

BABY MOMISH

A Sequel to Ndabuko Her Yardner

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PROLOGUE

They were not close, but the fact that her sister had married a man who was like a brother to him made it all a huge mess. It was all on her, at the back of her head she knew that, but as a man he had to take all the blame. Aren't men supposed to be superheroes? So she sat there, knowing that she had initiated the first kiss and led him on. She watched him pulling the strings of his hoodie over his face and getting verbally attacked by both families; his and hers. They asked if he didn't know that she was a

mere child, little did they know the action that went down that night.

Mam' Jabu was surprisingly angrier than her own mother. Phumzile had to eat the humble pie and apologize on behalf of her son. Ngidi said they were going to take care of it. That brought both families into an agreement, the baby wasn't denied so they were going to take all the responsibilities and pay for the damages.

At her sound mind she kept asking herself; how did she become so stupid? Yes, his sex was great. But she was supposed to take the damn pill. A baby was nothing she had ever dreamed of, at 21 she wanted to live her youth to the fullest and achieve at least half of what Ndondo had achieved in life. Thus, it was hard for her to bond with the baby. It didn't help that Maqhinga was still undergoing 'pregnancy shock' and emotionally unavailable.

When Ndondo appeared with Ndabuko behind her and asked what was going on,

she did expect a dramatic reaction but not a whole panic attack. That was a little bit dramatic for someone who had been deeply in love with a ghost for years. Under her Miss Perfect cap there were some scandals, mistakes and imperfections too.

Ndabuko was breathing fire, it had gotten too far if his wife needed to be fanned with a cushion and given a glass of water.

“You know I’ll never judge you, but her, Maqhinga. Her? How could you?” He had just escaped death. He was still a boy Ngidi wanted to protect with everything he had. So he stood up and took Ndabuko’s side. It was two men against one, and everyone was enjoying it, until his big brother spoke up.

“It’s no use crying over spilt milk. They’re having a baby and that’s it. It’s not like Maqhinga raped her.”

“Ndlalifa stay out of it!” Ngidi instructed abruptly.

But he didn't back down, that's not his nature. "Baba, he's 29 and she's 21. Stop barking."

"Oh, I'm barking?"

Phumzile quickly stood up and ushered Ngidi out of the room before he lost it.

It was time for them to go, so much drama had happened already. Mam'Jabu was the first to stand up.

"Let's go, we were not here to visit."

Maqhinga cleared his throat and pulled out his hoodie.

"Can I have a word with her, please?" he asked.

Andiswa's eyes bulged out. She'd slept with him, told him that she was pregnant two months later and then popped up with her mothers in his father's house. They had no interaction, no relationship and no bond with their little one, both of them.

Ndabuko took his wife to one of the rooms. She didn't say anything to Andiswa, even though she had a lot to say.

“That was hectic!” Snalo said, coming out of nowhere and staring at Andiswa and Maqhinga like they were two stage actors who had pulled an awesome comedy show. “Twinnie, I want to talk to her,” Maqhinga told her. There was a way he was looking at her, like he had the softest spot in his heart for her. Andiswa knew about the incest, but it was last thing on her mind. She just didn’t care, even if they weren’t related, she had bigger problems than worrying about Maqhinga’s heart.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

A little frown grew on Andiswa’s face. Was he apologizing for not being there or he was on something else?

“For what?” she asked.

“I want to be a part of my baby’s life, from this day to the day I close my eyes and take my last breath.” He meant those words, even though they masked an even deeper meaning. He looked regretful.

“15 weeks, right?” he asked.

Andiswa sighed, “Yes.”

She didn't show any emotions.

"I'm happy. I never thought I'd become a father at such a young age."

"I'm not," she said.

"What do you mean?"

"Maqhinga, I wanted sex, not a baby. I don't want to be a mom at all!"

She was rejecting his baby, hating her own flesh and blood. That's exactly what he feared about having kids, that a mother may not come through. His fear was having a kid who'd go through what he went through with his own mother.

He didn't want someone baby momish for his kids. Someone like a girl standing in front of him wearing a loose track pant and oversized sweater.

CHAPTER ONE

Andiswa

I'm only here because Ndondo paid for it. I got chauffeured from the house to here, Lena Ahrens Rd in Glenwood, because 'I'm going through a lot with my parents' divorce'. So now everyone is worried that I might harm myself. No, scratch that, they think I might kill the baby that I'm carrying. Maqhinga made it a big deal when I burnt ultrasound scan pictures. That's why I'm

here, in front of this golden-haired white woman, waiting to be mentally evaluated. "We can start when you're ready," she says with a pretentious smile plastered on her pale face. I can't believe she does this for a living.

"No, you go first, this is your office," I say.

"Tell me about your parents' divorce. How has it affected you?"

Interesting, indeed!

"They're separating, physically, not divorcing." Yes I know that's where my parents are headed, but neither of them has filed up for divorce, so I'm not going to sit here and listen to this woman commenting on something she has no knowledge of.

"Oh yes," she nods with a thin smile. "How are you dealing with that whole situation? You were born into a warm home, with both parents under one roof and attending church, and now all of a sudden, that's changing."

I lean forward to her desk and look at her straight in her sea-blue eyes.

“You’re a shrink, right?” I ask.

“No, I’m a psychological counselor, I have Masters in Pyschology.”

“Oh, congratulations! But my point is, I’m here because you’re an expert in people’s problems. I was brought here because you claim to have answers on everything. Right? So why don’t we just cut the formalities, go straight to the point and tell me how I must live my life.”

“Andiswa, please drink water and relax,” she says.

I pick a bottle of water and take a sip.

Oh, let me not forget to relax.

“What else must I do?” I ask.

She heaves a deep sigh and opens her little notepad. I like how classy she looks, even when she flips the pages she does it graciously, not the traditionally way of spitting saliva on your fingers and fighting with pages.

“I have a little task that I’d like you to do.”

Here we go!

I lean back on the chair with an eye roll,
“Yeah, go on.”
“You love plants, right?”
“Not that much, I have other interests, but I do love plants.”
She smiles, “I like that, even though I don’t know much about nature.”
“You’re white, aren’t you?” I’m shocked. Which white person doesn’t like nature? These people domesticate baboons and snakes. You see them travelling across borders to see famous rivers, forests and mountains in other countries.
“I am, but I’ve always been interested in humans more than anything,” she says.
“That explains why you’re in this profession. My sister has a big yard but she didn’t know how to make it attractive. I planted a few trees around, flowers and a lawn of grass. That’s actually how she met her husband, he’s the guy I hired to take care of the yard. I didn’t know he was rich, he pretended to be desperate and poor, only to get closer to my sister.” Okay, TMI! I

clear my throat and take another sip of water. She's looking at me amused. I realize that's the first thing I've said in a calm, sane tone since I entered this office.

"Tell me about trees, the ones you like and the ones you don't. What do they represent to you, if there's any part of your life that you can describe by a tree, which one it would be." She passes a piece of paper to me.

"Now?" I ask.

"No, we'll schedule another appointment for next week."

My nerves rest. I was lying when I said I don't love plants that much. I'm going to educate her.

I guess this is where today's session ends. I never thought one day I'd be scheduling sessions with psychologists. Growing up I had everything I wanted; the snobbish girl whose sisters was breaking boundaries and running a multi-million company.

I'm almost 7 months pregnant, by now I thought I'd have connected with the baby

somehow. Don't get me wrong, I don't hate my baby, if I did I would've terminated as soon as I found out that I was carrying.

There's a lot going on, Bahle was sent to a boarding school by Ndondo. I think she was trying to extract him from the current famous pastor and wife separation. But I doubt him being confined in a boarding school prevents him from seeing the public scandals.

I don't leave town before having extra hot shwarma. My cravings have got me familiar with many places I used to consider untidy and too crowded. I'd stay inside my car, roll down the window and order as if I was in a drive-thru. But now I realize I've been too big for my boots, I'm no better than these people. Maybe they're even better than me because they weren't a product of rape; they were created by love.

"Maka Syeza," a friendly waitering guy says as I walk in, pushing my big belly, and

sitting down instead of standing the ordering queue.

“Shwarma, make it hot, with chips and Coke,” I say.

People in the queue turn to look at me with displeasure as the guy hurries to punch in my order, skipping theirs.

One asks, “Is it because we don’t have cars?”

“Come on, she’s pregnant nje,” he says.

If I wasn’t pregnant I would’ve thought he likes me. He always treats me like a queen and makes sure that I’m taken care of from the moment I step inside this restaunt till the last minute. His tag is written Khaya but his colleagues call him DJ. I don’t know if he’s a legit DJ by night or it’s one of those Kasi-made names.

He personally comes from the front to my table with my food.

“Maka Syeza!” he says it in his forever-cheerful voice.

I don’t remember one time that I’ve been friendly to him. I always say ‘thank you’,

give him a tip and mind my own business, but he never seems to care. He gives what he gives- a happy smile- whether you return it or not, he simply doesn't care.

"Are you ever sad?" I ask him, tearing the tomato sauce sachet.

"Yes, but I don't make it other peoples business," he says.

"Wow, you're a good person. So are you really a DJ?" I ask.

He chuckles, "No. I used to be, but it didn't work out."

"Why?" I ask.

"It's a long story, I'm at work, remember?"

The smile fades from his eyes. I'm probably overstepping the line, he doesn't need to explain to me why his dreams didn't come true. Outside the bubble I grew in, only one out of ten people gets to live the lives they dreamed of.

I take R20 out of my purse and put it on the table, next to his hand that's balanced on it.

"Thank you," I say.

He pulls the money and folds it to his pocket. I expect him to leave, that's how we do business- it ends here.

But he doesn't leave, even though there are customers waiting to be served.

"Maybe I can tell you why if I'm not here, working," he says.

My lips crack into a smile. He's such a breath of fresh air with his scarred forehead.

"Write me your number. When do you knock off?"

"3pm today."

"Great, I'll call you later."

It's a date, I do need some new friends. He looks like a great person, so why not?

I eat my lunch, get in the car and drive back home. I know mom is freaking out, she already doesn't want me to drive, she wants to control everything I do. My life was easy when she didn't get along with Maqhinga. But now I feel like her, Ndondo and Maqhinga have triple-teamed against me.

I didn't expect to find Bab' Maqhawe home. He's been a great support to both my parents during these hard times. However I cannot help, but fear that one day either mom or him would be tempted to reignite the spark. These people were forced to be apart by their parents. They were first of everything to each other, they have a daughter and grandson together. Now that they're no longer angry at one another, risks are higher and I cannot help, but feel sorry for my father. Yes, he's a monster but I know good sides of him and I believe that he only needs help to deal with his childhood pain. I don't want my mother to get back with his brother, that would furtherly validates what he already thinks of himself; worthless.

"Hello parents," I say, snatching a bottle of water from the fridge and making my way to my room.

"How did your session go?" Mom yells.

"Great!" I walk inside my room and close the door behind.

The knock follows shortly. It's not my mom, that one knocks and yells simultaneously. "Vula ntombi." That's Bab'Maqhawe. He's the only one who calls me this way. If it wasn't him I swear I would've ignored the knock, but with this man you never know when he's going to pull out a *sagila* and smash your head.

I open the door and go back to bed. He walks in and looks around. Luckily, my mom always cleans my room and I'm not an untidy person.

"How are you doing?" he asks.

"I'm good Baba. When did you get here?"

"I think your mother said it was an hour after you left. You don't even want to visit us, hey."

My father is there and Nyandeni is boring AF.

"No," I say.

He chuckles, "Why? We now have everything you people have here in the suburbs."

"You don't have the vibe though," I say.

He frowns, "What's that?"

"It's either you have it or you don't. It's a natural thing, vaybbb."

"Just like you don't have any cows around here." He's throwing back shade. I crack into laughter. He's obsessed with his livestock, Ndongdo is always buying cow's injections and medicines. But that doesn't mean cows give Nyandeni a vibe, if anything, they're taking it away.

"I have something for you. Dumisani asked me to give it to you," he says.

I should've known that he was sent here. My heart drops to my feet. I love my father so much, but I just can't look at him and not think about what he's been doing to my mother.

Bab'Maqhawe gives the envelope to me and leaves me to read it.

Phewww!

Andiswa

I know that you hate me and I don't blame you. I wish I had done things differently. I miss you, I miss being your father. You are the first great thing that has ever happened to me. I love you so much. I pray that my grandson comes out healthily and ten times better than his grandfather. Please take care of yourself.

Love, Dad

I'm late with 10 minutes, not that bad for a lady, right? He smiles when he sees me coming in and stands up. He looks different in fit jeans and white poloneck. He looks too smart for a mere date with a new friend. "Maka Syeza," he opens his arms for a hug. I cannot resist it, after that letter from my father I really need a hug. "Khaya or DJ? What must I call you?" I ask.

“Just Khaya,” he says and pulls out a chair for me.

He’s a gentleman. I see he’s already ordered drinks too.

“Do they sell shwarma here?” I ask.

He laughs, “No, but I knew you’d want one.”

I raise my eyebrow.

He pushes a brown foodie bag to me. My heart warms up. He brought me a shwarma.

“Thank you so much!” This is just what I needed to uplift my mood.

We place our orders. Yes, I’m placing mine too, shwarma is just a starter.

“So who are you going to tell me about first. DJ or Khaya?” I ask.

“Who are you interested in?” Men! Now I’m interested? Okay.

“Both,” I say.

“Well, Khaya Mthabela is a 26 year old LLB graduate that’s currently unemployed and working at Shwarma Royal. He comes from Gcotsheni and he’s the first born at home.

Then DJ is a hustler, a party-animal and

music addict. But DJ no longer exists, only his memory does.”

“Wow, I can’t believe you’re 26 and a graduate for that matter. I need a drink!”

He laughs, “You thought I was waitering tables because it was my dream?”

“Of course not, but I just didn’t think you... you know what, never mind what I thought. I’m glad DJ is now a memory.”

“Why?” he asks, amused.

“Because I don’t like party-animals and music addicts.”

“Oh, I see. But you haven’t told me anything about yourself.”

“She’s Andiswa, the mother of my child,” someone says behind him. I lift my eyes to him. Damn, what is Maqhinga Ngidi doing here?

Khaya is confused, his eyes go from him to me. He needs an explanation.

“Maqhinga, what the hell?” I’m shocked.

He can’t ambush me like this. I never disturb him when he’s with his whores.

“I’m here to fetch you. It’s late.” He glances at his wrist-watch and glares at Khaya as if he’s challenging him to say something.

“You’re not my father,” I say.

“I am your father.” What in Africa is this? He’s my father?

Things like this make me mad. They make me burn pictures and sleep at friends places to disappear from him and my family.

“Or you want me to rough up your little friend to see that I mean business?” he asks, rolling his sleeves up. I quickly grab my bag and stand on my feet. I hate that he’s putting me in this position where I’m forced to choose him because he’s a polluted, taxi-rank-born son of a well-known hot-headed business man.

“Khaya I will call you,” I say.

He nods, uneasily, and drops his head.

Everyone’s eyes are fixed at our table.

Maqhinga knows how to create unnecessary drama.

I'm not going to speak to him for a week or two. He knows better than to get on my wrong side.

"We are going to my car," he says.

He's crazy, that's for sure.

"No. What about my car?" I ask.

"Give me the keys, someone will take it home," he says.

I stand with my arms folded. He needs to be serious.

"Andiswa, you want me to create drama in the parking now?" He pulls out his hand for car keys. There's a man making his way towards us. I don't need to ask to know that he's here to take my car.

"I hate you!" I throw keys to him and go to his car, leaving him behind.

"Andiswa don't kick my car!" he yells behind me. I'm slowly losing my sanity and the fact that they're treating me exactly like that makes me do crazy things. I do kick the door of his car, he asked for it.

He unlocks the car and opens the passenger door for me. I open the back one and lounge myself at the back, away from him.

He sits behind the wheel and heaves a loud sigh before starting the car.

I don't ask where he's taking me. I don't care, all I know is that when I want to go home he'll take me home.

We are indeed at Izinga Estate. He's brought me to his house, for his sake I hope there's no girl he's keeping inside because I'm going to create the same drama he just created at the restaurant.

I hop out of the car and rush toward to the door. He never locks the one connected to the garage, I kick it open and enter the house.

It looks like there's no one inside, but with him you'd never know. He could be keeping a girl inside the cupboard for all I know.

I check everywhere, there's no one. I sit on the stairs, breathing heavily and thirsty as hell.

I hear his footsteps coming up and lean my head on the rails. I'm about to hear how much I need help and bla bla bla.

He lowers himself on the stair above me and quietly watches me gasp for air.

"Why are you staring at me, whore?" I ask.

"I'm not a whore," he says.

"You're a whore Maqhinga, you fuck everything that wears a skirt. What kind of an example are you going to set to your son? I don't think you're ready to be a father. You're childish, messy and whorish."

He doesn't respond. I turn my head to him, what's keeping his mouth shut? I am telling the truth, he's fucked half of the Verulam ladies. That's the only reason I wanted to have sex with him, he's good and well experienced at it.

"I didn't want a son," he says after a moment.

I raise my eyebrow. He doesn't want my son? I thought he was the ready one.

"I wanted a girl who'd come out looking like you. Even now, I pray that our son comes out looking like you and not me," he says.

I'm surprised that he's not retaliating to my outburst and unnecessary insults. If it was any other day he would've called all my family members by now to report the case.

"But I'm scared that you're not going to love him regardless of how he looks. I understand that you're going through a lot, that's why I'm here with you every step of the way. I don't want my son not to have mother's love. You may not know how that feels like, but I do. Until Mam' Phumzile came into our lives, all I knew was that my father loved me with all his heart, that's what kept me going and cherishing this life thing. My father. I didn't know how it felt like to be loved by a woman, hence I found myself in the comfort of different women daily. If my mother had loved me like she

did to Ndlalifa, I'd be married too. I'd have everything that my brother has. I'd be content and happy with myself."

I've never seen this side of him. I know the carefree, messy, spoilt Maqhinga who can have any pussy he wants.

"I want to be a good father to my son. But more than anything I want you to be a good mother to him. I'd do anything in this world for my son to have your heart. I don't want him to watch Sandla and Nkuthalo interacting with their mothers and wish he was them." He lifts his T-shirt to his eyes and buries his head on his knees.

My eyes are burning. I don't know Maqhinga that deeply but I know what he wants for our son is what I want for him too. I just don't know how to do it. How do I move on from my parents' problems and focus on my life?

He pulls down the T-shirt and looks at me. "Do you want to go?" His eyes are moist and bloodshot. There's so much pain

reflecting in them. I know that I only had one sexual encounter with him, but he's the father of my unborn child, obviously I have a soft spot for him somewhere in my heart.

"You want me to go?" I ask.

"I want you to do anything that's going to make you happy," he says.

"Eating food, having sex and sleeping," I say.

"That's why you were on a date with that fool?"

"No, I don't sleep around, I'm not you. Khaya is a friendly guy, there's nothing going on between us," I say.

"I don't like him," he says.

He creates such good problems for himself?

He has a nice life.

"He's not your friend, you don't need to like or dislike him," I say.

"You're my babymama, I have a say." He's wearing boots that are too big for him!

"No, you don't," I say.

"You are here, aren't you? I have a say in who you go out with and who you don't.

These swollen breasts they're lusting after were made by me."

"He's not lusting after me. Not everyone sees women as walking vaginas like you." He laughs, "I know DJ. You don't. He wanted to chow you. What kind of a man goes on a date with a pregnant girl? He wanted money and the cookie. Boys believe that pregnant women have the extra heater down there."

Oh, wow!

"You're also 'boys', aren't you?" I ask.

"I'm about to find out." He smiles and bites his lower lip.

Why did I ask sex from him again? He's ridiculous.

"Do you ever say no to sex?" I ask.

"You taught me a lesson, now I do," he says.

"You think I fell pregnant on purpose?"

"You're twisting my words. Let's drop it. I really don't want you to be upset."

He stands up and pulls out his hand for me. I hold on to him and stand up. We make our way down to the kitchen.

“My brother is a good cook, do you know that?” he asks, taking a pot from the fridge.

“So you went to his house and took a whole pot of food?” I’m in shock. Who does that?

“He’s the reason why I can’t cook, so why not?” He dishes biryani into a bowl and puts it inside the microwave.

“Do you want tea?” he asks.

“I want orange juice and milk.”

“Mixed in one glass?”

“You got that right.”

