," Nobuhle squeaks waving at him suddenly feeling shy.

"Hi." He says and their eyes lock

Anzani pulls a chair, takes a seat, and darts her eyes between the two 'friends' who look nervous and uncertain about what

to do. She clears her throat and motions them to take a seat, simultaneously each pulls a chair in front of them and lowers themselves on it.

“So, who is Thando, mind telling us a few things about yourself?” -Anzani

So, his best friend was right about this whole lunch date thing with the sister being an interview of some sort. This sure feels like one, the way he’s so nervous one would swear he and Anzani are not the same age. It worse because Anzani looks younger than her age

“Okay, firstly I wish to thank you for allowing me a chance to prove myself. I appreciate it; I know if It was me in your place, I wouldn’t want to hear anything from an older man who wants to be friends with my teenage sister so thank you.” Anzani only offers him a nod in return.

Just then the waiter arrives with their drinks

he serves them and cribbles down their lunch orders on his notepad.

“Your food will be ready in 20 minutes,” he says after jotting down all their orders

“Thanks,” Anzani says. The waiter smiles and walks away

“My name is Ndaloyothando Mpilo Ngxito, I’m 23 years of age and a qualified chartered accountant. I have two siblings- a brother and a sister but I’m the eldest. By God’s grace both my parents are still alive, my mother is a high school principal, and my father is a businessman that's me in a nutshell.”

“Ok, so you don’t have a girlfriend?”

“No, I’m single.”

“How long have you been single if you don’t mind me asking?”

“It’s been a little over ten months now.”

“Okay, any kids?”

“No.”

“Excuse me but I’m curious as to why a handsome and financially stable guy like you would be interested in being Nobuhle’s friend? why not go for someone your age?”

“Well sis wami matters of the heart are difficult to comprehend, I didn’t choose to feel the way I do for Nobuhle but it happened. Trust me if I could change the way I feel about her then I would do it in a heartbeat, she’s still young and deserves to grow at the pace she's comfortable with. I know I'm not a good match for her presently, we are in different stages of life, and we want different things out of life. I never planned to fall for someone so much younger than me, but this little girl stole my heart the first day I met her, I tried to ignore what I feel for her but I failed because it only grew stronger. We do not choose who we fall in love with, the heart wants what it wants and mine wants Nobuhle, only her." His gaze shifts from Anzani to Nobuhle

"In my life, I've dated a lot of people and was deeply in love with some but none of them have ever made me feel the way Nobuhle makes me feel. She sets my soul on fire without even trying, just one look at her is enough to make my whole world standstill, I love her." Nobuhle averts her eyes unable to hold his gaze, how he boldly professed his feelings for her in front of her sister makes her heart beat in a different tune

"Wow, that was a loaded statement. I hear you but Nobuhle is young and not ready to be in a relationship, especially with someone like you. Someone mature, who has experience and obviously expects sex from a woman he's dating. How do I guarantee that you'll wait for her and not pressure her into doing anything she's not ready for? It's easy to say you'll wait but let's not fool ourselves here we are talking about years here."

"True, I know it won't be easy especially because I'm used to sex but for her, I'm willing to try. No one has ever died from lack of sex, I love Nobuhle and I want to be with her one day when she's ready. Just like I'm honest now about my feelings and what I want from her, along the way if I fail to go on waiting for her I will not hide it from her I will communicate." Anzani stares at him for a while

“Ok I think I’m satisfied; I have no further questions or objection to your friendship with my little sister.”

“Thank you so much.” He replies with a lopsided smile

“I’m choosing to trust you so please don’t disappoint me, Nobuhle is still way too young and has her whole life ahead of her. If you like her as much as you claim to, then you’ll never pressure her into doing anything she’s not ready for.”

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NOKWAZI

“This feels so good damn,” I say blowing out smoke through my nostrils, Namhla giggles blocking her pipe with her thumb. I woozy and lightheaded but in a nice kind of way

“I told you that this flavor slaps hard with weed.”

“Now I know to never argue with you.” a knock sounds on the door

“I wonder who’s that.... Come in!” She yells and fixes her gaze on the door.

The door opens and in walks Dipuo carrying a textbook, an exam pad, and a pencil case in her hands. Our kitchen is covered by a cloud of smoke, so she waves her hand in the air to clear her path as she walks in

“Nokwazi ngize kuwe.” She says completely ignoring Namhla  
(I’m here for you)

“Yini angibonakali?” Namhla quips  
(Am I invisible to you)

“Nokwazi, the assignment is due in a week we need to start working on it.” She says ignoring Namhla’s question.

Dipuo is my classmate, she doesn't like Namhla because apparently, she is a bad influence on me.

"Flip! The assignment completely slipped my mind, Dee, I'm sorry let's do it tomorrow." I say pulling my best puppy face

"Seriously Nokwazi?" the disappointment in her voice is loud

"Please." I implore

"Mxm!" she clicks her tongue and turns on her heels headed for the door

"Askies my friend, you can join us there are enough drinks for everyone!" I bellow

She continues walking banging the door on her way out

“She’s angry I need to go after her,” I say attempting to stand up but Namhla pulls me down with the hem of my shirt

“No don’t, let her be.”

“You don’t get it Namhla I need Dipuo’s help to complete this assignment, she’s a genius.”

“No let her be, I have a friend who’s a second-year nursing student I’ll ask her to help you. For now, sit down, smoke hubbly bubbly and enjoy the alcohol we’ll deal with your assignment tomorrow.”

“Alright,” I say and refill our glasses with Johnnie walker double black scotch whiskey

#65

FIVE MONTHS LATER

NARRATED

“Please Thomas don’t do this to me man, you and I go way back.”

“I know Netswinga but this is nothing personal its business,” Thomas says and hangs up

“Fuuuuuuck!” Mulalo growls tugging all the documents and stationery that is on top of his desk to the floor.

The door opens and his PA walks in, she frowns seeing the papers and stationery scattered on the floor.

“Ever heard of knocking!” He roars with veins popping on his forehead. Taken aback, Neliswa stops in her tracks and looks at him not sure if now is the right time to tell him the news

“Will you talk or?” The irritation in his voice is almost palpable.

“Sir. I got a call from the Tshivase Group of Companies-“

“Get to the damn point!” He yells cutting her mid-sentence

“They said they are taking their business elsewhere.” She scrambles through her sentence and looks down afterward evading his cold stare

“Fuuuuuuuuck!” He screams and throws a pen in her direction, fortunately, she ducks and the pen hits the wall behind her.

“What are you still waiting for, do you want me to strangle you? Get the f\*ck out of here!” shaken by his sudden violent behavior she scurries out of his office.

Everything is falling apart; and there’s nothing he can do about it-all his major clients are jumping ship without a valid reason,

clients he worked with for years and had a good business relationship with....this doesn't make sense. He slowly sinks onto his chair and unbuttons his shirt loosening his tie, balls of sweat roll down his face and pool under his chin despite the relatively large, and air-conditioned office. Feeling suffocated and struggling to catch his breath, he takes off the shirt along with the tie and dumps them on the floor leaving his white vest. Taking off his shirt doesn't give him the relief he seeks so he paces to the window and sticks his head out, a sigh breezes out of his lips as the cold breeze hits his face. His phone rings in the pocket of his black slacks disturbing him.

"Mulalo hello."

"Hey Mr. Netswinga this is Travis the security guard-"

"What do you want Travis!" he spits before the security can complete his sentence

"Your house is on fire sir." He must've not heard him correctly

“What?”

“Your house is on fire. There was a fault in-”

His chest begins to tighten, and his heart palpates, he struggles to breathe and plops to the floor with a loud thud, the phone slips from his hand and crashes with the tiled floor. A few minutes later the door flies open and Neliswa, his PA budes inside his office, her eyes widen in shock seeing her boss on the floor. She yells at the top of her voice “Someone please call the ambulance” before rushing to his side.

“Sir, sir! Please open your eyes.” She says pressing her hands on his chest trying to resuscitate him.

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Kabelo knocks once and lets himself inside Quinton’s apartment, defeat mirrors his features as he takes in Quinton’s appearance.

“Why are you still not dressed?” He asks looking at Quinton’s outfit “Did you even bath?” a chuckle escapes Quinton’s lips

“Of course, I bathed, ungithatha kanjani?”

(What do you take me for)

“I don’t know, you look depressed.” He glances at his wristwatch “Enough talking go and get ready the party is about to start.” He says lowering himself next to Quinton on the couch. A heavy sigh eludes Quinton’s lips

“Okay, what’s going on man? You don’t look okay, did something happen?”

“No, nothing happened I’m fine.” He says but the expression on his face and his body language tells a different story

“Then why do you look like this?”

“Like what?”Kabelo shrugs

“Depressed, sad, downhearted I don’t know man.”

“You know that emptiness you feel in your heart when something close to you passes on?” Kabelo nods his head “I’ve been feeling like that since I woke up, my heart is aching, and I don’t even know why. It feels like I’ve lost a part of me.” He says and fear dances in his eyes.

“Yoh!” for the first time he doesn’t know what to say, “Did you pray about it?” That’s the only thing that seems appropriate to say

“I did but the feeling didn’t go away.” Kabelo swallows nothingness and summons the courage to ask the question he's been dreading to ask from the moment he walked in

“Are Anzani and the baby okay?” Kabelo’s words are like a stab to Quinton’s heart

The last trimester of Anzani's pregnancy has been a rollercoaster for the couple, their friends, and their family. Despite seeing an obstetrician throughout her pregnancy, Anzani is constantly hospitalized due to high blood pressure, blood clots, kidney disease, and UTI (Urinary tract infection) which are all complications caused by Lupus during gestation.

"I called, her aunt said they are fine." Kabelo exhales heavily letting out the breath he didn't know he was holding

"Then there's probably nothing to worry about, go and get ready so we can leave Sarah will be so happy to see you at her farewell party. That white lady loves your work ethic, I heard from George that she's the one to put in a good word for you with the bosses to give you the promotion."

"Really?"

"Yes really, how do you think you got a promotion within a year?"

“Because of my hard work,” Quinton says with a shrug

“That and because Sarah recommended you.”

“Oh wow, let me go get dressed so we can leave.”

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ANZANI

I have lost count of the number of times I’ve been admitted to the hospital in the last three months, the third trimester is showing me flames. I had to leave my husband on his own and move in with my aunt because she can take better care of me, yes you heard me right, Quinton and I are legally married. It wasn’t a big wedding, it was a small celebration with our friends and families after signing at the commissioner’s office, exchanging our vows at the altar, and being blessed by the pastor. Hopefully, when we have our white wedding my mother will be here to celebrate with us.

She's still at the initiation school, I haven't seen her since she left but she is fine according to my aunt who visits her regularly. Her Gobela also said she is doing very well and should be done with her training soon. Aunt Lufuno, aunt Anzadakalo, and her husband take care of all her expenses, I only help with a few things. I hope she returns soon because I want her to help me with the baby, I have nothing against my aunts, but I prefer to be helped by my mother.

Given, Kabelo and our pastor were the ones who represented Mpilo during lobola negotiations because his uncles refused to do it without getting compensation, or should I say a lump sum because R15 000 is a lot of money. Mrs. Ndlovu doesn't have siblings, and all her relatives live far. Quinton had no choice but to ask his friends to stand in for him. Who represented him doesn't matter, what matters is that I'm his wife legally and traditionally so and I couldn't be more pleased. It feels amazing to be Mpilo's wife, to refer to him as 'my husband' lord! The feeling is amazing, it's such a shame that I had to spend the first few weeks as his wife going in and out of the hospital, it's a miracle that I didn't give birth prematurely. With me constantly feeling sick, I lost all the weight I gained during the first six months of my pregnancy, and now I'm back to being slender Anzani.

I'm sitting with my back against the headboard, my feet on Lutendo's lap getting a foot massage-he's good with his hands. He's telling me all about his day at school and the challenges he encounters during lessons due to the language barrier.

"I hate that I'm repeating a class, I hate that I'm in a new school and I hate that I don't hear when other learners gossip about me." My heart breaks for him, I know how hard it is to be among people who speak a language that you do not understand or hear, you feel stupid and like an outcast.

"Eish, I understand how you feel, you'll learn Zulu is not that hard I'll help you even though I'm not perfect myself."

"Please teach me, I get weary every time I think about school because I know everyone at school sees me as this weird Venda boy. Some even ask me if I know Azwindini and all those people who act on Muvhango, can you believe it?" I don't mean to laugh but it's funny how kids think

"You are laughing?" He's shocked and offended by my reaction so I try my best to swallow my chuckle and put on a straight face

"I'm sorry

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don't go to school with that mentality or else you'll fail. The more you hear something the more sense it makes, find a friend you'll learn faster that way."

"How? I'm shy" my poor brother

"Find the one you think is nice and talk to him about soccer, cartoons, or something boys like."

"Okay, I'll do-." I hold up my finger motioning him to be quiet

"Hold on my phone is ringing."

“Boyabenyathi,” I say picking up Quinton’s call, I know he’s blushing where he is.

I was watching Umkhokha on Showmax a few weeks ago and I noticed how Zulu men love it when they’re being called by their clan names so I googled the Ndlovu clan names and began calling him ‘Bonyabenyathi’, he couldn’t believe his ears the first time I called him that.

“Aw mkami.” Lutendo cracks up seeing the stupid smile on my face, I feel giddy inside every time he calls me that

(My wife)

“Who’s that?” He must’ve heard Lutendo laughing

“Lutendo.” I look at Lutendo “You, get out of here.” He gets up and leaves the room still laughing

“Why are you chasing the kid out?”

“He’s hyper, aren’t you supposed to be at a party?” I shift and sleep on my back

“I am, I stepped out because I wanted to call you. How are you and how’s my boy doing?”

“I’m fine, he’s fine. We are-aaaah!”

“What’s going on? Are you in pain?” he asks in a panicky tone

“Relax Gatsheni we are fine, your boy surely thinks my belly is a soccer field with the way he kicks me lately,” I say caressing my bun, he sighs in relief and chuckles.

“Leave him alone, that’s the next Cristiano Ronaldo right there. Have you guys eaten?”

“Yes, we are full. My aunt cooked tripe and dumplings; it was very nice.”

“Hmm sounds delicious...are you sure you’re not feeling any pain?”

“Yes, I’m sure. Love what’s going on, you’ve been asking me the same question all day long.”

“Nothing, I miss you.”

“I know, I miss you too.”

“I’m coming there.”

“What?” I remove the phone from my ear and check the time, it’s 21:09 “No babe you can’t come here it’s late.”

“Pack an overnight bag I’ll come there and pick you up.”

“Are you serious right now, what am I going to tell my aunt?”

“You’ll tell her your husband is coming to pick you up, it’s that simple.”

“What if she refuses?”

“She won’t, I’m your husband, not your boyfriend and besides I’ll bring you back tomorrow we’ll sleep at my mother’s house.”  
He says and hangs up

After his promotion; he was able to save money for building his mother’s house quicker. The construction company he hired was very efficient and fast, within a month mam’Nomonde’s house was done and waiting for her to move in. It’s not a big house, it’s a four-bedroom, the main bedroom has an ensuite bathroom. Then there's a lounge, dining room, bathroom, and a relatively large kitchen because the woman likes to cook and bake, so her son thought she will appreciate a bigger kitchen. The garage can accommodate up to three cars, everything is completed with regards to the house the only thing missing is new furniture to match the new house, Quinton will start with the kitchen furniture for obvious reasons and move to the rest of the house. My husband did a great job, his mother is proud and I’m equally proud of him.

He didn't sound like he was asking me, it felt more like order so for the sake of peace I packed an overnight bag, what's left for me to do is to go and ask my aunt for permission to leave with him. This whole thing feels silly, it's late and I can give birth any day from now I shouldn't be roaming about in the streets at night but at least mam'Nomonde will be there, she'll assist should anything happen to me

"Shouldn't you be in bed?" Aunt Lufuno asks looking up from her bible as I walk through her bedroom door

I know I have a chronic illness and my pregnancy has complications, but my aunt is doing too much, she doesn't allow me to do anything she always wants me to be in bed. If I allowed it, this one would even bathe and feed me. I don't know if her being fussy is genuine or it's because she's trying to make up for how she treated me after I lost my job.

"Mpilo just called, he said he's on his way to fetch me." She raises an eyebrow "He said he'll bring me back tomorrow."

“Anza! How many times did I tell you not to call your husband by his name?” She puts the bible on the nightstand “Do you feel fine?”

“Yes, I’m okay aunt.”

“Okay, you can only go if you’re going to his mother’s house. That way I know Nomonde will take care of you and will know what to do should anything happen.”

“Yes, we are going there.”

“Ok, you can go.”

“What?” I didn’t think she would agree

“Go, your mufunzi will be here soon” She and Aunt Anzadakalo refer to him as pastor imagine these two ladies!

(Pastor)

“Aunt no!” She laughs

“I don’t know why you get angry, it’s a way of showing him respect.” From the little knowledge I have, people who call you a pastor when you’re not one, are mocking you.

When I walk back into my bedroom, I find my phone ringing on top of the dresser. I pace toward the dresser and pick it up

“Baby.”

“I’m outside.” what? It’s only 21:43 did he drive or fly here?

“Ok, I’m coming.”

I say my goodbyes to my aunt and Mulanga, Lutendo walks me out carrying my bag for me. Quinton steps out of the car when he sees us approaching the gate and fist bumps Lutendo, he swaddles me in his arms clinging on to me like I almost died or something. When we break the hug he takes the bag from Lutendo and holds my hand leading me to the car

“I’ll see you tomorrow okay,” I say holding Lutendo’s hand through the open window

“Okay goodnight sis, goodnight brother-in-law.”

“Here, take this,” Quinton says giving him a R100 note, the smile on Lutendo’s face is bright enough to light up the whole world

“Thank you so much.”

“It’s a pleasure boy goodnight.” Lutendo waves and runs back inside the yard and locks the gate. Quinton watches him until he disappears before rounding the car and getting inside the driver’s seat.

With the baby on the way, we had to get ourselves a car. It’s a 2018 1.6 Hyundai Creta nothing fancy. He joins the road with one hand entwined with mine, he raises it to his lips and plants a soft peck.

“I missed you so much thembalam’.”

“I missed you too my love.” I know I didn't want him to come but I'm happy now that he's here, I am glad I'll sleep in my husband's arms tonight.

After a few minutes on the road, we eventually park outside his gate. He presses the remote control and the gate slides open.

“Mom went to bed early tonight,” I say catching sight of the dim house

“That’s strange, my mother never sleeps early you know how much she loves watching TV.” True, I don’t recall her going to bed before midnight in the few weeks she spent in Braamfontein with me when Quinton was in the hospital.

“Let’s go in.” We head to the house and go in through the front door, we switch on the lights in every room we pass until we reach the main bedroom.

Worry seeps in like a fog when we find the bed neatly made, without a single crease and no sign of Mam'Nomonde in the room.

“Ma!” He calls out pacing to the ensuite bathroom and I slowly toddle behind him

“What?” I ask when he halts at the door, eyes shining with tears. He doesn't reply so I pick up my pace.

I screech when I catch sight of Quinton's mother lying on the floor with her eyes wide open, I don't know what a dead person looks like, but she looks lifeless.

“Aaaaaaaaah!” I yelp as I feel a sharp pain in my abdomen.

#66

NARRATED

“Should we cook pumpkin? I don’t really fancy it.” Nobuhle asks her roommate Lungile

It’s a Sunday morning and the girls are up early preparing the infamous seven colors Sunday meal. Nobuhle is responsible for cooking while Lungile’s department is peeling vegetables and washing the dishes, Nobuhle wouldn’t be her mother’s daughter if she didn’t share a special relationship with the pots now, would she?

“Well, I love pumpkin and you make it so well, cook it pretty please.”-Lungile says while grating the beetroot they boiled last night

“Ok then, I’ll cook it but ngeke ngipheke eliningi ngoba lidliwa wuwe wedwa ithanga lay’ndlini.”

(I will make a small portion since you're the only one who eats pumpkin in this house)

As Thando promised, his friendship with Nobuhle didn't derail her from her studies the girl passed her matric with a bachelor's degree and five distinctions. She's pursuing her mechanical engineering degree at the University of Pretoria, owing to her outstanding results she received a bursary from Transnet. The bursary pays for her tuition fees, book allowance, and accommodation and gives her a considerable amount as a stipend every month. It's safe to say that, for someone who's only turning 17 years this year, Nobuhle is rich.

"Thanks, my lady, what we will make for dessert?"

"I was thinking something quick and easy to make like the tennis biscuit and custard fridge cake, we'll use ultra-Mel instead of custard though."

"Yum! I can't wait." Lungile sings causing Nobuhle to giggle

“Wena no shukela but umuhle ngoba awukhuluphali.”

(You and sugar but it’s good that sugar doesn’t make you gain weight)

“Yeah, or else I’d be a size forty-four by now,” Lungile says holding up four fingers on both her hands, then the two girls crack into booming laughter

“Khona iphone ekhalayo, is it not yours?” asks Lungile when their laughter ceases, Nobuhle listens attentively

(There’s a ringing phone)

“It’s mine.” She replies putting down the dish swab and dashing to her bedroom.

“Bhuti.” She says picking up Given’s call

“Nobuhle how are you?”

“I’m good bhuti wena unjani?” She replies struggling to figure out the reason for Given’s call.

(How are you)

“I’m good, please pack a bag. Kabelo and I are on our way to fetch you.”

“Bhuti?” Confused doesn’t begin to describe how she feels right now

“Please Nobuhle, your brother will explain everything once you get home.”

“Okay.”

“Please pack enough clothes.” He says and hangs up

“What’s wrong, who was that?” Lungile asks seeing the worried look on her face as she makes her way back into the kitchen

“My brother’s friend, Given. He said he’s on his way to fetch me, he even said I should pack enough clothes.”

“That’s strange, why would he fetch you when he knows tomorrow you have school?”

“Exactly!”

“What do you think is going on?”

“I don’t know but my gut tells me it’s something bad, I’ve had this nagging feeling in my gut since yesterday, but I ignored it thinking it’s one of those days where I wake up feeling down for no reason.”

“I’ll help you pack, try not to stress too much about it...I’m sure it’s nothing.” Lungile says already heading to Nobuhle's room and starts rummaging through her wardrobe once she's arrived.

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As pledged Kabelo and Given arrived to pick up Nobuhle and now the three of them are driving to Northwest to fetch Nokwazi who they haven't been able to hold of on the phone, her phone rings unanswered when they call her and she doesn't return their calls. Her last seen on WhatsApp is from yesterday night.

After a few minutes on the road they stop at a filling station and buy breakfast at Wimpy, Nobuhle puts hers away because she knows she will not be able to stomach anything. Her mind is racing, she's been trying to figure out what could've possibly happened at home to have her brother's friends driving all the way from Johannesburg to fetch them.

"She stays in which student residence?" Kabelo asks looking at Nobuhle in the rearview mirror

"TMM or something like that."

"Ok, search the location coordinates on google maps." Kabelo says handing Nobuhle his iPhone 13 pro max.

After two hours on the road and following the GPS's directions Kabelo parks his car outside Nokwazi's residence in Potchefstroom, Northwest.

"The security won't allow us in unless Nokwazi signs us in. Res's are strict on the rules"-Kabelo

"But how do we get hold of her when she's not picking up her phone?"-Nobuhle

She's frustrated. It's been a long journey on the road.

"Let's ask one of the students maybe one of them knows her you will never know." Given

"Good idea." Kabelo honks his bell at the two students walking past the car headed to the residence's gate, they turn and approach the car after he politely asks them to come closer to the car.

“Hey, ladies, sorry to bother you but by any chance do any of you know Nokwazi Ndlovu? She’s doing her second year in Nursing?”

“Uyakhanya, muhle, and uzomzimba omuhle nje?” The short one says

(She’s light in complexion, beautiful, and has a nice body)

“Yes, she looks like her.” Given says gesturing towards Nobuhle in the backseat, Nobuhle sticks her head between the passenger and driver’s seat and smiles waving at the two girls.

The short girl narrows her eyes at Nobuhle “Yeah, I know her, but she doesn’t stay here anymore oh here comes Dipuo. Dipuo!” The chubby student who just walked out of the gate turns to look “Please come.” Dipuo saunters to the car

“Dumelang.” She says in a hushed tone

“Hello.” All of them sing at the same time

“They are looking for Nokwazi.” The short one says and starts explaining the story to Dipuo

“Oh! You’re Nobuhle, her little sister, right?” Buhle nods  
“Nokwazi didn’t come back here this year, she moved to a bachelor pad not far from campus I can take you there.”

“Perfect, hop in.” Kabelo takes out his wallet and gives the two ladies a few notes thanking them for their help while Dipuo joins Nobuhle in the backseat.

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QUINTON

A day that was meant to be the happiest day of my life, a day when my precious son was born turned out to be the worst day of my life. A day in which I lost my mother, the woman who gave me life, nurtured, and loved me from birth. The woman whose teachings made me the man I am today. My beautiful mother, I’m crushed, it feels like there’s a hole in my chest, and

like a huge part of me has been taken away from me. I know I'm almost 30 and I have a family of my own but I was not prepared to lose my mother, at least not so soon and definitely not before I could do everything I wanted to do for her. Lord knows I had great plans for her, I wanted to buy her a beautiful car so she could drive herself around and stop using taxis but now she's gone. Gone before she can enjoy her beautiful house before I can give her everything I wished to give her, and before she could meet my son and shower him with all her love.

I don't know if I'll recover from losing her, I can't begin to imagine life without my mother, my pillar. The Queen of my heart, oh nkosi intando yakho ibuhlungu baba. My beautiful son made his grand entrance to the world last night a few minutes before midnight, he's the most precious baby my eyes have ever seen. His mother named him Murendeni(Praise him), and I gave him the name Zenzozothando (Acts of love) which was initially given to him by my mother. The pain of losing my mother intensified when I saw him for the first time and recalled just how excited she was to be a grandmother, I remember how stressed I would be whenever Anzani would be admitted to the hospital afraid that she will lose the baby, my mother would smile and say 'Zenzozothando will live, he's a strong boy like his father' with so much conviction in her words.

That assurance from her would always revive my faith and give me hope.

I called relatives from both my mother's side and my dad's side of the family informing them of my mother's untimely passing, the postmortem will be performed on my mother's cadaver to determine the cause of death. My mother was healthy and still young, her death was sudden and has left me with many questions. It's funny how the same relatives who were never there when we needed them arrived here shortly after hearing about my mother's death, none of them complained about not having money for transport or all the other excuses they used to make whenever we needed them. If I didn't know better

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I would say they are happy that my mother is late, but it could be pain and grief talking.

"When are your sisters arriving here?" Uncle Cebo asks

"They are on their way; my friends went to fetch them from school."

“Okay, I know we have had our differences in the past my son but I want you to know that I’m really sorry about your mother.”

“It’s okay.” I spot Kabelo’s Polo Tsi driving through the gate

“They are here.” Nobuhle is the first one to climb out of the car, she skims her eyes around the yard full of people, and relief prompts in her eyes when she locates me. She runs to me and throws herself in my arms, and I hold her tight.

“I’m so glad you’re safe, I thought something happened to you bhuti. What’s going on, why are there so many people in our yard?” She says when I put her down

"Bingelela sthandwasam'."

(Pass your greetings, my love)

She looks to my side and her eyes widen when she sees our uncle.

“Babomncane ngiyaxolisa angikubonanga, kunjani Gatsheni?”

She says with a smile

(Uncle I’m sorry I didn’t see you, how are you)

“Ngiphilile ntombi yami, awusemhle.”

(I’m okay my child, you look beautiful)

“Thank you.” She replies blushing

“Sanibonani.” That would be Nokwazi. She is wearing a short that could easily be passed off as underwear with a crop top that reveals her belly button piercing, she has another piercing on her tongue and nose. A long blonde weave cascades down her shoulders all the way down to her buttocks, she has long eyelashes that sweep the floor every time she blinks, and long lime green nails on her fingers, I wonder how she bathes with those on.

She has a tattoo on her thigh, arm, and another one on her leg. Her face is covered with makeup and her breath reeks of alcohol. I don’t recognize the person standing in front of me,

she has my sister's face and body, but this is not Nokwazi my little sister. My mother is probably heartbroken wherever she is seeing her daughter like this, she's holding a Gucci handbag in her left hand and an iPhone in the other. I didn't want to believe the things people say about her, but I need to come to terms with the truth-Nokwazi sleeps with grown men for money.

"Hambo qcoka Nokwazi man!" that's how my uncle replies to her greeting, not hiding his disapproval with her looks

(Go put on some clothes)

"Yebo babomncane." She says and struts to the house while everyone in the yard stops and turns to look at her. Varsity pressures have swallowed my little sister and it hurts watching the person she has turned into.

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I'm with my little sisters in Nobuhle's bedroom, I'm in the middle with each one sitting on either side of me on the bed and I have my arms wrapped around them. They know

something is wrong, they can see it, it's pretty obvious but I think they are waiting for me to confirm it.

“Bo sisi bami abahle.” I begin trying to swallow the lump blocking my throat

(My beautiful sisters)

“Bhuti!” They sing in unison

(Brother)

There's no easy way to say this.

“Umama akasekho emhlabeni, si ndlule izolo ismomondiya sika babwethu.”

(Our mother passed on yesterday)

Nobuhle frees herself from my embrace, jolts to her feet, and stands in front of me. She looks at me with eyes welled up with tears

“What? you’re joking, right? Mom is okay, she’s alive I spoke to her on Friday.” she looks into my eyes desperate to hear me say that I'm kidding

“I’m sorry nana.” A loud heart-rendering sob eludes her lips. I stand up and pull her into my arms.

Nokwazi hasn’t said a word, I think she’s still processing the news. She’s a crier, so her reaction is worrisome.

“Come Kwazi,” I say stretching out my right hand to her while holding Nobuhle with the other

“No, I’m fine.”

“Please.”

“I said I’m fine!” She bellows and bolts out of the room.

I sigh and embrace Buhle who's sobbing loudly wetting my shirt with her tears, I know I need to be strong for them, but I can't stop the tears. It hurts!

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ANZANI

"You need to stop crying or the baby won't stop wailing, he can sense when you're not okay." The nurse says walking inside my ward. My baby has been crying since they gave him to me today, I don't know how to calm him down because he doesn't want the bottle. My obstetrician and his pediatrician advised that it was risky to breastfeed him as some of the drugs I take for treatment can pass into the baby's milk

"Give him to me." I hand the baby to her and wipe my tears with my hands

"I'm sorry, I know it hurts but you need to stop crying it's not good for you or the baby. Your blood pressure is already way

too high, you need to tell me if you're trying to kill yourself phela.”

How can I not cry when the woman who has shown me nothing but love from the moment we first met has passed on, worse she died on the same day my son was born. How do I not cry when I know how much this will break my husband? How do I pretend like our world didn't turn upside down in a blink of an eye? I don't see how we will move past this; it's going to be hard. I should be happy that my son is here but I'm not because I'm mourning his grandmother. Life is not fair at all.

The door opens and both my aunts, Kamo, Dakalo, Mulanga, and Lutendo walk in. Dakalo is carrying a blue balloon written 'welcome baby Zenzothando Ndlovu' and a bouquet in her hands, and Kamo is holding a basket of fruits and a takeaway paper bag from Nandos. My aunts have shopping bags from Earth child and Naartjie and a pack of nappies in their hands.

“Ncoah he's so cute!” Dakalo exclaims peeping at Zothando who's now silent in the nurse's arms.

“He’s going to be such a charmer,” Kamo adds

Everyone is fixated on my son, Lutendo is the only one interested in me

“Was it too painful giving birth?” He asks leaving me in shock, how do I reply to this? “You were crying, your eyes are swollen.” He adds

“That’s why you were crying right?” The concern on his little face shudders my heart

“Yes, but I’m okay now. Your nephew is finally here, don’t you want to see him?” I say with the biggest fake smile on my face

“Okay.” He goes to join the rest of the crew

“I’m sorry ngwananga.” Aunt Anzadakalo says engulfing me in a hug “It’s going to be okay, please stop crying. You’ll make the baby sick.” I wipe my tears with my sleeves when we break the hug

“I’m so sorry Anza. Nomonde was such a good woman” Aunt Lufuno says stroking my shoulder. I thought they were still busy obsessing over the baby, I didn’t see them coming to my bed.

“How is your husband holding up?”- Aunt Anzadakalo

“He’s broken but he’s trying to put on a brave face.”

“Shame, poor man. Has he seen his son?” Aunt Lufuno

“Yes.”

“Okay, did the nurse show you how to feed the baby?”-Aunt Lufuno

“No, I can’t feed him because of the medication I’m taking. ...My breasts are too full and leaking, it’s painful.”

“Eish sorry, I’ll buy you breast pads. When are they discharging you?” -Aunt Anzadakalo

“The doctor says he’s going to keep me here for a few days.”

“Okay, I’ll show you how to do lactation suppression (the process of drying up breast milk) when you come back home.” - Aunt Lufuno

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I open my eyes when I feel someone’s presence inside the ward, it’s Mpilo he’s sitting next to my bedside holding our son in his arms

“Thembalam’.”

“My love, how did it go with the girls?” He sighs

“Nobuhle hasn’t stopped crying since I told her the news, Nokwazi is ...indifferent, I don’t maybe she’s still processing the news.”

“I’m sorry sthandwasam’,” I say putting my hand on his lap, he looks up preventing the tears in his eyes from rolling to his cheeks

“When is the doctor discharging you?” his voice is raspy and hoarse

“He said he wants to keep me here for a few days. Have you started with the funeral arrangements?”

“Yes, but we are still waiting for postmortem results to confirm the day of the funeral.....ngicela ubuye ekhaya sthandwasam’ I don’t know if I can do it on my own. I need you.” My heart breaks into a million pieces, he’s never been so vulnerable with me before.

(Please come back home, my love)

#67

It's scary how fast life can change, a day ago I had a mother, not just any mother but one who cared for and loved me dearly, and today I woke an orphan. The pain I feel inside can't be put into words; the future is blurry without my mother in it. There's a lot I wanted to do for my Queen, how could God rob me of a mother while I still needed her? I'm barely 18 and there are many things that my mother still needed to teach me about this life thing. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think that I'd be among those people who post their achievements on social media and write captions like 'for my mother in heaven, I hope you're proud.' I thought she still had time, time to see me graduate, mature into a woman, and chase after my dreams. Time to enjoy the fruits of the great job she did in raising me and time to raise my future children, her grandchildren with all the values and principles she raised me with.

I feel robbed, God cheated me a chance of making my mother proud and treating her like the Queen she was. How I wish this whole thing can be nothing but a terrible dream I will soon wake up from, my mother can't be gone forever. I can't be an orphan, oh my beautiful and kind mother. In my heart, she reigns supreme, and no one will ever take her place, no one in

this world will love me as my mother did. All the words in the dictionary cannot describe how I feel inside, I'm torn apart, and I don't know if I can pick up the pieces and move on. Where will I even begin?

"Buhle ngane yami, you need to stop crying otherwise you'll get sick." Aunt Keke, my mother's relative says letting herself inside my bedroom holding a plate of food.

(My child)

"But it hurts so much aunt," I say and burst into tears. She sets the plate on the bedside table, lowers herself on the bed, and pulls me into her arms.

"I know sisi, I know but I promise it'll get better with time. Phephisa sisi, umamakho beku ngumuntu olunge kakhulu sonke siphatheke kabi."

(Your mother was a good person all of us are saddened by her passing)

It might be true, but I doubt anyone feels the pain that I feel. My mother and I were inseparable, unlike most young people I've never had friends to visit or go out with. I'm very reserved and selective about the people I bring close to me. So I did almost everything with my mother, we would talk, gossip, cook, bake and sleep together (most of the time). I will miss our late-night chats, her doing bantu knots on my head before bed, and of course, sitting in front of the screen every evening watching our favorite soapies. Ismomondiya sika baba was my best friend, when I started varsity, it took a while for me to adjust to living miles away from her but at least I knew she was a phone call away when I needed her. Now tell me how do I live the rest of my life without her? Being in this house without her is torturous for me.

My aunt allows me to weep in her arms until I get hiccups, then she breaks the hug and hands me a bottle of water

"Here, drink this." I take the sealed bottle of sparkling water and guzzle the water down my throat in three gulps.

"I brought you something to eat." I wipe my tears with my palms and blow my nose

“Thanks, aunt but I’m not hungry.”

“I know but you haven’t eaten anything since you got here, please eat a few spoons, my child.”

“Okay, let me go wash my hands.” I roll out of bed and head to the bathroom to wash my hands. I almost don’t recognize myself when I catch my reflection in the mirror, my eyes are swollen and my whole face is puffy. I look like some Chinese old woman; I wash my face with water and pat it with a dry towel before heading back to the bedroom.

“Dlana sesi.” I take the plate from my aunt, eat a few spoons, and put it aside.

(Eat my child)

“Have two more spoons my child.” She says beseechingly. I grab the plate and eat; she keeps saying ‘two more’ until I finish everything on the plate.

“That’s my girl, now get some rest it’s been a long day.” She says tugging me in like I’m a toddler.

“Sleep tight muhleza ka Nomonde.” She plants a soft peck on my forehead

She closes my curtains, turns off the lights, and leaves my bedroom taking the dirty plate and the empty bottle. I sleep on my back and go through my mother’s photos on my gallery, she was such a beautiful woman with a slightly thick body, Nokwazi and I take after her. The round butt, the curves, small waist, the small tennis ball breasts, and of course the slightly bowed legs and shallow dimples. Nokwazi has a mole on her chin like our father and that’s how people differentiate us. Growing up people thought that we were twins because our mother used to buy us the same clothes and we would wear them on the same day, we used to be so close, and it hurts to see how much we’ve drifted from each other.

We grew distant over the past few months; we are no less than strangers because it feels like I don’t know her anymore. She has changed into something else, someone I don’t recognize. The door opens pulling me from my thoughts, it’s not too dark

so I can see from the body shape that it's Nokwazi who just walked in. She switches on the light, sets her luggage bag on the vanity chair, and looks up. Our eyes lock and we silently stare at each other.

"Uhm, the aunts from KZN asked to use my bedroom, can I sleep here?" she says breaking the silence

"Cool, no problem. Get in." I say peeling the covers. Maybe this is what we need to go back to how we used to be.

She strips naked and rummages through her bag for pajamas, I can't help but stare at her body. She's so sexy and the tattoos add 'that thing' making her look even sexier. I admit they look good on her, but I never thought she would get tattoos, not one but three tattoos!

"What?" she asks when she turns and catches me staring

"You look different."

“I know, I’m living my truth. This is who I am, who I’ve always wanted to be.”

“Okay.” We fall into an awkward silence as she dresses up.

My phone rings breaking the silence

“Hello.”

“Hey, I’m outside. Please come.”

“What?” My voice comes out higher than I intended earning me a look from Nokwazi

“I need to see you, please Hlehle.” I blow out a sigh and momentarily close my eyes.

“My brother is around, what if he comes back while I’m still outside what will I say when he asks where I’m coming from? I

don't want to disrespect him." The curiosity in Nokwazi's eyes hikes up, she even steps closer

"I understand, you won't stay long. I'll just give you what I bought for you and leave."

"Thando-"

"Please." If there's one thing I've learned about Thando in the past five months is that he's hardheaded and doesn't give up easily

"Ok, I'm coming."

"Thanks, babe." He says and hangs up

"And then, who was that?" she asks the moment I move the phone from my ear

“It was Thando, he wants to see me,” I reply rolling out of bed and stripping out of my pajamas

“At this time?”

“It’s only 7 pm chill.”

“I know but it’s still late, we are mourning. What will I say when Quinton comes back and asks about you?”

“I won’t stay long; I’ll just take something from him and come back.”

“In that case, I’m going with you.”

“What?”

“What’s the matter, you said he’s your friend so why do you mind if I come with you?”

“Yes but-.”

“But nothing, I’m coming with you

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or I’ll tell our uncles that you’re busy with an old man.”

“Nokwazi?” I’m in disbelief, this is the same person who has all these expensive things she can’t account for. Rumour has it, that the girl is dating sugar daddies so she is in no position to judge me

“The choice is yours, little sister.” She says folding her arms across her chest.

“Fiiine, let’s go.” She grins excitedly and puffs perfume on her neck and bust area.

“Okay, let’s go.”

“You won’t change?” She’s wearing short silky pajamas and sleepers; the pants are so short her butt cheeks are out in the open.

“We are not going to stay long; we are taking whatever from him and coming back. Changing will be too much admin.” I was also wearing pajamas and I changed them mos

“You know what Nokwazi, let’s just go.”

We lie and say we’re going to the shop when uncle Mfanafuthi asks where we are going. His black Audi Q5 is easy to spot because it stands out, he’s parked down the street not far from the Indian shop, I approach the car with Nokwazi hot on my heels and knock on the window. He rolls down the window and shoots me the ‘Really?’ look.

“Ngena ngaphakathi Hlehle njenganini uma ngaphandle?  
Andizu thatha ixesha lakho ndiyakuthembisa.”

(Get inside Hlehle, since when do you stand outside? I won’t take too much of your time I promise.)

“I might as well introduce myself since it doesn’t look like Buhle will. I’m Nokwazi her big sister.” She says making her presence known

Thando is shocked, he wasn’t aware that we have company. He clears his throat and greets her back

“Molo sisi ...mina ndingu Thando”

(Greetings, my name is Thando)

“Unjani?”

(How are you)

“Ndiphilile enkosi, unjani wena?”

(I’m good how are you)

“I’m also good”

“Ndiyavuya ukukwazi sisi”

(Pleased to meet you)

She smiles “I see Nobuhle wasn’t lying.”

“Excuse me?” Thando asks with an arched brow, she chuckles

“She told me you are handsome, now I see she wasn’t lying. Pictures don’t do you justice, uyababa shem you resemble Jamal from Empire. Are you colored? I’m sorry for asking but you look colored.” Thando looks at me and smiles awkwardly

I’m so embarrassed I wish I could evaporate into thin air, yo waze wangihlaza uNokwazi!

“Thanks.” He’s over this whole thing, his expression says it all.

“Please accept my heartfelt condolences on your mother’s passing, may the good Lord strengthen you and your family and soothe your broken hearts in these trying times.”

“Thanks, Nobuhle didn’t you say you were getting something from him? It’s chilly out here and mosquitoes are feasting on me.” She says rubbing her arms

“Oh, that! here take this.” He says handing me a shopping bag from Woolworths, I can’t resist the urge to peep and check what’s inside. I drool when I see the packet of Ferrero Roche’s, tin roof ice cream, Tiramisu cake, and a couple of other sweet treats, I look at his face and my lips stretch into an involuntary smile

“Thank you so much Ndalo.” That earns me a scowl from him, and I crack up. I know how much he hates it when I call him Ndalo, I did it on purpose because I enjoy teasing him. I still can’t believe he has the same name as my brother, well my brother isn’t exactly Mpilo he’s Mpilentle but it’s the same thing mos or not?

“Uzakuwaba wena utsho ngokuba mhle.” He says with that panty-dropping smile of his

(You’ll regret it you pretty thing)

I swear I didn't mean to blush, but I couldn't help myself, his voice combined with that sexy smile of his will be the death of me I swear. A dangerous combination for my poor cheeks I tell you!

"I'm sorry about your mom Hlehle, I know right now it doesn't look like you'll ever get over the pain of losing her, but it'll get better with time I promise. I'm here for you, don't hesitate to pick up the phone and call me whenever you need me. I will always be here." He says softly stroking my cheek and looking into my eyes as if trying to look into the depths of my soul

Nokwazi clears her throat, he quickly retracts his hand. I swear I completely forgot she's here and it seems I'm not the only one.

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NARRATED

Nqobile, Cebo's wife, and Keke are in the kitchen washing dishes, Nqobile washes the last plate and wipes her hands. She then pulls a chair, dumps her behind on it, takes out her snuff and the cloth she uses to wipe her nose from her bra.

"This house is big" She says putting the snuff in her nose

"Yes, Mpilentle did a great job. I'm proud of him." Keke replies with a smile

"Yeah, Kona usebenzile umfana but I'm worried." Keke turns  
(The boy did a good job)

"Why?"

"He lives in Joburg with his wife, Nokwazi lives in Northwest and Buhle in Pretoria. Who's going to take care of the house now that their mother is gone?"

"I'm sure Mpilentle has a plan."

“What plan?”

“I don’t know he’s a smart child I know he’ll think of something.”

“I think my daughter Nomcebo should move in with her three children, she needs a place to stay so it’s a win-win for everyone. She will stay here and take care of the house until the girls finish with school.”

“Haibo uNomcebo has three kids?” Keke fails to hide her shock, has it been that long? Nqobile nods shamefully

“Yebo sisi, all different fathers. That’s why I think the change of scenery will do her good, it might motivate her to go back to school when she sees other young women doing well with their lives. This house is perfect, each child will get their own bedroom then Nomcebo will take the master.”

“Haibo, bese balalaphi abo Mpilentle mabavakashile no makoti? Ok, asiyeke yaka Mpilentle, abo Nokwazi bona?”

(Where will Mpilentle and his wife sleep when they come to visit? Forget Mpilentle, what about Nokwazi and Nobuhle.)

“No sisi wena awungizwa kahle, bazalala khona mabangekho mababuyile abo Nokwazi eskolweni abazukulu bazalala no mawabo.”

(No, you didn't understand me. The kids will only use the bedrooms when the girls are at school, they will sleep with their mom when the girls come home for holidays)

“Hmm, asazi let's hope Mpilentle will agree.”

“He has no choice; my husband and I did a lot for them when his father died and Nomonde was left a widow. It's thanks to my husband that he went to school and completed his degree.”

“Haibo Nqobile kahle amanga NSFAS paid for his fees.”

(Stop lying)

“Did that same NSFAS buy Nomonde and the kid's groceries and clothes? We all know Nomonde never worked a day in her life, she was nothing but a spoiled wife, who do you think took over when her husband died? Cebo’elihle my husband, Nomcebo will stay here end of discussion!”

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QUINTON

I spent my evening bonding with my wife and son in the hospital, and only left when they fell asleep. There’s no one outside the house as I drive in, it’s safe to assume everyone is in the backyard or sleeping. I park my car in the garage and lock it, my phone rings as I’m rolling down the garage door

“Hello.”

“Hi, I heard about your mother. I’m sorry I know how much she meant to you.” It’s Lebo

“Thanks.”

“Don’t hesitate to call me if you need someone to talk to, I’m here for you and I got you. I don't mind being your shoulder to cry on.” Bathong!

“Lebohang I don’t know if you heard but I’m a married man, I don’t need a shoulder to cry on. my wife is here should I need someone to talk to.”

“Oh! I’m sorry I didn’t know...so you married her? So soon!”

“Lebohang it’s late, I need to get some rest it’s been a long day so goodnight.”

“Goodnight.” I hang up and block her number.

There’s no one in the kitchen when I walk in, it seems like everyone is sleeping which I appreciate because lord knows I’m not in a mood for their fake concern. I head to Buhle’s bedroom

to check on her because she was crying when I left, I knock once and let myself in.

“Bhuti it’s you.”

“Yes, ulele nobani lapho? Uphi uNobuhle”

(Who are you sleeping with there? Where is Nobuhle?)

“I’m sleeping with Nobuhle.” She is speaking in a hushed tone so she doesn’t wake Buhle up.

“How are your wife and the baby?” my lips curve into a smile

“She’s fine but her blood pressure is high, the doctor wants to keep her for a few days and keep an eye on her, the baby is also fine but damn that little rat can cry...I think he takes after his aunt.” I wink at her and she chuckles

“I know people say all babies look the same but I swear mine is the cutest baby alive.”

“He’s yours you’ll say that.”

“Okay let me show you a picture then, yintle ingane yami Nokwazi,” I say handing her my phone, I couldn’t help but update my screensaver and lock screen with Zothando's pictures that I took before I left the hospital. The boy stole my heart, it was love at first sight.

“He’s so cute bakithi, bhuti?”

“Yes?” she exhales

“Arg never mind, it’s none of my business anyway.”

“Today is not a good day to try me, Khuluma.”

(Talk)

“Ok since you insist here goes...how certain are you that he’s yours?”

“What?”

“I mean, he’s too pink.” This girl knows how to get on my last nerve

“Nokwazi you’re my sister and I love you but if keep doing what you’re doing, I’ll forget you’re my sister. Uyazikhipha kimi kancane kancane ngezenzo zakho, angikaze ngikubeke isandla ngicela ungangiphoci.”

(My love for you has decreased because of your actions, I’ve never hit so please don’t push me to do it.)

#68

“So..”

“What?”

“You are dating Thando.” I roll my eyes and sigh, this is getting old

“I already told you no.”

“You are just friends?”

“Yes.”

“Hmmm, just so you know he’s using reverse psychology on you. I know guys like him, he’ll pretend to be patient with you while doing all these nice things for you, be there when you need him, buy you gifts and make you feel special. He’ll never pressure you into a relationship, he’ll be patient until you’re the

one who wants more. He is smart I'll give him that. I can see that you're already in love with him and it's only a matter of time before you give in to your feelings and agree to be his girlfriend. I just hope you're ready to get your heartbroken. Handsome and monied guys like him are never loyal"

"Why do you always have to be so negative? Leave me alone, if he hurts me fine it'll be my lesson to learn."

"I'm only trying to look out for you as your elder sister, I don't want what happened to me to happen to you. Boys are dogs but older men are the pits."

"Yet you are sleeping with them."

"What did you say?"

"You heard me."

Within a blink of an eye my cheek is burning, my vision is impaired and I'm seeing double. Nokwazi has bitch slapped me.

“Don’t you ever talk to me like that again you little bitch, I’ll beat you up so bad you won’t believe it.” She says pointing a finger at me

“I'm not scared of you Nokwazi, ngingakushaya ngeke ukholwe ukuthi ushaywa yimi but because I respect you I won’t do it.”

(I can beat you up so much that you won’t believe it's me)

“Shaya, shaya sibone!”

(Hit me, hit me, and let's see)

The door flies open and aunt Keke rushes inside

“What’s going on here? I could hear your screams from the kitchen” She asks glaring at us

“Is it not this little tikiline that reckons because she is dating a man our brother's age she can disrespect me.”

“What?” Aunt looks at me unable to mask her disappointment  
“is it true?”

“No, I’m not dating him.”

“Oh really? ask her who bought her the cake, chocolates, and all the other things we were eating the other day.” I look down when my aunt looks at me

“Nobuhle!”

“He’s my friend I swear and he’s not my brother's age, he is sis'Anzani's age.” Nokwazi scoffs

“The same Anzani who encouraged her to do this.”

“What? Hlelo please go and call Anzani here.” Aunt asks one of Nomcebo's kids who are standing at the door with other kids watching the whole drama unfold

I'm shaking, I feel bad. I shouldn't have told Nokwazi about sis Anzani's meeting with Thando because now it will look like she's the one leading me astray.

"Auntie Hlelo says you're calling me," sis Anzani says making her way inside the bedroom, she's wearing a doek and pinafore and has traces of flour on her clothes and hands. She's baking scones in the kitchen with my aunts and older cousins.

"Get in and close the door." Aunt replies with a flared nose

"Okay." She closes the door and walks closer

"Nokwazi repeat what you told me."

"Nobuhle is dating an older man, he's a chartered accountant and drives a black Audi. When Nobuhle told me about him I told her not to date him because I know older men are bad news but because she thinks her perfect sister in law knows better than me she asked her for advice, Anzani advised her to follow her heart and even went as far as inviting this guy to

Braamfointen behind my brothers back and had lunch with him and that's when she consented to this relationship."

"Anzani I'm so disappointed in you, how can you mislead a child like this? You are older and I really thought you were someone who the girls could look up to but now I see I was wrong, how can you advise such a young girl like Nobuhle to follow her heart, were you already dating at 16?" Anzani shakes her head no

"Then why advise Nobuhle to do what you never did? I'm sure Nomonde is disappointed in you, she loved you so much and always spoke highly of you. She trusted you with all her kids and this is what you do? Lead her daughter astray? You are married to your son's father and you don't have a fatherless child, don't you want the same for your sister-in-law? I expected better than this from you!"

"I know how this looks aunt but can I please explain?"

"Explain what? Did Nokwazi lie?" Aunt retorts

“No, but-“

“But nothing, you’re a bad influence I can’t believe I liked you  
nxn!”

“No aunt you are wrong, sis Anzani didn’t do anything wrong.  
She didn’t advise me to date Thando, I’m not dating him I swear  
we are only friends.”

“Shut up wena, your mother must be disappointed because she  
had so much faith in you. Stop being forward, ungaphaphiswa  
yilo buhle bakho nomzimba omuhle abafana bazodlala ngawe  
bese bakulahle njenge orange eliphele umsoco.”

(Don’t let your beauty and that beautiful body make you  
forward, boys will play with you and dump you like a dry orange  
that has been sucked all its juice.)

“I promise sis Anzani did nothing wrong.”

“Of course, you’ll say that angithi you are nothing but a child,  
you don’t know that sometimes snakes come to you disguised

as angels. No one would advise a 16-year-old to date if they really love and want the best for them” her gaze moves to Anzani “Quinton will know about this.” Then she clicks her tongue and walks away

“Sis'Anzani I’m sorry, I will tell my brother the truth.” She smiles sadly, I can tell she’s trying so hard not to break down and cry

“No, it’s okay my love I know it's not your fault.” A tear rolls down her cheek but she quickly wipes it. She looks at Nokwazi “What did I ever do to you for you to hate me so much?” Nokwazi turns to look at her unbothered and walks out without replying. I feel anger surge throughout my body like a flame.

“Ukhohlakele wena makgosha ndini!” I pace after her trying to hit her but Sis Anzani pulls me back

(You are evil, you prostitute)

“Don’t allow her to turn you into someone you’re not. You are way better than this.” Nokwazi stops at the door and smiles

“Listen to your sister-in-law because I’ll beat you up so bad your boyfriend won’t be able to recognize you if you ever try that again nxn!”

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QUINTON

The postmortem results came back saying that my mother died from natural causes, I guess I need to accept that it was her time and try to come to terms with her passing and be strong for my siblings because they need me now more than ever. Anzani was discharged from the hospital two days ago, she came back and lessened the burden on my shoulders by taking charge of the funeral arrangements, she’s taking care of everything and is being strong for all of us. She’s acting as a pillar and holding all of us together during this difficult time, I never knew my wife was this strong until now and I thank the Lord daily for blessing me with her, she’s everything I need and more.

She never spends the night because Zothando is an infant, he's sensitive and can't be around too many people. Her aunt takes care of him during the day, Anzani comes every morning and goes back to her aunt's house in the afternoon. I feel terrible because she just gave birth to our son, she should be home nursing our baby not walking up and down hurting her stitches but circumstances have led us here.

Given and I are driving to a farm on the outskirts of Mpumalanga to buy a cow for the funeral, we are driving in Given's bakkie. It feels good to be driven around for a change, I'm exhausted I have been driving up and down running errands since last week Sunday

"How's my boy?" A smile visits my face

"He's doing fine, growing every day. I can't wait for the funeral to be over so my wife can rest and nurse our son the right way."

"Eish

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I understand. Anzani is a very special woman, you're lucky to have her in your life. She continuously proves that she would do anything for you, when you were in the COMA she starved herself for almost two weeks praying for your life, and now she just gave birth and should be resting, but here she is going out of her to make sure your mother gets a dignified send-off."

"Yeah, I know right. She's a blessing, and I love her more with each day that passes."

"I'm happy for you little brother, on other news my daughter's VISA was approved." He says with excitement oozing throughout his whole body

"What? Congratulations brother."

"Thanks."

"I can't wait to meet the princess."

“I can’t wait for her to come here, I’m so happy that finally, my daughter will stay with me.”

“I’m happy for you, I can’t imagine how it felt to be away from her for so many months. I already can’t go a day without seeing my son, not seeing him for months would be torture. I’m happy for you brother you deserve it.”

“Thanks, man.”

He drives through the open gate, the farm owner approaches our car dressed in his khaki shorts, brown boots, and a khaki short-sleeved hemp and a matching cowboy hat.

“Good day my name is Mariki, please come to this side so I can show you the cows.”

We exchange pleasantries and follow him to the small pond where the cows are drinking water

“You can look and choose the one you want, I’ll give you a moment to decide.” He says and excuses himself

“Wow, all of these cows look big and well-fed.” Given

“Yes, they look better than the ones we just saw in Balfour” He laughs

“Come on those things are not cows.” He laughs and I join in

“His prices are a bit too high but the cows are worth it, and this place is far but I’m buying the cow from here. My mother deserves only the best” He nods imperceptibly

“Yes, let me go tell him we are buying. Which one are you taking?”

“Let's take the black and white one.”

“Okay let me go call him.” I pay for the cow and tell him we will come to fetch it tomorrow afternoon.

It's three in the afternoon when we drive back into the yard, and I'm exhausted. More relatives keep arriving as the day of the funeral approaches so I might have to give up my room and go sleep in the guesthouse Given booked into. Given is such a blessing in my life, the best friend I never knew I needed. He has shown me that blood isn't always thicker than water and that family doesn't always mean blood relatives. He's my family, the big brother I never knew I needed.

“Come I need to talk to you.” Aunt Keke says the moment I walk through the front door

“What's going on aunt?”

“Just come.” She looks at Given with a smile “Given how are you, my son?”

“I'm good ma.”

“I’m glad, wena follow me.” I follow her and my heart skips when she leads me to Nobuhle’s bedroom. I hope nothing happened to my sisters

“He’s here, I want him to hear the truth from you.” She says to Nobuhle who looks like she’s been crying

“What’s going on nana?” I ask prepared to deal with whoever is the reason for her tears, angifuni nex ngo Nobuhle, she’s like my firstborn.

“She’s dating an older man with a car and apparently your wife knows.” What?

“Nobuhle?”

“That’s not the truth bhuti, aunt doesn’t want to listen to me. Nokwazi is just bitter and trying to stir up trouble because she’s not happy with herself, don’t allow her to come between you and your wife please.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I know you love Anzani and that she's your wife but please keep her away from your sisters she's a bad influence,” Aunt says and walks out

“What's going on kanti Nobuhle?” she wipes her tears and blows her nose

“I met a guy a couple of months back, some guy was trying to rape me and this guy defended me.”

“What? You almost got raped, by who? Why didn't you tell me?” I'm boiling in anger

“It was that time when you were in the hospital, I didn't tell anyone because I didn't want to worry anyone and because it was my fault.”

“What do you mean it was your fault?” she looks down

“I went out late at night and tried to smoke cigarettes.” Wow!

“What else don’t I know because it seems there’s a lot.”

“I’m sorry but I was hurt and couldn’t study, I just wanted something to make me feel better but I never smoked I promise,” I swear these girls will give me grey hair before my time, your kids are stressing me, mom. One is dating sugar daddies another is smoking cigarettes

“Go on.”

“He helped me and we started talking, he said he loves me and wants to be my friend until I’m ready to date because he understands that I’m still young for a relationship. I pushed him away but I missed him so much and couldn’t forget about him regardless of how much I tried so I asked sis Anzani what to do and she said she wants to meet with him and study him before

she can advise me, they met and she was satisfied with him and gave us the approval to be friends. “

“Wow, and all of this happened behind my back?”

“I’m sorry but I swear we are not dating, he has never even kissed me. We only hug that’s all, sis Anzani said I’m still too young to date, she is not a bad influence I promise, and when she said I should follow my heart she didn’t mean I should date him. I’m still a virgin you can take me to the doctor to check, I swear I have never done anything I shouldn’t be doing with him. Don’t be angry at my sister-in-law and please don’t blame her because she didn’t do anything wrong, don’t make her regret advising me because she’s the only one I can talk to about these things with. Nokwazi doesn’t know to behave like a big sister, please don’t ruin our relationship.” She implores desperation seeping into her voice.

The way she defends Anzani though, I don’t know if I should be impressed or worried. Nobuhle is a child and has no business befriending guys, I know men would do anything to get what they want. Using ‘Friendship’ is the oldest trick in the book, I understand why Buhle would fall for it but Anzani? I’m disappointed, to say the least.

#69

He's been silent the whole drive to my aunt's house, I guess his aunt already got to him and whispered in his ear. He's not talking to me so I also won't talk to him, why should I grovel when I didn't do anything wrong? I did what I did because I was trying to protect his sister, we are not always with her and we can't control what she does so it's better to know what she does and who she does it with so screw him if he doesn't see that.

He parks the car in front of the gate and I attempt to pull the handle but he presses the child lock button

"So, you're just going to go just like that?" I heave a sigh and turn to look at him

"What do you want me to do?"

"Explain your side of the story."

“But you didn’t ask me anything, you just got in here all moody and didn’t talk to me so how was I supposed to explain?”

“Drop the attitude.” He deadpans

“What attitude?”

“Anzani I’m not playing with you, drop the attitude, and let’s talk like civilized people.” Because now it suits him? Mxm

“Let’s talk about this guy who is seeing Buhle, what do you know about him, who is he?”

“First of all he’s not seeing Nobuhle, he’s her friend. His name is Ndaloyothando Mpilo Ngxito, he’s 23 turning 24 this year and he’s a qualified chartered accountant.”

“So let me get this straight, he’s 7 years older than Nobuhle and you approved of this ‘friendship’?” people and double standards, everything is bad only when they’re not the ones doing it.

“Yes, love knows no age. You are also five years older than me and no one is making a fuss about it.”

“Because I didn’t start dating you when you were in your teens, I waited for you to grow up and be mature before I started dating you.”

“Thando is not you so you can’t expect him to do things the way you do them, you could have lost me to someone else since I dated several people before you. He doesn’t want to risk it, he wants Nobuhle to be his and he’s willing to wait for her until she matures I don’t see anything wrong with that. They are not dating, they are just friends.”

“I'm a guy and I know how guys think, what if this guy manipulates Nobuhle and takes advantage of her naivety.”

“That’s where I come in, Nobuhle isn’t doing this by herself or with friends who will probably give her bad advises she has me to guide her.”

“I don’t know, I’m not comfortable with this whole setup. Nobuhle is young and should be focusing on her education not building friendships with grown men.”

“I know but we can’t run away from the fact that she’s a teenager, and she has feelings. It’s better to know what’s going on in her life than to have her explore alone and be misled by her friends. Would you rather know what’s going on in her life or have her sleeping with old men behind your back? You should be worried about Nokwazi who’s living a flashy lifestyle instead of blowing a gasket about Nobuhle who is innocent and transparent in what she is doing.”

“Why didn’t you tell me about this?”

“Because I knew you’d react like this, and Nobuhle would have lost faith in me. Now she trusts me and can talk to me about these things without any fear of being judged and that’s the kind of relationship I wish my mother had with me maybe I wouldn’t have made some of the mistakes I made. I would have known my worth and not felt pressured to give up my virginity when I wasn’t ready to, it's better to talk to kids about these

things than to shy away from reality and write them off as kids. Yes, she's a kid but life has changed. Teenagers nowadays are not the same as they were when you were growing up, you can't use the parenting skills your mother used on you on our kids, or your sisters because whether we like it or not times have changed and kids are exposed to everything out there. It's either you teach your sisters what you want them to know or watch their friends, social media and society teach them on your behalf." He hums

"Ukhulumile mkami, I have heard you." He says taking my hand in his

(My wife, you have spoken)

"I really hope you did, so when are you addressing the issue of Nokwazi? She's getting out of hand."

"I wanted to focus on the funeral now but I'll talk to her before she goes back to varsity."

"Ok cool, no problem."

“I want you to be part of the conversation.”

“Unfortunately I will have to refuse.” His face drops “Your sister doesn’t respect me, to her we are age mates. She talks to me anyhow and I won’t begin to mention the things I heard her saying about me behind my back. I don’t hate her but I would rather not get involved in her business.”

“What do you mean what she said about you behind your back?”

“I overheard her conversation with aunt Nqobile and aunt Zinzile, they were asking if she has met Zothando and she said no but she saw his pictures from your phone and she has reason to believe she’s not a Ndlovu because apparently he’s too light as if me and you are dark-skinned.”

I’m light-skinned and Mpilo is in the middle, he’s not dark nor light he’s just in between so why should my son be dark-skinned? When none of his immediate relatives are dark, Mam'Nomonde, Nobuhle, and Nokwazi are all caramel-skinned

I swear that girl wants my soul! And besides all babies are born light-skinned, well most of them.

“She said what?” he’s fuming with anger, he has veins popping on his forehead

“Exactly that.”

“I swear Nokwazi keeps pushing me to put my hands on her.”  
I’m not getting involved, let him deal with her how he sees fit.

“Let me go inside I miss my son.” Plus my boobs are painful, I’ve been ignoring the pain all day long.

When my aunt said she’ll show me how to stop breast milk from coming out she meant putting a cabbage from the freezer on my nipples and dang it’s painful as f\*\*k!

“I’m going in with you, I also want to see my yellow bone.” I cackle

“Yazi u Nokwazi akazwani nokuthula shem but maybe this is grief talking. She still hasn’t cried for our mother.”

(Nokwazi doesn’t like peace)

“Let me reserve my comment.”

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QUINTON

People came in numbers to help us to give our lovely mother ismomondiya sa babami a dignified send-off fit for a Queen, everyone had nothing but good things to say about her. I think the reality of my mother's death only sank in for Nokwazi when she saw my mother lying mute inside the coffin, I have never heard her cry as much as she did on Saturday morning when we viewed mom inside her casket. She even fainted, she did the same thing when her coffin was lowered into the grave. My

mother has left a huge gap in our hearts, she might be gone but she will forever live in our hearts and in our memories.

I doubt the pain will ever go away but I guess I will learn to live with it, I finally got to meet Anzani's boss and some of her colleagues who came to show their support at the funeral. She came with her husband and I've got to admit they make a lovely couple, Anzani told me they are having problems but it didn't look like that to me when I saw them together but I don't know them so I can't say for sure. I'm hurt that my mother is gone but I'm glad I was able to give her the burial she deserved. People from my previous church also came in numbers to show their support and left us some donations to as condolences. Mpho, Gift, and Kgahliso were among them.

It's Sunday, the day after the funeral and all the women in the yard woke up early to wash the blankets and clean the house. A black sheet is laid on top of the stoep and my mother's belongings are sprawled on top of it and everyone is taking what they like. I took out her valuables and the things I thought my siblings would like to keep before all the relatives arrived and locked them in her closet. I'm sitting with Kabelo and Gift outside the gate

Kabelo is drinking his cognac while Gift and I are having a soft drink it's been a long week. I'm tired, but at least I have a week off from work.

"Nokwazi buya la."

(Come here)

I say when she walks past us with one of my cousins from KZN, she tells Gugu to wait for her and comes closer. She's wearing a mini skirt and all her thighs are out in the open, I'm so ashamed to have her standing like that in front of my friends so I stand up and meet her halfway

"When are you going back to varsity?"

"Tomorrow, I've already missed out on a lot of school work." I nod in understanding

"Ok, ntambama I want us to have a conversation."

(In the evening)

“Okay.”

“I don’t like your attitude towards umaka Zothando, she’s my wife you have to understand that to me she comes first and I’ll always defend her against anyone who threatens her peace. Even if that person is you.”

“So, screw how I feel?”

“That’s not what I’m saying, what’s your issue with her vele?”

“I don’t have any issues naye.”

“Hmm, if I ever hear you insinuate that Zothando is not my son ever again you and I will have a problem. Angifuni ukuk'zonda Nokwazi kodwa qhubeka wenze lamasimba owenzayo ngizophuma kuwe ngikhohlwe ngawe stru nasi” she blinks repeatedly getting ready to cry “you can go.”

( I don’t want to hate you Nokwazi but keep doing what you’re doing I’ll forget I have a sister)

“This one is too forward.” Given says when I go back to my seat

“Very, she’s annoying. I don’t want to hate her, she’s my sister and she has no one but me in this life but it’s getting to that point I swear. Can you believe she told my aunts that Zothando is not mine?” I say feeling myself get angry all over again. Kabelo laughs while Given stares in shock.

“What drugs is she smoking? That kid looks like you. He just took Anzani's light complexion.” Given

“I don’t need anyone convincing me, that’s my son. Even if he didn’t look like me I would still believe he’s my son, he’s mine I don’t need to be convinced.”

“Ukhohlakele umtwana kini angifuni ukungasho yoh! Usile shem lomtwana ufuna induku, imagine the guts to say something like that, ai shem uyamyeka mina ngabe sengimshaye kudala shem.”

(Your little sister is cruel, she's evil she needs a beating.) ( you are too soft with her if it was me I would have long beaten her.)

“Kabelo is right, she shouldn't disrespect your wife like that.”

“I know but I think maybe it's grief talking.”

“No, there's no such thing Buhle also lost her mom but you don't see her being disrespectful. Beat Nokwazi or bring her to me, ngiyamhalela angifuni ukungasho ngimshaye lamathanga athanda ukusivezela wona avuvuke.” Kabelo says and we all roar in laughter

(I want to beat those thighs of hers that she likes showing off, I will beat them until they are swollen.)

“On a serious note, Nokwazi needs to dress appropriately.”

Given

“True.”

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Most of the relatives left yesterday after the funeral and some today during the day only uncle Cebo and his family are still here, he and his wife asked to talk to me. I'm in the lounge waiting for them to say why they have called me here

"Thank you for coming my son."

"Akunankinga babomncane." He clears his throat and looks at his wife

(It's not a problem uncle)

"My wife and I have been talking and we think Nomcebo and her children should come and stay in this house when you and the girls go back to your lives rather than leaving the house vacant." He forces a chuckle "She'll take care of the house for you guys, and don't worry you don't have to thank me." He says and smiles like he didn't just spew nonsense

"I'm confused uncle, which house?"

“This one.” He says skimming his eyes around the house with a smile “Ai kuhle, muhle impela umuzi kanyoko usebenzile mfana.”

(It's beautiful, your mother's house is very beautiful you did an amazing job.)

“Thanks, uncle but there’s no need for Nomcebo to move in, I already found someone to take care of the house for me.” His smile turns into a frown

“What?” his wife quips

“I found someone to look after the house in my absence there’s no need for Nomcebo to move in,” I repeat, sternly this time

“Oh, I see...the thing is Nomcebo needs to move to Gauteng, a lot of things have happened to her in KZN and I reckon a change of scenery will do her good.”

“I hear you, I would love to help but unfortunately there’s no empty room in my mother’s house that she can use unless she

doesn't mind using the backroom I used to use before building my mother this house."

"What do you mean there's no room? This house has four bedrooms." The wife says with so much entitlement in her voice.

"Exactly aunt, four bedrooms that are enough for all of us. One for Nobuhle, the other one is for Nokwazi, the remaining one is for my wife and me when we come to visit and the main bedroom belongs to my mother."

"But she's dead mos." It takes everything in me not to tell her exactly what I think of her

"Yeah, but the room remains hers. No one will use her room, not even me." She claps her hands

"Hai Ukhohlakele Mpilentle sewungaze uncabe nge kamere ngenca yomuntu oshonile? Your mother is gone and she's not coming back."

(You are cruel, how can you refuse with a bedroom because of someone who has died?)

“I have no problem with Nomcebo moving into the back rooms, it’s a two-room so she will have enough space. She’ll have to buy her groceries and pay for electricity though.”

“Wow, Mpilentle wow! How can you be so cruel? Do you think you’re better than everyone now that you’re working and married? You forgot that you struggled for years to get a job, Nilamba ningazi nizodlani?” Uncle Cebo says

(starving and not knowing where your next plate of food will come from)

“Exactly babomncane my mother struggled with my siblings and I and none of you stepped in to help, I had to hustle and fix people's appliances to put food on the table. I don’t like reminding people of what they said to me in the past but do you remember what you said when I asked for your help in paying for Nokwazi's registration? Do you still remember what you said when I wanted you to delegate my wife's Lobola? You asked me for R15000, 15 babomncane and today you want me to take Nomcebo in? Fine I don’t mind doing that but not at my

sisters or my inconvenience, my sisters went to varsity to study not to live there they must always have room to come back home to. I also can't be booking into guesthouses and lodges when I have a room at home, you'll forgive me but no one will use my mother's room I'm sorry. Nomcebo can move in the back room but she'll have to see herself out, I have a wife, two siblings, and a son to take care of I can't be maintaining someone else on top of that nizongixolela." My voice unintentionally rose higher and higher with each word that left my mouth, I'm almost shouting by the time I say the last sentence.

"You'll regret this, don't say I didn't warn you." Aunt Nqobile says pointing a finger at me, she's furious that much is evident.

#70

Nokwazi and I couldn't have our chat yesterday as planned because the conversation I had with my uncle and his wife didn't end on a good note, it ended with him and his family packing their belongings and leaving in the middle of the night while hurtful words were being thrown in the air by him and his wife that is. I didn't respond, I kept quiet and listened to his wife's endless threats about how I'm going to regret declining to take her daughter in, do I regret my decision? No, I don't. After all that drama, I told Nokwazi we would talk first thing in the morning when she woke up, it's 10 am now and the girl hasn't left her room.

"Buhle please go and call her." She looks at me but doesn't stand up

"And then?"

"Asikhulumisani," she says with an attitude

(We don't talk to each other)

Nangu umhlola wami bo!

“So? Nobuhle, go and call Nokwazi.” She pouts her lips, stands up from her seat, and walks away mumbling under her breath.

I’m on Twitter checking out what’s trending when they walk through the door. I put my phone away giving them my full attention.

“Good morning bhuti.”-Nokwazi

“Good morning Nokwazi please sit down, I want to talk to the both of you.” Nokwazi takes a seat on the single couch across me while Nobuhle joins me on the love seat

“Our mother passed on; I don’t know if you girls are aware of this but with mom gone, we only have each other in this world. Yes, we have relatives from both our parents’ sides of the family, but those people will never lift a single finger to help us in times of need. They only love us when they want something

from us so we only have each other, and instead of fighting amongst ourselves we should be united and have each other's backs like our mother would have wanted us to. I don't like what's going on between you two, you are blood sisters. You should be best friends, protecting each other against enemies not fighting amongst yourselves."