He wrinkles up his nose with a grin. It’s not that weird, some women get ridiculous cravings. Mine is just milk with orange juice, hot shwarma and cheese curls.

“When are we shopping for King?” he asks.

“King?” I frown.

He smiles, “Yes. I have bought a few clothes but Thalente said they’re too big.”

I didn’t know he has a nickname already, or is it a name? I like it.

“Which size did you buy?” I ask.

“Sneakers, size 1. They’re small, but Thalente insists that they’ll fit him a year after he’s born. Then I bought trousers and T-shirts.”

This man, he bought sneakers and T-shirts for a baby that’s yet to be born!

“Maybe Friday this week, or during the weekend,” I say.

“I hope you don’t change your mind.” He’s excited but reversed about it. He knows that I’m capable of changing sides like a coin. I leave him dishing up and breaking glasses, I make myself comfortable in front of the TV and hop through channels. This is the first time I’ve been here to cause no problems.

We are always on each other’s throat, sometimes I don’t even know why I fight with him. He just happens to be there when I need someone to snap at, and he knows how to push my buttons.

“Dinner is served!” he announces, putting the plate on my lap and a glass of milkrange juice on the coffee-table.

He thinks he's done a great job, like he's Ramsey Gordon or something. He has a white dish-cloth hung over his shoulder like a real chef.

"Thank you," I say.

"Do you like it?"

"I haven't tasted it, but it smells nice. Your brother must be really good."

"We are gifted differently. I do other things better than him."

Oh, this is now turning into a competition? Ndlalifa cooks very nicely, I can live with him. Ndabuko also cooks, only my babydaddy prides himself in stealing pots of cooked food.

He doesn't have table manners, he's talking throughout dinner. I thought I was a spoilt-brat, everyone says so, but this one takes the trophy.

I take a shower and change into his T-shirt, I have nothing under it. I wait for him in bed while he makes a call outside. It sounds like he's arguing with someone, his voice is kept

low, my instincts tell me he's talking to a girl.

He walks inside the bedroom, smelling nicotine and whoring. I'm leaning back on the headboard with my arms folded. Bra, I came to your house, behaved myself, ate your brother's food and offered myself to you, but all you want is to talk to other women over the phone?

"Are you okay?" His eyes aren't really on me, even though he's looking at my direction.

"Yes, come to bed," I say.

He doesn't, instead he takes a step back and widens his eyes.

"You're a crazy kid," he says.

See, this is why I do crazy things. Him and Ndondo treat me like a mental disturbed child.

"Because I said come to bed?" I'm hurt. I've been nothing, but nice to him since we got here. Well, I had a little episode but we ended on the same page.

“You’re going to start kicking and yelling as soon as I get in bed. I was talking to a girl, but not in the way you think,” he says.

“Okay, then don’t come.” I pull up the covers and lie down. A part of me wants to ask him to drive me home, but then I’m trying to be a better person. I don’t want to end up in a psychiatry.

“Andiswa,” he touches my shoulder.

I open my eyes and look at him.

“Does your offer still stand?” he asks.

Now he’s not scared of me?

“No,” I say.

“Come on, King needs ears. I’m sorry if I said something wrong. You can call the person I was talking to and confirm who she is to me.”

“Maqhinga, I don’t care who you are with. I don’t love you, I never did, all I want is sex, but that doesn’t mean don’t respect me.”

“So you only see me as a sex object?” he asks with a slight frown.

“You look like you’re experienced, that’s why....” I stop, his face is transforming into

something I don't like. Maybe I am being cruel for saying this to his ears, especially after learning about his relationship with his late mother.

"Say it," he says, glaring at me.

"I don't want to hurt your feelings."

"Really? Thank you." He takes off his T-shirt, throws it on the floor and disappears in the bathroom. Only today I wish I could take back my words.

My eyelids are growing heavy, I hear his footsteps coming in and force them to open. He's butt-naked and lotioning his body from shoulders to toes. Even his butt, he makes sure it's well moisturized. I didn't know men take care of their butt like this!

"Staring at your sex toy?" he asks.

Sigh!

I rest my head on the pillow and look the other way. After a moment he gets in bed and holds my waist. His shaft massages behind my thighs. I feel it thickening inch by inch.

His hand lowers down to my mound. He rubs my nub, a little bit rough and hard.

“Phakamisa umlenze kancane,” he says.

(Lift your leg up a little)

“Maqhinga you can’t just....” He lifts my leg and pushes his shaft between my moist folds. Now he’s treating me like an average whore he’s paying for dick services.

He kisses me behind the neck and that’s it, he starts fucking me right away.

“Open wider Andiswa, I want each and every corner of it.” He’s moaning, thrusting into the depths of my core and squeezing my nipples.

My legs open wider. I haven’t been intimate in a long time, he’s just what I needed.

Long, thick and hard. On top of that, he’s got moves to support it.

“Yeah like that...open like that...goddamn, bitch!” He bites the side of my neck, I scream out with pleasure. I’m getting there, he’s hitting it right.

“Maqhinga, I like it!” I cry.

He pulls out, comes on top of me and lifts my legs up.

My clit is throbbing, I know if he taps on it a few times I'm going to explode. As if he has something against my happiness, he ignores my clit and pleasures himself inside the heating core. His veins are pulsating visibly on his arms, bullets of sweat are rolling down his tensed face.

"Fuck! Andi...swa!" His breath shortens. I see his face squeezing and tensing up. Then I feel warm fluid filling up my core. He pulls out and empties the rest of it on my boobs.

I'm beside myself with anger. I didn't sleep over to become his sperm-dish, I wanted something out of this sexual intercourse too. He catches his breath, picks his T-shirt, wipes his face and leaves for the bathroom. I'm lying in bed, soaked in sperms; both in my thighs and breasts. My clit is still throbbing, I didn't reach even a brink of orgasm.

I feel dirty and used

CHAPTER TWO

Maqhinga

He's sitting on the couch with his foot on the coffee-table and a burning cigarette between his fingers. He's so lost in his thoughts that even when Ndabuko makes his way in he doesn't notice nor turn his head to the sound of the shutting door.

"It doesn't look like someone had a great night," Ndabuko says, heading to the kitchen to get himself something to drink. Maqhinga remains on the couch, puffing his cigarette absent-mindedly.

"I heard that Andiswa slept here. You two are good now?" Ndabuko asks, coming back with an icy cold cider.

He lowers himself on the couch, opposite Maqhinga and stares at him as he exhales

smoke and shuts his eyes like it soothes his bleeding spots.

“Bafo, what happened?” Ndabuko asks with worry.

He sighs, “Andiswa slept over, she wanted sex.”

“And?” Ndabuko cocks up his eyebrow.

“Do I look like a walking dick?”

“I’m a man, Maqhinga. Why must I answer that?”

“Because Andiswa only wants me in bed. I thought we were okay, but it only lasted a few minutes. I don’t know why she can’t see me as a man, I’m trying all my best, everyone sees it except her.”

“I’m not sure I understand. You’ve fucked how many girls, 100 maybe, and they’re not crying,” Ndabuko says.

“I know, but none of them ever said ‘I don’t love you, I never did, I just want sex’, as if I’m a walking dick.”

He cracks into laughter. It’s funny seeing Maqhinga tripping like this for getting a taste of his own medicine.

“So what did you do?” Ndabuko asks, holding back his laughter.

“I FUCKED her, nudded on her breasts and slept in the guest bedroom. In the morning she requested an Uber and left without a single word.”

“You nudded on her breasts?” Ndabuko frowns.

To him Andiswa is still a little sister regardless of her ‘thing’ with Maqhinga. If he had to choose a side it would be hers.

“She wants to be my whore, isn’t? So I treated her like one,” Maqhinga says.

“Bro, you forget that she just turned 22. She’s a child that’s going through a lot, you know that. How can you take her word as the gospel truth?”

“She said what she said and I did what I did,” Maqhinga says unapologetically.

“King needs one sane parent,” Ndabuko says in defeat.

“I’m the sane one. Your sister-in-law has deep issues that my dick can’t fix. I’m not going to be her toy, unfortunately.”

“She’ll get it somewhere and King will receive nutrition from another man’s balls.”

“That’s bullshit, I’m not having anyone fucking that pussy before my son slides out of it. Imagine if the MF has a drop and my son’s head has to pass through where he nudded.”

“Then become her sex toy until she says otherwise. If I was around when Ndondo was pregnant, trust me, I would’ve grabbed that opportunity of her being horny with both hands.”

They both laugh. It sounds funny now, but theirs was a very difficult journey. All they need to do now is create another baby, for themselves now, but Ndondo still wants to focus on her career.

Maqhinga heaves a sigh, “I think I want what you and Ndalifa have. I have a son coming, my days of fooling around are over. I want to have a warm house, a happy child and woman I can call mine.”

“Are you looking somewhere else or you want someone close?” Ndabuko asks.

“I don’t know. If it’s not Andiswa, then it must be someone I trust with King. But God knows that it’ll be hard for me to trust any woman other than his mother around him,” he says.

Ndabuko chuckles, “Just say you want Andiswa.”

“I want her to make peace with her parents and focus on me and King.”

“Andiswa thinks she’s a child of rape, until her parents sit down and talk to her, she’ll never be truly happy about herself.”

“Maybe I should go see her father in Nyandeni.”

“I’d advise you to start with her mother because she’ll think you’re taking sides and trying to turn her daughter against her.”

“Yeah, you’re right!”

He’s been very supportive of Andiswa despite her pushing him away every chance

she gets. So he's welcomed to come to her mother's house anytime, anyday. Today he's here to speak to her, hoping they'll talk things through.

"Hello Ma," he greets Nomagugu from the door.

Her lips stretch into a smile. She happens to love these boys; Maqhinga and Ndabuko. She may have judged them harshly before getting to know them. They may not attend church nor align with most of her expectations, but they're good to her daughters and that's what matters.

"Why didn't you call? I would've cooked something," she asks.

"I tried Andiswa but she didn't pick up," he says.

Nomagugu sighs heavily.

"She's in her bedroom, only God knows what pissed her off today. She should be studying for her exams, they're three weeks away, but I haven't seen her even charging her laptop."

“Can I talk to her? I brought a few clothes for King.”

“Yeah, go to her room. I’ll fix something to eat quickly.”

He passes the kitchen and makes his way to Andiswa’s room. After talking to Ndabuko he realized that he may have been a little bit harsh to someone who’s carrying his baby and capable of burning ultrasound pictures. She’s lying in bed with earphones tucked in her ears. When Maqhinga pushes the door and walks in, she takes them off and sits up with a frown on her face.

“Bitch, why are you here?” She calls him this or whore anytime she feels like. Truth be told, he hasn’t been sleeping around as much as she thinks. It’s been a few girls and it was all about sex overnight- nothing more, nothing less.

“I brought King’s clothes,” he says.

“Why are you bringing them to me? He’s your son.”

He mentally counts to three and takes a deep breath.

“He’s your son too,” he says.

She pulls the covers over her head and turns to the other side.

He lowers himself on the bed, below her feet and picks a notebook she’s been writing on. It has tree names and people’s names in brackets, more like she was comparing the two. She’s crazier than he thought!

“Andiswa, why is my name next to Ginkgo tree?” he asks.

Silence.

“What is a Ginkgo tree?” He’s getting concerned. The name alone sounds horrible. Gink-go, what the fuck?

She slowly removes the covers and peeps out.

“It’s a Chinese tree that bears smelly fruits.” Creases grow on his frown. Couldn’t she put his name next to a guava tree or something?

“I’m not Chinese and I don’t smell. Why are you comparing me to it?” he asks, clearly unhappy about what he’s seeing.

“I don’t owe you an explanation. This is my task, I’m narrating my life through plants, to Dr Wynberg,” she says.

“Why do you hate me? I’ve always given you what you ask for. I’m not bad as you think I am. Seriously, I may not have a good reputation in the streets, but with you I’m trying to be a better person.”

“I don’t want you to be a better man,” she says.

“What do you want?”

“I want my life back.”

He sighs and caresses her toes. He really cares about her, or is it a soft spot because she’s way too younger than him?

Whichever it is, he wants to be a better person through her and vice-versa.

“There are things you can’t change in life, Andiswa. You just have to accept and live with them. Your father was not a good husband, but to you he was a great father, you must not take that for granted. Both your parents are alive and they love you so much, try not to let their marital issues

destroy you. You're a bright, young girl. There's so much you can achieve in life, you have every resource, every connection and every privilege to be great."

"Do you think I'm exaggerating?" she asks, sniffing back tears. Everyone seems to have it together, Bahle and Ndongdo, except her. This has cracked her relationship with Ndongdo as well, she blames everyone, her behavior completely changed upon finding out that her father was abusive, both physically and sexually.

"I cannot judge how you feel, but I can advise how you can go about it. And I'm proud of you for going to Dr Wynberg," he says.

"You don't think I'm a spoilt-brat?" She wipes her face and smiles, even though it doesn't reach her eyes.

"Just a little bit," he says.

She punches his arm, Maqhinga pulls her for a hug.

"I'm going to help you enjoy your youth years after King's birth. I don't want you to

miss out on the fun of being under 25, but I'll need some commitment from your side. We can make it work."

She frowns, with a smile.

"Commitment?" she asks.

"Yes." He takes a small box out of his pocket.

A ring???

No, it's a bracelet.

He laughs, "You thought I was proposing?"

"Damn, I was ready to say YES."

He knows that she's lying, but he's still flattered.

"This is a piece of my promise to you; I'm going to be with you every step of the way, you're not going to miss out on anything in life, but you're still going to be responsible. I promise to be a great father to King, to be your best friend and loving babydaddy. Do you accept?"

"Wow! Of course, I accept." She stretches her arm for him to put the bracelet around her wrist.

It's gorgeous!

“I love it,” she beams with joy.

“Now do you promise to listen, respect and allow us to help you?”

“I feel like you’re stealing my mom,” she says.

He shrugs his shoulders, “She can’t resist the charm.”

“You’re so full of yourself, anyway I think I will go to Nyandeni and talk to my dad. He sent me a letter, I can’t imagine how hard it must be for him to be in the rural area and depend on his brother.”

“His brother comes here frequently,” Maqhinga says.

“And I don’t like it. Him and mom have deep history, they might reignite the spark. Where will that leave Mam’Jabu and my father?”

“Andiswa, you worry too much about elders and their business. You’re about to become a mother, why don’t you focus on the IFs of you reigniting the spark with your own babydaddy?”

She rolls her eyes, “There was never a spark.”

“You just miraculously fell in love with my dick?”

Nomagugu yells from the kitchen, calling them to the table for a brunch. The conversation is left loose, but they’ll definitely get time to conclude everything. They’re getting there. It’s promising!

CHAPTER THREE

Thalente

My father was admitted again. He's in Life St Joseph's. His mental health keeps getting worse. Today I went to see him, his helpless eyes still haunt me, he's not happy to be there. He said it felt as though he was still at the Nxumalos; imprisoned. But there's nothing I can do to help him, he's tried to take his life twice, he's safe in the hands of professionals.

I hear the door opening from the living room, footsteps come in, I know he's about to yell his son's name.

"Shhh!" I say with my finger over my lips. He frowns at the door. I baby both of them.

“He’s sleeping,” I tell him.

The frown on his face disperses.

“Nkuthalooo!” he yells.

He always does this. He leaves before dawn, comes back in the middle of the day to check on his son. He doesn’t care if he’s asleep or not, when he gets here his 36 year-old ass wants to play with the baby.

“Seriously, Ndlalifa?” He exhausts me. I don’t even have Nkuthalo’s milk ready.

He’s going to scream his little lungs off.

“You’ll make the milk if he cries,” I say.

He pulls him up by arms and shakes him in the air. I used to cry a river when he does this, saying he’s going to break my baby’s arms, but guess what? The little traitor loves his father’s harsh games.

“Is my Nkuthalo okay?” He lifts him to his chest and kisses his cheek. Nkuthalo is now wide awake and giggling. Ndlalifa is in a demanding industry, taxi industry, they don’t get to spend much time together.

“Did you boil water?” he asks me leaning over for a kiss.

Obviously, Nkuthalo gets the kiss first, I'm now the second best.

"Yes, I left his bottles on the counter," I say. He leaves with Nkuthalo in his arm, talking and asking him questions as if he knows how to speak. I fold the blanket and take it to the bedroom. He'll probably be here for less than an hour, I should fix him something to eat and try to talk to him about Nkuthalo and daycare centre. The last time I brought it up, a few weeks ago, he nearly chopped my boobs off. I have a job waiting for me at Bantwana Holdings, I got it through my wide connections, Nkuthalo is now 8 months-old, I can go to work.

I find him feeding Nkuthalo his bottle while staring at the live soccer match. The milk looks weird, I don't know what he did.

"How many scoops of milk did you put?" I ask.

"I didn't count." His attention is on TV. He did count, I know because we always fight about him putting extra milk scoops

all in the name of; “I buy the milk.” Which is unfortunately not the point, if it was Beyonce’s kids would drink the whole tin at once because she’s rich.

“He always gets a runny stomach after you make his bottles.” I snatch it and get a loud scowl from Nkuthalo. He must blame his father, I’m also a first time parent but I don’t do dumb things.

I quickly make another bottle while Nkuthalo cries his lungs out. It used to get to me when he cries, but not anymore, I know babies cry even when they’re happy. I couldn’t believe it when he cried because he was full. Babies will shock you!

Ndlalifa doesn’t know how to shush him if there’s no milk around, so he blows his face. Don’t ask, I don’t know why. I find him blowing air on Nkuthalo’s face, which Nkuthalo doesn’t give a damn about. Next time he’ll learn to follow instructions before thinking affordability has anything to do with making the baby’s milk.

“I need to tape your mouth when we make the second one,” he says straightening his shirt.

He thinks the baby crying has anything to do with me screaming during sex? Well, let me not act surprised, he was like this when I first met him- his left brain is damaged.

“Let me take a quick shower, make him sleep so that I can greet you properly,” he says.

“You should’ve considered that before waking him up,” I say.

He lifts my chin up and steals a quick kiss from my lips. He smells so good, I miss the early stages of our marriage where he’d cancel all his plans just to spend the rest of the day with us. Now he’s more invested in growing the Ngidi empire, I think he doesn’t want his father to regret appointing him for the position. He’s working his ass off, proving his capabilities to everyone. I’m proud of him, but I do wish he can make some time for us as well.

“Please watch the match for me,” he says.

I hate soccer. I don't even know what team is wearing yellow, everyone is running around and sweating.

Nkuthalo has eaten but he's not falling asleep. He's lying on his stomach, kicking his legs and trying to crawl. Mom says he's lazy, he should be trying to stand right now. I'm not in any rush, even if he starts crawling at 2 years I'll support him and tell him he's doing his best. It's not easy having a Ngidi blood running in your veins, it messes with your ability to be normal. I hope King will have dominant Sibisi genes, because wow, this family!

"Sthandwa, what's the score?" His voice catches me off-guard. I forgot about the soccer thing as soon as he disappeared. I glance at the TV screen, "83:47." Oh no, this can't be the score! Not even those overseas famous teams can score so many goals. I think I read time of the match. There, the score is at the right corner of the screen!

"1:0," I say.

He's already seen it.

"Funnily, I always watch your things when you ask me to."

I don't remember that. I always record my favourite shows if I can't watch them in time.

"Babe, I've been thinking," I say.

He shifts his eyes to me.

Courage, Thamente, courage!

"Nkuthalo is now 8 months old," I say.

He raises his eyebrow, "So?"

"Daycare centre," I say.

He looks for his cap, finds it behind him on the couch and puts it on.

He mustn't dare walk out on me!

"Ndlalifa, you're unfair. Sitting in the house, doing nothing 24/7 is tiring. I want to go to work, Nkuthalo is old enough to stay at daycare."

"You don't have to stay in the house. I leave with one car, your bank account is never empty, I'm sure you can find a plenty of

things to do. Go shopping, do your nails and all those things you women like.”

“I’m not a slayqueen, Ndlalifa. I want to go to work, you promised me that you’d never stand on my way of self elevation,” I say.

He sighs heavily and stares at me for quite a moment.

“Why do you want a 9-to-5 job?” he asks.

“Because I still want to earn a salary and create a social life beyond family and close friends,” I say.

Deep sigh!

“Can we consider a nanny? I don’t want him to be taken care of by different strangers.”

We are getting somewhere!

“That’s okay, I can ask Ndondo to help me find one through her agency.”

“Let me know then, I want to be there to interview candidates.”

I blow him a kiss, “I love you Hlomuka.”

He rests back his head and takes off the cap. He’s not happy but he has no other choice,

he promised to support my dreams, not to choose them for me.

“Don’t leave yet, I’ll put Nkuthalo to sleep,” I say.

He frowns. I rush to the bedroom to get a towel to strap Nkuthalo on my back. I know he’s going to fall asleep within a minute. When I come back his face breaks into a wide grin.

“I can’t believe we have to go through him to have sex,” he says and wrinkles his face at Nkuthalo on my back. “Hlomuka!” Seriously? I’m trying to put him to sleep and he’s praising him.

“I’m sorry,” he says with a smile and shifts his eyes back to the highlights on TV.

Nkuthalo takes his precious time falling asleep. I know Ndlalifa should be heading back to work by now, he’ll probably come back late when both Nkuthalo and I are in bed.

I gently put him in bed and tiptoe my way out. Just as I take the last step out, his ugly

voice bursts the ceiling. God what did I do to deserve a child that cries?!

“Baby, I’m here, shhh!” Well, I’m only here physically, my heart is with his father in the other room.

I pretend to sleep with him until I hear a soft snore. Then I tiptoe out again, luckily this time he doesn’t wake up.

Ndlalifa is on his feet; cap on, car keys and phone in hand.

He’s not leaving after all the trouble I’ve gone through to put his son to sleep.

“I’m here,” I say.

“I just received a call from the Mayoral office. Do you remember the shelter request I made for...?”

I raise my hand up. I don’t even want to hear it.

“My father is locked in a Psychiatric Hospital. My mom is struggling to raise grandchildren while my sister cohabits with different men. My uncles want my father high and low, his life is being threatened. And I’m here, raising a child by myself

while being a wife to an absent man. The least you can do when you're home for two-minutes, is spare me your glorious work stories." I really don't know where all this is coming from. I guess it's all been buried at the back of my head for some time, it has less to do with him leaving me dry.

"I was just..." He sighs, "Never mind.

Come here, sthandwa sami."

I don't move an inch. Our eyes are locked in an intense stare. He easily gets remorseful, his eyes are colored with fear and sadness.

"Can we have a conversation?" he asks.

"I guess not, you have a Mayoral deal to celebrate," I say.

"My wife comes first." He comes to me and holds my hands.

I take a deep sigh and hold his stare.

"Uma sengiphuma endleleni MaMbatha ungitshela iqiniso, kodwa ungangithethisi." (If I get out of line, tell me the truth MaMbatha, but don't yell at me)

“I wasn’t yelling,” I say softer than I had initially sounded. Yeah, he called me MaMbatha and anger suddenly vanished. “It felt like that. I didn’t know any of these concerns until a minute ago. If you feel neglected you should’ve told me from the onset so that I can rectify it,” he says. I release a sigh and sit on the couch. He sits too, throwing his car keys and phone on the coffee-table.

“I miss you,” I say.

“You’re all I think about. Even me working hard is because I don’t want you and my son to ever be short of anything in life.” He exhales heavily and drops his eyes, “And I want my father to be proud of me.”

“I understand, but don’t neglect your family. You leave at 5:00 am, pop in mid-day for an hour and come back home after 9pm. You used to be my bestfriend, Ndlalifa.”

He moves from his couch to mine and squeezes me in a tight hug. I sit in his

embrace for quite a moment before I remove his arms and sit up straight. "Come here, I love you." He holds my neck and brushes his lips against mine while trying to search where I'm at in my eyes. "I'm sorry, okay?"

I nod.

"And thank you for speaking up, I promise you there's going to be some changes. I'll definitely find a way to do better, starting now." He takes his phone from the coffee-table and dials a number. He's calling whoever he was meeting up with and cancelling. I have won!

He puts his phone back and pulls me to his arm. I'm glad he still does little things like kissing me when he gets a chance, wraps his arms around me and says nothing about my weight. Yes, say nothing! He's the last person allowed to complain about my weight. I've been struggling to lose kilos since I gave birth. Sitting home doing nothing may be contributing somehow.

“Am I heavy?” I ask sitting on his lap.
He chuckles, “*Ayikho indlovu esindwa umboko wayo.*” (No trunk is too heavy for its elephant)

“Did you just call me an elephant?” I ask.
He bursts into laughter.

“I called myself an elephant, and you a trunk.” He lowers his hand to my waist and massages his way under my skirt. “Even if you were an elephant, you’d be my elephant. *Ngazikhethela emini bebade.*” (-I chose you on broad daylight) He wraps his hand behind my neck and locks his lips on mine. I don’t know if something is still going to need him to leave, but I’m going to enjoy this moment and make the best out of it.

He kisses my forehead that he always refers to as big, and smiles. If he makes a comment about it I’m shaving his beard, he’s starting to look like a Shembe man anyway.

“What?” I ask.

“*Awufake umswesana wakho obomvu, uke utelebhele phela ngibuke.*” He’s asking me to

put a red lingerie on and model in front of him. I did that for him on his birthday, I wasn't this fat at that time. And who asks a woman to wear a lingerie? That gesture should come from the heart.

"Why are you acting shy? It's just me and you. Or even better, wear nothing," he says.

"You can't request such."

He frowns, "Why not?"

"Because you can't."

His finger slides on my clit and gives it a lazy rub.

"Come on, I want to prove something to you."

He wants to prove something? I'm not going to go through my closet looking for lingerie, but I'm curious to know what he wants to prove so badly.

He helps me take my clothes off and lies back on the couch with his boxers below his knees. His hand is wrapped around his shaft.

"Just sit there and look at me," he says.

I sit on the coffee-table, butt-naked, and watch him staring at me. Oh gosh, I should wipe that couch he's sitting on balls-naked before my son sits on it.

"Open your legs a little bit," he instructs.

I do as told. He groans and starts hand-stroking his shaft.

"Show me some more," he asks.

His moans are flooding my core with warm fluids.

"It looks so yummy, babe." He's staring at my body, working on his erection and complimenting. I don't know where this is heading; whether he's going to fuck me or he's going to keep playing with himself. He stands up, with his hand stroking his shaft, he comes to me and directs it to my mouth. I thought he was proving something but it seems like whatever he had planned is failing.

"You're too hot to look at and not touch."

He's thrusting into my mouth like it's just a hole that I don't need to breathe with. I push his thigh to catch my breath, he holds

the back of my head and pulls me back into his manhood.

“Come on, babe, you can do this,” he says thrusting deep in my throat.

No, I cannot do it! I’m choking and gasping for air. Imagine having “Penis” as the cause of death on your death certificate.

He lets me go and strokes himself a few times before releasing his warm fluid on my thighs.

“Urgh, fuck!” He puts it back inside my mouth.

I lick it like a dog- things we do for men!

CHAPTER FOUR

Maqhinga

Ndlalifa asked for a meeting with him, Ndabuko and Ngidi. They're meeting in Maqhinga's house in the next thirty-minutes. It could be work related or about family matters. Ndlalifa seems to have grabbed the leadership position with both hands and he's rocking it to the right direction. Him and Ngidi didn't get along for many years, but now that he's finally grown and understood his father's past better, he wants to show him that he can be a good son. He wants his father to be proud of him, he's done lot of shit in the past and now that he has a son of his own, he wants to be a good example.

Ndabuko is the first one to arrive. Punctual and smart AF.

“Hello Ndondo,” Maqhinga teases.

Ndabuko doesn't mind being called by his wife's name. “Sure bafo, what did you prepare for us?” he asks.

“In terms of...?” Maqhinga raises his eyebrow.

He's still in bed.

“Food and drinks. We are meeting at your house, there must be some sort of hospitality,” Ndabuko says.

He cracks into laughter. He's been eating cornflakes the whole day because he can't get his lazy ass off bed. He's not cooking for anyone, let alone grown ass men!

“You people also don't do shit, your wives prepare for guests. I'm not married, what the fuck am I supposed to do?”

“You mean to tell me there's no food in this meeting?” Ndabuko asks.

“Yes, but nobody will leave this house hungry. I'll make a plan, I'm Maqhinga after all,” he says.

Ngidi arrives shortly. Ndabuko keeps him company in the living room, while Maqhinga continues to wrap himself in bed. It's a cold day, Andiswa and him are doing okay but he couldn't call her over to warm his bed because that might've taken a wrong direction. He wants her to be comfortable first, to know that she can come to him for anything, anytime. Then he'll introduce her to his life, step by step.

"Maqhinga!" Ndlalifa yells.

He gets off bed and pulls his blanket over his shoulders. Winter makes one wish they were Sothos. They're such a bright tribe, and this thing of blankets is really cool. He walks into the living room and finds everyone gathered on the chairs, just waiting for him.

"Ngonyama!" He takes his elbow out of the blanket and bumps it on Ngidi's shoulder.

"You can't even welcome guests in your house," Ngidi says.

He lowers himself on the couch and wraps himself in a blanket.

“Feel at home, if you need something just raise your hand,” the host in him says. But everyone knows that he’s got zero sense of hospitality.

They shift their attention to Ndlalifa who seems to be colder than ice.

Or is it nerves?

“Well, thank you all for coming and thank you, bafo, for accommodating us,” he says and takes a deep breath.

“Oh, you’re welcome, anytime!” Maqhinga.

“Yesterday I had a talk with my wife. I wasn’t even aware of the things she brought up, but now that I think about them I understand where she was coming from.”

Silence.

They’re lost, waiting for him to find them.

“I’m not a good husband,” he says.

“Oh, shit! What did you do?” Maqhinga interferes.

“Not in that way. I did not cheat.” He shifts his eyes to Ngidi. “How did you balance it out with mom?”

“This is about you working everyday?”

Ngidi asks.

“It’s about me not having enough time for my wife. I don’t mind working because I know I’m growing my father’s legacy and it’s my job as a first son. But I don’t want to destroy my marriage while at it. There’d be no point in me working my ass off if I’m going to lose one person that means the world to me,” he says.

“So you’re stepping down as the chairman?” Ndabuko asks.

All of a sudden the atmosphere in the room is thick and heavy. Ngidi cannot go back to the taxi rank, he’s done his job and now it’s time for him to enjoy the rest of his life with his wife.

“If Nhlanzeko was still alive this wouldn’t have been a problem because I’d know that...” Ndabuko sighs; cutting Ngidi short.

“Please don’t say that. Don’t go there,” he pleads.

Ngidi nods. He didn’t mean to offend anyone. Nhlanzeko is the boy he trained for the industry, while Ndlalifa was born for it. He’s everything Ngonyama was growing up. Maqhinga and Ndabuko are not even options, they’re not material cut for taxi rank leadership. Maqhinga belongs in the streets, he’s just growing taller, not UP.

Ndabuko on the other hand is too gentle for that industry, he’s okay following the lead and taking instructions.

“I’m not stepping down,” Ndlalifa says and looks at both Maqhinga and Ndabuko. “I think I just need a lot of help from you guys.”

“What kind of help?” Maqhinga asks.

“Step up a little bit.” He looks at Ndabuko, “You too. I need extra pair of eyes, extra pair of hands and extra pair of ears. I also want to be able to spend time with my family.”

“Okay, maybe we can schedule shifts. Maqhinganga can be the eyes at the rank in the morning, after 10 it’s me, then you in the afternoon.”

“Oh, Maqhinganga must wake up at 5am when witches are coming back from their work?”

Maqhinganga asks.

He’s not happy with this schedule.

“I was setting an example, but I don’t think it’s such a bad idea given that you’d be leaving no one in bed, unlike us,” Ndabuko says.

“It’s not my fault that you two are married. We are going to change shifts weekly. I also have things to do in the mornings. And while we are talking, Dad I’m buying your shares at Hlomuka Logistics,” Maqhinganga says.

“I don’t remember saying I’m selling any shares,” Ngidi says.

“It’s me, your son. I’m going to sell them back to you if the company doesn’t do well. I’m having a baby soon, I need money,” he says.

Ngidi laughs, “ My daughter is only 28, I also need money.”

“Baba, you can’t compare Snalo to King, seriously.”

They can argue all day. It’s how their relationship is. Maqhinga never got out of the 16 year-old, last born bubble.

“I’ll leave you to figure out how things will be. It would break my heart to have an outsider taking over the business I’ve built through blood, sweat and tears for decades,” Ngidi says.

They all nod.

“There’s another issue, since we are all here we might as well talk about it,” he says and takes a deep breath.

They’re staring at him.

“Nomkhosi,” he says.

Oh that! Nobody expected it. They can’t even be angry at her because she’s a grown up and she’s been responsible all her life.

“I think she’ll figure it out. She’s a grown ass woman,” Ndlalifa says.

“That’s not the point. I knew the boy’s father, he was a very humble man. But this boy seems to be all over the place, both of them actually, because even Nomkhosi is acting out of character,” Ngidi says.

“Baba, you know everyone, even Shembe men from Squmbe!” Maqhinga exclaims.

“I was in the taxi industry socializing with people from all around KZN. My focus wasn’t on skirts,” Ngidi says.

“Sounds like me. Anyway how’s the boy now? I heard that he crashed the car into a wall after finding out that Nomkhosi is still pregnant.” He doesn’t even know this Thakasa guy, but because he’s sleeping with his sister and he’s not married to her he’s going to refer to him as a boy.

“It wasn’t that bad, Nomkhosi went there. Just that it’s a messed up situation because he has a wife back home,” Ndlalifa says. He’s closer to Nomkhosi than any of them. He knew about Thakasa before they did. Unfortunately, he cannot judge her because *inhliziyo idla ekuthandayo*.

“Wait, you mean to tell that Nomkhosi, the women’s worth advocate, is fucking a married man?” Ndabuko asks. Their relationship has always been rocky, but they try to coexist for Ndondo’s sake.

“They’re not together anymore. But I don’t think we can talk about her relationship yet, she’s still trying to figure things out. We should give them time, if the boy does something stupid to her then we can interfere.”

“You’re right,” Ngidi says.

Ndabuko looks at Maqhinga, “Can we have something to eat or drink? We’ve been here for quite some time.”

“Cornflakes or morvite?” Maqhinga asks.

“Bafo, you don’t even have those Woolworth cooked chickens in your fridge? I only had a sandwich in the morning,” Ndlalifa asks.

“Morvite or Cornflakes?” Maqhinga asks.

“That’s all you have in your kitchen?” They shouldn’t be shocked, but, wow!

“Fruits, instant porridges, cereals and raw food. I haven’t had any woman promising me heaven and earth. I’m not that lucky,” he defends himself.

“It’s not about luck, it will happen when it happens, and when it does you’ll be happy that you waited,” Ngidi says. He doesn’t play when it comes to his last son’s emotional being.

They share a brief eye-contact before Ndabuko breaks the silence. His father always believes in him, he’s his number one cheerleader in this world. He wants to be like that to King too.

Their taxis stay with drivers, unless requested otherwise. Because Ndlalifa has complained about having a lot on his plate, he decided to be the one to log heads with the rank manager before the last taxi in Verulam leaves the stand. He’ll be going

home by taxi, with one of their new drivers, Vela. As they leave the rank, Vela's phone rings. It's an emergency, someone from his section has been shot and they need a taxi to rush him to the hospital.

Judging by the panic in his voice, Vela personally knows the victim. He starts cursing and telling Maqhinga how innocent is the man who's been shot. He refers to him as Bab' Mzobanzi.

They don't waste time, they rush to Quarry Heights. For Vela it's more than work, he's rushing to rescue a good community man and probably find leads where he can find the perpetrators.

The man has a small, two-bedroom house surrounded by a rusty sharp fence. They probably jumped it to get inside the yard. It couldn't have been robbery gone wrong, considering the luxurious houses he's neighboring. He was a target, but they didn't complete the job. He's still alive! "Baba, who did this?" Vela asks, pushing through a crowd of neighbours who are

watching him bleed on the floor instead of helping him.

“Wait a minute!” Maqhinga frowns and takes a step back.

He takes another one forward and looks at the man again.

His father shaved his hair recently, so it can't be.

But, no, wait...

“Baba?” He just needs to make sure.

The man lifts his eyes to him, confusion masks his eyes but he quickly drops them and groans out in pain.

“Mlungu, help me take him to the taxi,” Vela says.

He's still confused. Who is this man? He gets that Vela hasn't met Ngidi yet, he's only been driving for them for two weeks, but damn, how did he miss Ndlalifa's resemblance on this man? It's too much not to notice.

Surely there's some kind of explanation for this. Yes, God is a human too, he's got only one brain and sometimes he runs out of

ideas for new faces. But you can't look like someone from head to toe, and even frown like him.

They rush the man to Glen Earle Clinic. Vela decides to stay behind, he's enraged by the incident and hurt as if the man is his father by blood.

Maqhinga drives home, instead of his house. He cannot sleep not knowing what's going on. His father might know something about that man. They look too alike for it to be a coincidence.

"Guess who's home?" Snalo screams and opens her arms for him.

They embrace in a tight hug. He kisses her cheek and pulls her hand. They're affectionate towards one another, it used to make their father uncomfortable but he's eventually chose to trust his kids, they like one another but it's all siblinghood.

"Where's my father?" he asks.

“They’re already in bed. Are you sleeping over? There’s a new movie on Netflix, gosh, you’re going to love it!”

Chances of him like a movie of her taste are very low. He likes guns, but only in his own hand, he’s not going to watch men chasing the one another with guns and flying off tall buildings.

“No, I’m not sleeping over. I want to confirm if my father is here and okay. I saw something unbelievable today.”

Snalo was about to turn, but hearing that makes her follow him up the stairs.

“What did you see?” she asks running behind him.

“A man shot,” he says.

“How’s that unbelievable though? People get shot everyday, it’s life- you live and die.” She has a very unique perspective on life and death. She’s not anything less of a Ngidi, but they don’t find pleasure in killing like her, they do it as a job that needs to be done.

“The man looked like my father, that’s what makes it unbelievable,” Maqhinga says.

“Really? Maybe he has a twin.”

Well, that’s highly impossible. Ngidi lost his parents at a very young age, his sister was killed with his parents, he only survived because he was sleeping in a different rondavel. He didn’t have a brother, he was young but grown enough to know his siblings.

“Knock, knock, parents!” Maqhinga knocks at their bedroom door. Snalo has turned back to watch her movie, she thought something dramatic had happened, not an easy thing like death.

Ngidi opens the door in his vest and sleeping shorts. He’s annoyed, that’s very evident on his face.

“Can I come in?” Maqhinga asks.

“No,” Ngidi closes the door behind him.

“Were you marinating the chicken?”

Maqhinga asks in a low whisper as he follows behind his father to the study.

“I’m not your friend, wena mbongolo.” He’s really annoyed.

Maqhinga silently laughs behind him.

Damn, he was really marinating the chicken, maybe he was about to put it in the oven, that’s why he’s mad.

“What’s going on?” Ngidi asks lowering himself on his leather chair.

Maqhinga exhales heavily.

“Just as we left the taxi rank, Vela got a call from his neighbors asking him to hurry with a taxi, someone had been shot.”

Ngidi frowns, “Who’s Vela?”

“The guy we gave the red taxi.” He nods,

Maqhinga goes on, “When we got there a man was bleeding on the floor of his

kitchen, but not dead. Baba, I swear my

heart skipped 100 seconds when I saw his face, he looks like you from head to toe.

Only he has a cute afro, you don’t.”

“Maqhinga you’re waking me up because you saw someone who looks like me?”

Ngidi asks.

“If you saw someone who looks like me that much, trust me, you would’ve woken me up too,” he says.

“No, I wouldn’t. I see stupid boys everyday but I don’t run to tell you about them,”

Ngidi says.

He sighs dramatically.

“Well, his name is Mzobanzi Nhleko,” he says.

Ngidi frowns.

“Nhleko from where?” he asks.

“From Quarry Heights, obviously.”

“I know the Nhlekos from my grandmother’s side of the family. But I don’t know them like that, we could be related, or it’s just a look-alike.”

“Maybe you should come and see this man. It’ll be like looking at yourself in the mirror. You’d probably run, I’m telling you.”

“You always exaggerate, I don’t need to see him. The Nhlekos and I had no relationship, even if he was from my grandmother’s family, it wouldn’t be a big deal.”

“Then I’ll pick you up in the morning and we’ll go to the hospital. They were sending him to Albert, I also want to introduce you to our new drivers.”

Ngidi is not looking forward to it, that’s very evident on his face. He’s retired, not meeting new drivers and worrying about who hired the taxi and looked a certain way is exactly what retirement is all about. But Maqhinga obviously doesn’t get it. He’s still too blown away by the looks of the man he saw, and as usual, he’s exaggerating.