"Kwazi started it."-Nobuhle

"It doesn't matter who started it, people fight and disagree all the time. I also fight with my wife, but we never go to bed angry at each other, we communicate and settle our differences and that's what I want you, girls, to do. Talk things through, there's no place for pride in relationships. Admitting that you are wrong and apologizing for your mistakes doesn't make you weak, it doesn't mean the other person is above you or that you're sucking up to them. No one is perfect, everyone has faults I also have my faults and a wise person is one who takes positive criticism and accepts correction. Accepting that you are wrong helps you grow because you learn from your mistakes, rectify them and become a better person so I need the both of you to learn to take correction with grace, no one knows everything so there's always something we can learn from each other. I might be older than you both but there is a

lot I can learn from you.” They hold contact for a few seconds and Buhle is the first one to give in and speak

“Nokwazi I’m sorry for what I said the other day, it was rude and disrespectful I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay,” Nokwazi replies meekly

“Nokwazi don’t you have anything you want to apologize to Buhle for?”

“No, I didn’t do anything wrong. I did what I did because I wanted to protect her.”

“But you lied and created conflict in our family, you painted Anzani as a bad person who is leading Buhle astray when you were well aware of the nature of the relationship between Nobuhle and this Thando guy.”

“What kind of friend would buy you all those things Thando bought for Nobuhle? They are dating, she’s lying to us.”

“I don’t know about the type of friends you have but I have friends who would do anything for me without expecting anything in return...you were wrong, and you made Anzani look like a bad person to aunt and the rest of the family. Not only that but you also told them that you suspect that Zothando isn’t mine, you were rude and disrespectful to my wife when she tried to talk to you. I don’t care how old you think you are, but Anzani is my wife, and you need to show her respect because not only is she older than you but she’s your elder brother’s wife. You don’t like her? Fine, I won’t force you to like her, but you’ll respect her otherwise you and I will have a big problem and I’m not joking Nokwazi. You need to afford her the same respect you give to me or else I’ll be forced to distance myself from you because I don’t want it to get to a point where I put my hands on you. If I do, I swear, I’ll mutilate you and rearrange your face.”

“I’m sorry it won’t happen again.”

“I hope you mean it because this is the last warning I’ll give to you, I’m tired of telling you the same thing repeatedly like you’re a small child. Siyezwana?”

(Are we clear)

“Yes.”

“Good, let’s move. I won’t beat about the bush; I know you’re sleeping with older men for money. I won’t lie my heart is sore seeing the person you have turned into, there’s nothing I wouldn’t do for you, and you know it so I don’t understand why you would compromise your self-worth, morals, and principles for material things you can afford to buy for yourself in the future. You need to work hard at school and pass well so you can afford to buy everything you want and I’ll be honest, there’s nothing more fulfilling than spending your hard-earned money. There’s no shortcut to this life thing, you need to understand who you are and your purpose and stop comparing yourself to others. Be content with what you have and work on achieving your goals. Using other people’s lives as a benchmark in which you rate yourself will bring you nothing but misery because in life there will always be someone better than you in something.”

“Yes, there are those people whose success will inspire you and motivate you to do better, be motivated by the success of

others but don't look at what others have with eyes of jealousy and compare their life to yours. You'll never be happy if you're always comparing yourself to others, you'll be envious, jealous and you will hate those who are doing better than you. A person's attitude determines their altitude and with this attitude, you'll never go anywhere in life and you'll never be happy, you can have the most caring boyfriend in the world, but you'll never appreciate him because he doesn't give you a 5k monthly allowance and take you to vacations like your boyfriend's friend. There are so many examples I can give you to explain what I'm saying but in essence what I'm saying is that you'll never be happy, see and appreciate the good that you have in your life while you're still comparing yourself with others. Everyone is different and so will our lives, you and your friend can attend the same creche, primary, secondary, and even the same tertiary

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graduate with the same marks but your success will not come at the same time or in the same way because every one of us in life has his/her purpose. God's plans for you are different from his plans for Nobuhle, we were all born for a purpose and my purpose is not the same as yours." they nod their heads in understanding

“You’re turning 20 soon, you’re old enough to know what’s right or wrong. If you want to give away your youth to old men in exchange for a few cents, then be my guest but don’t cry tomorrow when your agemates have made something out of their lives and you’re sick with several fatherless babies without a qualification depending on social grant money to survive because it’ll be on you.” She bursts into a loud sob putting her hands on her face, Nobuhle stands up from her seat and rushes to her side to comfort her

“I’m your brother, I love you both so much and I will do anything for you two, but you’re not kids you can see that I have a family of my own that I need to take care of. Things won’t be the same as before, I have a wife and a son now so please be considerate and don’t ask me to buy you a Brazilian weave or any of the expensive things you always demand. I will buy when I have the means, but you shouldn’t feel entitled to my money understood?”

I understand bhuti." - Nokwazi

“Nobuhle I know for now you’re not dating this Thando guy and you guys are just friends but when and if your relationship

moves to the next level please protect yourself, I practically raised you I will not raise your child. If anyone between you two falls pregnant just know that I Quinton Mpilentle Ndlovu will not get involved, ozomitha angakacedi iskolo uyaphuma ngaphantsi kwesandla sami angisam'yenzeli nex.”

(I will stop supporting whoever will get pregnant before they are done with school)

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NARRATED

“Is this him?”

“Yes, it’s him Makhosi I want him to suffer, I want him to lose everything he has. That house must burn down to ashes, and that car of his must get into an accident and be broken beyond repair. He must also lose his wife, mufake iscitho lo mfazi amuzonde. I want him to lose everything, including his job and his friends.”

“Are you sure about this?” The man asks

“Yes, I’m sure.”

“You need to know that once you do this, there’s no going back.”

“I’m sure Makhosi, do it.”

“Okay, your wish is my command.”

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ANZANI

I’m so glad mam’Nomonde was buried with the dignity she deserved, now I get to be home with my son and give him the proper care he needs. I love my boy, he’s the cutest thing ever and he no longer cries as much as he used to. I know what I said

about aunt but she's been a great help with the baby, and I've learned a lot from her.

"Is it really necessary for me to wear this? It's too tight yoh." I ask Dakalo referring to the waist belt

"I can imagine but you need to wear it to avoid having a flabby stomach, you're only 23 I'm sure you don't want to lose your figure so early in life. Being married doesn't mean you should relax, you still need to look sexy and attractive for your man."

"I guess I will have to endure the pain then because I also can't imagine myself without my flat stomach."

"Good then. The funeral was so sad, I couldn't help but shed a tear when Nokwazi wept. Her cry was raw and heartbreaking, I feel sorry for them they are still too young to be without their mother."

"Yeah that's true, mam'Nomonde was an amazing person, indeed good people die early In life."

“Eish it’s sad, now your son will never know his grandmother.”

“What a loss, such a warm and kind woman she was. I still remember the day she saw me for the first time, she came to fetch me from Quinton's room and made me something to eat. I was shocked because I expected her to behave differently, you know behave your like a typical mother-in-law.”

“You were blessed to have a mother-in-law like her some of us weren’t so fortunate.” She says sadly

I put my hand on her shoulder

“Keep her in your prayers one day she’ll change” just then my phone rings disturbing us

“Hello.”

“Hey Anzani, you’re speaking to Tendani Mulalo's friend.”

“What?”

“Please don’t hang up, Mulalo suffered a heart attack and has been hospitalized for over a week now.”

“Okay so?” I make sure not to hide my displeasure and disinterest in the conversation

“He wants to see you, there’s something he needs to tell you. Please come and see him.”

“No, I won’t be able to.”

“Please Anzani, it’s urgent.”

“I can’t, I’m a new mother I can’t leave my son and come to Venda I’m sorry.” He exhales heavily

“Ok, I understand goodbye.”

“Bye.”

“Who was that?”

“He said his name is Tendani, Mulalo's friend.... apparently Mulalo suffered a heart attack and has been in hospital for over a week.”

“So, what does that have to do with you?”

“He wants to see me, Tendani said it's urgent.”

“Don't tell me you're considering it.”

“What if it's important?”

“No, no Anzani! Nurse your son and forget about Mulalo. What if this whole thing is a trap and he kidnaps you when you arrive in Venda?”

“Eish, I don’t know what to think.”

“Don’t think anything, this is the same person who tried to kill your husband and took away your home. He’s dangerous I don’t think you should be mixed up with him.”

“True, you’re right.”

“Quinton will not agree anyway.”

“Do I need his approval?”

“What are you even asking? Don't forget that you're no longer a girl, you are a married woman now Anzani and you can't do things as you used to before. You and your husband are one and that means you can't take such a big decision without telling him.”

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NOBUHLE

“I’m glad we ironed things out I hate it when we fight”

“Yeah me too little sister.”

“I still think you need to apologize to sis Anzani for what you did, you were disrespectful towards her and what you said about our nephew was totally uncalled for.”

“Yeah, I will.”

“I think you should do it today so that there’s no bad blood between you two, she’s family. She’s our brother's wife and that makes her our big sister.”

“I hear you.” She doesn’t look too keen on the idea maybe I shouldn’t force her

“It’s okay, you don’t have to do it if you don’t want to.”

“Yeah, I’ll apologize when I’m ready.”

“Okay then, let me prepare myself Thando said he’s on his way uthe undlula emandiyeni manje.”

“Okay, this thing between you two is serious ne?” she asks with a smile

“Yeah, I feel strongly about him. You were right I have fallen for him it’s only a matter of time before I accept his proposal.”

“Hmm, what about sex are you ready for it?”

“No, I’m not. I want to wait until I’m over 21.” she laughs like I just made a joke.

"And he'll wait till then?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I hear you."

"I'll go and see Zothando when I'm done with Thando so you might leave before I come back, so in case we don't see each other anymore have a safe trip I love you," I say with my arms stretched for a hug, she walks into my arms and we hold each other tight

"I love you too little sister."

#71

NARRATED

Nokwazi is sitting on top of the kitchen counter guzzling Johnnie Walker double black straight from the bottle when the front door opens and Namhla walks in pulling her suitcases, Nokwazi looks up and affords her a small smile before bringing the bottle to her lips and taking a huge gulp of the scotch whiskey.

“Hey, friend.” Says the cheerful Namhla dragging her luggage inside the luxurious apartment she shares with her friend

“Hi, how was your trip?” A gigantic smile covers her face

“Amazing, Mike spoiled me rotten, and because I’m generous I got you something,” Namhla says taking off her shades and giving her friend a side hug

“Thanks, I’m glad that at least one of us had a good time.”

“Thanks, my babe, how are you coping? I’m sorry I couldn’t make it to your mom’s funeral.” A sigh breezes from Nokwazi’s lips

“I don’t know how I feel, my mother was the only person in this world who genuinely loved me and now she’s gone.” She mutters lowly and a lone tear runs down her face

In a heartbeat, Namhla swaddles her in her arms and rubs her back in circles as Nokwazi breaks into a shrill cry

“I’m sorry my love but you are not alone, you have me. I will never leave you alone; you hear me?” Nokwazi nods her head

Namhla breaks the hug and wipes her tears with her palms before cupping her face

“I’ll always be here for you alright?” She says looking into her eyes, Nokwazi nods her head vigorously while tears helplessly roll down her face.

“Don’t cry.” Namhla links their foreheads and plants a peck on her lips, Nokwazi’s eyes widen in shock

“Namhla-“

“Shhh, I only want to make you feel better. It doesn’t mean anything, kiss me.” She says rubbing Nokwazi’s lower lip with her forefinger

“What do I have to lose?” Nokwazi thinks to herself before leaning in...their lips fuse in a passionate kiss, the kiss starts slow and sensual but things gradually get heated as their hands fondle each other’s bodies and hastily help each other out of their clothes.

Namhla who’s standing between Nokwazi’s legs breaks the kiss and trails kisses to her neck, down to her breasts, stomach, and her loins before finally burying her face in her lady parts and swiping her tongue on her wetness eliciting a loud moan from Nokwazi’s lips. With her heart beating out of her chest,

Nokwazi lowers her back on the kitchen counter and pushes Namhla's head deeper into her haven.

"Oh, yes eat that pussy baby." She says in a quavering voice

Namhla skillfully eats her p\*ssy while her hands tweak and twist her erect nipples

"Fuuuuuck!" Nokwazi curses as Namhla's tongue taps on a sweet spot inside of her rendering her weak "Please don't stop." She implores and tears escape from the corner of her eyes.

Namhla gently rubs on her engorged clit with a finger while her mouth ravishes her wet and warm hole, Nokwazi's body goes rigid, and a scream departs her lips before she sprays Namhla's face with her juices with her thigh shaking violently.

"F\*ck that was amazing," Nokwazi says trying to catch her breath. Namhla smiles and picks up a T-shirt from the floor to wipe her face.

“Glad I could make you feel better, you taste sweet.”

“Thanks, but I also want to taste you.”

“You’re sure?”

“Yep.”

“In that case, let's take it to the bedroom.” She says flashing a seductive smile and running off the bedroom, Nokwazi jumps to the floor and paces behind her.

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NOBUHLE

“I’m sorry I couldn’t come to your mother’s funeral.” I have lost count of the number of times that he has apologized for this

“It’s okay, I know you wanted to but couldn’t because of the whole drama with my brother.”

I stayed for a week at home after the funeral. I’m going back to Pretoria tomorrow to try and catch up with my school work before I fail and lose my bursary, and who better to spend my last day in Ratanda with than Thando? He came to pick me up from the Indian shop and we drove to the park and hopped into the backseat, it’s a good thing that his windows are tinted, I’m carefree with no fear of anyone who knows me recognizing and reporting me to my brother. He might have acknowledged our ‘friendship’, but I don’t want to disrespect him like that.

His big strong arms are wrapped around my waist and my head is on his chest, being in his arms like this, breathing in his intoxicating cologne, and listening to his heart beating is my favorite thing in the world.

“Since we might not see each other tomorrow how about I take you out for lunch today?”

“No, I don’t want us to go anywhere. Let’s just stay here like this and talk or be silent...it doesn't matter as long as we are together.” He chuckles

“Look who wants me all to herself.” He is pleased to hear this, his tone rats him out.

“Do you blame me? I don’t know when I’ll see you again after today.” He blows out a heavy sigh and his warm breath fans my face

“If it was up to me, we would see each other every weekend but I don’t want to destruct you from your studies, engineering is not child’s play. You need to focus; I promised your sister that my presence in your life wouldn’t interfere with your studies, and I intend to keep my promise.” Ncoah, isn’t he the sweetest?

I know I promised sis Anzani that I wouldn’t date Thando until I was at least 18 but I don’t think I can keep being just his friend, what happened with my mother has shown me just how short life is. I don’t want any regrets, or to live my life with ‘should

have been' if anything my mother's sudden passing showed me how important it is to show your loved ones how much you love them while you still have time because every day you spend with them might be the last. As depressing as that sounds it's true, tomorrow is not guaranteed. It doesn't matter how young or healthy you think you are, death can strike when you least expect it.

Maybe I don't know what love is, but I know I love Thando and I want to be with him. I want to explore what I feel for him, I'm no longer sated with just being friends with him. I raise my head from his chest and look into his eyes, he stares back and all I see in them is nothing but his pure and untainted love for me.

"Thando..."

"Hlehle."

"Ask me..." his eyebrows furrow in confusion

“What?”

“Ask me to be your girlfriend.”

“What?” He’s shocked, he wasn’t expecting this

“I’m ready to be yours Thando, I don’t know anything about relationships but I’m ready to be yours. I’m ready to be your girlfriend

ready to learn and grow with you by my side so please ask me again-ask me to be yours.” Happiness clouds his face and his eyes shimmer with tears, he cups my face and gazes into my eyes while breathing heavily

“Ndiyakuthanda ntombenhle bendicela ube ngumuntu wami maNdlovu.” Every word that leaves his mouth is accompanied by emotion, every word comes from the heart ... that and the way he’s looking at me right now have my heart beating faster than usual, this is the second time he professes his love for me so I shouldn't be this affected but this time he’s saying it to me, not to sis Anzani and that makes his confession extra special.

“Yes Thando, I’ll be your girlfriend.” His lips break into a big smile, he lowers his face to mine and plants a long peck on my forehead

“I love you so much.” He whispers

“I love you too.” He squeezes me in his arms

“I don’t promise to be perfect, but I’ll love and take care of you with everything I have.” I don’t reply I just tighten my arms around him and shut my eyes taking every word in. This is it, my first relationship.

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ANZANI

Quinton is here to see Zothando and me, like always my family excused themselves from the lounge to give us privacy. He has

our son in his arms looking at him with nothing but love in his eyes accompanied by a gigantic smile on his face. For some reason, his presence irritates me lately.

“Where are you going?” He says when I stand up from the couch

“Dakalo wanted to talk to me about something, so I want to hear what she wanted to say.” He looks at me, disbelief all over his face

“What?” I ask nonchalantly

“Can’t whatever conversation the two of you need to have wait until after I leave?”

“No.”

“Wow!” He exclaims, visibly shocked by my retort and I couldn’t care less.

I saunter to the bedroom leaving him with his mouth hanging open, I won't lie the pain I see in his eyes gnaws at my conscience, but I couldn't take being in his presence any minute longer

"And then wena?" Dakalo says when I walk inside the bedroom

"What?" I know what she's talking about, but I play dumb

"Why are you here leaving your husband all alone in the lounge?"

"He came to see his son, he's with his son is he not?"

"Wow! Did you even offer his something to drink or eat?"

"He didn't ask, so no, and I'm sure there's food at his mother's house." I sit next to her on the bed

“What has gotten into you Anzani?”

“Nothing why?”

“You have changed, I don’t like your attitude towards your husband.” Is it necessary for her to keep mentioning that he’s my husband every second? I know that!

“What attitude?”

“You left him alone in the lounge without even offering him something to drink, the Anzani I know would never treat her husband like that.”

“I can’t help myself his presence irks me; I miss him when he’s not around but as soon as I see his face I instantly feel like puking.”

“Wow! I can’t believe this is you.”

“Stop judging me Dakalo, he’s the father of my son and my husband do you think I enjoy feeling this way? I don’t but I just can’t help it, Quinton annoys me so much that I can’t stand being in the same room with him.”

“When did this feeling start?”

“Since Monday, I didn’t think much of it when it happened for the first time but it’s like the feeling amplifies every time I see him.”

“Yo, did you tell him how you feel?”

“No, I don’t want to hurt him.”

“But you are hurting, how do you think he feels seeing you treat him this way? Obvious it hurts him.”

“I know but I can’t be around him for too long or else I’ll end up saying something I’ll later regret.”

“If you were still pregnant, I would say it's pregnancy hormones driving you crazy but now I don't know what to say...I would advise you to pray about it.”

“I will, I don't want to lose Mpilo.” It's true, I don't want to lose him, I hate treating him this way, but I can't seem to stand him these days.

“You won't lose him; this is just another hurdle that the two of you will overcome.”

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QUINTON

I'm trying so hard to be a 'man' about this and not break into tears, I still can't wrap my head around what just transpired. A huge part of me wants to believe that it didn't happen, that it was my mind playing tricks on me but unfortunately it happened. The woman I love with every fiber of my being and

every beat of my heart has treated me like I'm a chewing gum that's stuck under her shoe; I don't know what to make of this. When she was still pregnant there were times when my presence repulsed her, but it was never this bad, I'll never forget the look in her eyes when she walked into the lounge with our son in her arms today, how she hurriedly tossed him in my arms and scurried to take a sit on the couch opposite the one I am sitting on as if she couldn't bear being next to me.

I don't want to cry, much less in front of my son so I give him one last kiss and wet my dry throat with saliva before calling Anzani praying that my voice won't sell me out.

"Anzani! You can come and take him, I'm leaving." I say trying so hard to hide my quavering voice.

She doesn't reply but I hear footsteps and a door opening, a moment later Dakalo emerges, and my face drops in defeat. She flashes a sympathetic smile when she sees the disappointed look on my face

"Anzani is not feeling well, I'll take the baby." I give my son to her and stand to my feet

"What's wrong with her? Why didn't she say anything to me?"

“There’s need to worry, it’s nothing serious just a headache she will be fine,” she says reassuring me

“Okay, did she take anything for it?” She swallows and drops her eyes to my son, if I didn’t know better, I would say she’s evading my gaze

“Yes, she drank grandpa.”

“Okay, please tell me if the headache doesn’t go away. I will come and drive her to her doctor, Anzani has a chronic illness ...with her, every lameness needs to be taken seriously.”

“True.”

“Please tell her I’ll call her when I get home” I step closer and give my son another kiss on his cheek “Bye champ, daddy loves you.”

#72

“Hey.”

“Thembalam' are you feeling better?”

“What?”

“Dakalo told me you had a headache that's why you didn't come to bid me farewell.”

“Oh that, yes I feel much better.”

“I'm happy to hear that, I was a bit worried about you. You didn't seem like your normal self today, you were irritable was it the headache?”

“Yes.”

“I’m sorry sthandwasam, tomorrow I’m going back to Johannesburg. My leave is over Monday is back to work for me. Will you come with me?”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Our son is barely a month old Mpilo, I’m a new mother and still need assistance with some things with regards to the baby so I’ll stay with my aunt until my maternity leave is over.” As painful as it is to hear this I have no choice but to accept it

“Okay, I understand. Can you please come and spend the night with me at least?”

“I can’t leave our son alone.”

“I know, I’m not asking you to. He’s my son so I don’t think your aunt will mind if you take him with you, please don’t say no I miss you so much”

I can't remember the last time I slept next to my wife, she moved in with her aunt a few months before giving birth as she was constantly feeling sick. I won't even speak of the last time we made love, salt is killing me but I know I still have to wait for two or three months for her to heal.

"Please thembalam'." She blows out a sigh

"Okay, you can come and fetch me."

"Thank you so much." I jump to my feet, take my car keys from the coffee table and rush outside to the garage

A few minutes later I'm parked outside her aunt's house waiting for her to come out, Lutendo is the first one out of the gate carrying the baby's bag and Anza's overnight bag. I climb out of the car to meet him halfway and take the bags from him

"Anzani is coming."

“Ok boy, so tell me how’s school going? Still finding it difficult to adjust?” I say putting the bags in the backseat and leaning my back against the car

“Yes, but it gets better every day.”

“That’s good. Don’t worry too much about it, soon you’ll make friends and enjoy going to school.”

“I hope so.”

“Trust me you will.”

The gate opens and Anzani walks out with my son strapped to her chest with a baby carrier and a mini baby blanket covering him. I get the door for her and fist bump Lutendo before rounding the car to the driver's seat

“Thank you for doing this,” I say looking at her in the rearview mirror, she offers me a small smile before looking outside the window.

I start the ignition and join the road, the entire drive to my house is silent and it's not the comfortable kind of silence- it's awkward, we are more like strangers. One would swear we are not the same newlyweds who were so much in love with one another just a week ago.

She climbs out of the car as soon as the engine stops running and makes her way to the house, I close the garage door, take the bags from the backseat and follow her inside the house. I find her in the lounge with Nobuhle, and like always my little sister is gushing over Zothando. He's already cradled in her arms while Anzani shows her how to support his head, my heart swells with joy at the beautiful sight before me. Nothing brings me greater joy than seeing my two favorite girls getting along, I hope Nokwazi will come around soon.

"When did you get here?" I ask looking at Nobuhle, she wasn't here when I left

"A few minutes ago."

“Okay, will you cook or should I order something from Uber eats?”

Nobuhle is an excellent cook, I'm not surprised because she learned from the best, she's been cooking for me throughout the course of this week.

“I was about to but I changed my mind when I saw my favorite boy in the world.” She says looking at Zothando “Yes, baby. The cutest baby in the entire universe.”

“I guess I'll order then, thembalam' please come with me.”  
Anza looks at me blankly

“Does it have to be now?” her tone is sharp, it earns her a look from Nobuhle.

She darts her eyes between us sensing the tension “Okay, my nephew and I will be in my bedroom.” With that said she scurries out of the room with my son fleeing the thick tension in the lounge.

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ANZANI

“Sthandwasam what’s going on, please talk to me.” He implores, the look on his face tears my heart into two halves. I can’t believe I’m the one causing him so much pain.

I shouldn’t have listened to Dakalo when she convinced me to agree to come here, I should have stayed in my aunt's house. Being here with him irritates me, looking at his face repulses me and I’ve been trying so hard to conceal it but I can’t promise not to slip up and tell him what I really think of him if he doesn’t stop pushing.

“Nothing is going on Quinton, I’m tired I want to go to bed.”

“Quinton? Since when do you call me like that?”

“Okay, Mpilo. Are you happy now?” he gasps

“My love, what happened to us, what did I do Thembalam'? Tell me so I can apologize for my transgressions, I won't know what I did if you don't communicate with me.” He says and his eyes well up with tears

“Nothing, there's nothing.”

“Is it about what Nokwazi said? I spoke to her and I promise she'll never say anything like that ever again because she knows I'll cut her off.”

“It's not Nokwazi.”

“Then what is it, khuluma nami mkami ngiyakucela sthandwa Sam.”

(Talk to me my wife, I'm begging you, my love.)

“I can’t stand being in your presence, you irritate me, and seeing your face repulses me.....there you have it.” The words slip out of my mouth before I can stop them

He opens his mouth but nothing comes out then he nods his head and a lone tear rolls down his cheek

“That came out wrong, that’s not what I wanted to say. I’m sorry.” I say attempting to touch him but he moves back

“I see...it's okay, I'll leave. I love you mama wengane zami.”  
(Mother of my kids)

He says before pacing out of the room leaving me in tears, I swear I didn’t mean to hurt him but I just can't stand being next to her.

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NOLWAZI

I heard about what happened to Quinton's mother from one of the security guards, since I don't have his number I had to wait for him to come back to offer him my condolences. I didn't know his mother personally but I could tell she was a wonderful soul from the few weeks she stayed here when Quinton was hospitalized.

I was coming from the laundry line after taking down my clothes when I saw him walk inside his apartment, I didn't see his wife so I suppose she is not here because those two are always joined at the hip. She was pregnant the last time I saw her, she has probably given birth by now and remained back at home to get help from her mother with the baby. I know most women do that, especially when it's their first child.

I hit my knuckles on his door and take a step back

"Come in." his deep voice sounds from inside

I take a deep breath and push the door open. The apartment is an open plan so I can see him slumped on the couch

our eyes meet and oh my goodness he looks like a mess. His mother's death must have hit him harder than I thought, and now giving my condolences doesn't look like such a good idea. It will be like pouring salt into an open wound.

"Hi," I say standing awkwardly next to the door in case he decides to chase me out, he's very capable of doing that.

"Hi." His voice is just above a whisper

"Uhm I heard about your mother, I wanted to say I'm sorry. I didn't know her that well but she was a good person, she would always greet me with a warm smile on her face whenever we ran into each other on the corridors and in the elevator." a smile tugs at the corners of his lips

"Yeah, that was my mother. A kind and loving woman. Thank you."

“Are you okay?”

“Yes,” he says but the look on his face says otherwise

“You can talk to me if you need someone to talk to,” I say letting myself inside, he isn’t harsh today so I suppose it’s safe to enter.

“Thanks, I appreciate your concern but I’m okay.”

“No, you're not,” I say joining him on the love seat

“I might not know how it feels to lose a mother but I promise I’m a good listener. You can talk to me whenever the pain gets too heavy to bear”

“It's okay, I’m okay there is no need for that.”

“Okay, we don’t need to talk we’ll just be silent together.”

“Look I appreciate what you’re trying to do but you need to leave Nolwazi, I’m sorry but I want to be left alone.”

“Okay, can I at least call one of your friends then? I can’t leave you in this state on your own, what if you kill yourself.” He chuckles evidently amused by my admission.

“I don’t need a sitter Nolwazi, I’m a grown man. You don’t have to worry about me killing myself, I have a son and siblings who need me alive”

“I know but grown men also need someone to take care of them, and right now you don’t look okay. You don’t look like the Quinton I know.” He looks at me and our eyes lock, my heart beats faster, and my palms sweat.

“Why are you doing this?”

“Because I care about you.”

“Why?”

“You’re a good man I know you would do the same for me if the roles were reversed.” he lets out a dry chuckle

“Probably not but thanks for the vote of confidence.” He says moving his gaze to the dim TV screen

“You wouldn’t do the same?”

“No, I wouldn’t.”

“Why not?”

“Because I have a wife and I would never do anything to hurt her intentionally.”

“Wow, you really love her ne?”

“More than words can explain, I love her so much.” He chuckles “Isn’t it funny that the only person I love wholeheartedly and would never think of hurting wants nothing to do with me? I suppose it’s true what they say, the ones we love don’t love us and the ones they love are probably in love with someone else who most possibly doesn't feel the same way. It’s a continuous circle of loving the one who doesn’t love you back” He looks at me and tears escape from his eyes and roll down to his cheeks

So they broke up? That’s why he looks so miserable and here I thought it was because of his mother

“I’m so sorry to hear that, she doesn’t know how blessed she is to find a man like you. You are faithful, handsome, respectful, and humble.” He shakes his head in disbelief, I don’t think he heard anything I said.

“I still can’t believe that she glared into my eyes and told me that my presence repels her, she can’t bear to be in the same room with me. You should have seen the look on her face when she told me how much my presence makes her want to puke. It hurt so much to hear her say those words from her because I love her so much and I never imagined she would ever say

something like that to me, it stings because I love her so much and I don't think I'll ever stop at least not anytime soon."

I shift closer to him and take a chance by cupping his teary face in my hands, relief surges through my whole body when he doesn't fight me or tell me off like he normally would.

"Please stop crying over her, she doesn't deserve your tears. You are handsome and every women's dream, if she doesn't value you someone else will."

Who knew that little girl was so cruel? How dare she hurt this kind soul like that? I guess it's true that we don't realize what we have until it's gone, she has a man who loves and respects her in this world full of deceitful and cheating men and she chooses to play with him? Men like Quinton are very few in this world and hard to come by, she has a diamond but like the stupid little girl she is ..she doesn't know how to appreciate it.

"That's the thing Nolwazi, I don't want anyone else I want her...only her." Sheim poor man got his heartbroken, it's always the innocent looking ones who hurt you the most because you

never see it coming, they catch you off guard and that kind of pain can cripple anyone I don't blame him for being this miserable.

"I can help you forget about her, only if you let me."

"How?" they say actions speak louder than words so I get up from the couch and strip naked, his eyes pop out from their sockets as he stares at my nudity.

"Get dressed, what do you think you are doing?"

"I want you to fuck me hard tonight, take out all the pain on me. Don't have mercy on me, ravish my p\*ssy until you're satisfied. Use me as an outlet I don't mind."

"So what do you say?" I say sitting on the coffee table spreading my legs apart

“I can’t...please get dressed up and leave my place, I should’ve known letting you in was a bad idea.” He says looking away from me

“Are you sure that’s what you want?”

“Yes, leave.” He stands up and shows me the door

“But that’s not what the tent inside your pants suggests, you know you want me as much as I want you. Come on Quinton, are you going to deny yourself a good f\*ck because of a woman who doesn’t care about you? You said it yourself, Anzani doesn’t love you anymore. She said your presence repulses her so you wouldn’t be cheating because you’re technically single and quite frankly I don't think she gives a f\*ck about what you do. So what do you say, big boy?”

I stand up and touch his member damn he’s so big and long, his monster cannot fit into my small hand. His dick twitches in my hands while my p\*ssy throbs already anticipating his first thrust, plus he looks like someone who knows exactly how to lay down the pipe.

“So, what do you say?” I say stroking his dick

#73

NARRATED

“So, what do you say?” Nolwazi says stroking his dick

“Get your hands off me.” What was meant to be a rebuke comes out as a plea

“Please don’t fight it, you know you want me,” Nolwazi says standing on her tip-toes landing a peck on his lips, she forces her tongue inside his mouth and sucks on his lower lip. Quinton gives into the kiss and smooches her back with the same fervor

“I can’t do this.” He says pushing her off after a few seconds

“Don’t think too much about it, Anzani won’t know about this if that’s what you’re worried about,” Nolwazi says caressing his buff chest

“No, I’m sorry but I can’t.” He says pushing her hands off him  
“You need to leave, please.” He pleads

“Come on baby, don’t fight this.” She’s not ready to give up, she wants him, and she won’t leave without tasting that thick monster packed in his pants.

“Quinton!” A voice sounds from the door followed by a hard knock.

“Get dressed!” Panicky, he picks up her clothes from the floor and throws them at her

The knock on the door persists and emergency bells go off in Quinton’s head as he panics not wanting whoever his guest might be to find him in this compromising position, but luck is not on his side, the door opens while Nolwazi is putting on her jeans. Given freezes at the door not believing the sight before his eyes, he glances at Nolwazi once before moving his gaze to Quinton visibly enraged.

“What’s the meaning of this?” His voice remains monotone but his tone is bone-chilling.

“I... it’s not what it looks like, she was just leaving.”

“And you what are you still waiting for? Leave!” Given roars looking at Nolwazi, frightened Nolwazi takes her things and scurries out.

“What the actual fuck Quinton!” He howls

“I swear we didn’t do anything.”

“Do I like a fool huh? You’re here fucking hoes while Anzani is worried sick about you, you didn’t even tell her where you’re going.”

“That one must not pretend like she cares about me, why is she calling you and asking about me when my presence disgusts her?”

“Huh?” Quinton chuckles

“Let me guess... she didn’t tell you that part right?”

“What’s going on Quinton, you love Anzani why would you cheat on her?”

“I didn’t cheat, I have no reason to lie about that.” Given looks at him for a while reading his face and blows out a heavy sigh not knowing what to believe.

“But she was naked.”

“I know what it looks like, but I swear I didn’t sleep with her. I kissed her, but I wasn’t going to go through with it because Anzani’s face kept flashing in my mind.”

“Really?”

“Yes, Given really, I’m still fully dressed as you can see. She undressed herself to seduce me, but I swear I didn’t touch her!”  
Given's eyes drop to the tent in his pants

“Come on I'm only human, my body reacted but that doesn't mean I fucked her,” Quinton says defensively when he sees where Given's eyes are fixed.

“Fine, I believe you. Let’s sit down.” They settle on the couch getting themselves comfortable

“So, tell me what happened, why did you leave Ratanda without informing your wife? She is worried sick about you, she called and asked me to come and check if you are not here.”  
Quinton runs his fingers through unshaved hair

“Anzani has changed man, I don’t know what got into her, but she is not the same woman I got married to.”

“What do you mean?”

“So today....” Quinton begins narrating the whole story to him

“That’s not normal my man, maybe she’s suffering from postpartum depression. I bumped into an article lecturing about it a few weeks ago.”

“Huh?”

“Postpartum depression is a mood disorder involving intense psychological depression that typically occurs within one month after giving birth, it lasts more than two weeks or more, and is accompanied by other symptoms such as social withdrawal, difficulty in bonding with the baby, and feelings of worthlessness or guilt.”

“Anzani doesn’t have any difficulty bonding with the baby, or with other people, it’s only me she can’t stand but she’s fine with everyone else. Maybe she has fallen out of love with me.”

“No, Anzani loves you. She was genuinely worried about you when she called me, you can’t fake that kind of concern.. something else is going on here.”

“Maybe she was only worried about me for our son's sake.”

“Nonsense, that woman loves you.”

“I too used to think so until today.”

“I don’t know what’s going on but you need to pray, I don’t know you to be this weak.”

“What do you expect me to do? I can’t force her to love me.”

“So, you’d rather wallow in self-pity? marriage is a sacred institution blessed by God and that’s why the devil attacks marriages this badly. You need to stand up and fight for your marriage, whether we admit it or not life is spiritual whatever Anzani is doing it’s not her there’s a spirit behind it. We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against

powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual wickedness in high places. Take Daniel for instance he had to mourn food for three weeks before he was visited by an angel notifying him that his prayers have been approved by the heavens, God heard his prayer on the first day but the angel only appeared to him after twenty-one days because the prince of Persia had blocked the angel's way for twenty one days."

"What I'm trying to say is, when you pray don't expect things to change instantly. Sometimes the answers to our prayers get delayed, not because God doesn't hear our prayers but because the devil interferes and the only way to overcome that is by keeping the faith. Don't stop praying until your wife goes back to the Anzani you know, be like Daniel don't give up until your prayers are answered."

"I hear you."

"I don't want you to hear me, I want you to do what I'm telling you. I don't know how you don't see it but there's definitely something wrong here, Anzani can't change so much in such a short space of time I refuse."

“Now that you mention it, it is kind of weird how she just changed suddenly...what do you think could have happened?”

“I don’t know but you need to pray and ask for revelation fast if you must and all will be revealed to you. There’s no time to relax when you’re at war with the devil.”

“Thanks, I’ll fight.”

“I hope you’re telling the truth about not sleeping with that girl because if you did then trust me she’s going to tell Anzani, I know girls like her. They do anything to get what they want even if it means breaking up with two people in love, I can’t believe you allowed her go that far with you. I have never laid my hands on a woman before but I swear if it was me in your place I was going to slap her the moment she put her hands on my dick, you can’t let random girls touch your weapon you'll see now she’ll disrespect Anzani because you gave her ammunition.”

“Yeah, I messed up. ... My head was just all over the place, I was not in a good space, and believe me, I tried to resist her but she kept on pushing and pushing.”

“Still no excuse to do what you did.”

“I know but I promise I didn’t touch that girl we only kissed and the kiss only lasted for a few seconds.”

“You still cheated on her.... you need to tell Anzani the truth before that tikiline beats you to it and trust she won’t say you two only kissed she’ll add a few spices.”

“I will, I hope she will forgive me.”

“I hope so too.”

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ANZANI

“As you suspected I found him in his apartment.”

“Thank God,” I say exhaling loudly

“You can relax, he’s in perfect health.”

“Thank you so much Given, please forgive me for disturbing your quality time with the princess.” He was with his daughter when I called him

“No problem Anzani, Quinton is my brother.”

“Is he coming back?”

“I don’t know, I didn’t ask.” That’s his polite way of saying no.

I knew chances of him coming back tonight were close to none, I was very rude to him.

“Oh alright, thanks a lot. I appreciate your help.”

“Anytime.”

“Bye.”

“Give the champ a good night kiss for me, bye.”

I felt terrible after he left and tried to run after him, but it was already too late, the car was nowhere to be seen I could only see the trail of the dust it left behind as it sped down the road. I tried calling but he didn't pick up my call, I had no choice but to call Kabelo and Given and ask if they have seen or spoken to him today and both of them said no. At that moment my anxiety shot through the roof, and I couldn't shake the feeling of something bad happening to him, so I called Given again and begged him to go check him at our apartment. I'm glad he's okay because lord knows I would never forgive myself if anything happens to him because of me, I love him a lot and I would hate to lose him I don't understand why I get annoyed

every time he's here yet miss him terribly when he's not around.

"Is he sleeping?" I say to Nobuhle when she walks into my bedroom well the one I share with Quinton when we are here carrying my boy in her arms

"Yes, I can't get over how cute he is." I get up from the bed and prepare the bed for him

"Yeah, I know. Me too, he's perfect."

"Girls will be budding heads fighting for his attention."

"Never, not with my son. He'll be like his father; he'll focus on one partner." Buhle giggles

"Umfundisi akazali omunye umfundisi, it has never happened"  
(A priest doesn't give birth to another priest)

“This time it’ll happen.” I take him from her and gently lay him down on the bed.

“My brother hasn’t come back?”

“No, he’s not back yet, and to be frank I doubt he’s coming back.”

“Oh ok, let me order take out since he didn’t order.”

“I’m not hungry but you can order one for yourself.”

“Okay.”

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NARRATED

“Cebo!”

“Yes” Replies Nomcebo from the bedroom

“Mom is calling you.”

“Okay, I’m coming.” Nomcebo stands up and leaves her firstborn with an instruction to watch over her younger siblings until she's back.

“Ma.” She says making her way through the door

“Please take a seat.” She takes a seat next to her parents

“Cebo ngane yam’ there’s something I need you to do for me.”

“Yini leyo mama?”

(What is that mom)

“It’s nothing big, I just want to teach that boy Mpilentle a lesson he has grown too proud for his own good.”

“I still don’t understand my role in all of this.”

“Hey, wena awume kancane ngesingisi sikuhlulile eskolweni uzosiphaphela la!” Her father chides

(Stop with the English, you didn’t pass it at school so stop being forward.)

“Mamela ke, Quinton offered you the backroom I need you to call him and tell him you accept his offer to move into the back room.”

“Kodwa mama mina angfuni ukuyohlala egoli nje.”

(But I don’t want to move to Johannesburg)

“Yey wena Nomcebo!” Her father barks giving her a threatening look “Usafuna yini ukuhlala la kwami?”

(Do you still want to stay in this house)

“Yebo baba.”

“Then you’ll do everything your mother tells you to do, continue nkosikazi.”

“Like I was saying, you’ll move into the backroom and then when the three orphans go back to their respective cities you will plant the muti I will give to you all over their yard.”

“What will the muti do?”

“That doesn’t matter, all you need to know is that Quinton will never be happy again after you do what you’re supposed to.”

“Okay, so I have to stay in Ratanda permanently?” Sizwe, her new boyfriend will not be too happy when he hears about this.

“No, you can come back after doing what you’re supposed to do.” Whew! at least. She needs to go to Ratanda as soon as

possible so she can come back before Sizwe replaces her with someone else, he's capable of doing it that one.

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MULALO

I dial her number and hold my breath

"Hello."

"Hi, Anzani it's me please don't cut the call."

"You must be kidding me! What do you want Mulalo?"

"My house burnt down, I lost both my cars. The BMW was hijacked, and the other one broke down I took it to three different mechanics who came highly recommended and all of them failed to find the fault with it. I lost all my clients, with no

income I was forced to close office, my health is also not on incredible condition I was hospitalized for a week.”

“Why are telling me all this Mulalo? I’m not interested.”

“I know but my life is falling apart and I think it’s because of what I did to you and your family.”

“What did you do?”

“Please come to Venda, I found a good maine who can reverse everything and prevent more damage please come Anzani you’re my last hope. Where is your mother, her number doesn’t go through when I call.”

“Are you listening to yourself? Why would I want to help you?”

“Because it will also benefit you, I did some dark things to you when I wanted you to be mine.”

“What things?”

“I thought if your boyfriend died you would agree to be mine.  
U-“

“So you finally admit that you’re the one behind his shooting?”

“Yes, I’m sorry Anzani but there’s more that’s why I suggest you come down to Venda.”

“Mulalo say whatever you want to say over the phone because there’s no way I’m coming there, especially after you tried to kill my boyfriend, what if you kill me too?”

“I won’t, I promise. You can come with your boyfriend or anyone you’re comfortable with.”

“Tell me whatever it is here or forget about it.” I knew it would be hard to earn her forgiveness but I didn’t think it would be this hard.

“Ok, there’s a ceremony I performed at Funduduzi lake with a witch doctor to steal your luck and kill your boyfriend, you need to come down to Venda so I can make things right or you’ll lose him to death. I don’t want to carry his death on my conscience please come.”

“What?”

“I know someone who can undo this “

#74

As heartbroken and sexually deprived as I was, I couldn't bring myself to go all the way with Nolwazi, nothing would have happened between us even if Given didn't walk in when he did, but I'm glad that he came because he pulled me out from the pity party I had thrown myself and made me see things from a different perspective. Nolwazi was so determined to sleep with me that night and wouldn't back down regardless of how many times I rejected her but Given was right, my reaction to her seduction is what gave her the courage to keep pushing. I should have been stiffer with my words and chucked her out of my apartment the second she started stripping out of her clothes, but the truth is I was hurt and a part of me wanted something to alleviate the crippling ache I felt in my heart that's why I allowed the kiss to happen, but I just couldn't go through with it because of the love I feel for Anzani.

I always thought I was strong until I had to hear the one I love and trust with my heart, my wife tell me to my face that my presence sickens her. I can withstand anything but not those hurtful words especially coming from the one person I love most in this world. That's when I understood the power the ones we love have over us, they can break us with just words, I

wonder what has happened to my wife but like Given said this is no time to wallow in self-pity it's time to pray. Not that I ever stopped praying but I suppose it's time to add fasting to the mix like my pastor would say if prayer alone doesn't work add fasting to the mix and if the situation still doesn't change move away from everything and everyone and fellowship with the holy spirit.

I have made a conscious decision to give Anzani space for now and fight for our marriage the only way I know how which is through prayer and fasting, I can't believe I almost allowed my emotions to get the better of me and cloud my judgment. I failed to see things for what they are and pitied myself.

I haven't seen her since that fateful day, but we talk daily over the phone. I don't know if her feelings towards me have changed but we can hold a conversation without her getting irritated or annoyed with me, I haven't told her about what happened between me and Nolwazi that night because it's something I prefer to do face to face. Things are okay between us even though we talk more about our son than us as a couple every time we speak.

“You don’t know how bored I was when you were on leave, I was a miserable loner. I felt so lost like I didn’t belong-“

“Woah, stop exaggerating. I doubt you can ever be bored not with your flamboyant personality, you can keep yourself company plus you’re friends with everyone here.” He laughs

“I talk with everyone but you’re the only one I regard as my friend.”

“Hmmm, if you say so.”

“What? is that jealousy I sense?”

“Why would I be jealous of you? Get over yourself Kabelo, you’re not my wife I don’t care who you befriend.” He laughs throwing his head back

“You will never admit to it but you know you want me only to yourself.”

“Ew!” The idiot roars in laughter, he enjoys pressing my buttons this one

“Anyway, when is Mrs. Quinton Ndlovu coming back? I miss her cooking, now we are back to eating fast food for lunch... I’m even gaining weight.” Kabelo doesn’t know about the current situation between Anzani and I

“Get yourself a wife and stop missing my wife’s cooking, she’s coming back the first week of May when her maternity leave ends.” He whistles

“Yerr I’m sure you miss her ne?”

“You have no idea man. If it was up to me she would be here with me but there’s nothing I can do man, she needs help with the baby. She’s a new mother, her aunt still needs to teach her a few things about motherhood.”

“Yeah makes sense ma-.” His sentence is cut short by my ringing phone, I’m shocked to see Cebo’s name flash on my screen. I didn’t expect anyone in my uncle’s family to get in touch with me ever again because we didn’t part on good terms

“Who is it?” Asks Kabelo beholding the look on my face.

“Nomcebo, uncle Cebo’s daughter. I wonder what she wants from me.”

“There’s only one way to find out.” True

I answer the call and put the phone on speaker before setting it on the table so Kabelo can listen in on our conversation.

“Hey.”

“Mzala kunjani?” The tone of her voice throws me into confusion, I don’t know what I expected but I didn’t expect her to be all cheerful and in high spirits as if nothing happened

(Cousin how are you)

“I’m well and you”

“I’m not doing too well.” Her tone contradicts her statement but okay!

“Why?”

“Because I have had time to think about your offer and I have decided to take it, I would love to move into the backroom well that’s if you’ll still have me.” She pauses and blows out a sigh “I need a fresh start, KZN has nothing but bad memories I’m constantly reminded of my mistakes every time I see my peers elevating in their careers, getting married, and doing amazing things with their lives. I’m a failure and I have nothing to my name, three kids later I still live with my parents and am supported by them, not that I don’t love my kids but I can’t exactly be proud of having them because they all have different fathers ama choice assorted nje and not even one of my baby daddies pays child support.” She snuffles “Don’t get me wrong I love my little bambinos and I don’t regret having them but

sometimes I feel like if it wasn't for them I would be far ahead in life, maybe I would be a teacher, a nurse, or a doctor who knows but I would be doing something with my life not living off my parents at the age of 28. Sometimes I feel like I'm cursed, nothing ever goes right in my life. Every man has left me after I fell pregnant for them, they shun me and their child. I'm tired of living like this...what's wrong with me? Why can't I find someone who truly loves me like everyone else? Am I so unlovable? Is it my body, I'm too fat right?" My heart goes out to her, I didn't realize that this is how she feels because she always looks so happy and lively, but I guess that's just a façade to hide how she feels inside, I wonder if her parents are aware of this

"No, you're not. You're a beautiful African woman with curves in all the right places and one day you'll meet the man who will love and appreciate you, you know how life goes you kiss a lot of frogs before you meet your prince charming." She giggles

"Aw cousin you've always been a gentleman, Anzani is so blessed to have a kind and loving man like you but I'm mature enough to know that not all of us will be fortunate to find love and I'm okay with that. I'm sorry for dumping all of this on you but I need to get out of KZN before I commit suicide, this place

sucks out all my will to live, and maybe moving to a new place where no one knows me is what I need to find myself again. I apologize on behalf of my parents, what they said to you was rude and unacceptable you have every right not to want anyone in your mother's bedroom, I have no problem with staying in the backroom and buying my groceries. I would do anything to leave this hell hole." Kabelo looks at me expectantly, I won't lie I am tempted to agree especially after everything she told me. She needs a breather, no one deserves to feel about themselves the way she feels about herself.

"So, am I still welcome to move into the back room?"

"Tell her you'll talk to Anzani and revert to her" Kabelo murmurs just as I'm about to reply, I have no idea why he's saying this, but I do as he says anyway

"Mzala ithi ngikhulumisane no mama wasendlini bese ngibuye kuwe."

(Cousin let me talk to my wife then I'll get back to you)

“I don’t get it, has someone else moved in? Why do you have to talk to Anzani about it?” Now, what do I say?

“She’s my wife, we are one. I can’t take such a big decision on my own.”

“Wow, bayajabula abo Anzani inkosi mpela! Why do you need to consult her about your mother’s house?” I don’t appreciate her tone

“Nomcebo u Anzani yi nkosikazi wami, I won’t make a decision of this magnitude without telling her it’s either you respect that or you find another place to stay because I don’t take kindly to people who disrespect or belittle my wife.”

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have....I’m sorry it will never happen again, talk to her then and get back to me.”

“Okay, I’ll call you.”

“Please don’t disappoint me, I’m counting on you cuz you’re the only one who can help me. My bags are packed, and the kids are excited about the big move.” She chuckles “What am I even saying, you would never do that to me, you would never rob my kids of their mother at this tender age because I wasn’t joking, I will end up taking my own life if I don’t move from here.”

“I won’t disappoint you, bye cousin.”

“Bye.”

“Don’t tell me you fell for that?” Kabelo quips the moment I cut the call

“What do you mean?”

“You’re not considering giving this girl your backroom, right?”

“You heard her yourself Kabelo, she’s depressed and might kill herself of course I’m giving her the backroom.”

“You see this good heart of yours will be your downfall, she played right into your emotions. She has you right where she wants you, her youngest child is three years old where was this depression of hers when your mother was still staying in an RDP? Matter of fact where was she and her parents when you needed them the most, where were they when you were struggling alone to make ends meet? Now she knows your number, has money to buy airtime and call you because she wants your help? I know you’re a Christian and in church, they teach you guys to give someone the right cheek when they slap the left one but not under my watch, I will not watch you get manipulated by your so-called family. That girl is not moving into your backroom, try it and you’ll know me I’ll come there and drag her out myself, and please don’t say I didn’t warn you when it happens.” I’m shocked, to say the least, he’s boiling in anger and something tells me he’s not joking he’ll throw Nomcebo out if I allow her to move in.

“What’s going on man, are you okay? Why are you so ticked off?” He huffs and pours water inside a glass and guzzles it down in one go.

“Are you okay man?” I say rounding the table to his side

“I’m fine there’s no need to worry.”

“Okay.”

“Please sit, there’s something I want to tell you.” He’s acting weird

“Okay.” I go back to my seat, while he settles on his

“My mother has always been business-minded, so my siblings and I grew up with her selling things. There’s nothing that wasn’t sold in my house, clothes- she would sell them on weekends to areas where people had to travel far to go to town or those that lacked transportation like Groot vlei

Advertisement

Villiers, Balfour, and the likes. At home, she sold coal, firewood, meat, electricity and airtime, and cereals like corn flakes, coco pops, and rice crispies she had a place where she would get the cereals in sacks for a cheap price and my father was working at

a farm, he was a boss there so you can imagine life was nice. My siblings and I never lacked anything, my parents are kindhearted, so they would help their relatives financially. I remember every December my father would buy a cow; have it sliced and invite all our relatives to spend Christmas at our house. Sometimes he'd pay for transportation to take all of us on swimming trips and things like that, everyone liked us. Our house always had visitors and they never left our house empty-handed, whenever there was a funeral in the family my parents would contribute and help in every way possible to ensure that the deceased gets a dignified send-off." He has never gotten this deep with me before

"Things changed, people took goods on credit and made excuses when it was time to repay the money, then slowly the business started running at a loss until my mother stopped selling completely. Then my father got sick, his whole body was swollen including his genitals.." A tear escapes his eye, but he quickly wipes it with his hand "From there he started messing himself, lost hearing, and eventually couldn't talk anymore he would just lie on his bed like a zombie and dart his eyes between us when we spoke. He died a few months later and life only got worse for us, there was no source of income mom sold the two cars we had in an attempt to start a business, but

that business didn't go anywhere. She got into the construction business and built RDP's but her employees would steal her tools, nothing was going right for us. We started living from hand to mouth, something we were not used to until mom went to consult a traditional healer and was told that one of our relatives is the one responsible for everything that happened, apparently, she borrowed money from my mother and worked on it using dark magic."

"I'm so sorry to hear that."

"What I'm trying to tell you is that I don't trust family, especially after what they did to my parents, I know you only see the best in people but please be careful because not everyone has good intentions. Witchcraft is real and most of the time it is done by our close friends and family, strangers wouldn't bewitch you because they know nothing about you or where you come from, you have a family to look out for it's not just you man. Anzani, Zothando, Nobuhle, and Nokwazi need you to protect them man, you told me your uncle's wife was very angry when she left and now suddenly her daughter has depression and wants pity from you? wake up man, there's more to this than what meets the eye."

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## ANZANI

It's been over three weeks since that fateful day and I haven't seen Mpilo nor did we speak about what happened on the day he left, we just carried on like nothing happened and guilt is eating away at me. I feel terrible for what I said to him, and I want to apologize to him and tell him about Mulalo. I hope our recorded call will be enough to prove that he was the one behind the shooting that almost cost me my husband and send him to prison for a long time, I still can't believe Mulalo is a ritualist. His heart is dark, why would he go to so many lengths to break me up from Quinton? What luck was he talking about? I have many questions but I'm not going to Venda, I'll fix this through prayer.

I was sure that Quinton would come on weekends to see Zothando but he never came, I don't know if he's doing it purposefully avoiding catching sight of me or because he gets busy over the weekends. I feel like I'm losing my husband and it's all my fault, we were happy, and I did this to us. I can't tell

you where the sudden irritation every time I look at his face comes from, but I have been praying about it as Dakalo suggested. I don't know if the prayer is working because I haven't seen him since, but everything is okay when we speak over the phone, hearing his voice makes me miss him and crave his presence so bad that my heart drops to my toes every time our conversation ends. I miss us, how we used to be before this whole thing started. Now all we speak about is our son who is a little over a month old so you can imagine there's not much to say, our conversations are always short.

I don't know if he hates me or if he has given up on me and I don't want to wait for him to serve me with divorce papers before I make things right between us, I'm going back to my house I'm going back to my husband before I lose him.

"I still think you're making a mistake Anzani, what if that feeling of him annoying you comes back when you get there then what you'll come back?" My aunt says as I'm packing my suitcase

"I'll deal with all that when I get there aunt, I won't sit here and wait for the feeling to go away and lose my husband while at

it.” Quinton is a handsome man, girls are thirsty out here I don’t want them to snatch my man. Not that he’s ‘snatchable’

“You won’t lose him, Quinton loves you.”

“I’m not taking any chances.”

“What about Zothando, he’s still young you will need help.”

“Quinton will help me.”

“I guess there’s nothing I will say to change your mind, all the best my child I wish you the best.”

“Thanks for understanding.” Lutendo runs inside the bedroom

“Anzani your cab is outside.” I hired a cab to drive me, I can’t be using taxis with a newborn it’s risky healthwise.

“Okay, call Mulanga to help you carry these bags to the car.”

“Okay.” He walks out and comes back with Mulanga and the two of them make several trips to the car to put my luggage. I strap my boy to my chest using the baby carrier and cover him with his mini blanket.

“I’m going, aunt.”

“Go well my child, have a safe trip.”

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I didn’t tell Quinton that I’m coming because I didn’t know how he was going to react, so I decided to surprise him, it was 12 midday when I got here. I put my son to sleep and did some bit of cleaning, it wasn’t dirty, but the apartment needed my personal touch. After cleaning I started packing our closet, and now I’m chopping vegetables and preparing dinner.

My heart leaps to my throat when I see the door handle move, then the door opens, and he walks in, and his eyes land on me.

He stops in his tracks and stares at me, I can't read the look on his face but oh my goodness he looks so handsome I wish I could run and throw myself in his arms, take in his scent, and have those big arms of his wrapped around my waist

He clears his throat snapping me from my daydream

"Hi." He says

"Hi." Then he walks straight to the bedroom and my heart sinks

I put down the knife and rinse my hands on the sink before following him inside. He's standing next to the cot eyeing our son in his sleep, we bought the cot when I was still pregnant.

"Uhhh...can we please talk?" he turns and looks my way

"Sure." That feeling of annoyance is still there whenever I look at his face but it's no longer as strong as it was on the last day I saw him. I leave the room first and wait for him on the couch, he walks out a few minutes later having changed into shorts

and a vest. He's barefoot, gosh nothing in this world turns me on more than him walking barefoot, he has the cutest toes ever with clean nails that are always cut short.

I hope he won't break up with me because I still want to suck those toes of his, the only reason I haven't sucked them is that I haven't been brave enough to do it. I'm sure he'll think I'm crazy the day I do it. He settles on the couch across me and stares at me expectantly

"I'm back home." He nods

"I can see that."

"I'm sorry about what I said the other day, it wasn't supposed to come out like that. I know I hurt your feelings and I don't expect my sorry to fix things but from the bottom of my heart I'm sorry."

"Apology accepted; do I still irritate you?" I part my lips to speak "Please be honest with me and yourself?"

“Yes.” I see a twinge of pain in his eyes “I love you Mpilo, I don’t know why I feel this way but I love you and I don’t want to lose you.” He looks at me for a while

“I love you too thembalam’, you will never lose me don’t worry.”

“I’m sorry for hurting you, for feeling this way. If I could I would stop it but I can’t do it.” I tell him then burst into tears “I’m praying about it, hopefully, God will intervene because I don’t want to lose you Mpilo, I would die.”

“You will never lose me.” I can tell he wants to come and comfort me but he’s hesitant

“Do you still love me?” I need reassurance, I feel a huge distance between us even though we are sitting a few meters away from one another.

“With all my heart.”

“There’s no one else?” I don’t know why I’m asking because I know I will collapse if he says there’s someone.

“No, there’s no one else but there’s something I need to tell you.”

#75

I can hear those gugu sounds as my heart threatens to jump out of my chest, I hope he didn't cheat. That would slash my heart into pieces, I don't think I can forgive cheating I'm an overthinker. I would probably imagine him with the girl doing the nasty.

"What do you want to tell me?"

"I want to tell you the truth, but I'm scared I will lose you once I do." OMG, he cheated! My body temperature just skyrocketed.

"Who was it?" I ask wiping my tears

"What?"

"The one you cheated on me with, who was it? Did you enjoy the sex? Is she more beautiful than me, who was it tell me?"  
Tears fall down my face like a deluge of rain

“Thembalam’ you need to calm down.”

“Tell me Mpilentle, who was it?” He stands up from his seat and moves toward the couch I’m sitting on

“Sthandwa sam, babe look at me.” He cups my teary face in his palms

“I love you, I’m sorry I betrayed our wedding vows, but I love you so much.” I remove his hands from my face

“Don’t lie, you don’t! if you loved me you wouldn’t have cheated on me.” I cry putting my hands on my face, the thought of him pumping in and out of someone else slays my heart

“Who did you give my dick to?” A smile tugs on his lips

“No one sthandwa sam, no one tasted your dick.” He’s smiling, does this man think this is a joke? He breaks my heart and smiles like nothing happened.

“Do you think I’m a fool?” I hiss

“I know you’re not one but I promise mamakhe I didn’t sleep with anyone.” I believe him, I know when he’s telling the truth.

“So, what happened?”

“Please sit down.”

“No, I don’t want to sit. I want to stand, what happened? Who gave you a blow job?”

“Thembalam’ please sit down and stop jumping to conclusions.”

“No, talk.” He sighs

“It was Nolwazi, I was not in a good headspace when she came here to give her condolences, so she sat next to me and tried to console me.”

“Wow, so you’re even speaking for her ‘she tried to console you, console you with what? her pussy?” he’s shocked, he’s never seen me this angry. I’m livid!

“She noticed that I was not okay and asked what's wrong.” He drops his gaze “I told her everything that happened then she offered to help me forget, that’s when she stripped naked and tried to sleep with me, but I didn’t give in.” He looks at me “We only kissed nothing more, and the kiss only lasted a few seconds.”

“Okay” At least he didn’t sleep with her, but I’m still hurt that he kissed her, those are supposed to be my lips. How dare he allow someone else to taste them!

“Okay? Is that it?”

“What do you want me to say? You kissed someone who’s not me, your wife, and told her all about our marital problems. Couldn’t you talk to Given or Kabelo or you and Nolwazi are close I’m just the only one who is kept in the dark?”

“No, we are not close. I’m sorry sthandwa sam I shouldn’t have said anything to her please forgive me.”

“Goodnight Mpilo, I’m going to bed.”

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QUINTON

I feel relieved like a huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders, yes, she’s angry but at least now she knows the truth. It was horrible hiding this from her, I’m happy she is back home with my son. I trust God, I know he’ll see us through this problem we are facing.

She was about to cook when I walked in so I continue where she left off and prepare her a hearty meal, I’m not the greatest cook but I prepared this meal with love I hope it will taste delicious.

“Baby come and eat.” She’s under the covers but I know she’s not sleeping; she snores when she’s asleep.

Mini me is still sleeping peacefully inside his cot, damn this boy can sleep! I climb the bed, get under the covers and lie behind her.

“Sthandwa sam ngiyaxolisa I know I betrayed your trust, you can punish me any way you want but please don’t leave me.” I beseech but she doesn’t reply

“Baby..” I whisper putting my arm around her waist “Sthandwa sam, please look at me ngiyakucela.”

“Leave me alone Mpilo.” Her voice is groggy, she’s been crying. If I could go back to that day and do things differently I would. I hate hurting her

“Please mama.”

“No, leave me alone.” She pushes my hand from her waist. I jump over her so we sleep facing each other, regret surges through my whole body when I see her bloodshot and puffy eyes.

“I’m sorry sthandwa sam.” I wrap my arms around her, she attempts to push me but I tighten my hold and drop a kiss on her lips.

She bites my lips but I don’t stop kissing her, I kiss her until she gives in and starts kissing me back. The kiss feels like cold water after a long hot day, I taste my blood in my mouth but all of that doesn’t matter right now. What matters is that I’m with my woman and she’s letting me kiss and fondle her body, oh how I have missed her lips. I kiss her exploring all the corners of her mouth with my tongue, her hands move from my face down to my chest then she sneaks them under my vest touching my bare skin while mine caress her boobies. I move my kisses to her neck and gently suck on it while tweaking her engorged nipples, a moan escapes her lips and she throws her head back giving me access to her neck. I suck and gently bite before moving down to her nipples and latch on them as my son would

“Yes baby, this feels great.” She says in a hushed tone

It's been a while, I intend to take my time with her I'm not in any rush. I give each breast due attention before moving down to her stomach and teasing her belly button with my tongue her body trembles completely under my spell. I push down her Pajama bottom and settle between her legs, I pull it down to her feet and softly kiss her thighs, she squirms on the bed pushing her navel to my face whilst squeezing her boobs. I use my teeth to remove her thong that is soaked with her juices, she immediately spreads her legs wide and the scent of her p\*ssy hits my nostrils. Oh how I have missed being between these legs, I swipe my tongue up and down her closed lips

“Baby pleaseee, stop teasing.” She beseeches breathlessly

I put my hands under her bums, lift her waist so her nuna is level with my face, and suck her labial lips like I would her lips. Then I swirl my tongue on her wetness and gently suck and bite on her clit, loud moans escape her lips and Zothando wails loudly evidently startled by the noise.

“F\*ck!” She curses and I laugh

“We are three now my love you no longer have the luxury of moaning like that.” I roll out of bed and head to the cot to take my son, he has grown so much. I cradle him and just stare at the perfection my wife and I created, my seed- my son.

“Hello, my boy, daddy missed you so much.”

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NOKWAZI

We move one more time, our bodies in sync and our clits touching in a scissor position and cling to each other as we both reach our climax.

“Damn that was amazing,” Namhla says breathing like a tired dog

“Yeah, it was great.” I lie on my back facing the ceiling catching my breath.

We fall into comfortable silence until Namhla breaks it.

“Nokwazi.”

“Yes?”

“What are we?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean we’ve been doing this for weeks now, what does that make us? an item or?”

“I thought we were just having fun why the sudden change of heart?”

“Never mind. We are just friends who help each other out sexually.” She climbs down from the bed and picks up her clothes scattered all over the floor and runs out of my room. I wonder, maybe I should follow her

My phone rings just as I attempt to get up, it’s Dave. A gigantic smile covers my face

“Hey, daddy.”

“Hey, beautiful how are you?”

“I’m great my love, you?”

“I’m good too.”

“Look babe I’m going on a work trip to Sun City tomorrow want to tag along?”

“Of course.”

“Okay, I’ll send Kgosi to come and pick you up tomorrow say around 9 in the morning.” Kgosi is his driver

“Thanks, babe.”

“Please don’t pack anything, we’ll buy clothes when we get there.”

“Amazing.” This is why I can’t let go of him even after the long lecture my brother gave me, this man spoils me rotten.

“I love you, have a goodnight.”

“Love you more.” I cut the call and get another one just as I’m putting my phone down

“Hey.”

“Hey sis, how are you?”

“Great, you sound happy.” She giggles

“Yes, Thando is taking me to Cape town this weekend I’m so excited.”

“Wow, wena na and how are you going to sleep?”

“He’ll sleep on the couch.” Nobuhle’s problem is that she thinks she knows better than me, I can’t wait for this guy to break her little heart. Then she will learn not to ignore her elder sister’s advice

“Okay, if you say so have fun.”

“I will. Did you apologize to sis Anzani?” I should’ve known that this is why she called

“Yes.” I lie

“See? That wasn’t too hard now, was it? Now we can all get along and be one big and happy family.”

“Yeah.”

“You should see Zothando he’s so cute.”

“Yeah, I saw him on Quinton’s status.” I’m so over this conversation.

“Last weekend my roommate and I were doing shopping and I bumped into this beautiful romper I couldn’t help but buy it for him, he’s going to look so cute in it.”

“That’s nice baby sis, look I’m studying I have a test tomorrow we will talk.”

“Okay, all the best on your test.”

“Yeah, bye.”

“Have a good night I love you.”

“Me too,” I say and quickly cut the call before she says anything else

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QUINTON

It still feels surreal that I’m in bed with my son and wife, what more do I need? I’m content. I hope the feeling of her finding me annoying will eventually go away because now she can’t make eye contact for too long because she’s scared that she’ll get irritated and say something that will hurt me.

“Mpilo there’s something I need to tell you.”

“Hold that thought, let me take this little guy to his bed.”

“No Mpilo, he’s sleeping with us he’s still too young to sleep alone throughout the night. I only put him in there because it was during the day.”

“Then what was the purpose of buying this cot if he’s not going to use it?”

“He will, when he’s older maybe six months now he’s still too young to sleep alone. Yoh never my little boy, he’ll sleep between mom and dad until he’s at least 7or 8 months.”

“You said 6 now it’s 7or 8?” she chuckles

“Leave me alone.” Mothers and their sons! It’s cute though, makes me miss my mom.

“You wanted to tell me something?”

“Oh yeah listen to this.” She plays a recording of a phone call conversation between her and Mulalo

“What the hell?”

“I know, I was just as shocked. We should give it to the detective in charge of your case, they might arrest him who knows...Do you think we should go to Venda? I don't want you to die “

“I won't die, my love, my life is not Mulalo's he doesn't get to choose when I live or die only God can make that choice, don't be scared I'm going nowhere I'm going to love you until you're old and wrinkled.” She chuckles “Ngiyakuthanda mama, thanks for coming back home to your husband.”

“Aw Gatsheni.” She blushes

Yo kuthi mangi gqumagqume njenge ngane encane

“Babe what if Mulalo is behind this sudden feeling you get every time you look at my face?”

“I wouldn’t put it past him because he did admit to using muti to try and separate us but he won’t succeed, I’m not going anywhere we will fight against this dark magic together and come out of this whole thing as victors.”

“Amen, I love the spirit. So we are in this together?”

“Yes my love, we are in this together forever. No weapon formed against our love shall prosper.”

#76

“Can this recording be used as proof in court?”

“I don’t know about court but it’s good enough to make an arrest, you’re going to need a very good lawyer to prove beyond reasonable doubt in court that Mulalo did this. This recording doesn’t give us much to work with, he only admits to trying to kill you but he doesn’t explain how or when he did it. He can lie and say he only admitted to the crime because he wanted to coerce your wife to meet with him.”

Now I understand why so many people never get justice in our country and how perpetrators get away with crime, frankly, I don’t understand how the justice system works. Mulalo admitted to trying to kill me, but the court will still need more evidence to prove that he did it, come on man!

“I’m sorry I know this is not what you wanted to hear but that’s how the law works-with evidence.”

“Okay detective.”

“I’ll get in contact with the Limpopo SAPS, Mulalo will sleep in a cell tonight.”

“Thank you.”

“I’m only doing my job, don’t worry too much about this...there are ways that can be used to make him confess to the crime.”

“Ok detective, I’m getting late for work I’ll take my leave now,”  
I say glancing at my wristwatch

“Ok no problem, me and my team will do our best to ensure that justice is served.”

“I would appreciate that.”

My phone rings on my way out of the police station.

“Mzala,” I say picking up the call

(Cousin)

“Hey mzitho, how are you?”

“Can’t complain, how are you?”

I hate that I’m about to disappoint her, but after what Kabelo told me I don’t think it’s a good idea to move her into my mother's house. Her mother swore that I would regret my decision the day she left my mother’s house, as much as I don’t want to believe that my own family would be capable of causing me harm, I know that wasn’t an empty threat by aunt it was a promise and I’d rather be safe than sorry.

“Good”

“Nomcebo, you know I love and care about you right?”

“Yeah, why?”

“I’m sorry for everything you’re going through, I wish there was something I could do to help you get through this”

"You can by allowing me to move in."

"I'm sorry but you can't move to my mother's house."

“Why?”

“Truth is your parents and I didn’t part on good terms so I don’t think it’s a good idea to take you in. I don’t want to aggravate them further, your mother already expressed her disapproval of you moving into the backroom so I don’t think going behind her back would be a wise thing to do.”

“I’m a grown woman, I don’t need my mother’s approval for anything.”

“That may be true but you’re still her child, I don’t want to do anything that may worsen the situation between us.”

“Please don’t do this Quinton, I need this.”

“I’m sorry cousin, look I must hang up now. I’m running late to work.”

“Wow! Now I understand why my mother despises you, you’re pompous and think you’re better than everyone. Let’s see how long all this will last!”

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ANZANI

Coming back home was exactly what I needed, like the scripture says, ‘where two or three are gathered in my name I will be there. My husband and I read the bible and pray like never before, and it feels great. I’m growing spiritually and whatever spell Mulalo might have put on me is slowly wearing

off, things are gradually going back to what they used to be, but I'll never make the mistake of relaxing just because things seem fine at the moment. The devil doesn't sleep nor take a break, once bitten twice shy I almost lost my husband I'll never let my guard down ever again.

Staying cooped up all day in the house while Quinton is at work is not it but at least I have Zothando to keep me company even though he sleeps half the time, I've begun my search for a nanny who will take care of him when I go back to work and I hope I will find someone who will love my son and take care of him as she would her children. I've heard so many bad things about nannies in the past, things that left me unsettled and made me reluctant on getting one which is why I have included God in my search, he has never disappointed me before and I know he will not start now. He will lead me to the right person, one who will take good care of my little prince.

Aunt Lufuno offered to take my son in when I go back to work but I know my husband will not agree to Zothando living far from us, I also don't want him far from me. I never doubted that Mpilo would make a great father, but I didn't expect him to be so hands-on. He's so obsessed with our son and takes over from me when he comes back from work, I honestly

thought I would have to force him to help me with the baby, but he does everything effortlessly and without being asked the only thing he doesn't like doing is changing his diaper especially when it's poop but he does it anyway which I respect.

Mini-Quinton fell asleep shortly after his bath, and I used the recourse to do his laundry, I don't prefer using a washing machine on his clothes, I hand wash them with a sunlight green bar soap. I saunter to the bedroom to check if he's still sleeping, an involuntary smile spreads on my face when I find him sleeping peacefully. I can't get over how beautiful he is, I still can't wrap my head around the fact that I'm no longer just Anzani I'm someone's a mother now and everything I do, every decision I take needs to be in his best interest, he's my first priority now.

I plant a soft peck on his forehead before heading to the balcony to hang the laundry on the mobile indoor washing line, Nolwazi's apartment is opposite ours so I notice when her door opens while I'm busy hanging the laundry, she steps out and smiles widely when our eyes lock. She stops in her tracks peering at my boy's clothes on the line.

“Hey, new mommy. Congratulations.” I draw in a breath and hold it in for a few seconds before exhaling as an attempt to calm myself down. What is this?

“Hi.”

“You look so beautiful hey, motherhood agrees with you.”

“Thanks.”

“So, what did you get? Was it a boy or a girl?”

“Nolwazi what do you want from me?” I can't take it anymore, I'm not a good pretender.

“What do you mean?” She asks feigning confusion

“You seduce my husband then you come here and act all buddy-buddy with me, what's your plan?” She roars in laughter agitating me even further.