Bhekizitha “Ngonyama” Ngidi

Maqhinga is his last born. Okay scratch that, that’s basically how he treated him for 29 years of his life. He’s his little boy, that’s why it’s so easy for Maqhinga to trick him

into doing anything. Like today, he's being dragged to the hospital to visit a man who's said to look like from head to toe.

Meeting his drivers was great, he got to spend time with old friends as well, but now he's finally grown out of that status. He wants to focus on his wife, kids and grandkids.

Nhleko has been moved to a ward of recovering patients. The doctors removed the bullets, they're convinced he's going to be just okay, he wasn't shot that badly. Ngidi is on his phone entering the ward. He's already heard that the man looks like him, what else is there to look forward to? The man being a Nhleko doesn't mean anything, he grew up like an orphan while his grandmother's relatives were all alive. They enter the ward, there are rows of bed, Nhleko is on the second one from the door. He's a strong man, even though he was shot he's sitting on his bed, unlike others who are lying like sacks of potatoes in their beds.

“Hi, I drove you here yesterday with Vela,” Maqhinga says to him.

He nods, acknowledging him, and looks at Ngidi standing behind Maqhinga typing something on his phone. He looks pale for a second, Ngidi is not even aware of him.

Maqhinga waits patiently for his father to lift his eyes. He wants to see if his reaction is going to match his words. Right now it feels like he’s standing between the twins.

“Ummm, where is...?” Ngidi lifts his eyes to a man staring at him eyes widened.

“What the hell?”

Maqhinga steps aside and allows him to take a closer look at Nhleko.

“You’re Ngonyama, I guess,” Nhleko says, almost like he knew Ngidi before meeting him and he was aware of their similar looks.

“Yes, and who are you?” Ngidi is still in awe.

This is not just a look-alike as he thought, this man has a birthmark on his upper arm as well. It’s freaky!

“Mzobanzi Nhleko, that’s what I call myself. People always say I look like Ngonyama, the taxi owner. Now I understand why.”

“Are you from Melmoth?” Ngidi asks.

“Yes, Nhleko originally from KwaYanguye, Melmoth.”

Ngidi looks at Maqhingga. Something doesn’t add up here.

“I have Nhleko relatives. My mother’s grandmother was a Nhleko from the same place in Melmoth. Have you ever heard of Babhekile Zikhali who got married to Zimele Ngidi? That was my mother, Joseline Nhleko’s second daughter,” he says.

Silence.

Ngidi raises his eyebrow in question, but still, the man remains silent.

“You could be a different Nhleko, I just thought maybe you might know them because families are close back in the villages.”

Nhleko looks at Maqhinga, “Mfana, please get me some water from the sink.”

It doesn't look like he wants to talk about himself that much. He's still in pain, he lies on his back and sighs heavily.

“By the way I was forced by my son to come and see you,” Ngidi says. He didn't come here to befriends a Nhleko. He's better without them.

“Joseline Nhleko was my grandmother. She raised me up from birth to 21,” he explains when Ngidi least expects it. He was about to leave, but hearing that the man knows his grandmother makes him take a step back.

“I have a house in Quarry Heights. I bought it from an old friend five years ago, before I came back from Johannesburg. That's where I stay, one day you should come, maybe we can talk.”

Ngidi nods, “I'll take your number so that we can communicate.”

“Okay,” Nhleko says.

“You didn’t tell me if you heard of my mother though. She was the second daughter of our grandmother,” Ngidi.

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

Oh, okay! The Nhlekos didn’t like his mother, so he’s not surprised that this man refuses to even mention her name.

Phumzile has cooked tripe and samp. Snalo complained and ordered from Uber Eats. The person who should be happy about today’s dinner is Ngidi, it was specially made for him, but he’s not happy. He’s been tense since he came back from the hospital. Strange enough for someone who claims not to care about any of his relatives.

“Hlomuka, must I get you something to drink?” Phumzile asks standing next to him.

“Vodka,” he says.

It’s a Sunday evening, he knows very well that Phumzile won’t allow him to drink but he badly needs it.

“Did you see the man?” Phumzile asks heading to the liquor cabinet and

surprisingly taking a bottle of Vodka for him.

He sighs, "Yes, but he didn't say much about himself. He's a Nhleko, my grandmother's grandson, just like me."

"Does he really look like you?" Phumzile asks.

"Yes, we look alike." He's confused because with him, the Ngidi genes are more dominant, he looks very much like his late father.

"Something doesn't add up. If he refuses to talk I'll have to trace down other Nhlekos and have a conversation with them," he says.

"You think he might be your brother?" Phumzile asks.

He shrugs his shoulders, "I don't know. As far as I know, my parents had two children; me and my little sister."

He really needs a drink, and maybe a massage and something extra too.

She waits for him in bed while he takes one of his long late showers. She's in a black

dress-petticoat; Calcium tablets drank and mentally ready to comfort her husband like a wife. Ngidi walks back to the bedroom wearing only his briefs. He opens a drawer and throws two minty gums in his mouth before getting in bed.

“I’m sorry to drink on a Sunday,” he says to Phumzile.

“I understand Hlomuka, do you want back massage?”

His face breaks into a thin smile. He holds her hand and lifts it to his lips for a light peck.

“No, you’ve been up the whole evening cooking and serving me, now is your time to rest,” he says.

“I insist,” she says sitting up. “Please lie on your stomach.”

He does as told, Phumzile drops massage oil on his skin and rubs it all over his back. As her hand rolls on his skin he’s getting less and less tense.

“Stay on that spot, my love,” he says with a shallow moan.

Phumzile's hand lowers down to his butt. "Phumzile, *indoda ayigcotshwa izinge*," he says with a chuckle. (A man's butt must not be lotioned)

Phumzile drops massage oil right on his butt-crack. He tenses up as her hand slides between his butt cheeks and rubs him.

"I think I'm good now," he says attempting to turn.

Phumzile pushes her down and massages down to his thighs.

"You amaze me, you can pull a trigger but you're scared of butt massage," she says laughing.

He laughs too, "I am Zulu."

"In my bedroom you're a husband," she says. "Now lie on your back."

He turns and lies on his back. His schlong has woken up. It looks like a giant with veins pulsating all around it.

"See what you did," he says with a smile.

"This is just a massage. This is why I cannot take you to a spa, you'd freak masseurs out," Phumzile says.

He laughs, "I'd never allow anyone to massage my butt with oil anyway."

This time she starts from his feet, up to his legs and up to his....wait a minute!

"Mmm.... Mmm... Mmm!"

His hands are rolling nipples that are peeping out of the dress-petticoat. Hers are wrapped around his manhood, massaging it. Or is it now a hand job?

He pulls up the petticoat, there's nothing keeping him from his Pum-pum, she's wearing nothing underneath. He pulls her to lie on his chest and kisses her lips. She's absorbed into the kiss while he's secretly pushing his hungry giant into her core. He pushes himself in soon as he finds the opening, Phumzile didn't expect it at all. She nearly jumps up when she realizes that something has filled her core.

Ngidi chuckles, "Now it's my turn to massage your secret walls."

On top though? She inhales sharply and buries her head over his shoulders.

He lifts her bottom up a little bit and starting pounding her. There's a little aggression and fury, but she understands, her intention was for him to release his stress through his favourite deed.

"Phumzile, you're killing me!" he cries and turns to put her down on her side. He pulls her leg up and enters her the scissor-style. They don't usually make noise, but today Ngidi's groans are a bit audible. Phumzile shuts him with a kiss while he dips his manhood in the depths of her cookie, each stroke carrying more pleasure than the last one.

He breaks the kiss, squeezes her butt and releases another deep groan.

"Finish, Hlomuka," Phumzile begs.

There's a child in the house, a 28 year old one, they definitely don't want to traumatize her. Ngidi doesn't want her to move out, he's still trying to make up for the years he lost with them; her and the late twin. What he's not aware of is that he's

spoiling her and before he knows it Snalo will be rotten to the point of no return. "Oh, sweetheart!" He releases warm cream inside her and loses touch with reality for a minute.

Being able to make him this happy is what gives Phumzile confidence. Even though there were young housekeepers and a whole bunch of springy, tender girls before her, this man still sleeps home every night. Their lips lock in an intimate kiss before he pulls out and catches his breath.

"My body is slippery, just like Pum-pum," he says with a smile. "I need to take a shower, I can't sleep oily like this."

Phumzile chuckles, "Must I come and wash your back?"

"What did I do to deserve you?"

She blushes and drops her eyes.

He pulls her for another steamy kiss.

He's feeling better than he was when he came back from the hospital. Perks of having a good wife!

CHAPTER FIVE

Andiswa

This past week has been the better I've had in months. I didn't hear from Ndondo, which is a great thing because the last thing I need is a lecture of how to be perfect. Maqhinga has been less annoying as well. I think I like him as a friend -with benefits. As a baby daddy he's annoying, he has these creepy tendencies of wanting to control my life.

Today I'm being driven by him to Dr Wynberg's office. He got me shwarma and strawberry milkshake, I can't hate him, not today.

"Do you want me to come in?" he asks.

“Would you do that? It’s a therapy session, we cry and spill people’s secrets?” I’m shocked.

I’ve never heard of a taxi-owner who attends therapy.

“People’s secrets?” His eyes widen.

I laugh, “Yes, but it’s all confidential.”

“Oh, I think I can do that. But I’m not spilling anyone’s secret, I’m coming in to support you. Maybe I can understand you better.”

My lips crack into a smile. I roll my fist. He stares at me.

“Cool?” I ask.

He rolls his and bumps it into mine.

“I forget that you’re a kid. Cool.”

I roll my eyes, “Yes you forget, especially when you’re on top of me and turning me into your whore.”

“You want me to stop?” he asks.

He’s crazy, of course I don’t want him to stop.

I open my door and leave him laughing behind the wheel.

I'm late as usual. I sign in at the reception and head to her office followed by Maqhinga. He's wearing umqhele around his head today, I don't know what it stands for because he's not celebrating anything. "Hey," I hear him greeting a lady at the passage.

I turn to give him a look and stand to wait for him. Not in front of me, I don't care whether we're in a relationship or not, I'm the mother of his unborn child, I deserve some respect.

"I was just greeting her," he says with a grin.

I roll my eyes and open Wynberg's office door.

"You are a jerk. You always think with your dick." Oh shucks, we are inside.

Dr Wynberg looks at us with her eyes widened. I should start speaking more Zulu, look now this white woman has heard everything I said and she's about conclude that I need more therapy.

“Good day Dr,” I force a smile and glance at Maqhinga who’s staring at her like he’s now craving a white pussy.

“This is Maqhinga Ngidi, my new friend, he’s also the father of this baby.”

She smiles at Maqhinga and nods in acknowledgement.

“Maqhinga, this is the shrink...” Oops! “I mean a psychological counselor with a Masters degree in Pyschology,” I say. Maqhinga frowns at me before looking at her and extending his hand for a firm shake. Is it my eyes or that handshake was too sexy?

I look at him. He turns and looks at me.

Now we’re staring at each other.

“You’re comfortable with him being here?”

Dr Wynberg asks me.

I nod, “Yeap.”

“Okay, you can sit there, I’ll get him a chair to sit next to me so that he can observe your emotions throughout the session. I think reading people’s emotions makes you understand them better than just listening

to their voices. Some people sound stronger; what I'm trying to say is eyes don't lie, but the voice can, because we can control it."

She goes out and comes back with an extra chair for Maqhinga.

"How has this week been?" she asks lowering herself back on the chair.

"Great. Actually, it's been the best week I've had in a long time."

She tilts her head to the side with a smile.

"Tell me more," she says.

I take a breath and glance at Maqhinga.

"He gave me a promise bracelet and he's been very nice. I like how he's been treating me," I say.

I see shock in his eyes.

"How does he treat you now compared to before?"

"He doesn't team up with my family against me. He listens when I talk. He doesn't control what I do. He treats me like his best friend, not like his child," I say.

Dr Wynberg looks at him. I don't know if he's happy or saddened by this. He's just staring at me.

"Were you aware of these things before?" she asks him.

"Yes," he says.

"You changed because you were aware or it just happened?"

He sighs and rubs his knees.

"I had a talk with Ndabuko. It was kinda frustrating trying to be better for someone who hates you for no particular reason."

Whaaat?!

"I don't hate you," I say.

"But you said you don't love me, and as far as I know, the opposite of love is hate. That means you hate me," he says.

Dr Wynberg turns her eyes to me. I feel like she's putting me on a spot because now I have to either dismiss or verify what Maqhingisa is saying.

"I don't hate you," I say.

"So you love me?" he asks.

Dr Wynberg chuckles with her hand raised.

“I see that my office is being turned into *emthonsheni*.”

Say what? Both Maqhinga and I laugh. We roll our tongues learning English and they just twist our language anyhow they like.

“Please don’t put pressure on her,” she tells him.

I hope he listens, the Zulu tricks of *uyangifaka noma uyangiphika* won’t work.

“Let’s talk about the little activity I gave you. How did it go?” she asks me.

I take the envelope out of my bag and give it to her. I don’t know if I went too deep, considering the fact that she doesn’t like plants that much. A weird white person she is!

She reads throughout the paper, carefully.

“She called me a Gingko tree,” Maqhinga says.

Well, that has changed, now I see him more like a Tulip tree; tall, bursting flowers during spring and flaunting yellow flowers to decorate the ground under it.

Dr Wynberg looks at me. "His attitude smells like Gingko fruits, or that's all in the past now?" she asks.

"It's all in the past," I say.

She nods and reads more; "Your sister is like Dragon Blood tree. Tell me why is that?"

"Isihlahla somdlebe, really Andiswa?"

Maqhinga asks.

Dr Wynberg gives him a look. He puts his hand up in surrender and leans back on his chair.

"I don't believe in old theories, but if I was to reference to it, I'd say she's a Dragon Blood tree because everyone tiptoes around her because she's who she is. It's like everyone is now scared of Ndondo because if you step on her toes she'll bleed like a Dragon Blood tree and you'd be finished. She's resourceful, loving and definitely close to perfect, but sometimes I feel like she's now this big picture I have to be a photocopy of. Yes, she raised me up, but I'm not her and I'm not her child." I see

something changing in Maqhinga's eyes. I know if he had to take a side between me and Ndondo, he'd definitely take hers without even hearing me out. That's basically how life is, what Ndondo says is what goes. Can I disagree with her? No, because she made me who I am today. Dr Wynberg looks at him. "Do you have anything you want to say?" she asks. "No, I don't," he says. Well, his face says otherwise. He looks at me, "When are you finishing?" "When I'm done talking," I say. "When are you going to be done?" "I just answered you a second ago." "You'll find me in the car." "Don't worry, I'll take a taxi." He stands up and leaves. Back to square one! I turn to Dr Wynberg, "Where were we?" "That's your bestfriend?" I'm not sure if she's telling me or asking. "Baby's father," I say. "You have to meet him halfway."

Oh, she wants to go there!

“You don’t know him,” I say.

“Neither do you. If you knew him you’d know when he’s hurting and when he’s not.

Hurt people don’t have to hurt other people. You have a loving family and a supportive bestfriend, that’s why you’re here. That’s why he was here,” she says.

Seriously, I didn’t do anything today. I didn’t say anything to piss Maqhinga off. Or maybe I missed something?

“What did I do?” I ask her.

“That’s where you become a bestfriend, you go to him and find out.”

Phewww! I leave my bag on her desk and follow behind Maqhinga.

I’ve never ran after anybody in my life.

He’s already started the car. I run towards it. I know he won’t drive away from me. I hope we don’t fall out again, I really like it when we get along.

He stops the car, climbs out and walks around to meet me.

“What happened? Why are you leaving?” I ask.

“Because you’re not fair Andiswa, with anything in life. It’s not even about your parents’ divorce, you’re just not a nice person,” he says.

To say I’m shocked would be an understatement.

I’m not a nice person? Wow!

“What did I do?” I ask.

He shakes his head and collects his thoughts for a moment.

“The things you say to people and about them, you’re never nice. You’re just so cold and ungrateful,” he says.

“Wow, okay.” I’m speechless!

He exhales heavily.

“Maybe therapy will help you. Call me if you need anything.” He turns around and leaves.

My knees tremble. There’s a knot sitting below my stomach. I don’t know when I sat flat on the ground, I just felt my chest tightening and wailed out.

“Andiswa!” His arms wrap around me.

The street is not that busy, there’s no extra attention, just me and him.

He lifts me up and puts his hands over my shoulders.

“Go back inside and finish your session, please,” he says.

“Are you giving up on me?” I ask.

“I never leaned on you to give up on you. You’ve never never given me anything but your pussy. But as I said, I’m here for you, anytime you need me. If you want me to leave, I’ll leave. If you want me to stay, I’ll stay. I genuinely care about you and King. And I care about your family, especially your sister because I know what she’s been through.”

“So you don’t want me to say anything negative about her?” I ask.

“I don’t want anyone to say anything negative about you either. You are sisters, I don’t know the pain she’s going through seeing the person she practically raised turns to hate her, but I sympathize with her.

You're not being fair but she's still looking out for you."

"I don't hate her," I say.

"You don't speak to her. You talk bad about her behind her back. You let her success intimidate you, which I find so absurd, and then try to make her responsible for your own insecurities. Don't be that girl, Andiswa."

I don't know how I feel about this. Him saying all these things to me. He's honest, and maybe half of what he's saying is true, but is it his place? I mean, as my bestfriend who gave me a bracelet.

"I'm going inside to finish my therapy, wait for me," I say.

He raises his eyebrow. I'm attempted to roll my eyes, but I don't.

"PLEASE wait for me," I reconstruct my plea.

He nods, "Okay, I'll wait."

Phewww! I go back to Dr Wynberg office.

CHAPTER SIX

Thalente

I sit across the desk opposite him and hold both his hands. He hasn't been eating, that's why I'm here, to beg him to eat so that he can be home soon.

"Baba, I thought you wanted to come home to your grandson," I say.

He's not even looking at me. He's staring at the wall behind me.

"Baba?" I raise my voice and grab his attention.

"How are you?" I ask.

"I don't want to be in this place."

"I know, I don't want you to be here either. I want you to be okay, baba. Didn't you say you held on all those years to finally meet me and have a relationship with me?" I ask.

“I don’t want to be locked in here. When are you taking me home?”

Phewww! This is not going anywhere.

“When you stop trying to hurt yourself.

Why do you want to put me through such pain? I just found you.”

“I love you, MaMbatha,” he says.

I shake my head, “I’m MaGina, your daughter, and I want to have my father back. Please take the medication and eat, I want you to come home.”

“They will kill me,” he says.

He’s talking about his brother. He’s paranoid, but I understand his fears, they’ve been threatening him ever since they found out he was in Durban. They still believe that he killed their mother. I’m not saying he didn’t, but he wasn’t in his right senses, holding him responsible for the things Nxumalo made him do unconsciously is not fair.

“My husband will protect you. He’s got security keeping an eye everywhere you are,” I say.

“Your husband?” He frowns, “He wants to kill me too.”

It happened way before we found out who he was. Ndlalifa was only trying to fight for Ndabuko, had he known back then that he was my father he wouldn't have pointed a gun at him. He's apologized over and over again, I know my man, he's not perfect but he has a heart.

“Ndlalifa won't kill you,” I assure him.

He doesn't believe me. It looks like I'm freaking him out, somehow.

“I promise you, Baba,” I say.

He nods slowly and pulls his hands. He hides them under the desk and looks around. Then he looks at me and smiles. For a split second I see my father. I love that Nkuthalo took his forehead and not mine.

“I'll come back home,” he says.

I smile, “Really? That means you're going to take medication and eat?”

“Yes,” he nods.

He's positive for once. I'm excited and looking forward to him spending time with

Nkuthalo. I'm sure he'll love his grandfather.

I have to talk to Ndlalifa about him moving in with us so that I can personally take care of him.

I walk into a tall man in an apron, busy in my kitchen with a baby on the floor staring at his every move. This sight I'm gazing at is exactly why I got married. I stand by the door and watch them.

"He didn't cry, not even for a minute," he says.

I sigh and walk in.

"How did you see me?" I ask.

"I saw the forehead first," he says.

I roll my eyes and throw my bag on the counter and pick Nkuthalo from the floor. He's wearing smart clothes that I bought for special occasions.

"Why did you put him in this shirt?"

"Is it not his?" he asks.