“Wow! Amadoda ne, I respect them. Is that what he told you? that I tried to sleep with him? well he lied to you my darling I didn't try to. He and I slept together, and it was amazing, damn that man knows how to please a woman with that huge monster of his.” She seductively bites her bottom lip “Not forgetting his exceptional skills when it comes to giving head, he's the best.”

I'm seeing red the only thing I want to do now is walk up to her and pluck her eyes out but that's exactly what she wants, she's saying all of this to get a reaction from me. Unfortunately, it's working. I'm boiling in anger

“That's what men do to cheap and desperate women like yourself, they satisfy themselves with the likes of you and go on with life like you don't exist the day next but what do I know? I'm just a wife that's being lied to by her cheating husband after all.”

“What?” The look on her face is comical, she didn't expect me to react this way.

“Here is some free advice, no man will respect you if you don’t respect yourself. Men are men they will not refuse you if you get naked and spread your legs, they’ll f\*ck you until they are satisfied but that doesn't make you special it only makes you cheap and easy and that’s where it will end. You’ll remain just that, a mindless f\*ck! Where's your self-respect? You’re too beautiful to be acting like a cheap prostitute, what am I saying even prostitutes know their worth because they get paid for their services ... Oh, and one more thing, grow the f\*ck up! Shagging another woman’s man isn’t something to brag about, you should be ashamed of yourself matter of fact sies! Now get out of my face and don’t you ever talk to me again.”

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NARRATED

Nokwazi steps out of the shower dries herself with a towel, and wraps it around her body before taking off her shower cap letting her long silky black hair cascade down to her shoulders like a hair extension, she wipes the misty mirror with her bath towel and gapes at her reflection.

“You're stunning Nokwazi Michelle Ndlovu yeses!” Then she giggles and steps out of the bathroom taking her toiletry bag with her.

“Hi.” She says when she finds Namhla perching on top of her bed waiting for her

“Hello.” Nokwazi drops the towel on the rug and ably butters her body with lotion, Namhla's clit twitches as she ogles Nokwazi's sexy body.

She stands up and kneels in front of Nokwazi

“What are you doing?” Namhla doesn't reply, she grabs Nokwazi's leg and lays it on her shoulder before trailing kisses from her leg up to her inner thighs.

A moan escapes Nokwazi's lips as Namhla laps on her juices like a dog slurping water, she grabs a fistful of her braids and pushes her head deeper into her pulsating core.

“Oh yes baby, don’t stop.”

Namhla cups her buttocks and delves deeper into her haven f\*cking her with her tongue, she adds a finger and directs it to Nokwazi's upper pallet rubbing on her G-spot stimulating her even more, Nokwazi's toes curl as a wave of pleasure washes over her body like an electric shock. Her body goes rigid before she sprays Namhla's face with her salty juices, Namhla wipes her face with her hands and carries Nokwazi whose legs are still vibrating to bed.

“What was that?”-Nokwazi

“Nothing, I just couldn’t resist you.” She strips out of her clothes, climbs on top of the bed, and sits on Nokwazi's face

“Eat me!” Nokwazi doesn’t need to be told twice she swirls her tongue on her mound separating her folds and sucks on her engorged clit

“F\*ck yeeees!” Namhla moans holding on to the heard board.

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“So, you’re going with Dave?” Namhla

She’s lying nude on the bed watching Nokwazi getting herself dolled for her trip with Dave.

“Yes.”

“But it’s during the week.”

“So what? It’s not like I have school.” Namhla sighs

“About that, when are you going to tell your siblings that you failed your first year?”

“How about never? I will never hear the end of it if I do, Quinton will force me to go back home and I’m not ready to be a laughing stock”

“So you’re going to keep forging results, using Dipuo's results and passing them off as your own?”

"Yes, I don't have another choice."

"What’s going to happen in two years when they expect you to graduate?”

“I would be long married to Dave by then” Namhla chokes on her saliva and coughs violently

“What?”

“Dave asked me to be his second wife, are you okay?”

“Yeah...don’t tell me you are considering it.”

“I'm not considering it, I already agreed.”

“What?”

“Yep,” she says nonchalantly

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QUINTON

I told my wife not to cook and passed at the Wing Republic restaurant on my way from work and bought dinner for us, my heart swells when I find her in the lounge with my son snuggled in her arms when I walk through the door.

“Good evening family.”

“Hi.”

“Thembalam' what's going on?” she looks upset

“I don't know Mpilo, why don't you tell me?”

“What?” she clicks her tongue and drops her gaze to Zothando

I set the takeaway bag on top of the kitchen counter along with my laptop bag and car keys before advancing toward her.

“Sthandwa Sam what's going on?” I say settling next to her

“Today while I was minding my own business hanging my son's laundry on the balcony guess who walked out of her apartment?”

“Who?”

“Nolwazi, she pretended like nothing happened and acted like we are besties so I called out on her pretense. She laughed at me like I'm a fool and told me about how big your dick is and how good you are with your tongue, why did you lie to me Mpilo? You said you didn't sleep with her, why did you lie to me?” the pain in her voice is almost tangible

“Love let's not argue in front of our son.”

“No, I'm not arguing with you. I only want to know why you lied to me, you had an opportunity to come clean but you didn't. You chose to lie to me!”

“Please stop crying, you're breaking my heart. I didn't touch her I promise, you know me sthandwa sam I would never lie to you.” She looks into my eyes and I pray she can see the sincerity they hold.

“But she...she said your dick is big, how does she know that?”

“Because she touched it, but I promise I didn't sleep with her. I only kissed her nothing more, I didn't go down on her she only said that to hurt you.” The pain in her eyes slays my heart into pieces

“I'm sorry sthandwa sam.”

“I'm going to give my son a bath before he dozes off again, you know him and sleep.” she attempts to chuckle but a tear rolls down instead

“I'll do it,” I say wiping her tears with my hands

“Okay, don't put him inside the water, just wipe him I don't want him to catch a cold.”

“I'm sorry sthandwa Sam, I'll talk to Nolwazi and make sure she stays away from you.”

“I don't want you to talk to her, I want you to find us a house Mpilentle. We can't raise our son in an apartment, he needs a

stable home. I also need privacy, I want to have my own house.”

“Ok, I’ll find an estate agent to help us find a house around Johannesburg.”

“Good then.”

Given warned me that this would happen, I regret allowing that girl into my apartment that night.

#77

“So I was thinking how about we go out this weekend? We haven’t gone out in a long while.” Thabo says after taking a sip of his Hennessy

“Yeah, I think it’s a great idea,” Mabutho adds and puts the cigar between his lips and lights it up

“Unfortunately I can’t go, I already have plans.” His friends look at each other and back at him

“What plans?” he breaks into a lopsided smile setting his glass on the table

“I’m taking my girlfriend to Cape Town.” Thabo whistles

“What did you say?”-Mabutho quips dramatically

He chuckles “You heard me, I said I’m taking my girlfriend to Cape Town so next time boys.” He says with so much pride in his voice

“So, this is not a joke?” -Thabo

“No, it's not. I am back in the game, I have a girlfriend. I’m in love.”

“Congratulations I guess, so when are we seeing her?”  
Mabutho

“Not a chance, I don’t want any of you scaring her away. Our relationship is still new, I don’t want any mistakes.”

“Wow, I guess you really care about her.” It’s Mabutho again

“I do, she’s different from all the other girls I have been with. She makes me want to be a better person, she makes me do things I never thought I would do before.” He shakes his head

“Can you believe I even beg her and do all sorts of things I always swore I would never do?”

“What? A whole Thando begging a woman?”

“I know right, she just sparks something inside me and taps into a part of my heart that I never knew existed. I’m in love with her and I hope and pray she’s not going to be my karma for all those girls I have hurt in the past, she’s young and sometimes I lay awake thinking about her meeting someone else a few years down the line and realizing that I’m not what she wants...how will I handle that because she is all I want, I’ve explored and seen things and I’m sure she’s who I want to settle down with but we can’t say the same about her, I’m her first boyfriend. I want to love her and give her my all but I’m scared of the unknown, of the what-ifs. Everyone I have loved in the past has hurt me, I made a vow to myself to never open my heart like this again. I didn’t want to fall so hard so soon but it’s happening and I don’t know if I can stop it.”

“Wow, that’s a lot.” Mabutho

“Yeah, he said a lot.” He sighs “I don’t know what to say my friend, there are no guidelines to this love thing. You need to take a risk and just love her, if she hurts you then it would mean that she’s not for you but again she could be your soul mate and the best thing about all of this is that you are her first. You get to teach her about love, she doesn’t know anything about relationships she’s not carrying any past resentments or hurts she is pure and she’ll love you wholeheartedly so it’s up to you to give her all the love she deserves.”- Thabo

“Yeah Thabo is right Mpilo, girls give their all in their first relationships. Love her and treat her like a Queen she is in your heart because I can see that you love her and forget all about what can happen, just live in the moment and enjoy your relationship because expecting the worst to happen will rob you of your peace and make you paranoid.”

“I will try but I love her so much it scares me, she’s all I think about day in and day out and suddenly I don’t see all the other girls. It doesn’t matter how beautiful or sexy they are but they no longer entice me like they would if it was before, I’m content with her. I find myself comparing every girl I meet to her, in my head I would be like yes she’s beautiful but I have

Nobuhle and she's the most beautiful of them all as if the poor girl approached me or something." His friends laugh

"Oh my goodness you're in love, you're so whipped." Mabutho

"Yes and it's so crazy, I've loved before but it was never this intense."

"You're in love with her, you don't just love her." Thabo

"F\*ck all this talk about her has made me miss her, let me go outside and call her." He says already on his feet sending his friends into another fit of laughter

"Udlisiwe wena!"

"Fokof!" He gulps down the contents of his glass and heads outside, his phone in hand.

He walks closer to the gate, getting away from the boisterous music and the loud chatter of his friends, and dials her number leaning his back on his car, it rings unanswered the first time but she answers on the third ring when he calls for the second time

“Hi.”

“Sincandamathe Sam kutheni uthetha ngathi ubusulele?”

(My love why do you sound like you were sleeping?)

“Yes, I was sleeping. It’s almost midnight Thando and normal people sleep at this hour.” He chuckles at her spicy response

“Uxolo maNdlovu bendikukhumbula muntu wami.”

(Sorry I missed you)

“I miss you too baby.”

“You can go back to sleep, I only wanted to hear your voice.”

“No, it's fine. I'm already awake let's talk.”

“Okay then, let me video call you.”

“Okay, let me go and make myself a cup of coffee.”

“Okay Hlehle wami.” He hangs up and smiles to himself like an idiot.

A few minutes later his phone vibrates, it's a video call from 'Hlehle ❤️' he smiles widely and accepts the call

“Muntu wami.”

“Baby, I can't see you. It's dark, where are you?”

“I'm at Thabo's house with Mabutho, they are playing loud music so I stepped out to make a call.”

“Ok, but I want to see you.”

“Eish...let me get inside the car then.” He digs through his pockets for his car keys and opens the front door, he climbs inside, and switches on the light

“Better now?”

“Much better, why do you look like that? Have you been drinking?” he smiles nervously

“Ewe.”

(Yes)

“But you promised no more alcohol until your birthday.” she's disappointed

“Uxolo va?”

(sorry okay)

“It’s okay, it’s your liver.”

“Suthetha ngalohlobo undiphatha ka buhlungu Hlehle.”

(Don't talk like that, you're hurting me)

“I’m sorry.”

“Seeing you like this makes me miss you even more, tell you what I am coming there.”

“What?”

“I only want to hug you that’s all.”

“Come on Thando you’ll see me this weekend.”

“I’ll be there soon, don’t fall asleep before I get there.”

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NOBUHLE

Oh my God is this guy crazy? He's coming here at this hour? I roll out of bed and make my way to the kitchen I share with Lungile and three other girls, Lungile is still up and studying with the pen between her teeth and her books all over the table.

"You won't believe my boyfriend Lungile"

"What did he do?"

"He said he's on his way to see me"

"What?"

“Exactly, and he’s been drinking so I won’t let him drive back to Boksburg when he gets here.”

“So, he’ll sleepover?” I nod “Okay, so what do you need from me?”

“Can't you go and sleep at your boyfriend's place just for tonight?” I stay in a commune, Lungile and I share the room and share the kitchen with three other girls. One has a single room while the four of us share, the landlord isn’t that strict she only wants her yard kept clean. What we do in our private lives is our business.

“Fine, no problem friend I'll call him and ask him to fetch me.”

“Thanks, I owe you one.” The things that Thando makes me do though

Lungile calls her boyfriend and asks him to come and pick her up, fortunately, he doesn't stay too far from here. I help her pack up her books then wait for him to pull up, he arrives a few

minutes later and the couple keeps me company until Thando parks his car at the gate.

“Is that him?” Lungile asks chirping at his car

“Yes, thanks once again friend and Casper for keeping me company. Let me go to him.”

“Ok bye friend Casper and I will get going then, baby let’s go.”

He steps out of the car when he sees me approaching the gate, it’s chilly I’m wearing winter pajamas and a fluffy gown on top but I can still feel the cold. He’s wearing a short-sleeved shirt with a jean and standing in the cold breeze like it's a hot summer day

doesn’t he feel the frostiness or he’s acting tough to please me?

He pulls me into his arms before I can even greet him and cages me in them making me sniff his cologne and the puff of alcohol in his breath.

“Park your car inside I’ll open the gate for you.”

“Why?”

“You’re sleeping over, ain’t no way I’m letting you drive back in this condition.” he pulls away from me

“But I’m not drunk, look I can stand on one leg to prove it.” He attempts to show me but I pull his arms and wrap them around me

“No, drive in and park your car inside.”

“Ok boss.” I giggle

“Who is the boss?”

“You, you’re so bossy!” I laugh breaking off the hug

“Ngiyakulaya angisho awuzwa.”

"Wow, awondoyiki shem!"

(You're not scared of me)

“What?” he’s staring at me with a wild smile on his face

“Umuhle.” I can't help but grin like a Cheshire cat, he’s smooth I will give him that

“Thanks, now get in the car and drive inside the yard I’ll open the gate for you.”

"Yes ma'am"

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“This is you, this is me.”

“Whose bed is this?”

“Mine, I’ll take Lungile's.”

“No, we will sleep together.”

“Come on Thando, it’s a single bed we won't fit”

“Don’t worry the bed is big enough for the both of us.” I don’t know how to feel about his suggestion, I have never slept with any guy before

“I won’t do anything to you I swear.” He says probably seeing the hesitation in my eyes

“I know you won’t but mina ngidla mazinyo mangilele, sleep alone I will keep you up.”

“No, I want to sleep with you. I don’t care what you do in your sleep.” I have ran out excuses

“Ok undress and let us sleep, it’s late.” He takes off his clothes and only leaves his boxer shorts, I quickly move my eyes to his chest avoiding looking at his dickprint. He sees this and chuckles

“You can look I promise it won't do anything to you.” I hit him with a pillow and jump into bed after taking off my gown, he laughs and joins me.

My heart is beating promptly, I’m scared. I trust him I know he won’t do anything to me but I’m anxious because this is the first time I’m sharing the bed with a male either than my brother

“Relax would you.” He says pulling me into his arms

“I love you.”

“I love you too,” I reply then we fall into a comfortable silence. His breathing pattern soon changes and I immediately know

that he's sleeping, I raise my head and look at him in his sleep still not believing that he's here with me.

I take my phone under the pillow and steal a picture, Thando is a beautiful man yes you heard me right he is beautiful!

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ANZANI

A WEEK LATER

I was so shocked when Quinton told me Mulalo confessed to everything he did when police apprehended him, he's behind bars waiting for his sentencing. My husband got in touch with an estate agent like he promised to, the lady said she has two houses that she thinks we might be interested in buying so we'll go to view them over the weekend.

I don't want to keep staying in the same building as that Nolwazi girl because I remember Quinton's betrayal every time I look at her face, I don't want to be like this because I have

forgiven him and I want us to move past this. I don't want to be the kind of partner who constantly reminds him of his mistakes whenever we argue but it'll get to that point if we don't find another place to stay. We'll keep paying the rent here because we were renting to own so it would be foolish of us to let this place go after paying so much money.

"Wow, you look beautiful."

"Thanks, you look gorgeous as always, please come in and have a seat."

"Thanks, this is for my boy and this one is for you." She says giving me two shopping bags

"Thanks, you're ever so kind."

"Stop it, you deserve it for being a good employee and friend"  
She makes her way to the lounge and settles on the recliner

"Would you like tea, coffee, or juice?"

“Haibo Anzani ungu mdlezana onjani o active so?” We laugh  
“When Hlelo was a month old I was in bed getting pampered by my mother, she would do everything for me including washing the baby’s clothes. How are you so active and beautiful? I was always tired and barely had time to look good.”

“My aunt was doing the same for me when I was in Ratanda, even Quinton tries not to overwork me when he's around. I would have loved to stay home for a little while longer because I enjoyed the treatment to some extent but I had no choice but to come back to my house, and besides this sleeping all-day stuff is not me. I like to keep busy.”

“Hmmm ukhuthele ke but I won't allow you to serve me anything, come and join me on the couch I’ll order something from Uber eats.”

“You don’t have to, I can whip something for you quickly.”

“No, I insist come and join me.” There’s no winning with my boss so I make my way to the couch and settle next to her, she

presses her phone for a while placing an order at NewsCafe before bringing her attention back to me

“So, where’s my boy? I would love to see him or it’s still too early for him to be seen?”

“No, it's fine you can see him. He was asleep, let me go check on him he should be awake by now.”

I'm surprised when I find him silently staring into space, wow somebody is growing up. He no longer cries when he wakes up and doesn't find anyone next to him, I pick him up and immediately pick up the stench of poop.

“Sies!” he smiles like he can hear what I'm saying. I change his diaper and wrap him with a mini blankie before taking him to Ndalo.

“My goodness, he looks exactly like his father.” She says taking him

"I know right, what a betrayal after I suffered so much to bring him into this world."

"At least he took your light skin, my kids look nothing like me. Hlelo looks like her grandmother while the twins look like their father."

"I suppose I'm better then."

"Trust me you are, please go through the bags I gave you, I got him some really cute outfits."

"Thanks, but you shouldn't have." I go through the bags and I'm in awe, she bought my baby so many beautiful clothes. I appreciate it even though I feel like it's a waste of money, this boy grows bigger every day he'll wear these clothes two or three times before he outgrows them.

"So, I came across this video." She says handing me her phone

It's a video of a doctor who claims she got healed from Lupus by changing her diet, she stopped eating meat, eggs, and milk and only ate vegetables and her Lupus got cured completely

"Yo, I love my meat." She laughs

"I know right but think about it, you'll be free from this sickness."

"I know but the thought of never eating meat again iyoh. I can't imagine myself living on vegetables forever"

"Awume kancane zimzim and think about your health." We roar in laughter

"I'm kidding, I'm open to trying anything that might help me be rid of this disease forever. Living with a disease like Lupus is not nice, I can die anytime. I have a child, a husband, and a family to live for...I don't want to die and leave my son without a mother, I want to see him grow up and have kids of his own. I

want to have more kids with my husband and actually enjoy my pregnancy and not constantly be hospitalized.”

“You’ll be healed, this doctor is living proof that it’s possible. Don’t cry, children can sense these things.” I didn’t even realize I was crying until she mentioned it, I never really talk about it but living with Lupus is not nice, it's hell.

This disease has taken so many lives and I pray every night when I sleep for God to give me more time because I fear every day could be my last, Lupus is vicious and has taken so many before my eyes. I'm part of a WhatsApp group for people living with Lupus and we are often informed about the death of someone from our group and that shows me how serious this illness I'm living with is. I'm blessed to still be alive, I always thank God for waking me up every morning without fail because I know someone out there wasn't so lucky.

#78

I'm in my husband's arms telling him about the video Ndalo showed me, I'm going to take a leap of faith and do this and hope it works but even if it doesn't work then I have nothing to lose.

"So, no more meat for you?"

"Yes." He tightens his arms around me and plants a soft peck on my temple

"We will do this together, we'll change our diet and adopt a meat-free lifestyle." I break free from his arms so I can look into his eyes

"Really? You would do that for me?" I know how much he loves his meat

“Of course sthandwa Sam I would do anything to support you, if changing our diet and living like rabbits will help you then so be it.” I cup his face and smooch his lips

“Thank you so much Mpilo, you’re the best husband anyone could ever ask for.” He links our foreheads and strokes my cheek with his finger

“And you’re the best wife any man could ever ask for” he takes my hand and sets it on the left side of his chest “Ngiyakuthanda mama, ngikuthanda ngenhliziyo yami yonke ngingakwenzela nanoma yini.”

(I love you, I love you with all my heart and I would do anything for you)

I’m tearing up, call me emotional but I have never had anyone love me so much.

“Don’t cry Thembalam’.” He wipes my tears with his fingers and pulls me in for a passionate kiss.

My heart thumps rapidly against my rib cage and Goosebumps tease my skin, I break the kiss and jump down to the floor taking my son with me.

“Babe what’s going on?” he’s confused

“Putting him in his bed, I don’t want him to disturb us.” A mischievous smile instantly coats his face

“I like how you think Mrs. Ndlovu.” I smile back and gently lay my son down wrapping him with a blanket

Quinton tries to grab my waist when I climb back to bed but I push him and get on top of him, I grab the waistband of his boxer shorts and pull them down. He helps me take it out by slightly bucking his hips, his thick veined member springs out pointing up and the tip glistening with precum. I take off my nightdress and push my thong to the side and guide his member into my throbbing wet slit, I’m too hungry for him there’s no time for four play and I’m happy he understands the assignment.

He places his hands on either side of my waist and slowly plunges into me from beneath. There's a slight discomfort as his member stretches my nuna, I begin moving once all of his meat is buried inside of me filling me up and leaving no space making me feel stuffed. I move my waist in circles at first until my nuna adjusts to his size then I start spelling the word coconut with my waist, oh my goodness this feels amazing a feverish moan evades my lips as I ride him hard while my breast bounces up and down. The room is filled by the sounds of our muffled moans and groans, he takes a pillow and puts it over his face to stop himself from groaning out loud and startling our son. His grip on my waist tightens as he moves beneath me fucking me hard and fast.

"F\*ck!" he curses and flips us over so that he's on top and places my one leg on his shoulder and plunges into me hard

"Aaahh!" I cry out in pleasure and bite my tongue when I remember that there's a third person in the room.

This position allows for deeper penetration, balls of sweat roll down his face to my breasts as he slips in and out of me. I momentarily close my eyes before opening them again savoring

the moment as I feel my orgasm build up, there's something weirdly arousing about watching his c\*\*k slip in and out of me. It makes my clit vibrate violently with need and has my entire body fired up.

"Thembalam' please look at me." I open my eyes and look into his half hooded eyes laden with lust, his lower lip is tucked between his teeth. It's incredibly satisfying to watch him so horned up knowing I'm the one responsible for it.

"I love you so much."

"Aaah..I...I love you too." The pleasure I feel is out of this world, I don't know what to do with myself. He's doing me so well I want to break down and cry, my body is trembling from the immense pleasure I feel, and looking at him and seeing all the love burning inside his eyes for me sends me on edge

"Mpilo I'm cumming!"

“Chama sthandwa sam'.” And just like that, I let myself go and release all over his dick my thighs fluttering violently like I’m being electrocuted, a heartbeat later his facial expression hardens and veins pop up all over his face as he shoots his cum deep inside my womb with a loud grunt. I feel our juices trail down to my inner thighs when he pulls out leaving me feeling empty.

“I missed you.” He says in a gruff whisper before shoving his semi-hard dick back inside my now slippery hole.

He puts both my legs on his shoulders and leans in for a kiss, he plunges in and out of me while our tongues dance to the rhythm of our hearts.

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My ringing phone wakes me up from sleep, I quest for it under my pillow with my hand and answer with my eyes still closed hoping that whoever is on the line will be brief so I can go back to sleep.

“Hello.”

“Anzani, are you still sleeping?” it’s aunt Lufuno

“Yes, aunt I slept late last night.” More like I didn’t sleep at all, Mpilo didn’t stop drilling me until 5 AM this morning. My nuna is throbbing and swollen but I’m not complaining, this is exactly what I needed. It was almost as if it was payback for all the months we spent without being intimate, we couldn’t get enough of each other.

“Ok, I just got a call from your mother's Gobela. Next week Saturday is your mother's ‘ntwaso eating ceremony' you need to be there.”

“Of course aunt, I’ll come.”

“Okay, bye then.”

“Bye, aunt.”

The door opens and my husband walks in carrying our son in his arms. My heart swells with joy, these are the two important people in my life. It's crazy how they look so much alike, but I'm not complaining because Mpilo is quite a looker.

"My baby boy come to mommy," I say sitting up with my back against the headboard and pulling the covers to my bosom, Zothando smiles widely when he hears my voice I think he's starting to recognize me as his mother. Quinton comes to my side of the bed and gives him to me

"I thought you wouldn't wake up," he says kissing my forehead

"My aunt's call woke me up, I'm tired and my pussy is throbbing and swollen all thanks to you." He smirks visibly proud of himself

"I can kiss it better you know" I release a chuckle

"As tempting as that sounds, your son is awake so no hubby I'll have to pass."

“I regret having a baby.” He sulks causing me to laugh

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NARRATED

“Molweni ekhaya.”

(Good morning family)

Thando sings making his way to the dining area where his family is having breakfast, there is a bounce in his step, and a gigantic smile spread on his face. Not even the black shades covering his eyes can conceal the joy on his face, he’s booming in a sea of happiness.

“Molo nyana, please grab a seat and join us.”

(Good morning son)

His mother says already filling an empty plate with toast, bacon mushroom, slices of tomato, and a sausage.

“Esihle sukuma umenzele itiyi.”

(Esihle stand up and make tea for him)

His mother says much to Esihle's annoyance, she puts her fork down and makes her way to the kitchen to make a cup of tea for her brother.

“Ndiyabulela maNkosi wami omuhle”

He says accepting the plate from his mother and perching his behind on the seat next to Langa, Luvuyo, his father looks at him and shakes his head.

“Khupha le nonsense esemehlweni Ndaloyothando” he might be a young professional who owns a house, and a car and earns a lot of money but under this roof, he’s still a child and he behaves as such.

He nods and takes off his glasses setting them on the table, shortly after that Esihle walks back to the dining room clutching a steaming cup of tea in hand and hands it to him.

“Thank you.” He says and begins eating

“Esihle told me you have a girlfriend, when am I meeting my daughter-in-law?” His mother says excitedly

He shoots his little sister a look before bringing his gaze back to his mother and his expression softens

“Uhm, our relationship is still new. For now, I just want to enjoy our relationship without interference from our families and friends, I love her and I’m sure about her and I wouldn’t mind introducing her to you but I don’t think she is ready for that.”

“Ok makes sense, I can see you’re happy with her and that’s what any mother wants for her children. For them to be happy.”

“Thanks, mom, I am happy with her. She’s very special, I have never loved anyone as I do her.”

“She’s very beautiful too, I know her. She doesn’t stay far from aunt Thembi's place.” Langa chips in

“Langa!” He chides

“What?” he says with his shoulders raised then his focus goes back to his mother when Thando doesn't say anything. “She was in matric last year, she attended the same school with Tumelo.”

“Matric? How old is this girl kanene?”

“17” the blabbermouth, Langa replies and the room falls into an uncomfortable silence.

“What?” His father raises the question looking at him with his eyebrows contorted “is it true Thando, you’re dating a 17-year-old?” he bobs his head.

“Wow, that’s a child Ndaloyothando. How can you sit here and tell us you’re in love with someone younger than both your younger siblings? 17...she's still a child and knows nothing about love, what you’re doing is not right you’ll ruin the poor child's future.” His mother looks equally disappointed in him

“I know how it sounds but I really love her and I have no intention to hurt or distract her from her studies, she’s only 17 but she’s mature way above her years. ”

“Kodwa naye undwebile bo, at 17 she’s dating a 24-year-old. What does she know about love and relationships, shouldn’t she be studying instead of running after older men. The way these young girls do anything for money, they see nothing wrong with dating men as old as their fathers” His mother says

“Hlehle is nothing like that, she’s very well behaved. I’m her first boyfriend, she has never dated anyone before me and she

is doing her first year in Mechanical Engineering at UP and she's funded by Transnet. She doesn't need my money because her brother is an engineer and he gives her everything she wants, her bursary also gives her a considerable amount every month as a stipend. She doesn't need my money She matriculated at the age of 16, at 17 she's doing her first year...if that doesn't convince you of the kind of person she is then I don't know what will."

"Ndivumelana naye maka Thando, you can't blame the girl when your son is the one in the wrong. He's the older one here and he's taking advantage of a child, if you're looking for someone to blame then you should blame your son. He's the pervert here lusting over a young girl, sies how do you see a woman in a 17-year-old girl?"

(I agree with him)

"I know how it looks tata kodwa ndiyamthanda u Hlehle kwaye ndizimisele ngaye."

(Dad but I love Hlehle and I'm serious about her)

“So, xelela mna Mpilo utsho umde umngaka ukhwela umntana?” His father asks wearing a grimace on his face, nauseated by the idea.

(So tell me Mpilo as tall as you are you sleep with a child?)

“Hayi tata I don’t do anything with her.”

(No Dad)

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NOKWAZI

Sun City was amazing, Dave and I had so much fun. I took so many amazing videos and pictures for my youTube vlog, he bought me so many beautiful clothes Namhla will be green with envy when she sees them. The apartment is desolate when I walk in, I assume Namhla is at school I drag my bags to my bedroom and strip out of my clothes.

I spray the got2b blasting freeze spray on my hair and remove my wig before heading to the bathroom to scrub the makeup off my face then apply tissue oil on my face. Once I'm back in the bedroom I put on my silk pajamas and get under the covers, my phone vibrates next to me. It's a text message from an unsaved number

Unsaved number: "So you're the bitch that's been sleeping with my husband? You don't know me, I'm going to teach you a lesson. Watch the space and don't forget to watch your back."

I dial Dave's number after reading the text but his number directs me to voicemail so I send him a text

"Daddy your wife just sent me a message threatening me, didn't you say she knows about us and has accepted me as the second wife? Please call me as soon as you can, I'm scared. You promised to protect me should anything like this happen." I send the message and roll out of bed running to lock the front door

There's another message when I get back into bed

Unsaved number: “I'm going to humiliate you in front of your friends and all your peers, you'll regret sleeping with my husband. I'm going to beat you so hard your mother will fail to recognize you, oh I hope you weren't stupid enough to let my husband sleep with you without protection because he and I are positive.”

She sent numerous pictures after the messages, with trembling hands I download all of them and slowly sink to the floor as they download. It's pictures of different pill containers, I immediately go to my search bar and search for the names written outside each pill case.

“NTRIs are sometimes referred to as nukes. They work by interrupting the cycle of HIV as it tries to copy itself-“ Tears blur my vision and fall to my screen as my head spins, no no no! I can't be HIV positive NO!

#79

Thando and I had such an amazing weekend in Cape Town, we booked into Cammisa House in Oranjezicht, located 2,6KM away from the Table Mountain the house offers accommodation with an outdoor swimming pool, free private parking, a bar, and a shared lounge but he booked the entire house, so we had the lounge all to ourselves. It came with room service and concierge service, along with free WI-Fi throughout the property, our units included a balcony with a view of the pool. I love cooking and I'm good at it but this was a vacation I appreciated the fact that Thando booked into a place that also offers a buffet or a la carte breakfast in the morning. The house is spectacular I loved the modern design, the architecture, and the fantastic professional service from the staff. They were helpful, friendly, and very warm and welcoming and no one made me feel uncomfortable for being there with Thando who is much older than me. I couldn't stop taking pictures of myself in every room to show to my friend and of course my sisters Nokwazi and Anzani.

On Saturday we went for a Snorkeling with seals and Cape Peninsula Full-day private tour. We glided over the water with these graceful aquatic creatures, the seals and after snorkeling,

we explored Cape Peninsula attractions like Penguins at the Boulders Beach and the Cape Peninsula Nature reserve. At the Boulders beach, penguins wander freely in a protected natural environment, Boulders form part of the Table Mountain National Park (TMNP) Marine Protected Area and an entrance fee is required to access the sandy shores. Strictly controlled access to this beach by the South African National Parks (SANparks) authority ensures it is always clean and tidy and the facilities are well maintained and spotless. These facilities include toilets and outdoor beach showers. The beach offers a very gentle and warm ocean swimming experience. The immense boulders after which the beach is named shelter the cove from currents and large waves, so we were warned to take care. Also, we were not permitted to touch or feed the penguins. They look cute and cuddly, but their beaks are razor sharp and if they feel threatened, they have no qualms about nipping the odd finger or nose. They also feel nothing about traipsing through your picnic lunch and over your towels. As someone who loves to learn new things, the tour was not only adventurous it was educational as well.

In the evening we went out for dinner at Con Brio Bistro and took a late-night stroll hand in hand and barefoot at the Clifton beach, there's something oddly satisfying about walking

barefoot at the beach and letting the sand make love to your toes.

On Sunday we were still exhausted from the previous day's trip so we had an indoor picnic on the balcony overlooking the stunning views of the city, the mountain, and the ocean. There's nothing I appreciate more than spending quality time with my boyfriend, I enjoyed the picnic more than everything we did because Thando and I had our uninterrupted moment away from everyone else and got deep and spoke about our future goals and plans. We even shared our first kiss; it was amazing even though I didn't know what I was doing at first, I even bit him and gosh I was so embarrassed and didn't want to try again afterward but he was so patient in teaching me and I soon got the hang of it and didn't want to stop kissing him which he was more than happy to do.

“Wu awusa blushi nje!”

(You're blushing)

“Eish I can't help myself I had so much fun in Cape Town.”

“So did you two like do the deed?”

“What? of course not, we only kissed.”

“That’s it?” She looks disappointed

“Yes.”

“Even that day when he slept over here?”

“Yes, Thando knows I’m a virgin and that I’m not ready to have sex with him yet.”

“Okay, and he’s willing to wait?” I nod “That yummy-looking guy? I’m sure he’s getting it from elsewhere.”

“Why are you talking as if he can’t live without sex.”

“Because men can’t, they love sex. We can go for months without sex, but they can’t, it’s in their DNA it’s who they are.”

“So, you’re having sex with Casper?”

“Yep, and it’s amazing friend, you should try it I promise you’ll enjoy it.”

“No, I’m not ready. I want to wait until I’m at least 21.” She laughs throwing her head backwards.

“21? Come on Buhle, Thando would be long gone by then.”

“You’re so negative maybe I shouldn’t be telling you about my relationship.”

“No friend, I’m just realistic. No man will wait that long without sex, if he does then he’ll be getting it from elsewhere.”

I tried not to let what Lungile said to get to me, but it's been on my mind the whole day, I might have suppressed my doubts but deep down I'm also scared Thando will force me into having sex with him or cheat on me. I'm writing a test next week so I had to force myself to study and prepare for it because the last thing I want to do is fail and forfeit my bursary, I owe it to my late mother to pass and be the engineer I have always craved to be. It's 21:45 when I receive a call, the smile on my face doesn't last longer than a second when I see Thando's name on the screen because what Lungile said crosses my mind stealing my peace yet again.

"Hi."

"Hi? What's going on muntu wami?"

"Nothing, I'm studying that's all."

"Come on Hlehle ndiyakwazi xa ungathethi inyani, kwenzakala ntoni?"

(I know you when you're not telling the truth, what's going on)

“It’s something Lungile said today, it hasn’t left my mind since.”

“Ok, what did she say?”

“She said that men can’t stay long without sex, if you’re willing to wait for me then it’s because you’re probably getting it from someone else.”

“Ok, and you’re bothered by her opinion because?”

“She’s telling the truth, most boys I know say they cannot survive two months without sex.”

“So ndimi u most boys ngoku?”

(I’m like most boys now)

“No, but-“

“Hlehle mamela apha sthandwa sam, people always have something negative to say you’re going to have a very big problem if you’re going to let yourself be bothered by everything they say about me or our relationship. I’m your man, not Lungile’s you should know me better than she does, and I’m disappointed that you would listen to things about me from someone who doesn’t know me from a bar of soap, I don’t know why she said what she said but maybe she’s speaking from personal experience I don’t know but what I know is that I love you and I will wait for you for as long you want me to wait. It will not be easy because it’s already so hard for me to be next to you and not touch you but I’m willing to wait because you mean that much to me, I will not sleep with anyone because I know how much it would hurt you and I would never intentionally hurt you.” He sounds sincere, call me stupid but I believe him.

“I’m sorry for doubting you.”

“It’s okay, it’s human to have doubts. I also have mine but I don’t allow them to ruin what we have.”

“What doubts?”

“That maybe one day you’ll meet someone else and realize what you feel for me isn’t love.”

“What? You’re crazy, I’m not meeting anyone else. Ngithanda wena uy1 emhlabeni wonke jikelele.”

(I love only you in the whole wide world)

“Aw baby that’s so cheesy!” We laugh

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QUINTON

I have done my research on what Anzani said about the doctor who got healed from Lupus by simply changing her diet and staying away from animal food and it turned out to be the truth, there are a few people who have been healed from various diseases by staying away from animal produced foods.

“So you’ll turn into a vegetarian?” That’s the first thing Kabelo says when I tell him about my plans to change my diet

“Yes.”

“Can’t you eat meat when you’re away from her, like when you’re here at work?”

“No, I want to support her completely.”

“Wow, you’re a better man than I am. I would never stop eating meat just because my wife isn’t eating it.”

“That is because you don’t have a wife, one day you’ll love someone so much you’d be willing to do anything for her well-being and happiness. Anzani didn’t ask me to do this, she didn’t even expect me to do it but I’m doing it because I know it’ll be hard for her to change her diet even with my support, so it will be impossible if I keep eating meat in front of her. She’ll be tempted to cheat and might end up not following through with the diet so I’m doing this for myself

she'll be healed from this disease and live longer for me and our son. I know I would die without her, I would rather change my diet than lose the love of my life. She means more to me than food ever will, and I know it'll be easy to change her diet and actually stick to it when we are doing it together.”

“Wow, when I fall in love again, I want what you and Anzani share. Your love is so pure and beautiful, it has nothing to do with money, status, and all these materialistic things that people believe to be love nowadays it's just two people who love one another and would be willing to do anything for each other. I still remember how she held a dry fast for you while you were in the hospital.”

“Oh my thank you...to be honest I'm blessed to have found a woman like Anzani, she's rare and I'm so glad she's mine.”

“Me too, I love this for you. You deserve it all.”

“Thank you.”

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NARRATED

“So how are we going to plant this muti inside the yard since Mpilentle refused for Nomcebo to move in?”

“I don’t know but we need to find another way, Mpilentle must die like his mother.”

“What about those girls?”

“I doubt they will be a problem, during the funeral I heard that Nokwazi uyafeba le e matswaneni e Northwest so angeke abe neskhathi sa lendlu bese loku okuncane kuyafunda I’m sure kuzoba nemali kuthenge indlu kwenye indawo.”

(Nokwazi is busy being a hoe at Northwest she won’t have time to worry about the house, the young one is in school studying I’m sure she’ll have money and buy herself another house)

“Yeah, that’s true. Mpilentle needs to die. It’s clear Mlilo's muti didn’t work because he’s still married, driving that car and the house is still standing.”

“So, what makes you think he’ll die now?”

“MaNkosi says she knows someone powerful from Zimbabwe who can help me, he is said to be very strong, but the problem is he doesn’t come cheap.”

“How much?”

“R20 000.”

“Hah imali engaka!”

(So much money)

“Look at the bigger picture, Quinton will die and that house will be ours along with his car and everything else he owns. We will

throw out that Venda girl from his apartment in Joburg and rent it out to make money.” Cebo’elihle grins like a fool

“Wow, you’re so clever nkosikazi.”

“I know right, that’s why you married me.”

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NOKWAZI

“Dammit!” Namhla exclaims after reading the message on my phone

“I can’t get hold of Dave, I’m so scared Hlahla what if she beats me?” She hugs me

“I’m sorry my friend but I think you should stay away from Dave before you get yourself beaten up by his wife.”

“How will I survive? I failed my first year and NSFAS didn’t approve me this year and might never fund me again since I got an F7, how will I afford to pay rent here without Dave’s help?”

“Don’t you have money saved up from the money he gives to you?”

“No, I used to, but I recently used all my savings and bought myself a Chanel handbag.”

“WOW!”

“I’m screwed.”

“You need to go to the clinic and get tested for HIV.” I can feel my heart tearing into pieces, the possibility of being HIV positive makes my heart sink. I can’t be positive; I’m only turning 20 this year. My life is just getting started.

“No Namhla I can’t be positive,” I say and release a loud sob, she embraces me in her arms. Then it hits me “We had sex too, do you think I gave it to you?” She breaks off the hug and tears gush down her face

“No! No Nokwazi, I can’t be HIV positive no.”

“What are you doing?” I say when she violently presses on her phone

She ignores me and keeps tapping her phone with trembling hands “It says here HIV is transmitted when blood, vaginal fluids, breast milk, or semen from an infected person enters your bloodstream. So, it follows that lesbians can be infected with HIV through having unsafe sex (with women or men), sharing injectable drug works (needles), and piercing and tattooing with unsterilized equipment. Still, given the total lack of data on transmission between women, many lesbians who only have sex with other lesbians may view the whole risk scenario as completely hypothetical.” Her voice is groggy, and the words are sluggish, so I snatch the phone from her and continue reading the article

“Time for a reality check: Whether sexual behaviors are safe or unsafe depends on the chances of your partner's bodily fluids meeting your blood. Women who have sex with women might want to consider these guidelines:

1. Wet kissing is safe unless either of you has sores or cuts in your mouth or bleeding gums. After you brush your teeth or floss, wait half an hour or so before kissing.

2. Touching your lover's breast, massage, and body-to-body rubbing are safe -- as long as no suckling of breast milk is involved.

3. Cuts or sores in the mouth can increase the risk during oral-vaginal (lips, tongue, and mouth on vagina) and oral-anal contact (lips, tongue, and mouth on the anus). Unprotected oral sex is especially risky when your partner has her period, vaginal infection, or a rectal discharge involving blood. To make it safer, cover her genital area (vulva) or anus with a latex dam (also known as a dental dam), or cut open a condom to make a barrier. You can also use clear Saran Wrap as a barrier. (The non-microwavable kind only!) If a woman is infected, her menstrual blood, vaginal secretions, and ejaculation will have the virus in them.

4. Cuts or sores on the fingers create risk during vaginal masturbation (fingers or hand in the vagina). Cover hands with latex gloves or buy individual finger cots in the first aid section

of most drug stores (they're like little condoms for your fingers). The same applies to buttplay.

5. When sex toys are used (such as vibrators or dildos), they should not be shared. Example: Don't remove a dildo from your vagina or rectum and insert it into your partner without first putting a condom on it or disinfecting it with warm water and soap.

6. Consensual S&M or rough sex is safe if there is no blood involved. If you are piercing each other, clean the needle with bleach, disinfect the body areas to be pierced with alcohol and wear latex gloves. If shaving the vaginal area, do not share razors.

Dozens and dozens of studies have been conducted on every kind of sex involving men. Now, finally, the CDC has funded a research project on lesbian HIV transmission. The study was launched in May 1999, after another unrelated study, the HIV Epidemiology Research Study of HIV Positive Women (known as HERS), found that 18 percent of the women reported having sex with women. The CDC's project will use virus-matching techniques to identify potential cases of female-to-female transmission.

A second study funded by the National Institutes for Health is also underway. This one examines lesbian injection-drug users

to determine if their risk is higher than that of heterosexual female injection-drug users.

Until that data comes in, I hope lesbians and women who sometimes have sex with other women will continue to speak out. Whenever possible and appropriate, be clear with your chosen medical professionals about your risks for transmission of HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases. Lesbians are often the invisible minority in this country. Indeed, research suggests that women who have sex with women are typically reluctant to share this information with their primary physician or gynecologist. Sometimes we must encourage doctors to ask the right questions and answer our questions, regardless of how much personal squeamishness it may cause us or them.”

“See you might not be infected after all; we need to get tested.”

“I’ll never forgive you if the test comes back positive.”

“What if you didn’t get it from me Namhla? You also sleep with Mike, what if he’s also positive like his friend?”

“Mike and I always use a condom, I’m not stupid like you to put my health at risk like that because of a few thousands I can make for myself in a couple of years.”

#80

It's Saturday, the day of my mother's ancestral ceremony. My husband and I left Braamfontein in the morning and he dropped me off in Tsakane, the Gobela's house where the ceremony was held, and drove to Ratanda, his mother's house with our son. He couldn't stay and attend the ceremony with me because Zothando is still too young to be around people, since we couldn't find anyone to babysit him one of us had to miss the ceremony and Quinton was the obvious choice, I haven't seen my mother since she started her initiation process, and I knew she would be looking forward to seeing me today. Nonetheless, I'm glad that both my aunts, my cousins, aunt Anzadakalo's husband, and Lutendo are all here with me to show my mother support.

She looks very different from what I know her to be, she has lost weight and her skin has gotten darker. A single glance at her face was all it took for me to know that being an initiate isn't pap en vleis, my mother is having it hard it's written all over her face. She's dressed in red and white maine clothing and has a mixture of red, white, and royal blue large beads on her wrists and ankles. Her hair is covered with a lump of red clay (idumane), and beads, and has goat's gall attached to her

dreadlocks, she's wearing goat's skin on her upper body. She's wearing the animal skin like a jacket, and it makes a cross on her chest.

Many things were said and done before she ate the 'intwaso' which is basically ingesting impande mixed with other herbs, then she had to do what they refer to as 'ukuliphuza uliphalaze' where she had to drink the goat's blood and vomit it out and seemingly one can lose their lives while sponging the blood of the goat. I won't lie this whole process is quite creepy for me, I feel out of place, and guilty because it feels like I'm betraying God by being part of this, but I must suck it up and endure it for my mom's sake. After completing the ntwaso process she was taken to the river, for a procedure referred to as 'ukuparula'.

The yard is brimming with people, ninety percent of them are traditional healers who came to the ceremony to support my mother's Gobela, they are beating drums, singing, and dancing to the music in jubilation celebrating the successful ceremony. My mother and the other initiates she is being initiated with danced first and I still can't believe what I saw my mother doing, the leg work, the energy, and the look on her face throughout the process it was as if something had possessed and taken control of her body. I can't imagine the mother I

know springing up and down barefoot on the ground like she didn't feel any pain, I swear something else took over when the drums started rolling.

"Look at your cousin." Says Dakalo gesturing towards Kamo.

Kamo has entered the circle dancing along with the traditional healers imitating their moves and getting cheered on by the crowd.

"This one doesn't mind being the center of attention shem."

"Tell me about it." Soon the dancing and singing die down as the initiates begin serving the guests food

"Thank you," I say when the lady hands me a plate of food

My mother emerges from the house and joins us at our table, unlike us she's not eating. I don't know if it's because she's not hungry or if it's because she is not supposed to eat, one can never be too sure about these things because there are too

many rules. My heart sank to the pit of my stomach when she told me she's not allowed to sit on a chair or walk straight in the yard, she crawls on her knees but today is the exception and I suppose because it's her ceremony but wawu!

Lutendo moves to the seat next to my mother and envelopes her in a hug

"Ndo ni humbula mma, ndi kale ndi sani vhone" He says his eyes welling up with tears

(I miss you mom; I haven't seen you in ages)

"Nanne ndo ni humbula ngwananga" She says holding him in her arms, Lutendo bursts into a loud sob breaking my heart. I never realized that this is how much he missed our mother.

(I missed you too my child)

"Don't cry my child, I'll be back home before you know it."  
She's rubbing his back in circles

“Mma.” I didn’t know how much I missed my mother until this moment

“Ngwananga.” No, I’m not going to cry. No, no I won’t cry!

She and Lutendo break off the hug then she wipes his tears with her palms, Lutendo clings to my mother laying his head on her bosom. My brother is such a mommy’s boy, but I don’t blame him, he and my mother have always been joined at the hip.

“How are you?” Her question is directed at me

“I’m fine mma.”

“Oh, ngwananga congratulations on your marriage and your son.”

“Thanks, mma, I’m just sad you were not part of the celebration nor were you there when he was born.”

“That doesn’t matter my child, as long as you’re happy. Where’s my son-in-law, I didn’t see him?” She says looking around

“He couldn’t come, Zothando is still too young to be around people.” A smile journeys on her face

“Zothando, is that what you named my grandson?” I nod

“It’s Zenzozothando, his grandmother is the one who gave him the name before she passed on. I named him Murendeni.”

“Beautiful names, I can’t wait to get out of here and meet my grandson I’m sure he’s the most beautiful baby in the entire universe.” I chuckle

“He is

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he looks like his father. The only thing he took from me is my complexion.”

“I’m so proud of you my child, proud of the woman you have become...you fought for your love even when I tried to ruin it for you. I’m sorry my child I don’t know what had gotten into me that time.”

“That’s in the past mma, I have forgiven you and oh that reminds me Mulalo is in jail for Quinton’s attempted murder. On the day he got arrested he called and told me that he gave the keys to your house to your neighbor, the house is still in your name since you didn’t complete the transfer of ownership process. You will go back to Venda, to your house when you leave from here.” She smiles knowingly

“It was only a matter of time.”

“Haibo mma what did you do?” She closes her lips and pretends to be zipping them

“Oh ok, I won’t ask.”

“I’m sorry about your mother-in-law, I know how much you loved her.”

“Thanks, ma, she was an honorable woman I’m sad my son will never have a chance to know her.” She takes my hand into hers and instantly releases a loud burp startling me and everyone sitting next to us

“What’s wrong?” Aunt Lufuno asks looking at my mother who looks spooked out “Mulanga get some water.” Mulanga sprints to the kitchen and returns a minute later with a glass of water, my mother takes the glass and guzzles the water down her throat in one go.

“What’s wrong, what did you see?” Aunt Lufuno asks again

“Ngwananga can we talk?” She asks looking at me ignoring aunt Lufuno’s question, to say I’m scared would be an

understatement. What did she see? I thought the spell Mulalo cast on me had been broken mos or there's something else?

Once we are far from prying eyes, she begins talking

"Don't stop praying for your family my child the enemy is at work." This sounds more like a warning than a mother's advice.

"What do you mean mma?"

"Don't stop praying for your family, I know I'm a maine now, but I still strongly believe in prayer because it works my child. Don't stop fighting for your family, especially for your husband, and your kids and don't forget to mention his siblings in your prayers. The enemy is at work, you're dealing with very cruel people who are ready to kill to get what they want."

"Who?"

"I can't tell you that, I can only tell you to pray. Pray my child and never stop. God and your ancestors are with you."

“I won’t stop mma...wait a minute what did you mean when you said I should pray for my kids? I only have one child mma.”

“I said that? ...I didn’t hear myself I’m sorry I made a mistake; it must be old age catching up with me.” She says and laughs it off, old age where? She’s not even that old!

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NOKWAZI

Namhla and I went to the doctor, and got ourselves tested for HIV after the message I received from Dave’s wife, I didn’t want to take a rapid test because it can give a false-negative result for someone who has been recently infected with HIV and that’s why nurses/doctors always advise that you return after three months to test again. We opted for a blood test because we want to know if we are positive or not without any doubt, blood tests are the most accurate type of HIV test. The results are back, now we are in the doctor’s office being counseled before the doctor gives us our results, I don’t know about

Namhla but I'm not listening the only thing I want to know now is if I'm positive or not.

"Are you ready for your results?" The doctor asks looking at us. We nod simultaneously

"Okay then, let's get into it." She hands each of us an envelope

I tear mine with my teeth and take the report out with trembling hands

"Yeeessss!" Namhla cheers next to me "I'm negative, what do your results say?" I give her my report

"I'm sorry friend." She engulfs me in a hug, and I break down into tears

"This is not the end of the world miss Ndlovu, I know it looks like it, but I swear it's not." The doctor says in a soft sympathetic voice

“I’m sorry my friend,” Namhla says whispering in my ear

“My life is over.”

“No, it’s not over.” I break off the hug and wipe my tears with the sleeve of my shirt

“Miss Ndaba can you please excuse us for a second please.”  
Namhla nods and walks out

The doctor gives me a box of tissues

“I’m sorry, I know this feels like the end of the world but it’s not. You can still live a long healthy life-“

“I’m sorry I can’t do this.” I take my bag and bolt out of the doctor’s office

“Miss Ndlovu!” I hear her call after me but I don’t stop running

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NARRATED

“Your father tells me upheth e ibhobhodlwane” -Luyolo says with humor in his voice

(You're dating a young girl)

Uncle Luyolo is his father’s childhood best friend who turned into his brother, he is Thando and his siblings' Godfather. He’s more like their second dad

“He’s exaggerating, she’s not that young. She’s 17”

“Yerr that’s too young, I see why he’s so furious.”

“But you two always say a woman should be younger than the man.”

“Yes, a woman not a girl. You should’ve waited for her to grow up a bit.”

“And have someone else take her from me? No, I’m sorry, I can’t take that risk.” Luyolo cracks into a belly laugh

“Zisa apha i picture ndimbone.”

(Show me her picture)

Thando takes out his phone from his pocket and slides it to him on the other end of the table, he whistles staring at Hlehle's picture on Thando's screensaver

“Yerrr muhle nyani lomtana mfondini!”

(She's very beautiful)

“Enkosi”

(Thank you)

## INSIDE THE HOUSE

Esihle is in her bedroom getting dressed in front of the mirror while Yamkela is sitting on the edge of the bed absentmindedly

“Ndiyanyisa okanye?”

(Do I look hot or not)

Esihle says twirling in front of the mirror showing Yamkela her outfit but Yamkela doesn't reply, Esihle looks at her through the mirror and sees that she's deep in thoughts

“Yami are you okay?” she asks turning around

“YAMKELA!” She bellows startling her

“Undithuselani Esihle ufuna ukundibulala!”

(Why are you scaring me, do you want to kill me)

She asks with a hand on her chest trying to steady her breathing

“I’m sorry but your mind was not here, what’s going on? You haven’t been yourself since you got here?” she sighs

“Nothing.” Esihle steps closer to the bed

“Come on Yaya I know you, we’ve been friends since forever.”

“How serious is this relationship between Thando and this young girl?”

“I don’t know but it seems very serious, he even took her to Cape Town for the weekend. Why are you asking?”

“Nothing, I’ve just never heard him talk about any girl like he talks about her.”

“Yeah, me too. He’s really in love with her, I don’t know but I think she’s too young for him.”

“Exactly, what if she hurts him like his exes did in the past? You know how he gets when he's in love”

“Thando is a grown up, he’ll pick up the pieces and move on.”

“Ok...”

“What, I can see you want to say something.”

“Promise not to judge me.”

“Okay.” Esihle replies with a raised brow

“I have a huge crush on your brother, actually I’m in love with him. I’ve always loved him.”

“What? Yamkela we are no less than family, we grew up together and our fathers are best friends shouldn’t you see Thando as your brother?”

“I know, I know okay but I can’t help myself....I don’t see him like a brother and I already hate this Hlehle girl before I even meet her.”

#81

TWO MONTHS LATER

When I told my husband about my mother's warning, he too was spooked out like I was when my mother told me, we didn't take the warning for granted. We are praying like never before and just like my mother advised we pray for all our close relatives.

"Thembalam'!" My husband calls out from the lounge

"In here!" I shout from the bedroom

A heartbeat later the door swings open and in he walks, a frown mirrors his features as his eyes run up and down my form.

"Anzani I told you to get ready before I even left work." He says trying hard to conceal how annoyed he is with me.

“I’m sorry but I have been struggling to find anything that still fits me, all my nice clothes no longer fit.”

“It must be the junk you’ve been eating lately.”

“Yeah.”

My husband did more research on the alkaline diet I have to follow and uncovered more information to help me, we found out that I need to prepare a recipe using Cayenne pepper, turmeric, garlic glove, ginger, onions, and lemons to detox my body before I start with the alkaline diet. We’ve also purchased an e-Book by DR Sebi which encompasses a full guideline on how to use the alkaline nutritional diet eating method to get rid of Lupus permanently.

When I first learned about this diet, I had already bought groceries and as usual, there was a lot of meat, so my husband and I agreed to finish the food we already had in our cupboards and fridge and start the diet the following month. In the previous months, I didn’t rob myself I ate meat like never

before and regularly nursed myself with takeout and sweet treats, I know it was foolish of me, but I did it because I'm never going to eat all these delicious, tasty meals again. It was my last chance and I wanted to use it wisely because like most people I'm not a fan of vegetables.

"So, what now? We are running late for our appointment." He's running out of patience, and I can't say I blame him. He took time from work to come and take me to the doctor, it's Zothando's monthly visit with his pediatrician. Quinton is such a hands-on and involved father, he always makes time for his son, and I love him more for that.

"Zothando is ready, take him to the car so long...I'll come out shortly." He doesn't respond, he takes off his jacket and takes his son strapping him to his chest with the baby carrier and covering him with his blanket.

"Where is his bag?"

"In the lounge, I've already packed everything."

“You’ll find us in the car” he dips his hands inside the pocket of his blue slacks “You’re driving.” He tosses the car keys on top of the bed and walks out.

I cry with my hands on my mouth staring at my reflection in the mirror when the door closes behind him, how did I gain so much weight in such a short space of time? My pity party doesn’t last long because I have an angry husband waiting for me downstairs, I quickly pull myself together and wipe my face before reapplying ponds. I wanted to look like those sexy new mothers we see on Instagram but unfortunately, I have no choice but to settle for leggings because they are the only things that still fit me in my closet.

Mpilo baby talks to Zothando the entire drive to the doctor’s office and pays me no attention, I know I messed up, but it wasn’t intentional my body played an evil joke on me and I realized at the last minute because I’m always home so there’s never a need to dress up. I’m the first one to step out of the car after parking the car in the driveway, he follows me with our son and his bag. When we walk through the door the receptionist greets us with a big smile on her face.

“Good day Mr. and Mrs. Ndlovu, Doctor Khan is waiting for you in his office. You may go in.”

“Thank you,” I say and lead the way to the doctor’s office.

We exchange pleasantries with the doctor then he begins examining Zothando taking his measurements, conducting the head-to-toe exam, checking his development since the last visit, and giving him his shot.

“I’m happy with baby Zothando’s growth and development, he’s doing well. He makes other sounds other than crying, he reacts to loud sounds, I observed him looking at his father after he laid him on the bed his eyes were on him until he took a seat. He can move both his arms and legs and can briefly open his hands, he smiles when someone smiles at him so at this point everything seems perfect. He’s doing very good for his age; he’s growing as he should.”

“Oh, thank God!” I mutter breathing a sigh of relief, the last thing I wanted was for my son to have complications because of my Lupus.

“You can relax mommy, there’s nothing wrong with your son. He’s healthy and growing very well, I’m also happy with his weight.”

“Thank you doctor.”-Quinton

“It’s okay Mr. Ndlovu I’m only doing my job, for safety purposes lay Zothando on his back when putting him to sleep. When mommy or daddy want to drive alone with him in the car, please consider using a rear-infant car seat.”

“Will do doctor thank you.” Mpilo stands up and takes our son from the doctor. “We will be on our way.” He says preparing to leave but I clear my throat

“Uhm, doctor there’s something I would like to ask you. It’s about me not the baby” Mpilo turns and gives me the ‘why don’t I know about this’ look

“Ok, feel free.” He says fixing his eye glasses

“Lately I have been feeling a bit weird, I’m always tired even after getting enough rest, even my appetite has increased I eat more than I normally would, and sometimes I get heartburn during the night. I didn’t realize how much weight I have gained until today when none of my clothes would fit me.”

“But you have been eating junk food thembalam’.” So, he can talk to me now? Must be nice!

“I’ve indeed been eating unhealthily but the weight I have gained is too much. I want to know if maybe this is common for women who have just given birth?” I say looking at the doctor

“Yes, it’s common for new mothers to have increased appetite and to feel fatigued. Raising a newborn is exhausting plus remember you carried a human being inside of you for nine months, your body went through a big change, and it might take a while to adapt to the transition. People are different, some women recuperate quickly after giving birth, and others take longer.”

“I hear you doctor but you know how I was when I brought Zothando for his six weeks checkup, I was energetic and almost back to my old self. My husband’s mother passed away on the same day Zothando was born, I was up and running helping with the funeral preparations immediately after being discharged from the hospital. All this change is sudden.”

“Maybe you didn’t give your body enough time to recover and the exhaustion you didn’t allow yourself to feel post giving birth is catching up with you now, it’s your body’s way of telling you to rest.”

“Even the constant urination and the sensitive breasts?” He chuckles

“Forgive me but I need to ask, did you have unprotected sex at any point shortly after giving birth?” I shamefully bob my head unable to meet his gaze

My obstetrician advised me to wait for six weeks before having sex again, but Quinton and I resumed mating like rabbits

shortly after our son had turned a month old. Contraceptives completely slipped my mind.

“Well, I’m afraid you might be pregnant again Mrs. Ndlovu.”

“That’s impossible doctor, my son just turned three months.”

“Sadly

there is a very high chance of getting pregnant within the first three months after giving birth.”

“What!” Mpilo and I exclaim at the same time. No, I can’t be pregnant again. Zothando is only three months old, what kind of mother would that make me?

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves, you might not be pregnant maybe it's exhaustion catching up with you because you didn’t give your body enough time to rest after giving birth, or maybe it’s something else. I need to test you for pregnancy so we can get the suspicion out of the way.”

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NOKWAZI

Life has changed drastically after learning that I am HIV positive, I still haven't come to terms with my status, and I haven't started taking treatment. Dave changed immediately when I confronted him about infecting me with HIV, he denied being HIV positive and gave me a beat down that landed me in hospital for a week accusing me of being the one who gave him the virus. He changed from the sweet Dave I knew who would do anything and everything for me without thinking twice, the Dave who would never raise his voice at me turned into a monster and beat me up to a pulp.

Everything has changed and so has my friendship with Namhla, the same person who introduced me to this life has turned her back on me and has told everyone ready to listen about my status. I'm scared to show my face in public because I can't bear the stares and whispers, I don't even know how to begin picking up the pieces of my life. My phone has been off for almost two months now because I'm ashamed to face my

siblings, especially my brother, he warned me several times, but his advice fell on deaf ears because I thought I knew better.

“Pack your bags and leave my apartment when you’re done crying,” Namhla says barging inside my bedroom

“What?” I ask sitting up

“Ntlwa! You don’t have money to pay rent here, who do you think will feed and pay rent for you?”

“Namhla please don’t do this, you know you’re the only person I have.”

“Nothing in life is free babes, you must earn your keep. You can’t just sit here all day and expect me to cover the bills just because ‘we are friends.’”

“I’m willing to do anything, I will cook, clean, and wash your laundry.”

“Tempting but not good enough, look around my love this is a luxury apartment not some backroom in Soweto. Pack your bags and leave or I’ll call security.” I jump out of bed and drop to my knees

“Namhla please.” Tears fall down my face and blind my vision.

“You have one hour!”

“Namhla please.” I plead attempting to grab her t-shirt, but she pushes me off so hard I fall to the floor landing on my back

“Never put your filthy, HIV-infected hands on me again. You’re left with 59 minutes; I would use it wisely if I were you.” She says and walks out of the room leaving me hurdled in shock, am I hallucinating, or has this really happened?

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NARRATED

“You’re not okay, what’s going on?” Given says putting a glass of soft drink in front of Quinton

“Thanks, man, where is Asante?” Quinton asks looking around the bachelor pad

“With Nyasha, my neighbor. I swear that lady will steal my daughter from me, she spends more time with her than in here with me.” Given replies with a thin smile on his lips, Quinton smiles looking at him

“What?”

“You like Nyasha ne?”

“No!” Quinton chuckles

“If you say so.”

“Yes, I’m saying so. Don’t change the topic here, I asked you what’s wrong.” Quinton mops his face with his fingers and blows out a sigh

“Eish, I don’t even know where to start.”

“From the beginning, tell me what’s going on?” Quinton eyes him for a while trying to find the best way to put what he wants to tell him

“Talk man you’re scaring me.”

“Anzani is pregnant, seven weeks.”

“What? Zothando is only three months old.”

“I know, that’s not even the worst of it....she wants to abort.”

“What! For what?”

“She says she’s not ready to have another baby, it’s too soon, and because she doesn’t want to go through what she went through during her pregnancy with Zothando again. I understand where she’s coming from, I do but that’s my son/daughter man I can’t just agree for him/her to be robbed of a chance at life.”

“I understand, children are a blessing from God. It doesn’t matter how they come; God blessed you with that child for a reason.”

“I know I’m not a millionaire, but I can fend for my kids’ man, I didn’t plan this one and I’m not ready for him/her because my son is still young, but I want him to live Given. How do I live with myself knowing I killed my child?” He asks and tears shimmer in his eyes

“I’m sorry man, maybe you can speak to Anzani and make her see things from your perspective man.”

“I tried but she won’t listen to reason, I love her with all my heart, but I don’t think I will look at her the same way if she goes ahead with this. I will not force her to carry my child, it’s her body after all and only she understands the pain she went through during her first pregnancy but I don’t think I will love her the same way if she aborts my child.”

“What are you saying, man? You love her and you two are moving into your new house in a month, you have gone through many challenges in the past and came out stronger than before and I know you will get through this one as well.”

“Not this time my brother, not if she aborts my baby. I will not stop or force her to keep the baby if she doesn't want to but I don't see myself loving her the same if she aborts”

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Inside Thando’s car

He and Buhle are inside, he flattened the seat so Buhle can straddle him with her legs on either side of his waist with her back pressed against the steering wheel. Thando's arms are tightly wrapped around her small waist while his face is buried in her small bust

"You need to go, it's getting late." He raises his head from her small breasts and looks at her with a sulky face causing a glorious giggle to depart her mouth

"Nice try, but you're going back to Boksburg you are not sleeping over."

"Ngweeeee!" He says faking a cry, Buhle laughs throwing her head back

"Bese bathi yimi omncane phakwathi kwethu." Thando  
(Then they said I'm the youngest between us)

"Please Hlehle, ndicela ukulala kokugqibela."  
(Can I please sleep over for the last time)

“Haw awusakhali manje? Uphelelephi ngokutetema.”

Thando laughs and pulls her in for a smooch, his hands move from her waist up to her chest and squeeze her small titties tweaking her nipples. Nobuhle’s heartbeat accelerates as her panties soak feeling herself get weaker and weaker completely under his spell. He breaks the kiss, pulls up her Pajama top, and sucks her nipples as a baby would.

“hhmmmmm!” Nobuhle moans feeling indiscernible pleasure

“Hlehle you make me weak.” He murmurs trailing kisses to her belly button

“Are you comfortable here or should we go inside?” he says, his warm breath fanning her neither region

“My roommate is inside, we can’t.”

“Sh\*t!” he curses, raises his head to look at her and plants a long peck on her lips

“It’s late, I should get going,” He says looking at her with red half hooded eyes, his voice coming out hoarse and thick

#82

The person who suffered the most from my poor decision making was my son Lutendo, he had to drop out of school in the middle of the year and relocate to another province leaving the life he had always known and all his friends behind and as if that wasn't enough, he enrolled into a new school where instruction is given in a language he didn't know nor understand, because of my stupidity my son had to repeat a grade. I will admit that when I first accepted my gift, I did it for my kids more than anyone else and because I couldn't bear the cross of being the one who was responsible for everyone's suffering in my family but once I began with my training, I gradually began to accept that being a maine is my calling. Something I cannot run away from even if I tried because it's what I was destined for, my purpose so I started to embrace it and that helped to make the journey more bearable because the truth is being initiated was not a walk in the park it was one of the most difficult things I have had to do in my life but I'm glad I did it because it has remarkably changed my life.

It's been a month since I completed my training and moved back to my house, people in Vuwani were so shocked to see me return as a maine which was expected because I have always

been a staunch Christian woman who wanted to hear nothing about traditional healers and ancestors, yes I was one of those who referred to ancestors as demons and judged everyone who believed in them calling them lost so you can imagine the shock on everyone's face when they saw me draped in my maine outfit dancing to the beat of drum and belching loudly. My ancestral room was ready and waiting for me when I came back from initiation school thanks to Anzadakalo and her husband, those two have done so much for me I would take the whole day if I were to start counting everything they did for me. One day when the Lord blesses me financially, I will show them how grateful I am for all the love and support they gave me throughout my spiritual journey.

Unfortunately, Lutendo didn't move back with me, I couldn't keep uprooting his life and disturbing his stability as I please, for now, he'll stay with Lufuno and visit me during the school holidays, he'll move back to Vuwani when he starts with secondary school. I haven't started consulting with clients because I'm still finding myself and adapting to my new reality, but I trust my ancestors to guide me and show me the right path. It took time but I have accepted that I'm their vessel, that I was born with the sole purpose to heal and help people. Healing comes in different forms and ways; I can't believe I was

selfish and denied my calling when so many people are suffering in the world and require my assistance. I know I can't change the world, but I can try, one person at a time.

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NOKWAZI

I can't believe it took so long for Namhla to show me her true colors, I still can't believe that she threw me out of the apartment we shared like a dog. It was as if she's a different person, it hurt me to accept that everything we shared and went through together in the past 14 months we lived together meant nothing to her, everything we shared up until now was all a lie. Stupid me believed her every time she told me how much she loved me and that she will always have my back no matter what, and for the longest time her actions portrayed that so you can't blame me for trusting her. A part of me still believes she did love me because I could feel it, it's a shame her love was not unconditional.

I didn't want to believe her when she said she would throw me out so I convinced myself she was just joking, that she was only trying to see how I'm going to react so I made no attempt to pack my belongings, after the hour she had given me, she came back to my bedroom, this time with security, and I was escorted out of the apartment like an intruder with her hurling insults and airing my dirty laundry to everyone and of course, people didn't miss the opportunity to film the whole thing. I haven't logged in to any of my social media accounts because I'm afraid of what I will find there, how will I face my siblings? Not only did I embarrass and let myself down, but I also tarnished my mother's memory and went against all the principles and values she raised me with.

"Don't you have anyone you can call to come and fetch you?"  
Agang says handing me a cup of tea and a plate with three fat cakes

Agang is one of the security guys who came to escort me out when Namhla threw me out, it was 6 in the evening I had nowhere to go, and worse I had no money on me. His shift had ended so I followed him and cried pleading with him to take me with him, I could have gone to Dipuo but I didn't have the stamina to endure the public ridicule that would soon follow. He refused at

first, but I begged and cried until he agreed, he carried my bags and the two of us got into a taxi to Ikageng where he's renting a backroom. In that moment I didn't care if he was a stranger or if he raped or killed me because I was prepared for anything, but thank God he didn't try anything, he was a perfect gentleman and was kind enough to give me the bed while he slept on the couch.

He wants me gone, he didn't say it in so many words, but he's been dropping hints since we woke up. He can't even look at my face, I know he's disgusted by me but who can blame him? I'm disgusted by myself too.

"No, but you have nothing to worry about I will be out of your hair soon I just need to bath."

"Okay." I can tell he's relieved

"Yeah, thanks for breakfast." He nods and walks out leaving me bundled in thoughts

I don't know where I'll go from here, but I know I'm not going back home, I don't have the courage to look my brother in the eye after everything I did especially after he warned me multiple times. It's cowardice I know but I'm not ready to face anyone, I would rather live under a bridge than go back to Ratanda. Everyone will call me names and make fun of me; many people will be happy that my life fell apart because I've always been pompous and looked down on people.

"The fat cakes aren't good?" He asks walking back into the room thirty minutes later, his eyes are fixed on the plate on my lap. Two of the three fat cakes he gave me are still untouched and the third one has only been bitten once

"No, they are very nice, but I can't eat anything. I'm sorry."

"It's okay, look I don't mean to be rude, but you need to leave. I'm off from work and I have plans for the day, I can't leave you alone in my room." I nod vigorously swallowing nothingness

"It's okay, I understand."

“Good, as you can see, I don’t have a shower here you’ll have to use a dish. I’ve already plugged the kettle for you in the kitchen, I’ll be outside to give you privacy.” From the way he said it, he thinks I have used a shower all my life if only he knew!

“Okay, thank you.” He nods and makes his way out

The backroom he’s renting is a two-room, it has a bedroom and a kitchen/slash lounge. The bedroom is quite big I guess it’s because he doesn’t have much furniture, the only big thing he has in the room that takes up space is the double bed and the wardrobe the rest is the small stuff. He has a three-door cupboard in the kitchen where his utensils, dishes, and groceries are kept, a fridge, a plasma tv mounted to the wall, and a two-seater couch facing the TV. He doesn’t have much, but his place looks good because the furniture is properly arranged, plus he keeps his space tidy and smelling fresh.

After taking a quick bath I slip into my grey sweatpants, a black turtleneck, and my Nike running takkies. I leave everything the way I found it and drag my luggage to the door; he’s standing outside with his back leaning against the wall fence and his eyes

buried in his phone. He looks up when the door squeaks open and our eyes lock.

“Oh, you’re done.” He says walking toward me and slipping his phone inside his pockets

“Yes, thanks once again for giving me a place to sleep.”

“No, problem.”

“I guess this is goodbye.” he nods

“Bye.” I slowly toddle to the gate but halt on my step after a few steps, I find him staring at me when I swivel to face him. He looks at me and doesn’t say anything until I speak

“I have nowhere to go Agang, can I please spend another night I promise I’ll leave first thing tomorrow morning.”

“No, I’m sorry but I can’t help you.” His answer comes out fast, he didn’t take time to think about it. This confirms it

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he wants me gone!

I drop my bags on the ground and pace toward him

“Please, I’m begging you.” I don’t mean to cry but my tears betray me and roll down my cheeks

“No, Nokwazi you need to leave. My girlfriend is coming over tonight.”

“Please Agang, I can do anything. I can wash your clothes, clean your house, and cook for you in exchange for a place to stay. I won’t bother you; I swear you won’t even know I’m here please.” I say beseechingly. He stares at me for a while without a word then he laughs out loud throwing me into plight

“What’s funny?”

“You saying you’ll clean, cook and wash my clothes is hilarious ...do you even know how to hold a broom?” Wow! I’m dying to give him a piece of my mind, but I can’t do that because he has the upper hand, I need him.

“Yes, I know how to clean, do laundry and cook my mother taught me well,” I say as politely as I can

“Yeah right.” He’s still laughing

“Please..”

“No, I can’t I’m sorry. I only have one bed, where will you sleep?”

“I’ll sleep on the floor, I don’t mind. Please don’t kick me out.”

“Stop with the tears, you look pathetic” He mops his face with his fingers “I’m probably going to regret this but it’s fine you can stay but only for a week.”

“Thank you so much!” Who knew I would be so excited to stay in a backroom? Life will humble you shem!

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NOBUHLE

Nothing is as heartbreaking as finding out about your sibling’s HIV status from social media, I have lost count of the number of people who tagged me on posts and sent me the video of her being chased out like a criminal while her friend called her names. I’m usually strong and it takes a lot to get to me but seeing my sister like that broke me, I couldn’t even watch the entire video. I’ve been calling her number since yesterday to no avail, I didn’t sleep a wink last night worried about her thinking about where she was and how she’s feeling because I know how fragile she is, the smallest of things get to her so I know

being attacked and ridiculed on social media will cripple her and I pray she doesn't resort to taking her own life.

Lungile stirs awake and flutters her eyelashes opening her eyes

"You didn't sleep, did you?" She says with a groggy voice

"No, how could I when my sister is out there all alone. Who knows if she's still alive?" I say and an involuntary tear escapes my eye

"I'm sorry Nobuhle I can't imagine how you feel but you need to be positive, you still can't get ahold of her on the phone?"

"No, her phone is still off," I reply looking up trying so hard not to cry but it's fruitless, my tears are relentless.

"Maybe you should tell your brother, well that's if he hasn't seen the video because it went viral."

“I doubt he has seen it, he’s not a social media fanatic. He would’ve already called me if he knew.”

“You need to tell him before someone else beats you to it.”

“You’re right, let me call him.” I sit up and dial his number

“Baby.” He says answering on the first ring, I don’t know but he sounds sad, maybe he already knows about Nokwazi.

“Uhm bhuti kunjani?”

(How are you brother)

“Sthandwa sam what’s wrong, why are you crying?”

“It’s nothing bhuti, are you okay?”

“I’m good” His tone contradicts his statement, he sounds sad and downhearted, but it must be from something else. He

would've said something by now if he already knew about Nokwazi.

"I don't know how to tell you this, but something happened to Nokwazi."

"What do you mean?"

"There's a video circulating the internet, a video where she's being dragged by security guards while a friend of hers is insulting her saying she's HIV positive and throwing her with her luggage."

"What?"

"Yes."

"Oh no Nobuhle, where is she? Have you spoken to her?"

"No, I can't get hold of her on the phone for months now."

“Oh, my goodness knowing her she’s probably crying her eyes out and thinking of taking her life, I need to go to Northwest to look for her.” Music to my ears

“Please pass here and take me with you.”

“Okay baby, I’ll tell you when I leave from here.”

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ANZANI

I still can’t wrap my head around my pregnancy, it’s too early for me to be pregnant again. Yes, I wish to have more kids with my husband but not like this, I want to be healthy before going through another pregnancy. Zothando’s pregnancy was hell, and I almost lost my life, I’m not ready to go through that kind of pain again especially so soon after giving birth. I wish my husband could understand where I’m coming from and see things from my perspective, I normally wouldn’t think of

aborting hell it kills me that I'm going to kill and deny my child the right to live but we can't keep ignoring the reality that I have Lupus, a vicious chronic illness and I could lose my life if I go through another pregnancy. This baby came at the worst time, my body hasn't fully recovered plus there were many complications with Zothando's pregnancy and my doctor advised against getting pregnant again in the next year or two to give my body time to recuperate, I have no choice but to abort this baby I don't want to die and leave my son at such a tender age, it's not fair!

The door flies open and Mpilo rushes in looking disorientated

"What's going on?" I look at the time, he's supposed to be at work

I jolt to my feet and stride to meet him halfway. He stops in his tracks and looks up pinching his nose bridge

"I can't talk right now, Nokwazi needs me. I will tell you when I come back."

“What’s wrong, what happened to Nokwazi?” He sighs looking at me, his eyes hold so much sadness and pain.

“It’s nothing you should worry about; focus on the doctor’s appointment you have in two days I’ll worry about my sister.”

“Mpilo come on, you’re being unfair. You know why I’m doing this; you were there when the obstetrician and my doctor told the both of us that being pregnant again now is risky.”

“Kanti mina ngitheni Anzani? Ye, ngitheni?”

(What did I say? What did I say?)

“You didn’t say anything but you’re not supporting me either, you of all people know what I went through when I was pregnant with our son...you saw how much I suffered, you were there Mpilo!” I say and burst into tears “You’re being unfair, I need your support right now. Do you think I want to kill my child? Of course not, I don’t want to but I have no choice but to do it, I’ll change my diet and be free from this virus then we can have as many kids as you want.” He looks at me in disbelief before releasing a dry chuckle

“Wow, so you think kids are objects and can be replaced just like that?”

“Of course not, that’s not what I’m saying Mpilentle and you know it.” I do breathing exercises to calm myself down “Please Mpilo wanga, try to understand where I’m coming from.” I say trying to put my hand on his shoulder, but he takes a step back

“I understand where you’re coming from Anzani, believe me, I do, and I want you to do what’s best for you. I can’t force you to carry my child if you don’t want to because everything the doctors said will happen will come to pass and I’ll never forgive myself if you lose your life, but I don’t know if I will forgive you if you abort my child Anzani.”

“What? I’m confused, you just said you understand.”

“I do, what I don’t understand is why you’re behaving like an unbeliever what happened to your faith in God? Why do you have such little faith in him? do you think he will bless you with a child only for him to kill you? what happened to the Anzani

who prayed, and fasted for my life ignoring the doctor's warnings and everyone else's, the Anzani who believed her faith would wake me up when doctors said the opposite? Do you not trust the same God who healed me after the doctors had declared that I would die will also save you and the child you're carrying." He closes the distance between us and looks at me with eyes glimmering with tears "Don't you have faith in God that he'll save our child and you? Please don't do this Anzani, don't deny our child a chance at life, yes it's too soon for us to have another child and we are both not ready but he/she is here now can't we just love and accept our blessing from God?" He wipes his tears with his palms and sets his hands on my stomach "Don't kill our child thembalam', please I'm begging you."

#83

“So, what do you say sthandwa sam?” I ask desperately waiting for her to say she’ll not abort our child.

She steps back opening a gap between us and exhales loudly

“Give me time to think about it.”

“Ok, I can work with that. For now, I need to leave Nokwazi needs me.” I peck her forehead and pace to the bedroom

“What happened to her?” She says trudging behind me

“I will explain when I come back, please my love.” I advance to Zothando’s cot and peck his forehead; this boy is always sleeping. He’s lazy, I wonder who he took after.

“Okay, I won’t push.”

“Thanks.” I quickly change into a casual outfit and peck my wife’s lips before running to the door.

I’m wrapped in thoughts the whole drive to Nobuhle's commune, I hope Anzani will reconsider and give our child a chance. I’m already in love with my baby even before I could meet him, losing him/her would weaken me.

“Was there traffic on the road?”-Nobuhle

She says putting on her seatbelt

“No, why?”

“You took long to get here.”

“I know, I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay, you’re here now. I hope Nokwazi hasn’t done anything to cause herself harm.”

“Yeah, me too. Doesn’t she have any friend she could have went to or one we can call?”

“No, I only have Namhla’s number and she’s the same one who tossed her out.”

“I don’t get it, why was she staying at an apartment in the first place? She’s supposed to be at Res.”

“She didn’t return to res this year.” Why am I only hearing about this now?

“What? Why?”

“I don’t know.”

“You knew about this and didn’t tell me because?”

“I’m sorry, I found out when mom passed, and a bunch of things happened afterward and this slipped my mind.”

“Ok.”

After spending over an hour on the road, we park outside the apartment building where Nokwazi was cast out, it was easy to find the place because Nobuhle knew the way since it’s the same place Kwazi was when Given and Kabelo came to get her. This is the last place she was seen; maybe someone saw something that will help us find her. I park my car next to the gate and climb out, the security guard on duty approaches the locked gate when he sees me standing on the other side of the gate

“Sawubona.” I humbly say with my head bowed

“Dumela, O kae?” He replies with a Tswana accent

(Greetings, how are you)

I don't know Tswana so English will do

"I'm okay my brother, I was wondering if you could help me."  
His eyebrows arch in confusion

"That will depend on what kind of help you require from me."

"There's a girl, Nokwazi she was thrown out of here yesterday if I'm not mistaken... do you know where she went?"

"Oh that rude light-skinned girl, I know her. Her friend is the one who threw her out and said she was HIV positive, between you and me I believe the friend. Those two girls are bitches, they sleep with old men for money, and you should see the cars that fetch and drop them off here. German machines monna! Top of the range, I knew that sooner or later those hoes would contract HIV and STI's." It's taking everything in me not to punch his face, how dare he speak about my sister like that to my face?

"That's my sister you're talking about," I warn

“What? I’m sorry I didn’t-..”

“Did you see where she went or not?” I say cutting him short, my patience is running thin

“No, I’m sorry.”

“Ok, thanks for nothing. It's men like you who give all of us a bad name, buy a petticoat and bonnet once ngoba awusiyo indoda wena uwumfazi!”

(You’re not a man, you’re a woman)

“Did he tell you anything?” Buhle says when I climb back inside the car

“No, let’s drive around maybe someone saw something.”

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## ANZANI

Seeing my husband in tears, begging me not to abort changed everything for me. I will lose him if I abort this child, I saw the look on his face when he told me he'll never forgive me if I go through with the abortion, and I know him well enough to know that he wasn't joking when he said that. He meant every word, I'm at the crossroads I don't know which direction to take. It's not like I don't trust God to save the baby and me, but I feel like I'll be testing him if I keep the pregnancy knowing the risks it comes with. My maternity leave is ending in a week, I'm going back to work and I can't help but wonder what my boss will say when she finds out that I'm pregnant again, she'll probably fire me because wawu I've been away from work for a long time.

I stand in front of the mirror and pull up my top staring at my flat stomach, my hands gradually move down to my stomach and gently caress it. I can't believe there's another human growing inside of me, mine, and Quinton's second child. After three minutes in front of the mirror, I pull down my top and wipe the tears pouring down my face, I need someone to speak

to. Someone neutral, one who will not take mine or Quinton's side, and I can't think of such a person at the moment.

Zothando's cries snap me from my reverie, he smiles when my face comes into view. My beautiful son, I love him so much and I can't imagine him growing up without me. I love my unborn child too, he/she is mine, but Zothando is already here. I have bonded with him; he knows me and loves me what if I keep this baby and lose my life? Will that be fair to my son who's only an infant? These are the things Quinton doesn't understand or think of

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he can replace me after I'm dead and move on with life, but my son will never have another mother. I pick him up and cradle him in my arms admiring my beautiful creation

"Mommy's beautiful boy." He smiles and attempts to pull my top wiggling his legs as if he can hear what I'm saying

"I love you so much, my son." My phone rings startling him, and he begins wailing. I silence it and calm him down.

He doesn't like noise this one maybe it's because we are always cooped up in the apartment and never go anywhere except for the doctor's office. Once he has calmed down, I call my mother back.

"Mma."

"Ngwananga are you okay?" No, I'm not but there's no need for her to know that

"Yes, I'm fine mma what's wrong?"

"Nothing, is my son-in-law also okay?"

"Yes, he's okay mma."

"Good, don't forget about what I told you. Pray for him, his siblings, and your children."

"Mma you just said it again, children instead of a child."

“I’m sorry, I don’t know why I keep saying that.” She says and conceals her lie with a fake laugh but I’m not buying it this time around, she knows I’m pregnant. It's obvious

“You know don’t you?”

“Know what?”

“That I’m pregnant, stop pretending mma.” She chuckles

“Yes, I know but I didn’t want to tell you less you freak out.”

“Too late, I’m already freaking out. I found out yesterday.”

“Congratulations my child.” She’s excited about the pregnancy, her tone gives her away.

“Thanks, mma but I still don’t know if I’ll keep the baby or not ”

“What? why, you are married and you’re pregnant with your husband's child. I don't understand why you would even consider abortion, or Quinton is not the father of that child?”

“What? Of course he is mma, how can you even ask me that question?” I’m offended, to say the least

“What do you want me to think? Which married woman with a loving husband will consider aborting her child? It doesn’t make sense.”

“I love Quinton, I would never cheat on him.” I explain, rather defensively

“So what’s the matter? I hope it’s not because you’re afraid of what people will say about you getting pregnant again so soon when they find out.”

“Of course not, it’s my Lupus. You know how risky my first pregnancy was, I can’t go through that again at least not so soon.”

“Have you gone insane? Why would even think of aborting your child? Didn’t I tell you to pray?” This is why I didn’t want to talk to her about this, no one cares about how I feel or tries to see things from my perspective all everyone does is judge me and make me to look like a bad person. I’m not crazy, I would never kill my child for the fun of it

“Mma we’ll talk I’m getting another call.”

“Anzani don’t you dare hang u-“ I end the call, my mother will have to forgive me I’m not in the mood for one of her lectures today. I have a right to make my decision without anyone making me feel guilty or judging me for it because only I know what I went through with Zothando’s pregnancy.

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## NOBUHLE

My brother and I spent hours searching Potchefstroom looking for Nokwazi and asking people if they have seen her but nobody knows or saw anything, her phone is still off so we had no choice but to drive back without finding her but that was after we reported her missing at the police station. I have also posted her pictures on social media and the NWU page and asked people to help us find her, I hope she's still alive wherever she is because I would never forgive myself if something bad happens to her.

"I can't believe Nokwazi has been going through so much and I didn't even notice." My brother says clinging on to the steering wheel regret seeping into his voice

"I feel the same way, I couldn't get hold of her for two months I should have known something was wrong then."

"At least you tried calling her, I don't remember the last time we spoke. I carried on with my life like she doesn't exist and told myself that I will hear from her when she is ready to

behave like my little sister again, I should have pushed harder. I don't blame her for not considering us in her time of trouble because we have neglected her."

"Eish!" I was so caught up in my relationship and school and failed to pick up that something was wrong with my sister, the only sister I have.

"Let's remain positive, we'll find her." He says reassuring me, I nod and look out the window and silently cry while reciting a prayer in my heart asking God to protect her wherever she is.

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NARRATED

"So, you're telling me you allowed that girl to move in with you? Goitsemodimo will dump you."

“I know I made a blunder, but you should’ve seen her man, she was crying and begging me to let her stay and I couldn’t say no.”

“Where is her family? You're too soft let me chase her out for you,” Baboloki says already attempting to stride inside the house, but Agang grabs his arm pulling him back

“Let her be, it’s late. She can get raped and killed I don’t want that on my conscience. I will feel better knowing she is safe.” Baboloki raises his hands as a sign of surrender

“Don’t say I didn’t try warning you, you’re digging your grave mmata this girl is nothing but trouble.”

“I know, I’ll tell her to leave tomorrow morning.”

“You better do it, for your own good. Goitsemodimo will not appreciate this arrangement at all. Don’t ruin your relationship with that angel because of this hoe please.”

“I won’t.”

“I hope not, don’t let her beauty and her body confuse you. This girl is nothing but a gold-digger who sleeps with old men for money, don’t get confused she’s only here because she wants something from you. She will leave as soon as she finds the next old man to shower her with money.”

“I heard you Babo.”

“Good!”

Meanwhile inside the house, Nokwazi is leaning against the door listening to the entire conversation. She runs to the bedroom and throws herself on top of the bed crying her eyes out, thanks to Namhla everyone knows about her business. Will she ever recover from this? Her life is over, she cries wondering if she will ever find love like other people you know to be loved like how she has seen her brother love Anzani or have someone look at her like how Thando looks at Nobuhle?

“Stop dreaming Nokwazi, no sane man will love someone like you.” She murmurs then a loud sob evades her lips, she cries with her hand clutched to her chest muffling her sob with a pillow

#84

If you want things to work out, put God in the center and trust him to do the things and get things done on your behalf. My search for Zothando's nanny was fruitful, I found a 40-year-old nanny with years of experience in childcare. What stood out the most for me was that her former employer was the one who applied on her behalf, the white lady only had good things to say about the nanny and emphasized that the only reason she was letting her go was that her daughter is starting school next year and doesn't need a nanny anymore. I'm returning to work in a week, but I asked Mary, the nanny to start on Monday so Zothando can get used to having her around before I go back to work and so I get a chance to observe how they get along.

I'm in bed with my back leaned against the headboard, Zothando is cradled in my arms sucking his bottle and from how he's kicking his small leg in the air he's enjoying himself. I hear footsteps on the passage before the door opens revealing a drained-looking Mpilo.

“Love, how did it go?” I ask seeing his worried face. He looks at me and a loud sigh breezes from his lips

“Not good, we didn’t find Nokwazi.” He lowers next to me and eyes Zothando who is suckling his dummy and slowly caresses his cheek causing Zothando to look in his direction. He smiles when he sees his father’s face causing him to smile involuntarily... the bond between father and son is heartwarming

“I’m sorry, what’s going on with Nokwazi? Why were you looking for her?”

“There’s a trending video of her being chucked out from the apartment she shared with her friend Namhla, in that video Namhla accuses her of being HIV positive and many other ugly things. No one knows where she went and we can’t even get ahold of her on the phone, Nokwazi is fragile she’s not as strong as she appears to be. I’m afraid she might do something stupid like taking her own life, the video is trending, and everyone has something to say about her.”

“No, don’t think like that. She won’t do it, she’s stronger than you think...I just think she wants some space away from everyone and everything.”

“Maybe but where is she, because from what I heard she doesn’t have any money. We looked everywhere and couldn’t find her”

“Maybe she doesn’t want to be found.”

“I hear you, but I can’t just fold my arms and hope for the best, this is my sister we are talking about. I need to find her, I failed her once I can’t afford to do it again.”

Knowing my husband, he blames himself for Nokwazi going astray, he probably thinks Nokwazi wouldn’t have dated a blesser if he kept feeding onto her demands. I’m tempted to tell him Nokwazi is an adult who chose not to listen even after being warned multiple times, but I opt to swallow my opinion for the sake of peace

“Have you reached a decision?” He asks after a few minutes of silence

“No, I’m going to need more time.” He bobs his head and stands to his feet stripping out of his clothes, once he’s done, he grabs his toiletry bag and a towel.

“I’m going to take a shower.” He announces before making his way out of the room

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NOBUHLE

“Ndicela uxolo sthandwa sam kodwa ungazi beki ityala kuba ubungeke usazi ba kuzayenzeka ntoni”

(I’m sorry my love, but you should not blame yourself you couldn’t have known)

“I would have known if I paid attention to her, you and I know I’m telling the truth. I carried on with my life like Nokwazi doesn’t exist”

“No, muntu wami it’s-“ His phone rings cutting him short, I take a glance and see the name Yamkela flashing on the screen

“Uxolo kodwa kunyanzelekile ba ndiphendule” He answers putting the call on speaker

(Sorry I need to take this)

“Hi, Thando I know it’s late and I’m sorry to bother you but you’re the only one who picked up my call,” Yamkela says on the other side of the phone, her words are slurred, and the background is noisy, from that I conclude she’s calling from a club/party.

“It’s okay, you don’t need to apologize. What’s wrong?”

“I went out for dinner with a couple of friends, after dinner, we decided to hit the club. I didn’t take my car because I wanted to

get wasted but now the person who was supposed to drive me back home hooked up with some guy and left the club with him, I tried calling Esihle but I couldn't reach her and you know I can't call my parents my dad would kill me."

"Why doesn't she take an Uber?" I whisper looking at Thando and he looks at me like I'm the one who killed Jesus Christ of Nazareth!

"Send me your location and I'll come and pick you up, who are you with?"

"I'm alone, all of my friends left."

"Okay, please drink a lot of water so you can sober up. I'm coming." He says with so much concern in his voice, who's this Yamkela?

"Who is she?" I ask the moment he hangs up the phone

“Yamkela, she’s like a sister to me. Our fathers are best friends, we were raised together.”

“Hmm.” I can’t believe I almost got myself worried over nothing

“Yeah, you heard what she said I’m sorry sthandwa sam ndincamise ndikwazi uku goduka. I’ll call you when I get home, ndiyakuthanda vha.”

(Give me a kiss so I can get going) (I love you)

“I love you too,” I say and give him a baby kiss, he wraps his arms around my waist, and what was meant to be a peck blossoms into a full-blown French kiss with our hands all over each other’s bodies

“No, babe you need to leave. It’s late we don’t want Yamkela getting in trouble.” I say breaking the kiss even though my body craves to do the opposite, which is getting lost in the throes of passion with him, but someone needs to be rational between us

“You’re right.” He says planting a long peck on my lips and rolling out of bed

Lungile is spending the night at her boyfriend’s place, so I have the whole bedroom to myself, but I swear Thando ‘sleeping over’ wasn’t planned, he came to see me and didn’t want to drive back when he saw the somber mood I was in due to Nokwazi’s disappearance.

“I was looking forward to sleeping in your arms tonight it’s a pity our plans got interrupted,” I say watching him get dressed.

He chuckles “Maybe this is a blessing in disguise, we can’t keep doing this. We are playing with fire and one day we will get burnt, maybe we shouldn’t spend the night together until you’re ready.”

“You have a point.” I thought I could do this, waiting until I’m 21 years old that is but it proves to be harder and harder with each day that passes and it doesn’t help that he’s so damn attractive and that his kisses are to die for. They always leave me with a pool in my neither region and a throbbing clit

“Yes, my love, I don’t want us to rush into this. I promised your sister to wait for you, and I plan to do exactly that, I love you. Come and lock the door.” He says taking his car keys and making his way out, why do I want to break down and cry from seeing him leave? I get out of bed and put on my gown and sleepers before following him out.

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NARRATED

Agang hasn’t seen Nokwazi since 3 in the afternoon when his friend Baboloki arrived, it’s almost 7:43 now Babo long left and Agang has cooked pap and chicken feet for dinner. He wants to dish up for her but he’s a bit skeptical because this is Nokwazi, not Goitsemodimo who appreciates anything he prepares for her

Nokwazi doesn’t look like the kind to eat chicken feet maybe he should’ve prepared something else for her. It’s almost month-end and he’s running out of groceries; he only has eggs, chicken livers, vegetables, and some leftover fried chicken in his fridge.

Nokwazi is a guest, one who forced herself on him so she should accept whatever she's offered but he's not one to mistreat people because he's helping them. He takes out a clean plate from the cupboard and covers his steaming plate before heading to the bedroom, he knocks on the door and only walks in when Nokwazi's low hoarse voice permits him inside.

"Nokwazi, I cooked chicken feet and pap for dinner, and I realize that you might not eat them, so I want to know what you prefer to eat. I have chicken livers, eggs, and vegetables in the fridge." She's facing the other side; from where he's standing, he can only see her back.

She clears her throat "It's okay, there won't be a need for that, I'll eat what you're eating you shouldn't stress yourself over me." She sits up and looks at him with puffy red eyes "And I'm sorry for forcing myself into your life, I was selfish and only thought about myself like always. I didn't think about the damage my presence could do to your relationship, thank you for being kind but I promise I'll leave tomorrow morning. You won't have to ask your friend to throw me out."

That hits a nerve! Shit, she heard his conversation with Baboloki. Nokwazi is nothing to him, he shouldn't care if she's hurt or not but why does it pain him to see the tears rolling down his face knowing he's responsible for them?

"I'm sorry, you were not supposed to hear that." He mutters lowly, feeling ashamed of himself

"No, don't be sorry your friend was right. I should go back home before I ruin your relationship with your girlfriend." He saunters to the bed and sits beside her

"Still, you shouldn't have heard the things he said about you, they were unkind." Her lips break into a thin smile

"You're a good person."

"Thanks...now tell me why don't you want to go home? I saw a post on Facebook, your siblings are looking for you and from what they wrote on that post they love you a lot so why don't

you just go home and be with people who love you ...why choose to be stuck in a backroom and subject yourself to chicken feet and sleep on the couch when you can be with a family that adores you?" Tears roll down her face

"You don't understand, it's not that simple I disappointed them so much that I don't have the guts to face them. My brother did everything for my sister and me but I was ungrateful, didn't appreciate his efforts, and always wanted more because I compared myself with others. He found love, he was happy, and started limiting the things he did for me, I got jealous and tried to cause a rift between him and his wife, by insinuating that their son might not be his. I wanted to plant a seed of doubt in his mind and cause a gap between them because I know any woman would feel offended if her husband questioned their child's paternity. I did all of that so they could fight and eventually break up because I was under the impression that Anzani is to blame for the sudden rift between my brother and me." She wipes her tears and mucus with her T-shirt, but tears keep rolling down "Before then my brother had always put me and our sister first, and adjusting to someone else coming first in his life was hard to get used to, I hated Anzani because he never hid it from me that he would choose her over me...I hated her because I felt like she was slowly

replacing us in our brother's heart. I tried to recruit Nobuhle in hating her, but I failed, they are the best of friends and I somehow feel like she loves her more than me. Now tell me how do I go back home after doing everything I told you?"

"They are your siblings; they will always love you no matter what you did in the past and trust me they have forgiven you for everything. You need to forgive yourself and go back home to your siblings because you're not doing them a favor, you're hurting them by staying away because now they think something bad has happened to you."

"No, Agang didn't you hear what Namhla said? I'm HIV positive and all of that because I was ungrateful and didn't listen when my brother warned me, I'm a disgrace, do you want to hear the worst part? I killed our mother!"

Just when he thought he heard it all "What?"

"Yes, I killed her. I caused her death."

“What do you mean?”

“On the day before she died, she called me and told me how disappointed she was in me for the path I chose. I don’t know how but somehow, she found out about me dating blessers, she was so hurt and cried hysterically on the phone begging me to stop what I was doing but I disrespected her and dropped the call on her. Two days later my brother’s friends rock up in my apartment to fetch me, want to guess why? my mother was deceased, so yes I’m the one who killed her. I’m sure she couldn’t take the pain of knowing her daughter was sleeping with old men for money and had a heart attack that led to her untimely death.”

“What did the post-mortem say was the cause of her death?”

“Natural causes but I know it was because of me, I’m the reason she died.” She says and a loud sob breaks out of her lips, f\*ck this he grabs her and squeezes her in his arms letting her cry on his chest.

“I’m sorry...so sorry, I know you feel responsible but you’re not the cause of your mother’s death, she didn’t die because of you...maybe she was hurt by your choices when she died but you didn’t kill her.” He whispers in her ear slowly rubbing her back in circles “Shhh don’t cry.”

“Why do you care? I’m a bad person, a horrible person and I don’t deserve your kindness please stop caring about me because I’ll destroy your life...everything I touch turns into dust.” She says pulling away from his arms.

He puts her forefinger on her parted lips “Shhh, don’t say that about yourself. You’re not a bad person, you just made bad decisions but that doesn’t make you a bad person. You acknowledge your mistakes, and you feel bad for doing them and that tells me you’re ready to change and be a better person but you can’t do that by running away. You need to go back home and face the consequences of your actions, apologize to your brother and his wife and start over. HIV is not a death sentence, you can still live a long and healthy life if you take your treatment correctly, eat healthily, and exercise regularly. What about school, how far did you go?”

“I failed my first year and NSFAS dropped me, I was doing my first year in nursing at NWU last year.”

“Do you want to be a nurse?”

“No, I just chose it because I had to choose something at the end of the day but to be honest with you Agang I don’t know what I want to be. Unlike my little sister who always knew from a young age that she wants to be an engineer, I don’t know what I want to be. I’m not passionate about anything nor am I talented in anything.” This is the most honest she has been to herself and someone else

“That’s not true, there must be something you’re good at...just think harder and you’ll find it.” She looks up tapping her hand on her chin pretending to be deep in thought.

“Oh, I know! Being a troublemaker.” She says and loud laughter echoes through the room

“You’re stupid.” He says playfully hitting the back of her head.

“This is your homework, go back home and think about what you want to do okay?” He says looking into her eyes making her shy as she struggles to keep contact

Giving in she drops her gaze to her hands “Ok.”

“Ok, get up, and let’s go eat. I’m sure the food is cold now.”

“I can’t wait to taste it.” She says chirpily jumping down the bed.

Agang smiles, happiness looks good on her.

#85

NARRATED

“I’ll be there in five minutes.” Yamkela smiles while reading the text message from Thando, she stands up and heads to the restroom to powder her nose.

“Now you look perfect.” She says staring at her reflection in the mirror, her phone chimes inside her clutch startling her. A big smile travels on her lips when she sees Thando’s name on her screen

“Thando.” She says purposefully slurring her words

“I’m outside where are you?”

“In the bathroom but I’ll be out now.”

“Ok, I’ll wait for you at the door.” He says before hanging up

Yamkela smiles and pulls up her miniskirt exposing her yellow thick thighs and showing her cleavage. She makes her way out of the bathroom mastering her drunken walk

“OMG Yami you look bad,” Thando exclaims and rushes to her side and sets her arm over his shoulder helping her walk to where his car is parked causing Yamkela to smile in satisfaction.

“Thank you for coming, I didn’t think you’d come.”

“Why wouldn’t I come?”

“Eshle told me that you went to PTA to visit your girlfriend.”

“Come on, you know I would do anything for you.” He casually says much to Yamkela's pleasure.

He rounds to the driver’s side after helping her inside the car.

“So, where to?”

“Can we please go to your place? My dad will freak if she sees me in this state and your mother will tell on me if she sees me.”

Yamkela is like a sister to him, they grew up together so he doesn't find her suggestion controversial

“Okay, no problem.” He starts the ignition and drives out joining the main road

“You’re so handsome, do you know that?” Thando looks at her through the rearview mirror and chuckles

“You’re totally wasted.” He replies not making much of her statement and plays music to kill the silence in the car

Almost 20 minutes later they drive through Clearwater estate where Thando resides

“Sometimes I forget how monied you are!” Yamkela exclaims as Thando helps her inside the house

“That’s because I’m not.”

“Yes, you are I mean look at this place!” she says waving her eyes in the air to emphasize her point

“Okay, thanks. You’ll use this bedroom, there are fresh towels in the bathroom you can take a shower or sleep it’s up to you really.”

“Where are you going?”

“To my bedroom, goodnight Yami.” He says playfully pulling her cheek

Yamkela runs to the mirror as soon as the door closes behind him and ogles her thighs and cleavage? They look great, so why didn’t Thando notice them? Never mind, he’s a man she knows just how to get his attention.

Having arrived in his bedroom Thando strips naked and gets under the covers. A video call from Nobuhle comes through and brightens his whole face, he accepts it keeping the smile on his face intact.

“Are you home yet?”

“Yes, muntu wam’.”

“So why didn’t you call me like you promised to.” She’s speaking soft but she’s angry and he knows it.

“I’m sorry baby I was just about to call you when you called.”

“Yeah right, how convenient.”

“I promise I’m telling you the truth, ndicela undikholelwe MaGatsheni wami omuhle.”

(Please trust me my beautiful MaGatsheni)

Nobuhle wouldn't be a Zulu lady if being called by her clan names didn't tickle her fancy, she's a blushing mess and by this Thando knows all is forgiven

"I miss you already." He says leaning his back on the pillow

"Me too."

"Ndiyakuthanda Hlehle, ngenhliziyo yami yonke."

(I love you Hlehle, with all of my heart)

"I love you too babe"

Just then the door opens, and Yamkela struts in naked. Thando turns in her direction and his eyes widen in shock? but it's more of confusion and disbelief really.

"Like what you see?" She asks slowly strutting to his bed

“Who’s that?” Nobuhle asks hearing the female voice snapping Thando from his reverie

“What the f\*ck Yamkela! What are you doing here looking like this?” He’s breathing fire

“What is she doing? Thando! What’s going on?” Buhle's panicky voice pierces through the phone's speaker

Ignoring Buhle he springs out of bed, the phone slips from his hand and lands on the floor with the screen facing up, oblivious to what’s going on he charges towards Yamkela

“What the f\*ck do you think you’re doing Yamkela!”

“Fuck!” Yamkela says seductively biting her bottom lip drooling at his nakedness and only then does his mind recollect that he’s butt naked, shit! He immediately puts a hand on his neither region to cover his genitals

“Leave my room!” He roars picking up his clothes from the floor using his free hand.

Yamkela giggles and runs out of the room, TF just happened?  
Nobuhle, oh yes Nobuhle.

He skims his eyes on the bed in search of his phone but doesn't find it, he peels all the covers from the bed but nothing.

“Maybe it fell.” He thinks to himself and roams his eyes on the rug and they land on his phone, he paces towards it and picks it up..damn the video call with Nobuhle was ended a minute ago...F\*ck, did Hlehle see all of that?

“YAMKELA!!” he bellows charging to the guestroom she's using

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QUINTON

Nokwazi reached out to me last night and sent me the location of where she is, I'm on my way to Ikageng with Given. The plan was to drive with Nobuhle but she's submitting an assignment and couldn't come, Anzani also couldn't come because she went shopping so she can get the guest bedroom ready for Nokwazi's arrival.

"How do you feel?"-Given

"I won't lie, I'm greatly disappointed in Nokwazi but she needs support not judgment right now."

"You're a good brother."

"Not really but thanks."

He tells me about his blossoming relationship with Nyasha the entire trip and I'm happy to know that at least one of us is enjoying their romantic life, Given is a good person. He deserves to be happy.

“Are you sure it’s here?” He asks looking around the township

“Yeah, that’s what GPS says.”

“Ok, let’s get in.” Abo Given abasabi ukudliwa yi zinja shame

“I think we should call Nokwazi and tell her we have arrived first.”

“Good idea.” I grab my phone and dial her number

“Bhuti.” She says picking up on the second ring

“I think I’m here, it’s a yellow house with a black gate, right?”

“Yes, give me a second, I’m coming.”

“Ok, there is no dog in the yard right?” She chuckles

"No, there is no dog in the yard. You don't have to come in, I'll be out soon."

"Ok" I hang up and look at Given "Let's go in

Advertisement

I want to meet the guy she's been living with."

"Ok." We climb out of the car and make our way to the front door after locking the car.

"Come in!" A female voice sounds from inside

We walk in and exchange pleasantries with the middle-aged woman we find sitting on the couch drinking tea.

"Ma I don't know if we're at the right place but we are looking for Nokwazi, she said we will find her here."

“Nokwazi? I don’t know anyone by that name, but if she said she’s here then it must be the light-skinned girl I saw yesterday, please check the backroom.”

“Thanks, ma.”

We follow each other to the back of the house; the backroom has two relatively big rooms with a shimmering red stoep outside. The glimmering pots on the stand blind us as we walk through the door, damn I’ve never seen such a tidy backroom. Nokwazi was in the other room when she permitted us in, so we stand awkwardly next to the door not sure whether to sit or not, the door to what I conclude is the bedroom swings open, and Nokwazi steps out looking beautiful dragging her suitcases. She pauses when she sees me and her eyes instantly well up with tears.

When I learned about what she did I thought I would be angry at her for ruining her life, but I find myself advancing toward her and pulling her into my arms.

“It’s okay, I’m here now.” My statements cause a loud sob to evade her lips, she cries in my arms wetting my T-shirt.

“I’m sorry for letting you down bhuti, I’m so sorry please forgive me.” She says in between hiccups

“It’s okay sthandwa sam, we all make mistakes.”

She cries for a good five minutes before calming herself down, she exchanges greetings with Given when we break the hug and offers us a seat, we have no choice but to squeeze ourselves on the two-seater couch since it’s the only one available

“So, I was hoping to meet the guy who gave you accommodation. Where is he?” I ask with my eyes fixed on the bed room door, so they were sleeping on the same bed?

“His name is Agang, unfortunately he's at work today.”

"What type of work does he do?"

"He's a security guard."

"Okay, it's such a bummer that I couldn't meet him, I wanted thank him properly for taking you in."

"You can call him and thank him on the phone."

"No, I wanted to do it face to face....so he lives alone?"

"Yes."

"And he didn't try to take advantage of you?" Given interjects

"What? no, why would you even think of something like that? Agang is a good guy he would never do something like that."  
She looks ready to kill

“Okay, why are you so offended?” Given asks and we laugh at her

“No, I’m not but I just don’t want anyone to accuse him of things he didn’t do because he is a good guy. He took me in when no one would and took good care of me during my stay here”

“That’s all?” I ask

“Yeah, that’s all. He has a girlfriend, can I offer you anything to drink?”

"Hey kukwakho mos la, uyazenzela nje uphuma ungene emakhabetheni wabantu bangekho." I say throwing Given to a fit of laughter beside me

"You can say that again, she's the woman of the house they even left her with the house keys."-Given

"You know what ngiyaniyeka, masambeni."

(Forget it, lets go)

"Okay mamas" Given says ruffling her feathers

"Help me with my bags, I'll lock and leave the keys with the landlord."

"Okay." She scurries out

"She likes him." Given says confirming my suspicions

"Yes, that's what I also think. Nokwazi likes the guy, for her sake I hope she won't get hurt."

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NARRATED

“And then wena? You’ve been smoking more than normal today and that only happens when you’re stressed.”

“That girl is leaving today.”

“Which one? The slay queen?”

“Can’t you call her by her name and stop with the condescending labels? NO-KWA-ZI, Nokwazi her name is that simple really.”

“Why are you so touchy? Ok then Nokwazi, she’s leaving?”

“Yes.”

“So? Why do you look so down, shouldn’t you be celebrating?”  
Agang looks at him but doesn’t reply

“No! Please don’t tell me you’ve fallen in love with her.” The smoke goes into the wrong windpipe choking him and causing a violent cough to bubble from his throat

“Of course not, yesterday we had a conversation and I realized that I judged her unfairly. She’s not a bad person.”

“Yeah right! A hoe is a hoe, nothing can justify that.”

“Come on, we all make mistakes. You've never done something you regret in your life? ”

“Selling your vagina to old men for money is not a mistake, I don’t care what you say but that girl is a b\*tch.”

“There’s no winning with you, it’s fine let’s drop it.”

“Yeah, I hope you’re not thinking of ditching Goitsemodimo for that h\*e because that would be the biggest mistake of your life. That girl is everything any man in his right mind wants.”

“I love Goitsemodimo and I’m not a cheater, I wonder why you always trying to make me feel like I’m cheating when I’m not. Give it a rest man, why are you so involved in my relationship anyway?”

With his hands raised as a sign of surrender “Forgive me, I was only trying to help.”

“I’m not a kid, I don’t need you micromanaging my relationship please butt out of my business.”

#86

“Stop what you’re doing Anzani can't you see that you’re slowly losing your husband.”

“But what if I die and leave my son Dakalo?” Dakalo rolls her eyes visibly irritated

“I don’t know what to say Anzani...I don’t know what to say anymore. Go abort and lose Mpilo I don’t care anymore, some of us would give anything to be pregnant yet here you are not appreciating the gift God has blessed you with.” I feel bad, Dakalo would give anything to be a mother. She and her husband have been trying for a baby for over two years now, we thought my mother accepting her calling would help her situation but it appears not.

“I’m sorry cousin, I know how much you want to have your own child.”

“Yeah, I don’t know what makes you think it’s a good idea to tell me you’re thinking of aborting when you know how desperate I am for a child. It’s insensitive, it’s like you’re rubbing my barrenness on my face.”

“I’m sorry but you know I would never do that I only wanted someone to talk to, you’re my best friend Daki that’s why I thought of you but forgive me you’re right maybe I shouldn’t have.”

“It’s okay...If you end up getting an abortion I don’t want to know.” She’ll know when my pregnancy doesn't show mos but okay!

“Okay cuz, I respect your wishes.”

“Thanks, let me get back to work.”

“Okay cuz, thank you for your time.”

I went shopping for some small furniture items and other things I think Nokwazi would need in her bedroom, I didn't want to go shopping with Zothando so I asked Nyasha, Given's friend to babysit for me. She's very good with kids so I'm not worried about her not taking proper care of my son.

I had just walked inside my apartment when Dakalo called, my confusion hikes as the day of my abortion appointment nears so I told her about my dilemma, and we all know how that ended.

I take off my takkies and sigh in relief stretching my toes, slip my feet inside Quinton's slippers and relax on the couch, Quinton will get Zothando when he drops off Given it's easier that way since Given and Nyasha live in the same apartment building.

I'm browsing through my Facebook timeline when I come across a post

"Proverbs 18:21

Death and Life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

As we live we carry both life and death. Death is not something that will happen in the future but what we carry within us whilst we are still living and breathing. There is a higher level of living which is called life and a lesser level of living which is called death. Both these we carry whilst we are still in existence, whilst we are still in the land of the living. God has given us the power to choose between these two, by giving our tongue the power to push us through to what we have chosen. How you utilize the power and where you take that power is solemnly up to you.

We might all be alive, and appear to be breathing, walking, talking, and eating but some are dead whilst some are experiencing life. This tells us that it's possible to live but not have life because you have chosen to use your tongue's power to death. Being alive means that you still have an option to choose, breathing means you still have the courtesy to choose.

Deuteronomy 30: 14-15

But the word is very near you, it is in your mouth and your heart, so that you may obey it. See, I have set before you life and goodness, as well as death and disaster.

Child of God the choice is yours.”

Lord, you’re wonderful, I jolt up from the couch and open my mouth to sing praises to the holy of holies. God always speaks to us; you just need to learn how to listen and hear him. He has spoken to me and I’ve heard him.

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NOBUHLE

“I’ll get it,” Lungile says when a knock sounds on our door.

“Okay,” I say and cover my head with a blanket, I’m not in the mood to see Lungile’s friends. I don’t have friends so she’s the only one who gets visitors here.

“Hlehle.” Kill me now! I pull the covers off my face and stare into this shameless man’s face

“When a person blocks you it means they don’t want to talk to you, what are you doing here? Didn’t you hurt me enough?”

“Hlehle I know how it looks like but I swear I have never cheated on you.”

“Tell that to someone who cares because I don’t! “Ye ye ye she’s family, our fathers are best friends” when you know you’re f\*cking her!”

“Babe no! I’m not sleeping with Yamkela, she’s like Esihle to me. Why would I sleep with someone I consider my little sister?”

“But I saw you and you were naked Thando!” why doesn’t he admit the truth?

“But babe come on, I was in bed talking to you on the video call. Yamkela invited herself into my room while I was still talking to you, you saw how shocked I was to see her.”

“Yeah, so shocked that you pranced in front of your so-called sister naked. I saw you Thando, I saw you.” I pull up my top and hide my face inside it and release a shrill cry. “You left me Thando and went running because your drunk ‘sister’ needed you, only to wind up naked with her....I heard her speak, she wasn’t drunk. I should have listened to Nokwazi, you played me like she said you would. They warned me about you, and I foolishly ignored them, guess what now I’m paying for my stubbornness.”

“Muntu wami please look into my eyes, you’ll see that I’m not lying. I love you so much and would never cheat on you, I don’t know what happened, but I swear Yamkela was drunk when I picked her up from the club. It seems she planned this, if there’s one thing I’m guilty of then it’s being stupid and not seeing through her but I promise I didn’t cheat on you....I would never, ever cheat on you I swear.” He’s kneeling next to my single bed pleading his case desperate for me to believe him

“Okay, I believe you.”

“Thank you.” He breathes a sigh of relief

“But I still want us to break up, what happened proved to me that I’m not ready to be in a relationship if that means giving someone so much power to hurt me.”

“No, no no no no! you said you believe me nje?”

“I do” To be honest I don’t believe his story; I think he’s a good liar. I mean his excuse is convincing but I won't allowed myself to be fooled.

“So why are you breaking up with me?”

“Just go Thando, it’s over between us,” I say and swivel to face the wall giving him my back

“Hlehle please don’t do this.” I cover my face with a blanket and bite my hand to muffle my cry

“Babe...sthandwa sam? Sukuyiyenza lento.”

(Don't do this)

"Hlehle...please."

"I'm sorry but you need to leave, or I'll be forced to call my landlord." That's Lungile's voice

"Okay, I'll leave I just need to say one last thing to her."

"Okay, you have a minute," Lungile says and I hear a door bang close a moment later

"Babe, I know you think I cheated on you but I swear I didn't cheat on you nor did I think about it but I don't blame you for being upset because it's true I messed up. I should have seen through Yamkela, I really loved you Hlehle but I'll respect your wishes if a break-up is what you want. My love for you was genuine."

He confesses then I hear his footsteps shuffling to the door

## Advertisement

I break into a loud whimper when the door bangs close behind him. Why didn't anyone tell me this is how much heartbreak hurts?

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## NARRATED

Nokwazi is sitting in the backseat of the car bonding with Zothando, this baby is her brother's photocopy minus the complexion no wonder her accusation didn't spark any doubt or stir trouble between the happy couple. She laughs at her foolishness

"And then? Wahleka wedwa, yini sewuyahlanya?" Her brother jokes looking at her in the rearview mirror

(Why are you laughing alone, have you lost your marbles)

She laughs out loud and Quinton joins in, he missed this side of her.

“No, I’m not. I’m just thinking out loud.”

“Hmmm.”

“Your son is cute by the way,” Quinton smirks and wipes imaginary dust off his shoulders using his left hand while the right-hand is on the steering wheel

“Of course, he’s his father’s son.”

“Okay!” She says laughing. “How do you think his mother will take you coming back with me?” she’s anxious about meeting Anzani after everything that happened the last time they met

“She doesn’t have a problem, she’s actually the one who suggested you should move in with us. she reckons being around family will do you some good.”

“Wow, really?”

“Yes, Zothando’s mother is a good person. You’ll see that once you give her a chance.”

“Okay.” A few minutes later they drive through the gate housing the apartment Mpilo resides, he steps out of the car and takes her luggage from the boot while she climbs out and takes in the place carrying mini Quinton and his bag

“Wow, you stay here?”

“Yep, you like it?”

“Like? I love it, the place looks very beautiful.”

“Tell you what, Anzani and I are moving into our new house at month end but we’ll keep paying rent here. I’ll talk to Anzani about you staying here, you will stay here if she agrees, I believe a change of scenery will do you some good.” She’s screaming her lungs out by the time he completes his sentence scaring Zothando who begins crying

“Shhh sorry nana, aunt is sorry handsome nephew I just got too excited.” Quinton chuckles looking at her, Lord knows how long he prayed for this day. It’s a pity it took her contracting HIV to come back to her senses but either way, he’s glad to have his little sister back

A tantalizing aroma of food welcomes them as they walk through the door, Anzani cooked Mogodu and dumplings. The table is set for three people with three champagne glasses and a bottle of non-alcoholic champagne- a bizarre combination but Nokwazi is back home and hopefully back to her senses and that calls for celebration. She beams when her eyes lock with Nokwazi

“Hey, Kwazi!”

Nokwazi is shocked for a second but quickly pulls herself together and returns the greeting matching her exhilaration

“Food will be ready in a few minutes, you can go ahead and familiarize yourself with your bedroom for the time being. It’s

the second door on your left-hand side, I'll take him." She says taking Zothando who smiles cheerfully seeing his mother's face

"Thembalam' what's going on, you look different." He asks the moment Nokwazi is out of sight

Anzani smiles sweetly "Nothing, God spoke to me today and knocked some sense into me."

He's confused but he doesn't ask further "He should speak to your more often if this is how you'll behave."

"Yeah, go and refresh. Dinner will be ready soon, go-go." He chuckles and drops a peck on her lips

"I missed this." He says stroking her cheek

"Yeah, me too babe and I'll show you just how much after dinner." He likes the sound of that, the enormous smile on his face is a testament to that!

“Okay, in that case let me hurry up and take a shower then.” He says dashing to their bedroom

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NOKWAZI

Anzani’s food was delicious but nothing close to my mother’s cooking, I’ve been missing her more in these past few days. She must be disappointed in me, I brought nothing but humiliation to her upbringing

“Hey, are you okay?” Anzani says wiping my tears with her palms, I didn’t even know that I was crying.

I’m in the kitchen washing the dishes and last time I checked she was in the bedroom with my brother and their son, witnessing the love they share has heightened my guilt. I can’t believe I wanted to ruin such a perfect and beautiful love story

“I’m okay Anzani, your food just made me think of my mom.”

“Eish, I’m sorry. I can’t imagine how you must feel if I miss her terribly after only knowing her for a little over a year.”

“Yeah, she was a great mother and I disappointed her.”

“You need to forgive yourself, your mother wouldn’t want to go through life feeling guilty for your mistakes. Sure you made mistakes but who hasn’t? You are sorry and that’s what’s important.” Now I think I understand why Nobuhle adores her so much, she’s got a big heart.

“Look at you being the same person to comfort me after everything I have done to you in the past, you’re a good woman my brother is blessed.”

“Thank you, those words mean a lot, especially coming from you.” We laugh

“I was a b\*\*\*h wasn’t I?” She chuckles

“You said it, I didn’t.” We break into booming laughter, who would have thought?

“From the bottom of my heart, I’m very sorry for everything I put you through in the past. You are a good person, and you didn’t deserve any of it.”

“I have long forgiven you but thanks for your apology, it means a lot. I'm curious though why did you hate me because I’ve never done anything to you?”

“Jealousy sisi, I was jealous of you and thought your presence in my brother's life will make him love me less than he already did. All my life I’ve always felt like he loves Nobuhle more than me, my mom too. You being there made it worse”

“That’s not true your brother loves you so much, both you and Nobuhle.”

“I know that now... Agang made me realize how unappreciative, self-absorbed and selfish I was in the past and that somehow made it difficult for my siblings or anyone else for that matter to get close to me. Just look at how I treated you? but that doesn't mean they hate me. They love me it's just that they couldn't stand the person I had turned into.”

“Hmm who's this Agang, I think I like him.” she says with a naughty smile on her face, she's very beautiful this one yoh!

“He's the security guard who works in the buiding Namhla and I were renting an apartment in, when Namhla threw me out it was late in the evening and his shift had just ended so I begged him to take me with him. He didn't want to at first but he ended up agreeing as I wouldn't stop begging and crying.”

“Poor guy!Why didn't you call your brother or Nobuhle? They were so worried about you, that they dropped everything as soon as they found out about what happened to you and drove all the way to Northwest to look for you. They were so troubled when they didn't find you, beating themselves up and blaming themselves for not being the best siblings to you.”

“I know, once again I was selfish and only thought about myself. What people would say and also because I didn’t have the guts to face them after everything I’ve done, I was prepared to be a hobo and live under the bridge because I knew Agang wouldn’t house me for long but he made me see reason and convinced me to come back home.”

“I'm in love with this Agang angeke!” I chortle “No for real, he managed to do in a few days what Quinton failed to do for ages. He’s a keeper!”

#87

NARRATED

She just walked into her bedroom after taking a shower when she finds her phone ringing on top of the bed, her cheeks flush when she sees Agang's name on the screen. She didn't expect him to call so soon, well she didn't expect him to call at all.

"Hey, found your key?" She says lowering herself on the bed

"Yes, and found my room spotless thank you." She smiles like a retard and swings her headphones around her finger

"It's the least I could do after everything you did for me, you're a good man Agang."

"You didn't have to but thanks, in their whole existence my pots have never shined this much. I try to do it but somehow no matter how much I try I just can never get them to that level."  
She giggles pleased with herself

“Well let’s just say I wanted you to swallow your words, remember how much you laughed at me when I offered to clean, cook and wash your clothes because you thought I didn’t know how to do chores?” He laughs out loud recalling the incident

“You can’t blame me; I mean look at you.” She sleeps on her back and hugs the pillow to her chest smiling like a Cheshire cat

“What do you mean by that?”

“No, I don’t mean it in a bad way but you’re so beautiful no one would expect someone like you to know how to do chores.”

“So beautiful girls can’t do chores?”

“No, that’s not what I meant” He exhales “How is home?” He changes the topic; he doesn’t want to argue especially not with her.

“Amazing, you won’t believe how welcoming my sister-in-law was to me after everything I have done to her.”

“Not everyone holds grudges, I hope you won’t mess up this time around. Kind people have limits too, consider yourself fortunate because people like her are hard to come by. Don’t take advantage of her kindness.”

“I won’t, can you believe she allowed me to move in with them?”

“For real?”

“Yep.”

“Wow, please behave yourself. She was kind enough to allow you into her house, don’t make her regret it, and remember it’s her house so you follow her rules. No acting bratty or anything of that sort.”

“Aibo Agang why does it sound like you’re scolding me?”

“I'm sorry if it feels that way, I just don't want you to mess things up with your sister-in-law again. From what you told me about your family, you only have your siblings and your sister-in-law and they all seem to care about you a lot. Don't disappoint them again.” God, do people like Agang really exist?

“Thank you, I won't. I have really learned from my mistakes.”

“Good, do you still remember what you promised me?”

“Yes, how can I forget?”

“So, when are you going?”

“Tomorrow, my brother is taking me to his doctor.”

“I don't trust you, send me a picture of the doctor's card when you come back.”

“Wow! Okay.” Why does he care so much? Whatever his reasons are, he should stop before she gets carried away and thinks he feels the same way

“Good then, bye.” She’s disappointed that he’s ending the call so soon, she enjoys their conversations and still wanted to talk more.

“Goodbye, have a good night.”

“Thanks, you too.”

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Anzani is sitting in front of the mirror making her sleeping knots while Quinton stares in admiration until she’s done, she puts on her hair bonnet and joins him in bed after switching off the lights. His arms are spread open so she sinks into them and buries her head on the crook of his neck taking in his scent, gosh how she missed this. He pecks her forehead and slowly caresses the sides of her tummy

“So, we are keeping the baby?” He believes he knows the answer, but he wants to be certain before he starts celebrating the good news.

“Yes my love, we are keeping our baby no more abortion.” Excitement surges through his whole body like a flame, he tightens his hold around her waist and rains kisses on her face causing her to giggle.

“Thank you so much thembalam’, you’ve made me the happiest man in the entire universe.”

“I’m sorry I took so long.”

“That doesn’t matter, what matters is that we are keeping our bundle of joy.” He says caressing her stomach

“I wanted to start with the alkaline diet tomorrow, but I want to hear the obstetricians’ advice before I begin, I have an appointment with her tomorrow do you want to come with me?”

“Of course, sthandwa sam hopefully we get to see our little bambino.”

“That’s the whole point of this appointment, I want to know if the diet will be safe to do during pregnancy. Protein and Calcium are very important for general nutrition, so I need to know if I won’t be endangering our baby’s life by taking on this diet.”

“Makes sense.”

“Yes...I’m glad Nokwazi is here, and I hope she has really changed.”

“Yeah, me too. I hope she has changed for real. Remember what you promised me before dinner?”

"Yep." She says popping the p and taking his length in her hands.

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“Oh omonate gore! Shuuu!” Babo says pumping in and out of her wetness while she softly moans under him scratching his back with her long manicured nails

“Cum for me!” He commands tapping his finger on her engorged clit, her eyes roll to the back of her head as her body spasms. She cums moaning out loud creaming his tool with her juices, he follows a few thrusts later shooting his thick cum straight to her womb, and slumps beside her all sweaty and breathing heavily

“Wuuu! That was amazing!” She remarks in between heavy breaths

He smirks and slips his fingers between her slippery folds “Want to go again?”

“No, we’ve been at it for hours I’m tired and my cookie is complaining.” He laughs

“Ok mami as you wish.” He takes her small hand into his and plays with her short fingers

“When are you telling him you’re pregnant?”

“I don’t know.”

“You need to do it soon; the baby is not going anywhere he’s going to find out eventually.”

“I know but I’m not ready to lose him.”

“What do you mean?” Goitse shifts and sleeps on her side putting her hand under her chin and pulls the stubble on his chin with her free hand

“I love you that’s for sure, but Agang is a good guy he doesn’t deserve what we are doing to him

he loves me so much and has never cheated on me. He was there for me when my aunt and her husband took my parent’s

house after my mother's death, he was patient with me when I denied him sex for two years because whenever we tried to be intimate the memory of my uncle molesting me and taking my innocence would flood my mind." She's in tears now remembering the painful memories

"I'm sorry baby," Babo says pulling her into his warm embrace

"He found me a center for rape victims and attended every session with me, by law he wasn't allowed to be part of the sessions, but he wouldn't leave because he felt I needed him." He wipes her tears "Do you want to know what he told the therapist when he tried to chase him out?" Babo shakes his head "He boldly said, "She's my woman, I won't leave because she needs me to support her." The therapist tried to get him to leave but he wouldn't leave, he loves me so much and I hate myself for betraying his trust and falling in love with his best friend and getting pregnant for him."

"Well sorry to disappoint you but he's not as perfect as you think, there's a girl Nokwazi she's caramel-skinned, very beautiful with smooth skin and a body to match. She reminds me of the actress Nomzamo Mbatho everytime I see her, they

somehow lookalike. She's a slay queen and dates old men for money, she was staying in one of the apartments where we work. She had a fall out with her friend, and the friend threw her out and told everyone that she's HIV positive and aired all her dirty laundry, want to know what your precious Agang did? He took her in and let her sleep in the same bed you share with him."

She rolls her eyes and fakes a yawn "Agang is kind like that, I'm not surprised he helped her when no one would. I'm not moved, I know he only has eyes for me"

"Then how do you explain why he was smoking like a chimney today at work?"

"Huh?"

"You know he only smokes when he's stressed by something and when I asked him what's going on, he told me Nokwazi is leaving."

"So?"

"He has fallen in love with her, he even bit my head off for referring to her as a 'slay queen'. All I'm saying is that Agang is not the saint he makes himself out to be, who knows what happened between them during the three days they spent together? maybe she gave him p\*\*\*y I mean why else would he be so hung up on a stranger? Unless of course, he has tasted the forbidden fruit"

"No, Agang would never do that to me." She says lowly, tears burning her eyes

"I'm sorry but no one is perfect, not even Agang. He's a good guy but not many men can resist temptation especially when it's a gorgeous girl like Nokwazi, her b\*tchiness aside the girl is a total flame. She wasn't wearing make-up when I stopped by Agang's room yesterday, yes I don't like her and would never go for her but I will admit she's even more beautiful without make-up."

“Why should I believe you? you’re probably saying all of this to get me to break up with Agang, sorry to disappoint but it won’t work. You said it yourself, the girl is a slay queen Agang is not attracted to girls like that.”

“Okay but just know that he’s going to break up with you as soon as he realizes that you’re pregnant and the child isn’t his, he may love you as you say but he won’t forgive you for cheating.”

“How will he know that the baby is not his? He and I have unprotected sex all the time mos.”

“In case you don’t realize Agang and I look completely different from each other. He’ll immediately know the baby is not his as soon as he’s born, because us Diale men have strong genes.”

“Not if I can help it.”

“What do you mean?”

“Don’t worry about it baby daddy, the baby I’m carrying will come out looking exactly like his father, Agang that is.” She says with a devious grin enraging Babo further

“I won’t allow you to reward Agang with my child, he should make his own if he wants a child.”

“Who’s going to believe you? I’m the kind, shy, and reserved Goitsemodimo who would never hurt a fly much less cheat, or have you forgotten?”

“Wow!” He’s lost for words, who is this girl?

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THANDO

“Woah, take it easy,” Esihle says taking the bottle of liquor from me

“Yewena Esihle buyisa lo botile!”

(Esihle bring back that bottle)

“No, I’m not going to stand by and watch you commit suicide.”

“What do you care?”

“Haibo! Do you have something you want to cough out?” She says folding her arms across her chest

“Uthetha nabani ngalolo hlobo? Ndizakubetha unye mna sundiqheli ikaka!”

(Who are you talking to like that? I’ll beat you up, don’t disrespect me)

“What do you want me to say, besides whatever that is making you drink it’s obvious you have a problem with me. You’ve been giving me attitude since I walked in.”

“Esihle you of all people know how much I love Hlehle, so tell me how can you plot with Yamkela to do this to me, your brother?”

“What do you mean?” She looks confused

“Quit pretending, Yamkela is your bestie I’m sure she told you about her sick feelings for me.”

“Oh, that! she confessed?”

“No, she did more than that. She called me pretending to be drunk and said she was stuck in a club, like a fool I am instead of telling her to get an Uber I left my girlfriend and ran to her aid. I drove her to my place because I didn’t want her parents seeing how ‘sloshed’ she was kanti elo gqwirhakazi orchestrated all of that to seduce me.”

(That witch)

“What? I didn’t know she would do that, I promise I’m not involved in any of that.”

“Well she did it and Hlehle broke up with me because Yamkela walked in naked while I was on a video call with her. I tried to plead my case but she didn’t believe me because I was also naked.”

“Eish...I’m sorry bro.”

“I hate that Yamkela and I never want to see her again because I swear if I do I’ll wring her neck.”

“That’s a bit tricky, she’s practically family and comes around a lot what are you going to tell the rents because obviously, they’ll notice that something is up. You and Yami have always been close.”

“I don’t care what they think, I want nothing to do with that little sl\*t!”

“Yoh!” I can tell she’s stuck in the middle, bitchy as she is Yamkela is a good friend of Esihle's and they’ve been friends since forever but I don’t care about all of that right now, I want nothing to do with Yamkela or I shouldn’t be held responsible for what I’ll do to her.

#88

NARRATED

“I missed you so much, it’s so good to have you back home,” Nobuhle says giving Nokwazi a tight squeeze. That's all she's been doing since she came, the possibility of almost losing Nokwazi shook her.

Quinton fetched her from Pretoria last night, she’ll spend the weekend in Braamfontein and head back to school first thing Monday morning.

“I missed you more little sister.” She says freeing herself from her sister’s tight hold, she climbs out of bed and puts on her gown “So, I was thinking...how about we do something for our brother and his wife to show them appreciation.”

Nobuhle instantly sits up “What?” she’s surprised, this is not like Nokwazi. She never thinks about anyone except herself

“I don’t know maybe we could babysit Zothando so they can spend quality time alone, book them into a spa, cook and decorate the house with a few balloons and flowers and maybe buy some smaller nyana gifts for them.”

“Ok.”

“What? you don’t think it’s a good idea?”

“No, no no... I think it’s a great idea I’m just surprised that’s all. It seems you have really changed” Buhle says wearing a proud smile on her face, who knew this day would come? Nokwazi buries her head to the ground in shame feeling embarrassed by everything she did in the past.

“Yes, I have changed. I’m tired of being the troublemaker who always brings shame to our family name, I have done enough of that to last us a lifetime getting myself infected with HIV was the last straw.” She mutters and tears prick her eyes, coming to terms with her new status is difficult.

She is starting to accept that it won't be something that will happen overnight, it will take a while but at least she saw a doctor and started with her treatment. That's some form of progress is it not?

"Oh sisi, it'll be okay...you'll pick yourself and start over HIV is not a death sentence," She says brushing her shoulder and fighting to keep her own tears at bay.

"Thanks" she pauses and draws in a breath "Anyway... what do you think about my idea? Should we give it a go?" She says digressing from the heavy topic, patting her eyes with the sleeves of her gown

"Yes, it's a great idea. I know you don't have any money, so don't worry about the expenses I'll cover the costs."

"Hmm look at you being moreki chile! You have money neh?"  
Buhle chuckles

"Not really...I just happen to save a lot."

"Well, I'm not surprised you've always preferred saving money rather than blowing it on unnecessary things, if only I reasoned like you then I wouldn't be here today, without a single penny to my name. You're wise beyond your years."

"Ah stop it, you'll make me cry," Buhle says dramatically, and the pair break into a belly laugh

"I'll google a few beauty spas around Joburg and make bookings for this afternoon if possible, I hope our couple didn't make any plans for the day because we will be forced to postpone. I want us to do it while you're still here."

"I doubt it, Sis Anzani is not outgoing and doesn't have a lot of friends. I doubt she has anything planned out for today."

"Good then, while they go for their massage you'll be shopping for their presents, the flower petals and balloons we will use to decorate the apartment. I'll remain here with Zothando and get started with the pots. What meal do you think I should prepare for them?"

“Since we are doing this to show appreciation not only to our brother but sis Anzani as well, I think we can prepare dishes like Delele (Spinach), pap and Mashonhza (Mopane worms), I think Sis Anzani will appreciate the gesture”

“Ok, but the problem is I don’t know how to cook mopane worms do you know how to?”

“Yep, she taught me how to. You can cook everything else; I’ll cook the mopane worms when I come back then...I will pass by woolies and buy Tiramisu cake for dessert, sis Anzani loves it.”

“See why it was such a good idea to do this while you’re still around? you know exactly what she prefers.”

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“What is this I hear about you taking in a stranger and allowing her to sleep in the bed you share with me Agang?” Goitse says

budging into Agang's bedroom catching him off guard as he wasn't expecting her.

Agang knows to tread carefully after a single glance at her face, she's riled up. He stands up from the bed where he was resting, and a sigh eludes his lips

"You would know about this Goitse if you made time for me, for us."

"Uhm...that's no excuse to keep something of this magnitude from me Agang? Did you even change the bed sheets? I'm not sleeping in the same sheets that were used by that HIV-infected gold-digging somebody Agang." Her remark about Nokwazi gets to him but he keeps his composure and doesn't say anything, Goitse must be really upset to say something like this about someone. It's unlike her, now he realizes how huge the mistake he made was.

Goitse has every right to be angry, he shouldn't have taken Nokwazi in without telling his girlfriend about it.

“I’m sorry, I should’ve told you. You have every right to be angry.” A smile tugs at the corners of her lips upon hearing that, pleased to know her suspicion was right. Baboloki said all of that nonsense to spite her.

Agang is still very much in love with her, look at him apologizing to her after she insulted the precious ‘Nomzamo Mbatha’

“I’m not trying to justify what I did but when was the last time did you spend the night with me much less call me Goitsemodimo?”

“I...no don’t do that, don’t shift the blame. You know I would give anything to spend time with you, but I just never have time between work, school, church, and your unstable shifts it’s really hard to make time.”

“I know. Trust me I don’t want to complain, I know you have a lot on your plate but I ...I miss spending time with you.” He puts his hands on his face and exhales heavily “I understand the pressure, I do but I miss you, I miss us. I miss spending time with you like old times you know making love until the break of

dawn, having you in my arms, and listening to you go on and on with the gossip from your office and I miss the evening strolls we'd take hand in hand." Goitsemodimo drops her head struck by guilt

Agang advances towards her and cups her face in his palms

"But I'm glad you're here now, I missed you so much." He mutters stroking her plump cheeks and looking into her eyes as though he can see inside her soul, a smile travels on his lips "You've gained weight but I'm not complaining, it looks good on you." Goitse averts her eyes and fakes a cough pulling away from his touch unable to hold his gaze.

"Uhm thanks, I've been eating too much lately." She replies looking everywhere but his eyes

"I see, who told you about Nokwazi, was it Baboloki?"

"Yes."

“I’m really sorry I didn’t tell you; I shouldn’t have kept it from you I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay but never hide something like that from me again.”

“I won’t, I promise.”

“Good then, ao siame?”

(How are you)

“Ke siame babe, wena?”

(I’m good and you)

“Lenna ke siame empa ke tshwerwe ke tlala onale sengwe nyana sa ho ja?”

(I’m good too but I’m hungry do you have anything I can eat in here?)

An involuntary chuckle escapes his lips, tickled by her sudden appetite. The Goitse he knows doesn't eat until he forces her to.

"No, but I can quickly whip up something for you...what do you want to eat?"

"Tinned fish mixed with Koo baked beans, garlic achaar with papa e soft."

"Now that's a first wena le tin fish?" Oh, snap! How will she get out of this one? She releases a nervous chuckle while cooking up an excuse in her head.

"I know right, I was also surprised when I suddenly started craving for it." He eyes her suspiciously for a few seconds

"Are you sure we are not pregnant?"

"What? No, of course not." The plan is for them to 'find out' about the pregnancy at the same time because how else is she

going to explain knowing about the pregnancy and keeping quiet about it for so long?

“Hmm, I think we should get tested just to be sure.” He fell right into her trap, see she knows him too well and knows which strings to pull to get the reaction she wants from him.

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ANZANI

My appointment with my obstetrician went very well, she advised against detoxing whilst still pregnant and suggested that I should gradually change my diet to give my body a chance to adapt because doing the 360-degree turn could endanger my baby's life. Speaking of which, our little intruder is doing well inside mommy's tummy, I couldn't help but break down when I heard his strong heartbeat. I cannot believe I almost killed my baby; I would have probably lived to regret it for the rest of my life. It's too soon for us to have another baby but I'm so excited to be a mother again, I have a supportive and loving husband and I can handle anything with him by my side.

The girls treated us to a couple's spa two-hour pamper session at Nouvelle Ere beauty spa, it has always been my wish to take Quinton to a spa because he works a lot, and looks out for everyone's interests, and always puts everyone's needs before his own. I'm happy that his siblings thought of doing this for him to appreciate him for everything he does for them. We are lying side by side getting our 60 minutes full body hot stone massage, don't get me wrong I love my son but I'm glad he's not here Mpilo and I never spend time alone ever since he was born. We needed this, to spend time together away from everything and everyone so we can talk and put some things into perspective

"Thembalam' I don't know if I'm mistaken, but I think Nokwazi can remain in the apartment when we move into our new home month end."

"I have no problem with that, I think it's a good idea. I don't have any issues with her, but I wouldn't want to live with her full-time, I want it to be only us and our kids in our house. Relatives and siblings sometimes cause problems for married couples-"

“It’s okay, you don’t have to explain because I understand. We need our space.”

“Yeah, I’m so excited I can’t wait for us to move into our new home.”

“Me too thembalam’.”

After the full body massage came the 30 minutes foot soak, exfoliation, and massage and a 30-minute head, neck, and shoulder massage. We felt rejuvenated, energized, and refreshed when we walked out of the spa.

“Did you enjoy the pampering?” I ask as we climb inside the car

“A lot.”

“I’m glad you did; I’ve always wanted to take you for a massage so I’m a bit jealous that your sisters took you there before me”  
His lips break into a smile

“There’s no need to be jealous my love, it’s not a competition. You can always take me to the spa another time and I will still appreciate it.” I must’ve done something great in my previous life to be blessed with a man like him, he’s amazing.

“I love you.”

“Nami ngiyakuthanda thembalam’.” He starts the ignition and drives out with his left hand entwined with mine

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THANDO

I don’t know how many times I’ve stopped myself from driving to Pretoria to see Nobuhle, she blocked me on social media and blocked my number so I can’t do anything to explain myself or

ask for forgiveness. I thought I would just give her time to calm down before going back to her place to plead with her but not talking to her is killing me, knowing that I might lose her over something I didn't even do makes me want to wring Yamkela's neck for being a b\*tch.

"And then wena why are you so grumpy?" My father asks when I walk past him on the passage headed to my bedroom

"Nothing."

"Awukwazi ukuthi nothing mfondini while your face looks like a dumpling, kuqhubekeka ntoni Thando."

(You can't say it's nothing) (What's going on)

My father is against my relationship with Hlehle, he'd probably celebrate that it's over between us so I don't think he's the right person to talk to.

“Ndimamele.” He says with his brow arched; I know the expression on his face all too well he’s commanding me to start talking

(I’m listening)

“Uxolo tata kodwa andizukwazi ukuthetha nawe ngale ngxaki.”

(I’m sorry dad but I can’t talk to you about this.)

“Ngoba kutheni?”

(Why)

“Because you’ve never supported my relationship with Nobuhle and I honestly don’t need any negativity right now.”

“Really? Is that what you think of me?” he sighs looking a bit pained when I don’t reply “I know I didn’t exactly support this relationship when you first told us about it but that doesn’t mean I wish for it to fail, you’re my son and your happiness means the world to me. I’m only against the relationship because I don’t want you to land yourself in trouble seeing that this girl is underage not because I don’t want you to be in a

relationship with her, I'm a father and I know I would go crazy if I found out a 24-year-old man is dating my 17-year-old daughter. It was nothing malicious son just my fatherly instincts at play"

"You're right, I guess I understand where you're coming from."

"So will you tell me what's going on?"

"Yes." I have no choice

"Ok, let's go talk in my study." I nod and follow him to his study room; he offers me a chair and fills two glasses with the whiskey that is on his table. He settles on his chair after giving me my glass. I'm a bit hesitant to take the glass from him because believe it or not this is the first time my father offers me alcohol; he knows I drink but I never do it in front of him. I take a sip and start narrating everything that happened.

"I won't lie I'm very shocked and disappointed in Yamkela for what she did, I didn't expect something like this from her. I

know how you feel but we can't ignore the fact that she's part of the family and the two of you will always see each other one way or the other, I think we should tell her parents about what she did so they can chastise their child, or I won't be comfortable having her in my house if she can look at you with those eyes. I mean the two of you were raised as siblings, if she can do this to you it means she can do the same thing to Langa. Why did she wait until you fell in love before she confessed her feelings? I'm worried about what else she's capable of doing if she can fake being drunk, call you to fetch her knowing full well that you're with your girlfriend, and try to seduce you."

"Uhm I didn't expect this, I mean you love Yamkela like your own, and uncle Luyolo is your best friend."

"I do but you're my son and you will always come first."

#89

“SURPRISE!” Bellows Nokwazi and Nobuhle as my wife and I make our way through the door, the apartment is decorated with black, red, and white balloons and some are floating on the floor. There's a big transparent balloon with gold tints, written "we appreciate you" using gold italic font given to my wife by Nobuhle.

I've arranged something like this for my wife in the past, but my setup never looked as good as what I see before my eyes right now, the apartment has completely transformed, the arrangement is mind-blowing and I can admit with my full chest that women are so much better at this decorating thing than men can ever be, because wow!