“It is, but it’s too expensive for him to wear to sit in the house.” He should’ve googled its price. If I wasn’t shopping with Ndondo I would’ve bought a goat instead of a shirt, but I didn’t want to look poor, I spent R1350 on a mere shirt.

“Nothing is too expensive for my son,” he says.

I’m not arguing with his black ass today. He’ll ruin my mood but I’ll end up kissing him because I’m stupid in love.

“What are you cooking?” I ask sitting on the kitchen stool.

“Macaroni, mince and cheese. I thought I was cooking for me and Nkuthalo,” he says.

“Maybe we should take cooking turns. I cook Monday, Wednesday, Friday and you cook Tuesday, Thursday and braai Sunday.”

“How many cows are you going to pay for me?” he asks.

“How many babies are you going to push out for me?” I ask.

He breaks a brief chuckle and shakes his head. His 11 cows aren't shit to what I went through delivering his son.

"I'm not promising anything," he says. "I work Thalente. The taxi industry is not easy as it looks. I don't just go, fold my arms and watch taxis drive in and out of town. I don't wake up in the morning and leave you and my son in bed to go have fun."

"That's not what I was trying to say," I say. "I know, I'm just saying I cannot come back from work and cook. If you need helping hands just let me know and we'll figure it out."

I feel my eyes getting moist. I wipe the corners with my fingers.

"Are you crying?" He panicks, puts down the dishcloth and comes to me.

"I'm okay," I quickly pull myself together.

"You took me too serious about the cooking thing," I say.

He chuckles, "I know it can get too much, so I understand. How is your father?"

"He's coming home soon. He promised me," I say.

"Oh, that's good to know." His eyebrow is raised though.

I stare at him, waiting for him to ask whatever he wants to ask.

"Did he promise to start taking medication?" he asks.

"Yes, and I promised him that he'll stay with us," I say.

"You did what?" He frowns.

"Is it a problem?" I ask.

"Yes, Thalente, it's a problem. I can't live with my wife's father. That would be me losing my freedom."

"How, Ndlalifa?" I ask.

"I can't touch you anyhow in front of him. I have to watch how I speak to you, I can't just ask about my cookie when he's around. Damn, I won't even be able to walk around the house half-naked."

"Okay, you have a point. Instead of bringing him here, I'll go and stay with him for a few weeks," I say.

“Visit him, yes. Stay with him, no.”

“Are you serious?” I’m shocked.

“Dead serious. I’ll get your father someone who’ll look after him. I have no problem with him and I want him to get better so that you can have a relationship with him. But if that means I have to lose you for him to have you then I...” I stop him with a hand. He’s taking it too far.

“I said stay with him for a few weeks, you won’t be losing me,” I say.

“Okay,” he says and goes back to his pot. I guess we’re now having a fight. I did see it coming, he always hates it when I leave, even when I go home, which is why I suggested that my father comes to stay with us.

I put Nkuthalo on the floor and go to him behind the stove. I wrap my arms around his waist.

He tenses up.

“Can we talk about it? Please,” I beg.

He exhales heavily.

“I said it’s okay, Thalente. You can go and stay with him.”

I know him too well to believe this.

“I’m scared he’s going to do something and I won’t be there to help him. He’s also scared. He only has me in this world. Everyone hates him as if he’s responsible for what was done to him. He needs a lot of support.”

“I hear you, sthandwa sami. He’s your father, I understand. He’ll move in with us, I’ll have to forget that it’s my house and behave myself for a while.”

I release a sigh of relief.

“Thank you, Hlomuka. What would you like me to do to show my gratitude?” I ask.

“Throw away those pills in the drawer,” he says.

My eyes widen. Is he out of his mind?

Nkuthalo is not even one, and already he wants to make me pregnant the second time. Does he know what I went through asking nurses for a poo-bucket and end up not using it. I went to the hospital with nice

box braids and came back with only six of them. I pulled some out during labor. I couldn't cut my hair short, even though I had damaged my scalp, because my mother said Nkuthalo will die if I cut my hair before he turns one. So I now wear wigs, but that's not the point for now, this man wants to get me pregnant- that's why I'm ranting.

He raises his eyebrow, "What?"

"You want a second baby?" I ask.

"Nkuthalo gets bored. We're being nice parents and giving him someone to play with." He's trying to be a sweet-talker, but he's naturally not one. His words sound sharper than he intended. I only heard a twisted; "You're a baby-making machine, get rid of the pills so that I can knock you up."

"You remember that I said I want to go to work?" I ask.

"Yes, I'm waiting to hear from you and Ndondo," he says.

"I'm glad you remember because what you're asking from me doesn't show that you do," I say.

"I wasn't going to ask you anything, you gave me the platform and I used it," he says with a chuckle.

"I didn't know you're the type that asks for the whole arm when given a hand."

"You want to give me a hand?" He turns to me with a stupid grin.

Oh, Dear Lord!

"I didn't say a hand job, that was a metaphor, similar or whatever. But I didn't literally mean a hand," I say.

"Say what you mean, Mrs Hlomuka. You excite sleeping members and wake them up with your poetic lines."

This is my cue to leave.

He laughs as I pick Nkuthalo and grab my bag from the counter.

"Run, big girl. Run from a tiny organ that can't even talk," he says behind me.

Tiny, really? And who said it can't talk, these two always talk when they meet.

Don't ask me what do they say, I can't hear
their brrrr languages.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Andiswa

Ndondo hasn't done anything wrong- these words kept replaying in my mind. Maqhinga was right. Something is wrong with me and I'm taking my frustrations out to a wrong person. She was made with love, she worked her way up, she found love before getting pregnant, and she makes sure that her life is orderly. None of the things happening in my life is her fault. I let her intimidate me by comparing myself to her. There's a knock at the door. I know it's Maqhinga, I called him and asked him to come and pick me up. I can drive myself- Ndondo's car is still with me and my allowance still reports every month-

but I also wanted to have a moment with Maqhinga.

I know I can do better. Dr Wynberg complimented me for realizing that something was wrong. It was the first step forward, and I'm here now, ready to face my demons.

I open the door for him, "Hello."

"Hi, Andiswa." He looks around for any signs of mom and finds none. She went to Nyandeni, I don't know what's the tea, I'll be going there too to have a talk with my father.

"Where's your mom?" he asks.

"She went to Nyandeni," I say.

He frowns, "Why? Is your father not there?"

"Maybe they want to sort things out. I don't know."

"How would you feel if they do that?" he asks.

I shrug, "I don't know. I think both of them deserve better than old versions of each other. If they can work it out I guess I'll hold my breath and pray for the best."

“What about us?” he asks.

“Have you forgotten what Dr Wynberg said to you?”

He smiles. I notice that the upper corner of his lip always curves up when he smiles. It’s so cute. He smiles bright as a kid. And he has nicely shaped eyebrows. How old is he again? 30. Not that bad.

“I’m not ugly. It’s just that God was rushing, so many of us were born on the 10th of August, it was a busy day for the man,” he says.

What a way for one to defend his look!
I choke down a laugh and lead him to my bedroom.

“I bought something for you,” I say.

“Okay, what is it? I hope it’s not poison.”
Really? I’m not cruel. Well, at least not to that extent.

I open my wardrobe and take it out. It’s nothing out of this world, just a T-shirt I made for him with King’s name on it.

“What’s this?” He sees exactly what it is.
His lips have stretched to his ears.

He takes off the one he was wearing and puts the new one on.

“I love this. But how did you know my size?” he asks.

“I just asked them to make it for a skinny, tall man.”

“I’m not skinny. See, I have a belly and some abs.”

I see no abs. He’s not skinny as he used to be, the taxi rank did the Lord’s work, but he still doesn’t have the belly. Not that I want him to have one, I love his springy-self.

“I really appreciate this. Where is yours?” he asks.

I laugh. I wasn’t trying to make His & Hers kind of wear.

“I didn’t make a T-shirt for myself. I went to Dr Zulu for an ultrasound.”

“What? And you didn’t tell me?” he asks.

“It’s a surprise, relax. So, I have pictures and I recorded his heartbeat.”

His face melts. “Really?”

“Yes, I love King. I know everyone has doubts but I’m going to be a good mother.

That's why I want to mend things with Ndondo and my father before he arrives. I want to be in a good mental space."

"You're going to mend things with Ndondo?" he asks.

"Yes, today," I say.

He stares at me for a good moment.

"You don't think I'll be nice?" I ask.

"No, it's not that. I'm just worried as I should be. Are you sure about this? Because the last thing you want is to make matters worse."

Can he believe in me for once in his life?!

"How am I going to make matters worse?" I ask.

"By calling her a Dragon Blood tree," he says.

I don't know if I should laugh or cry. I'm not that stupid.

"Are you coming with me?" I ask.

"No. I will drop you and leave. I don't want her to think I put you into it. This is your decision, you see your wrongs and you are genuinely sorry."

He has a point. Ndondo may think the apology doesn't come from me if Maqhinga is with me.

I grab my sweater and a packet of choc sweets. I'm ready to humble myself. Trust me, it took a lot of self introspection.

Ndabuko is outside their garden and watering the plants. He's not that much into my issues with Ndondo. We still talk as we used to. I stop for a brief chat before walking into the house.

Baby Nhla is trying to climb onto the coffee-table. I think his target is the vase on top of it.

"Hey baby,"

He stops and looks at me. He's not even frightened, I guess he doesn't get reprimanded for climbing tables.

I pick him for a cheek kiss and ask how he is. He responds and drops saliva on me.

Unfortunately, I cannot hear a thing he says.

Ndondo comes from the kitchen with a slight frown that disperses when she sees me.

“I was wondering who he’s talking to,” she says with relief and goes back to the kitchen.

I play with Nhla while trying to mentally plan my approach. I have to be apologetic, that means I cannot argue with her or defend my behavior in anyway. I cannot reject her opinions of me.

Oh, I bet she has a lot of them.

I stand with my hands balanced on the counter. She doesn’t turn to look at me, she’s cleaning her microwave.

“Where’s your helper?” I ask.

“I gave her a day-off,” she says.

Okay! Breathe.

“How are you?” I ask.

“You could’ve called to find out, Andiswa. Why are you here? Why do you want to be around someone you hate so much?”

“I don’t hate you,” I say.

“The things you say about me show that you do. If I’m a bad person as you say, why are you here?” she asks.

“I’m here to say I’m sorry. I know I haven’t been kind to you, and everyone around me, I saw an enemy in everyone. I guess I’m at the stage where I’m not happy with life and I don’t know how to handle my fears and insecurities.”

She exhales heavily and turns around to stand face to face with me.

“You’re not a product of rape, neither is Bahle. Mom and Dad had their highs and lows. He has his past traumas and demons, but inside that hard shell he’s a scared, little boy who’s never experienced true love from anyone, other than us. You know his problem, right?”

I frown, “What problem now?”

“I shouldn’t be telling you this, but he’s not okay down there. It doesn’t grow, that’s one of the things that made him an insecure monster that he was to Mom. I talk to her about everything, she’s never mentioned

being raped to conceive you, or any regret for that matter. They both love you and Bahle, there are no regrets or arguments when it comes to you guys."

I think I need water, and to sit down. It's weird hearing such things about your father. How am I going to look at him and not think about this?

"Is it a disability?" I ask.

"It's like a curse, he's the product of incest."

My poor father! I cannot hate you, even though what you did to Mom was cruel.

Because of your past, I understand. Chances of you being a normal man were very slim.

"Do you think it can be genetic?"

"No, Andiswa. King will be fine."

God knows I'd die if my son comes out with an abnormal penis because of his great-grandparents' sins.

"I'll go to Nyandeni and talk to him," I tell her.

"He'd appreciate that. He always says he misses you, but he doesn't want to anger you," she says.

"Do you forgive me?" I ask her.

"You're a child, Andiswa. To me you'll always be one, even when you think you're old and better without me. I don't hold any grudge against you, I just want to see you become a better person and stop hurting people who love you," she says.

"Thank you. I'm trying to get back on track. I miss my family."

"So you and Maqhinga are together now?" she asks.

I clear my throat and reach for my water to take a sip.

"He's my bestfriend," I say.

"Oh, that's all?" she asks.

I'm not sure where she stands when it comes to Maqhinga and I, considering that she had a panic attack when she found out I was pregnant by him.

"We do hang out and have fun," I say.

"Sexual fun?" She raises her eyebrow.

"Kind of," I say.

"I'm not going to give you any lecture. I want you to be happy, if what he gives you

for fun makes you happy then I cannot say anything.”

That’s all I want from her. A bit of faith.

“I’m glad we talked. I was actually planning something for you. I know you don’t like people at times, I was like that too when I was pregnant with Nhla. So I’ll make it small, with only us and your friends.”

“What is it?” I ask.

“A baby shower,” she says.

Oh, shut up! This is going to be great.

“You know my taste, right? I can recommend a décor for you.”

“No, I’m planning, you’re the guest of honor. Don’t worry, I’ll keep it up to your standards.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

Bhekizitha "Ngonyama" Ngidi

It's been two weeks since he had a conversation with Nhleko. He tried to call him after he heard that he was discharged from the hospital, but Nhleko made excuses not to meet.

But eventually he called and gave him the address to his house. Today they're meeting, hopefully they'll have a fruitful conversation about their true identities.

He finds the gate open and drives inside the yard. He doesn't have taxis on this route, so he's not that familiar with the place. He steps out of his car and looks around to take in the surroundings. Not that bad. As a business-minded person he can make money around here.

“You can come in, Ngonyama,” Nhleko says.

He nods and follows him inside the two-bedroom house with cracky walls.

There’s an old, single couch leaning by the living room wall. It’s where he should sit, Nhleko has brought a bench for himself.

“I’m glad we could meet,” Ngidi says.

Nhleko rolls a stray of his hair. He looks like Ngidi, yet acts so differently from him. He doesn’t like eye-contact that much. He usually says what he has to say and keeps his other opinions to himself. You cannot tell whether he’s cruel or kind-hearted because he’s such a close book.

“So how were you related to my grandmother?” Ngidi asks.

“She was my grandmother. I have Coke, do you drink it?”

Out of respect, Ngidi nods.

He goes to the kitchen and comes back with 2L of Coke and two glasses.

He pours for Ngidi, fills up the glass and passes it to him.

“Babhekile is, or was, my mother. Never met her. Never heard anything from her. Never read a letter from her. She gave birth to me, that’s how she was my mother,” he says.

The glass in Ngidi’s hand nearly spills down.

“So when you asked me about her it wasn’t because I was dodging the question, I don’t know anything about the woman except for her name.”

Ngidi shakes his head. He can’t say he’s lying because this man is a photocopy of him, together they resemble his father.

“When were you born?” he asks.

“24 March 1961,” Nhleko says.

This got to be a joke!

“That’s my date of birth.”

Nhleko chuckles, “Gogo did mention something about a twin. But to be honest with you, I was not interested, my parents were ready to sacrifice me so that you can live. If my grandmother didn’t steal me from the kitchen where I was wrapped in an

old blanket and left for an old family man to murder me, I wouldn't be alive today."

"Which old man?" Ngidi frowns.

"He was either your grandfather or close relative, all I know is that your parents wanted me dead. Gogo had to take me to her family to hide me. I grew up there, when I turned 10 she reached out to Babhekile and told her the big secret, guess what she did? She said she was coming to visit. I waited. Days turned into weeks, weeks turned into months and months turned into years. She never showed up. One morning we got a message that she was dead, together with her kids and husband. Then I thought maybe I was lucky she didn't want me because I would've died too."

Ngidi inhales sharply. There's a lot going on in his mind right now. His chest is burning, because him narrating that unfortunate incident so carelessly has evoked a lot of emotions.

"I'm the only one who survived," he says.

There's a moment of silence.

He puts down his glass and walks out for fresh air. How can his mother do something like this? He understands his father was a man of power, he was likely to eliminate anything that was said to be a hindrance on his way, but his mother was a kind woman. He never visited his grandmother because he was made to believe that she didn't love his mother, or him. Had he known that he had a brother, not just a brother but a twin, he would've did everything in his power to have a relationship with him. He's always been confused by his twin-daughters because neither did his family nor Magcina's had a twin history. So he thought it just happened, but now it turns out he's a twin too. They were separated at birth.

He walks back inside the living room and finds Nhleko staring into space with a glass of Coke in his hand.

He sits. Nhleko turns his eyes to him. For a brief moment they're staring at one another.

“I never had an easy life,” Ngidi says. “They were brutally killed before I even turned 20. I had no one, absolutely no one! I slept at the taxi rank, ate from dustbins and dodged bullets. I had to grow up fast. When I found someone I started a family, but just like everyone, she didn’t stay. She left me with two kids and never came back. Almost 3 decades later I found out she gave birth to my twin daughters and passed on. I was sad, yet happy that I had found my children. But as my fate would have it, one of the twins committed suicide in the most mysterious way. I still don’t understand, maybe it’s just how life is supposed to be for me. I fell in love again with a woman who raised the twins, who happened to be her sister. I’ve been happy for a year now, but now I’m finding out about this. It’s just a circle of pain that I can’t break.” He sighs and covers his face with his hand.

Nhleko nods, sympathetic.

“I didn’t know anything about you. I only know the Ngidi side of the family, shortly

after they were killed one of the aunts took me in but it didn't work out. I've been alone ever since I was a teenager. I had no legacy, no nothing."

"So they never talked about me? Not even once?" Nhleko asks.

He hates himself for asking. He doesn't care, why is he asking.

"No, they didn't. Not while I was around," Ngidi says.

"It makes sense. I was dead in their hearts. They never loved me even for a second, they chose me straight from birth that I was going to be the twin of sacrifice."

"I wish I can answer for them, but I can't." Nhleko extends his hand for a shake, "I'm happy to meet you at last. How old are we now?"

"My son says 70," Ngidi chuckles and firmly shakes his hand.

"I'm old, but not that old," Nhleko says laughing.

Now that they've talked about the parents issue they can talk about themselves as Bhekizitha and Mzobanzi. There's so much to talk about!

He called everyone. His sons, their wives and grandkids. There's an announcement he needs to make.

Phumzile suspected what may be happening and dutied the girls to cook a feasty dinner.

Nomkhosi is heavily pregnant, everyone has decided to let her deal with the issue of her babydaddy the way she sees fit.

Maqhinga arrived with Andiswa, she's carrying a Ngidi, that makes her family. Snalo invited Mondli. They have their highs and lows. Mondli has found his feet again, but with a babymama like Snalo he's likely not to have a peaceful life. Nobody knows if they're in a romantic relation or a genuine

friendship, but everyone is fond of Mondli so he's welcome.

"Who knows what's happening?" Ndlalifa asks, coming in at last with his family.

"Me, but I won't say anything," Maqhinga.

"You won't even tell me?" Snalo stares at him.

"Not this time, Twinnie, sorry."

Ndondo and Nomkhosi set the table outside the balcony. Ngidi arrives when everyone is sat. He's with someone, or someone is with Ngidi. Who's Ngidi between them and who's someone?

"Wait a minute, who's my Dad?" Snalo asks.

Both him and Nhleko stand, looking at everyone. They're wearing white shirts and grey pants. There's no telling them apart.

"I'm getting dizzy. What's going on?"

Nomkhosi asks.

"Ma, please take your husband," Ndlalifa says.

Phumzile laughs and directs her eyes to the real Ngidi. She cannot confuse someone she sleeps next to every night.

Ngidi smiles and hugs her before sitting down next to her.

He shows Nhleko a chair and sits.

“I’m glad everyone made it. We have a new addition to the family. I’m sure everyone is confused,” Ngidi says.

“I’m not confused,” Maqhinga says.

“Shut up, wena. So, two weeks ago Maqhinga saw this man and just like all of you, he was taken back by his resemblance of me. I had to find out what was going on.”

“You have a twin?” Snalo asks.

“Yes, I have a brother and we are twins. So, please meet and welcome Mzobanzi Nhleko, a Ngidi by blood. You all call him Baba though, not Mzobanzi,” he says.

Ndlalifa is the first to leave his seat and goes to hug Nhleko. He’s just a young photocopy of him. He introduces himself and his wife and son. They chat briefly before he steps

aside for others to introduce themselves as well.

It takes a moment for him to melt and feel welcomed. Phumzile has warm hands, even though the kids get too much and overwhelming at times, today she's able to ensure that everything goes smoothly.

"Where is your wife?" Snalo asks randomly, when nobody expects it.

Ngidi gives her a look, but it's not firm enough. He just can't reprimand her, not even when he wants to.

"I'm gay," Nhleko says.

There are gasps!

Then silence...

"Then where's your husband?" Snalo.

Nhleko laughs. They are still in shock. He doesn't stop laughing, so they join in and laugh too.

"My wife and kids are back home, in Melmoth," he says after a moment.

Maqhingha gulps down his drink. "I was about to faint. A whole 70 year old gay, I was choking in my breath."

"I'm not 70," Nhleko says.

"Yes, you are. Both of you are 70. No, in fact you're 100. We're breathing the same air with our ancestors here."

Ndlalifa clears his throat, "You were shot, did I hear that right?"

"Yes, two weeks ago but it wasn't that bad," Nhleko says.

"But it could've been bad. Do you know who did it?"

Thalente turns her eyes to him. He scratches the side of his face.

"I just want to pray for God to forgive them because they didn't know what they were doing," he says.

Everyone laughs.

"MaMbatha is the best. One look and the man turns into a Christian," Ngidi says.

Again, Ndlalifa is being laughed at.

They have their good times as a family.

Hopefully with an additional elder in the family there'll be more good times, than sad times. There's a lot to adjust to, but he looks strong like all of them, he'll fit in.

CHAPTER NINE

Dumisani Sibisi

He's received counseling both from church and professional psychologists. It's been hard adjusting in the rural areas, but it's been peaceful. He's at peace with almost everything, except that he doesn't have a relationship with his daughter, Andiswa, and Nomagugu still hasn't decided on the future of their marriage. He's going through each day with his breath held up. Anyday he could be summoned with divorce papers.

Today he accompanied Maqhawe to fetch cows from the veld. When they come back, approaching from the bottom of the yard, he sees Nomagugu's Toyota Etios parked

by the yard's entrance. His heart almost leaps to his throat. Nobody told him she was coming, not even Ndondo.

"She's here," he says in a shaky voice.

"I'm surprised. I had no idea she was coming."

His legs start trembling, but he walks on.

"I wonder what's bringing her here? I hope the kids are okay," Maqhawe says.

"They're okay, Ndondo would've said something if anything had happened. I think she's here to officially end our marriage," he says.

"Let's not jump into conclusions. Go and freshen up. I'll manage here alone, I still need to check the black calf's wound."

He wishes the clock could turn. He needs more time. He's not ready for the official divorce. Without papers he could pray and still ask God for a second chance.

Sometimes you don't know what you have until it's gone. He had a wonderful wife, he never tried to make her fall in love with him, he never gave himself a chance either.

But now he wants it all back. He wants to start over. That's the mother of his children, and now he believes, his only love too. He quickly freshens up and dresses in the lime shirt she got him for his 45th birthday and combs his hair. Had he known she was coming he would've gone to town and had a proper hair cut.

It's almost dinner time. He should be stepping out of this rondavel and going to join the family. But he's scared, he's still pacing up and down, silently praying for the best but expecting the worst.

There's a knock at the door. He takes a deep breath before opening.

It's her. He stands still, his heart is heavily pounding against his chest, his hands are shaky.

"Sibisi," she says walking in with a brown envelope in her hand.

His legs fail him. He slowly sits on bed and bows his head.

“I thought we should talk before dinner, I’ll be leaving early in the morning,” she says. He doesn’t lift his head.

“You know what’s left for us; signatures.”

The lump rises up from his chest to his throat. He keeps his head down, for a moment there’s no response.

Then there’s a sob.

“You can’t be seriously crying for a wife you never loved. Or you’re crying because you can’t hit anyone now, you can’t force your finger-dick inside anyone and you can’t call anyone names? Sign the papers, Dumisani!”

“Nomagugu, I’m so sorry. Please, don’t divorce me.” He’s openly crying. So much for a man who’s been making others cry for years!

He falls down on his knees.

“Nomagugu, I know I did you wrong. Please give me another chance, I don’t want to lose you.”

“You lost me the first day you put your hands on me,” she says.

“What’s going to become of me? I cannot live without you. I cannot live without my kids and family. Please soften your heart and accept my apology.” He’s crying painfully.

She’s tempted to lift him up and give him a hug. But her heart fights against it. She’s made a decision to protect herself from this man, she needs to stand by it.

“I’m not staying in this marriage. Please sign the papers, this doesn’t have to turn into an ugly battle. We have kids and this has already taken a strain on them.”

“I love you, Nomagugu. I don’t have a life if I don’t have you,” he says.

She sighs.

This is nothing she expected, this dramatic act.

“Please, do it for your kids, sign the papers,” she begs.

He shakes his head, tears flooding his face, and heads to the door.

“Don’t leave Dumisani, I want a divorce,” she says firmly.

He stops at the door, looks back at her and shuts it. He turns the key and locks it.

“Dumisani, you said you’ve changed!” She makes her way towards the door, he blocks her way and pushes her back.

“I love you,” he says pushing her to bed.

“I’ll scream for Maqhawe to come and save me.”

He exhales and puts his hands over her shoulders. He doesn’t look violent, so she lets her guard down.

“Nomagugu, I don’t want to sign these papers,” he says.

“You have to. You don’t have a choice, this marriage is over.”

He shakes his head, “No!”

“Dumisani, don’t make this harder that it should be.”

His hands wrap her neck, he brings her closer, for a kiss, maybe. Nomagugu turns her face to the side. She just wants the papers signed, nothing else. His hands start tightening around her neck. Her eyes widen. No, he’s not doing this to her again!

“Dumi....” He strangles her neck and pushes her down on bed. She cannot scream, his hands are pressing on her neck harder with each second.

She starts kicking her legs, trying to gasp for air, but he doesn’t let go.

“I’m sorry, Gugu lami. Let’s meet again in the other world, maybe we’ll have a better life in the world of no pain and no sorrow.”

She lies still, with no impulse.

He closes her eyes and kisses her lips one last time.

Then he takes a pen and a piece of paper;

**To our two princesses and one prince,
please stay strong and always remember
that we loved you all very much. We shall
meet again!**

**Kind Regards,
Mom and Dad.**

Jabu comes out of the bathroom and finds Maqhawe still sitting alone. She frowns and asks, "What's keeping Nomagugu and Bhut' Dumisani?"

"I'm sure they're not having an easy conversation," Maqhawe says.

"But still, they've taken too long. I'll go and check what's keeping them. The food is getting cold, they can talk after we've eaten."

Maqhawe lets her be. His heart bleeds for his brother. His worst fears have become a reality. This is the moment he was dreading the most; to finally end it on the paper. A part of him believes he can be a better husband if he gets another chance. But then again, he has to consider Nomagugu's feelings. She's right to ask for a divorce. Dumisani has been hurting her for years. She held on for the sake of her kids, now that they know and want her out of this marriage as well, there's nothing forcing her to stay.

"Baba!" he hears Jabu's voice yelling.

He quickly goes out to check what's scaring her.

She's standing outside Dumisani's rondavel.

"Why are you yelling?" he asks.

"The door is locked. Nobody answers when I knock," she says.

Maqhawe pushes her aside and knocks.

"Dumisani open the door," he says.

There's no response.

He knocks again. Nothing.

He turns to the window and tries to peep in but doesn't see anything with the curtain closed.

"Dumisani, if you don't open now I'm breaking this door," he threatens.

Still, there's no movement.

He picks a block by the kraal and throws it across the locked door. It'll take a moment for him to be able to break it. He's now panicking. A lot could've happened in the 10 minutes he thought they were using to discuss their future.

Jabu helps him by bringing objects closer. They're calling both Nomagugu and Dumisani, begging them to open the door. Finally the door breaks, they push it and rush inside.

Nomagugu is lying in bed, on her back, with her eyes closed.

Jabu lifts her eyes up and sees Dumisani's lifeless body hanging from a rope. She lets out a scream and runs out crying hysterically.

Dumisani is gone. He killed himself. The mystery now is Nomagugu.

"Gugu," Maqhawe.

No response.

He puts his hand at the side of her neck.

There's nothing.

"He killed her! He killed the mother of my child. What am I going to tell Ndondo?

Dumisani, how can you do this to me?"

Within a few minutes their neighbours have poured in to hear what's going on. There are two lifeless bodies in one rondavel.

Maqhawe is losing his mind, Nomagugu is hysterical.

CHAPTER TEN

Ndondo Mngomezulu

I don't understand. Why would he drop a call on me? So he thinks I'll just up and leave everything I'm doing here. Andiswa may have promised to correct her behavior but I'm sure she'll flip if I just tell her, at this minute, to pack her bags and come with me to Nyandeni.

I call Mam' Jabu, maybe she can talk to her husband for me.

Luckily, she picks up.

"Ma, I just got a call from Bab' Maqhawe, he wants me to just leave everything I'm doing and..."

"Mntanami, you're speaking to MaZikalala across the river," says the woman on the phone.

I check my screen. I'm indeed calling Mam' Jabu.

"Where's Mam' Jabu?" I ask.

"Mntanami, please come home with your sister. Your father has fallen ill, things are not good," she says.

"Which father? Bab' Maqhawe or my father?" It's actually vice-versa, but I grew up knowing Dumisani as my father, I can't change now.

"Your father from Durban," she says.

That's how they call him in the village, Sibisi from Durban.

"Okay, I'm on my way. Can you give him the phone? I want to talk to him," I ask.

"You'll talk to him when you get here," she says.

Shocker! Now I can't even speak to my father.

"Oh, okay, I'll be there in a few hours."

To make things easy I call the babydaddy and tell him to get Andiswa ready for Nyandeni in 30 minutes. I don't know how sick my father is, I know they both wanted

to talk and sort things out, the time for that is now.

They have to put their differences aside. I'm glad Mom is there too.

We had many stops on the road. Ice-cream stops, pee stops, breathing stops and every other shit she felt like stopping the car for. I don't know how Maqhinga deals with her. She needs to pop this baby out now, I'm tired of her drama.

It's almost 9pm when we arrive at Nyandeni. All outside lights are. I see Mom's car and Qondani's. This idiot didn't tell me he was home. We haven't hung out in a long time. I hope Zamafuze is not pregnant again, they're planting ideas in Ndabuko's head. I heard Thalente complaining about the same thing; Ndlalifa wants another child. Maybe they see us as baby-making machines.

"Why is everyone here? Jeez, the crowd!" Andiswa complains before we even step out of the car.

Something doesn't look right here.
Everyone is staring at us as we climb out of the car with our bags. Neighbors, strangers and induna, everyone is here. My heart starts beating abnormally. Someone is dead, that's the only logic explanation of this.
"Where's my mom?" I ask.
Mam' Jabu appears. Her eyes are swollen.
"Where's my dad?" I ask her.
"Please come and sit down."
I hold Andiswa's hand, deep down in my heart I know that I've lost someone, I pull her to the couch.
There's Bab' Maqhawe sitting on one-seater couch opposite the one we sat on.
"So my father died? I called and a woman from across the river said he had fallen ill."
I'm angry, that's the only way I can cope with this for now.
"What?" Andiswa.
"I don't know how to say this," Bab' Maqhawe.

“Just say it. Or rather tell us what was wrong with him? Where’s Mom by the way?” I stand and look around.

“They left us, Ndondo. Dumisani and Nomagugu left us.”

I sit with a frown on my face.

“Where did they go?” Andiswa asks.

I want to know as well. Where did they go?

“They were in the rondavel, discussing their divorce. We were here waiting for them to finish and join us for dinner.” He stops and releases a sigh. “We realized that they had taken too long, Mam’ Jabu went to check and found the door locked. I broke down the door because they were not answering. Dumisani strangled her to death and then killed himself. It all happened in 10 minutes.”

No, this is a prank!

He’s gonna say he’s joking.

They’re not dead. Not in one day. My father was not kind, we’ve learnt that, but he cared about us, his children. He wouldn’t take our mother away from us and then kill himself.

“You’re lying,” Andiswa says.

Mam’ Jabu starts crying. This is not a game. Everyone cries with her. I feel my soul deserting my body.

“Noooooo!” Andiswa screams.

Dad, how can you do this to us? You could’ve left if you didn’t want us anymore, why take our mother with you?

I’ve been numb the whole week. I never thought one day I’d be preparing to bury both my parents in one day. They dug his grave next to hers, I felt like scratching my nipples when I saw it. Why is he even getting buried with the Sibisis? He should be thrown in the forest for wild animals to eat. I don’t even know what to say to Bahle. He’s too young to go through this. Couldn’t they wait until he was 17 at least? Why leave me with their little boy and unstable

pregnant daughter? How am I supposed to get it together?

I feel hands wiping my cheeks. I look up and see my husband. He took the whole week off to help Qondani with everything that needs men.

“You’re not alone,” he says.

I nod. He pulls me in for a tight hug.

I should be dressing up for the service.

Their beloved congregants are already humming sad harmonies inside the tent.

“I know exactly what you’re going through.

You don’t have to be strong for anyone.

Snalo is looking after Andiswa, cry as much as you want, you’re burying your parents.

I’ll take care of Bahle.”

I think I’ve cried enough. They’re not coming back. But I appreciate him coming here and saying this. I’ve been getting a lot of “**Be Strong**” messages from colleagues. I don’t want to be strong, not when I just lost both my parents in such a harsh way.

I join the service, we have chairs at the front. Their coffins are a few feet in front of us. Snalo is keeping an eye on Andiswa. She keeps fanning her face and giving her water. It must be Maqhinga's orders. Nomkhosi couldn't make it, the control-freak that's her babydaddy told her not to come with the baby. I know that, but because it came from him I decided not to understand. I don't like him, the same way Nomkhosi didn't like Ndabuko. They're about wrap the service when a girl comes with a piercing scream. Andiswa has stopped crying, this girl is taking us back to square one. Who is she by the way? She's younger than Andiswa, but not that much. She falls down on her knees. "Why, Baba? Why?" They have to get her up. She's getting hysterical. MaZikalala rushes to her and tries to comfort her. She's having none of it. She just wants to know why.

Surprisingly, she's calling our father her father. Imhlola kaJames!

They finally manage to calm her down.

She's being taken out by a woman, I think she was called KaMajola, I remember her from church years ago, I was still a child.

"Your father had another child?" Snalo asks on our way to the cemetery.

"Did you see her mother? She used to be a church member, I'm so angry at the man in that coffin. Like what the fuck, bru?!"

"You had no idea?" She's appalled.

"I'm telling you, stand close to me after the funeral because you might need to hold me from attacking someone. That girl looks a little younger than Andiswa. They made a fool out of my mother."

"He seriously cheated and exposed his disability like that?"

I cannot laugh at my parents' funeral, but hey this man was brave. So brave!

We say goodbye to the people we've known since we first opened our eyes in this world. Mom is not here to tell us what happened. Dumisani is not here to tell us why either. Coffins are lowered down, we throw soil to bid them goodbye and leave without turning our heads back.

"Please wait for her," someone calls behind us.

We cannot turn our heads to look at the person we have to wait for.

"Did you know anything about that girl?" Andiswa asks me.

"No, I'm still in shock," I say.

"I'm glad I didn't forgive him. It would've been a waste of time. He still had a child outside his marriage, he still killed Mom and turned us into orphans," she says.

"It'll take time for me to forget this day. Was he that heartless? He could've stopped himself, but he made sure he strangles her to death."

There are footsteps running behind us as we walk down to the river to bath.

Jesus Christ, it's Andiswa's sister! These people have no timing, after years of hiding themselves they're now just shoving themselves down our throat.

"And who are you?" Andiswa asks.

"I'm Zime Sibisi," she says.

"Dumisani was your father?" I ask.

"Yes, but I didn't see him very often. Maybe twice a year. I live in Ladysmith with my mother."

"So he'd visit you there twice a year?" I ask.

"Yes, or ask that we meet in town. I don't think you guys knew about me, but I think uMa knew because one day she called my mother and talked to her." Little body, big mouth!

"I'm Ndondo, this is Andiswa, Bahle was in the tent with us. I guess we are all siblings, even though I wasn't his biological child," I say.

"I'm happy to meet you, even though it's under difficult..." Andiswa starts singing before she even finishes.

Dear Lord, the drama that awaits me in this family. The mess that Dumisani left behind!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Thalente

Things happen. I think everyone was shocked by what Mr Sibisi did. I found myself waking up in the middle of the night and checking if Ndlalifa wasn't strangling me. Fear men, fear these creatures! He didn't even think about Bahle, their little boy. I cannot imagine how Ndondo is feeling. Now both Andiswa and Bahle are hers to raise. Andiswa will surely give her a headache. Hopefully becoming a mother will change her attitude. If I was Ndondo I would've beaten crap out of her ass. That child is so disrespectful, I don't even know how Maqhinga manages with her.

Anyway, today I got a call from the hospital. My old man kept his promises, he's coming home today. I've arranged his room, removed any object he might use to harm himself- you can't easily trust him. I'm so excited, I took Nkuthalo with me to fetch him from the hospital. He's also excited to finally meet his grandfather. By that I mean I'm excited on his behalf too. Nkuthalo doesn't even know that I was born too. As far as his little brains are concerned, I don't have parents and I can't cry. He thinks he's the only one who can cry. One day I must surprise him and cry while he's crying as well. I'm also a child to my parents.

Oh yes, I drive now. I don't have a car to my name yet but I drive any car I want from the garage. I failed Learners twice before I finally got it and went on to get my License. I'm officially a driver, I can't stand the passenger seat, I'm always behind the wheel. At least my husband has been driving cars since he was a teenager, it's

such a relief for him to have a wife that refuses to be a passenger. I like it when people think he's the passenger and I'm the car owner. He'd be sitting at the back with Nkuthalo looking like my clown.

I ask one of the nurses to help me with bags. I cannot give Nkuthalo to him and take bags to the car. What if he runs away with my son? I'm not discriminating or anything, but he's depending on medication for sanity.

"Are you excited to go home?" I ask him.

"Yes. I was tired of staying here like a prisoner," he says.

"I understand, I'm so proud of you for making efforts to come out. Do you want us to go to the beach?" No, Thamente!

What if he runs straight to the waves?

Who's going to stop him?

"Never mind, let's go straight home and watch a movie," I say.

He doesn't say anything. I don't think he cares about movies and beach, he just wants to be out of this place.

"If you don't do anything that will scare me off you'll go to your own apartment in two weeks. I'll get you a helper and tennis court at the background. Do you like tennis?" I ask.

"I want a house with bright lights and open passages," he says.

Noted! You got it, Daddy.

Ndlalifa will be home late. I help him settle in his room and start cooking dinner. I'm celebrating today, I cooked a feast. Dad is napping in his room. I think medication makes him drowsy, which is even better, the more time he spends sleeping, the better.

MaNgobese is calling. She knows that her babydaddy is in my house and she's not pleased at all.

"Hello, Ma," I answer.

“Now that you’re living with your father you don’t call me?”

Babymamas are bitter! I haven’t even lived with my father for more than an hour.

“I was going to call you after cooking,” I say.

“What are you cooking?” She wants to judge.

“Samp and beef curry,” I say.

Of course I’m lying through my teeth. I just want her to think I’m a good wife. Why would I cook samp in the middle of the week?

“That’s my girl, feed your husband before Durban loose girls lure him with fast foods,” she says.

I’m rolling my eyes.

I think old age is catching up with her. She talks and complains a lot. She’s on the phone for almost five minutes, giving me lecture after lecture. Funnily, she doesn’t give my sister the same lecture. Zama does anything she wants and gets away with it.

I'm talking about a mother of two who doesn't even work. Oh, she's not even 20.

I set the table and take Nkuthalo with me to the bathroom. I know he doesn't know anything yet, but it's so awkward taking a bath in front of him. He makes things worse by wanting to get in the shower with me. I bath quickly and gets out before he gets ideas of sharing a bath with me. He's very handful, which is why I'm happy with him being lazy to start crawling because I know the headache he's going to give me then. Ndlalifa is home. He's lying in bed with his eyes closed. Long day!

"Love, go take a shower and join us for dinner," I say.

He opens his eyes. I kiss his lips and give Nkuthalo to him.

"Long day?" I ask.

"Yes. Ndabuko and Maqhinga are slacking again. I think they're still trying to make sure the Sibisis are okay," he says.

“Yeah, I can’t imagine what they’re going through. Andiswa needs extra attention,” I say.

“Is your father here?” he asks.

“Yes, he’s lying in his bedroom. He’s happy to be here.”

“Okay, I’ll be down in 10 minutes, leave Nkuthalo.”

I go to my father’s room and find him awake, staring at the ceiling.