“Oh, my word, this looks so beautiful.” My wife says teary-eyed seemingly blown away like I am

“This is nothing compared to what the two of you have done for us.”- Nokwazi

“Yeah, Kwazi is right...bhuti you’ve been the best brother we could ever ask for; you’ve always put us first and did your best to provide for all our needs. We are not your kids; you were not forced to do anything for us, but you did it and not once did you ever complain. We are the luckiest girls in the world to have been blessed with a brother like you, the most selfless, loving, caring, wise, and protective handsome big brother in the whole wide world. There’s no big enough gift in this world no matter how expensive that would ever describe your worth in my life, I love you so so much bhuti wami please accept this small gift as a token of our appreciation. One day when I’m an engineer and making money I promise to reward you, to me you’re more than just a brother, you’re a father, a friend, and my role model. While other people look up to celebrities, I look up to you because you inspire and motivate me, you’re the most kindhearted, hardworking, and selfless person I know. The person I love the most in this world.” I’m at loss for words, I don’t know what to say. Her words are heartwarming and I’ll forever treasure them

She comes towards me, hands me a gift bag, and attempts to hug me, but I pull her in my arms sweeping her off her feet, and give her the biggest and tightest hug ever.

“I love you too sthandwa sam, thank you for your kind words,” I whisper into her ear and break the hug

“Buhle has summed it all, I’ve been the most difficult sibling to deal with, very disrespectful, selfish, self-centered, rebellious, and every other negative word you can think of, but you never got tired of me. You never stopped loving and wanting the best for me, thank you so much for loving me through all of my mistakes for always being there whenever I need you, and for never reminding me of my mistakes when I’m down or using words like ‘I told you so’ even when you should. The reason why I was so embarrassed to come back home after everything was because you tried your best to warn me and stir me into the right path, but I never listened because I thought I knew better than you, I didn’t want to come back home because I know I have embarrassed you and I didn’t want your reputation tainted because of me. I expected you to chastise me and tell me how much of a disappointment I am to you, our family, and all of that but you embraced me and allowed me to cry in your arms instead, you had every right to yell, curse and even beat me up after everything I did but you looked at me with nothing but love in your eyes and reassured me that things would be okay.” Emotions are high in the room; everyone is emotional,

and my wife and Buhle are sniffing while almost every word that eludes Nokwazi's mouth is accompanied by tears

“Thank you for loving me even when I didn't deserve it, I love you so much and just like Buhle one day I will do something to show you how much I appreciate you. I don't want to tell you what I'll do but I promise you won't die before I thank you for being the best brother in the whole universe, blessed I am to call myself your sister. I love you.” Her voice is hoarse, and most of her words are barely audible I had to read her lips to hear most of what she said.

“Oh, nana you're not a disappointment, never refer to yourself like that again in your life. You are human and you made a few mistakes, as long as umphefumulo usadibene ne nyama there's a chance to fix things. There's still an opportunity to turn your life around and make Nokwazi proud, not me, not Buhle, and not our late parents but yourself, you, Nokwazi proud. I love you so much and I'll never stop, come here.” I say with my arms spread open, she paces and throws herself in them and I squeeze her in my arms. A loud sob breaks out of her lips tearing my heart to pieces

“You need to forgive yourself sisi, we have all forgiven you,” Anzani says rubbing her back in circles

“Sis Anzani is right Kwazi, we have forgiven and love you so much. You are not defined by your past mistakes, there’s a lot of greatness locked inside of you waiting to be unleashed. Be kind to yourself, we have forgiven you.” Nobuhle says joining in the group hug

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NARRATED

After the emotional moment, Nokwazi pulled herself together and ran to the bathroom to refresh and came back to join the others who are now sitting comfortably in the lounge, and of course, the couple has occupied the love seat. Quinton has his gift bag in hand and is showing Anzani his gifts, he loves all of them. They bought him a watch, a beautiful navy tie, and cologne. There’s been a permanent smile on his face since he unwrapped his gifts, he has even tested the cologne by

spritzing it all over his clothes, and as a result, the entire apartment smells of his new cologne.

“Great, you’re back. Let’s continue” Nobuhle says standing to her feet as soon as Nokwazi comes into view, Nokwazi picks up her pace and stands beside Nobuhle.

“Sis Anzani, my brother’s gorgeous gorgeous wife. Thank you for being so warm, welcoming, and loving to me, for always showing me love, advising me, and for being the best big sister to me. You were not forced to love me or do any of the things you do for me

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I appreciate you so much and I thank God every day that my brother chose you to be his wife. You embody who I want to be in the future as a wife, a mother, and a sister-in-law, I always tell anyone who cares to listen that my brother is the most blessed man in the world because he didn’t only find a woman who loves him, but he found one who loves and accepts his family as her own. Thank you for my beautiful nephew, Zothando, and thank you so much for loving my brother and choosing him even with all his baggage. I know not every woman would want to settle with a man with so many

responsibilities on his shoulders, but you did, and you never complained, most people have negative things to say about their sisters-in-law but thank the Lord because I can't even think of one bad thing to say about you." She chuckles "Yes, you're not perfect but you are to me, and I love you more than words can describe. The age difference between us isn't that great but you are a mother figure in my life, God knew what he was doing when he brought you into our lives, he knew my brother will need a helper since our mother wouldn't be around for long."

Anzani who was weeping throughout Buhle's speech jolts up and pulls the younger into a hug while Nokwazi and Quinton watch in admiration

"Aw phela cedani nani, kunini ni bambene!"

(Finish up, you've been holding each other for a while now)

Quinton jokes causing everyone to roar in laughter, Anzani and Nobuhle break off the hug and wipe each other's tears before pecking one another's lips.

“Yewena Nobuhle umenzani umkami wena? Pasop!” Quinton warns and the room erupts in laughter

(What are you doing to my wife)

“I know you and I didn’t start on the right foot, you probably don’t trust me or have your reservations about me rightfully so because I did a lot of bad things to you in the past for absolutely no reason. Driven by jealousy and resentment, I’ve only been living with you for a few days, but they were enough for me to realize how wrong I was about you. You’re nothing I always thought you were, you’re kind and pure-hearted. I agree with Nobuhle, our brother is truly blessed to have a wife like you, there’s something I’ve heard a few people say during my stay at Northwest and it goes like “Pelo yahae eya jeha” which simply means the person's heart is so beautiful one can eat it and that’s exactly how your heart is. If the roles were reversed and I was in your place, I know I would have never allowed you into my home hell I wouldn’t want someone like me next to me because you never know if they’ve truly changed, I appreciate your love and support and I’m so angry at myself for having such a beautiful person within my reach but didn’t utilize them and denied myself a big sister because of my unfounded jealousy.” They all laugh “But no worries, I will take advantage now so be ready to have a nagging little sister.”

Anzani smiles touched by her kind words “I don’t mind.”

“It’s not like you have a choice.” Anzani chuckles, who knew Nokwazi had this easy-going and friendly side to her? “You’re stuck with me for life regardless of what happens between you and my brother in the future, you deserve so much more than what we bought for you, but this is the little we could afford please accept our gift to you. Please wait while we go and fetch your gift from our room.”

“Go ahead.”

The girls run to the bedroom and return a heartbeat later carrying a big basket filled with toiletries, a pack of Ferrero Roche chocolates, biscuits, and other sweet treats wrapped in see-through plastic. Nobuhle is carrying a bouquet of red roses.

“Huh! And I only got three things?” Complains Quinton next to Anzani

“Stop being jealous, you were happy with your gift before you saw mine...What’s that scripture about jealousy again?”

“Umona ucala esweni uye enhlizweni.” The girls sing in unison

“Exactly so bhutiza let me have my moment.” Anzani says swooning over her gifts “Thank you so much for doing this ladies, I really appreciate it.”

“Wait until you see what we have cooked for you.”-Nobuhle

“What?” Anzani quips curiosity already dealing with her

“Delele, mashonhza, and pap,” Nokwazi replies causing Anzani to scream in jubilation

“Where’s my son?” Quinton says prompting all of them to laugh at his drama.

“Sleeping in his cot.”-Nokwazi

“Let me go to him.”

“Stop being jealous baby, I’ll share these with you,” Anzani says gesturing to her basket of goodies, a big smile brightens up his face

“Really?”

“Yes, my love.” She replies and pulls him in for a kiss

“Such a crybaby!”

“Tell me about it.”

The girls say and scurry out of the room excusing the lovebirds who have deepened the kiss and by the look of things, they have forgotten about the other people in the room.

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AGANG

Goitse took the test this afternoon and she's pregnant like I suspected, I'm not as happy and excited as I always thought I would be if she falls pregnant and I feel terrible. I should be over the moon, jumping for joy because after 31 years of life I'm about to become a father and I'm having this baby with the most amazing woman but I'm not happy, not even a little bit...is this normal or this is how being a deadbeat dad starts? By not being excited about the pregnancy then you end up abandoning your kids. God, please help me, I don't want to be like my father. I know how it feels to be raised by a single mother as a male child and I vowed to be better than my sperm donor that's why I waited for so long before I could have kids, I've always convinced myself that I'm a better man than my father but it seems the apple doesn't fall far from the tree after all, where's the excitement I'm supposed to be feeling after uncovering this wonderful news?

I'm on nightshift and have stepped outside for a smoke break, I feel footsteps approaching me from behind I don't have to turn

to know who it is. I know his scent very well; he has used the same perfume for years now

“Ao mmata what’s going on? Why does it seem like you’re avoiding me.”- Baboloki

“Mxm!” I click my tongue and ignore him

“Agang if you have a problem with me, please tell me so we can fix it.” I don’t like putting myself in a position where I have to exchange words or argue with anyone because I don’t like who I turn into when I’m angry

I throw my cigarette bud on the ground and step on it with my boot “Babo, leave me alone.” I attempt to leave but he grabs my arm

“Come on Agang, let’s talk.”

“Okay, tell me why did you tell Goitse about Nokwazi? What was your intention and where did the two of you even see each

other? Me, who is her boyfriend I hadn't seen her for weeks before today, but you did and even had time to gossip. Le kopane kae?" He gasps and swallows nothingness, it's obvious he wasn't expecting this question

(Where did you two meet)

"E monna bua pele ke ho thuba sefatlhego ka rifi, you wanted to talk things out now talk!"

(Speak up before I rearrange your face with my boot)

"Ke kopa re seke ra lwa tlhe, kana re di tsala, eseng ditsala fela mme ditsala tsa tlhogo ya kgomo, Ke kopa re se letlelle ntwanyana fela e re kgaoganye."

(Please man let's not fight, we are friends, best friends let us not allow a misunderstanding to get between us)

"Baboloki nkase gobotse gape, bua!"

(I won't ask again, talk!)

"Okay...I met her on her way from the mall, we got in the same taxi." I take steps toward him closing the distance between us

“Ok, and how did you end up telling her about Nokwazi? Are the two of you friends now?” I ask pulling his collar and fixing him up, my breath fanning his face and the fear I smell on him alarms me “Why are you so scared Babo?”

“I’m not scared, it’s just...” He exhales

“Just what?”

“Agang man come please don’t do this, you’re scaring me let’s talk calmly.”

“Calmly? What do you mean? I’m calm or am I not calm?”

“Hhhh...you know what I mean Agang, please man don’t do this.”

“Ketla go thuba ka clapa gobane ke go botsisa sentle hela kele calm mara wena wang’gafela.”

(I'll smack your face because I'm asking you calmly and you're talking crazy.)

“Okay....I told her because I can see that you are falling for Nokwazi, you're my friend and I don't want you to make a mistake and end up losing Goitsemodimo because of that girl. She's beautiful I know but Goitse is the right woman for you, you two have been through a lot and I would hate to see you throw away that because of someone like Nokwazi...I'm sorry I was only looking out for you as your friend.”

“So, you live in my heart now, you see what I'm feeling and who I'm feeling it for huh?”

“No but be honest with yourself Agang you were getting attached to that girl, you know you feel something stronger than care for her.”

“Even if that was the case, it doesn't give you the right to run to my girlfriend and spill the beans. I was going to tell Goitse everything in my own time, you didn't have to run your mouth like a woman. If you were so concerned as you claim then you

could have spoken to me, your friend, and not run to report me to Goitsemodimo like you did.”

“You’re right, I’m sorry.”

“I’m not comfortable with your level of involvement in my relationship Babo, I told you to butt out of my business last time, but it seems my warning wasn’t clear enough because you still had the guts to go running your mouth. I’ll say this for the last time, tswa mo relationshiping yame! The next time something like this happens again I swear I’ll break your ribs and disfigure you, wantella wena monna mxm o bona ke didimetsi o ntira sematla.”

(Stay out of my relationship) (You’re disrespecting me man, just because I’m quiet doesn’t mean I’m a fool)

#90

NARRATED

“Shit babe man wantshosa!” Goitsemodimo says clutching her chest with her hand

Agang blows out smoke through his nostrils looking at her with a blank face, fear spreads throughout her body like wildfire.

“Rra go diragalang?” her voice comes out squeaky and quavering

(What’s going on)

“Where did you see Baboloki?”

“When?” She counters

“When else did you meet him?” His eyebrow is raised in suspicion

“Oh, you’re talking about the day he told me about the HIV-infected slay queen?”

“Would you stop calling her like that? I let it slip the last time because you were angry, but I won’t allow you to call her names, when did you turn into this person that labels people, or is it the pregnancy?” He’s angry, his voice might have remained monotone throughout his sentence but the warning it carries is loud.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know what got into me.”

“Ok, back to the question I asked you.”

“Uhm...we met in a taxi on my way back from the mall why?”  
Thank God Babo already briefed her on what to say.

“Ok.” He says eyeing her suspiciously, something feels off about this whole thing but he can’t quite put a finger on it yet but something is definitely hitting the water here.

His phone rings exempting Goitse from his intense stare, a smile creeps up on his face when he sees the caller ID. He picks up the call and walks out of the bedroom, once he’s out of sight Goitse breaths a sigh of relief

“Shit! That was close.” She says to herself, at this point she doesn’t care about who the caller that got Agang grinning like that is. She’s grateful to whoever it is for helping her, even if it’s for a few minutes.

She almost shit her pants, she has never seen that side of him. In the three and a half years they’ve been together she’s always been exposed to the sweet, calm, and humble Agang, not the terrifying man she was introduced to today

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In Braamfontein Nokwazi is sitting on top of the toilet talking to Agang on the phone, she’s not peeing or anything but she wanted privacy that’s why she came here.

“Don’t tell me you’re calling from the bathroom.” Agang questions in his ever raspy voice that tickles parts of Nokwazi's body that she never knew were capable of sentiment.

She laughs “How did you know?”

“Come on Kwazi the echo gives it away, don’t tell me you didn’t know.”

It’s not the first time someone calls her Kwazi, but how her name rolls off his tongue is very different from how everyone else calls her. It’s sexy and has a zoo of butterflies fluttering in her tummy.

“Of course, I know but I opened the window and the door. I thought you wouldn't realize.” He chuckles

“You've got jokes.”

“Enough about that, remember when you asked me to find what my passion is?”

“Yes?”

“I think I finally found it.”

“And?”

“I’ve always been passionate about storytelling. I remember during my primary school years all the kids from our street would flood to me whenever I’m talking with stones, I don’t know what its called in your language but in mine, we call it “ukuxoxisa” and when I started high school I moved to pen and paper/paper and instrument and drew houses on paper, I remember I would always get into trouble for knocking holes on the school desk.” He cracks up going down memory lane

“I remember that thing, almost every girl used to do it during my high school years and some were so in it that they wouldn’t talk without digging holes into the desk with their

pens/instruments. Their fingers would sometimes accidentally get stabbed by the instruments or pens but not even that could stop the girls. The unfortunate part was that our school jerseys would pay the price, they would rip especially on around the elbow area because wow those instruments eradicated the school desks.” Nokwazi laughs

“Yeah, I was that girl. It was a phase to many as most girls outgrew it as they grew up but I didn’t, I had so many stories in my head so I moved to using my mind to play them out in my head and that’s how I get myself to fall asleep most of the time.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really. There are just so many stories in my head threatening to drive me crazy, I have written a few novels but I’ve never shown them to anyone because I’m scared to hear feedback. I’m scared to face the possibility that maybe I’m not as good as I think I am at this storytelling thing...I’ve read a few books and I think I know which niche I want to focus on.”

“You need to stop doubting your capabilities because trust me no matter how good your writing may be, not everyone will love or relate to it so you need to believe in your talent so that other people’s negative opinions won’t demotivate you.”

“I know, but that’s easier said than done... I guess it’s human nature to seek some sort of validation from other people.”

“You don’t need anyone to validate you Kwazi, validation and happiness should come from within. Nothing that comes from outside will truly satisfy you, it’ll only make you happy for a short while and then you’ll get over it. So believe in yourself and nurture your talent, read literature books and improve your writing skills, learn from others and have someone in the same field whom you look up to and learn from.”

“Thanks, Agang.”

“Don’t thank me yet, share your work with me and I promise to give you an honest review.”

“Really? You would do that for me?”

“Yes, I love reading so I don’t see why not.”

“Wow, thank you so much Agang. You’re the best.” He laughs

“Don’t thank me yet, your homework is still not done, you still need to find a career path to follow. Look up the available careers options that would best suit and complement your passion for writing and storytelling and apply, next year I want you back in school.”

“Ave ulawulana nje!”

“Whatever you said, nawe!” she laughs out loud

“Shame, that’s probably the only Zulu word you know. For the record I didn’t swear at you, I said you are bossy.”

“If wanting the best for you makes me bossy then so be it.”

“I’m kidding I know you mean well.”

“Agang.” A feminine voice calls out in the background and pain shoots straight to Nokwazi's heart

“You have no reason to be jealous Nokwazi, you knew he had a girlfriend and still foolishly allowed yourself to fall in love with him.” Her subconscious mocks her

“Nokwazi I’m sorry but I have to hang up now... we’ll talk some other time, my girlfriend is here. Goodnight.” Agang says and hangs up not giving her a chance to respond. A lone tear rolls down her cheek, out of all the men in the world did it have to be a man who belongs to another that her heart chooses? Damn this stupid organ, it always falls for the ones she can never have!

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NOKWAZI

“Yo, waze wahlala e toilet bo yini bewukaka amatshe na?”

Buhle remarks as I make my way inside the bedroom

(You were in the loo for so long, were you shitting stones?)

I know she means well but I’m not in the mood, my mood just dropped below 0%. I can’t help myself, I’m emotional as f\*\*k, it annoys me sometimes but it’s who I am and I can’t change it.

“What's wrong? You don’t look too well.”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Okay but please don’t bottle things up, it’s not healthy, and remember HIV is not as scary and bad as people make it out to be. There are so many people living with HIV and they all lead healthy lives, I would never think that they are positive if they weren’t so open about their status.”

“Relax

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that's not why I'm feeling down."

"Are you worried about what people are saying about you? It'll blow over soon and they'll forg-" Yes, people are still talking trash about me on social media

"Woah relax...it's Agang the security guard who took me in when I was stranded."

"What about him, did something happen to him?"

"No..but I think I am in love with him." Her eyes widen in shock

"Before you judge me, I tried to stop myself from feeling this way trust me I tried but I think I have feelings for him, like deep and immense feelings. Nothing like what I've felt for anyone in the past"

"That's a good thing or is it not?"

“No, it’s not. He has a girlfriend that he’s in love with and I doubt he would ever go for someone like me even if he were single.”

“Why not? You are beautiful, you have a beautiful body, and you have an amazing personality so why wouldn’t he fall for you?”

“Have you forgotten my status? I’m HIV positive and I’m known for dating blessers, I doubt a man like him who lives a peaceful and drama free life would wish for a girlfriend with a past like mine.”

“Stop judging yourself harshly, the only reason he wouldn’t fall for you is that his heart already belongs to someone else like you just mentioned nothing else.” I love her for always seeing the best in me, but truth be told I bhubhudled my youth and I have no one to blame but myself. I don’t want to lie to myself and raise my hopes, a man like Agang would never take interest in me and I have made peace with it.

“If you say so.”

“Yes, I am saying so. So tell me about this Agang guy who is driving you crazy, is he handsome?”

“Maybe not your type of handsome like Thando who looks like a colored with striking good looks, Agang has a more subtle kind of beauty the kind that only gets better the longer you look at him. His skin is dark like coffee that has a bit of milk, he has small Chinese eyes with the most beautiful long lashes. His eyebrows are perfectly shaped, it's so unfair that a male can have such perfect eyebrows while most of us have to draw ours, his voice is raspy and thick maybe because he smokes but gosh he sounds so sexy whenever he speaks and his lips! He has the most delectable lips I've ever seen, they are not thick nor thin but they look so juicy and soft, the bottom one is a bit pinkish despite him being dark-skinned and a smoker.”

“Ai shem uyakuhlanyisa lo bhuti shem! Look at the smile on your face when you talk about him.”

(He drives you crazy)

“I won’t lie, he does and I can say for the first time in my life I love someone for who he is not for what he has. It’s not even about his looks for me, part of me believes I would have still fallen in love with him even if he was missing an eye or if he was ugly, I love his good looks of course and I’m glad that he is good looking but that’s not what drew me to him. Ngithanda ubuyena bakhe, his inner being, how caring, wise, and how he seems to want the best for me is what drew me to him. I’ve never had anyone except my family care about me the way he does”

“Wow, you really love him it’s such a shame that he has a girlfriend. He sounds like a great guy, you’ve been through a lot relationships wise it would have been nice to see you being loved the way you deserve for a change but don’t fret there’s someone out there for all of us and I believe that one day you’ll meet the one for you, he’ll be single and he’ll give you all the love you deserve.”

“I can’t wait for that day, I yearn to experience how it feels to be really loved by someone like how our brother loves Anzani, or how Thando loves you, I also want to be someone's everything. To mean the world to someone's son, I want him to look at me like how our brother looks at Anzani as if he can see

his whole world in her eyes...anyway enough about me where is your boyfriend, you haven't spoken about him since you arrived?" Sadness instantly mirrors her features

"We broke up."

"What? Why?"

"He cheated."

"No!" I know I always told her Thando would cheat on her but that was jealousy and bitterness talking, that guy looked genuinely in love with her and I didn't expect him to cheat. At least not so soon

"Yes, I should have listened to you."

"I'm sorry little sister, what happened?"

She narrates the entire story to me

“No, Buhle... I don’t think he cheated.”

“What?”

“I think he was telling the truth, you’re playing right into the trap and doing exactly what Yamkela wanted when she planned this whole thing.”

“Really?”

“Yes, take it from me. That Yamkela tricked him, call your man, and stop this nonsense before you lose him to someone else. You clearly know nothing about relationships little sister, I’ve never been in a stable one myself but I know relationships are not for the faint-hearted. Look at Anzani and our brother, do you think their relationship is smooth without any problems?”

“No, but I’m sure their problems don’t include cheating.”

“You can never be too sure, you’d be surprised to find out the things people endure in marriages and relationships. It’s never easy, you need to be strong if you want to survive the dating game.”

“But can’t love just be smooth and nice? Why does it always have to hurt and be emotionally taxing?”

“Unfortunately that’s how life goes, every journey has a few bumps and curves nothing worth having is ever smooth. Take school, for example, there are certain challenges you need to overcome for you to get that pass, even in your career when you’re a qualified engineer you’ll still go through some challenges and tests. The same will happen in your faith, in your relationship, and in basically every sphere of your life. Take our relationship for instance there were so many challenges and disagreements before we got to where we are today. It wasn’t smooth, so why didn’t you give up on me or our relationship?”

“That’s different, we are family nothing and no one can ever change that or come between us.”

“That’s true but just like we fight and makeup, a relationship is also like that. Some fights are more serious than others, some fights can be solved by a simple thing like you giving me a bar of chocolate as a peace offering while others are resolved by us sitting down and talking things through. In the same way that’s what a romantic relationship is like, talk to Thando and give him a chance to explain himself otherwise you’ll lose a man you love over something that can easily be fixed. I know you’re not stupid, think about this carefully and search deep in your heart and mind, do you really think he cheated on you or you’ve allowed what I’ve always said he will do and your fears and insecurities to cloud your judgment?”

#91

What people neglect to mention when they scare you into accepting your ancestral calling using phrases like 'nothing will work out for you or your kids if you don't accept your calling' is to warn you not to expect things to magically fall into place because you're now a maine, it takes a while for things to fall into place and be the way they should and let's be honest with ourselves not everyone's lives change for the better after accepting their calling. Some people's lives get even more messed up after being initiated and that's the truth we need to acknowledge.

I'm slowly adapting to my new life, I've started consulting with clients and I must say the first consultation I had was an epic flop, I was so nervous and fumbled half of the time. I looked like someone who didn't know what they were doing and judging by her reaction the client was not at all impressed with my work. She told everyone willing to listen about our botched consultation and I was sure my maine career was over before it even began, as to how I kept getting more clients after that embarrassing scandal is a mystery to me.

Thanks to my ancestor's guidance I'm getting better at this with each client that consults, I never reckoned this would be easy but I didn't foresee it being so difficult. I mean I completed my maine training and my Gobela was impressed with my abilities, can you blame me for thinking I had everything under control? I guess learning never stops as this proves to be another learning curve for me, I'm discovering many things about my gift and how to use it except this time the lessons come directly from my ancestors as I have learned to communicate and listen to them.

People in the community are slowly getting used to seeing me clad in my maine attire and it's starting to sink in that this is who I am now, things are still a bit rocky financially but I'm in a much better place than I've been in years and I couldn't be gladder. My kids are happy and at peace, my daughter is married to a wonderful man and is expecting her second child, and my son is doing well at school and adapting to staying in Ratanda with his aunt. I don't regret the choice I made to follow my calling and I'm grateful that my ancestors kept their end of the deal. My children's happiness and well-being come first to me

A smile spreads on my face when I receive a call from my daughter

“Ngwananga.”

“Mma o vuwa hani?”

(How are you)

“Ndo vuwa zwavhudi ngamanda ngwananga.”

(I’m very well my child)

“Ndo takala ngamanda upfa hezwo, I want to apologize for how I spoke to you the last time we spoke mma.”

(I’m glad to hear that)

“It’s okay my child I have forgiven you... so you finally came back to your senses?” She releases a shy giggle

“Yes mma, I’m keeping the baby. Quinton is so excited.”

“I’m glad you didn’t go through with your madness because a child is given by God, he's a gift. God saw you worthy and blessed you with two bundles of joy. I don’t need to remind you how fortunate you are to have the ability to bare your husband kids, especially in your condition, and you shouldn’t take that for granted....you are blessed and highly favored.

Most women who are ‘healthier’ than you struggle to conceive.”

“Mma! I have heard you.”

“No, I have to give you a piece of my mind so you never consider that madness ever again in your life.”

“I won’t, I promise.”

“Good then.”

“Which account should I send your money to? Capitec or Absa?”

“What money? I’m okay my child I can manage you don’t need to give me any money, you have a family and kids to think about now.”

“Ao mma don’t pretend like you don’t want money, you know you want it.” She teases causing a chuckle to bubble from my throat

“You're too forward Anza! You can send it to my Capitec account, thank you so much ngwananga.”

“It's a pleasure mma.”

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THANDO

I’m on my way to Nobuhle's place, shaking in my boots because I don't know why I was summoned nor did I attempt to ask. I

was elated to hear from her after so long, questioning her was the last thing I wanted to do. I agreed with everything she said, overjoyed that I would get another opportunity to see her again because at some point during our 'separation' I was convinced that I lost her for good so you can imagine the warmth I felt in my heart when I saw her name flash on my screen.

Today is Saturday, five days after I received her call. It was Monday evening when she called asking me to come and see her today. I was apprehensive throughout the course of the week anxious because I didn't know whether to expect good or bad news, she might have unblocked me but things were still icy between us. We hardly speak over the phone, she replies with one-word answers whenever I try to have a conversation with her. I took the hint and only speak to her when necessary, I didn't want to push and risk annoying her and have her cancel the meeting.

I was not sure what to bring so I bought her a slab of her favorite chocolate and a bouquet of fresh lilies, she loves chocolate and I hope it will serve its purpose and pave the way for me by softening her up. After an hour behind the wheel I finally park my car outside her commune and sniff my breath to make sure the stench of alcohol is gone, she doesn't like the

smell of beer and the last thing I want to do is do anything that will irritate her. I put a sweet- black halls lozenges in my mouth before stepping out of the car carrying the chocolates and lilies in my hand.

The gate is not locked so I walk right in, I told her to open it for me when I was five minutes away, thank God I don't bump into anyone on my way to the bedroom she shares with Lungile. I take a deep breath willing myself for what is about to come before hitting my knuckles against the wooden door.

"Come in." her velvety voice sounds from inside

I push the door and toddle inside, she's sitting on top of her bed with her back leaned against the wall, hugging her knees to her chest. She's still the beautiful Hlehle I fell in love with except her face is missing the beautiful smile I have grown to love.

"Hey" I greet pulling a chair and settling on it

“Please come and sit here.” She says patting the space next to her on the bed and changing her sitting position

“Thanks...These are for you.” A smile tugs on the corners of her lips but she quickly covers it up with a straight face and accepts the flowers and chocolate

“Thanks...I called you here because I want to know what happened that day with Yamkela, I want to know everything, so please don't leave anything out”

This is what I've been waiting to hear for days, I like that she didn't beat about the bush. I jump at the opportunity and narrate everything exactly the way it happened.

“I believe you, I'm sorry it took this long for me to trust you but-“

“Shhh, it's okay you don't have to explain yourself to me...I understand my love.”

“Really? Just like that?”

“Yes, I left you here and ran to her aid when I could’ve told her to take an Uber then I took too long to call you as I promised to. You took matters into your own hands and called me, I reply naked under the covers, and the next thing you know my so-called sister walks into my bedroom naked. So, I totally understand why you would think I was cheating on you.”

“No, Thando I was stupid to think that I mean think about it why would you pick up my video call if you knew she was coming? And I saw your face, you were shocked to see her and I heard you shouting at her and the anger and distaste in your voice were loud, I should have trusted you and not dumped you at the first sign of trouble. That was very immature of me”

“It's okay my love, it’s all in the past now...what matters now is that we are together again, my life was bitter without you in it.”

“Mine too, I missed you so much not a single day passed without me thinking of picking up the phone and call you, the

urge to call you would accelerate at night when I had to sleep.”  
I wrap my arms around her and give her the biggest bear hug

“I love you sthandwa sam,” I whisper into her ear and sensually  
kiss her neck inducing a moan to escape from her lips

“Ohhh Thando...” she says laying her back on the bed and  
slanting her head giving me access to her neck

I get on top of her and lock lips with her kissing her deeply, my  
heart threatens to break out of my chest at the tinge of our lips.  
Her hands are all over my back caressing me while mine fondles  
her small boobs, she helps me take off her dress, and my dick  
jerks painfully at the sight of her beautiful body and soft skin.

The only piece of clothing she has on is her underwear, she’s  
fidgety and uncomfortable under my stare, unable to take it  
anymore she grabs a throw and covers her nakedness with it.

“There’s no need to be uncomfortable with me Hlehle, every  
part of you is beautiful .”

“Uhm you promised to wait for me, I’m not ready for sex.”

“I know, Sthandwa Sam I know and I will never do anything you’re not ready for. I will wait for you as I promised you.” She sighs in relief

“I thought you wanted to have sex.”

“I know but I won’t do it, I only want to taste you but if you’re uncomfortable with that as well then it's okay we won’t do anything.”

“Like licking my..my..” she can’t bring herself to say the magic word and I can’t help but laugh at her innocence, she’s so cute.

“Yes.”

“I'm nervous but okay..let me go and bath first,” she says attempting to climb down the bed but I grab her hand

“No

you don't need to. You're perfect like this, I want you like this.”

“No, Thando what if I smell.”

“Please relax and just trust me okay?” She's not convinced but she bobs her head in agreement anyway.

I remove the throw hiding her body from me and pull her in for a passionate smooch, we kiss until she relaxes and is comfortable with my hands on her bare body oh my goodness her skin is so soft and smooth. I move my kisses down to her neck and gradually move down to her bust and make love to her engorged nipples with my tongue, she moans out loud throwing her head back enjoying the feeling. Her soft sexy little moans are like music to my ears, oh how I love pleasing my woman.

I take my time worshipping her body with my kisses, branding her with my love starting with her loins and teasing her belly

button with my tongue. Her body stiffens as my mouth lands on her hips, she crosses her legs denying me access to her haven.

“Babe please open, I promise I won’t do anything to you. Please.” At this point I can’t recognize my own voice, it’s thick, laden with lust.

She takes a deep breath and detangles her crossed legs, with my hands on either side of her hips and my face on her nana I grab her lacy underwear and pull it out. She bucks her hips helping me to take it off, I pull it out of her feet and plant soft kisses from her feet up to her inner thighs. It’s as if shock waves ripple through her body every time my mouth lands on her bare skin, she trembles and releases a feverish breath.

“You smell so sweet, open up for me.” She slowly parts her legs revealing her small pinkish nana, my member twitches and grows larger instantly. This is by far the most beautiful nana I’ve ever seen and the fact that it’s never been touched or seen by anyone else makes it even more desirable.

"More." She shyly spreads her legs and shuts her eyes, I bury my face between her legs separating her folds with my tongue, and eat her up swiping my tongue on her wetness. Oh my goodness I love the tastes of her on my tongue...

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AGANG

Nokwazi sent me a PDF of her work, once I started reading I couldn't put it down because every chapter left me yearning for more, and before I knew it, It was five in the morning time to go to work without having slept a wink, which is why I'm a walking zombie now yawning every five minutes like a fool. I tried drinking coffee, bio plus, and energy drink but they only managed to keep sleep away for a few hours then it was back to yawning again.

"You were busy last night huh? When we were sleeping you were busy doing adult things " Oupa, my colleague says laughing at me after seeing me yawn for the umpteenth time in the last thirty minutes

I laugh and throw a jab at his shoulder

“Wa phapha...I was reading a book, it was so nice I couldn’t put it down.”

“What was it about?”

“It’s a romantic novel.” He cracks up

“So you stayed up all night reading about love? Didn’t think you were one of those.”

“Those who?”

“Guys who read novels, especially romantic novels”

“Well I do, I’m a huge fan. I’m a hopeless romantic matter of fact.”

“Could never be me shem, I hate anything that has to do with me reading. I used to hate school, I was one of those kids who were accompanied by a stick to school every morning. I would cry a river every time my mother woke me up for school hoping my tears would do the trick and she’ll let me be but mang? That woman beat the shit out of me daily without fail until I realized that crying was not going to save me.” I’m laughing my lungs out imagining the whole scenario

“Really?”

“Yes, ore why kele security guard? I didn’t complete school laitaka, ke la phapha when I got to high school, got mixed up with the wrong crowd, started smoking, bunked classes, and eventually dropped out. My mom tried beating me forcing me to go back to school but it didn’t work because I had grown immune to the pain, she gave up eventually...but sometimes I regret it.” There’s a glint of sadness dancing in his eyes as he says this “I should’ve listened to my mom, who knows maybe I would be way ahead in life.”

“Maybe or maybe not ntjaka, life is unpredictable mfethu I went to school and did all of that but where did that leave me? I’m here today working as a security guard, living in a back room, and earning peanuts. People always say ‘hey hey do IT it has a lot of job opportunities but where? It’s been years monna since I graduated but I’ve never gotten a single IT job, the only jobs I get are the ones tsabo retail, garage, and all these other jobs that don’t pay. Ebile I’m no longer searching for a job, ke nkile degree ela ka tutula ka yona because it’s useless.”

“No, Agang you shouldn’t give up. Keep trying, unlike me, you have a qualification and can get a better job than this, you have another choice but I’m stuck here.”

“You do have a choice actually, you can go back to school and get your matric via Abet and apply for the course you want or just go to a TVET college and do NCV courses. You only need Grade 9 to do those and you do have Grade 9 right?” he laughs

“Of course I do.”

“Then you can go back to school if you want to, you don’t have to quit your job you can study part-time.”

“Thanks, man.”

“It’s a pleasure.”

“So, you’re just going to give up just like that and continue working as a security guard?”

“No, but I’m no longer interested in being employed by anyone. I’ve been saving money for years now, getting the required documentation to register my company. This is my last year working as a security guard next year I’m getting my business off the ground, officially that is.”

“Oh wow, what kind of business will it be?”

“I don’t like announcing my moves, I move in silence. You’ll see for yourself, I’ve already shared a lot.” Many a times our plans don’t succeed because we told someone about them, it happened to me so many times that I’ve lost count and that’s when I made a decision to never share my plans with anyone before they materialize. Everything has been going well ever since I started moving in silence, not announcing my moves.

“Ok, no problem I understand.”

#92

NARRATED

It's Sunday evening, Nokwazi is wearing her long pajama set and a thick winter gown on top, she has those thick winter colorful socks that look like boots on her feet. She's alone in the living room wrapped in a fleece blanket on the couch watching the Sunday night action movie playing on E tv. It has been a long day, she and Anzani woke up early to prepare the Sunday lunch before the entire family left for church. It was late afternoon when they walked into the apartment from church and feasted on the delicious Sunday meal, after the lunch while she and her brother played with Zothando, Anzani was busy ironing hers and her husband's laundry it's no wonder she hit the sack early tonight and Quinton being his clingy self he followed his wife to bed.

It's only early May but it's already super chilly in the evenings, this year's winter promises to be a cold one. When she sets her cup of hot chocolate on top of the armrest after taking a sip, she sees Agang's message on her screen, she picks up her

phone and unlocks it reading Agang's WhatsApp message from 3min ago.

HEY KWAZI, I'M DONE WITH YOUR BOOK. LET'S VIDEO CALL AND I'LL GIVE YOU A REVIEW.

What? he's done so soon! Happiness doesn't begin to describe how she feels right now. She jolts up from the couch, ignoring the cold breeze, and bounces up and down dancing in jubilation.

OK, NO PROBLEM.

She switches off the TV and lights before grabbing her fleece from the couch and jogs to her bedroom as soon as the ticks on her message turn blue. A minute later her phone vibrates, it's Agang calling.

"Hey." She picks and positions her phone on the bedside drawer and continues peeling the covers

“Hey, are you busy?”

“No, I’m almost done...see?” She says and hops into bed, Agang chuckles in response.

“I read your book and all I can say is WOW! You’re very talented Kwazi.” Oh, there he goes again, calling her Kwazi with that voice of his. Kahle kahle Agang’s plan is to make her fall madly in love with him ne?

“You’re not exaggerating right?”

“No, you’re very good Kwazi. There’s one thing I picked up though?”

“Ok, what?” she asks, her heart beating fast

“I don’t know if it was intentional, but I feel like the story ended way too soon, you could have stretched it if you wanted to and elaborated more on Kate’s recovery. For example, how she got over losing her husband and kids in the fire, the trauma she

went through before she accepted their passing, and I feel like you could've also explored more on Terry and Lizole's love story."

"I know, but I didn't because I thought maybe I'd drag the book and the reader would lose interest."

"You're very good Nokwazi, you need to start believing in yourself. That book is very intriguing, I couldn't put my phone down once I began reading. I didn't even sleep last night, reading your novel. I was yawning like a fool the whole day at work as a result." Nokwazi laughs, tears rolling down her cheeks, it's tears of elation for a change. Agang better not be lying about this

"Yes, Nokwazi. That's how good you are, you need to believe in yourself. South Africa needs fresh and raw talent like yours, the media industry needs rescuing Kwazi. We are tired of watching soapies that keep going around in circles and recycle storylines from previous seasons. Please do me and south Africa a favor and save us from these lazy writers!" Nokwazi giggles wiping her tears with her hands, but it proves futile because they keep streaming down her face.

“You’re such a cry baby!” He teases and pouts his lips squinting his sexy Chinese eyes narrowing them on her beautiful face.

She giggles “Ngiryt!... Thank you so much Agang.” She says in her nasal speech

“You’re talented Nokwazi, I for one believe in you...You’re going to be great!” Her lips quiver as she looks at him emotionally  
“Please don’t start crying again.” She laughs

“Leave me alone, okay!”

“At least you still look beautiful even when you’re crying that’s why I’m still on the line otherwise I would have long hung up”

“Uyaphapha shem! Lapho mina bengizitshela ukuthi uthulile!”

(You’re forward and here I thought you were quiet)

“Arg whatever.” He says

She offers him a small smile and silence befalls them; they silently gaze into each other's eyes. Breaths heavy and hearts beating fast, the mood suddenly tense.

"We need to stop this," Nokwazi says breaking the silence

"What?"

"This? Whatever it is, we need to stop it. I can't do this anymore."

"What? what are you talking about?"

"This friendship or whatever it is that's going on between us needs to stop."

"Why? Did I do something wrong?"

“No, but I can’t keep being friends with you.”

“Why?”

“BECAUSE I’M FALLING IN LOVE WITH YOU DAMMIT!” the words slip out of her before she can stop them, Agang looks at her wide-eyed visibly shocked by her confession. Mortification envelopes her like a blanket, she mashes the red button abruptly ending their video call, and immediately blocks Agang’s number.

“You had to go and embarrass yourself like that Nokwazi, great just great!” her subconscious chastises her

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ANZANI

I’m swiveling in front of the mirror making sure everything is okay with my outfit, make-up, and hair. Today is the D-day, your girl is finally going back to work. Mary, the nanny started

on Monday, and so far, I'm comfortable with her. What I like the most about her is that she's not a chancer, she knows a lot about kids and has years of experience under her belt plus Zothando seems to like her. I know some nannies tend to treat kids badly in the absence of their parents and pretend to be angels when you're around, in this case, I'm relieved that Nokwazi will be home during the day so there won't be a reason for me to worry about her mistreating my son.

Mpilo wraps his arms around my waist, hugging me from behind, and plants a wet kiss on my neck.

"You look beautiful Mrs. Ndlovu." He mutters looking at me in the mirror.

"Thank you, baby."

"Please tell your boss that you're pregnant so she doesn't bombard you with work, you don't need the stress." He's caressing my stomach as he says this

“I can’t say that Mpilo, I don’t want her to think I’m taking advantage of our friendship or her kindness. I don’t want any special treatment; I don’t want her to walk on eggshells around me. I’ll do what’s required of me.”

“Thembalam’ I know you’re a hard worker, passionate, and an excellent employee but you need to remember that you are pregnant mama. I don’t want anything causing you stress, I can’t risk losing you or our baby.” I exhale and turn around to look him in the eye wrapping my arms around his neck.

“I understand Gatsheni, trust me I would never do anything that endangers our child’s life.”

“I know but it’ll put my heart at ease when I know your boss is aware that you’re pregnant, that way she’ll know not to overwork you.” There’s no winning with him, he won’t let this go until I agree to do what he’s saying.

“Okay, Boyabenyathi I’ll tell her.” He cups my face in his palms looking into my eyes as if searching for something

“You’re not just saying that to get me off your back

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are you?” There’s no way I’m telling Ndalo that I’m pregnant, I don’t want any special treatment. I’m pregnant, not sick!

“I’m serious Mpilo, I’ll tell her.” He nods and plants a long peck on my lips.

“I trust you; I’ll wait for you in the car.” He kisses his sleeping son, grabs his suitcase from the vanity chair, and leaves the bedroom.

A tear escapes my eye when my gaze lands on my beautiful son, oh good lord I don’t think I can do this. We’ve never been apart for more than three hours since he was born, how will I spend 8 hours away from him? at this moment the idea of being a housewife, and raising my son seems very appealing but I can’t do that even if I wanted to because I need to secure the bag, so my kids live a comfortable life. A life much better than the one their father and I lived; I don’t know about other parents, but my kids motivate me to grind even harder. Tears

blur my vision as I look down on him, caressing his face with a finger.

“Mommy needs to go to work now, please be a good boy and don’t give Aunt Mary and Nokwazi too much trouble” I pick him up, careful not to wake him and take his blankie. I make my way to Nokwazi’s bedroom after locking my bedroom door. Everything Zothando needs is in the lounge, no one enters my bedroom in my absence.

“Come in.” Nokwazi’s sleep-laden voice permits me inside

“Hello, mfana wama auntiza come here.” Her arms are spread, ready to take him

“Shh, he’s still sleeping,” I murmur

“Oh, sorry I didn't realize. I just got too excited when I saw him.” My lips spread into a smile

The way Nokwazi loves my son is heartwarming to see, mostly because she didn't strike me as someone who has any interest in kids. If anything, living with her proved just how little I know about her. I fall in love with her every day as I keep uncovering new things about her, she's not a bad person.

She scoots and peels the blankets so I can lay him on the bed next to her.

"I'm so sorry to wake you"

"No, it's okay." Her eyes travel up and down my form "You look beautiful."

"Thank you. I'm leaving, I told Mary to come at 9 because Zothando normally wakes up around 9:30 or 10:00. He baths first thing in the morning then you give him his bottle, please tell Mary not to give him the bottle before bathing him, or else he'll cry when she tries to bathe him an-"

“I know, you told me all of this yesterday already...Just go to work sis, your son is in good hands. I know his routine, or have you forgotten that I’ve been living with you and seeing how you do things?” I chuckle

“Okay, I’ll leave.” I peck his forehead and half run to the door before Mpilo grows impatient, waiting for me downstairs.

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NARRATED

“Or jwang Agang?” Oupa says startling Agang whose thoughts are from here

“Dintshang monna? Are you okay?”

(What’s going on man)

“Yeah, I’m okay. Just a bit distracted that’s all.”

“You’re sure?” Oupa questions, concern loud in his tone.

“Yes, I’m sure don’t worry.”

“Okay if you say so.” He doesn’t believe him, but Agang is a private person, so he has no choice but to let it go

“Thanks.”

“What’s going between you and Babo?”

“Nothing, why?”

“He asked to exchange shifts with me when he saw on the schedule that he’s working with you today.”

“I don’t know, everything is fine from my side. If anyone has a problem, then it’s him.”

“Hmm, I hope you two don’t allow whatever is going on between you two to destroy the beautiful friendship you share.”

“Like I said nothing is going on, he probably had something to do or somewhere to go to that’s why he changed shifts. I doubt it has anything to do with me.”

“Okay, I love the brotherhood between you two. It inspires me and makes me wish I had someone like Babo in my life, someone who would have my back the way he has yours. That guy always speaks highly of you, he loves you and would do anything for you. I mean just two months ago I saw him at the mall with your girlfriend, Goitsemodimo and you could-“

“Woah! You said what?” He asks cutting him off

“I said I love the friendship-“

“No, where did you see Babo and my girlfriend?” Oupa regrets having said anything when he sees the rage burning inside

Agang's eyes. Goodness, the last thing he needs is to come between two friends who love each other and destroy a 3-year-long relationship. It's obvious Agang wasn't made aware of this small fact.

"I...uhm. Yeah, I saw them together, but I think they bumped into each other or something." He says trying to salvage the situation, but the damage is already done, there's no fixing this.

"Ska ntira sematla Oupa, tell me what you saw"

(Don't make me a fool)

"Agang, you need to calm yourself down, I didn't see anything just two people walking side by side. I assumed you knew that's why I told you, otherwise I wouldn't have said anything- Babo is your best friend so it's normal for him and your woman to have some form of friendship or relation. There's no need for you to react the way you're doing now; it screams insecure and trust me it's not attractive! Don't tell me you're one of those jealous boyfriends who don't want their girlfriends to talk to other males because they feel intimidated, come on Agang don't disappoint me, be confident you're a good-looking fellow."

“Mxm, I’m not insecure.”

“Then what’s with this jungle behavior?”

“Something doesn’t make sense here.”

“What?”

“No, it’s okay don’t worry. I will get to the bottom of it.”

“Tell me about it, who knows maybe you’re jumping to conclusions.”

“Oupa please.”

“Come on man, bua lenna.”

(Talk to me)

Agang puts his hands on his face peeking at him through his finger “You won’t let this go, will you?”

“No, I won’t. Do yourself a favor and start talking.” He says and looks at him expectantly

“Okay...so..” He narrates everything to Oupa who doesn’t say anything but whistles when he’s done

“Tell me I’m not crazy Oupa,” he asks pacing up and down

“You’re not crazy Agang, I can smell a rat.”

“I knew it!” He exclaims punching his clenched fist in the air, Oupa shakes his head feeling sorry for him.

He’s already added  $1 + 1$  and it gave him 2, he knows that deep down Agang knows the truth I mean it’s obvious even a blind man can see it but he’s just not ready to face it yet and Oupa understands why.

Lerato fela❤️

#93

“Naku ukudla kwakho baba.” She says placing the tray lined with food in front of him, a warm napkin hangs over her shoulder while her head is bowed respectfully. She’s slightly bent at the knees as a sign of respect.

“Mxm!” He clicks his tongue and looks away; an exasperated sigh eludes her lips as pain slices her heart in half.

“Gatsheni please, you need to eat.” Her voice is low, tears are locked in her eyelids.

“Susa lokudla phambi kwam’ Mamzobe!” He barks shoving away the tray of food, it falls and the plate breaks into pieces crashing with the floor. “Ngithe phuma kimi!” He’s on his feet, wagging his finger at her.

She buries her head to the ground shamefully

“Suka la phambikwami!” She runs out of the room, tears streaming down her face.

(Get out of my sight)

When she gets to the kitchen, she pulls a chair and dumps her body on it. Her hands cover her mouth to muffle her cry as she sobs in pain.

“Mama, what’s wrong?” Asks Nomcebo walking in.

She rushes to her side and rubs her back, comforting her.

“Mama kanti kwenzakalani Phakathi kwakho no Gatsheni?”

(Mom what’s going on between you and dad)

“Nomcebo ngitheni kuwe? Phuma endabeni zami!”

(What did I say to you? stay out of my business)

“I would if I didn’t have to witness you crying every single day, why are you still here ma? Dad is hurting you, choose yourself

and leave him. You can't allow him to keep treating you like his doormat." A lightning slap lands on her cheek in a flash.

"Ma!" she screams cradling her burning cheek, her shock is greater than the sting she feels on her cheek. She never "expected it"

"I will do more than just slapping you if you ever repeat the nonsense you just spewed!" She says and charges out of the kitchen, leaving Nomcebo wobbling in shock.

She needs to find a way to fix this or at least find a way to accumulate the money they got scammed by that fake Zimbabwean witch and give it back to her husband. They spent over 15 thousand rands, traveling costs included on their trip to the well-known Zimbabwean witch who was said to be powerful to bewitch Quinton. Days, weeks, and months have come and passed since that fateful day and none of what was supposed to happen to that boy happened. He's still alive and kicking, she heard from the grapevine that he bought a beautiful house in one of the estates in Johannesburg.

She can't sit back and watch Quinton flourish while her children amount to nothing in life, there must be something that she can do to put an end to all of this nonsense. Cebo has every right to be angry, who wouldn't be angry after paying so much money to see someone suffer only for them to prosper instead? That's why she's taking all the abuse-the insults, the disrespect, and the unkind words he always dishes every time she tries to offer him food or touch him. She'll bare it all, Cebo is justified. Going to Zimbabwe was her idea after all so she'll be the sacrificial lamb.

There must be another way to kill this boy, a way that doesn't include spending a lot of money because she's got no money left to splurge especially not on these fake witches with expired muti that doesn't work. She doesn't know how she's going to do it yet but there's no way she'll allow that woman's son to do better than the children of her womb. That will prove all the naysayers right, the friends, relatives, and even immediate family members who always compared her to that woman from a young age. They always said that woman was better than her and would be more successful in life, everyone saw her as better than her and that's why she had to die...but not even death could erase the hate she feels, even in death she detests

her and now her bastard son needs to follow her mother to the grave, South Africa is not big enough for them both.

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AGANG

I have a terrible headache; I've lost count of the number of cigarettes I have smoked in the last four hours. I've been cracking my brain trying to put the puzzle pieces together, digging into my memories trying to recollect incidents where I was with both Babo and Goitse in the same room. Trying to remember their body language whenever we were together, how they communicated with each other, and how comfortable they were around each other and all the memories came back crashing down on me like a ton of bricks.

All the subtle little signs I never paid much attention to in the past, all the eye conversations I ignored, and how he always defended Goitse and never failed to remind me not to cheat on her. My chest is on fire and I'm slowly running out of breath, I can't put to words the immense hurt I feel inside my heart. I'm

not sure whether I should be angry at them for betraying me or laugh at myself for being the biggest fool on earth, how could I have missed it? When did it even begin? How did it start? Who approached who first? Are they in love with each other or they are just fooling around? And most importantly, why am I still in the picture?

Now it makes sense why she never had time for me, she was spending all that time with Babo. what is it about Babo? Was I not satisfying her in bed? Like I don't understand what I did or where I went wrong, I've always been a good boyfriend to her. I gave her my heart and remained faithful to her even when it was difficult to do so, I've never looked at another woman the same way I look at her, well until Nokwazi happened but still I didn't nurture my feelings for her nor did I have plans to pursue her... that counts for something right? I loved Goitse with all my heart and I would never dream of hurting her, I remained loyal to her even when every part of my body began yearning for another woman.

I battled with my thoughts and ignored the burning feelings I have for Nokwazi because I knew it would slay her heart if I ever cheated on her, and hurting her was the last thing I would want to do.

Do they use protection? Come to think of it, is the baby even mine? I need to vent but I don't just talk to anyone about my feelings, Babo was my go-to person whenever I needed someone to talk but who to turn to when the only person I trusted with my life turned out to be the same one to lodge the arrow into my back? I dial Nokwazi's number, but it doesn't ring it beeps once and automatically hangs up, so she still hasn't unblocked me. I go to her contact on the green app and guess what I'm still blocked, but there are no surprises there. I stand up from the floor where I was slumped, put on my slides, and walk to the main house

"Agang." My landlord says with a big smile on her face as I walk through the door but her smile turns into a frown when she sees my face

"Son, are you okay?"

"Yes mama I'm fine but I need help, I don't know if you can help me."

“With what my son?” She asks sitting upright from her slanted position on the couch, worry masking her features.

“I need to make an urgent call to someone, my phone is low and refuses to charge, I suspect the charger is getting old...can you please lend me your phone I’ll recharge and bring it back after making my call.” She exhales visibly relieved

“Arg man Agang you scared me! I almost had a heart attack thinking it was something serious, relax you don’t have to recharge Gaisang recharged my account yesterday, I have more than enough airtime on my phone.” her daughter, Gaisang works on a cruise ship that travels to different countries across the globe. She’s rarely in the country due to her demanding job.

Gaisang is an only child, most of the time it’s just my landlord and Gaisang’s son Ditebogo in the house but my landlord is often alone because Ditebogo frequently visits his father’s side of the family. What I admire the most about her daughter is that she takes good care of her mother and son, she didn’t dump her son with her mother and disappeared as most young women do, she takes good care of them and ensures that they don’t lack anything. She also tries her best to be available

emotionally not just financially, she calls home at least twice a week.

“Thank you mme I’ll return it soon.”

“Okay, my son.” I take the phone and dial Nokwazi’s number while making my way back to my room, don’t ask me why I know her number by heart!

It’s those small old phones, I don’t know what you call them but we call them ‘Lepopotwane’. It takes a while to punch in her numbers on the phone

Advertisement

my fingers are too big for these small buttons so I struggle a bit as I would press two digits instead of one.

“Hi.” Her voice is like medicine to my bleeding heart, that 'hi' instantly reduces the ache I feel in my chest.

“Why did you block me?”

“Agang?”

“Yes, who else did you block kante?”

“Agang please don’t do this, this is already awkward enough for me please don’t make it worse by calling me.”

“What’s awkward?”

“You know, you need to stop acting up!” she’s losing her patience with me. I can’t help but chuckle, her voice is tiny so it sounds funny when she tries to act strictly. Am I supposed to be scared, with that voice? Hell No!

“Oh wow! So, this is funny to you? my feelings are a joke to you!” She’s pissed

“No, of course not. Your feelings matter to me, you matter to me but...” I pause and breathe out

“But what?”

“It’s not the right time Kwazi.”

“I know you have a girlfriend Agang and I’m not stupid, I know you would never leave your girlfriend for a girl like me trust me I know that. I wasn’t even supposed to tell you how I feel but I’m glad the words slipped out because now you know how I feel about you, and I know I will get over you someday but for that to happen you need to stop calling me because this is torture Agang! What am I supposed to do? Keep falling in love with you knowing full well you’ll never be mine? ....I know I’m not the best person to date and I’ve done many bad things in the past but I don’t think I deserve this, I’m human I have feelings too...ngiyacela bandla ngicela ungizwele!” I hate myself for being her source of pain and hurt, I wish I could bare my heart out to her, but the timing is off, I don’t want to use her as a rebound, she doesn’t deserve that.

I hate that she sells herself short, I wish I could reassure her and tell what I see when I look at her. Give her a detailed

description of who Nokwazi is in my eyes but my hands are tied.

“I’m sorry for hurting you, I never meant to hurt you but I’m sorry for being the cause of your pain. I wasn’t aware that my presence in your life will bring you anguish, but I know now and I won’t call you again, I respect your decision.”

She cries into the receiver, her painful cry shoots straight to my heart tearing it to shreds. I try to hold back my tears, but I fail dismally as they stream down my face like a deluge of rain. I’m no crier, hell I didn’t cry even when I lost my mom but there’s something about Nokwazi that touches the deepest parts of my soul. Parts of me that I thought were cold and frozen.

“Please stop crying, you’re breaking my heart.” I always refrain from saying things I don’t mean, I don’t like wasting my breath on empty words so I mean it. She’s hurting me!

She doesn’t reply, she snuffles and cuts the call. I can only pray that she doesn’t hate me after this.

I hope I won't lose her even before I can have her, I could have been selfish and told her how I feel and implored her to wait for me to avoid losing her, but I didn't and I won't do that. She doesn't deserve that, she deserves a man who will love her fully not one who's still in love with another woman, if we are to be together in the future then I must be completely over Goitse, or else it won't happen.

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QUINTON

"So, how was your first day at work?" We are in our bedroom; our son is cradled in her arms while her feet are on my lap. I'm giving her a foot massage; she deserves it after a long day at work.

"Not bad."

"That's good, did you remember to tell your boss that you're pregnant?"

“Yes, I did.”

“And how did she take the news?”

“Better than I expected.”

“See? I told you, there’s nothing to be ashamed of, you’re a married woman and there’s no way she won’t understand because she’s a married woman herself. She knows the dynamics of marriage.”

“Yeah, I’m not ashamed I just didn’t want any special treatment.”

“No, it’s not special treatment. Your pregnancy is not a normal one thembalam’, it’s a high-risk pregnancy so your boss needs to be aware so as not to stress or overwork you. You heard the doctor; any amount of stress can put you and the baby’s life in danger, and I don’t want to lose either of you. If it was up to

me, you'd stay at home until you give birth, but I know how much you love your work that's why I didn't even suggest it."

"Relax my love, I'm not doing anything stressful at work. I just bark orders, sign documents, and make decisions that's all."

"I know, I guess I will stop stressing now that Ndalo knows you're pregnant. I know she's a sensible woman, she won't stress you."

"Uhm, yes baby...enough about work, let's talk about something else?"

"Okay thembalam'."

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THANDO

My father is a man of his word, he always keeps his promises. He asked for a meeting with Aunt Mpho, Uncle Luyolo, Yamkela, myself, and him and my mother. Yamkela's parents have no idea why they've been summoned and I'm sure their conniving daughter didn't say a word to them, Esihle is uneasy about this whole thing understandably so because Yamkela is her best friend, but she needs to pick a side already because I'm her brother, her blood and the one who was wronged. Hlehle and I just fixed things and I don't want any mistakes this time because I almost died during our breakup, I never want to go through that again so Esihle needs to pick a side already so I can separate my friends from my foes!

"Molweni ekhaya." Uncle Luyolo greets making his way in, his wife and daughter are behind him.

We exchange pleasantries and settle down, Esihle brings refreshments and makes herself scarce. Yamkela is behaving like a new bride, her eyes have not left the ground ever since they arrived.

"Boet what's this about?" uncle Luyolo asks looking at my father

“Thando nyana please tell your Godparents about what Yamkela did.”-Dad

I nod and clear my throat putting my hands on the table and elevate my gaze at Yamkela's parents who are looking at me expectantly

“It was a Saturday night, I wanted to spend the night with my girlfriend so I told....” I iterate everything that happened and before I’m even done with my story uncle smacks Yamkela on the face shocking us all. Aunt Mpho jumps up from her seat and stands between them protecting her daughter like a mother hen protecting her chicks

“I won’t allow you to use my daughter to suck up to the Ngxito's!” she retorts and all of us are left stunned by her statement including her husband

“What?” his voice comes out low, he even staggers back taken aback by her accusation

“You heard me, when will you be your own man LUYOLO? GROW THE FUCK UP AND STOP SUCKING UP TO LUVUYO, UNTIL WHEN? I’VE BEEN KEEPING QUIET FOR YEARS TOLERATING THIS BULLSHIT BECAUSE I KNEW WHAT I WAS GETTING MYSELF INTO WHEN I MARRIED YOU BUT YOU TOOK IT TOO FAR BY PUTTING YOUR HANDS ON MY DAUGHTER TO PLEASE YOUR PRECIOUS ‘BROTHER’ LUVUYO WHO SEES YOU AS NOTHING BUT HIS LAPDOG, Yami come on my child lets go.” Yamkela stands up and the two of them storm out of our house slamming the door on their way out.

“Wow yi film!” my mom says clapping her hands

#94

It's been exactly three days since the last time Agang and I spoke, and these three days have been 72 hours and 4320 minutes of nothing but pain, self-doubt, introspection, and reflection. My life is a mess and I have no one to blame for that except myself, I'm HIV positive, a university drop out and I had sexual relations with a man old enough to be my father. I've embarrassed my siblings in front of the whole community numerous times, all that under the age of 21. I would be lying if I said I thought Agang feels the same way about me. Truth is I didn't expect him to proclaim his undying love for me when I confessed my feelings, I expected him to reject me but all that still doesn't make the pain of his rejection hurt any less. During these three days he never attempted to call or text me, he stayed away from me as he promised to in our last conversation.

I miss him so much it hurts. Gift took advantage of the 'love' I had for him, snatched my innocence most cruelly, and discarded me like a used pad while the whole community watched but I swear how I feel now is triple what I felt after the Gift saga, yes I was hurt and humiliated but it didn't sting this much. Now it feels like a part of me is missing. I kind of felt that

the love I felt for Agang is different from what I have felt for anyone before in my life, but I never thought it was this much.

I unblocked him hoping he'll call or text but dololo, I don't know how many times I've deleted lengthy texts I had typed for him. How a person I have known for less than two months has come to mean so much to me is beyond me, how I hope my heart can listen to my mind and stop loving him so I can stop feeling all this anguish.

I hear a soft knock on my door before it swings open, and my brother steps inside. I can see the gloom masking his face underneath the forced smile dancing on his lips. I sit up putting my back against the headboard, worry sinking in. I hope nothing is wrong, our family has been through enough already we deserve a break.

"Kwazi." He says settling on the foot of the bed

"Bhuti, is everything okay? Anzani and Zothando are okay right?" I rush through my sentence, my heart beating fast, and my breath hitched as panic takes over.

He breaks into a soft chuckle “Relax, Anzani and the baby are okay. It’s you I’m worried about”

“Me?” I ask with a hand on my chest “What did I do?” I’ve been a good girl since I moved in with them, trying my utmost best not to step on anyone’s corners so I’m very perplexed by this.

“Yes, you haven’t been your normal bubbly self for days now. What’s going on, is everything okay?” A sigh of relief breezes out of my lips, at least I didn’t do anything wrong. I’m tired of being the thorn in everyone’s flesh.

“It’s nothing hectic, I’m just being my over-emotional self about it. Don’t worry I will get over it in a couple of days.”

“No, don’t do that. Don’t invalidate how you feel and reduce it to you being over-emotional, tell me about it maybe I can help.” We are cool and all but he’s still my brother, I don’t think he’ll appreciate me telling him about my love interest.

“I appreciate your concern bhuti but I don’t want to overstep my boundaries.”

“What do you mean?” He asks looking into my eyes, I drop my gaze to my hands “Is this about boys?” I nod shyly

He sighs “Look mtasekhaya, if our mother was still alive, I would have referred you to her but unfortunately, she’s gone now, and you only have me. I would say speak to my wife, but I know you and she hasn’t reached that level of closeness where you’d be comfortable to talk ‘Boyfriends’ with her. You have Nobuhle but she’s younger than you and hasn’t experienced much in life so she might not know how to help you, you can talk to me about anything little sister I promise to put my ‘big brother’ title aside and listen to you as a friend would.” Oh man, am I not blessed to have a brother like him? He’s the best honestly

“Do you remember Agang?” He frowns and eyes me seemingly deep in thought

“The one who took you in?” He says after a few seconds of thought

“Yep, that one.”

“Okay, what about him?”

“He’s a great guy, so humble and down to earth. He doesn’t have much but from the little time I spent with him I can tell that he’s quick to land a helping hand, he doesn’t speak much but whenever he speaks, he speaks so much sense. He’s the one who convinced me to come back home, and made me realize my mistakes and how much you guys love me. When I moved in he begged me to respect Anzani and not give her trouble, he also advised me to find a career I’m passionate about since I’m not passionate about nursing.”

“Nursing is not your passion? How come I didn’t know that?” I chuckle

“That’s because I also didn’t know or maybe because I never wanted to admit it to myself until he raised the topic.”

“Ok, that makes sense so what are you passionate about?”

“Storytelling, I’ve written several novels and short stories.”

“Haibo! Do I even know you? what else are you hiding from us.”  
I laugh at his melodrama

“Come on, it’s not a big deal. No one knew.”

“But I’m sure you told this Agang person about it.”

“Yes, because he asked the relevant questions.” He claps his hands in shock

“Tell you what I don’t like this Agang already!” I can’t help but laugh at him “Anyway, what did this Agang character do?”

“I fell in love with him, like deeply so. I slipped during one of our video calls and told him how I feel about him, he didn’t reply he just looked at me spooked out, so I panicked and

immediately blocked him feeling embarrassed. He called using a different number but I told him to stay away from me because communicating with him, while in love with him knowing that I can never have him hurts. He told me he'll respect my decision and apologized for causing me pain and that was the last time he and I spoke. I know I'm the one who called for this, but I miss him so much it hurts"

"Did you give him a chance to say his piece or you just told him to stay away from you?"

"No, I didn't because I know he doesn't feel the same way. He has a girlfriend that he's in love with, they've been together for ages so I know there's no way he would leave her for someone like me. He doesn't strike me as a cheater so there's no way he and can be together."

"That's your problem, ever since you were diagnosed with HIV and your status became public knowledge, you think lowly of yourself, and you assume everyone sees you in the same light and that's not true. Everyone has a past, likewise, you have yours but it doesn't mean you are not worthy of love or respect because of your past mistakes. Your status doesn't define who

you are; you are still the same Nokwazi mama raised, a beautiful girl who deserves nothing but the best, and screw anyone who doesn't see that. You are a queen; you need to see and carry yourself as such. Anyone who doesn't agree with that shouldn't be in your life, to begin with."

"Thank you, brother."

"It's a pleasure, you will find a man who will love you and accept you with all your flaws. I know you desperately want that man to be Agang but maybe he's not the one for you and you will need to accept and live with that fact if that's the case, for now, I want you to focus on your life, work on your confidence and esteem

think about what you want to do and where you want to be in the next five years. Work on your goals and forget about Agang, if he's the one for you destiny will play its part and the two of you will end up together but until then work on yourself so that he comes back to a confident Nokwazi not this broken girl with low self-esteem sitting in front of me." I'm sure you know me by now, I'm a cry baby. So I'm a weeping mess right now

"Thank you, brother."

“Don’t cry.” He says wiping my tears with his fingers “I never asked, how old is Agang?”

“Promise not to judge first.”

“Don’t tell me he’s a 40-something-year-old man.”

“Well he’s not in his 40s but he’s way older than me.”

A frown mirrors his features “Exactly how old is he?”

“31.”

“What?” He whistles “Ai cha I give up, niyawathanda ama khehla bantwana baka Nomonde. Yours is 11 years older than you and Buhle's friend or whatever he is to her is 7 years older than she is. Banihlula ngani ontanga benu?”

(You girls love older men)( why don’t you go for people your age)

“Love knows no age bhutiza, you don’t choose who you fall in love with so please don’t judge”

“Ai mina ngiyani judger shem, who’s going to fight for you when this guy of yours mistreats you njengoba emdala ngisho kunami?”

(Since he’s older than me)

“He’s older than you by 2 years and besides empini oku balulekile amandla ukuthi wubani omdala akusebenzi bhutiza vuma nje wena ukuthi uyigwala.” I tease, he laughs out throwing his head backward

(In a physical fight what matters is strength, whose older than who doesn’t count. Just admit that you’re a coward)

“If he ever mistreats me, which I doubt he will you can always come with Given.”

“Mxm uyabheda wena ngiyi ndoda yo mzulu mina angino sabiswa wu mtswana.” Only if you knew brother, only if you knew!

(You are mad, I’m a Zulu man I’m not threatened by a Tswana man.)

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AGANG

I haven’t been to work for the past three days because I didn’t want to see Babo, I know myself and I know I would have jumped on him and beat him up the moment I lay my eyes on him and I wouldn’t have stopped until he ceased breathing. That’s why I don’t like getting angry because I turn into a wild animal when angry, it’s like something possesses me, I see red, all I want to do is combat and I never stop until I see blood or the person I’m fighting with stops moving. Babo knows me so I don’t know why he thought it was a good idea to betray me, why he had the nerve to dip his rotten manhood in the same place as me? Babo is not the only person I’ve been avoiding seeing, I’ve also been ignoring Goitse’s calls and messages and I guess that’s why she’s outside my door now knocking on it like

a police officer and yelling on top of her voice like a frantic woman.

“Agang! Open this door, I know you’re inside. Mrs. Ranaka told me you’re in” I blow out smoke through my nostrils, put out my cigarette, and steadily get up from the couch and head to the door to open.

“Gosh, how much did you smoke?” She says coughing violently, she rushes to the window and opens it along with the curtain  
“Agang what’s going on, you’ve been ignoring me?”

I look at her face and instantly feel like puking my insides out; I’m disgusted by the sight of her. How can she betray me like this? That too with my best friend of all people, Why?

“What’s wrong, why are you looking at me like that?” She says taking steps towards me and I retreat backward feeling bile rise to my throat

“Don’t come near me Goitsemodimo!” She stops in her tracks and stares at me with glossy eyes, visibly pained by my attitude.

“What’s going on, why are you looking at me like you hate me? I’m sure it’s the baby-making you hate me, it happened to my cousin when she was pregnant with her first. The baby daddy started hating her out of nowhere, but everything went back to normal after she gave birth, I guess the same thing is happening to us.” My eyes travel to her small pregnancy bun poking underneath the yellow sweater she’s wearing

“How far along are you?”

She coughs “What?”

“You heard me, how far along are you with your pregnancy?”

“Three months or more I don’t know; I still need to go to the clinic to confirm.” She says casually showing no signs of fear or panic

“So you haven’t been to the clinic after all this time?” it’s been over a week since we found out about the pregnancy

“Yes, what’s going on Agang? You’re acting weird.” I look at her and shake my head in disbelief, why did it take so long for me to see through her?

“Am I the father of this baby?”

“What? what are you trying to say about me Agang?” She’s fuming feigning hurt, she’s such a good pretender that I’m beginning to wonder if any of what happened in our relationship was real. Did she even love me, or it was all an act?

“I’m sorry, please forgive me.” I softly say looking into her eyes

“Sorry? Do you think you can just say sorry, and everything will be alright, no Agang sorry is not good enough! You just accused me of cheating on you when I’ve been nothing but a loyal girlfriend, you have to do more than just say ‘sorry’ after what you just did. I won’t say I’m surprised by your accusation; you

never showed any excitement ever since we found out about this pregnancy, you never even rub my belly when we are together or ask me about the baby when you call. It's like I made this baby alone or I raped you the way you're so disinterested in this pregnancy."

"I'm sorry, you're right I haven't been behaving as a responsible father should. You don't deserve that but I'll right my wrongs, give me a few minutes to bath then the both of us will go and see a doctor. It's time I take responsibility for my actions and be involved in my baby's life, I want to know how far we are and how the baby is doing so we can start preparing for him/her."

"A doctor? We don't have to spend so much money when we can go to the clinic."

"Do they have scans in the clinic?"

"No."

“This is my son/daughter you’re carrying and he/she deserves the best of everything. I want us to go see those doctors who specialize in women's health and pregnancy, I don’t want any mistakes.”

“But Agang Obstetricians don’t come cheap.”

“The price doesn’t matter, daddy would pay any amount of money for his little cub in mommy’s tummy.”

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ANZANI

“You need to get yourself checked out.” Pogiso, my co-manager says when I walk through the door.

We are having a meeting in his office, conversing about the best strategies to launch the student accommodation the Meyiwa’s have just opened in Northwest and your girl has been to the bathroom to vomit at least three times already. I don’t

know where the sudden nausea comes from because I was fine all along.

“Yeah, I will go.” I take a seat and grab a bottle of still water from the table and gulp it down my throat

“When?” I roll my eyes

“Pogiso please tu,” I say not hiding my irritation

“Shoot me for being concerned about you,” He says with his hands raised as a sign of surrender

“I’m sorry, I know you’re trying to help but there’s nothing wrong with me. I’m pregnant that’s why I’m nauseous, there’s absolutely no need to worry. Nausea is common to pregnant women”

“Woah really? Congratulations.”

“Thank you.”

“Yo monna wahao oho dulelletse ne haofe break, wa ho imisa every chance he gets. Nou so ro qetella reo bitsa always pregnant.” He says sending me into a fit of laughter

(Your husband is not giving a breather; he’s impregnating you one way. At this rate we’ll end up referring to you as always pregnant)

“Whatever!”

“I’m telling you, phela you just came back from maternity leave and in a few months, you’ll be going back.” He says and we roar in laughter

“Mxm, leave me alone!”

“But at least he married you, nahana fela ntse otsholela monna bana every year asa ho nyala le ho ho nyala ha qeta moo aho lahle ahosiye le crèche yahae.”

(Imagine giving a man who didn't marry you, kids, every year and then he dumps you leaving you with his crèche)

"Pogiso man." My voice is faint, as a result of laughing like a clown.

"Okay...congratulations mfanaka I'm happy for you. Don't listen to the naysayers tsholela monna bana ngwaneso onyetswe but I won't promise not to call you always pregnant."

(Bore your husband kids, my sister, you're married)

"Wow."

"Yes, anyway did you tell your boss?"

"No."

"You should because she's thinking of putting you in charge of the Northwest project, and that means you'll be required to drive to Northwest at least three times a week and you can't do

that in your condition, it's not safe." We have company cars that we use to move about for work purposes.

"I doubt anything will happen to me or the baby, it's not like I'm heavily pregnant or anything. I'm barely even showing Pogiso, I doubt driving would pose a danger to the baby."

"Hmm, if you say so. I'm a man, I know nothing about pregnancy and all of that. I was just saying what I thought was best."

"Thanks for your concern but nothing will happen to me."

#95

NARRATED

Agang was lucky to find Dr. Mtsweni free and quickly booked an appointment with her. All of this came as a shock for Goitse, she didn't see it coming so she couldn't prepare for it. She left her house with the sole intention to confront Agang for ignoring her and not to find herself dragged to the doctor's room to perform an ultrasound scan with Agang present, of course, she knows how far along she is with her pregnancy, and she's had several scans done prior to this one with the 'real' father of her child present. She had a full-proof plan for how she was going to do all of this but now this, Agang wouldn't even tell her which doctor he was taking her to so she could improvise and send Babo to bribe the doctor before their scheduled appointment time. It's mid-May, and the weather is chilly but she's sweating underneath the sweater she has on. Her heart is knocking violently against her ribcage threatening to crack her chest open, she's trying her utmost best not to show how scared she is but it proves difficult which each minute that passes.

“Please come and lie down here for me.” The doctor says with a friendly smile directing her to the bed.

She slowly stands up and toddles to the stretcher shaking like a leaf during autumn winds. Dr. Mtsweni giggles seeing how terrified she looks

“This is your first pregnancy?” She nods her head vigorously not trusting her voice

“I can tell, you look so anxious! You can relax, I promise won’t do anything uncomfortable to you. Please lie down and lift your top.” Agang helps her climb the bed and stands beside her holding her hand as any supportive baby daddy would. With trembling hands, she lifts her top revealing her protruding stomach

“Oh my! How far along are we?”

“We don’t know yet doc, we found out about the pregnancy recently,” Agang interjects

“Really?” The doctor questions giving Goitse a look. Goitse's pregnancy bun is not that big but still, it's hard to believe that she didn't know.

“Yes doctor.”-Agang

“Ok!” She wears latex gloves and grabs a tube” I will apply this gel on your belly, it will feel a bit cold on your skin.” She smears the gel and moves the probe on her stomach gesturing toward the monitor

“Wow! Is that his heartbeat?”-Agang

The doctor laughs “His? are we hoping for a boy daddy?”

“Yes.”

“I see, so I take it you want to know the gender of the baby?”

“Isn't it too soon for that?”

“No, it's not. Miss Molefe is over 18 weeks pregnant. We can determine the baby's gender with ease because he/she is large enough for us to see his/her genitals.”

“18 weeks? That means she's four months pregnant right?”

“That's correct, she'll start her fifth month in a few days.”

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“Are you ready to tell me who the father of your baby is?” -  
Agang

This is the first time he's saying a word to her since they left the doctor's office, he's been waiting for her to confess the truth but it seems it won't happen.

“You are the father of my baby Agang.”

“What?” What kind of person is she? Which normal person would insist on lying even when she knows she has been caught?

“You are the only man I have sex with, so yes Agang you are the father of my baby.” Rage surges throughout his whole body like a wildfire, he’s tempted to smack her face and wring her neck for treating him like a fool.

He draws in a breath and shuts his eyes mopping his face with his hands. “Goitsemodimo, I’ll ask you for the last time. Who is the father of your baby?”

“You.” She says angering him more

“I swear I’ll kill you if I put my hands on you so please don’t push me to punch the truth out of you, I assure you don’t want to see that side of me. I have never laid my hands on a woman before but I swear you’ll be my first victim if you don’t tell me the truth.” He pauses and exhales “I’m not the father of your baby Goitse and you know it, if you’re almost five months pregnant then it means you fell pregnant in Jan or somewhere

in December, and if my memory serves me well I didn't touch you until late February because you were always 'tired' and not in the mood to have sex whenever I tried." Goitse goes down on her knees, clasps her hands together like she's praying and tears roll down her face.

"You know me Agang I would never cheat on you willingly, I love you so much and would never dream of doing anything to hurt you. I wanted to tell you the truth for the longest time but I couldn't bring myself to do it because I knew it would shatter you, I hated myself for keeping the truth from you that's why I have been distant but I guess I have no choice but to come clean now."

"On the 16th of December last year I went clubbing in Potchefstroom with a few colleagues from work, I ran into Babo at the club we were in. He was with some weird-looking guy when he saw me both of them came to our table and asked to join us. My colleagues didn't mind and neither did I because I know him as your best friend, the last thing I remember was him coercing me to drink some sweet drink saying it was nice which I did because I trusted him, I don't know what happened afterward but I woke up in his bed naked with him plunging inside of me and I suspect that's when I fell pregnant." A loud

laugh bubbles from Agang's throat, he laughs until he has tears rolling down his face

“Bathong wena and you expect me to believe your shoddy story? I can’t believe I was crushed when I realized what you and Babo have been getting up to behind my back, I felt so hurt and betrayed that I wanted to beat the shit out of him for disrespecting me and cheating my friendship and my trust but looking at you now I’m pleased I didn’t lift a finger because you’re not worth me going to jail and losing my freedom. You are nothing but a pathetic cheap skank, the only thing I regret is that it took three long years for me to see through you. Please get up and get the f\*ck out of my room.” He says showing her to the door

“What? Agang please don’t do this, it's me Goitsemodimo the love of your life please don’t do this to me Babo raped me I swear.”

“Quit embarrassing yourself and leave my room, all the love I felt for you ceased to exist the day I realized how fake you really are. Go to your lover Babo and make more babies with

him or whatever I don't care, I want you out of my sight because you disgust me."

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NOBUHLE

The pressure at school is intense with mid-year exams barely a month away, I hardly have time to do anything eating included as I'm always at the school's library studying and I've lost weight as a result. Today it's Friday I'm giving myself a break from books for the entire weekend, and what better way to relax than spending the weekend with my boyfriend. He'll come and pick me up in the evening, that's why I came straight home after my classes and started packing my bags and getting myself ready for the night.

"Did you shave your caramel swirl?" Lungile asks, she's lying on her stomach on top of the bed watching my every move.

“Why are you asking?”

“Because khona ozodliwa this weekend so Thando must find his cookie clean.”

“We won’t do anything, I told you we’ll sleep in separate bedrooms.” She laughs throwing her head backward

“Okay girl if you say so, enjoy your weekend.”

“Thank you...hold on my phone is ringing.” A smile embraces my lips when I see my sister’s name on the caller ID, I take the call and perch my behind on the bed

“Big sister.”

“Hey kiddo, how are you?”

“I'm good and yourself?”

“I'm okay, you've been scarce so I take it you fixed things with Thando.” An involuntary smile seizes my face at the mention of Thando's name, I can't help myself I'm so in love.

“Yes

thank you so much for knocking sense into me that day. I almost lost my boyfriend over nonsense.”

“It's alright, I'm glad I could help. When are you telling Quinton and Anzani that you and Thando are dating now? They still think the two of you are friends.”

“I don't know, I'm scared.”

“You need to do it soon because the truth always has a way of coming out and please do me a favour and use condoms and contraceptives.”

“What? We are not having sex.”

“For now but take it from me prevention is always better than cure little sis, you don’t want to end up HIV positive like me. There’s nothing more awful than having to live your life with regrets wishing you had you had listened when you were warned. When you’re ready to have sex go with Thando to the clinic or a doctor and get tested for HIV and STIs and always use protection, HIV can’t be diagnosed by your naked eyes so never make the mistake of looking at someone and thinking ‘he's negative’ I did that and look at where that led me to.”

“I won't, thank you.”

“Hey, hey don’t do that don’t feel sorry for me. Look at the bigger picture.”

“Which is?”

“Ngizokgola I grant.” She says and we crack into laughter. I didn’t see it coming, Nokwazi is crazy.

(I'll get a grant)

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TWO MONTHS LATER

NOKWAZI

“How do I look?” Anzani asks twirling in front of me.

“You look amazing, I love your body.”

“Thank you, are you sure you can handle him through the night?”

“Yes, just go and have fun. My nephew and I will just be fine.” I say glancing at Zothando who's falling asleep in my arms

“Okay, call me if you need anything.”

“Yes, yes I’ll do so now go before my brother comes back looking for you.” She chuckles and plants a peck on her son's forehead

“Bye.”

“Bye, have fun.”

“Thank you, I'll try to.” She takes her clutch bag and struts to the door, I sigh in relief when Zothando doesn’t cry for her.

He’s growing up and starting to recognize and cry for his mother whenever she leaves the room, that’s why I thought he would cry when he saw her leave. My brother and his wife finally moved to their new home and left me alone in this beautiful apartment as they promised to when I moved in with them months ago. Quinton hired someone to take care of our house in Ratanda and drives down at least twice a month to check if everything is still the way it should be.

They are going out on a double date with Given and his new girlfriend Nyasha, I love my nephew so I was more than happy to babysit for them while they go out and mingle with their friends. It was love at first sight with Zothando, all it took was a single glance at his innocent cute face and it was over for me, he won my heart at first sight and I keep falling deeper and deeper with each day that passes.

I'm someone who finds it difficult to express how I feel to other people and that's one of the reasons why I fell in love with writing, it liberates me in a way as it allows me to pen down all my feelings, and emotions and thoughts. I feel better knowing that whatever I write down will never reach anyone's eyes because I always tear the paper into pieces and throw it away after unpacking but lately I find myself venting to Zothando.

Knowing he'll never judge me or love me any less because of what I tell him as he doesn't understand what I'm saying comforts me, yes I speak to my siblings about my feelings but there are things I did during my brief reign as a blessee that I have never shared with anyone else except for Zothando because they are things that embarrass and strip me off all of my dignity and confidence. It's been two months since Agang and I last spoke, I should be over him by now because it's not

like him and I dated anyway but my heart still bleeds every time I think of him. I have tried everything I can think of to forget about him but none of it ever works, the love I feel for him refuses to go away.

“Zo darling I recently realized that I’ve never been truly loved by any men in my life except for your father and mine, I always meet men who do nothing but use me. First, it was Gift then Dave, I’m so naïve and gullible can you believe I thought Dave would marry me and make me his second wife?” I laugh at my stupidity “I don’t know if I’m cursed or I’m just so hard to love but I never seem to meet the right man, or maybe I’m too desperate for love that’s why I always fall for the first man who shows interest in me. See how I went and fell for Agang because he showed me a bit of kindness, he didn’t have to do much really all he had to do was show me a bit of care and I naïvely fell in love with him ha-“ my phone vibrates cutting me short, I shut my eyes and open them again not believing the name I see flashing on my screen. I let it ring until he hangs up and only pick up when he calls for the second time as I wanted to make sure he didn’t call me by mistake.

“Hi.”

“Hey.” Like always his voice has my insides melting into liquid gold, but I keep quiet and wait for him to speak. He’s the one who called after all “I see you have unblocked me.”

“Yes.”

He blows out a heavy sigh “Nokwazi I’m sorry for what happened the last time we spoke, I’m sorry for hurting you but I swear it wasn’t my intention.”

“It’s okay I understand you don’t have to apologize.”

“No, you don’t understand.”

“I do Agang, I understand that you love your girlfriend and that you and I can never be a thing. I understand that you feel nothing for me so yes Agang I understand.”

“Can I video call you?”

“For what? So you can see me crying for you?”

“Of course not, there’s something I want to tell you and I want to look into your eyes when I do.”

“No.”

“Please.”

“I said no.”

“Kwazi please, grant me this one thing and I swear I’ll never bother you again if you want nothing to do with me after listening to what I have to say to you.”

“Okay.” I hate that I can never refuse him

“Thank you.” He hangs up and calls by video call almost immediately

“Who's that cutie in your arms?” he asks referring to Zo who has fallen asleep in my arms with his head on my boobs

“Zothando, my nephew.”

“Nice, he's cute.”

“Thanks, it looks like you're walking maybe we should do this when you reach your destination.” He rotates the camera

“Do you by any chance recognize this place?”

“No!” he laughs “How? I don't get it.”

“Open the door for me and I'll tell you all about it.” It can't be. I jolt up from the couch and go put Zothando to bed before trudging to the door to open it for him

He pulls me into his arms and picks me up before I can wrap my head around the fact that he's standing on my doorstep, I wrap my arms around his neck and hug his waist with legs holding onto him for dear life. Don't judge! Oh my goodness he smells so good, he walks inside the apartment with me in his arms and closes the door with his leg.

He gently places me on the kitchen counter and cups my face in his big hands

"How are you here?" I ask but instead of replying he pulls me in for a kiss, my insides freeze and I momentarily stop breathing.

Can someone please explain what the f\*ck is going on here? His lips are soft as I always imagined them to be and his breath smells like nicotine and mint, my bean won't stop twitching because damn his kisses are so good! We kiss until we both run out of breath, he pulls me into his arms and plants a peck on the crown of my head when we break the kiss

"No, Agang I won't allow you to come in here and act like nothing happened when you rejected me," I said shoving him away from me, finally regaining my senses.

#96

“No, Agang I won’t allow you to come in here and act like nothing happened when you rejected me.” She says pushing me away from her

“Forgive me, I shouldn’t have kissed you... but all I wanted to do was hold you in my arms and kiss you when I laid my eyes on you for the first time after not seeing and talking to you for two months, but that’s not an excuse I still should have controlled myself.”

“Damn right you should have! Look Agang I know I have a bad reputation in the streets and I’m positive but that doesn’t mean I’m a slut who sleeps with all the men I come across.”

“No, no Kwazi don’t take it that way. I didn’t kiss you because I thought you were cheap, I did it because it’s what I’ve been dying to do for a long while now.”

“What?”

“Can we sit down and talk?” she huffs and jumps down from the kitchen counter

She leads the way to the lounge and shows me to my seat before lowering herself on the recliner across the sofa I’m occupying.

“Go on, I’m listening.” She says with an attitude and folds her arms across her chest

“I have feelings for you Kwazi, I always have. I started having feelings for you before you even knew someone like me exists, I took a liking to you when you wouldn’t look in my direction twice but I never entertained or nurtured the feelings I have for you because I had Goitsemodimo who meant everything to me at the time.” I see a twinge of pain flash in her eyes before she drops her gaze “I knew God was testing me when you came after me after Namhla threw you out, spending those few days with you taught me a lot about you and made me realize how wrong most of us were in judging you. You’re nothing like what I thought you were, the more we spoke and got closer to each other the more I recognized what an amazing person you truly

are Nokwazi, and my feelings for you only intensified while the desire to make you mine multiplied.”

“If that’s the case why did you reject me when I told you how I feel about you.”

“I didn’t reject you Kwazi, you never gave me a chance to explain but maybe my response wouldn’t have been the one you wanted to hear. I was in a relationship with Goitsemodimo, how could I tell you I’m in love with you while I’m still seeing another woman? I have so much respect for you, and I had no intentions of making you the other woman”

“But you should have told me how you feel Agang, I’m sure it would have put me at ease to know you feel the same way. To know that you love me as I love you, it stung to think that the only person I desperately wish to be with didn’t feel the same way.”

“I know but I didn’t tell you how I feel because at the time you and I couldn’t be together, I was going through a lot and I didn’t

want to make you a rebound. You don't deserve that, you deserve a man who loves you and loves you fully."

"What do you mean?"

"I had just found out that Goitse was cheating on me with none other than my best friend Baboloki, you can imagine how hurt and betrayed I felt because they were the two people I trusted the most in my life. I didn't want to get into another relationship while I was still hurt and I'm sure you also wouldn't fully trust in my love for you because you'd always wonder if I truly love you or if I only considered being with you. After all, I was betrayed by the one I loved."

"What? Oh, my word Agang I'm so sorry, you are a good man, you don't deserve any of that." She says with concern masking her features, she's pained on my behalf.

"It's okay, I would be lying if I said I'm over it. I doubt I can ever regard anyone as a friend ever again in my life or trust someone blindly as I did with Goitse. I wanted to wait until I heal completely before telling you how I feel but I couldn't risk you

moving on and falling in love with someone else, I don't want to lose you Kwazi. I'm in love with you Nokwazi and I want to be with you but we can't run away from the fact I need some time, I don't want to rush into this and bleed on you when you're not the one who cut me."

"I understand, I'll wait for you Agang for as long as it takes."  
She says looking into my eyes, I know she means it. Nokwazi is the kind of person who wears her heart on her sleeve, she's in touch with her emotions and that's what I appreciate the most about her.

"Thank you."

"I'm sorry I didn't offer you anything to eat or drink when you came in, I was going through a lot of emotions but anger and shock were the primary emotions."

"It's okay, I understand. There's no need to explain yourself."

"Thanks, what can I offer you?"

“Nothing, I should be on my way it’s getting late,” I say standing to my feet

“You still didn’t tell me how you found me.”

“You’ll have to ask your lookalike, Nobuhle about that.” She smiles in amusement

“What? I’ll get her for this, she should have warned me or something.” I laugh in response, it took a lot of begging for Nobuhle to give me the address and speak to the security guards at the gate to let me in “How did you even get in touch with her?”

“Searched for her on Facebook, remember that post she made looking for you?” she nods “I used it to track her Facebook account.”

“Wow! I’m still shocked.” She says clapping her hands in shock

“There's nothing I wouldn't do to get what I want Kwazi, and I wanted to see and talk to you.”

“Where are you spending the night? You're not traveling back to Northwest are you?”

“No, of course not. I booked into a guesthouse in town and that's where I left my stuff.”

"When are you going back?"

"On Sunday, I want us to spend some time together before heading back. When is Zothando going back?" She smiles exposing her dimples

"Tomorrow morning."

"Perfect, I'll come to pick you up around 12 midday."

"Great, I'll be ready."

"One last kiss before I leave?" I can't remember the last time I enjoyed a kiss as I did with Nokwazi, I need more.

She giggles "Never, I'm still waiting for you and my kisses will wait with me thank you very much!" I laugh

"How about a peck then?"

"Nope, strictly no kissing."

"Bathong, o stingy le ka mba ya mba?" She laughs nodding her head

"Okay." I can't say I'm not disappointed

"I still can't believe you came all the way to talk to me."

“Well, believe it because I came all the way for you. There’s nothing I wouldn’t do for you girl, but I don’t like talking too much I prefer actions.”

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NOKWAZI

I’m going to bed as the happiest girl in the world tonight, I can’t stop smiling. Agang was here, the man my heart beats for came all the way to Gauteng from Northwest and went through the trouble of searching for my sister on Facebook so he could see me. Do you realize what that means? It means he cares about me as much I care about him, they always say another man's trash is another man's treasure but in this case, Goitse's trash is my treasure. Agang is a wonderful man, my chance at love and happiness I’m going to love him until the day my soul leaves my body, he’s my redemption

my second chance at this love thing and may the Lord help me to respect and take care of him.

“Big sis”

“Don’t big sis me, why didn’t you tell me about Agang?” she giggles

“How did you like your surprise?”

“I almost fainted, I couldn’t believe that he was here standing at my doorstep.” She laughs

“I knew you would be happy to see him, oh my word Nokwazi why didn’t you warn about his voice?” I chuckle

“What about it?”

“It’s so sexy, it has that thing man that grrrr.”

“Nantsi umhlola wami!” Thando exclaims in the background causing us to laugh

“You're with Thando at this hour of the night?”

“Yes, goodbye sis talk tomorrow.” She says dismissing me and cutting the call.

I hope she's using protection as I warned her, she might not say it but usewuzwile umsipha ka Thando u Buhle nizosho kuthi ngasho!

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QUINTON

“Are you ready to make your dessert orders or I should give you more time?” our waitress, Palesa says carrying her little notepad

I look at my wife next to me “Do you still have space for dessert in there?” I'm asking because she's on the alkaline diet, she doesn't eat meat, eggs, milk, or any junk food, and just like I promised her, I'm helping her bear this cross.

“I’m full but I wouldn’t mind ice cream.” She says winking at me.

“Caramel ice cream for my wife, I don’t know about Nyasha you can ask her,” I tell the waitress and kiss my wife's knuckles causing her to giggle.

She tries her best not to cheat but she’s still pregnant after all, so sometimes the cravings get the better of her.

“I would love your malva pudding,” Nyasha says looking at the menu

“Ok, lovely. Anything for you sir?” Palesa says looking at Given, he laughs shaking his head

“No, I’m fine ma'am.”

The date has been a success, Nyasha and Anzani got along like a house on fire and it was refreshing to see a different side of Given, the softer version of him that only comes out when Nyasha is around. They are a beautiful couple and I wish them nothing but love and prosperity

“I'm getting sleepy,” Anza whispers into my ear

“Let's wait for your dessert then we'll leave.”

“Okay.”

“Anzani can you please accompany me to the ladies?”-Nyasha

“No problem.” They stand up and follow each other to the restroom

“I'm glad they get along, you're my brother and we spend a lot of time together the person in my life needs to get along with your wife because they'll be around each other a lot because of us.”

“Nyasha is a good woman, I love her for you. I was getting worried thinking my brother is gay or something.” He laughs

“It’s not easy to date as a single father, because you can’t just go for the first woman you like. You need to choose someone who will love you and your child, Asante means everything to me I doubt I can ever be with any woman who doesn’t understand that Asante and I are a package. You can’t have one without the other.”

“No, I understand you because my kids also mean the world to me. I doubt I can ever be cool with anyone who doesn’t like them.”

“I can’t believe you’re already expecting your second child while I’m still on the first one.” We laugh

“You snooze you lose brother.” He chuckles “ I’m kidding, we didn’t plan him but I’m happy God gave him to us.”

“Don’t tell me it’s another boy.”

“It's another him, and I was hoping this one would be a girl.”

“Shem, keep on trying.”

“Don’t let Anzani hear you say that, she insists that this one is our last one.”

“Haibo! And what do you say?”

“I can’t force her to have more kids if she doesn’t want but I would have loved two more, I’ve always wanted a big family.”

“So you’re just going to give up on what you want?” I’m about to reply when I see Palesa approaching our table with the dessert

“There you go.”

“Thanks, please bring the bill we would love to pay.”

“Ok, sir.” She says and turns to her heels

“Yeah, I guess so. Marriage is about compromise.”

“I agree but don’t you think you’re the only one compromising in this marriage? She wanted to do an abortion not long ago and you were willing to let her do it even though you wanted the baby and now this?”

“She also compromises for me Given, come on.”

“I agree but not when it comes to kids, I understand that you love her and all but don’t allow yourself to be turned into a fool of love. You always compromise and put her first, as in always why is it so hard for her to do the same? I don’t get it, you’re her husband not her boyfriend so why-“ I clear my throat and signal him to keep quiet when I see the ladies approaching

“Think about what I said.” He’s not having it, he’s annoyed and I hope he won’t act funny in front of my wife

“I will.”

“You were gone for a while, what were you doing in there?” I say to lighten up the mood, Given is pissed and he’s not trying to hide it

“Girl stuff!” Nyasha replies and settles next to her man.

I stand up and pick up Anzani's ice cream and purse

“We should have more nights like this, I had a good time tonight and I’m sure everyone can agree with me.”

“Yes, it was amazing.” -Nyasha

“I had fun.” – Anzani

“I don’t know if you guys still want to stick around for a little longer but we’ll get going, madam here is sleepy,” I say snaking my arm around my wife's waist.

“It's okay, we understand, the joys of pregnancy,” Nyasha says looking at Anzani

I leave a few notes on the table and head out of the restaurant holding Anzani's hand.

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“It feels weird to go to bed without Zothando.” She says getting into bed

“I know, I feel the same way. I miss my little champ.” I strip and join her under the covers, wrap my arm around her body and pull her to me

“Thembalam'.”

“Hmm?” she says in a sleepy voice

“It's okay. Sleep, we'll talk tomorrow.”

“Okay, no problem. Goodnight baby.”

“Good night sthandwa sam'.”

It doesn't take long before I hear her breathing change, I get out of bed and stand next to the bed looking at her. I love her so much, with every fiber of my being but am I willing to forget about my dream of having a big family?

#97

I've been rummaging through my closet for the last hour yet I still don't know which outfit to wear, I want to look simple but not sluggish. I hate winter angfuni kungasho shem because I always struggle to find the balance between looking good and keeping warm. My phone rings snapping me from my thoughts, I pace to the bed and pick it up.

"I'm outside your door." His sexy voice sounds onto the receiver. Don't tell me it's already 12 midday!

"Huh?"

"I'm outside, please come and open for me."

"Ok, I'm coming." I grab my robe and wear it over the towel I have wrapped around my body.

Just like yesterday Agang pulls me into a hug the moment I open the door for him, I hold him back and we silently hold on to each other still rooted at the door.

“I missed you.” He whispers into my ear, the feel of his warm breath on my neck tickles my neck region. Ai nami Angisazi kwenzakalani ngami, it seems everything Agang does turns me on. He could be sneezing and my body will be twitching like there’s no tomorrow, what in the sexual tension is this one?

“I missed you too.” He puts his mouth on my neck and gently sucks on it turning me on further.

“Agang, we are at the door. Someone might pass and see us.” My voice is just above a whisper, my eyelids are heavy I can barely keep my eyes open.

Without a warning, he sweeps me off my feet and closes the door behind us with his foot. I cling to him and the towel slips and tumbles to the floor, now the only thing covering my nudity is my robe. I have my legs wrapped around his waist so you can

imagine the frosty breeze brushing against my thighs and lady parts. It's winter after all

"Why are you still not ready?" he asks and plants a soft peck on my lips

"Agang!" I chastise, of course, I enjoyed the kiss and I'm yearning for more but you know how it goes mos, a girl's got to play 'hard to get'.

"I'm struggling to pick an outfit."

"I'll help you choose, where to?"

"First door on your left." He walks to the bedroom carrying me in his arms, I hope I'm not too heavy for him phela mina ngipakile bafwethu!

I quickly cross my legs when he puts me on top of the bed. I'm dying to be with him but I won't act cheap, he needs to sweat for it. There won't be any sex until he's ready for a relationship.

“Let us see your clothes?” I show him my closet behind him

He advances towards it and looks through the different clothes I have inside, I didn't expect him to be so serious about this. I thought he was joking when he offered to help me choose an outfit. A few minutes later he hands me black letter pants, a black turtleneck, and an over-the-knee nude coat

“Wow! You've got style, I'm impressed!”

“Thanks, now dress up and accessorize the outfit with gold jewelry preferably. We are running out of time ” He says settling on top of the vanity chair

“Haibo bhutiza you need to leave the room so I can dress.” He chuckles and makes his way to the door

I dress up and pair my outfit with black ankle boots, I look smashing ninani my man has taste or should I say my soon-to-be man has an eye for fashion.

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We are snuggled under the fleece blanket on the couch while the wall heaters warm up the room, we are watching a movie and having popcorn. He wanted us to go out but it's cold outside so I voted against it and settled for an indoor movie setup kinda vibe. He's going back to Ikageng tomorrow so why not have a cozy day indoors? Plus the weather allows it. I'm not about to be frosting somewhere in a restaurant in this whether trying to push romantic vibes, you can mark me absent shem andizi.

"What?" I ask when I catch him staring for the umpteenth time, he's been watching me instead of watching the movie.

"I thought I could do this but I can't, I want to be with you Nokwazi. I want you in my life, I can't wait any longer."

"What?" he snakes his arm behind my neck and pulls me in for a sultry smooch, my insides flutter and my heart beat raises at the twinge of our lips. The kiss is slow, sensual, and passionate, he puts his tongue inside my mouth exploring all the corners of my mouth

“Wait, what do you mean?” Breaking the kiss was the most difficult thing I’ve had to do because of how good his kisses are, but I need answers.

His eyes have turned to slits, his breath heavy “I want you to be mine, for me to be yours. I want us to be a couple, to love each other and be committed to one another. I want your body and heart to belong only to me.” He mutters in a gruff whisper running his big hands all over my body “I love you Kwazi and it’s not about sex, we don’t have to have sex today but can you please agree to be mine, like fully be mine. Be committed and faithful to me like I will be to you, please give me your heart and I promise to take care of it.” He’s wearing his heart on his words, I’ve never seen him so naked and vulnerable before.

He cups my face and stares into my eyes linking our foreheads “Please be mine Kwazi, I already belong to you.”

I bob my head as I can’t bring myself to speak, I’m overwhelmed, in a good way that is.

“I want words pununu.”

“Yes, Agang. I'll be yours.”

He smiles emotionally “So you're mine, all mine Kwazi.” I laugh

“Yes silly, I'm yours. Only yours.” He plants a long peck on my lips and pulls me into a hug, I hold him back and sink in his big arms. Lord, this feels good please let it not be a dream.

He breaks the hug and picks me up making me sit on his lap with my legs on either side of his waist.

“Hello, girlfriend.” He says with a smile

“Hey, boyfriend.” Ngijola nomantshingilani nina, iyabulisa i girlfriend ye security guard. On some “You can go in sir.” vibes.

“Kea go rata.”

(I love you)

My heart palpates every time he declares his love for me “I love you too Agang.”

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ANZANI

I woke up to an empty bed, my husband wasn't next to me but he left a note stating his whereabouts. His phone sends me to voicemail when I try calling him, a part of me is worried because this has never happened before. We always spend our weekends together no matter what, I hope Given isn't in trouble because that's the only explanation I can think of.

It's just me and my son in the house, he didn't take the car so I went to fetch Zothando first thing when I woke up. One would swear it was ages ago when I last saw him with the way I missed him, I'm so used to him that I feel somehow incomplete when he's not next to me. I'm lying on the bed with Zothando

on top of me with his hands all over my face and boobs, speaking to my mom on the phone.

“This time I want to be the one to help you with the baby since I couldn’t do it with the first one, you need to come down to Venda when you go for your maternity leave so I can take care of you.”

“I have no problem with that mma but I will talk to my husband first and hear what he has to say, Mpilo never wants to part ways with his son so he might refuse.”

“But he can come anytime he wants to see them, I won’t stop him from seeing his kids.”

“I know mma but remember I spent the last trimester going in and out of hospital while pregnant with Zothando, he never got to enjoy the pregnancy. He might want to make up for it with this one.”

“It's fine, I understand. You are no longer just my daughter, you're someone's wife. A married woman.” I can tell she's disappointed, she really wants to do this. I'll have to speak to Mpilo and try to convince him

“I'll ask Mpilo to drive me there next Friday, your grandchild and I will spend the weekend with you.”

“Okay my love, I would love that.”

“I'll call you again later mma, I'm getting another call.”

“Alright ngwananga, bye.”

“Bye.” I hang up and take Dakalo's call

“Cuz please tell this security guard to let me in.” there's shuffling before a manly voice booms through my phone's speaker “Mrs. Ndlovu there's a lady here-“

“You can let her in Simon, she’s my cousin.” I saying cutting him short

“Okay, ma'am.” He says and gives her the phone “I hope you’ve taken a bath because I want us to go shopping.” Dakalo says

I chuckle “No, I’m having a lazy Saturday with my son. This is what you get for showing up unannounced.”

“Whatever, open up. I don't want to wait at your door.”

I get up from the bed and head to the door carrying my son on the side of my waist

“Ntombi!” we bellow in unison as soon as our eyes lock then we laugh at our silliness

“Oh my goodness Zothando looks so cute, come to auntie Dakalo big boy.” She says trying to take him from me but my boy clings onto me and cries disappointing her

“You don’t visit

so my son doesn’t know you that’s why he’s crying but give him some time he’ll come around.”

“He really should, you don’t know how much I looked forward to seeing him.”

“I know cuz but he’ll come around.”

“You look great, this pregnancy loves you. I love the weight gain, It suits you.” She says brushing my pregnancy bun

“Thanks, cousin, I hope this time I won’t lose weight. I love being a size 32.”

“You won’t.”

“I hope so, let’s get inside.”

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I can't believe I let Dakalo drag me across all the malls in the east rand looking for a jacket she saw on Mr. Price's website, now we're at Heidelberg mall and this crazy girl expects me to walk inside with her can you imagine it? I'm not ready to see those distasteful, bitter gossips who work in this particular Mr. Price shop.

"Come on Anza don't be a party pooper."

"No, Dakalo. You're not the one who was emotionally and verbally abused in that shop, I made a vow to never set my foot there again when I left and I don't intend to go back on my word."

"You're missing the bigger picture Anzani, you're beautiful, successful, and married to a handsome loving man. You have the cutest son ever and you're expecting your second, these people bullied you and fired you from your job but God elevated you to even greater heights so you get in there and show them who you are."

“Dakalo, I’m content with who I am and I’m not trying to prove a point to anyone.”

“Well, I want to prove a point to those witches so you’re going to have to do it for me since you don’t want to do it for yourself.” I can’t help but laugh

“Are you serious right now?”

“Yes, I am. I’m the one who had to listen to your daily complaints about work, you have to do this for me.”

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NARRATED

Nontobeko is at the door relieving the security guard for lunch when her eyes land on someone who looks like her ex-colleague, but it can’t be! Anzani was skinny and dull, this

beautiful lady with a perfectly installed lace afro kinky bob wig, faultlessly done make-up and glowing skin can't possibly be her. Ukufana kwa bantu nje!

"Hi Nontobeko, it's good to see you." Her eyes widen in shock, so it is Anzani!

"Hi." She smiles and walks past her pushing a luxurious baby stroller, her eyes travel up and down her form eyeing her outfit.

The light-skinned lady she walked in with says something and Anzani laughs and high-fives her, the diamond ring on her ring finger catches Nontobeko's attention

"So she's married?" she thinks to herself

Her eyes skim around the store looking for one of her colleagues to share the news with, they land on Bongiwe who's in her department serving customers nasty looks so they don't ruin her flat pack

“Bongiwe!” she bellows

She signals her to come to her when Bongiwe looks at her, from her body language Bongiwe immediately knows she has news so she doesn't ask twice and paces towards her.

“You won't believe what I'm about to tell you.” She's still in disbelief, she can't wrap her mind around what she just saw.

“Yini?” Bongiwe asks impatiently

(What)

“Buka lapha.” She says gesturing to where Anzani and her companion are “That's Anzani.”

(Look over there)

"Which one?"

"The one pushing the stroller"

“Hayi Nontobeko unamanga!”

(It can't be, you're lying)

“Buka.” She says crossing her fingers “Wu Anzani loya.”

(I swear)(That's Anzani)

“Njani?”

(How)

“I should be asking you, wuwena ohlala ngaka anti wakhe mos.”

(You're the one who lives next to her aunt's place)

“She long moved, ngezwa bathi she's married to an engineer and moved to Joburg but I thought it was lies.”

(I heard that)

“Turns out it's the truth, she's married I saw the diamond ring on her finger. Nengane yakhona uyiphusha ngenye I pram

uyaybona nje kuthi iyabiza, nangu ugcoke ne puffer jacket ka Gucci angmazi ufunani la.”

(She was pushing the baby with a fancy-looking stroller, she’s also wearing a Gucci puffer jacket. I wonder what she’s doing here)

“Uzosibonisa thina phela.”

(She’s here to show off)

“Ai shem yislima mos uma enjalo, sihlanganaphi thina. We are not fazed!”

(She’s foolish if that’s the case, we don’t care)

“Nakancane nje. Sibajwayele abafana naye, abaqhoma ngemali yamadoda, ajike abashiye lamadoda babuye bafane nathi, at least thina siya sebenza sine mali yethu.”

(Not even a bit. We are used to girls like her, who brag with men's money then the same men dump them and they end up looking like us. At least we are working and earning our keep)

“Exactly.”

Anza's presence in the store left most of her ex-colleagues uncomfortable, just like Bongiwe and Nontobeko Boitumelo and Linda also couldn't stop gossiping and making nasty remarks after seeing her but not everyone is pained by her success, Mamohau, Daniel and Ellen are happy to see her. As we all know Saturday is a busy day for the store, so unfortunately Daniel and Ellen couldn't stick around for long.

“Wu Munyai haosole motle je mosadi!” Mamuhau exclaims running her eyes up and down Anzani's form

(Munyai you look beautiful)

“Thank you, you look beautiful too.”

“Is that your son?”

"Yes, my first born. The second one is here" she says opening up her jacket revealing her bun

“Ncoah congratulations, he’s so cute.” She holds Zothando's tiny fingers “Hello handsome. Wu ngwanao omotle jwang Venda girl, ha tshwane le wena mara keng o tshwana le ntatae?”

(Your son is so cute Venda girl but he doesn’t look like you, does he look like his father)

“Yes.” She coos

“Ho tjhong moguy omotle mos.” Anzani laughs

(That means he’s handsome then)

“Watch yourself, Hau, that’s my husband,” Anzani warns jokingly

“Honestly keo thabetse ngwanana, you deserve every good thing you have going on for you.”

(I’m happy for you girl)

“Thank you.”

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AGANG

“Spend the night with me, please,” I say tightening my arms around her.

We spent the whole day talking, watching movies, and eating and somehow ended up under the covers fully clothed that is, it's six o'clock now. The time we agreed on her leaving but I'm still not ready to let her go, the hours we spent together are not enough I want more.

“Agang, we agreed on six and you were okay with it. What changed suddenly?”

“I know I agreed but I still want to spend time with you Kwazi, tomorrow I'm going back to Northwest and who knows when I'll see you again. Please stay.”

She blows out a sigh “I don’t know Agang isn’t it too soon?”

“No, it’s not. I won’t touch you I promise, I just want to be with you that’s all.”

“Eish... I don’t know.”

“Please baby, don’t you want to spend the night with your man?”

“You know I do but I feel like I’ll be acting cheap and easy if I agree to spend the night on the first day of our relationship.”

“That’s the thing with you, you think too much. Look cheap to who? I know you’re not cheap and I respect you a lot, I would never do anything you’re not comfortable with. Stop overthinking and spend the night with your man, you know you want to.” I say getting on top of her and tickling the sides of her tummy, she giggles sweetly

“Okay..okay! I’ll spend the night.” I offer her a smile and drop a kiss on her lips, I can’t get enough of her lips.

She wraps her arms around my neck and deepens the kiss, we kiss making love with our tongues and we don’t stop until we both run out of breath.

“Thank you,” I say grazing her nipple with my teeth through the fabric of her turtleneck, she’s got small pecky tits so she doesn’t wear a bra.

“Agang!” she moans running her manicured fingers through my hair

“Keng baby?” I ask pulling up her top and feasting my eyes on her upper body waiting for a response

(What’s wrong)

She responds with heavy breaths, I drop my mouth on her belly and her body shudders.

“Motho wame?” I say raising my head and looking at her face  
(My love)

“Urg! Why did you stop what you were doing?” I break into a  
chuckle

“I want you to tell me what you want me to do, I need words  
Wame words.”

(Mine)

“Agang please continue with what you were doing.”

“What was I doing?” I counter-testing her patience

“Mxm! Yekela angikuncengi!”

(Leave it, I won't beg)

#98

“Where are you coming from?” Quinton asks the moment I walk through the door, he’s sitting on the couch drinking water from a glass.

“Hey love.”

“I asked you a question Anzani.” He says, firmly this time around.

“I was out with Dakalo, she came here and asked me to accompany her to do shopping. Yoh love, you won’t believe what happened today.” I advance towards him and push Zothando’s stroller next to him, he peeks inside, and his face instantly changes into a smile. He picks him up and cradles him in his arms

“How did it go with Given?” I ask settling next to him on the couch

“Fine. You were about to tell me something.”

“Oh, that! Dakalo wanted some jacket she saw on Mr. Price’s website, so I drove her to Carlton center, but we didn’t find it. She didn’t accept defeat she was adamant about buying that jacket, that too yesterday. She had me driving all over the city we even went to East rand looking for that jacket, but we still didn’t find it, we would either find it out of stock or in a smaller or bigger size than the size she wanted and that’s how we found ourselves in Heidelberg mall.”

“Let me get this straight, so you drove all over the city looking for the jacket until you ended up in Heidelberg mall?” He’s furious, me and my big mouth why did I tell him that?

“Yes.”

“Anzani you know how I feel about you driving long distances in your condition, worse in this cold weather with my son for a measly jacket that’s not even yours.”

“But nothing happened my love, I’m fine and so is our baby there’s no need to worry.”

“The problem with you Anzani is that you take things lightly, I don’t know how to explain it to you so you can understand that driving long distances in your condition is not safe.”

“I’m sorry.” He doesn’t respond, he stands up and walks away with our son leaving me with an egg on my face. I regret allowing Dakalo to convince me, look now my husband is angry with me.

Speak of the devil, she’s calling me. “Hey.”

“I still can’t get over the jealousy on your ex-colleague's faces when they saw you, I should’ve taken pictures.” She enjoyed the show, it’s all she spoke about until I dropped her off at the taxi rank.

“Yeah.”

“Hao Ntombi kutheni kengoku.”

(What’s going on now)

“My husband is angry at me Dakalo, I’m not supposed to drive for long distances you know for safety reasons. You know my pregnancies are always high-risk mos.”

“Eish! I’m sorry, it’s all my fault. I shouldn’t have made you drive all that distance, it completely slipped my mind.”

“It’s okay, Mpilo will be fine. I’ll ask for forgiveness.”

“Do that and tell me how it goes.”

I head to the bedroom to look for my husband after getting off the phone with Dakalo, he’s sleeping skyward with our son sitting on his stomach. Zothando’s loud giggles warm my heart, he always laughs like this every time his father is playing with him. I take off my shoes and lie next to him.

“Baby I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.”

“No, it’s not I can see that you’re still angry with me.”

“Of course, I’m angry Anzani, you’re always doing something to put our unborn baby at risk. First, you lied to me about telling your boss about your pregnancy, then you went driving to Northwest three times a week ignoring your doctor's orders. I forgave all of that when I found out, and now it’s this. There’s only so much I can take, yeka nje ukudlala ngami.”

(Stop taking advantage of my kindness)

“I’m sorry”

He takes a deep breath and turns his face in my direction “Do you even want this baby?”

“Of course, I do.” I know I do the wildest things at times, but I want my son, I do.

“Then why do you go out of your way to do things that put our baby’s life at risk?”

“I’m sorry baby, I have no excuse for this but I promise it won’t happen again please forgive me.” At this point I’m tearing up; I can’t fault him for being angry nor do I find lies in what he said because it’s the truth. I keep messing up

“That’s what you said the last time but look where we are today.” Now I don’t know what to say to defend myself so I stick to crying “Stop with the tears, what impression do you want to give my son? Ungangi casuli ngoba ayikho nje nalento oyikhalelayo.”

(You’re making me angry because there’s no reason for you to cry)

“I’m sorry baby, I swear it won’t happen again.” I snuggle closer to him and hug his waist laying my head on his chest

“Ngiyaxolisa Gatsheni wami omuhle.”

Apologizing in Zulu and adding his clan names in the mix always does the trick, he resists for a few seconds but eventually gives in. He snakes his arm around my waist and pulls Zothando to his chest, laying him under his left arm so Zo and I both lie on his chest.

Zothando raises his head looks at me and giggles cheerfully, he loves it when his father does this. I'm sure in his little mind, he and I are equals because of this treatment.

“This right here means everything to me, you and our children complete me. Stop endangering our child's life Anzani because I swear I will never forgive you if we lose him because of your negligence, I will forever be grateful to you for giving me kids mama please don't taint the good you've done by being careless.”

“It won't happen again.”

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## NOKWAZI

Do you guys know the feeling of sleeping in the arms of the man you love who loves you just as much if not more in return? I've been through a lot. Life has shown me flames at my tender age, so I'll be bragging about every little thing that goes right in my life especially in my relationship because wawu mjolo has been showing me flames since day one so nje allow me to brag about my sexy Tswana man every chance I get. I woke up first so I could stare at him in his sleep, a part of me found it difficult to believe that all of this is happening so eish akulalekanga izolo I kept waking up every two hours to see if Agang is really sleeping next to me, all of this feels surreal. Not long ago this looked like nothing but a farfetched dream but guess what? I'm living the life of my dreams, I deserve my own LIVING THE DREAM WITH NOKWAZI reality show shame, Showmax please hear me out tu!

"Good morning." He says opening his eyes

I lean closer to him and plant a peck on his lips "Morning love."

“Hmmm, I could get used to being woken up like this.”

“Marry me and live the life of your dreams bhutiza.” He chuckles

“You’re funny, who would have thought.”

“Aisuka...tell me how did you sleep?”

“Like a baby, you?”

“I couldn’t sleep, your guy was poking me all night long.”

“Askies Wame, but that’s the effect you have on him. He gets up at the mere mention of your name.” I guess I’m not the only one suffering from the extraordinary sexual attraction between us.

“I haven’t seen you smoke. Did you quit?” I’m curious because I caught a whiff of cigarettes in his breath on Friday yet I haven't seen him smoke since yesterday.

“No, but how do I crave cigarettes when I’m with you because all I’m craving for is you.” Did that not get me blushing like a moron! I’m sure my face is red like a tomato right about now

“Kea go rata wena mara waitse.” He says stroking my cheek

“I love you too baby.” He shifts and lies on his back pillowing his arms flexing his biceps and chocolate-chiseled abs, every time I see his bare chest I just see a vision of myself smearing his abs with whip cream and sucking it off his abs using my tongue

“I can’t believe I’m going back to Northwest today; can’t we rewind back to Friday? I’m not ready to part with you.”

“Eish

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I know right. Me too.”

“What if you went back with me?”

“What? haibo anever! My brother would freak!”

“Eish, mara I’m going to miss you shem.”

“I know me too.”

“You know what let’s make the most of the few hours we have left together starting with taking a shower.”

“Together?”

“Yep, why not?” Bathong, Agang is moving too fast

“Already?”

“Wabona? I told you not to overthink, just go with the flow and do what your heart tells you.” He climbs down the bed and picks me up, the T-shirt I’m wearing rides up exposing my bums. I slept in his T-shirt by the way.

Yey ave kumnandi ukugugwa yindoda oyithandayo! Bayaniguga nani ebenu or nigcina ngoku bona ezinye ingane zigoniwe ku TV nango kufunda ngakho kuma novels?

“I didn’t bring my toiletries, what am I going to bath with.” I’m sitting on top of the toilet seat while he’s inside the shower trying to get the right water temperature for us.

“We’ll share mine.” Haibo guys, is that even doable or kudlalwa ngami?

“Really?”

“Yes, really.”

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It's three in the afternoon, we've checked out and now we are on an Uber to the taxi rank. I smell like a man, but I don't mind because I smell like my man. The closer the car drives towards the destination the more it dawns on me that he's going back to Northwest, and I might not see him anytime soon. I'm so tempted to go with him but I know my brother won't like it and besides it's too soon for visits, but all the reasons I just mentioned don't change the fact that I so badly want to break down and cry right now at the thought of him leaving.

"Don't look so sad, we'll talk every day."

"But it's not the same."

"I know but unfortunately this will be our life until I have enough money to marry you."

"And when will that be?"

"I can't say for sure, but it'll happen."

A few heartbeats later the Uber halts at the rank, Agang steps out of the car first and goes to the boot to fetch his bag. I reluctantly get off and pluck myself next to him, he holds my waist with one arm and his duffel bag on the other.

“Take care of yourself for me please.” He says before getting inside the taxi, the queue marshal closes the door and I watch as the Quantum drives away with the man I love. Tears pour down my face causing people to stare at me like I’ve lost my mind.

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THANDO

“Yamkela wants us to go out tonight, do you think I should go?” Esihle says walking inside my bedroom, well the one I use when I’m in my parent's house.

“I don’t know sis, I can’t tell you what to do. If you want to keep being friends with someone like Yamkela do so but know that if

you decide to keep your friendship with her I'll create a distance between us."

"Why does it sound like you're giving me an ultimatum?"

"I'm not, I'm just being frank with you." How she's still considering being friends with Yamkela after what happened the last time she was here with her parents is beyond me

"I hate that things have turned out this way, we used to be one big and happy family before all of this happened. I just wish we could go back to how things used to be."

"Unfortunately we can't go back to how things used to be, you'll have to choose a side- your friend or us your family," I say and make my way out leaving her deep in thought.

"Thando come here." My mother says as I pass her in the kitchen, I retreat praying that whatever she wants to talk about doesn't take too long. I'm on my way to meet my girlfriend

“I've been having weird dreams lately, it's either I'm dreaming of eggs or water and all these other weird things.” I honestly don't understand why my mother is telling me this, but I can't ask exactly say that to her unless I'm ready for a lecture from her husband. My father doesn't take kindly to people disrespecting his wife, he changes color instantly.

“How really?” what else can I say?

“Do you know what dreams like that mean?”

“No, I don't.”

“I usually get them when someone close to me is pregnant, I asked Esihle and she told me she's not dating ndide ndathi maka khulule so I'm sure it's not her.”

( I even told her to undress)

“What about Langa? Maybe he's the one who impregnated someone.”

“I also asked him, he said he doesn’t have a girlfriend and I believe him. That leaves you, is your girlfriend pregnant?”

“Why me? Maybe it’s you, I mean you’re still young, and-“ I don’t get to finish my sentence because she strikes my face with a dish swab.

“Ungazongijwayela kabi!” I know I’ve crossed the line when she changes to her mother tongue, Isizulu.

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QUINTON

I’m in church with Anzani and our kids, I can see my parents among the congregation, they are seating a few rows behind us. I can’t describe the indescribable joy I feel in my heart seeing my parents after so long, as a result, I can’t concentrate on the sermon as I keep glancing behind me worried that my parents will disappear if I look forward for too long.

I love church and everyone knows that there's nothing I enjoy more than being in the house of the lord and listening to his word but today I'm anxiously waiting for the sermon to be over, after what feels like forever the pastor concludes the sermon and the MC calls a member of the church forward to say the last prayer. Relief washes over me when the man says 'Amen' I pick up my daughter and son next to me and tell Anzani to follow me, she looks nervous to meet my parents for the first time but she holds Zothando's hand and follows behind me.

Big smiles travel on their lips when they see us approaching, they look so good together I can't help but be proud to call them my parents.

"Mom, dad these are my kids." Dad smiles sweetly and takes my daughter from me.

"Such a beautiful daughter you have, come son." He says stretching his free hand to my son, my son is a bit shy. He looks at him and hides his face on my chest, I guess it's because he's seeing him for the first time.

“Go to granddad big boy,” I whisper in his ear, he looks at me and reluctantly reaches out to dad.

“Hao koti don’t be shy, come closer.” My mom says looking behind me, I turn and see Anzani standing behind us awkwardly with Zothando holding on to his mother's leg.

“Thembalam' sondela I want to introduce you to my parents.”

Mom smiles sweetly “Mina ngiyamazi fana usukhohliwe yini? Zenzozothando ka gogo wakhe woza la mfanami”

(I know her have you forgotten? Zenzozothando come to granny my boy)

A big smile embraces Zothando's lips after my mother's statement, he looks at her briefly squinting his eyes as if recognizing her then he charges to her arms. My mother catches him and spins him around causing him to giggle

“Sthandwa Sam sondela hau,” I say stretching my hand out to my wife, she slowly steps forwards and greets my parents shyly.

(My love come closer)

Mom smiles at her and pulls her into a hug, or rather what was meant to be one. They can't properly hug with Zothando clinging to my mother like he is now, my father stares at her with a straight face for a bit before moving his gaze to me.

“Wuye lo, hlala naye emthandazweni ungayengwa yizinto zomhlaba. Uyena ozovusa umuzi ka Ndlovu.” He says and turns to her with a smile

(She's the one, stick with you in prayer and cry be misled by worldly things. She's the one who'll give rise to the Ndlovu surname.)

Zothando's loud sob jolts me up from my sleep, I'm covered in sweat and the my sleeping shirt is clinging onto me. What kind of dream was that, it felt so real. I glance at Anzani next to me, she's sleeping peacefully and even drooling. I get out of bed and make my way to Zothando's cot to attend to him

#99

I'm disappointed that my husband is not next to me yet again as I wake up this morning and judging from how cold his side of the bed is, it's been a while since he woke up. I peel the blankets, slide my feet inside my morning slippers and make my way to Zothando's cot but just like his father, I don't find him. It seems they are together wherever they are, I head to the bathroom to pee and then wash my hands before brushing my teeth and washing my face.

I think the time has come for Zothando and his cot to move to his bedroom, or all the work and decoration I had done in that bedroom would have all been for nothing. He's growing up fast and can now sleep through the night without waking up, I believe now is the perfect time for him to learn to be independent. I wear my robe and trek all over the house looking for my boys, I'm grateful when I finally find them in the kitchen. Zothando is on top of the kitchen countertop while Mpilo feeds him sour porridge, he's humming a melody and waving his hands in the air. That's how much he's enjoying his breakfast, my son is not too fussy when it comes to food he prefers basic things like sour porridge, sorghum porridge, and phuthu and maas over Weet-bix, nutritic, oats, and all the other

meals most babies enjoy. He's a true Zulu descendent this one, I'm sure he'll be eating ox head by the time he turns five.

"Morning baby." I say dropping a kiss on his cheek "Morning son." Zothando smiles at me briefly and grabs his father's hand directing the spoon to his mouth causing us to roar in laughter

"Ai shem uyazithandela umdoko nangu muntu."

(He loves his porridge)

"Yeah hey."

"Good morning thembalam', your breakfast is in the microwave."

"Ncoah, thank you, baby!" He made pancakes, my favorite!  
How sweet is my husband? I know shouldn't be eating this but I can't resist temptation sometimes

“It’s a pleasure.” I make a cup of hot chocolate and settle next to him

“I was upset when I saw that you woke up early and left me in bed again, but this makes up for it, because wow these tastes so delicious.” I’m gobbling the pancakes like I haven’t eaten in years as I say this.

He offers me a smile in response, but I notice that the smile doesn’t reach his eyes.

“Mpilo what’s wrong?”

“Nothing, why?” He replies avoiding my eyes

“Did you forget that I know you? you can’t lie to me, something has been going on with you for a while now. What is it? You know you can talk to me about anything.” He looks at the plate in front of me

“Please finish up your food, then we’ll talk.” I push the plate away from me and wipe my mouth with a serviette

“I’ve lost my appetite.” He looks down and a sigh breezes out of his lips, I set my right hand on his lap and give it a gentle squeeze giving him moral support.

“I had a weird dream last week.”

“What dream?”

“For the first time since my mother passed, she visited me in my dreams....she wasn’t alone, she was with my father.”

“That’s a good thing, right?”

“I don’t know, I’m not sure.”

“What was the dream about?” He narrates his dream to me, and I’m left confused. I don’t know the first thing about dreams

much less how to interpret them so I'm not sure if the dream was a negative or positive one.

"Seeing that the dream bothers you so much, I think you should ask someone who knows how to interpret dreams to tell what it means. And also, why did we have three children in the dream? Does it mean we'll have another child?" I have nothing against kids but I'm not willing to go through another pregnancy, two kids are enough for me.

"I don't know maybe." He says with a shrug. Zothando stretches his arms for me to take him, he's done eating, and only now does he remember that he has a mother. This little betrayer, this is why I want him out of my bedroom because he's not loyal at all.

Mpilo ruffles Zothando's hair with his hand, my baby has hair for days and long lashes that sweep his eye sockets each time he blinks, if only he was a girl.

“There’s something you’re not telling me, what is it?” I’m not comfortable with the way he’s looking at our son or the unshed tears I see glowing in his eyes.

“I googled the meaning of hugging a deceased person in a dream and...” He looks up and tears roll down his cheeks freaking me out

“And what Mpilo!” The alarm bells in my head have gone off, he better start talking.

“Google says it’s a sign of accepting death or a way for your guardian angel to prepare you for death.”

“No, not my son. He can’t die, he’s still too young!”

“It’s just a myth baby, that doesn’t mean it's true.” Then why is he crying? “Our son will be okay, we just need to pray for him.” I don’t know what he means by what he just said because we’ve never ceased praying for our marriage and children unless there’s a new way of praying that I haven’t heard of.

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## THANDO

My mother is so convinced that I'm the one who impregnated someone among her children and all that because of a dream, but I'm not fazed because all of that is nothing but superstition, not a proven fact. There's no way I made someone pregnant because Hlehle and I are not sexually active nor am I cheating on her, so if my mother is to welcome a grandchild in the next few months it definitely won't be from me.

"There you go," Hlehle says handing me a dish swab, she's holding a tray lined with food and a glass filled with my favorite beer.

My mouth is already watering, I can't wait to indulge. Not only because the food looks and smells delicious but because I know my lady never disappoints in the kitchen, she's one hell of a great cook. She must open a restaurant and make money from her talent; such great skills shouldn't go to waste.

“Thank you Hlehle wami.” Whenever she doesn’t have a lot of schoolwork, she spends the weekend with me. She's submitted all her assignments, so we’re in my house spending quality time together.

She goes back to the kitchen after giving me my food and comes back a heartbeat later with her plate and the bottle of Aromat in her hands.

“What?” She asks with her eyebrows contoured when she catches me eyeing her

“Where does your sudden obsession with Aromat come from?”

“I don’t know but I can’t live without it nowadays.”

“Hmm okay.” I can’t help but moan after having the first spoon, yerr Hlehle can cook, and I can’t stress enough how much I enjoy having a girlfriend who can cook for the first time since I began dating. Not that all my exes were bad cooks

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but Hlehle is on another level, uhamba yedwa! “The food is delicious thank you baby.”

Her lips break into a huge smile “Thank you, love, I’m glad you’re enjoying your food.”

We enjoy our meal over nice conversations, Hlehle is only 17 years old but the wisdom she possesses always blows my mind away. I’m more attracted to her mind over everything else, there’s nothing I find sexier than a woman who’s not only beautiful but intelligent as well. Women who can hold their own during conversations and challenge your intellect, and my Hlehle is exactly that.

“Muntu wam’ I forget to tell you what my mother said last week when I was at home.”

“What did she say?” She puts her fork down and grabs the glass of soda in front of her.

“She believes that I have made someone pregnant because apparently she’s been dreaming of water, eggs, and poop.”

“Sies baby, I’m eating!”

“Sorry love... So because of those dreams, she’s convinced that I’ll give her a grandchild in the next couple of months, she even emphasized that I shouldn’t deny her grandchild.”

“All this because of a dream? What makes her so sure it’s you who’s expecting a child, it can be any one of your siblings.”

“Exactly baby but she says she confronted Esihle and even made her undress so she’s sure it’s not her.”

“What about Langa?”

“Same, she says Langa said he doesn’t have a girlfriend, so she’s convinced it’s me.”

“She’s wrong unless you’re cheating on me because you and I have never had sex, we only have oral sex.” She says shooting me a glare

“Come on baby, you know I’m not cheating. You have access to my phone, why would I cheat when all of this is mine. Have you seen how gorgeous you look sthandwa sam’? not only that but you’re amazing as hell, I swear abo Ngxito would turn their backs on me if I ever cheated on you because, with you, I’ve struck gold.” She tries to keep a straight face but she fails and the beautiful smile I’m crazy about eventually creeps up on her face

“I love you Hlehle,” I say putting my hand on top of hers

“I know, I love you too baby.”

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AGANG

I had a long week missing my pununu, if I wasn't going to work tomorrow, I would be on a taxi to Johannesburg right now. To say I miss her would be an understatement, every single cell in my body craves to be next to her and talking via video call no longer alleviates the urge to be with her. I feel like I'm going out of my mind, I'm scared is this love or obsession because I've never felt like this before not even with Goitse who I was convinced I loved with all my heart.

I'm doing my laundry next to the tap when I see Oupa walk through the gate holding a plastic from Checkers liquor.

"Laitaka!" He bellows when he sees me next to the tap

I chuckle "Oupa, the bad influence." He cackles

"What did I do?"

"What is inside that plastic in your hands?" He laughs out loud grabbing Ditebogo's attention who is kicking his plastic ball on the grass

“Ke weekend mfanaka.”

(It’s the weekend my friend)

“You know I have work tomorrow.”

“Two nyana won’t kill you.”

“Of course, you’ll say that, let me go and get a chair for you.”

“Okay, ntwana.” I depart to my back room and take a chair with me; I find him drinking on my return and laugh at him

“Lenyoro laitaka lenyoro!” He says in his defence

(Thirst my friend thirst)

He takes the chair and dumps his behind on it “Peek inside the plastic and see what I bought for you.” He says handing me the plastic

“Ta my bra” I say seeing the bottle of Johnnie walker double black, the smile on my face right now!

(Thank you, my friend)

“And I also got this.” He says showing me a packet of weed

“I can see your plan; you want to kill me today.” He laughs throwing his head backward. It's official Oupa is a bad influence

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It's six in the evening, Oupa and I are in the lounge feasting on the full chicken and pap we just bought from the Chisanyama down the street, I didn't drink too much but I'm a bit tipsy unfortunately I can't say the same thing about Oupa he's wasted and won't stop drinking. My stomach hurts from laughing, Oupa is hilarious the nonsense he spews with his mouth will surely kill me one of these days. I had a great day, he's great company.

He jolts up from the couch and screams with one hand on his chest, looking up with a longing look on his face when Sofa Selahlane by Nkosazana daughter and Master KG comes on.

“This song laitaka this song.” He picks up a scatter cushion on the couch and starts dancing hugging it to his chest, I laugh and take out my phone to take a video as proof in case he denies doing this tomorrow.

A loud knock sounds on the door disturbing us, he pauses and reduces the volume on the amplifier

“Who are you knocking on my door like that?” I’m already on my feet charging to the door, I know it’s not my landlord. She would never knock on my door like a lunatic, she respects my space.

“Agang please open.” The voice halts me in my tracks, I know it very well and would recognize it from anywhere

“What do you want Goitsemodimo?”

“Please open the door, it’s chilly out here.” Oupa looks at me wanting to gauge my reaction, I guess hearing Goitse's voice sobered him up.

I take a deep breath and open the door; she walks in pulling her suitcase and hesitates when she sees Oupa.

“Uhm Agang, can we talk in private?” she says turning to me  
“I’m not going anywhere,” Oupa interjects before I can even reply, Goitse ignores him and looks at me.

“Say whatever you want to say in front of him or you can leave.” She looks so ugly and round, this pregnancy doesn’t agree with her. I can’t believe how much she has changed in two months, she’s what seven or eight months pregnant now? I guess this was expected.

“I need a place to stay, I lost my job a month ago and I’m trying to save the little I have for the baby... you know how the situation with my aunt and relatives is so I can’t go to any of them.”

“What about Babo? Is he not your boyfriend and the father of your baby? Why didn’t he take you in?” she drops her face in shame

“He broke up with me and denied the pregnancy, he says he will only believe the baby is his after she’s born. He says if I could cheat on you with him then he can’t be certain that he was the only person I cheated on you with.” She wipes her tears “I know I cheated on you but I swear he’s the only one I slept with throughout the course of our relationship.”

Oupa laughs and claps his hands in disbelief “Let me leave laitaka” He takes one bottle of Heineken from the table and walks out

“I’m sorry for what you’re going through Goitse but I’m sorry I can’t help you, I have a girlfriend and she won’t appreciate me giving my ex-girlfriend accommodation. I sympathize with you, I do but I really can’t help you.”

“You have a girlfriend, so soon? Were you cheating on me Agang?” I don’t have to answer her so I don’t “It’s that HIV girl right? Babo told me and I thought he was jealous, wow I can’t believe I trusted you and thought you’re one of a kind but now I know better. You’re nothing but a cheat just like the rest of the men, sies!”

#100

“Please tell me you’re joking, I promise I’ll forgive you for what you just said. You’re the one who cheated on me with my best friend, not the other way around. What did you expect me to do after we broke up? To stop my life and feel sorry for myself because a hoe spread her legs and got pregnant for another guy while in a relationship with me?” She flinches at the word “Hoe”, I’m not a vile person but she forced my hand. How dare she call my girlfriend names when she’s the one who cheated and intended to pin the pregnancy on me? I’m fuming yeses!

She takes a deep breath “I’m sorry, that came out wrong. I know I cheated and didn’t appreciate you when you were mine, but it hurts to know that you moved on, I’m jealous of that girl because I know how deep and far your love goes. I hope she won’t make the same mistake I did and fail to appreciate you, you’re a remarkable man Agang Moroka Nokwazi is blessed to have you.”

“Thanks, I guess but you can’t stay here, I’m sorry.” Her compliment doesn’t mean anything to me because she still

cheated on me, she looks down and bobs her head in understanding

“It’s okay, I understand. All the best in your relationship.”

“Thank you, I wish you well.” I walk to the door and open it wider; she wipes a lone tear that just rolled down her cheek and makes her way out pulling her suitcase.

I shut the door and lean my back against it, her gut-wrenching sob sounds in my ears a heartbeat later. The altruist in me is tempted to chase after her and comfort her but I have to fight with nature because my assistance may be misunderstood not only by her but by Nokwazi should she find out and it’s too early in our relationship for disputes, I want the honeymoon phase to last a little longer or forever If possible.

I turn up the volume and her whimper gets swallowed by the music and eventually fades away.

As if on cue I receive an incoming call from my girlfriend, if you ask me this is just what I need to get over the guilt snubbing on my gut.

“Wame.” Her sweet giggles boom in my ear through the phone’s speaker. I made certain to turn off the music before taking her call.

“I miss you so much.”

“Not as much as I miss you.”

“Next week I’m coming, angeke angisakhoni phela manje.”

(I can’t do this anymore)

That warms my heart and causes me to smile delightfully

“I’ll be more than glad to have you, come my love.”

“You didn’t call me today.”

“I know I’m sorry. I spent the day with Oupa and forgot about my phone, I was about to call now since he just left.”

“Hmm did you have a good time?”

“Yeah, I enjoyed myself.” I lie skyward on the bed putting my legs up

“I’m glad you did, I thought long and hard about what I want to do and I’ve decided to pursue a career in media. I don’t know if I want to study TV, film, and entertainment production or if I should consider a bachelor's degree in creative writing since writing is my passion but so far those are the two courses that appealed to me the most when I was looking at the courses offered by AFDA.”

“Wow, that’s nice. What is AFDA?”

“AFDA is a private Higher Education institution that offers courses in film, television, performance, business innovation, and technology, radio, and podcasting. It has campuses located in Auckland Park, Johannesburg; Observatory, Cape Town; Durban North, Durban Central, and Port Elizabeth. Most people in the entertainment industry are AFDA graduates.”

“Nice, I’m glad you’ll finally get to study what you’re passionate about. Are applications for next year open?”

“Yes, I’ve already sent my application. Hope I get in.”

“You’ll get in, I have no doubts about it.”

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NARRATED

Lungile walks in while Buhle is jumping up and down trying to get inside her jeans, her forehead is beaded with sweat and her armpits are moist. She sits down with the jeans halfway up her

thighs and wipes her face releasing an exasperated sigh, giving up.

“You've gained a lot of weight,” Lungile says sitting on her bed opposite Buhle

She sighs and tears well up in her eyes “I know, I bought these jeans two months ago.”

“Askies, but it's a sign that bae is treating you well. There's no way you wouldn't gain weight with how he's been spoiling you, I know what I said about him initially but shame the guy is madly in love with you sbwl to loved like you.” A smile brightens up her face

“Yeah, he's been amazing. I love him, I didn't expect him to stay so long without sex.”

“You're blessed, hold on to him and never cheat on him.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it, I don’t see any other guy but him. That’s how much I love him.” Her phone chimes next to her, it’s Thando.

“It's him” she mouths to Lungile before picking “Babe.”

“Sithandwa sam’ I’m on my way, are you done?”

“No, I can’t fit into my new jeans. I’ll have to wear a dress or something.”

He sighs onto the receiver “About that, there's something we need to talk about.” Her heart raises at that, judging by his tone whatever he wants to talk about must be serious.

“What?”

“We’ll talk when we get to my place, for now, focus on getting dressed I’ll be there in five minutes.” With that said he hangs up

She stands up and rummages through her wardrobe for something to wear, she settles on a dress and Nike sneakers. She's no longer in the mood to dress up, so she doesn't do anything to her face she leaves it bare. Her skin is beautiful and glows even without makeup, She brushes her edges and applies gloss on her lips

"You look beautiful as always," Thando says leaning in for a kiss after Buhle settles in the passenger seat.

"Thanks, you don't look too bad yourself."

He starts the ignition and drives off joining the main road

"What would you like to eat?" he asks driving into the mall.

"Hot wings from chicken liken would slap right now."

"Ok." He nods and drives to Chicken licken's drive-thru

Almost an hour later they're sitting on the couch in his house, he's watching her intently as she gobbles down her hot wings and washes them down with a Bubblegum milkshake.

"What?"

"You're beautiful." No matter how many times he says this to her, she always smiles like a retard whenever he compliments her.

"Thanks, my love. You said you wanted to talk." She's wiping her hands with a serviette, done with her food.

"Yes, come here." He pulls her arm and makes her sit on his lap, he snakes his arms around her waist and blows out a heavy sigh not knowing where to begin. He's not sure how to tackle this or how Buhle will take the news.

“Babe, you’re scaring me.” She says after a minute of him opening his mouth only for him to close it without saying anything.

“There’s no need to be scared, when last did you get your period?” he asks stroking her cheek

“Last month  
why?”

He draws in breath and looks at her “I think you’re pregnant Hlehle.” He cups her boob and gives it a gentle squeeze causing her to flinch in pain, confirming his suspicions.

“What? How we don’t even have sex Thando...no that’s crazy.” She jolts up from his lap and paces the lounge In terror, her brother will never forgive her if any of this turns out to be the truth.

“I know babe but how do we explain what’s been happening to you, the weird cravings, the weight gain, and the sensitive breasts. I think my mother was right, maybe you’re pregnant “

“No, that’s crazy I’m not pregnant.... I can’t be pregnant.” Her thoughts are raging, tears are pouring down her face and she has a banging headache.

“Don’t cry Sthandwa sam’ we’ll get through this together.” He says trying to touch her but she retreats backward as if burnt by his touch

“I’m 17 Thando, 17! I can’t be pregnant, I can’t.”

“Trust me I know sthandwa sam’, but we can’t ignore what’s happening... we need to go to the doctor and get you tested so we can be certain.”

“I’m not going there, I never had sex so I can’t be pregnant unless there’s something you want to tell me.”

“I know you’re scared and confused but trust me the last thing I wanted to do is get you pregnant, I know we’ve never had sex but I did my research and it’s possible to get pregnant from dry humping, and we happen to do that a lot. I’m aware that you’re not ready for a child and quite frankly neither am I but if there’s our child is growing inside you, I’ll step up and do the right thing .” Her eyes widen in shock, she thought she had all this figured out. No sex, just oral sex and no allowing him to rub himself between her thighs which is referred to as ‘ukusoma’ by the Zulu tribe.

She did everything she could to avoid getting pregnant and disappointing her brother, she had to go and get pregnant in one of the most stupidest ways, from dry humping really? Now she might be a pregnant virgin, pregnant without having enjoyed the sin that everyone can’t seem to stay away from.

“God please let me not be pregnant and I swear I’ll stay away from men until I’m of age.” She prays internally feeling the wheels inside her head turn.

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QUINTON

Things have been icy in our marriage of late and the recent dream I had made everything worse, I'm praying like never before asking God to protect my family from any harm.

"Good afternoon Mary." I greet the nanny when I find her in the kitchen washing and rinsing my son's bottles.

"Good afternoon sir." She replies with a warm smile

"Has Mrs. Ndlovu come back from work?"

"Yes, she's in the bedroom taking a nap. She asked not to be disturbed."

"Okay, where's Zothando?"

"He's sleeping in his room." I check the time on my wristwatch

“It’s okay, you can go home. I’ll manage from here.”

“Are you sure sir?”

“Yes, I’m sure Mary go home.”

“Thank you.” She rushes to fetch her handbag and paces out of the door. I put my bag on top of the counter, take off my jacket and fold the sleeves of my shirt and carry on where she left off before boiling water and pouring it inside the flask in case my son wakes up thirsty at night and wants a bottle.

My first stop is my son's bedroom, I still can’t believe that Anzani was serious about having him sleep alone in his bedroom. I put the flask and the tin of formula on top of the chest of drawers and peek inside his cot, he’s sleeping peacefully sucking his thumb. I fix the blankets and lean over dropping a peck on his forehead before heading out leaving the door slightly ajar and after making sure the monitor is on so we can hear when and if he cries during the night since it rarely happens.

It's only 6 in the evening but I find Anzani under the covers, I order food from Uber eats before stripping all of my clothes and joining her under the covers since it's evident that neither of us is in the mood to stand behind the stove tonight.

"Thembalam' what's going on? Are you feeling ok, Mary said you asked not to be disturbed. Did something happen at work?" I ask snuggling my body close to hers and kissing her shoulder

"No, but I feel like I'm losing you Mpilo. I can slowly feel you pulling away from me, what's going on have you fallen out of love with me?" she turns around and gazes at me with glossy eyes full of sadness and gloom.

"What? No, never. There's no way I would ever stop loving you, today I love you more than I did yesterday and I know at 7 pm I'll love you more than I love you now because my love for grows with each second that passes... I'm sorry if I made you feel unloved but I promise, my heart is yours." I cup her face and give her a long peck on the lips, she wraps her arms around

my neck deepening the kiss. My whole body tingles, the feel of her soft skin brushing against mine feels nearly forbidden.

I pull her in, claiming her mouth again, hungrily and intense until her whole body gives in. She moves her soft fingers to my chest leaving sweet caresses radiating heat throughout my body with every touch. The taste of her soft lips unfurling all my senses and silencing all thoughts, my fingers find their way between her legs and into her slick hole. I run them up and down her wetness stimulating her engorged clit with my finger

“Baby!” she moans in my ear getting wetter and wetter so much so that I can feel her juices rolling through my fingers down to her inner thighs and the bed sheet. She pushes me off as I get on top of her positioning myself at her entrance.

“Wait, we can’t do this until you tell me what’s going on, because I can feel that something else is going on.” I sigh and drop my head to her bust, and suck on her nipples

“Mpilo! Please don’t do this.” her voice comes out softer than she intended

“I don’t think now is the time.”