“We are about to eat dinner,” I say.

“Where do we eat?”

“Dining room.”

He nods, but doesn’t get up.

“Please, Magadlela, come,” I beg.

“Where do we eat?” he asks.

Again I answer; “Dining room.”

He gets up and follows me. I don’t think this will be easy as I thought, he still needs a lot of attention.

I dish for him and put his food in front of him.

“What are you going to drink?” I ask.

“Sugar water,” he says.

“Are you sure? I can make coffee, juice or milkshake for you.”

“I want sugar water,” he says.

Okay! I go to the kitchen and mix his water with sugar.

Ndlalifa comes down wearing long pants and formal shirt. I want to laugh, the person he’s dressed up for doesn’t even remember him. Sometimes he doesn’t even remember me, his daughter.

He kisses my cheek and sits next to me.

“Sawubona Baba,” he greets and extends his hand for a shake.

Dad just stares at it and then looks at his face.

“This is my husband, Ndlalifa Ngidi,” I say.

He shakes his head dismissively.

“You, don’t kiss my daughter’s cheek,” he says.

Ndlalifa pulls back his hand and sighs.

“He’s my husband, Baba,” I say.

“I don’t want him to kiss your cheeks,” he insists. “Why are you sitting next to her?”

“Baba, he’s my husband,” I say.

“No, move away from my daughter.”

This was a bad idea! MaNgobese told me so.

“Babe, please sit on the other chair, I want a peaceful dinner,” I say.

He’s not happy, but I expect him to understand as the sane one. He picks his plate and moves to the other side.

“How was your day at work?” I’m trying to break the ice.

He shrugs his shoulders and eats his food.

Well, I guess this is going to be a silent dinner. He eats and feeds Nkuthalo some.

Dad has stopped using the spoon, he’s eating with his hand. He makes a lot of noise when he chews and licks his fingers like a cat. I’d be annoyed if he wasn’t my father, but he’s my father, I’m happy to see him eat.

“Babe, you’ll find me in bed,” Ndlalifa says towards the end of dinner.

Dad looks up, “You’re not sleeping in my daughter’s room!”

I look stupid right now.

“No, we don’t sleep together. He has his own room,” I lie.

Ndlalifa looks up and sighs. Surely he can put an act for a moment. He knows my father’s condition.

“Leave the baby,” he instructs.

“Baba, no. The baby has to sleep.”

He turns his eyes to me for assurance.

“He won’t harm the baby,” I assure him.

He nods and focuses on his food.

Ndlalifa gives me a look before leaving with Nkuthalo.

This is a mess!

I make sure he drinks his medication and gets in bed before I make my way to the bedroom. Ndlalifa is on his feet waiting for me.

“I’m sorry about that,” I say.

He sits on bed, “I cannot live like this. I’m sorry, you’ll have to make another plan.

He’s not mentally fit to be around my son.”

“Where am I supposed to take him? You know that I’m the only person he has,” I ask.

“I don’t know Thalente, all I know is that I’m not going to come to a crazy person treating me like I’m the crazy one everyday.”

Wow, he’s so insensitive!

“Don’t call him crazy,” I say.

“Whatever you want to call it, I don’t want to come home to it. I don’t want my son around it. Find him another place, hire a professional person to look after him and keep my son out of his reach.”

“He needs people who love him around,” I say.

“Then go and stay with him. But you’ll leave my son behind. I’m not discussing this any further.” He takes his clothes off and slides under covers.

Right now I don’t have any plan. I don’t want my father to live alone, yet I also don’t want to leave my husband.

I know Ndlalifa would do anything for me,
I was inconveniencing him by bringing
Magadlela here and now things have turned
for the worse.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Andiswa

When the truck starts moving my stuff to Ndondo's house it really sinks in that I have no home. Now I'm about to live at the Mngomezulus, from there I don't know. Bahle is at boarding school, at least he likes Nyandeni, he'll go there during school holidays or visit Ndondo.

I'm not going to have a mother teaching me how to be a mother. Dad couldn't even wait until they both met King. He just didn't care. I hate that man, he left his other daughter R250k for school expenses. I don't care how he made his money, my sister had an influence. He had what he had because of the name- Ndondo.

Maqhingha has been helping me pack. He comes with what I think is the last suitcase. When he sees me standing in the middle of my mother's kitchen he leaves it on the floor and comes to me.

"Are you okay?" he asks.

I exhale, "I can't believe I'll never see them again. If I knew they didn't have much time left I was going to spend the last months with them, instead of crying about their separation. We weren't on good terms, I hate myself for it, especially with mom."

"Please don't beat yourself about it. Deep down in their hearts they knew that you loved them." He embraces me in a tight hug.

I don't let go, I feel safe in his arms.

"Do you want us to stay a little bit?" he asks.

"I want to sleep at your house today," I say.

"Are you allowed to share a bed with a man?" he asks.

"Who said I'll share a bed with you?"

He chuckles and pushes his knee between my legs.

“I’m sorry for being forward. You can come to my house but we’ll have to let Ndondo know first,” he says.

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Ndondo didn’t have a problem with me coming here. I think she’s now the person I report to. Life moves like a wheel.

Maqhinga takes my bag to the bedroom and comes back wearing a short and white vest.

“You love your legs?” I ask.

He looks at them, “They’re my legs, obviously, I love them.”

I crack into laughter. He doesn’t have a good pair of legs, but he loves them and he’s happy.

“You like body-shaming me,” he says.

“What did I say?” I ask laughing.

“I know you want to say something bad.

You’ve never had anything good to say to me,” he says.

“Really? You have nice lips, beautiful eyebrows and a very good smile. I wouldn’t cry if King comes out looking like you.”

“No, don’t say that. I don’t want him to look like me. Are you hungry?” he asks going to the fridge. He’s not insecure with his looks, but he hates them. He’s good-looking, regardless of who he resembles.

“Do you have yogurt?” I ask.

“You want us to play with yogurt?”

“Play with it?” I raise my eyebrow.

“Oh, you’re not sharing a bed with me. I would’ve showed you.”

I clear my throat, “Seven days have passed since the funeral, so I’m good.”

“Really?” His smile brightens up the whole kitchen.

“Yes,” I say.

“Then go to bed, you’re my guest for tonight.”

I like how he sounds when he’s about to ruin my innocence. I leave him in the kitchen and go wait for him in the kitchen like a pregnant chicken.

He finds me waiting naked in bed. He smiles and puts yoghurt, grapes and strawberries on the side-table.

“Do you know what I love about you?” he asks climbing on bed and giving me a lip peck.

“No, I don’t.” I shake my head.

“Because the sexual attraction between you and I cannot be denied. You crave for me as much I crave you. You turn me on when you’re sexually vulnerable, I feel attractive.”

“You’re attractive,” I say wrapping my legs around his waist.

“You just want my dick. During the day you like DJ,” he says.

Urgh, I had forgotten about that one!

“I don’t like DJ,” I say.

“Who do you like?” He brushes his lips on top of my nose.

“The one who gives me the best sex of my life,” I say.

“And who’s that?” he asks.

“I’m only sleeping with one man.”

“Really? Who is the lucky man?”

“The father of my child.”

He chuckles and kisses my lips slowly. I can't believe we've been whispering all this time. The mood is just so sultry and warm.

“Are you sure that you want us to play?”

Yogurt is a bit cold.”

“Where are you going to put it?” I ask

He smiles, “Everywhere.”

“And grapes?” I ask.

“You'll use them on me.”

Huh?!

“How?” I ask

“Babymama, please eat a strawberry and stop asking questions.” He bites the strawberry and pushes it inside my mouth.

“Do you love it?” he asks.

I nod, “Mmm-mmm.”

“Let's try your yogurt. I'll dip your toes only.”

He's already brought it to the room, I can't say no. He removes everything on bed and pours cold yogurt on my toes.

“That's so damn cold,” I cry.

He laughs, "Okay, sorry, let me wipe it off."
He licks my toes, one by one. I've never had anyone suck my toes before. He's sucking, moaning and licking me. I'm such a freak for getting turned on by his moans. They're just innocent moans.

"Can I cover your nipples? I know you're cold, I'll lick them off quickly, I'm hungry," he says.

I laugh, "Get a bowl and eat your yogurt."

"I want it off your skin," he says.

"Why don't we just fuck and sleep? We'll try this another day when it's not cold," I say.

"I wanted you to squirt over my face."

Sounds tempting.

But no, I'm cold. I even want this sex under covers, like an old couple.

"Get in bed, I'm cold," I say.

He picks up the covers and climbs on bed.

He feeds me strawberry and grapes while his knees is pressed over my mound.

"I'm proud of you," he says.

That's so random!

“What did I do?” I ask.

“For being so strong. There’s so much change in you. You’re changing for the better and I love it,” he says.

“Thank you, I’m trying,” I say.

He kisses my lips. He smells sweet like a grape.

“I love you, Andiswa. I mean it.”

I open my mouth to speak but words fail me. I can’t seem to find the right words to express myself.

“Don’t say anything. Just open your legs,” he says.

“Oh, like your whore?” I ask.

He bites my earlobe. I let out a deep moan.

“You’re only a whore for me, right?”

I gasp as his tip knocks at my opening.

“I’m asking a question, babymama. Who else do you whore for?”

“Nobody,” I say.

His shaft fills me up, inch by inch.

“You know that I can kill, right?”

What a question to ask someone during sex!

"I will kill anyone who touches my nunuberry," he says.

"Yours?" I ask.

"Yes, mine." He moves his waist around, in repeated circles, and then digs deeply in my core.

"Ah, baby!" I scream.

"Take it!" He pounds me furiously about five times, hitting the same spot. My legs tremble, I can't take it.

He pulls out and taps his tip over my clit. I feel my sexual fluids flowing down my legs. He pokes my clit with his tip. My whole body is in what feels like a shaky wave of pleasure. I don't know if I'm squirting or just caught up in a series of orgasms.

"Own it, baby!" he says thrusting inside my core again. He's hitting all my right spots. I don't know where my pleasure comes from, I'm being pulled from all directions.

"Let those juices out. I'm going to fuck you to sleep." Everything he says right now is super sexy. I let my body lead me to another explosive orgasm.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Thalente

He's gone from not wanting Ndlalifa to kiss me to wanting him completely out of the house. Yesterday he let himself inside our bedroom early in the morning and found Ndlalifa all over me. All hell broke loose, Ndlalifa didn't want to back down either. Now I'm not sure if he's mentally okay either. I mean, how do you boldly argue with someone who's on medication? I know that I have to make a decision and make it fast. The only option I have is to find an apartment for him as Ndlalifa initially suggested. I can visit him anytime I want.

Ndlalifa walks down dressed up for work. I put his lunch inside his bag and give him a smile since we can't kiss.

He drinks a glass of water and comes to me. He holds my neck and onslaughts me with a passionate kiss.

"Yey! Yey! Yey!" I don't even know where he was hiding. He's getting creepy by the day. Now he hides to stalk Ndlalifa's moves?

Ndlalifa holds me, he doesn't let go even when my father starts screaming at him.

"Come on, babe," I whisper.

He presses his front on me. I swear I'm about to faint on behalf of my father.

"Stop hurting my daughter," he says.

Ndlalifa breaks a chuckle before letting me go. "You have two days to decide, Thalente. I don't want us to fight."

"Okay," I nod.

Fuck, I hate my life!

Why can't I have a normal father? Why does mine have to cry if my husband

touches me? Why does he forget basics things in life, like love?

“Come say goodbye in the car,” he says walking out with his bag.

“Did he hurt you?” Dad asks.

I sigh, “No, he’s my husband.”

“Okay, don’t let him take your car.”

SMH!

I find him in the car making a phone call.

“Are you angry?” I ask him when he finally drops the call.

“Living with family members always causes problems in marriages. His mental state aside, living with parents or any relative is a bad idea. That’s why I’ve never taken you to my father’s house to stay more than two days, because I care about your peace of mind.”

“I’ll get him a place, there’s no need for you to keep talking.” I’m getting pissed.

“I’ll keep talking if your crazy father is still in my house and threatening to throw chairs at me,” he says.

“At least he’s not a murderer like yours.”
His eyes quickly turn to me. He’s breathing fire. I know I’m wrong to include Ngidi in our fights, but that’s my father, excuse me if I love him even when he’s not mental well, I lost 27 years of my life without him.

“But you’re married to a murderer’s son, and you’re living off his legacy?”

Living off? Excuse my Ngidwini English, but this one is making his poe.

“I’m not sorry for being taken care of by my husband. That’s your job, I don’t care where you get the money. And it’s not like I don’t want to work, you found me selling beef plates at the taxi rank. I was okay with my life, I still wouldn’t mind going back to it.”

“That’s not what I meant,” he says with a sigh.

“You said I’m living off your father’s legacy. Like are you kidding me? I live in YOUR house, I drive YOUR cars, I don’t have anything I bought using your father’s money. How am I living off? Your head is full of shit. Don’t ever call my father crazy

again, he has no control over it. I'll see where I send him to."

"He can move in to the old house, we'll hire..."

"There's no "we", now you want to accuse my crazy father of living off your father's legacy? No, thank you. He's my father, I'll make a plan for him," I say.

He sighs, "Thalente..."

I open the door and get out of the legacy car. I get that my father's presence inconveniences him, but calling him crazy makes me angry because he wasn't born this way. He knows what happened, he's the one who found him for me.

Heavy footsteps follow me. It's him, he's furiously coming back to the house. I go to the kitchen and clean the counter. At least Dad is out of sight, I don't need more of their drama.

A few minutes later he's coming out of the bedroom with a bag. I stop dead on my tracks. He's moving out?

“Ndlalifa where are you going?” I ask.
He doesn’t respond. He walks out of the
door with his bag and bangs it.

Oh, Dear Lord!

Can’t this drama end already? Where is he
going? I said I’ll move my father out.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Ndlalifa

He walks straight to his bedroom, passing Phumzile and his father in the living room watching TV.

“What’s wrong with him?” Phumzile asks. Ngidi stands up, “Let me go and find out.” He makes his way to Ndlalifa’s never-used bedroom and finds him lying in bed and staring at the ceiling.

“Can I come in” he asks at the door.

“Yeah,” Ndlalifa sighs and sits up.

Ngidi walks in and stands in front of the wardrobe with his hands tucked inside his pockets.

“What’s wrong?” he asks.

“It’s Thalente, baba,” Ndlalifa says.

“What did she do?” This is the first time Ndlalifa has ever run home from his marriage.

“She doesn’t listen to me. She only hears what she wants to hear,” he says.

“Have you tried to talk to her about it?” Ngidi asks.

“So that she can twist my words? No, thank you. I’ll sleep here if I’m still welcomed.”

“This is your home, you’re welcome anytime. But I really need you to work things out before the weekend, we’re going to Melmoth to meet the Nhlekos. All of us.”

“You’re ready to meet them now?” Ndlalifa asks him with a bit of surprise.

“I’m old, it’s time to leave all the bullshit behind. If Mzobanzi can forgive the Ngidis, I can forgive my grandmother as well. I don’t want to die and leave you in a mess to sort things out when I’m gone,” he says.

“I’ll call MaNgobese, maybe she can speak sense into her daughter because I’m really tired now,” Ndlalifa says taking his phone out.

“What’s the real issue?” Ngidi asks
“Her father is living with us,” he says.
“Oh, I want to come and live with you too.”
Ndlalifa laughs, “Exactly what I’ve been
trying to tell her. Now you want to come as
well, imagine you and that mental unstable
man under one roof.”
“He’s still not well?” Ngidi frowns.
“Yes, he thinks I’m a stranger living in his
daughter’s house. If I kiss her he screams
and wakes the neighbours up.”
“Why did she take him from the mental
institution? That person is not fit to be
around the kid. What if one day he thinks
Nkuthalo is a puppy?”
“Baba, don’t even say that. If he ever
touches my son I’ll forget that he’s my
father-in-law. I feel like Thalente is setting
me up for patience failure. Nobody wants to
live like that, I personally remove anything
that threatens my life and she wants me to
endure her father’s daily threats.”

Ngidi sighs, “Don’t touch her father. That would be the end of your marriage. That man carries your son’s blessings.”

“I know, Hlomuka, that’s why I’m here. I don’t want to do something stupid.”

Thalente

So I called the hospital, that’s the only safe place I could think of, they want to take him in for more tests. I know he’s going to freak out when he sees the ambulance fetching him again. I’m breaking the promise I made to him; he’s been eating well and drinking his medication. The only problem he has is the aggression that’s mostly directed to Ndlalifa. I have to take him back to that place he hates with everything in him. He’s leaving today. Hopefully the owner of the house can come back.

I haven't told him that he's leaving today, I don't know how to do it.

I pack his clothes and medication while he's watching TV in the living room. He keeps laughing, I guess he's enjoying whatever show is playing.

There's a car driving in. I peep through the window with my heart pounding like a drum. It's not the hospital yet. It's Ndlalifa's car. I carry on with what I'm doing.

I don't know if my ears are playing tricks on me, I'm hearing MaNgobese's voice.

I step out of the room and finds her waiting for me. She's with Ndlalifa, so I guess this concerns the common enemy- my dad.

"Hi," I really don't have any energy to fight with anyone today.

"Thalente why are you chasing your husband from his own house?" she asks.

"I didn't chase him away," I say turning my shocked face to him.

"Bringing lunatics to his house is a way of chasing him out of the house."

“He’s leaving today, I’m sorry.”

“Where is he going?” Ndlalifa asks.

“Back to the hospital,” I say and leave them standing there.

My heart is bleeding. I never thought I’d be in this position of deciding for my father’s well-being and having to choose between him and my husband.

He didn’t make things easy for me, but I can’t blame him because he doesn’t know what he’s doing.

A while later the ambulance arrives. I haven’t told my father that he’s going back yet, I can’t bring myself to do it.

Two bulky men come out and approach the house. I guess I’m not going to tell him anything, he’s still watching TV in the living room.

I take his large bag to the ambulance and sign the papers with the driver. I hear his screams, my heart tears up. He doesn’t want to leave.

They come back with him. He's protesting, one is holding his legs and the other his arms.

I find myself saying what he's been saying to Ndlalifa everyday; "Please don't hurt him," I beg them.

They shove him at the back of the ambulance and inject him to calm down. "I'll come and get you soon," I tell him before they close the door. More empty promises!

The ambulance drives out leaving me in tears. I love my father, he doesn't deserve this on top of everything he's gone through.

Oh, I had an audience of two. It was a movie, they were watching. I don't even look at them, I pass them and go straight to my room.

My chest is burning. I want to scream my lungs off, but Nkuthalo is asleep, I can't wake him up.

Footsteps come in. I face the wall and close my eyes. I hear him taking his shoes off and

climbing on bed. I shrug him off but he still pulls me into his arms and wraps them around me.

This is what he wanted, right? Why is he sympathetic now.

"I'm sorry," he says.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Bhekizitha "Ngonyama" Ngidi

If anyone told him that he'd be standing here, next to his grandparents' grave, a few years ago, he would've laughed at their faces. He swore to never set his foot here because these people didn't care about his mother. But Mzobanzi has gone to visit their parents' grave, it's very important for them to restart a relationship between these two families, even when none of the elders are alive.

He came with all the kids, Ndabuko and Nomkhosi included. They may not be his by blood, but in his heart they're his children so he wants them to know his roots as well. It's not clear whether Thalente and Ndlalifa worked their issues out or not, but they've

been civil towards one another throughout this trip.

Ngidi gets time with Ndlalifa and pulls him aside.

“Did you talk things through with MaMbatha?” he asks.

“She’s still hurting over her father going back to the mental institution. I’m just giving her time to be ready to talk.”

“Talk to her today. I want everyone to get along, especially you and her, because you’re the eldest. I want you to set a good example to your brother.”

Ndlalifa nods with a sigh.

“I’ll talk to her,” he says and takes a step forward. A tap on the shoulder stops him. He turns back to his father smiling.

“I’m proud of you,” Ngidi says.

“Come on, Baba.” He’s been waiting for him to say these words for a year, but now that he’s hearing them he doesn’t know how to react.

“You had your phase, but now you’re grown. You’re a leader. I couldn’t have

asked for a better son. I know your mother is proud of you as well.”

No, don't cry, Ndlalifa!

“Thank you, Hlomuka,” he says.

They head back to their cars. He owes Thalente an apology. Not that he regrets expressing his discomfort, he just wants them to be okay.

“Bab'Mzo says there's a store somewhere over that hill,” he says breaking the ice.