“No, I want to know. Whatever it is it’s affecting your mood, I want to know.”

I blow out a heavy sigh and stretch my hand under my pillow to retrieve my phone, I go through my messages searching for the one I want, and hand it to her so she reads the message herself

“No, this is bullshit Mpilo. Don’t tell me you believe him.”

“I don’t know what to think Thembalam’, Buhle and Nokwazi were both born in front of my eyes. I saw my mother pregnant with them, they even look alike. I’m 100% sure they are my parent's children, if my DNA doesn’t match with theirs then I’m the one who’s not my parent's child.”

“What if he is lying and only said all of this nonsense because he’s trying to get back at you for not giving Nomcebo a place to stay?”

“I thought so at first but I discovered that he’s not lying after having a sibling’s DNA tests done on mine and Kwazi’s sample.”  
She pulls my face up and looks into my eyes

“Kwazi knows about this?”

“No, she doesn’t. I stole her toothbrush and had it tested without her knowledge, we are not siblings we don’t have the same biological mother or father.”

“No, there must a mistake somewhere my love. Mam’Nomonde loved you, she was your mother. You even felt it when she died, she’s your mother. I don’t trust your uncle, what if he bought the doctor to rig the tests?”

“You give him too much credit, how could he have known which doctor I’d go to when he’s all the way in KwaZulu-Natal?”  
so I received a text message from my uncle telling me that my biological mother gave me up for adoption, and that Nomonde and Ntsizwa Ndlovu were not my biological parents.

Initially, I ignored him but what he said sparked doubt in my mind and had me looking at things with a different eye. Comparing my siblings and me and noting the differences between us, sure I kind of look like my 'late father' I guess that's why I never paid much attention to the differences between my siblings and me growing up. They both look a lot like our mom while I look like our father, well almost but not quite. One has to look really hard to pick the similarities between us, knowing that both my parents are not really my parents' stings. I think it would have been less painful if one of them was my biological parent but both of them are not my parents.

I don't know who my parents are and I don't know where I'll even start looking for them because I doubt my uncle or any of the Ndlovus would be willing to tell me, I guess this explains why they dislike me so much- it's because I'm not one of them!

"I'm sorry my love I can't imagine how you must feel... but you have me, you have a family in me, Zothando, and our unborn child." She says giving me a tight embrace "We'll always love you no matter what."

#101

“How can I help you today?” The doctor asks after we’ve exchanged pleasantries with her

How do I bring myself to answer her question? To say I’m embarrassed by the fact that today I find myself sitting across a woman old enough to be my mother because I suspect that I’m pregnant would be putting it lightly, I feel low and so mortified that I can’t even bring myself to look into her eyes.

She’s not my mother and I don’t know her from a bar of soap but that doesn't take away the fact that she’s an elder and I’m not comfortable with discussing my sex life with her, Thando should’ve found a young female doctor for this, not a middle-aged woman who’s probably internally judging me!

Seeing my discomfort Thando takes my hand in his and gives it the gentle “I’m here for you” squeeze.

“Doctor we are here today because I have reason to believe that my girlfriend is pregnant with my child, but she doesn’t believe me because we’ve never had penetrative sex.” -Thando

I can’t believe he just blurt it out like that, I’ve never been so embarrassed in my life. How I wish the ground could open and swallow me whole

“I see, if the two of you have never had sex as you say then why are so convinced that she’s pregnant?” Asks the doctor

I would also like to know because according to my research it’s impossible to fall pregnant from dry humping which is why I agreed for us to do it in the first place, I was confident it would be impossible for me to fall pregnant. I wouldn’t have done it if I knew there was a possibility of falling pregnant.

Dry humping generally involves rubbing or grinding your genitals against your partner’s body or genitals. In many cases, one or both partners are at least partially clothed. Since dry humping can lead to orgasm, it can be pleasurable without the risk of pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), or

during times you would prefer not to have sex. Dry humping may happen in addition to sex with penetration or may act as foreplay. Dry humping can also be done alone by rubbing your clothed genitals against a pillow or piece of furniture.

**Other Names for Dry Humping:** Like many sexual acts, there are plenty of alternate words for dry humping. It's known as frottage, dry sex, outercourse, and grinding. While everyone might go about it slightly differently, there's one common theme: the act is "dry." Body fluids are not exchanged between partners.

"Because she's been experiencing pregnancy symptoms of late, sensitive breast, weird cravings, weight gain, constant urination, and many other pregnancy symptoms."

"I see, forgive me but I need to ask ...since the two of you don't have penetrative sex do you perhaps practice other sexual acts like oral sex, masturbation, dry humping, and many others?"  
Yoh, I'm too young to be going through this. Lord if you get me out of this one, I promise I'll run in the other direction whenever I see a man, I'll be a nun.

“Yes doctor, we do all the above.”

“And do you reach the climax?” She’s looking at Thando, he bobs his head and looks down

“Though dry humping doesn’t include penetration and ideally, no body fluids should be exchanged, there’s still a chance of you getting pregnant. The man’s sperm can land anywhere near the opening of the vagina and all hell will break loose if fresh semen gets into someone’s vagina, pregnancy is possible no matter how the semen got there. Yes it’s unlikely to get pregnant from dry humping but it’s possible, another weird and unusual way you could have fallen pregnant is through fingering. If there’s semen on the hand that’s touching the vulva and it hasn’t dried, moist sperm could make its way up the vagina and through the cervix into the uterus and fertilize the egg so it’s advisable that if you’ve got semen on your hands, wash them before touching the vulva or vagina to prevent pregnancy.” What?

“The scenario is unbelievable but it’s possible, Miss Ndlovu we’ll perform three types of tests, so can we rid of any doubt and know if you’re pregnant or not. The first one will be the

urine test, followed by the blood test, and lastly the sonogram test. Are you ready?" She says looking at the shocked expression on my face.

I take a deep breath "Yes." Wish me, luck guys, I can't be pregnant!

"Okay, is there anything else you'd like me to help you with before we proceed?" She asks darting her eyes between Thando and I

"There's nothing from my side doc."

"Buhle?"

"Is it possible for you to check if I'm still a virgin?" I heard everything the doctor said but I still can't wrap my head around being a pregnant virgin, it doesn't make sense no matter how much the doctor tries to explain it.

“Yes, it’s possible. Would you like me to check?” I bob my head in agreement

“Okay then, let’s get to it.”

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NARRATED

Gabisile is sleeping under the tree on top of a reed mat, listening to the birds chirping and the excruciating pains she feels all over her body. Painkillers only alleviate the pain for a few hours then it comes back stronger than before, this has been her life for a while now and she’s lost all hope in recovering and getting back to her former self, now she’s patiently waiting for her death. She even prays for it to come sooner every night before she goes to sleep. She’s had enough of this pain and is ready to join her ancestors on the other side.

She hears the door opening and looks up, the sickness didn’t only scrap her body but her eyesight too so her vision is

distorted, she can't see who it is she only sees a blurry figure advancing towards her and calls out her daughter's name first.

"Londiwe! Dorothy! Is that you?" Sometimes she sees things that other people others can't see, so she constantly verifies if what she sees is real. Dorothy is the lady who was hired by her daughter to take care of her when she fell sick.

"Mom it's me." Her daughter replies trying so hard to conceal the distress in her voice, it hurts seeing what this sickness has reduced her mother to. It's hard to look at the woman lying on the reed mat and see her as the same strong woman who raised her.

"Dorothy made your favorite, please eat." She says kneeling next to her mother putting the bowl of sorghum porridge beside her, the sleeves of her long sleeved t-shirt pulled up, ready to feed her.

"I'm not hungry." Tears breakout from Londiwe's eyes.

“But you have to eat mama to gain strength, please.” She says in between sniffles

“I’ve been seeing Nkanyezi in my dreams lately, she never says anything to me. She just looks at me with eyes filled with sadness, I think she wants me to tell her son the truth.” She digresses

Londiwe sighs and settles next to her mother “Why was his identity kept a secret from him in the first place? I still don’t understand.”

" I think it's what his father wanted; I was barely in my teen years when my cousin got Nkanyezi pregnant. I only remember her because I was the only girl child in the yard so we would spend a lot of time together whenever she came around to visit, she was a very soft-spoken and humble lady. She’s the reason why I would visit my uncle’s house every school holiday. She would always come to the house whenever aunt and uncle were not home, and she made sure to always bring me sweets; I recall how she would sometimes plait my hair.”

“Ncoah, she sounds like she was a good person,” Londiwe says with a smile on her face

“She was, it’s a pity her life was cut short.”

“What do you mean?”

“She died mysteriously shortly after giving birth and because my cousin had already paid damages for his son when it happened, culturally the baby belonged to his paternal family, so they took him from Nkanyezi’s parents and raised him.”

“If that’s the case why didn’t uncle raise him as his own?” Her mother has told her a bit about Nkanyezi, so she’s not completely clueless.

“Because he blamed him for his mother’s death, we all thought it was a phase or maybe heartache talking. We thought it would pass and that as time goes, he’ll eventually learn to love and accept his son as his own but that never happened. He gave him to his elder brother instead and begged him to raise him as

his and to never tell him about his true identity, it's one of those family secrets that no one would dare reveal, but I think Nkanyezi wants her son to know about her that's why she's been visiting me a lot in my dreams."

"Isn't there anyone from his mother's side of the family who can reach out to him?"

"As I said, I was young when everything happened so I really don't know much about Nkanyezi's family, but I do know Nqobile is related to Nkanyezi but I doubt she would lift a finger to help him."

"Nqobile?" Londiwe asks in confusion

"My cousin's wife, Mamzobe. Her name is Nqobile."

"I know her name but I didn't think you were referring to her, so she got married to her deceased relative's baby daddy?"

“Nkanyezi and Nqobile were sisters my child, blood sisters not relatives. They have the same mother and father. So yes, she got married to her late sister’s baby daddy.”

“What?” Gabisile bobs her head looking down

“And from what I’ve heard around the village over the years is that they were not close; you know how favoritism from parents can sometimes get between siblings and cause hatred. Apparently, Nqobile was a rebel in her teen years while Nkanyezi was the opposite, so she always got compared to her elder sister not only by their parents and relatives but by everyone around them and I think that’s what created the animosity between them. Nqobile had to work twice as hard to please her parents and everyone while Nkanyezi was seen as the perfect daughter, the smart one, the one who always did things the right way, and the beautiful and well-mannered one.”

“But I still don’t understand how uncle ended up marrying ‘the love of his life’s sister yet he fails to forgive his own son for a sin he didn’t even commit, he was innocent and didn’t know a thing! I struggle to understand why the son gets blamed for

something he had no control over. He didn't kill his mother; God called her back home and it's no one's fault." She's in tears, listening to this story opens up old wounds and brings back the hurt she believed she had buried.

She hates herself for crying over that bastard called her father, she went to school and got educated. She built her mother a house and she's doing well for herself; she has a man that loves her and a beautiful daughter. She should be happy but she's not because there's a part of her that still longs for her father's love, that still yearns for the daddy and daughter bond that never happened. A part of her that always wonders if maybe her life would've turned out differently if her father was in her life, sometimes she excuses herself and go cry when she sees her daughter playing with her husband because a part of her, still weeps for the young Londiwe who never got to experience that.

Gabisile heaves a sigh "I don't know my child; I don't know why your uncle hates his son so much."

Londiwe jolts up from the reed mat and runs to the house in tears, tears roll down Gabisile's cheeks as regret sinks in. She

shouldn't have told Londiwe about this knowing her situation with her father, if she could she would run and follow her inside because she knows that she's crying wherever she is.

She feels a presence next to her and turns her head, isn't it funny that she can see the gloom and pain in Nkanyezi's eyes and face with her weak sight but can't see anything else? Just like in her dreams, she's not saying anything she's just staring at her with nothing but pain in her eyes.

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ANZANI

"Did you hear anything I said?" Pogiso says waving his fingers on my face

"I'm sorry."

"What's going on? Are you okay, maybe you should go back home?"

“Yep, maybe I should.” I stand to my feet and call an Uber before packing up my things inside my bag

I’m not okay, what Mpilo told me yesterday completely threw me off, I hate seeing my husband in pain and not knowing how to help him. I can’t imagine how it must feel to find out at the age of 29 years that you’re not who you thought you were, that your parents are not who you thought they were and that you were adopted. I know the bible preaches forgiveness, but I hate uncle Cebo for causing my husband pain, why wait for both his parents to pass on before telling Mpilo this news? I know there’s a reason why Quinton’s parents didn’t tell him about being adopted, Cebo should’ve kept his mouth shut because it wasn’t his place.

“I’ll tell Ndalo you had to knock off early.”

“Ok, thank you.” After checking on the app I see that the Uber is almost here, so I take my bag and go wait for him downstairs.

The first thing I do when I get to my house is to change into joggers and an oversized shirt and give Mary the rest of the day off. Mpilo needs to come back to a house full of warmth and love when he comes back from work and what better way to show him love than preparing all his favorites for dinner and inviting his friends and of course waiting for him in bed with a little silky sexy something for dessert.

When you love someone the way I love him, their pain becomes yours and you feel it twice as hard, I couldn't concentrate at work knowing what my husband is going through. Sometimes I ask myself, will we ever be happy? Like, be happy without anything or anyone stealing our joy? I know marriage is not easy but I'm tired of this up and down, this back and forth I just want to be happy with my husband and kids.

I take out all my ingredients from the fridge and cupboard and send Kwazi, Given, and Kabelo messages inviting them for dinner before I forget. You know pregnancy brain!

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## QUINTON

The dream I had of my late parents has been playing on my mind like a broken record, why did my father say Anzani wuye ozovusa umuzi ka Ndlovu uma kung'kuthi mina angiyena wakwa Ndlovu? Or maybe it's because he loved me so much and had accepted me as his son? I don't know what to think or what I should do, I'm a born-again Christian and I'm not really invested much in culture and all that, but I believe as a man it's important to know your roots and where you come from. I'm a father to two sons and that means my sons will carry on the lineage that doesn't belong to them like I have, all the descendants who come from me will all be lost like I am. I have so much respect for Ndlovu, he raised me into the man I am, but I want to know who I am, that's something I can never run away from. I have to know who I am, for my kids if not for myself.

A tantalizing aroma of food hits my nostrils as I make my way inside the house causing my stomach to growl reminding me that I haven't had anything to eat since morning, Mary doesn't touch the pots so I know my wife is the one who cooked. I learn that she's not alone in the house when I hear more than one voice, I follow the trail of their voices and it leads me to the

sitting room. She's with Nokwazi and Nyasha at the dinner table and like always Nokwazi has Zothando on her lap

"Sanibonani"

"Hi." They all chorus at the same time

"What's the occasion?" I ask gesturing to the setup on the dinner table, she even took the cutlery and dinner sets that she only uses on special occasions.

She smiles and stands up from her seat "Do you like it? I just thought I should do something to appreciate my lovely husband." She plants a peck on my lips and takes my work bag from me "Come with me, I'll prepare your bathwater." She says and leads the way. Damn, I could get used to coming home to this.

"I took out your outfit, you'll wear that when you're done here and come join us downstairs. Given and Kabelo should be here soon." She says after walking me to our ensuite bathroom. My

wife is the best ninani, I still don't know what I did to deserve her.

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Dinner was amazing, my wife really went all out and even organized beverages for Kabelo who drinks so everyone has a good time. I'm with the gents in my study while the ladies are in the kitchen washing the dishes well my wife and Nyasha because Nokwazi used Zothando as an excuse not to do anything. I can't wait for all these people to leave so I can show my wife just how grateful I am for tonight; I feel like marrying her again. She's the best thing to ever happen to me, most things in my life don't make sense right now she's the only good thing I have going on for me.

"Beautiful house man." Kabelo says skimming his eyes around the study room, it's his first time here since we moved in so I was giving him a tour.

"Thanks, my wife chose it. She's got taste."

“Yes, she does. Dinner was great man; I can’t remember the last time I had a home-cooked meal.”-Kabelo

“I’ll let the Mrs. know.”

“Doesn’t she have a sister or a cousin nyana? I think I’m done with games and I’m ready to settle down.” I laugh

“No, she’s the only girl at home and all her cousins are taken as far as I’m concerned.”

“Eish, my loss! You have a good one man, please take care of her.” He says and from the corner of my eye I see Given rolling his eyes

“Thanks, man, I will.”

Given checks his wristwatch “Look man it’s late, Nyasha and I should get going. Asante is all alone.”

“Why didn’t you bring her?” Kabelo interjects

“I didn’t think about it.”

“Can I talk to you before you go?” I say looking at Given, Kabelo darts his eyes between us and exhales

“Let me go see the little man before I go, he’s growing up so fast. I see what you and Anzani did there.”

“What?”

“You quickly made a sibling for him, so he doesn’t get bored. You're such thoughtful parents!” He jokes causing us to laugh, Kabelo is a clown shem.

“Let me go attend my favourite nephew and give you two space.” He walks out leaving us in awkward silence

“What’s your problem with my wife Given? I don’t appreciate how you carry yourself around her. She invited you into her house and fed you, the least you could do is show her some respect. I know what I said the other day ticked you off, I probably shouldn't have. Anzani is not perfect but she's doing her best, you need to forget whatever I said that day and treat her with the respect she deserves if you still wish for me and you to be cool.” He snickers

“I have nothing more to say to you Quinton, it’s obvious who wears the pants between you two in this house!”

“How dare you talk to my husband like that in his house Given!” barks a fuming Anzani standing at the door with Nyasha behind her. How I hate myself for letting Given think he has a say in my marriage, my wife doesn’t need the stress!

#102

NARRATED

Anzani charges inside the study and stands in front of her husband glaring at Given, he looks at her and chuckles.

“What a joke! Now you’re going to act like you care about h-.”

“Given!” Quinton warns

“No, let him speak Mpilo. Speak Given, say what you want to say.” She says with her arms folded to her chest as if challenging him

“Guys, can we please stop this? We are friends, it doesn’t have to get to this point.” A disappointed Nyasha says looking at Given. He’s the one who introduced her to these people, she likes them now and has built a healthy relationship with Anzani why is he ruining everything?

“No, I want him to finish what he was saying.”-Anzani

“Thembalam’ please let it go, stress is not good for you. Given please leave.”

“He’s going nowhere before saying whatever it is that he wanted to say, what do you mean by saying that “I act like I care about him” Given?” Quinton glares at Given daring him to speak.

Given sighs putting his hands up as a sign of surrender “I’m sorry for what I said, I shouldn’t have. Please forgive me.” He says and walks out, Nyasha flashes the pair an apologetic smile before following her boyfriend out.

Anzani takes a deep breath and looks at her husband “What was he talking about Mpilo, why didn’t you let him speak?”

He blows out a heavy sigh “Can I please see Kabelo off? I promise I’ll explain everything when I come back.”

“It’s okay, you can go. I’ll go put Zothando to bed. I’m sure he’s fallen asleep by now.”

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ANZANI

“Nokwazi is in the guest bedroom, she said she’s spending the night.” He says making his way back inside our bedroom. I nod my head and sit up.

I stare as he slowly undresses and finally gets under the covers “Thembalam’ I’m sorry about what happened earlier, it’s all my fault. Given said what he said because of me, I’m sorry.”

For some reason, I can already feel that whatever he’s about to say will crush me “Remember the Friday night we went on a double date with him and Nyasha?” I nod my head not trusting my voice

“We had a conversation when you and Nyasha went to the restroom, I ...” He iterates the entire story and I’m gutted, to say the least, it hurts to know that this is how little my husband thinks of me.

“Maybe I’m selfish and I don’t compromise like Given says but you’ve never told me you wanted more kids Mpilo, how was I supposed to know how you feel when you don’t communicate and express yourself? Am I such a horrible wife that you have no choice but to agree with everything I say even if it’s not what you want?” Am I such a tyrant that my husband can’t freely express himself to me?

“No, no Thembalam’ you’re nothing like that I’m sorry, I was stupid I shouldn’t have discussed our marital affairs with Given without first talking to you. Please forgive me I’m sorry mama.”

I don’t blame Given for reacting the way he did, I probably would’ve reacted the same way if my friend kept telling me how inconsiderate her husband is. How he doesn’t consider her feelings when making decisions, maybe I’ve been selfish, but it hurts to know that I go to bed with an unhappy husband while

I'm under the impression that everything is okay between us. I feel stupid and like the biggest fool!

"Please don't cry sthandwasam' I'm sorry."

"Do you know what hurts me the most Quinton? is that you were unhappy all this time, and I didn't even know it. I thought we were okay, we are happy kanti you're dying inside....am I such a horrible person?"

"No, you're not. I should have spoken to you instead of Given, you couldn't have known about my desire to have more kids because I didn't tell you."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I didn't want you to feel pressured into doing anything you don't want to"

"But you always do things you don't want to. How's that fair, what happened to us communicating about everything?"

“There's nothing I do under duress, everything I do and did for you in the past I do it because I want to.”

“But that’s not the impression Given seems to have.”

“I know you’re hurt and disappointed in me, I don’t blame you because even I’m disappointed in myself. I’m sorry Thembalam’ it won’t happen again.” I wipe my tears with my palms and look at him

“Is there anything else that you’re unhappy about, or it’s only the issue of kids?” He takes my hands into his and kisses my knuckles

“Thembalam’ you make me happy I don’t want you to doubt that, you’re everything I need and want in a woman. You are a remarkable woman; I’m blessed to have you in my life, and I appreciate everything that you do for me. There are a lot of things you have compromised for me including your life, I’m sorry I let what Given said to get into my head but I promise I’m happy with how things are in our marriage.”

“No Mpilo, you’re not. You told Given about the issue of kids because it bothers you.... I think you misunderstood me when I said this baby is the last one I’m carrying, in saying so I meant exactly that. I don’t want to go through another pregnancy, maybe I’ll change my mind in a few years but for now, I don’t want anything that has to do with me falling pregnant but that doesn’t mean I’m not open to the idea of having more kids if that’s what my husband wants, there are many ways to kill a cat...we have another option-we can use a surrogate.”

“Really? You would do that for me”

“You haven’t realized it, have you? There’s nothing I wouldn’t do for you Mpilo.”

“I’m sorry thembalam’ I’m such a fool I should’ve talked to you about this from the onset instead of assuming. I’m sorry about Given, I’ll talk to him and put things into perspective. He’ll never disrespect you again.”

“I know he’s your brother and all and I appreciate how he loves and always has your best interest at heart, but his job is to advise you and allow you to make your own decision, I fear he’s too involved in our marriage and honestly his anger and behavior was unwarranted and uncalled for. He behaved like that because he was under the impression that I don’t want to have more kids. Really?” He chuckles

“Kona uqinisile sthandwasam’ usengene kakhulu endabeni zethu but I don’t blame him I blame myself for over-sharing and not reprimanding him the first time I saw him acting funny around you, I care about him that’s why I hope he’ll work on his attitude towards you or else I’ll be forced to cut him off. You come first in my life, I won’t continue being friends with anyone who disrespects you.”

(You’re right my love, he’s too involved in our business)

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NOBUHLE

The tests confirmed it, I'm pregnant and yep, I'm still a virgin now how about that! I'm numb and I don't know how to feel about this whole thing, I keep hoping that this turns out to be nothing but a nightmare, but this baby is here and it's not going anywhere. Am I so fertile that I got pregnant without being penetrated when there are people who've been trying for kids for years and still can't fall pregnant? They say a child is a blessing from God but what if you don't want the blessing..is it okay to return it to him because wawu!

I don't even know how I'll tell my brother the news

where will I even start? Nokwazi warned me but I thought I was clever and knew all so I didn't listen. So there's going to be a little stranger and he/she will call me mom? I'll be responsible for him/her and when she cries kuzothiwa mnikeni umawakhe besho mina lapho? Yoh kuthi mangi kgayize!

So I'm a statistic now. I'll be counted ku teenage pregnancy, who could've thought? ay, yazini impilo yitswape straight.

"Staring at that belly won't make the pregnancy untrue," Lungile says when she walks in on me staring at my flat stomach in the mirror

I pull down my top and dump my body on my bed “So Sis Anzani and I will be exchanging motherhood tips soon?” She cackles

“It’s not that bad, at least the father is present and supportive I know it won’t be easy but others have it harder than you and still survive.”

“He told his parents about the pregnancy, and now they want my brother’s number so they can arrange for damages to be paid.”

She smiles “You see, he’s responsible.”

“You don’t get it, do you! How am I going to tell my brother the news?”

“Tell his wife, the two of you are close right....she’ll tell him and soften him up for you.”

“Well that’s if she won’t kill me first, she asked me not to date until I turned 18 years old and I did it behind her back. Look at where that led me?” She whistles putting her hands on top of her head

“It’s bad yoh.” I look at her and a thought crosses my mind

“Why kungamithanga wena vele Lungile? You’ve been having sex for ages but you don’t get pregnant, I’m a virgin I haven’t even tasted the forbidden fruit it’s not fair that I’m the one who got pregnant.”

(Why weren’t you the one who fell pregnant)

She laughs “Uyangihlolela awuthunywanga yimi kubo dry humping without panties!” I laugh throwing my head back, ngoba vele noma kushoniwe kuyahlekwa but seriously guys kanti lo nkulunkulu unjani? He chose to bless me with a baby ngina 17 worse I didn’t even have sex! Oh, Nkosi yami ngaze ngalithwala idombolo le sbusiso engingasicelanga!

(You’re crazy, I’m not the one who said you should dry hump without your panties)

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NARRATED

Nokwazi is swimming in a sea of happiness, it's Friday and she'll finally get to see her bae after the last time she went to Ikageng to visit him which was A-mazing by the way! She enjoys every single moment she spends with her boyfriend; a big smile clouds her features as the taxi drops her off at the rank. She hangs her duffel bag over her shoulder and slowly makes her way to Agang's workplace, he won't knock off till 8 pm so she has to make a detour by his workplace and collect the keys from him before taking a cab to Ikageng. Not that she minds, this will allow her to see her sexy bae and maybe steal a kiss for the road.

"Mrs. Agang omonte, obothakga mosadi ke wena!"-Oupa  
(The beautiful Mrs. Agang, you're a beautiful woman!)

Her cheeks flush and turn crimson as she blushes "Good day Oupa."

“Dumela le kae kgosigadi ya Agang?”

(Greetings how are you Agang’s queen)

“Stop it Oupa you’re making motho wame shy,” Agang says and shoos Oupa away before pressing the gate remote, the gate slides open and immediately closes after he has walked out.

“Hey.” He says pulling Nokwazi in for a tight squeeze. Nokwazi clings to him like her life depends on it inhaling his scent.

“I missed you,” he says as they break the hug, taking her bag from her

“I missed you too baby.” He takes out the keys from his pocket and places them on her palm

“Should I dodge work and come home with you? She giggles and shakes her head no “Ok, what should I bring for dinner? I don’t want you to cook.”

“So, I’ll have to wait until 8 at night to eat? I’m already hungry mina.”

“I stocked up all your favorite snacks so you can nibble on them until I get back, I would love for us to have dinner together. I want to have a relaxed evening with the woman my heart beats for, I bought your favorite wine and six-pack Bernin for myself I want us to be tipsy and have crazy fun together.” Nokwazi smiles sweetly

“I can’t wait to get tipsy and freaky with you.” She’s seductively biting her lower lip as she says this, she’s done playing the good girl. She wants him buried deep in her and can’t keep torturing herself like this any longer, tonight is the night. She even packed her favorite red lingerie.

“Hmmm, I love the sound of that.” They’re about to kiss when a white Mercedes C300 parks in front of them, Namhla steps out of the car carrying various designer shopping bags and laughs out when her eyes meet with Nokwazi’s. She says something to her blesser before he drives off then she struts towards the couple

“And what do we have here? The fallen slay queen and the security guard, how the mighty have fallen! But at least you’ve still got taste Kwazi.” She says wearing a devilish grin on her face

“Don’t let her get to you,” Agang whispers into her ear

Nokwazi grabs Agang’s hand intertwining it with hers and smiles sweetly “Hello Namhla, good to see you. I don’t know if you’ve met this very handsome man next to me.” She peers into Agang's eyes “In case you haven't his name is Agang, umantshingilani wami bakithi. The one my heart beats for, sthandwa sam this is Namhla, you know her.”

“Nice to meet you Namhla but if you’ll excuse us my gorgeous lady and I were in the middle of something before you arrived.” He says and gazes into Nokwazi’s eyes completely blown away by what she just did.

He knows she loves him, but he didn't expect her to profess her love for him in front of Namhla of all people. A part of him thought she would be ashamed of him.

"Wame you still haven't told me what you want to eat for supper?"

"Uhhh let me think babe, how about some seafood from ocean basket." Her left hand is on his chest while she's rubbing the stubble on his chin with the right one, lost in her little love bubble where only she and Agang exist.

"Great choice." He says and plants a long peck on her lips

Namhla whose watching the whole scene claps her hands in disbelief and requests Oupa to open the gate for her. She has never seen Nokwazi look so in love and happy, Nokwazi Ndlovu dating a security guard? Now that's a first but she can't deny that they make such a cute couple and seeing them together made her crave to be in a relationship, like a real relationship, and have someone who loves and cares for her not what she has with all these men.

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QUINTON

A phone call from an unsaved number interrupts me from my thoughts “Quinton hello.”

“Mpilentle hi, you’re speaking to Londiwe...your cousin.”

“Oh, hey Londz what a nice surprise!”

“I’m glad you’re happy to hear from me, we haven’t talked in so long I didn’t expect you to sound so happy to hear from me.”

“I understand, it’s life we get busy so don’t beat yourself up about it.”

“You’re too kind. My mother has been sick, that’s one of the reasons why I’ve been out of touch.”

“Eish, I’m sorry to hear that is it serious?”

“Yes but I don’t want to talk about that right now, my mother wants to see you do you think you can drive down to Richard’s bay to see her?” Ok, that’s odd and so out of the blue

“When?”

“Tomorrow if possible.”

“Haibo!”

“Please Mpilentle, it’s urgent. She doesn’t have much time and there’s something she wants to tell you before she takes her last breath.”

“Okay, I’ll try to come tomorrow or Sunday latest.”

“Thank you. Please greet your wife for me.”

“Ok, I will. Bye.”

#103

Like me, I'm sure you've also been told of how curiosity killed the cat numerous times, but I still can't help but be curious. Londiwe's phone call left me with so many questions, I'm dying to know what's the urgent thing that aunt Gabisile wants to talk to me about, I'm on my way to Richard's Bay with my family as we speak.

"How long till we get to the next garage? I'm pressed." Says Anzani. I check on the map and make an estimate

"Three minutes."

"Please step on the accelerator Mpilo or else I'll pee in this car." She threatens and I can't help but think she's not joking so I increase the speed.

She bolts out of the car as soon as it comes to a halt at the filling station and runs to the store's entrance, I unstrap my son

from the backseat, pick him up and lock the car before making my way to the entrance.

I'm parched, I need water. Anzani drank all the water from the 2l we took from our house, it's no wonder she's pressed. The store is a bit packed, not your usual retail store kind of packed but there are more patrons than on a regular day and a bit of a queue.

I grab a bottle of still water, a pack of peanuts and raisins, and biltong before joining the queue. Anzani emerges from the direction of the restrooms wiping her wet hands on her dress, she catches a glimpse of me in the queue and changes direction succeeding towards me.

"Don't you want something, a snack maybe?" I say when she stands next to me, and she shakes her head no.

Yep, that is how she expresses herself nowadays-through actions and not her mouth. She's been like this since the Given issue, I asked her about it and she told me she's not angry and

said she was over it but I'm inclined not to believe her as things have slightly changed between us since that fateful evening.

I feel she's holding back and too careful with her words, it's as if she's afraid of being herself less she offends me.

"Are you sure?" She sighs and takes a pack of wine gums and hands it to me.

"The queue is moving slowly. I'm getting tired, I'll go wait in the car." She says and attempts to walk away but Zothando cries for her, she turns and takes him from me and walks off leaving me huddled in despair, Anzani is here with me yet she feels so far away.

Now I understand why elders always advise young married couples to never disclose their marital affairs to friends especially ones who are single. Ignoring that advice has been my biggest mistake to date.

We find Londiwe waiting for us at the gate, she did right by waiting for us outside otherwise I would have gotten lost. The entire area has changed a lot since the last time I was here not to mention the gigantic house she built for her mother, I'm so proud of her. At least her mother got to enjoy her house unlike mine who passed on before I bought furniture for the house I had built for her, I drive in and park my car next to a red BMW X5 parked in front of the closed garage. She presses the gate remote, and the gate closes behind us, the yard is barricaded with tall walls that deny anyone outside the yard view of what's happening inside the yard.

"Mzala no mama wasendlini ngiyabonga manikwazile ukufika," Londiwe says as we step out of the car

Her hips are wider and her face fuller than what I remember but she's still the same Londiwe I know, only prettier and thicker.

(Cousin and wife, I'm glad you made it)

"How could we not? It sounded urgent...This is my beautiful wife and mother of my kids Anzani, and my son Zothando. Thembalam' this is Londiwe, my cousin."

“Lovely to meet you sis in law, you look beautiful I love your afro...it’s so thick and full what do you use?”

Anzani smiles “Thanks, I use native child products.”

“Thanks, sis I’ll try them because as you can see we struggle with hairline this side.” She says and the two of them share a laugh, it seems they’ll get along well.

“Is aunt inside?”

“Yes, let’s go in. Bakithi akasafani nawe nje lomtwana Mpilentle, he’s your copy I swear.” She says pinching Zothando’s cheek

(He looks so much like you)

“He is his father’s son.” The pride I feel every time someone mentions how much Zothando looks like me is out of this world, zalani befwethu kumnandi.

As we make our way in we find aunt Gabi and a middle-aged woman in the lounge, the woman has a plate of food on her lap and appears to be feeding my aunt. The large plasma screen mounted on the wall adjacent to the sofa aunt and her companion are occupying is on, playing Gospel music videos. My heart breaks seeing the state my aunt is in, has it really been that long since we last saw each other because the woman before me looks nothing like my aunt. She's frail and looks way older than she should, and I won't mention the amount of weight she shredded.

She squints her eyes at us "Mpilentle is that you son?" she says stretching out her boney wrinkled and trembling hand

"Yes, aunt it's me." I take her shaky hand and plant a peck on it and greet the woman next to her

A lone tear rolls down her cheek "Thank you for coming, I'm glad you came." Her companion asks to be excused and makes her way out of the lounge taking the plate and utensils with "I heard you got married, did you come with your wife?"

“Yes aunt, I came with my wife...my son is also here.” I gesture for Anzani to come to greet her since it looks like aunt is struggling with her eyesight.

She steps forward

places Zothando on my lap, and holds my aunt’s hand. “God bless you, my child, I’m happy to have met you.”

“Thank you, I’m also happy to meet you aunt.” She says and goes back to her seat

“Give the baby to me.” I give my son to her hoping he won’t refuse and thank the Lord he doesn’t refuse. Londiwe stands up from her seat and excuses herself leaving us with my aunt.

“I’m sure you’re wondering why I called you here, my family will probably hate me for this but my time is near Mpilentle I can feel it and I feel like I have to tell you this even though it’s not my place, but I think you deserve to know who you are and where you come from.”

“Is this about my biological parents?”

“You know?” She’s shocked, she didn’t expect me to know.

“Yes.” I know I said I wanted to know who my biological parents are but now I’m not so sure, but I guess there’s no going back now.

“What do you know?”

“That I was adopted.” She chuckles

“And who told you that nonsense?”

“Babomncane Cebo’elihle.” She shakes her hands visibly out of words

“That’s not the truth, you were not adopted. Your real mother’s name is Nkanyezi Mzobe, a beautifully humble and soft-spoken maiden who was dating my cousin, she was older than me but I know a bit about her because she was very sweet and generous to me whenever she came around to my uncle's house to visit my cousin ” I don’t know why I feel a sting in my heart the moment she used the word ‘was’ instead of ‘is.’

“Where is she? Why didn’t she raise me herself?”

“Unfortunately, she died mysteriously after giving birth to her one and only handsome son whom she named Mpilentle.”  
There’s a painful lump blocking my throat, my chest is tight and I’m finding it tough to regulate my breathing, Anzani rushes to my side in an instant and helps me regulate my breath via breathing exercises.

I was in pain when I found my mother lying dead in the bathroom but what I feel now is worse than what I felt that day, it’s intense and crippling. So my mother lost her life while giving me mine?

“I’m sorry son...your mother loved you so much, she was so happy after she learned that she was pregnant with you. Yes, I was young but I have vivid memories of the permanent smile and sparkle in her eyes whenever she spoke of her Mpilente, she gave you the name before you were even born.” I know it’s embarrassing for a man to cry but I can’t stop the tears streaming down my face and the burning ache I feel in my chest.

“Londiwe come to take the child!” - Aunt bellows probably hearing my sniffles

Londiwe walks in with a tray lined with tea cups, a small kettle of water, a jar of milk, sugar pot and side plates with assorted cookies. She positions it on the coffee table and walks away taking Zothando with her, who doesn’t cry. It’s as if my son knows that today is not a good day for tantrums, he’s on his best behavior.

“I’m so sorry.” Anzani mouths wiping my tears with her palms

“What about my father, do you know him..did he also die?”

“No, he’s alive. His name is Cebo’elihle Ndlovu...I’m sorry my son but your uncle is your biological father.” What?

“Are you sure aunt, that man hates me?” For as long as I can remember my uncle has always had a problem with me, even when I was young he’d scold me unnecessarily.

Him and I have never had a good relationship, I’ve always asked myself why he dislikes me so much, it was better my father was still alive. His hate wasn’t so vivid then, things got worse after my father’s passing.

“I’m completely sure my son, he’s your father. I don’t know why he hates you but he’s your father, at first, he didn’t want you because he blamed you for your mother’s death. We thought he’d get over it as time goes but he didn’t, he gave you to his elder brother to raise since he was married and him and his wife didn’t have kids at the time. That’s how Nomonde and my cousin became your parents, they loved you and accepted you as their own, and trust me it was for the best that you were raised by them and not him.” I can’t say I’m not hurt, it was easier to ignore the hate he feels for me when I thought he was

my uncle but learning that he's actually my biological father changes everything.

I'm a father myself and I love my kids to death, I can't think of anything that would make me hate my kids to a point of wanting to see them suffer which puzzles me as to what sin I committed against him to deserve so much hatred? It can't only be about my mother dying after giving birth to me, there must be another explanation.

"Wow!" Anzani says, she looks as shocked as I am.

"I'm sorry my son, I've been seeing your mother in my dreams a lot lately. Sometimes even during the day while I'm awake and I concluded that maybe it's because she wants me to tell you about your identity, I tried to ignore it but I couldn't take seeing the sadness and pain I always see in her eyes."

"Do you have her pictures?" I would love to see the woman who gave me life

“Nope but you can ask your aunt Nqobile, they didn’t get along from what I heard but I’m sure she has her pictures. They were sisters after all.”

“What?” Anzani and I say in unison

“Mamzobe as in uncle Cebo’s wife?” Asks Anzani, I’m too stunned to speak

“Yes, she’s your mother’s younger sister.” Wow, and the plot thickens

#104

I've been cracking my brain trying to think of the reason that would make my uncle, well my 'father' dislike me so much. Trying to think of what I could've done or said to him to deserve so much hate and brutality from him, but my mind always comes back empty. Now that I think about it, I've never really been his favorite person but before his hate for me was something I couldn't confirm for sure, it was something I always suspected but never dwelt much on it because the hostility wasn't so vivid when my father was still alive. It was after his death that I got to realize that my uncle doesn't wish me well and noticed how he'd always go out of his way to say things that offend me. It wasn't easy to accept that my relative didn't like me but I eventually made peace with it but now how do I accept that my own father loathes me? And if he loved my late mother so much that he hated me for being the one who made it out alive from the labor ward and not her then how come he went and got married to her little sister? A lot of things don't make sense right now and I doubt they ever will because I don't see him explaining himself to me, I guess this is one of the situations that I must accept and gradually get over because seeking answers will only hurt me.

From what aunt Gabisile said, Mamzobe and my birth mother didn't get along so I reckon that's why she dislikes me but can a tiff between siblings really run so deep that it gets transferred to their children? I feel there's more to this than what meets the eye, but I don't think I want to find out, knowing that my mother loved me is enough for me. My father might abhor me, but I will forever be grateful to him for giving me to his elder brother and wife to raise and give me the love he knew he couldn't, they raised me with nothing but love, and not once did they make me feel like I don't belong. I will forever be indebted to them because I am who I am today because of them, there's no denying that in my heart Nomonde will always remain my mother but I'm dying to see the face and know more about the woman who lost her life giving me mine.

"Thank you so much for coming my son, I know what I told you has left you with many questions that I'm unable to provide answers for, but I had to tell you the truth. I feel it's what your mother wanted."

"No, it's okay aunt you don't have to apologize. I understand and thank you for telling me at least now I know who I am and where I come from. And trust me this is better than thinking that my mother gave me up for adoption."

“Ukhohlakele umalume kodwa angifuni kungasho shem. He recharged his phone and called you to tell you lies completely unprovoked, for what good reason? Ukuloya akusi kona ukundiza ngomtshanyelo ebusuku kuphela!” Londiwe exclaims disgust mirroring her features

(Uncle is very cruel) (Witchcraft doesn't end with flying the broom at night)

“So, from my mother's side of the family Mamzobe is the only person you know? Didn't she have any other siblings, parents, or relatives?” I say changing the topic, talking about uncle Cebo is the last thing I want to do right now.

“No, like I said my son. I was young when your mother passed, I was barely in my teens so yes Mamzobe is the only one I know but I think you can find something if you can go back to Mahlabathini where your father and uncles grew up. Nkanyezi and Nqobile are from the same area if I'm not mistaken.”

“Ok, thanks, aunt. I will hire someone to track down my late mother's family for me because it's important for me to see

where my mother was buried and meet her relatives well that's if they'll want to meet me, I'm sure they also blame me for my mother's death that's why they haven't bothered looking for me all these years."

"No, I'm sure they don't. Find them who knows maybe they have been dying to see and have a relationship with you but stayed away because of the feud between them and the Ndlovus."

"What feud?"

"Apparently your mother's family wanted to take you when your mother passed but the Ndlovus refused because your damages were paid and so culturally you belonged to the Ndlovus, that's when the feud between the two families began. I don't know all the details, but I know they severed all ties with the Ndlovu's when Cebo asked for Nqobile's hand in marriage barely a few months after your mother's passing."

"Really? So, Mamzobe got married without their approval?"

Londiwe asks

Aunt sighs “Yes, Mamzobe’s uncles and her father refused to accept lobola from Cebo on her behalf and you know how strict things were back then. Culture and traditional was observed to the last detail and respected, the uncles refused to pay lobola to the men Mamzobe had found on the street and asked to stand in for her, in the end, her bride price was not paid. She’s only Mrs. Ndlovu on paper but our ancestors don’t recognize her as one of our own because she was never introduced to them as a Ndlovu bride.”

“Wow.” It seems there’s a lot I don’t know about my family, there are so many secrets! I wonder what else is being kept under wraps because wow!

“Yes, go look for your mother’s family my child. You’re the one and only child Nkanyezi had and I’m sure her family would love to meet the son of their beloved daughter.”

“I will do so aunt.”

“So, how was Mpilo’s mother aunt? Was she light-skinned or dark-skinned, tall, or short?” Anzani asks and we all laugh “I really want to know more about the woman who gave birth to this wonderful man I call my husband.”

“Ncoah!” Londiwe swoons. I’m trying so hard to not to blush right now but I’m failing dismally

Aunt smiles “Well there’s no need to explain yourself, my child, I understand. Your mother-in-law was fair, not too light or dark she had Mpilente’s complexion, her protruding clear eyes set her apart from the rest making her face appear soft and unique. She was gentle, in how she spoke, and walked, and even in her aura, I don’t remember seeing her angry or hearing her shout. Her beauty was childlike and innocent, she looked more beautiful the more you looked at her and her kind nature only added to her beauty.” She sounds like a lovely person it’s such a shame that I never got to meet and experience the delightful soul she was.

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## NOKWAZI

I was having the time of my life with my boyfriend when I received Nobuhle's message on WhatsApp accompanied by a picture of an ultrasound scan, my heart almost leaped out of my mouth while my whole body trembled from shock. I immediately called her desperate for her to say that it was nothing but a joke, but unfortunately, she was serious as a heart attack. Her revelation dropped my mood and ruined my weekend when it was just beginning, there's no way I would have stayed in Ikageng and enjoyed myself with my boyfriend after knowing what I now knew. At that instant, the only thing I wanted to do was to get on the first taxi to Gauteng. I'm so used to being the troublemaker and the one that always causes our brother stress, I didn't expect something like this from Buhle if anything I thought I would be the one to get pregnant first.

Agang being the gentleman he is understood my situation and accompanied me to the taxis even though I could tell he was disappointed as he had already made plans for our weekend together, but at that moment, I had to be by my sister's side as I could only imagine how frightened she feels. When I left for

Gauteng, I asked Nobuhle to take the first taxi out of Pretoria and meet me at the apartment.

Thando's family wants to pay damages for the pregnancy and for that to happen Buhle needs to tell our brother the truth, she needs me to hold her hand and give her moral support when she does, as the elder sister I'm the one who called our brother and told him we needed to speak to him urgently. He said he was out of town but promised to inform us as soon as he's back.

I find Nobuhle pacing the lounge as I walk in from collecting our food from the delivery guy downstairs.

"What's wrong?" I ask setting the takeaway bag on the countertop

"Sis'Anzani just sent me a text message, they are back in town. They came back an hour ago, and it appears driving drained bhuti Quinton, she said he's been napping since they came back." I can imagine how she feels, I'm not the one who's

pregnant but yoh my whole body just went cold after hearing that.

“Do you think we should let him rest today and go there tomorrow?”

“No, I want to do this and get it over and done with.”

“Ok, let’s go.”

She blows out a heavy sigh “Let me call Thando and tell him we are leaving.” She takes out her phone from her pocket and dials him “Love we are going now, wish me luck.”

I can’t hear what he’s saying but Buhle keeps nodding her head vigorously listening to him “Thanks babe, I Love you too.” She says and hangs up

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ncoah these two love each other. I know the situation is not ideal but I’m glad her boyfriend is supportive, imagine if she

had to deal with being pregnant at her age and an absent father.

“Ready?”

She takes a deep breath “Yes, let's go.”

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ANZANI

Quinton has been sleeping since we came back but I understand all this can't be easy on him and I pray the lord gives me the strength to support him through this difficult time, I love my husband dearly and I'm not going anywhere this is just another hurdle we'll get over. I know we'll always bounce back from any situation because God is on our side. I slept most of the drive back home I suppose that's why I'm the only one who's not sleepy. Zothando is also sleeping with his father, to kill boredom I decided to prepare something to eat since the

girls are coming here nothing hectic just roasted potatoes, grilled chicken, and a garden salad.

I've just put the Chicken back into the oven when the intercom rings, I know it's Nobuhle and Nokwazi at the door because security called and notified me when they were at the gate. I decrease the heat on the stove and make my way to the door to open for them

"Hey, wow look at you looking like a sexy mother of two," Nokwazi says gesturing to the short shirt dress I'm wearing, I laugh and twirl giving them a show.

We are approaching the end of July, the weather is still chilly but today the sun is out and shining so I had to take advantage and wear my dress. It's been long, can winter end already?

"Nokwazi is right, you look beautiful. This pregnancy suits you and your fro? I absolutely adore it!"

“You’re so kind, thank you, ladies.” I give each of them a hug before leading them to the lounge

“It’s so quiet in here, where’s my boy?” Nokwazi says looking around the house

“He’s sleeping with his father upstairs, ladies you know you’re not guests here so please make yourselves comfortable and find something to nibble on while I go and wake your brother from his nap.”

“Okay.” They say in unison

I find the father and son duo still sleeping. Zothando has his feet on his father’s face, my poor hubby! Quinton opens his eyes and looks at me when I try to take Zothando from the bed.

“Hey.” His voice is raspy and laden with sleep

“I’m taking him to his room,” I murmur

“Okay.” He says and sits up brushing his face with his fingers

I take Zothando to his room and put him to sleep, and then switch on the monitor so we will hear him when he cries. Mpilo is still in the same position I left him in when I walk back into our bedroom

“Babe the girls are here.” He nods and stretches out his hand to me, he pulls me to his lap when I take his hand.

“Ngyakthanda Anzani, I know sometimes I mess up but ngyiakthanda and lokho ngeke kushintshe. Inhliziyo yami ngeyakho mama, thank you for being my wife and loving me unconditionally. I’m sorry about what I said to Given and I promise something like that will never happen again.”

(I love you Anzani) (I love you and that will never change, my heart is yours)

He says and pulls me in for a sultry kiss, we kiss allowing our mouths and bodies to proclaim the love we feel and our commitment to one another.

“I love you too khotshi ya Zothando,” I say linking our foreheads and tracing my fingers on his lips.

“I had a dream; I think it was my mother I’m not sure but she was exactly like how aunt described her. We were sitting in what looked like some sort of garden, the place had the greenest grass I’ve ever seen and beautiful tall trees and flowers, and a river with clear blue water. I was sitting on the bench not far from the flowing river listening to the birds chirping when she appeared, she looked so beautiful and young and for some awkward reason in the dream, I recognized her and smiled at her the moment she appeared. She returned the smile and took a seat next to me, and ran her hands on my face with the smile on her face growing larger by the second and her eyes sparkling with tears- not from sadness but pure joy! She told me she has never left my side. She said she’s always been there and has never left me alone.” He pauses and smiles emotionally “She told me she loves me so much and that she’s proud of the man I matured into, she said we should never stop

praying because the enemy never takes a break....there's something else she said that left me confused though”

“What?”

“She implored me not to hate my father nor blame him for anything.”

“Wow, that’s strange. Considering everything he’s done to you.”

“Very, anyway let’s go I’m sure the girls are waiting for us.”

“Yeah, are you going to tell them about your real parents?”

“Yeah, but for me, this doesn’t change anything, they’re still my siblings and that will never change.”

“Yeah.”

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## NARRATED

The girls tense up as Anzani and Quinton walk down the stairs, Nobuhle looks at her brother and swallows looking down. Hand in hand they settle on the sofa across the one the girls are sharing, and Quinton greets them putting his arm over his wife's shoulder, love is definitely in the air and everyone can see and feel it. If it was any other day, the girls would be admiring the beautiful love this two share but they can't because the news they are about to break to them will disappoint and take away the smiles plastered on their faces.

“Buhle awsemuhlophe nje, kumnandi e Pretoria ne uze usdudla nokuba sdudla.” Quinton jokes taking in Buhle's appearance (Buhle you've gained complexion; Pretoria is nice look at how much weight you've gained.)

Everyone laughs while Buhle looks down and twiddles her thumbs. Quinton puts one leg over the other and rests his back on the sofa “You girls wanted to talk, I’m here now. Who wants to go first?”

Buhle looks at Nokwazi and the two have a conversation with their eyes then Nokwazi nods and clears her throat looking at the couple “Uhm bhuti there’s no easy way to say this but Nobuhle is pregnant.”

“What?” Quinton asks, eyes bulging out in shock. Anzani looks at Nobuhle and blows out an exasperated sigh “Explain, I didn’t hear you uthi kwenzenjani?”

Kwazi swallows and repeats her statement. The room falls into an uncomfortable silence as Quinton digests the news, he claps his hands and looks at Buhle. “Do you have anything to say for yourself?” The hurt and disappointment in his voice is hard to miss and shoots straight to Buhle’s heart tearing it into a thousand pieces

“I’m sorry bhuti I didn’t mean to disappoint you, I was careful. I didn’t even have sex, I don’t know how it happened.” She says and tears stream down her face

She explained herself but Quinton didn’t quite grasp what she said, who gets pregnant without having sex? Buhle must think he’s stupid. He opens his mouth to say something but closes it without saying anything and turns to Anzani motioning her to say something

Anzani clears her throat and looks at the weeping Buhle in Nokwazi’s arms “Who’s responsible for your pregnancy, is it Thando?” Buhle lifts up her tear-stained face from her sister’s bosom and looks at Anzani nodding her head in agreement. “Wow, when did you two start dating because the last time we spoke you two were just friends?”

“Shortly after mom’s funeral, I’m sorry I kept it from you.” Anzani doesn’t know what to say, shouting at Buhle won’t help anything. She’s pregnant and that’s not going to change after she yells at her and lets out how disappointed she is in her.

She also feels somewhat responsible for this, maybe Quinton was right she shouldn’t have encouraged Nobuhle to be friends with Thando. Look at what happened now.

“I don’t know what to say Buhle, what’s done is done. I hope you know that being a mother isn’t easy and that the relationship changes once there’s a child involved, I’m scared for you because I don’t know if you’re ready for all of that. Take me for example I’m married, your brother is a supportive husband and a present father, but I still struggle when it comes to raising Zothando sometimes.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to disappoint you two. I didn’t have sex, I’m still a virgin the doctor confirmed it. I got pregnant from dry humping.” This child should just shut up, no one wants to know about the nasty things she does with her boyfriend.

“Buhle I don’t know what to say, I’m so disappointed in you because I expected better from you. Yelling and saying all sorts of things to you won’t help anything because you’re already pregnant so I won’t chastise or shout at you but do know that from now on you’re on your own, I told you two that anyone who falls pregnant would be exempting themselves as my responsibility. I have a family of my own, you guys know this, and another child on the way who’ll add to the expenses I have. For your sake Buhle I hope Thando will step up and take care of you and your child because I’m not getting involved, I told you this before and I wasn’t joking. I’m not raising another man’s child.” He stands up and walks away leaving the three women in shock.

#105

NARRATED

“Please stop crying babe, he’s disappointed and hurt but I’m sure he didn’t mean any of what he said,” Thando says wiping Buhle’s tears who has been crying since he picked her up from her brother’s place

“You weren’t there Thando; you didn’t see the look on his face when he said it. He meant it. My brother has washed his hands off me, I’m all alone now.” Thando plants a peck on her forehead and both her puffy eyes

“No, you’re not alone. I’m here and I’m not going anywhere, you and I will go through this together, but I know your brother will come around ...he loves you too much to give up on you and his niece or nephew. He’s still upset, rightfully so but I know he’ll calm down eventually and forgive you.”

“What if he doesn’t?”

“He will trust me.” A loud sob breaks out of her lips breaking Thando’s heart. He exhales loudly, feeling helpless.

He has tried every trick in the book to get her to calm down, but nothing worked. All this crying can’t be good for the baby he pulls her face up and smashes his lips into hers, anything to get her to stop crying. Buhle puts her hands on his chest and kisses him back, he deepens it and they kiss passionately with their breaths ragged.

Buhle sneaks her hands under Thando’s shirt and helps him take it off, her soft hands caresses his bare back and move to his slightly buffed-up chest, and trail down to his abs and inside his pants cupping his beast. He purrs like a cat rolling his eyes to the back of his head as his manhood fills her small hand, his shaft jerks and grows larger in her hands. She grabs the waistband of his joggers and pulls them down together with his boxer shorts causing his member to spring up, she stares at it... all thick, veined, and the cockhead oozing with pre-cum, she glances at his face and the desperation in his eyes gives her the courage she needs to do this. She bobs her head putting the tip in her warm mouth for the first time

“F\*\*k!” Thando groans with veins all over his forehead looking at her as she skillfully works her mouth on his member, it’s the first time she’s doing this to him but she’s doing it right. He doesn’t feel any teeth, just her mouth and her tongue lusciously teasing his cockhead and twirling around his cock, he lays on his back pillowing his arms, and enjoys the feel of her mouth tightly wrapped around his member.

With one hand she holds his manhood and twirls her tongue on the sides of his manhood sending him straight to a world he’s never been to before, a loud groan bubbles from his throat, and his thighs quiver when Hlehle sucks his balls. Where did she learn all of that, feeling impatient he rolls them over so that he’s on top of her and hastily takes off her jeans along with her panties and opens her thighs wide. His member jerks painfully as he feasts his eyes with her clean shaved nana glistening with her juices, he buries his face on her nana and gently sucks on her clit while slightly shaking his face against her aching cookie.

Buhle raises her head looking at him as he eats her up like his favorite dessert, the pleasure she feels making her heart swell threatening to give her a heart attack, he separates her labial lips with his fingers and dips his tongue onto her slit and stimulates her g-spot with his tongue. Tears run down the sides

of her face as she cums undone crying out his name, he wipes his face with his hands and looks down at her rubbing his tip on her wet slit

“Should I?”

“Yes please.”

“Are you sure baby?”

“Yes, Thando. Please make love to me.” He nods and gently pushes himself inside of her causing her excruciating pain, he looks at her glimmering eyes and stops moving

“Don’t stop.”

“But I’m hurting you.”

“I’m a big girl, I can take it. Make me a woman Thando, please.” He nods and starts thrusting in again gently so until the head

pops inside her nana causing her to scream out in pain, he drops his sweaty forehead on top of her chest

“I’m sorry sthandwa sam’ but the worst is over now, I swear.” He says and begins plunging in and out of her stretching her tight pussy to accommodate his size

Buhle starts moaning in pleasure a couple of strokes later feeling the pleasure mixed with a bit of pain, she clings onto Thando pulling him towards her and buries her face in the crook of his neck immersing herself in the erotic pleasure she feels and listens to him groan in pleasure and shower her with compliments

“I love you.” He says looking into her eyes and a drop of the sweat from his forehead hits her on the face

“I love you too.” She murmurs in his ear stretching her legs even wider

The pair continue making love staring into each other's eyes and professing their endless love for each other.

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ANZANI

I turn off the faucet, step out of the shower and grab a clean towel from the bathroom rack and start wiping myself, I feel cool air hitting my bare back and instantly get goosebumps on my skin. I look behind me and see my husband walk toward me stark naked

“Thought you’d wait for me.” He says advancing toward me

“You didn’t tell me.”

He turns on the faucet, takes the towel from my hands, and tows it on the floor before picking me up and getting into the shower with me in his arms. He puts me down and grabs the shower gel and smears a handful into his palms before

lathering it all over my boobs and my pregnancy bun, the way he's doing is so erotic and sends signals down south.

He gently washes my body with his hands, rather seductively I must say. I can't help but moan out in pleasure as his fingers gently separate my folds and rub my throbbing clit and circle around my wet hole.

"Baby.." I say breathing heavily

"What?" He says and goes down on his knees putting my leg on his shoulder and plants his face between my legs eating me up so deliciously that my heart starts beating rapidly and my chest feels like it's on fire. He works his mouth on my nuna gently sucking, licking, and biting my engorged clit and kissing my labial lips as he would my lips then he turns me around and spread my butt cheeks.

My heart almost stops beating when I feel his tongue on my a\*s, I love his mouth on my nuna but f\*ck the feel of his tongue on my a\*s is something out of this world, he circles his tongue on the wrinkles around my a\*s and dips his finger inside my

pussy rubbing on my g-spot stimulating both my holes at the same time sending me straight to heaven. My toes curl as a wave of pleasure washes over me and I cum all over his face with my body vibrating violently.

He plunges deep inside of me before I can catch my breath and fucks me so good, I can't help but cry and moan out loud like a porn star, oh my goodness this feels so good. Sex in the shower is the best thing ever I swear, the water adds its own aroma and creates the highest form of pleasure I have ever felt in my life. His strokes are hard and fast but I can tell he's being careful because I'm pregnant, he plunges in and out of me and I feel a knot in my stomach as I feel my orgasm nearing, he buries all of his dick inside my nuna so much so that I feel his balls slapping against my inner thighs. I cum all over his cock feeling my body weaken. He f\*cks me through my orgasm while he pinches and tweaks my nipples

"Limnandi ikhekhe lakho Thembalam'." He groans into my ear  
"Umnandi mama, I still can't believe that all of this sweetness is all mine."

(You feel so good)

“It’s all yours, my love  
I’m all yours.”

“Do you promise?” He says and taps his finger on my clit driving me crazy with pleasure

“Ye..yes baby I’m all yours.”

“Then cum for me.” He breaths into my ear and sucks on it before slipping his tongue inside making me feel things I’ve never felt before.

I fall apart and he follows suit two strokes later, he tightens his arms around me breathing heavily as the mixture of our juices run down my legs

“I love you Thembalam’.”

“I love you Mpilo.” I reply breathlessly “I’m tired.” I confess

He turns me around and picks me up “Thank you for loving me.” He says and pulls me in for a kiss.

“Don’t you think you were too hard on Buhle earlier on? I know she made a mistake and you’re disappointed but I think what you said was uncalled for”

My head is on his chest while his arms are wrapped around me like a blanket and our legs are intertwined together like a coil, under the covers.

We had an innocent shower after which he helped me apply lotion then we got under the covers naked. My body is numb, I can’t feel my lower body after that intense session we had in the shower but I’m not complaining.

“No, I told them to use protection and contraceptives when they start having sex. I told them I have responsibilities and a family to take care of and that I wouldn’t get involved should anyone of them get pregnant.”

“I know Mpilo wanga but she wasn’t even having sex, she didn’t think that this would happen I mean dry humping is supposed to be safe....I know you didn’t mean whatever you said to her, you love her and would never give up on her because of an honest mistake. I know you are used to her being perfect but she’s human too and allowed to make a mistake, she’s already blaming herself and I can imagine how scared she must be so she doesn’t need all of this right now she needs your support.” He plants a peck on my forehead and rubs my belly

“Sleep sthandwa sam it’s been a long day.” I guess I’ll try again tomorrow.

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NARRATED

Having reached Mamzobe’s stop, the taxi driver stops the car and Mamzobe climbs out and rummages through her purse for coins to pay the taxi fare

“Mama awsheshe tu angina langa lonke!” The driver says running out of patience

(Ma’am please hurry up I don’t have all day)

“Ngixolele mkhwenyana sesidala leskhwama sino mkhuba wokufihla imali.” She says with a fake chuckle irritating the driver further

(Forgive me driver, the purse is old and has a bad habit of hiding coins)

Mamzobe takes out all the contents inside her purse and swings it in the air holding it face down. Old tissue papers, sweet wrappers, and two coins fall from the purse, the coins roll down the street in different directions forcing her to chase after them. Her fat body jerks as she runs after the coins, she manages to step on one with her foot while the other one falls inside the water drainage on the street. A sigh of defeat eludes her lips as she removes her shoe on top of the coin and realizes that it’s a 50 cent, she looks at the driver and calculates the distance between where she is and her house before looking back to the driver again.

He's not paying attention to her, he's busy pressing on his phone while twisting the toothpick inside his mouth. She makes a run for it, and one of the passengers inside the taxi notices her running away and quickly alerts the taxi driver

“Nangu edla phantsi lo mama!”

(She's running away)

“What?” the driver asks looking at the backseat through the rearview mirror

“Uyabaleka lo mama!” all the passengers inside sing in unison while some laugh finding this entertaining and of course, it wouldn't be South Africa if someone didn't have their phone out taking a video of the whole thing.

“Yewena mama!” Bellows the driver pressing his foot on the accelerator

Mamzobe doesn't make it far before the taxi catches up to her and corners her from the front blocking her path, the driver's door opens and the taxi driver jumps down boiling in anger

"Yewena mama ucabanga kuthi uyenzani? Give me my money!" he bellows wagging a finger at her

(What do you think you're doing)

"I'm sorry please forgive me, son, I will give you your money I swear," Says Mamzobe breathing heavily from the little exercise she just did hitting her chest with her hand feeling it tighten

"Give me my money before I slap you!" The driver's voice is loud drawing everyone's attention, all the nosy neighbors come running and surround the taxi. If she could Mamzobe would disappear right this instant, her neighbors can't be witnessing this, Gatsheni will slay her for embarrassing him like this in front of the whole community.

"Please don't, I'm begging you. I have money in my house, just wait here I promise I'll come back and give it to you." She says

with her hands clasped together like she's praying, hoping he agrees.

"There won't be a need for that, I'll pay. How much is your money driver?" Interjects Mamsibi already giving the driver a R50 note and tells him to keep the change.

The driver takes his money, climbs inside the taxi, and drives off leaving behind a trail of dust.

"Abo Mamzobe baney'bindi ze nkomo inkosi impela, bekayaphi etaxini azazi akana mali?" Mamsibi says and the crowd that had pooled around the taxi roars in laughter

(Mamzobe is brave, why did she get in the taxi knowing she doesn't have any money)

"Cabanga nje azoziyehlisa isthunzi emphakathini agijinyiswe emgwacweni agijinyiswela I R20 ka R20, umama womuzi wonke!" Another neighbor adds

(Imagine embarrassing herself in front of the community and being chased down the street for a mere R20, a whole wife.)

“Yey ubonile amafutha akhuhluzeka nkosi yam.” She cackles clapping her hands “Ay Mamzobe almost killed me with laughter today.” She says and everyone laughs some even high fiving emasculating Mamzobe further, she’s never felt so small and naked in her entire life. With her tail lodged between her legs and her head buried in the ground in shame, she toddles to her house while her neighbors continue to laugh and ridicule her.

(Did you see fats shaking)

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NOKWAZI

“Thando is right, our brother will come around. He’s just disappointed and shocked because he didn’t expect this from you. Give him time.” I’m on a video call with Buhle checking up on her, she wasn’t in a good state when Thando picked her up.

She blows out a sigh “I hope you’re right because I can’t imagine my life without my brother in it.”

“Stop stressing it’s not good for the baby, our brother is kindhearted I know he’ll come around.”

“Yeah...anyway, Thando and I did it today.”

“I won’t ask how it was because that smile on your face says it all.”

“It was amazing sis, he was so gentle with me and oh my goodness it felt amazing to be with him even though it was extremely painful at first.”

“Ncoah, I’m happy for you and I’m glad your purity was taken by someone who loves and adores you.” If I could I would go back in time and wait for the right time before rushing to have sex, I would give anything for Agang to be my first. “I envy you, your first will probably be your last.”

“I hope so, Thando is my first in basically everything and I hope him and I won’t break up anyway did you and Agang do it?”

“No, we were about to but we realized that he didn’t have any condoms. He wanted to continue saying he’ll take PREp but I just couldn’t allow him to put his life at risk like that, I regret

being greedy and sleeping around with an old man for money because now I can't even allow my boyfriend to go down on me without thinking that I'm going to infect him."

"Oh sisi I'm sorry."

I sniff wiping my tears with my pajama top "No, don't feel sorry for me, I did this to myself and now I can't even enjoy oral sex like normal people do because I'm constantly thinking 'what if I infect him'"

"You are being too hard on yourself, he can take PREp and if you take your treatment religiously eventually your HIV will become undetectable which means you can't pass it to someone else. The two of you can still enjoy sex like other healthy couples"

"I guess you have a point, I'm getting another call. We'll talk again tomorrow." I don't wait for her response, I hang up and let the tears roll freely down my face.

I don't know if I'll ever accept my status, I try but it's not easy. How I wish I could take back the hands of time

#106

“Are you ready?” he nods and takes a deep breath, I take his hand into mine and give it a gentle squeeze.

“Let’s go in.” He says after a few minutes of silence

The PI we hired to find his maternal side of the family came through for us exceeding all our expectations, I mean it’s only been a month since the Richards bay trip we didn’t expect him to find Nkanyezi's family so soon. The information aunt Gabisile told us was credible and helped a great deal as it benefited the PI to narrow down his search to a specific area rather than searching the entire KwaZulu-Natal, Nkanyezi's mother stays in Ulundi which was previously known as Mahlabathini.

This time we didn’t take Zothando with us since we didn’t know what we would find ahead, we left him with Nokwazi who was more than happy to babysit him for us. Mpilo climbs out of the car and rounds to the passenger seat to get my door and helps me out, I’m getting bigger by the day and I’m loving it. I wasn’t this big when I was pregnant with Zothando but maybe it’s

because I'm enjoying my pregnancy this time around, there are not many complications or sickness I just have a sweet tooth and a thicker body.

We slowly make our way to the gate, thank goodness it's unlocked and from the look of things they don't have dogs in the yard. When Mpilo opens the gate I notice that his hands are trembling, shame my poor baby is scared and I can't say I blame him, this has been hard on him that's why I need to be strong for him. I know there's someone inside the house when I see the opened door and hear the TV playing cartoons, I hit my knuckles on the door and take a step back waiting to be permitted inside.

"Come in!" sounds a female voice from inside, I push the door and walk in with Mpilo on my tail.

There's a toddler on the couch watching cartoons and an elderly woman ironing laundry, a single glance at her face is enough to see the resemblance between her and Mamzobe. She's definitely Quinton's grandmother.

“Sanibonani ma, igama lami ngiwu Anzani Ndlovu lona wu myeni wami u Mpilentle Ndlovu angazi noma silahlekile kodwa sihamba sifuna kwa Mzobe.”

(Greeting ma, my name is Anzani Ndlovu and this is my husband Mpilentle Ndlovu I don't know if we are lost but we are looking for the Mzobe family)

“Anilahlekanga, kuka Mzobe la ekhaya” She switches off the iron and asks us to take a seat before settling on the recliner opposite our seat “Ngingani siza ngani bantwa bami?” here comes the difficult part, how do you tell someone you've never met that you are their grandchild?

(You came to the right place, we are the Mzobe family) (How may I be of help)

Mpilo clears his throat and begins talking “Njengoba besekashilo unkosikazi, igama lami ngiwu Mpilentle Ndlovu indodana ka Cebo'elihle Ndlovu.” She looks at Mpilo and has what looks like 'a light bulb' moment, she covers her open mouth with her hands visibly stunned.

(Asy wife has mentioned, my name is Mpilentle Ndlovu son of Cebo'elihle Ndlovu)

“I was raised by Nomonde and Ntsizwa Ndlovu and all my life I knew them as my parents until a couple of weeks ago when I learned the truth about my identity and learned that the person who I’ve known my whole life as my uncle is actually my father and that my mother, Nkanyezi Mzobe passed on shortly after giving birth to me.” She looks at Mpilo and tears stream down her face, I can’t tell if she’s crying because this is opening up old wounds or because she’s happy to see her grandson after all these years.

“Mpilente, is it really you?” she asks looking at him as if studying his face

“Yes, it’s me.”

She puts her hands on her face and breaks into a gut-wrenching sob, her cry is so painful I can’t help but tear up. Mpilo stands from his seat and kneels in front of her pulling her into his arms, she holds onto him and cries painfully in his arms.

The toddler sees his grandmother crying and sadness masks his features before he bursts into a loud cry, I take him into my arms and try to calm him down bribing him with a stick sweet I had inside my handbag. It takes a while for Mpilo's grandmother to calm down, but she does eventually. She takes Mpilo's hands and pecks them repeatedly, tears still rolling down her face helplessly.

“I can’t believe this is happening, I can’t believe you’re here in front of me. I thought I would also die before laying my eyes on you. Ngiwu maMkhize mina, ugoto wakho ngizala umamakho.” She says and looks up “Mzobe uze wayolala kobandayo inhliziyo yakho ibuhlungu ngomzulukulu wakho asethembe njengoba esenyathele emagcekeni alaykhaya nawe lapho okhona usuyokuthola ukuphumula emoyeni wakho” Mpilo wipes her tears with his palms and plants a peck on her forehead. Thirty minutes haven’t passed since these two met but I can already feel the love between them, ya neh family bonds – blood is thicker than water.

(I'm maMkhize, your grandmother) (Mzobe you passed with a broken heart because of your grandson, I hope you're resting in peace now that he's found his way home.)

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## QUINTON

When I left my house to come here I was ready for one of two possibilities, to be rejected and turned away or to be received well but I didn't expect things to be this easy and natural. Do you know the love, warmth, and that sense of belonging you feel whenever you're surrounded by your loved ones? That's exactly how I feel being here, this right here feels like home. After the emotional moment with my grandmother in the lounge, she called her son, his wife, and some of her relatives who don't live too far and summoned them home and told them the news of my return.

The house is packed, one would swear there's a celebration of some sort. My uncle, Andile took it upon himself to introduce me and my wife to every new person who walked through the door after I was introduced to him but I would be lying if I told you I still remember everyone's names. Now Anzani and I are with my grandmother in her bedroom, she's showing us pictures from their family album and iterating the story behind every picture, my mother was a beautiful woman nina and I can

see a bit of myself in her. For some weird reason, Mamzobe isn't in any of the pictures in the album but I don't ask why.

"Here Nkanyezi was six and had just lost her first tooth-" the door swings open interrupting my grandmother's narration, it's my uncle.

"Ntwana as'vaye." He says looking at me

(Let's go)

"Ai Andile umsaphi ngisambonisa izithombe za mamakhe."

(Where are you taking him, I'm still showing him pictures of his mother)

"Ngizombuyisa ma oulady ungawari, asambe ntwana."

(I'll bring him back mom don't worry, let's go, buddy)

"Will you be okay without me?" I ask looking at my wife.

“Yes, go.” She says with a smile

“Hamba mfanami don’t worry about Anzani, I’ll take care of her. Wena Andile ngiyakwazi ungayenzisi umtwana izinto eziphume ndleleni.” I can’t help but laugh, I’ve never been referred to as ‘umtwana’ in my whole life. I’ve always been the older brother who had to look out for my siblings so it’s kind of weird to be referred to as a child.

(Go my boy) (I know you Andile, don’t get the child in trouble)

“Khululeka ma oulady udedele u blood, ngizomnakekela umshana. Asvaye mshana ka malume.” He says ruffling my hair with his hand and I give him a look, the clown laughs throwing his head back.

(Relax mom, I’ll take care of him. Let’s go, nephew)

"Ungadlali ngomtwana wena Andile man!" My grandmother chastises making Anzani laugh

(Dont play with the child)

"Yo aike ngizamthini umfana ka gogo makoti wami, Nangu muntu azongthathela indawo yami ku mamami"

(What can I do to this granny's boy my daughter in law, he has replaced me in my mother's heart )

I can tell he's enjoying this, being older than someone that is. He's my grandparent's lastborn, my mother was the first followed by Mamzobe, and Smiso(he also passed on) then him- he's not that much older than me I guess that's why he calls me ntwana

"Senibucedile madoda?" he asks his friends seating under the tree with empty bottles of beer in front of them.

(You've finished it, gents)

"Yes." One of them replies

"Eish

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okay." He looks at me "I'm sorry these men finished all the booze but no worries we'll go and buy more, yabona nawe

lendaba yakho yok'hlala emakameremi nabafazi amadoda a khona mele uyiyeke mshana ka malume” His friends laugh

(You should leave this thing of staying with women in the bedroom while there are men)

“Wubani ntwana, wu mshana ka malume?”

(Who is he, uncle's nephew)

“Yes, wu mshanami lo niyambona muhle ufuze umalumakhe. Ngimdala bafana nibo nghlonipha.” Yo ngaze ngasha!

(He's my nephew you see he's good-looking like his uncle. I'm old, you guys should respect me)

“Okay, malum' Andile.” One of them says and they all roar in laughter

“Okay majita ngiyabuya, ngisaphuma no mshanami ningahambi.”

(Okay gents I'll be back, I'm going somewhere with my nephew please don't leave)

“Okay.”

“Where are we going?”

“Butchery then the bottle store, my nephew is finally home and that calls for celebration. We are going to have a braai and have some crazy fun, we'll drink, eat and be merry.”

“You really don't have to do all of this, being reunited with all of you guys is enough for me.”

“Nonsense, you're my nephew I have to do this. Kuncane futhi loku, kahle kahle bekumele ngabe ngikuhlabela inkomo ngikwenzela umsebenzi.”

(This is nothing, I should be slaughtering a cow for you and making a ceremony for you)

His mind is made up there's no arguing with him “Okay, but I still feel all of this is useless because I don't drink alcohol.”

“Oksalayo uyayidla inyama, catch you’re the one driving.” He says tossing me his car keys

(But you eat meat)

He drives a black Ford Ranger Roush, izinja madoda!

Our first stop is the butchery, he tells me to take the meat and notify him when it’s time to pay while he wanders the whole butchery flirting with the female staff. Now I see why my grandmother warned him not to get me into trouble, he’s a handful!

I join the queue when I'm done and gesture for him to come, the first thing he does is to look inside the basket and exhales in defeat.

“Mara mshana kungani ufuna ungibukanisa nabantu, inyama encane kanje? Ngithe thatha inyama mshana ai lento ongyenzela yona la. Hambo thatha inyama mshanami khululeka umalume uzabhadala”

(But nephew why do you want to make a spectacle of me in front of everyone? I said take meat not what you did. Go and take more meat, you don't have to worry about the bill uncle will pay) The people in the queue look at him and laugh

“Andile ne drama! Awuboni uyenza omunye umtwana shy ngalo msindo wakho.” says the cashier

(Can't you see you're making the guy shy with your noise)

“Weeeh! Sibongile ngiyakwazi ke wena sewuhalela umshanami njalo, aike khohlwa nje nge sdomu eskolweni. This is top of the range, top tier uyazbonela nawe, he's not your type.”

(I know you, you want my nephew but you can forget about it) (you can see for yourself) everyone on the queue cracks up, ai angina malume ngizihlalele shem

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NOKWAZI

“Is that Zo?”

“Yes, I'm babysitting. You should actually come and practice for your own child.”

“That’s a good idea, how long will you have him for?”

“It was supposed to be only for today but Anzani just called and told me they’ll come back tomorrow.”

“Kanti bayephi?”

(Where did they go)

“I don’t know.”

“I don’t know if it’s me but Quinton has changed man like he's no longer the same brother we’ve always known.”

“Is this about the pregnancy and him not liking Thando? You gotta understand that to him Thando is someone who impregnated his teenage sister so obviously he won’t like him.”

“But he paid damages and is taking responsibility, what else does he want from him? Naye he wasn’t married to Anzani when she fell pregnant for the first time, he should stop acting like a saint.” Like I believed, Quinton came around after a week and Thando's family paid damages to him but even so, he still doesn't like Thando. Buhle feels he's being too hard on him.

“Haibo Nobuhle? Is this you talking about our brother like that?”

“I'm tired of him making my boyfriend feel like he’s not good enough when he’s doing his best.”

“Don't take it personal, he’s just being a protective big brother. That’s how brothers are, I’m sure he’ll treat Agang the same way.”

“Well I won’t have it, I’m tired of his nonsense.” I don’t know if it’s pregnancy hormones but yoh Buhle is breathing fire

“i know you love your boyfriend, but please don't disrespect our brother because of him. I’m not saying he’ll betray you but we don’t know what the future holds, our brother is the only constant in our lives.”

“Hmmm, look I have to go. I have an assignment to write, we'll chat.” She hangs up not giving me a chance to get a word in.

I don’t like the tension brewing between my siblings, things haven’t been the same between them since Buhle's pregnancy announcement and the wedge between them keeps growing larger and larger because Buhle feels the need to protect her boyfriend against our brother, it’s a lot honestly.

My phone rings just after I put it down, I stare at the screen for a while before picking up.

“Babomncane.” I’m so shocked, this is the first time I receive a call from him

“Nokwazi kunjani?”

(How are you)

“Ngiyaphila babomncane ngingezwa kuwe?”

(Good uncle and you)

“Eish, ngingabe ngikhuluma amanga mangingathi ngiyaphila.”

(I would be lying if I said I’m fine)

“Kwenzenjani babomncane?”

(What’s going on uncle)

“Wu Mamzobe mntwanami uthethe imali engango R7000 kumashonisa ngaphandle kwe mvumo yami, manje lo mashonisa usefike waqubula I fridge, wena tv, wena microwave wena gedlela ngisho ne stove imbala. Bengisacela sisi

ungkhulumele no bhuti wakho umtshela ngicela angboleke I R10k, mina akulubambi ucingo lwami mangim'founela.”

(It's Mamzobe my child she borrowed R7000 from a loan shark without my permission now the loan shark came and took my fridge, TV, microwave, kettle and the stove. Please talk to your brother on my behalf and ask him to borrow me R10k, he doesn't pick up the phone when I call.)

My brother is avoiding him for a reason, my uncle is very vile. The reason he's speaking politely to me now is because he needs my help otherwise he'd be throwing my mistakes in my face. Him and his wife Mamzobe have verbal diarrhea shem, the things that come out of their mouths! Ungafa nokufa mabangakuthola u weak emotionally nje ngami so.

“Okay no problem, I'll try but I can't promise you anything.”

“As long as my message will reach his ears, my child, that's all I ask for.”

“Okay, I'll tell him when he comes back.”

“Comes back? Where is he? Don't you all stay in Joburg together?”

“We do but for now he's out of town”

“Where is he?”

“I don’t know babomncane, he didn’t tell me”

“Unamanga uyazi you just don’t want to tell me, yini u Mpilentle unitshele ukuthi mina ngiyathakatha ningangitsheli izindaba zakhe yini?”

(You are lying) (Did Mpilentle tell you that I’m a witch and shouldn’t be told things)

Haibo! “Cha babomncane!”

(No, uncle)

“So manje? Khuluma ukuphi u Mpilentle?”

(So talk, where is Mpilentle)

“Angmazi babomncane akashongo.” I know he ended the call when I hear ‘twi!’ beep in my ear, bathong!

(I don’t know uncle, he didn’t say where he’s going to)

#107

We ended up spending the night at my grandmother's house, there was no way we could have left especially after Andile bought meat and liquor and hosted a braai in my name. He introduced me to everyone willing to listen telling them I'm his nephew, he even video called his friends from work showing me off. I've never seen anyone so excited to have a nephew like he was, and for someone who was rejected by his extended family members all his life, this makes me so happy. It feels great to be loved, not for what you can do or the good you've done in the past but just be loved for merely existing.

“Ubuye ke ngizokupheleza emalibeni.”

(You must come back so I can accompany you to the cemetery)

Like I said before, I want to see where my mother is buried. My grandmother says we need to go there early in the morning before the sun is out, we could've gone today but I was too lazy to wake up in the morning because we slept late last night. I'll make time and come back so my gran can take me to my mother's, uncle's, and grandfather's graves.

“Ngizoza gogo, khululeka”

(I will come, grandma, relax)

“Ok, ungphathele umzukulu wami ngizo cabuza bakithi,” she says making those kissing sounds making us laugh.

(Please bring my grandson so I can kiss him)

“Ya, uma oulady uright mshanami uze no mzukulu wami bazodlala no babomncane wakhe u Ntokozo”

(Yes, mom is right nephew. Come with my grandchild so that he can come and play with his uncle)

So the toddler we found in the house with my grandmother is Ntokozo, Andile's last born which makes him my cousin and Zothando's uncle.

“Ey awusiyeke Andile, you’re not the first person to have a nephew. Sifelani bakithi!” My grandmother to the rescue

(Give it a rest Andile)

“Mama ake uyeke umona, phela usumdala wena usunga shona noma kunini and wazi kahle ukuthi umhlabeleli uthini mos.” He says and starts singing “Abano mona abangeni zulwini ai abene jealous abangeni zulwini, shintsha shintsha, shintsha mzalwane”

(Mom stop being jealous, you’ve gotten old and you can die anytime soon and you know what the song says)

Ntokozo backs him sending all of us to a fit of laughter, I’ll say it again. Angina malume ngizihlelele shem, what do you call this?

“Nihambe kahle mshana ka malume no makoti wami.”

(Have a safe trip nephew and my daughter in law)

Anzani smiles “Siyabonga malume, nawe usale kahle”

(Thanks uncle, keep well)

He takes out his purse, takes a roll of two hundred rand notes, and gives them to Anzani

“It's for my grandchildren, buy them some sweets.” This one and splurging money! I thought I was a giver until I met him, and I guess that's why he has so much money. He's such a giver this one and he does so cheerfully and we all know what the Bible says about people like him.

“Siyababongela malume,” I say  
(Thank you on their behalf uncle)

“What did you just say?” he says with a hand behind his ear  
“Please say it again I didn't hear you.”

“Thank you, uncle.” This is the first time I call him uncle, and it's definitely the last time because wawu!

“Aw'zweke! Manje bamba umalume ngamadlebe umcabule.”  
He says causing my grandmother and Anzani to laugh  
(Good! Now come and hold uncle's ear and kiss him)

“Angeke nihambe maningaphika nale hlanya, nihambe kahle bantwa bami,” she says giving Anzani and me hugs

(You won't leave if you keep entertaining this clown, have a safe trip, my children)

“Bye koti wami,” Andile says hugging Anzani

“Mshana awuthi umalume asule uzothi maw'khula ube ney'nkomo ey'ningi.”

(Nephew let alcohol wipe so that you'll have many cows when you grow up)

He says wiping his hands on top of my head imitating some old advert that used to play on TV back then, I can't believe Anzani is laughing, wow such betrayal!

“Andile maan!” my grandmother says trying hard not to laugh

“I'm sorry ntwana it's just that I wanted to do that since the moment ngibona le chiskop yakho icwebezela kamnandi” I give him a look and get inside the car “You're angry? Askies

mshanami umalume uzakuthumelela imadlana to show how sorry he is.”

(I’m sorry nephew it's just that I wanted to do that since the moment I saw your bald head, uncle will send you some money)

I regret allowing him to convince me to get a haircut this side.

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ANZANI

We had such an amazing time at Mpilo's grandmother's house one would swear we didn't meet them yesterday, they're so warm and welcoming. I love uncle Andile please, he's such a vibe and easy-going but I also love granny she's the sweetest person ever.

“Where's your head at?” Mpilo asks leaving his hand between my thighs while the other one is on the steering wheel

“I’m just thinking about how easily your mother’s family accepted you, you could see that they were really happy to see you. They didn’t care about much, they were just glad to have you, especially your uncle he couldn’t stop boasting about his nephew.” I laugh

“Don’t remind me of that one...to be honest, I was not expecting so much warmth and love, it was overwhelming but not in a bad way. I’m just not used to all that, being babied and being taken care of, all of that is new to me and it felt amazing to be the one being cared for, for a change. Not that I don’t enjoy taking care of-“

“It’s okay baby, you don’t have to explain I understand. I’m glad uncle Cebo told you the truth about your parents, he did it because he wanted to break you not knowing that he’s actually leading you to your family. A family that adores you.”

“Yes, it was a blessing in disguise. I need to call aunt Gabi and thank her for telling me the truth, she helped me reunite with my family.”

“Yes, we must resize this picture and frame it,” I say showing him my favorite picture of his mother, his grandmother allowed him to take a few pictures of her.

“Yeah, that one or the one where she’s smiling and has her hair plaited Ben&Betty.”

“Ya, I also love that one. Her beauty is something else, I don’t know how to explain it but it’s innocuous and has this adorable thing about it that makes her look like a child.”

“True, my mother was a beauty.” He says with a proud smile on his face

We pass by MacDonald’s and buy takeaways before going to Nokwazi's place to pick up Zothando

“Come with me, I promise we won’t stay long.”

“Promise?”

“I promise if I stay longer than five minutes you’re free to stand and leave me.”

“Okay, I’m not the one who made that rule and best believe that I’ll hold you to it.” He takes Nokwazi's paper bag and steps out of the car coming to my side to help me out, my husband spoils me rotten y’all!

Hand in hand we walk to the elevator and guess who we run into? Yes, you guessed it. None other than Nolwazi. We greet her and step inside. After what feels like forever the elevator stops on our floor and she’s the first one out, from the way she’s hurrying to her apartment I know we are not the only ones who were uncomfortable around her.

“Don't think you’ll bribe me with this, I still want the money you promised me,” Nokwazi says when Mpilo gives her the takeaway bag

I laugh and take a seat on the couch

## Advertisement

I don't see my son anywhere and that could only mean one thing, he's sleeping.

"I'll pay you don't worry, you know me mos," Quinton replies and settles next to me.

"Don't tell me he's sleeping, I miss him so much. I've been looking forward to seeing his cute face the whole day" I say

"That karate kid just fell asleep, yey akano kungi khahlela kangaka umtwanenu ebusuku!"

(He kicked me the entire night)

We laugh "Askies, you should have used his sleeping bed."

"I thought he was still the same baby Zo who sleeps peacefully through the night, I regret it shame!"

“Askies my love, thanks for babysitting him for us auntie wakhe we really appreciate your help,” Mpilo says

“Kanti vele beniye kuphi? Your uncle called me yesterday, apparently, you don’t pick up his calls when he calls and he needs R10k urgently to pay the loan shark debt that Mamzobe made. He says the loan shark took his tv, fridge, kettle, and the stove.”

(Where were you)

“So, mina ngingenaphi lapho?” Mpilo asks visibly annoyed.

(How is that my problem)

The nerve of that uncle! “When I told him you’re not around he demanded to know your whereabouts.” My husband and I look at each other, what’s uncle Cebo playing at? Why the sudden interest in my husband's movements?

“And what did you tell him?” he asks

“That I don’t know, where were you guys vele?”

He exhales and puts his elbows on his knees leaning forward  
“There is something I need to tell you and Nobuhle, I don’t know how you are going to take it but for me, this changes nothing between us.”

“What is it, you’re scaring me. Are you dying?”

“No, no. I’m not dying, it’s something else.”

“Please tell me.”

He clears his throat “Almost two months ago I found out that mom and dad were not my biological parents.”

“What? That can’t be true!”

“Unfortunately it’s true little sister, I also didn’t want to believe it at first but I had no choice but to face the facts after DNA tests confirmed it.”

“What? You had a DNA test done with who, Buhle? She also knows about this?”

“No, Buhle doesn’t know anything. I stole your toothbrush and had it tested against my DNA in a sibling's DNA that checks whether two or more people are of the same father or mother and unfortunately me and you share none.”

“So, you’re not my brother?” she asks tears rolling down her face “Who are your parents then, did mom and dad adopt you?”

“I'm not your brother but your cousin, mom, and dad didn’t adopt me. I was given to them by my father to raise as their own, my father is uncle Cebo.”

“What? Who's your mom then, Mamzobe?”

“No, her late sister Nkanyezi.”

“Wow! How can uncle be your biological father when he hates you so much?”

He sighs “I don’t know nami kodwa nakhoke, he’s my father. To answer your first question, Anzani and I were in KZN to meet my mother’s family, the trip was successful they received me well and my uncle is quite the character. He was introducing me to everyone e..” he stops talking when he sees Nokwazi's expression

“You went to meet with your mother's family? What does that mean for us, are we no longer your family?”

“What? No, you’re my little sisters and that will never change, I love you guys with everything in me. You know this right?”

“Now I’m not sure anymore, I mean you went and met your mother's family without telling us. You’ve been keeping this from us and now thinking of the way you treated Nobuhle when she told you about her pregnancy, all those things you said to her...did you say them because you knew we are not your siblings?” What?

“No, Kwazi that’s not fair. You know your brother loves you guys and he long told you to use condoms and contraceptives when you start having sex because he won’t help you raise the kids. Don’t twist this and make it sound like what it's not.” I had to get interject, these girls can’t do my husband like this after everything he’s done for them.

“I only wanted to understand, hence I’m asking.”

“Didn’t he tell you two not to get pregnant or he’ll stop supporting you financially?”

“He did.”

“So what’s the problem?”

“No, it's fine. I understand.” She doesn’t understand anything, she’s just dismissing me. It’s clear her mind is made up, I can only pray she doesn’t influence Nobuhle. Maybe he should

have told them at the same time, now Buhle will hear Nokwazi's version of the story, not the truth.

“Which room is he sleeping in?” Mpilo asks breaking the silence

“The main.” He stands up and makes his way to the bedroom and returns shortly with our son in his arms

“Where are his things?” Nokwazi stands up and disappears to the bedroom and returns with his bag. Mpilo takes it from her and says his goodbyes and tells me I’ll find him in the car leaving me with a sniffling Nokwazi

“See how he just left? He doesn’t care about us anymore.”

“That’s not true, your brother loves you both a lot but you guys also need to cut him some slack. He’s going through a lot, imagine finding out you’re not who you thought you were after so many years. It’s a lot and on top of that he needs to deal with the fact that his father and aunt practically hate him, then he’s expected to nurse your feelings on top of that? No

Nokwazi, you guys need to be considerate. He's no superhuman, he's human and he has feelings too. He's always the one understanding when you guys mess up, the one who forgives and encourages you guys even when you anticipate the opposite then he does one mistake and you guys want to hold it against him? I agree he was rude to Buhle the other day when she told us about her pregnancy but does that single mistake cancel all the good he's done? No, you guys are not being fair on my husband angeke shem."

She laughs " What?"

"You love him shem, the way you defend him aibo!" we laugh

"He's my husband Nokwazi, if I don't stand by him who will? Your brother has always been my strength when I'm weak, and I'll tell you I've been weak a lot of times. He's strong but I can tell everything that's happening now is taking a huge toll on him, he needs me to be strong for him and that's how marriage works. You become one, whatever hurts one hurts the both of you, and whatever makes one happy makes the both of you happy because you are one person in two bodies."

“Wow, that sounds so beautiful.”

I giggle “It is, marriage is beautiful Kwazi but things are not always rosy. There are things you’ll go through that will have you doubting the decision you made to get married to the person, sometimes you will question if love is really enough and most people think that challenges in a relationship refer to infidelity but that’s not always the case. When people say they’ve been through a lot together they don’t necessarily mean that one cheated and the other one forgave.” She laughs

“Buhle feels Quinton is being too hard on Thando.”

“Aibo, what does she want Quinton to do? Be best friends with her boyfriend? Buhle needs to understand that she’s 17 years old and a baby in her brother’s eyes, Thando is 24 years... seven older than her and somehow your brother feels like he took advantage of her naivety. It’s not easy for him to accept him as your sister's boyfriend, maybe if they were the same age or with a two or three-year age gap but we’re talking about a grown man here who’s a qualified professional and established in his life to Quinton it will always feel like he's taking advantage of her even when he isn’t because to him Buhle is

still young. It would be a different story if Buhle was a young adult even with the same age gap or even bigger than 7 but for now it will always feel like Thando is taking advantage I mean Buhle is not even 18 yet”

“Makes sense, exactly what I told her.”

“Anyway let me get going but think about what I just told you, cut your brother some slack. He’s going through a lot but I’ll also talk to him.”

“Will do, you made me see things in a different light. Thank you.”

“Glad I could help.” I hug her and make my way out.

#108

He walks in while I'm getting undressed in front of the mirror and stands behind me wrapping his hands on my belly and looking at me in the mirror

"I love you Thembalam'."

"I love you too khotsi ya Zothando." He unclips my bra and lets it fall to the rug and cups my boobs in his hand, they are so full and sensitive.

"I don't know what I would do without you, my wife." He says and sucks on my neck, I moan throwing my head back giving him more access to my neck.

He trails his kisses to my back down to my spine gently sucking and licking me until he reaches my butt, he spreads my buttocks and runs his tongue on my butt crack giving me insane pleasure.

“Please bend for me.” I bend holding on to the mirror making sure my ass is wide and ready to eat, a loud moan escapes my lips when I feel his tongue on my pussy lapping on my flabs and slurping on my juices like a dog slurping water. He eats me up driving me insane with lust, my heart pumps faster as he continues to twirl his tongue deliciously on my sex. He rubs my pulsating clit with his thumb while he continues to work his mouth on my pussy, plunging his tongue deep into my twitching core. My body goes rigid as a wild orgasm ripple through me like an electric wave leaving me trembling

He wipes his face with his hands and gets up from the floor and kisses me making me taste myself on his tongue.

“Do you still want more?” He asks groping my ass

“Pp...please.”

“Please what?” he asks looking into my eyes in the mirror

“I want more.” He turns me around making me face him

“Then take it, it’s yours.” I remove his clothes with his help and pull him to our bed, then I push him backward making him lie on his back then I climb on the bed with my ass facing his face and slowly lower myself on his hard cock

“Shhhhhhhrrrrr!” a loud groan bubbles from his throat as I start moving my waist in circles on top of him making sure to jiggle my ass giving him a show, I move my waist in circles, side to side and twerk on his dick eliciting loud groans from his throat.

I continue bouncing on top of him until I feel his dick twitch inside of my sex and his thighs vibrating and quicken my pace feeling that he’s close, he orgasms shooting his cum straight to my womb groaning like a wounded animal. Once every last drop of his cum is inside of me and spilling onto his ball and the bed sheets I dump my exhausted body next to him on the bed breathing heavily, that was quite a stretch for someone in my condition.

I think he’s sleeping until I feel him pulling me towards him with my legs, he puts one leg on his shoulder and buries himself inside of my wet sex and begins fucking me so hard I can feel

his dick in my womb. He thrusts in and out of me massaging me with his member deliciously that I can't help moaning out loud while tears run from the corner of my eyes, he slowly pulls out and looks at me with half-hooded eyes.

“Please don't stop, I was close,” I say pleadingly

“Okay, sthandwa sam'.” With that said he thrusts back in burying himself to the hilt and rams into my sex fast and hard, it doesn't take long before my body convulses as I orgasm. He keeps going in and out moving his waist like a male stripper until I feel another orgasm coming, I dig my nails into his arms and fall apart at his mercy and he follows behind me groaning loud.

“That was amazing thank you sthandwa sam.” He says kissing my lips and lies on his back breathing heavily

The way I enjoy sex with my husband you guys, I can have him the whole day without a break. This man knows his story in the bedroom I swear, he always leaves me begging for more.

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QUINTON

I love my siblings with everything in me and wouldn't hesitate to lay down my life for both of them but sometimes I feel they expect too much of me, and it's getting to a point where I don't want to explain myself anymore. Whatever they think is true, they should run with it.

"Babe when are you telling Nobuhle, I think she should hear it from you and not Nokwazi."

"Can you be there when I tell her?" I'm slowly getting dependent on my wife especially when it comes to my siblings, I'm so glad God gave me a wife like Anzani because I don't know what I would do without someone like her. She's my strength and emotional crutch.

"Of course my love."

I wrap my arm around her and kiss her “I know I'm always saying it but you reign supreme in my heart, I love you more than words can explain. Uyiphakade lami, ubambo lwami, usofa slahlane wami, ithambo lam le Kentucky, i sweet lam' lomkhuhlane umama wasendlini, umama wengane zami umakoti waka Ndlovu ngikuthanda into engena size wena suka sambe wami.”

(You're my forever, my soul mate, my bone of Kentucky, my flue sweet. My wife, mother of my kids, and daughter-in-law of the Ndlovus. My love for you can't be measured, my remarkable woman)

She's smiling like a retard, my woman though

“I always hear people on social media saying Zulu men are the hill they're willing to die on, you do it for me shame. This is where my heart is, I was made to love you and I can't imagine myself loving someone else. Thank you, baby, for your beautiful words. I also love you Mpilo, with all my heart and soul and I can't imagine myself loving someone else. I belong to you and only you, God had you in mind when he created me because I don't think anyone can understand and love me the way you

do. I'm yours." Her words are sacred and find a place in the depth of my heart.

I kiss her passionately assigning my tongue in her mouth and exploring all the corners of her mouth while my hands caress her body sensually, I feel my dick stirring and twitching painfully desperate to be buried inside her but I have to be considerate because she's pregnant and we've had enough sex for the day.

We don't stop kissing until we both run out of breath then I plant my lips on her forehead, I'm in love with this woman.

"Love?" she says after a few minutes of silence

"Yes, my love."

"I was thinking of visiting my mother at Vuwani, I long promised her that I would come to spend the weekend with Zothando but I ended up not going because of all that's been happening the past few weeks."

“When do you want to go?” I can’t say I’m happy that she wants to go to Venda but I can’t deny her, I’ll just have to be strong and take it like a man.

“This weekend.” It's going to be a long weekend without them, I wouldn’t separate from them if it were up to me

“Ok, no problem. I’ll knock off early so I can drive you.”

“Thank you, baby, let me call my mother. She’ll be so excited.”

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NOBUHLE

My bursary only cares about my academic achievements not what goes on in my personal life, the only thing I need to do is to make sure I keep passing my course well. Thando has been really supportive through this very difficult time, it’s that time of the year when all the assignments are due its been crazy I won’t lie but my boyfriend has been really helpful. He’s a

finance person and doesn't know the first thing about engineering but he always goes out of his way to help me study for my tests and exams and also helps with my assignments, I'm not lucky I am blessed to have someone like him in my life it's just a pity my brother doesn't want to see that.

My phone chimes disturbing me from my books, it's my brother.

"Bhuti kunjani?"

(Brother how are you)

"I'm good and you"

"Good." I'm not good but I'm not in the mood to butt heads with him, I hate how he treats my boyfriend. It's not it shem.

"I'm glad, there's something I need to tell you but I can't do it over the phone. When are you free?"

“Weekend.”

“This weekend I can’t come, it’ll have to be next weekend then.” I can’t wait till then as I’m already curious

“I don’t have classes today, you can come if you can.”

“Okay, I’ll come when I knock off then.”

“Okay, no problem.”

“Bye.”

“Bye.” I need to be done with this assignment by the time he gets here because I have a feeling I won’t like whatever he wants to tell me.

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It's 7 pm when I get a call from my brother telling me he's outside, I grab a Jersey and make my way outside to meet with him. His car is parked at the gate

the closer I succeed to his car I notice that he's not alone inside. He's with Anzani and their son, the way these two love each other though.

"Sanibonani." I greet them standing outside the passenger door

"Hey, please get in." He says

Sis Anzani and Zo are at the back so I take the front seat then he starts the ignition joining the main road.

"Where are we going?"

"We can't talk in your commune, I don't want to make your roommates uncomfortable just imagine all three of us in your room. We'll find a restaurant where we can all sit down and have a conversation privately."

“That’s not such a bad idea, plus I’m famished.”

“Great, what do you feel like eating?”

“Spur, I’m craving their onion rings.”

“Spurs it is then.”

Sis Anzani has been quiet since I met with them, the only time she spoke to me was when she was greeting me. I don’t know what’s up because the last time I checked, me and her were okay. The mall is not far from my commune so within a few minutes we reach our destination and walk towards the entrance after parking the car in the parking lot.

“Come here, big boy,” I say and attempt to take him from his mother’s arms but he turns his face the other way clinging onto his mother

“Come on Zothando my baby, go to auntie Buhle.” She says trying to give him to me but he burst into a loud cry. I’m hurt, why doesn’t he want me?

“Don’t take it personal my love, he’ll come around,” Anzani says trying to console me probably seeing the unshed tears in my eyes

“It’s okay.” It’s midweek, in the evening almost closing time so the restaurant is almost empty as most people visit the restaurant on weekends.

We find a table next to the window, the waiter takes our orders and excuses herself.

“As I said over the phone, there’s something I need to tell you and I hope you take it well. Please know that for me it changes nothing, you’ll always be my beautiful and lovely little sister.” He says with a smile on his face and I can’t help but return it

He and his wife are sitting on the same side of the table facing me, I don't think they realize it yet but they can't seem to stay away from each other and it's so cute to see. I love this for them, their love is an inspiration to me. I want something like this with Thando, something solid.

"Yeah, like your brother said. Whatever he's about to tell you doesn't change anything, he still loves you the same." I'm beginning to get scared, what is it that they want to tell me?

"What is it, please tell me?"

"I'm not your biological brother, mom and dad were not my biological parents. I was given to them by my father to raise, my biological father is none other than uncle Cebo and my mother is Mamzobe's late sister Nkanyezi. Can you believe that? Last weekend Anzani and I took a trip to Ulundi, KZN where my mother was born and raised and I met with her family. The meeting was successful they accepted me with warm hearts and arms, biologically I'm not your brother but your cousin but to me, you'll forever be my little sister and nothing will ever change that. This new discovery doesn't change the love I have for you or our relationship, you're my sister and that's what

you'll always be." I don't know what to say or how to feel about this whole thing, it's just too much for me.

"Say something sisi, how do you feel about what your brother just told you?" Anzani says covering my hand with hers

"I don't know, it's a lot. I'm still processing it, so you went to meet your mother's family?" He nods his head positive "Now what's going to happen to Nokwazi and me, I mean you have another family now what about us?"

"What do you mean? Nothing has to change, you two will always be my sisters." Easy for him to say

"But things have changed, before it was always us against the world but now you have another family who you'll focus your attention on."

"Buhle I'm not understanding sisi." It's Anzani again

The waiter brings our food and drinks before excusing herself, I don't think I can stomach anything. I've lost my appetite

"I mean what's the reason that made you seek out your maternal family?"

He shakes his head in disbelief puzzled by my question.

"Because I wanted to know more about the woman who gave birth to me, about where she comes from and the type of person she was. I also wanted to meet her family and have a relationship with them."

"Why? Our mother wasn't a mother enough to you? because from what I remember my mother loved you so much and would do anything for you." He's betraying my mother's memory by referring to someone else as his mother

"That's true, she did and she'll always remain, my mother, because she's the only mother I've always known but I needed to know about my real mother. She didn't choose not to raise me, she didn't abandon me. If she could, she would have raised me herself but she passed on after giving birth to me, so you

see why it's important for me to know where she was buried and know more about her? The only way to do that is by seeking out her family. I didn't seek them because you guys are not enough for me but let's be frank Nobuhle they are my family too and I deserve to know and have a relationship with them like I do with you, do you know how sorrowful my grandmother cried when she saw me? She waited 29 years to meet me, my grandfather passed on wanting to see me but never got a chance to. I'm sorry if me going to meet my family makes you feel like you're not good enough because that's not my intention, but they're my family too Nobuhle and they also deserve to have a relationship with me."

"Why didn't they look for you all these years? "

"Things aren't always black and white Buhle, they wanted to but couldn't for reasons I can't get into right now."

"I'm happy for you I guess."

"Buhle sisi I understand how you must feel but believe me nothing has to change between you two, he's still the same big

brother you know and love. He will never ever turn his back on you or Nokwazi, you two will always come first in his life no matter what.” Well, that used to be the case but now we all know who comes first in my brother’s life, it’s her and their children, not us.

“This is a lot for me to take in all at once, I’m going to need some time to digest the news.”

“No problem my love, for now, let’s eat.” I don’t have an appetite but I eat anyway, awkward tension lingers in the atmosphere as we all dig in.

“So, how’s the pregnancy treating you so far?” Anza says breaking the silence

“So far so good.”

“You don’t have any weird cravings or morning sickness yet?”

“I just have a bizarre obsession with Aromat that’s all, nothing hectic so far.”

“Lucky you, my first pregnancy was hell. It showed me flames and I swore never to have kids again but look at me, I got pregnant five weeks after giving birth.” She laughs and I join in, I can't wait to go back to my room. I’m over this whole dinner, to be honest with y’all

#109

MONTHS LATER

NARRATED

He's been pacing the hospital corridors up and down in frustration, with his breath held and his heart sitting in his throat. What's taking these doctor's so long? It's been over three hours since his wife was rushed inside and no one has given him any news, all the nurses say the same thing when he asks- "wait for her doctor to give you an update."

His phone vibrates inside the pockets of his pants, he takes it out and looks at the screen before settling on the bench to take the call.

"Hello."

"Son, please tell me everything went well." Livhuwani, Anzani's mother says desperately

He blows out a sigh and mops his face with his fingers “I haven’t seen her since they took her in, and the nurses refuse to tell me anything. They all say that I should wait for her doctor to give me an update.”

“Don’t worry, everything will be okay.” She says trying to convince him and herself because truth is, she’s also scared.

“Yebo mama, how’s my son doing?” Anzani's mother moved in with them a few weeks ago to help them with Zothando and the new baby when he comes.

“You know how mischievous he is since he started walking.” His lips stretch into a thin smile thinking about his son

“I hope he’s not troubling you too much.”

“No, he’s not plus Mary is also here.” He notices the doctor appearing from the corner striding towards him

“Mma the doctor is here, I’ll call you back.”

“Okay, my son.” He hangs up and jolts up from the bench

“How did it go, doctor? How’s my wife?” the panic in his voice is almost palpable

“Calm down Mr. Ndlovu, your wife is doing well. She did good in there.” A breath of relief flees his lips

“And my son?”

“You mean your son and daughter? Your wife and the twins are all fine and perfectly healthy, you can go ahead and see them.” The doctor says with a smile on his face

“Daughter? What do you mean doctor?”

“Your wife gave birth to twins sir, a boy, and a girl, and both of them are fine and healthy. You can go ahead and see them.”

The doctor repeats and a lone tear rolls down his face, so he's a father of three now? God, you are wonderful.

He follows behind the doctor mumbling a prayer, thanking God for blessing him with two healthy children.

"Hey." He says tracing his fingers on his wife's face, she looks drained understandably so.

"Hi." She replies flashing him a weak smile, he takes her hand into his and plants his lips on her knuckles looking into her eyes

"Thank you so much Thembalam' for making me a father once more."

Anzani smiles in return "I nearly fainted when the doctor told me there's another baby."

"Wow, I can't believe you were pregnant with twins all along and we didn't know it."

The door opens and two nurses walk in, each holding a baby in her arms. A smile travels on Quinton's lips as he settles down getting ready to take his twins

“Please bring both of them here.” He carries both of them in his arms and looks at his wife with eyes full of nothing but gratitude “Thank you so much thembalami”

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Nomcebo is outside doing her kids' laundry when maMsibi bolts inside the yard

“Cebo you need to come with me.” She says breathing heavily

“What's going on?”

“It's your mother, she's undressing in the street and chasing after every male that passes. Please come and take her before the members of the community practice mob justice on her, she forcefully grabbed maCele's 6-year-old grandson and tried

to undress him but luckily his friends ran and notified his grandmother in time. The community is very angry, please come before they beat her to death.” Shock doesn’t begin to describe how the news makes her feel, yes her mother has been behaving weirdly in the past few months. Exchanging words and fighting a person they all couldn’t see but this? It’s another level of crazy, she didn’t expect it.

She runs out of the yard following maMsibi not caring about the fact that she’s not wearing a bra or that she’s still dressed in her sleeping clothes, the sight she finds is one she'll never forget. Her mother is naked while the angry mob whacks her up, some are slapping her while others are kicking her like a senseless criminal and of course, someone is standing nearby with a camera recording the whole thing. She stands in front of her mother, receiving slaps and kicks meant for her mother as a result.

“Nomcebo move before we kill you together with this evil woman you call your mother!” an angry maCele says and the community echoes her sentiments.

With tears streaming down her face, she kneels with both her hands clasped together like she's praying and pleads her mother's case

"I know what my mother did is despicable and unforgivable but she's not herself, she's not in her right senses and all of you have lived with her long enough to know that she's not capable of doing something like this." She darts her eyes between all of them beseechingly and a sob breaks out of her lips "Something was done to my mother, she was bewitched because this woman standing right here is not my mother. My mother would never do such a terrible thing."

"The child is right, Nqobile would never do something like this. She hasn't been herself for months now, she needs our help not for us to condemn her." maNkosi, maMzobe's bosom friend adds

"Then she should be kept away from the public, what if no one was around when she snatched my grandson, stripped him out of his clothes, and wanted to force herself on him? What if she succeeded in doing it? maMzobe is a danger to society and if you people say she's not in her senses then you should send

her to a mental asylum instead of keeping her in the house because our children are no longer safe around her.”

“MaCele is right, we will let this go for now but do know that the next time something like this happens we won’t be so forgiving.” Says another neighbor

“Thank you so much.” Nomcebo says and pulls her mother up “Where are your clothes?” everything is out for the world to see, and it’s very embarrassing. “Ma, where are your clothes?” she asks again skimming her eyes around for her mother’s clothes. MaMzobe looks at her absentmindedly as if not understanding a word she just said.

MaNkosi unties the towel she has wrapped around her waist and covers her with it, well she tries to. MaMzobe is a big woman so the tiny towel only succeeds in covering half her butt. MaMsibi sees this and takes off hers and covers her with it then the four women begin toddling towards the Ndlovu homestead, maMzobe stops in her tracks when they reach the gate refusing to walk inside the yard.

“Look at her, look at how she’s looking at me. I’m not going in, she’s going to torture me.” She says pointing next to the tree, they all look there and see nothing. MaNkosi and maMsibi look at each other in confusion

“Who is she talking about? There’s no one there” MaNkosi's question is directed to Nomcebo

She blows out a sigh “I don’t know but that’s what happens most of the time when she’s in the yard, she talks to and at times quarrels with this invisible woman we all can’t see.” The two women look at each other in suspicion

“Where’s your father? Shouldn’t he be helping you with all of this?” maCele asks not out of concern but because she needs to have all the facts when she spreads the gossip.

“My father doesn’t care about our mother or us, we haven’t seen him in months. He left after the loan shark took most of our appliances and furniture because mom couldn’t repay her debt. Someone told me that he’s shacking up with another woman ka L.”

“Amadoda!” Mamsibi exclaims clapping her hands

“Then you need to step up and woman up Cebo, your mother needs help, and as you can see you’re the only one she has. You need to take her to someone who can help her, it’s obvious that she has been bewitched.” maNkosi says while maMsibi nods her head vigorously

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NOKWAZI

I was in class when my brother called me and told me that Anzani gave birth to two healthy babies instead of one, the joy seeping in his tone couldn’t be missed and it rubbed off on me. According to him, his daughter is the cutest baby in the entire universe, but ain’t all kids cute to their parents? I’m so happy to be an aunt again and I can’t wait to meet my niece and nephew, if it were up to me I would pack up my sh\*t and take the first taxi to the hospital but I can’t do that because it’s midweek and I have an important assignment to submit on

Friday. Yes, you heard right, your girl is registered with AFDA for a screenwriting course and I've got to say I'm having the time of my life. For the first time in ages

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I look forward to waking up every morning and going to school to attend lectures because I love and enjoy what I do, it's my passion.

I'm still gushing over the news of my niece and nephew when I receive an incoming call, my lips stretch into the biggest smile when I see my boyfriend's name on the screen

"Love."

"Wame." It's been months since we started dating but his voice still does the things to me "How are you, how's school?"

"I'm well how are you and how's business?" Agang quit his job as a security guard beginning of the year and started his own company, a courier company.

He couriers for companies like Makro, Take a lot, and other small businesses that trade goods and services online and so far he's doing well and might need to add another bakkie to his fleet and hire another driver. Moroka couriers is slowly making a name for itself in the industry because of its fast and efficient delivery services, to say I'm proud of him would be an understatement I had no problem with being intombi ka mantshingilani kodwa being a businessman's girlfriend has a nice ring to it. He says the initial plan was to buy trucks and start a logistics company but because of finances he had to start small, let's be realistic he couldn't have bought a truck from his salary as a security guard.

“Business is great babe I still can't believe how good everything is going, I have no complaints except for exhaustion, I hardly get time to rest much less eat as I'm always on the road.”

“I'm sorry love but I believe that's a good thing, endure it now because you're still building a name for yourself in the industry plus money is coming in.”

“Yeah, I still can't believe how fast all of this is happening. I didn't expect business to do well so soon.”

“Its because you are great at what you do my love and your clients can see that, you need to stop doubting yourself.”

“Thank you, my love, I miss you so much. I can’t wait to see you this coming weekend” Eish!

“Uhm about that, I can’t come anymore. My sister-in-law gave birth to twins today, I need-“

“It's okay, you don’t need to explain I understand. Congratulations, you’re an Auntie again how does it feel?”

“It feels amazing, I can’t wait to see them. I’m sure they’re the most precious little humans ever. I need to go shopping and buy them something as their aunt.”

He chuckles “You love kids ne”

“I do.”

“Maybe we should make our own.”

“No, never! I love babies but I’m nowhere near ready to have my own, I want to be financially independent and done with school when that happens. For now, I’ll just play aunt to my siblings' children.” Nobuhle is still pregnant but she’s due to give birth soon, this month is her last month of school then she’ll return after she gives birth.

“I understand.” That’s what he says but the tone of his voice says something different, this is the problem with being in a relationship with an elder man. He’s at that age where he wants to settle down and have kids while I still want to chase my dreams and build my future.

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NOBUHLE

Being pregnant and an engineering student is a suicide, these past few months have been difficult not only academically but physically, emotionally, and psychologically on me. Thank God Thando didn't change on me, he's still my biggest support system and lately, he seems like the only person who understands me. My relationship with Quinton and his wife has changed and I doubt things will ever go back to how they used to be before, my heart breaks to pieces whenever I think about giving birth because I don't have anyone to help me when the baby comes. Nokwazi is doing her first year at AFDA and has moved to res so she can't help, knowing my relatives they would never help me for free they would want to be paid to help me with the baby. I have never missed my mother like I do now, if only she was here I wouldn't be worried about anything. I wanted to go to Thando's house after giving birth but he doesn't think it's a good idea.

He thinks moving in with my brother and Anzani will be a good idea but I don't agree, they might have invited me to come to live with them after the baby is born but I can't help but think they only said that as a formality not because they meant it. I still can't forget what my brother said when I told him about my pregnancy, the expression on his face when he said it and the tone of his voice, he meant it he doesn't want to raise another

man's child so I can't help but feel like my baby won't be welcome in his house.

A knock on the door pulls me from my thoughts, I slip my feet inside my sleepers and waddle to the front door.

"Hey, you." It's Lungile, the one I used to share a room with at the commune last year. This year Thando rented an apartment for me so that he can come and go as he pleases, and so that he can bring our son to visit regularly once he's born.

Thando's mother offered to raise our son for us when I return to school after giving birth, at least I won't have to worry about that.

"Hi," I say leaning in and giving her a side hug

"You look bigger every time I see you."

"Leave me alone please, I'm pregnant and my bae loves and takes good care of me why wouldn't I gain weight?"

She cackles “Hmm if you say so.” She throws herself on my L-shaped couch and hops through the channels looking for something to watch while I make my way to the kitchen to get snacks for us.

“Thanks.” She says when I set a snack platter on her lap

“Pleasure,” I say and settle next to her on the couch

“So how is it like to have the whole apartment to yourself?”

“You always ask me the same thing every time you come here.”

She chuckles “I know, I just can’t get over the fact that your boyfriend rented out this whole apartment for you and –” my ringing phone cuts her short

“Brother.”

“Hey, little sister.” He’s in a good mood, his tone gives him away.

“I won’t ask how are you because it’s obvious, you’re swimming in a sea of happiness all I’m waiting for, is for you to tell me why.”

He laughs “You're right, I’m probably the happiest man in the world right now. My wife gave birth to two beautiful babies this afternoon, a boy and a girl.”

“What? So she was pregnant with twins all this time and we didn’t know it?”

“Yep, the doctor says the other one was hiding. I was so shocked when the doctor told me about twins but you know me, I love my kids so the more the merrier I’m happy.”

“Ncoah I’m happy for you, congratulations brother.”

“Thank you.”

“So what are their names?”

“My daughter is Ntandoyenkosi Alora Riamufuna and my son is Phawulothando Tshilidzitshawe.”

“Wow, beautiful names.”

“Thank you. They were given their Zulu names by my grandmother, and Anzani's mother gave them their Venda names.”

“Nice.”

“My grandmother literally broke down when she saw Alora’s face on video call, she says she reminds her of my late mother when she was a newborn.” I can’t help but feel a twinge of jealousy every time he mentions his newly found family, he hasn’t known them for long but he’s already way too close to them.

I met them once and I'll admit that they are nice people, his uncle is very energetic and full of jokes and the love he has for my brother is out of this world that even a blind man can see. I know I should be happy for my brother because finally he's being loved right but I can't help but think that eventually, he'll ditch us like he ditched his friends Kabelo and Given, I no longer see them around since he met his new family Andile has replaced them because it seems he's his friend now. Is it wrong to feel like his newfound family will take him away from us? Unlike Nokwazi and me, they don't need anything from him like we normally do. They just need his love nothing more.

#110

NARRATED

She took maNkosi's advice and took her mother to someone, and now all the money and time she spent taking that trip to the sangoma feels like a waste. He came highly recommended that's why she didn't mind going all the way to see him but she regrets it now, because the sangoma didn't help her mother with anything in fact he refused to see her and told his initiates not to allow the evil woman inside his premises, the "evil woman" being her mother, maMzobe then he called her(Nomcebo) in and gave her a firm instruction to encourage her mother to confess or be ready to face the wrath of the ancestors.

“Mama u gogo ukakile!”

(Mom grandmother soiled herself)

Says her daughter running into the kitchen where Nomcebo is behind the stove cooking

“Ini?” She asks not believing her ears

“Ukakile u gogo. Ukakele phantsi ekamereni.”

(She pooped on the bedroom floor)

Her first born says wearing grimace on his face backing his sister's statement.

She looks away not wanting her children to see her in tears but lord knows that she's tired, her mother's situation is taking a huge toll on her. She wipes her hands with a dish swab, switches off the stove and picks her youngest on the floor

“Asiyeni niyongibonisa.”

(Come and show me)

She says and follows her children to the bedroom where she finds her mother sitting next to a heap of her of own shit on the

floor, the sight is nauseating not forgetting the awful odor filling the room.

“Sies!” her kids sing in unison wrinkling their noses while she sighs in defeat

She tells her kids to take her youngest to the lounge and starts cleaning up her mother’s mess, and immediately pukes out all her stomach's contents after she’s done disposing it in the toilet.

“Mama mara uyabona ukuthi uyanghlukumeza? What you are doing to me is not fair, I’m too young to be going through this.” She says with tears in her eyes, maMzobe looks at her and doesn’t breath a word.

“You are not an invalid, you can walk why didn’t you go to the bathroom when you felt it coming? Did you have to do your thing on the floor?” she shakes her head and tears roll down her face “You are traumatizing my kids, they shouldn’t have seen that mama. They are kids.” She draws the curtains and

opens up the windows letting fresh air in and sprays her body spray in the room to get rid of the smell in the air

Nomcebo doesn't understand what's going on with her mother, one minute she's okay and in her senses and the next minute she's completely out of touch with reality and doing the weirdest things.

"Cebo!" her mother calls out as she's about to leave the room, she turns and looks at her face. She's lucid again

"Ma."

"Please come here." She says in a soft voice. Nomcebo sighs and retreats back to the room and settles on the foot of the bed.

"What's going on, you don't look okay. Did something happen?"

“Mama what did you do? Who did you offend because that sangoma was very clear that you need to confess what you did otherwise you’re still going to suffer, you’re my mother I love you so much and I promise I’ll never judge you for anything you did because I know you must have had a good reason for doing it but please confess mama please.”

“I can’t.”

“Why?”

“Your father will never forgive me if he finds out the truth.” The statements grates Nomcebo's tits and fills her with rage

“Mama do you see dad anywhere here? He doesn’t care about you, he walked out on you, on us! You need to forget about him and put yourself first mama, I don’t want to lose you mina ma. You almost raped maCele's grandson and today you pooped in front of my kids ma what’s next? What if this thing, whatever it is starts again and you molest my son ma? How do I trust you with my kids now, please confess so you can be set free do it for me and your grandchildren we need you alive because I

swear the community will kill you one of these days.” Her words penetrate through maMzobe's heart, the pain on her daughter's face tears her apart.

“It's okay my child I'll confess, please call your cousins Mpilentle, Nobuhle and Nokwazi and my family. I hope they'll agree to come and see me because they severed all ties with me after Nkanyezi's funeral. I haven't seen them in years”

“Your family? Do you mean the one you told me about from Ulundi?”

“Yes, I know someone who can give me their numbers and if you know where your father is please also ask him to come to the meeting. He needs to be there when I confess.”

“Okay, no problem ma.”

“Thank you my child.”

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## ANZANI

I still can't wrap my head around the fact that I gave birth to two babies instead of one, they are not identical-Phawu looks like Zothando and Alora doesn't look like either of us, Mpilo's grandmother says she looks like Nkanyezi so I guess she took after her late grandma. She's the cutest baby girl ever, I didn't know how much I needed a daughter until I held her in my arms. She's everything I never knew I wanted, she completes our family and I can already tell that she'll be the apple of her father's eye.

The alkaline diet really works, I wasn't as loyal as I should've have been in the beginning but I gradually adjusted to my new diet and followed the guidelines in the book completely and it helped at great deal. I had a healthy pregnancy and safe delivery, my babies are healthy and the doctor gave me the go ahead to breastfeed them which has been an absolute bliss. It's such a shame that I didn't get to experience this with Zothando but damn I love breastfeeding my little people even though it was so painful at first but damn I enjoy it.

Having twins is not easy but having my mother around has made things a lot easier, my husband also took a paternity leave from work so he's home helping out with the twins so I have all the support I need.

"You should get some rest thembalam' don't worry I'll watch over them." He says after I finish breastfeeding Alora.

He takes him from me and gently lays her down "Lala sthandwasam uphumule."

(Sleep my love and get some rest)

We barely slept last night, these kids can cry shem they are nothing like their brother. When one cries the other one starts crying as well, I don't know what I would do without my mother's help.

"Where's Zothando?"

"He's in the playroom with Mary watching cartoons, why?"

“I miss him, my son probably thinks I’ve abandoned him. Can you please come with him?”

“Anzani you know Zothando, he’ll want to play with you and jump on top of you. He won’t understand that you are unwell, I don’t want you to hurt your stitches.”

“I’ll be careful, please baby I miss my son. I don’t want him to feel like I’ve abandoned him.”

He blows out a sigh “Okay let me go get him.” He gets up from the bed and plant a kiss on my forehead “You are a good mother sthandwa Sam never doubt that.”

While I’m still waiting for Mpilo to come back with Zothando his phone rings, I take it and look at the caller ID. It’s Nomcebo, I don’t know if I should answer so I just let it ring until she hangs up. Just then the door opens, Zothando is the first one inside he runs to the bed screaming “Mama! Mama!” excitedly making my heart swell with nothing but joy.

Mpilo smiles and helps him get on the bed and settles on the foot of the bed, I spread my arms wide open and Zothando throws himself between my arms giving me a tight hug well more like strangles my neck but I will live.

“Mommy's handsome boy.” I say tickling him causing him to giggle gloriously .

“Baby niyabasukela bazithulele angisho.” Mpilo warns gesturing towards the babies

“Shhh” I say to Zothando with my finger on my lips but he giggles even more, Ya ne being a child.

Mpilo's phone goes off again “Please answer it.” He says when I try to give it to him

“It's Nomcebo.”

He frowns “What does she want?” we haven't heard from uncle Cebo or anyone from his house in months, I hope Nomcebo

isn't about to start some drama because we don't need any. We are at a happy place in our lives and marriage, we don't need any drama especially one that involves uncle Cebo.

"I don't know

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should I answer?"

"Give it here." I give him the phone, he answers the call and puts the phone on speaker

"Hello"

"Ya Cebo what's going on?"

"Hao mntase is that how you answer your phone now?"

"Nomcebo I'm sure that's not why you called me, so please speak up." She gasps in shock, I can tell she didn't expect this kind of attitude from Mpilo.

She clears her throat “My mother has something to tell you and your siblings, she asked me to ask you guys to come down to KZN so she can talk to you guys.”

“Usuyongixolisela kumawakho angeke ngiphumelele.”

(Please apologize to your mother on my behalf, I won't make it.)

“Hao ngobani?”

(Why)

“Asikho isidingo sokuthi ngiziqhaze, mina ngeke ngiphumelele ungakhuluma nabo Nokwazi uzwe bona mhlawumbe bazakhona mina angeke ngikhone ngiyaxolisa.”

(I don't need to explain myself to you, I can't make it you can talk to my siblings and hear what they have to say maybe they'll be able to come but I can't. I'm sorry)

“Yoh! Okay I'll tell my mother.”

“Okay bye.” He says and hangs up the phone

“Don’t you want to hear what she wants to say?”

“No.”

“Mpilo what if she wants to tell you something important? Just think about it, maMzobe hates you and suddenly she wants to talk to you? I'm sure whatever she wants to tell you guys is important.”

“Well I'm not interested in whatever she has to say.”

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NOBUHLE

“Will you go?” Thando asks breaking the silence

I just got off the phone with Nomcebo, apparently her mother wants to talk to Nokwazi and I about something important and she's asking us to come to KZN asap.

"I don't know, what do you think?"

"I can't tell you what to do my love but I'll support whatever decision you take."

"But do you think it's a good idea to go there, I mean this woman has never liked us."

"I don't know babe, maybe you should tell your brother about this. He's your guardian, they can't summon you there without asking for his permission."

"I'm scared, what if they're going to tell us our parents were not really our parents like they did with Quinton or worse that Kwazi and I are not related. I can't lose another sibling" He chuckles

“There's no way any of that is true, you and Nokwazi look the same. You are definitely siblings.”

“You will never know with the Ndlovus and all their secrets.”

“We'll go through whatever it is together, I love you sthandwa sam.”

“I love you more baby...let me call Nokwazi and ask her if she's going.”

“Ok do that, I'll go and collect our order downstairs.”

Kwazi doesn't pick up the phone until it almost goes to voicemail “Hey.”

“Are you busy?”

“Yeah, busy packing but we can talk. What’s up?”

“Nomcebo called me, did she also call you?”

“Yes, she did.”

“And? Will you go?”

“I don’t know but I don’t think so, I’m not interested in whatever maMzobe wants to say.”

“And why not?”

“Come on Buhle that woman has never liked us so why does she suddenly want to talk to us? Personally I’m not interested in what she has to say, it could be one of her tricks no babomncane.”

“I guess you’re right, I didn’t think of it that way.”

“Yeah don’t go anywhere near that woman, worse now that you are pregnant. I don’t trust them”

“True.” Thando walks in with our food and my mouth instantly waters “Let me get busy, we’ll talk.”

“Okay bye.” Thando laughs out loud as soon as I hang up the phone

“You're such a foodie!”

“Don’t blame me, blame your son.”

I still can’t believe that I am going to be someone’s mother, Alunamda's mother to be more specific. His father is the one who gave him the name, apparently it means endless love and he says that’s exactly the kind of love he has for me and our son. I instantly fell in love with the name when I knew the meaning, it’s a beautiful name.

“My poor son, he gets blamed for everything. What did Kwazi say?”

“She doesn’t think it’s a good idea, I won’t go.”

“Okay but I still think you should talk to your brother about this, you know get his opinion on this.” I blow out a sigh and settle on the bar stool and start munching on my food, ignoring him.

“What's your problem with your brother?”

“I have no problem with him, why?” I ask with a shoulder shrug.

“You know what I’m talking about, I sense some disrespect and attitude from you lately and this is not the Hlehle I fell in love with. One who loved and held her brother in high regard, I don’t know if its hormones or whatever but I don’t like what you are doing, it’s not nice and if you’re not careful you’ll lose your brother.”

“But I’ve already lost him, he has a new family now.”

“Nobuhle what drew me to you was mature you were beyond your years and your kind heart and right now you’re behaving very childishly and like a brat, your brother is not a possession or a toy that you’ll throw a tantrum because someone else is getting his attention . You don’t own him, he’s his own person. His life revolved around you and Nokwazi for the longest time, he put you two first and himself second because he loved you and wanted to give you the best of everything but that doesn’t mean you guys own him, he did his dues as an elder brother the both of you are grown now and have your own lives so allow him to live for himself and his family and stop being selfish. Your brother has suffered half his life so allow him to enjoy his new life and all the love he’s receiving from his newfound family, you should be happy for him not throwing tantrums and acting like an entitled spoil brat, Quinton is your brother not your father or your boyfriend so stop with the entitlement!”

“I know you’re smart so think about it, would you be happy if Esihle was so possessive of me? If Esihle came first then you in my life? Don’t be selfish, as you expect you and our child to come first in my life so will Anzani and their children worse she’s not just a girlfriend or a mere baby mama she’s his wife, his better half of course she’ll always come first.”

#111

It's been a week since I moved in with my brother and his wife and so far so good, I had time to think about what Thando said and saw the truth in his words. I've been selfish, but that's only because I've always had my brother's attention and couldn't handle it when things changed drastically in a short space of time so everything became too much to handle but that's no excuse. I was selfish and I shouldn't have, I'm glad Thando spoke sense into me and made me see reason, my brother is like my parent, my father because he raised me, and losing him because of my selfishness would have been such a shame.

"I didn't know that you love Indian dramas as I do," Anzani's mother says taking a seat next to me on the couch.

"They remind me of my mother, she loved them." She puts her palm on top of my intertwined hands and gives them a gentle squeeze

"You miss her, don't you?" I exhale and look up

“Always, life is not the same without her.”

“Oh my girl, I know I can never take your mother’s place so I won’t even try to but as I’m here I’m not just Anzani's mother. I’m your mother too and you can talk to me about anything.” She says looking into my eyes with softness and warmth in her eyes

“Thank you so much, I really appreciate your words.”

“I mean it, I know you’re scared and worried about what’s going to happen when the baby comes but there’s no need to be. I’m here and I’ll help you every step of the way, I won’t go back to Vuwani until you have to go back to school.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really.” I throw myself into her arms and thank her for her kindness

“Looks like I just came in time.” That’s Nokwazi making her way inside the lounge with a duffel bag hanging over her shoulder, I’m sure Mary is the one who let her in

I pull away from ma's embrace and wipe my teary eyes with my palms

“Hey you, I didn’t know you were coming.”

“You look so beautiful my girl,” Ma says speaking what’s on my mind, my sister has always been beautiful but I swear being in a relationship agrees with her. She looks extra gorgeous, I’m jealous to be quite honest because this pregnancy has turned me into a hippo.

“Yes, you look gorgeous muntu ka Agang.” She cheeses and twirls giving us a show

“I’ll go and prepare a snack for us,” Ma says standing up from the couch and excusing herself, Nokwazi settles next to me and sets her bag on the floor looking around the house.

“Where’s everyone?”

“Sis'Anzani left a while ago to feed the twins, Zo can't stand being in my presence so he literally ran after his mother and our brother is at work.”

“Don’t look so sad it's this boy inside your tummy that’s making Zo not to want you, I’m sure he’ll love you once you give birth.” She says probably seeing the hurt on my face

“That’s what Ma and Mary also say.” She chuckles

“Yes, there’s nothing to stress about. I can’t wait to see the twins, especially Alora yo muhle loyo mtwana!”

(That child is beautiful)

“Yeah, she is. She looks like Quinton's biological mother. He showed me her pictures the other day.”

“I know he showed me too. Let me take my bag to our room.” Nokwazi shares the bedroom with me whenever she spends the night here, which rarely happens since the girl always spends weekends with her boyfriend. Love is in the air and I love it for her, she deserves this.

Ma walks back into the lounge carrying a tray lined with a snack platter, a bowl of sliced fruits, a tub of yogurt, ultra Mel, crackers, and three glasses of juice.

“I made this for you, I know how much you enjoy this.” She says giving me the fruit salad, this woman takes good care of me I won’t lie. She’s going to add to my weight gain.

I take the bowl and add spoons of yogurt before indulging, she settles on the opposite sofa and nibbles on the snacks. Kwazi walks back in a few minutes later having changed into shorts and a top that shows off her belly piercing and flat stomach, envy is dealing with me right now. I’m breathing through the wound, the girl is sexy.

“Thanks, ma.” She says referring to the snacks and starts nibbling while watching the TV. “Yo ma the way my mother loved Indian stories, we couldn’t even watch our soapies without her throwing a tantrum.” She says causing Ma to laugh

“I also prefer them over our stories, you can watch them with kids without any worries. With Mzansi stories there’s always a sex scene or something inappropriate that makes it awkward to watch with kids.” Kwazi and I laugh

“That’s exactly what she used to say whenever we complained, and I was always with her so I ended up liking them,” I say

Mary walks in and clears her throat gaining our attention  
“There’s a woman here asking to see Mr. Ndlovu and his sisters.” Our eyes dart between the three of us in confusion

“Did she give you her name?” ma asks as the elderly one in the room

Mary is about to reply when someone cuts in reaching from behind her

“It’s me!” maMzobe says.

If I didn’t know better I would think she’s using drugs or some substance, judging from how horrible she looks. There are dark patches under her eyes, she’s dressed in a washed-out dress and old pumps and I won’t mention how much weight she has lost. She looks like an old nyaope addict

She’s a shell of who she used to be, I wouldn’t have recognized her if she didn’t speak. What the hell happened to her?

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QUINTON

The drive back to my house felt long, I couldn’t wait to be back home with my wife and kids. There’s nothing and no one I love more in this world than my wife and my beautiful kids and I

make sure to spend every free moment of my time with them showing them just how much I love and appreciate them, after the whole drama that happened with Given I decided to stay away from friends which was unfair to Kabelo in a way because he didn't do anything to me but its better to be safe than sorry. We work in the same place so we still talk and have lunch together but I've learned not to over-share when it comes to my personal life if there's anything that troubles me I report it to God through prayer or I consult with my pastor.

It's quiet in the house as I make my way in through the kitchen door, as usual, a mouth-watering aroma teases my taste buds from the door and I can't help but salivate. I hear muffled voices as I approach the sitting room so I know that's where everyone is, my heart almost stops beating when I come face to face with maMzobe sitting uncomfortably on my sofa. My gaze goes to my wife who looks at me apologetically, out of everyone here she's the one who knows how I feel about maMzobe so why did she allow her into our home?

"Son, we've been waiting for you." Her mother lets out with a shaky voice, I look at her and she pleads with her eyes for me to sit down.

She's my elder, I can't disrespect her. I take strides to the sofa next to my wife and settle next to her. Everyone in the room looks uncomfortable to be in maMzobe's presence except Anzani's mother, it's no secret that this woman hates us so why is she here?

"MaMzobe he's here now, you can say what you wanted to say," Ma says breaking the uncomfortable silence

MaMzobe swallows nothingness and nods her head before doing the unexpected, she goes down on her knees and clasps her hands together like she's praying and starts shedding tears "My children please forgive me for what I'm about to tell you, you guys didn't deserve what I put you through especially you." She says raising her teary eyes at me "Ngiyaxolisa Mpilentle mtana sesi. Ngicela ungxolele."

(I am sorry my sister's child, please forgive me)

I'm not sure why she's apologizing but I can guess and I don't know if my heart can take this "I'm here today because I want to confess, that I'm a horrible person who did many horrible

things to people and right now I'm paying for my sins. I don't know sleep, I can't remember the last time I fell asleep through the night and not see all the people I've wronged. I can't even eat because Nkanyezi slaps any edible thing off my hand, I don't know peace and I know it'll only get worse until I confess all the bad things I did in the past."

"I'm sure you're all asking yourselves who Nkanyezi is, well she was my elder sister. She was beautiful and kind and everyone liked her, at school, at home basically everywhere and I always got compared to her. Everyone would never fail to mention how better than me she was and eventually that created a distance between us as siblings, no matter how much I tried people saw her as better than me so instead of looking up to her I began detesting her. I hated her so much that I developed this weird obsession with her and started liking and wanting everything she had because I thought people would also love me if I did what she did and liked the things she liked, I began dressing like her, hanging around the same circle of friends and even stopped partying and going out late at night but even that still wasn't good enough. It was Nkanyezi this, Nkanyezi that no one saw Nqobile or acknowledged the good I did regardless of how hard I tried." All of us are silently listening to her talking

“This carried on for years until she finished high school and started college and that’s when her relationship with Cebo'elihle Ndlovu started, Cebo was a well-known womanizer in eMahlabathini but like everyone else, he also got roped into the Nkanyezi spell and changed for her. He loved her so much, that everyone could see it and because I hated her that bothered me. I hated seeing her happy and in love so I tried to seduce him and you want to know what he did? He rejected me and told Nkanyezi about it, Nkanyezi told our parents and I was scolded for being evil and a witch who didn’t want to see her sister happy. She fell pregnant with you two years later, Cebo paid damages and started saving for lobola but I couldn’t let her have her happily ever after not under my watch so I told my friend about it and she referred me to someone who helped me with the situation.”

“Helped you how?” I ask

“He gave me something to give to Cebo so he could love me and asked me to bring Nkanyezi's picture, we took that picture to the graveyard and performed some ritual with black candles and different colored strings calling for her death and she died shortly after giving birth to you.”

“What?” everyone exclaims in shock while I gasp for air, her words are like a stab to the heart

“Yes

I’m the one who killed Nkanyezi and bewitched Cebo so he could love me. Nkanyezi's son is you Mpilentle, you’re her son and culturally you belonged to the Ndlovu's because your damages were paid, my parents tried fighting for you but the Ndlovu's wouldn’t budge they wanted to raise you as a Ndlovu. I hated you because every time I looked at you I saw your mother, you don’t know her but you have some resemblance to her so I had to get rid of you, I went back to my sangoma and he did some ritual to make Cebo hate you that’s why he ended up giving you to his brother to raise.”

“You are evil maMzobe!” Nokwazi and spits on the ground

“Kwazi.” Anzani's mother warns

“No, it’s okay sisi I deserve that. I was happy my plan worked, with my sangoma's help Cebo was eating at the palm of my hand and dancing to my tune. He gave me two beautiful kids Nomcebo and Zolane, I was happy well that was until my kids amounted to nothing while Mpilentle prospered. He went to school and studied even after his father’s death while Zolane got hooked on drugs and stole from the community to feed his addiction until he ended up in jail and Nomcebo on the other hand kept making fatherless babies, it felt like Nkanyezi was mocking me from the grave proving to me that everyone was right about her being better than me because her seed was better than mine but I was consoled by the fact that Mpilentle was unemployed and couldn’t get a job. His mother might have been dead, but my hate for her was still very much alive, and the fact that Mpilentle reminded me of her every time I looked at him only kept the hate burning. I hated him with all my heart and I was so pained when he got a job, got married, and started renting a flat in Johannesburg. My jealousy got out of control when he built Nomonde a house, I had to do something to stop him so I went back to my sangoma and he helped me get Nomonde out of the way.” Loud screams erupt from both my sister’s lips after maMzobe's confession

“So, you are the one who killed my mother? You are so evil.”  
Nokwazi says already charging towards her but I stand up and block her giving her a tight hug.

“She’s not worth it little sister,” I tell her and look at Nobuhle who is swaddled in Anzani's mother's arms crying her heart out.

“I think you should leave, we don’t want to hear anymore. Please leave my house.” Anzani says showing her to the door

“Mpilentle I’m sorry please forgive me, my child, I know what I did was wrong and evil but please I need you to forgive me.”  
She says groveling at my feet and I’m so tempted to kick her in the face, how dare she touch me after everything she put me and my sisters through?

“MaMzobe please leave, you’ve done enough damage,” Anzani says dragging her to the door. What a day!

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## ANZANI

Mamzobe's confession left everyone in dismay, the girls have been locked in their bedroom since and my husband walked out and has not returned. I can only imagine how all of them feel after what was revealed to them, it can't be easy knowing that your parent didn't die because God remembered her but she died because someone chose to play God in their lives and take their life robbing you of a mother. I don't know how I feel about maMzobe, she's remorseful and all but it'll take a while before I can bring myself to forgive her for all the pain she's caused my husband and his siblings, I knew she was not a good person and that she didn't fancy Mpilo but I didn't expect her to do something so evil and inhumane.

Poor uncle Cebo, he got married to a witch and has been her zombie all these years dancing to her tune. Now I don't know if I should still be angry at him for everything he did to my husband or if I should feel sorry for him because he's not in his right mind.

"I just put the kids to bed." My mother says pulling me from my raging thoughts

“Thanks, ma.” I don’t know what I would do if she wasn’t here, especially today.

“It's okay, should I dish up for you?”

“No, but you can eat I’ll eat when my husband comes back.” Her eyes go to the clock on the wall then she looks down, it’s 19:54 and my husband is still not back.

He left after I chased maMzobe out of the house, I tried to run after him but he was too quick for me. He was driving out of the yard by the time I made it out of the front door, I tried to call him but he wouldn’t pick up any of my calls but I guess I understand, all of this must hard on him.

“I will go and ask the girls if I should dish up for them.” She says

“Okay mma.” Food is probably the last thing on their minds right now, I pray that all this stress won’t send Buhle to the labor ward before time.

“They said they are okay.” She says on her way back from the girl's bedroom.

I thought so “I don’t blame them.”

She sighs “Yeah but Buhle needs to eat, for the baby if not for herself. I’ll go and prepare something light for her.” Out of all of us, my mother is the only one who didn’t take the news badly, and I remember how she once mentioned something about ‘people not being afraid to kill’ when she warned me to pray for my kids, marriage, and husband's siblings.

“Mma did you know?” she stops in her tracks but doesn’t turn to face me.

“What?”

“About maMzobe, did you know?” she turns around slowly and looks at me apologetically

“It wasn’t my place to say anything, all I could do was to tell you to pray for protection. I knew Nkanyezi would fight from the grave and that maMzobe would eventually confess, the ancestors had revealed that to me.”

“Wow!” I feel betrayed, I still feel like she should have told me. How can she let us be around a snake like maMzobe knowing everything she’s capable of?

She disappears to the kitchen when my phone starts ringing, I rush to the sofa to pick it up hoping it’s my husband. Disappointment washes over me when I see Dakalo's name on the screen.

“Hello.”

“Ntombi!” it doesn’t take rocket science to figure out that she’s in a good mood so I won’t be a party pooper I’ll try to match her exhilaration.

“How are you?”

“I'm very pregnant and how are you?”

What? “Please tell me you are joking.” She giggles

“I'm pregnant Anzani, my prayers have been answered. I'm finally going to be a mother, my doctor confirmed it this afternoon. I'm five weeks pregnant.”

“Congratulations ntombi, I'm so happy for you.” No one deserves this more than she does, God is really good.

“Thank you ntombi, please save anything I might use from the twins' things. You know your strollers, car seats, and the works.”

“You won't need old things cousin, my niece or nephew deserves new things and I'll buy them for him/her.” She coos

“Yes, wena girl.”

“Yep, my niece/nephew won’t use hand me down while their aunt is rich.” Well, I’m not exactly rich, Quinton is or should I say he’s well on his way to being wealthy? He was promoted to chief director of his department and the salary went up by a very huge margin, God has been good to us I won’t lie.

His grace has been mind-blowing, I’ve also turned in my resignation with Ndalo. I’m following my passion and starting my own advertising agency, the company registration is already underway all I need now is to find office space to rent and hire a few passionate people to help with the conception of the business.

“Yes, wena rich aunt!” My phone makes those beeping sounds, I remove it from my ear and see that I’m getting another call. It’s Kabelo, I wonder why he’d call so late.

“Ntombi I’m getting another call, we’ll talk.”

“Okay love, goodnight. Kiss my babies for me.”

“Will do, kisses.” I end the call with Dakalo and take Kabelo's call.

“Hey.”

“Hey, Anzani have you seen the accident trending on social media?” He sounds terrified and I’m not sure why.

“No, why?”

“Where's Quinton, I’ve been trying to call him but his phone doesn’t go through. Please tell me he’s there with you.” The panic in his voice is almost palpable

“Kabelo what’s going on?”

“I’m not sure but there’s been a big accident involving four cars at Mandela bridge and one of the cars there looks like Quinton's car and apparently-“ my heart beats out of my chest

as fear spreads throughout my body like wildfire and I begin pacing the lounge in panic

“What Kabelo! What?”

“One of the drivers didn’t make it, he died on the spot!” I cut the call and go through my phone searching for the accident, tears gush out of my eyes blurring my vision when I see what looks like my husband's car squashed beyond recognition from the accident pictures.

Oh no, I can’t be a widow, Mpilo can’t die on me and leave me with three kids. What am I going to tell them when they grow up and ask about their father? God no please save my husband. I wipe my tears and go to the Uber app, I need to go to the scene of the accident. My hands are trembling so the phone slips from my hands and crashes on the floor and I go down on my knees and sob with my hands on my face.

“Thembalam' what’s going on?” I look up and relief surges through my body when I see Mpilo standing in front of me

without a single scratch, I jolt up to my feet and throw myself in his arms.

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“I thought I lost you, I swear I wouldn’t have survived it.” We are in bed with his arms wrapped around me

Thank God my husband wasn’t involved in an accident, the car Kabelo saw just happens to look like his. He went out for a drive to clear his head after everything maMzobe confessed to us.

“You will never lose me sthandwa sam, I’m sorry I scared you.” He says stroking my arm

“So what now? Are you going to fix things with your father?” He releases a heavy breath and looks into my eyes

“I don’t know but from today I’ll put him in my prayers so God can deliver him from whatever maMzobe did to him.” Or maybe my mother can help him “I don’t much I just know that

I'm grateful to have you in my life, I love you thembalam'. You and our kids mean the world to me."

"I love you too."

.....THE END.....

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