Thalente clears her throat and stares outside the window. She's still angry.

“Do you feel like I let you down?” he asks holding her hand.

“Drive, Ndlalifa,” she says.

He chuckles, “Why are you not driving today? I thought I was your official passenger.”

“I'll drive once I afford my own car,” she says.

She's still holding on to that!

“I didn't even mean it that way. We're married in community of property.

Everything that's mine is yours and everything that's yours is mine. I apologize if you felt financially ashamed, that was not my intention. I was just trying to say my father didn't just become a murderer, he was trying to create a legacy for us. I know you're a hard-worker and I don't mind providing for you, not even once have I ever felt some type of way. I know my responsibilities as a man."

She sighs and turns to look at him.

"I'm sorry I said that. I didn't mean to, I just spoke out of turn to hurt your feelings because you kept talking bad about my father. I was childish, I apologize," she says.

"Can I come back to the bedroom? I miss you," he asks.

Thalente smiles, "I never chased you out of the bedroom, or the house."

"You know that I'm scared of you. You're the only person that makes me apologize for the sins I haven't even committed."

She laughs, "Don't lie. You never apologize for anything."

“Test me,” he says.

“How?” She frowns slightly.

“By greeting Hlomuka.”

“Ndlalifa we’re coming from the cemetery!”

“So what?”

“Drive, bru!”

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Phumzile stayed behind with MaZungu, Nhleko’s wife, to help around the kitchen. When they see the cars coming back from the cemetery, they starts setting the table for dinner.

“I still can’t believe what I’m seeing,” MaZungu says. “Baba has such a big family. When I came here it was just him and his first son that he got from a previous marriage.”

“And you gave him more children?”

Phumzile asks with a smile. It’s almost unbelievable that together they have seven children. They have a whole primary school in their yard.

“He doesn’t rest, every night he wants to run the race,” MaZungu says.

Both of them crack into laughter.

“Even at this age?” Phumzile asks.

“I know when he’s home that I won’t sleep at night. Sometimes I wake up with a snake inside me,” she says.

Laughter again!

“I know that he has other women there in Durban, but as long as he respects me enough not to show me, I’m good.”

“For your own peace of mind, sisi. I had my fair share with Ngidi’s housekeeper at the early stages of our relationship. But we’re good now, he sleeps home every night and makes sure I’m well taken care of.”

“He looks aggressive like his brother,” MaZungu says.

Phumzile laughs, “He has his days. Some days he’s gentle and some others I don’t know if I’m sleeping with a beast or a lion.”

“The sun is setting down, I must eat my sweets and be ready.”

“What sweets?” Phumzile frowns.

“For the cake to stay intact. Why do you think he wants it every night?”

“MaZungu, you don’t fear cancer? Who approved those sweets.”

She waves her hand, “I forget that you’re from suburbs. Every woman around here eat these things, you should try it for Ngidi tonight.”

She takes it out of her bag and gives it to Phumzile. It has a red wrapping with Chinese names on it.

“You trust this thing?” Phumzile asks.

“I’ll hear from you in the morning. ‘Hawe Ma’ works like magic,” she says.

“That’s the name of it?” Phumzile laughs. This village is about to pollute her!

She ate the thing, but now she’s scared that it might not work or even cause her problems.

Why did she listen to MaZungu again?

Ngidi looks at her, “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” she says.

“Then get in bed. We had a long day.”

Well, there's no other way.

He pulls her to his chest, rubbing their skin as he hugs her.

"You're so warm," he says.

"I was indoors the whole day, that's why."

"Yes that and the fact that you're naturally very warm. I can't imagine spending my night with anyone other than you."

She smiles and drops her eyes.

He loves making her blush!

"Is Hlomuka getting anything today?" He smiles and kisses her lips. "Or you're tired?" he asks.

Tired how? She swallowed a Chinese sweet for this night.

"You're smiling. Is that a yes?" he asks lowering his hand to her waist. He feels the panty and lifts his eyes to her.

"What's the occasion?" he asks.

"I'm not home, Ngidi, I had to wear one."

"I don't like them, you know that. So Pum-pum was squeezed by panty all day?"

"Come on, what if I fell in front of your brother and my legs went up?"

“His wife has the same thing between her legs, it would’ve been no big deal.”

She laughs, shaking her head.

He pulls the panty out of her legs.

“How would you have fallen?” he asks.

Phumzile frowns, “What do you mean?”

“Show me how you would’ve fallen with your legs up in front of my brother.”

“Bheki, you like playing games!”

“With my wife, not just anyone.” He plants a kiss over her mound and pulls her up.

She really has to imitate falling now?

Marry a freak!

She lies on the floor and lifts her legs up.

“Like this,” she says.

He kneels between her lifted legs with his hard manhood in his hand.

“You opened it so nicely,” he says kissing her clit and licking her skin all the way up to her lips.

“Let me get it in before you get tired of holding your legs like this.” He fingers her opening a few times, then pushes his tip in.

“Mmmm!” he moans before he’s even fully inside her. “What did you eat, Phumzile?”
Chest dries up! He knows?
He closes his eyes and groans like a bull.
“What did you eat, Mkami?” he asks thrusting into every corner of her core.
“A Chinese sweet, Hlomuka,” she says.
He opens his eyes and looks at her. Pleasure is bursting his body and pulling him to all directions, but what did he just hear?
“Huh?” He starts moving again. Her cookie is too warm for him to stand still.
“MaZungu asked me to try it. I’ll never eat it again, I promise,” she says.
“What are you talking about? I’m asking about Pum-pum, what did you do to make her so warm today? I’m going to explode in a minute if I don’t pull out.”
Oh, he doesn’t know? Only if she could slap herself for stupidity.
“Nothing, Hlomuka makes her warm,” she says.

Ngidi smiles and kisses her. His eyes are sinking in, he's sweating bullets, today he might get killed by Pum-pum.

"MaNsele, thank you for everything." He's fighting to stay in the game, but there's a power of pussy, it's bigger than him.

He cries for his mother and drops his head on her chest.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Bhekizitha "Ngonyama" Ngidi

Everything went well, even though he had to leave everyone behind to see Ntombela, an old friend who's in town. Phumzile gets along very well with Nhleko's wife, they're always laughing, so he decided to leave them to catch up. Maqhinga will give her a lift back.

He hasn't seen Ntombela in over twenty years. They used to be close, even though they weren't what you'd call a best friend because of the type of industry they were in. He settled in Johannesburg with two of his taxis that operate around Soweto.

He sends him directions to his house and takes a shower while waiting.

It doesn't take long for Ntombela to find the house.

"Ngonyama yeRenke," he says laughing as Ngidi makes his way towards him.

"Ntombela, what's this thing you're driving? I thought you're being driven by your wife."

He laughs, "It's her car, I stole it."

"Don't tell me you haven't grown from that 30 year old, troublesome boy."

"This band should tell you something." He shows Ngidi his wedding finger.

"Congratulations, ndoda yamadoda!" They bump fists and shake hands.

"Come inside, I left the wife in Melmoth, we'll figure out what to eat on our own."

"The boys' mother came back?" Ntombela asks.

"No, she passed on. I married someone else," Ngidi says.

"That's better, I'm happy for you. Indeed your house looks warm, it shows that there's a woman around."

They set a braai-stand outside and grill wors and redmeat. Unfortunately, nobody is here to cook pap, so they'll have their meat with bread and beers.

"You've worked really hard. You're now living like a white man," Ntombela says looking at the exterior design of his house.

"No, I'm living like a black man," Ngidi says laughing.

"Which black man swims in a pool? We swim in a river full of crocodiles," Nhleko says.

"We worked hard to escape that life, Ntombela. Black lives matter, don't you know that?"

Ntombela shakes his head, "No, you're too white now."

They talk and laugh for hours as they catch up with cold beers and meat in front of them.

Ngidi keeps checking his wrist-watch for time. Maqhingha should be home with Phumzile anytime, he wants them to meet

Ntombela before he leaves for
Johannesburg.

A gun goes off somewhere in the backyard.
Ntombela jumps and runs inside the house.
It goes off again, Ngidi pulls out his and
cocks it. He sees a figure running towards
the back of the garage and fires a shot.
There's more of them, he fires tirelessly
even when he feels a bullet going through
his stomach. He only falls down when he
runs out of bullets.

Two bullets go through his chest as he lies
on the floor, with no bullet left in his gun.
Out of four men, there's only one left. He
wasn't going to die alone. Not him. Not
Ngonyama Ngidi!
"Msunu wakho!" he curses before taking his
last breath!

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Maqhinga

He's been trying to call his father to let him know that he got stuck in traffic, but his phone rings unanswered.

He's not panicking, he's just surprised by his father's lack of concern. Now that he's linked up with his old friends he doesn't pick his calls. He's driving with his wife for crying out loud!

"What if I needed money for petrol?" he asks in the car.

"Oh, because you're driving me?" Phumzile asks in disbelief.

"Ma, you're like what, 200kg? I need a full tank from your husband."

Phumzile laughs, "200kg? Not even your pregnant girlfriend weighs that much."

“Andiswa is light like a feather, I don’t struggle at all,” he says.

“Struggle with what?” Phumzile asks.

“With petrol,” he says and laughs.

Phumzile shakes her head in despair.

Arriving in Ngidi’s house Maqhinga notices that something is not right.

“Please stay in the car,” he says and reaches for something behind his seat. It’s a gun, Phumzile’s eyes widen.

“What’s going on?” she asks in panic.

“Ma, stay in the car,” Maqhinga instructs and closes the door.

He runs to the house with the gun in his hand. He yells for his father; windows have holes in them, the house looks like a war zone.

Then he opens the balcony door and sees his father lying in a pool of blood.

“Baba. No, no, no!” He kneels next to him and looks at his wide opened eyes.

“Baba, you left me?” he asks tears flooding his face.

Phumzile hears him crying all the way from the driveway and jumps out of the car with her heart pounding hard against her chest. “What happened to Hlomuka?” She lets out a shrill cry when she sees his body lying in a pool of blood.

Maqhingga finally calms down and kneels next to him and closes his eyes.

Neighbors had already called the police after hearing gunshots. They arrive shortly after Phumzile and Maqhingga.

He has to call Ndlalifa and tell him. Then there’s Snalo, the hardest one to tell. The police have checked the yard and found three more dead bodies. It was an attack and Ntombela has a lot to answer. If he thought ending Ngidi was ending his life, he was terribly wrong, because he’ll continue living through his children. Nobody spills a Ngidi blood and lives to tell the tale.

Thalente

We just got in the house. I'm boiling water for Nkuthalo's milk. Ndlalifa comes out of the bedroom running. He has a phone against his ear and a gun in his hand. I hope it's not another taxi war.

"Lock the doors!" he tells me.

"Babe, is everything okay? You're scaring me," I ask.

"They killed my father. Izinja zibulale ubaba!" he says.

I need a moment, but he doesn't have it. He leaves through the door. A minute later I hear his car speeding off.

I find my phone and call Ndondo. I don't know if he said people killed his father or that they killed the dog.

"Ndondo, what's happening?" I ask.

Soft sobs! Oh, no.

“Ndondo?” Now I’m shaking.

“Ngidi is dead.”

“Whaaat?!”

“He’s been killed. Ndabuko is losing his mind, he just left with a gun, I don’t know what they’re going to do.”

“Ndalifa has left too. You think they’re going to a war?” I ask.

“Thalente, Ngonyama is dead. It’s a war, everything is about to stand still until everyone who was involved is caught.”

“Are we safe?” I ask.

“No, we are anything, but not safe. That’s why we are locked inside the houses.”

Shwele ngrozi! I drop the call and strap my son on my back with a towel.

Who in their right mind would kill the Lord of the taxi rank? Now we’re all in danger. Imagine dying for taxis while you’ve never owned one.

I miss home! I miss being a Mbatha with their wheelbarrows. I was never scared for my life.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Andiswa

Ndondo has been crying for hours. Both for Ngidi and Ndabuko being gone. I didn't think he had it in him. Today I saw a different side of Ndabuko.

It's at times like these where I wish I had a mother. I'm scared of bothering Ndondo while she's going through a lot. I feel like a burden on her shoulders. I can't reach out to Maqhingana, not when he just lost his father. I only have one person I can call, she's miles away from me.

"Andiswa, are you okay, my child?" she asks picking up my call.

"Mam' Jabu..." I start crying.

"Talk to me baby, what's wrong?"

“My waist hurts,” I say.

“How far are you?” she asks.

“Eight months,” I say.

“Is Ndondo not there? She needs to rush you to the hospital now.”

“She can’t. Ngidi just passed on. Everyone is a mess,” I say.

“But you have to get to the hospital. What if something is wrong with the baby?”

“I’ll try to call the driver and ask him to drive me,” I say.

“Please stay in touch. Now I can’t even eat this food, it’s tasteless. Give me a glass of water there.” Oh, she’s now off the phone. I drop it and get King’s bag from the closet. I pack my toiletries and gown and call Steven.

I arrive at the hospital and get admitted to the maternity ward. The nurse puts a belt around me, it’s connected to a tocodynamometer. It records the frequency and length of my contractions. Indeed, I’m

in labor, now I'm worried because I'm almost three weeks early.

"Is my baby going to die?" I ask the nurse.

"No, premature delivery is common. Your baby seems fine, everything is in order."

"So when am I giving birth?" I ask.

She laughs.

What's funny now?

"Unlike when you made him, you don't get to decide when he should come out."

Oh, what a nice way to put it!

I lie in bed, wondering if Ndondo has realized that I'm not in the house. If my mother was still alive I'm sure she would've been here, making sure that everything goes well.

Contractions start again, just when I'm about to fall asleep. Now they're more frequent and intense. I call the nurse, she inserts her fat fingers inside my vagina and yells for others to come.

They wheel me to the other room- delivery room. Now I'm in immense pain, I cannot

hold back tears. Nobody told me it was painful like this. I wish someone can chop off my body from waist.

“The head is here, push,” the nurse says. I feel something hard between my legs and push. Now I’m not thinking about my vagina cracking, all I want is this person to come out of me.

“1...2...3....Push!”

I close my eyes and push with the last drop of energy that I have.

There’s a weak cry. I see a tiny thing that looks like a cat being placed on my chest.

“This is King?” I ask.

“Yes, look how handsome he looks.”

Handsome? I turn his sticky head and look at him. He’s a human, he’s got eyes and everything. But he’s so tiny!

I can’t believe he chose to be born on the day his grandfather died. How is Maqhinga supposed to celebrate his birthday?

“We have to take him for a few tests. Can you recognize him in a crowd?”

I laugh, “No.”

“Okay, I’ll give you another minute.”

I look at him carefully. I can’t believe I’m a mom, this human will depend on me for everything. This is like a lifetime commitment, I cannot back down, never. This is my son and I’d die for him.

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King is five hours old. I wake up and take a shower before calling Ndondo.

“Andiswa, I’ve been trying to call you all night. Why are you doing this? Is it because you know I can’t do anything to you?”

“I have given birth. He’s a bit underweight, but other than that, he’s perfectly fine.

Congratulations aunty,” I say.

Silence.

I know she thinks this one of my crazy episodes. I drop and video-call her.

“Andiswa, what the hell?” she asks when she sees me on the hospital sheet.

I turn the screen to King. She gasps in shock.

“Why didn’t you say anything? I thought you sneaked out to party or something.” She’s crying. I don’t know why the hell am I crying as well. I’ve been through a lot during this pregnancy, I can’t believe I made it to eight months.

“You were alone?” she asks.

I nod, “Yes.”

“You’re so brave. I can’t wait to meet him. What must I bring?”

“Just pads and food,” I say.

“Oh my goodness, I’m so happy, King baby!”

“Yeah, he’s here.”

It feels like a dream. Like someone is going to wake me up and say It’s a doll.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Nalalifa

He wasn't going to hire anyone. He was going to get Ntombela himself and he got him. They're sitting on the table with his wife and two girls. Dinner is about to be served and someone still looks like he's just seen a ghost.

"I remember you, I think I was still in my lower grades, you used to come to the house and hang out with my father," he says breaking the silence.

Ntombela clears his throat with a fake grin on his face. He knew that Ngidi had a son, but he was rebellious when he left KZN, he didn't think he'd be this grown and cold-hearted. Killing Ngidi wasn't part of the plan, he just wanted a few thousand rands to restart his taxi business, Ngidi wasn't

supposed to shoot his boys. They got scared and killed him. He was already inside the house, they were going to find the safe and break it open and leave like nothing happened.

“Yeah, those were the days,” he says after clearing his throat, unnecessarily long.

“I remember I was still innocent back then, I wouldn’t kill a father in front of his wife and kids. Good, old days!” Ndlalifa says playing with his food.

Ntombela’s wife’s eyes widen.

“You have killed a father in front of his kids?” she asks.

He looks at Ntombela, “Have I?”

“No, you haven’t,” Ntombela says.

He grins and looks at the wife.

“You heard him. He’s saying I haven’t.” He looks at Ntombela, “But there’s always a first time for everything, you know that?”

“Son, I didn’t kill your father,” he says.

Ndlalifa chuckles, “I never said you did. Eat your rice and fish.”

There’s a moment of silence.

Nobody is eating except for the kids. If it wasn't for them he would've spilt Ntombela's brains the moment he walked through the door. But he's a father, he has a soft spot for kids, so he'll do it away.

"So the police were able to get the fourth guy of five men who killed my father."

"They were five? I only saw one," Ntombela says with fake shock.

"Don't interrupt me when I'm telling you a story, Mahlobo." His face changes, but when the wife looks at him he smiles.

"I was saying they arrested the fourth guy. So because I'm rich in a way, I paid the police and got access to his cell. It was good seeing him, he sang like a canary."

"Oh, what did he say? Who killed my friend?" Ntombela asks.

"The recording is in my car boot."

Ntombela gasps and nearly spills fish and rice on himself.

"Let's go. Say something to your wife, you don't want her to be caught in the crossfire."

Ntombela clears his throat and looks at his wife. He regrets it, God knows he does.

“My love, please take take care of the children, don’t be friends with the police.”

Ndlalifa raises his eyebrow.

“And don’t say anything about seeing him here. I love you,” he says.

“Cute!” Ndlalifa says.

They head out to his car. There’s no recording, he didn’t discuss anything with the fourth guy, he crushed a bottle in front of him and mixed it with his food then forced him to eat it. He left him in the hands of the police who were working the night shift. In the morning he was announced dead. It was a long, painful death. He didn’t just drop on the floor and die. He froze on the cold floor, cried the whole night and finally visited his forefathers when Ndabuko fed him a bullet for breakfast.

“How much did you want?” Ndlalifa asks him in the car.

“R50k,” he says shakily.

“Is it worth my siblings not having a father? My aunt not having a husband? Our kids not having a grandfather? And mostly, is R50k worth you leaving those two girls and your wife?”

“No,” he shakes his head.

“You know I could’ve canceled one dinner with my wife for you to have that R50k?”

Silence.

“Fasten your seatbelt,” Ndlalifa instructs.

He does as told. The car drives off. He knows his chances of living are slim, but he doesn’t want to put his kids through that trauma.

A black SUV with tinted windows joins them on the freeway. He’s already wet his pants. His intention wasn’t to kill their father, he was just financially frustrated and Ngidi was his way out.

Ndlalifa shoots both his legs and breaks his fingers with a hammer before pouring petrol over the car and setting it on fire. His screams are deafening, but in their ears they're like sweet melodies. As his body start bursting like balloons, Maqhinga starts the car and they head back to KZN. There's a lot waiting for them at home, so much backlash. They should be mourning, instead of going around killing people.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Thalente

Now I don't know what else to say. I don't know where my husband is. I really don't. Their phones have been off since the day they left their houses with guns. Nhleko is here, doing everything necessary while Ndlalifa is MIA.

"Thalente, please try calling again," Mam' Phumzile says.

Sigh! I dial his number. I'm waiting for the voice to tell me that I've reached the voicemail of 07...but it rings.

This man is making me look like a liar now.

"Hey babe," he answers.

I haven't heard his voice in three days.

"Ndlalifa, where are you? Everyone is asking about you guys. We should've left

yesterday to prepare for the funeral at home but you're all not here."

"I'm pulling up outside," he says.

I'm relieved. Now everyone can direct questions to him.

"He's here," I announce.

"Did he say where Ndabuko is?" Ndondo asks.

"I didn't ask. I'm sure they're all here."

I was right, all three of them are here. I don't know if they bathed or ate wherever they've been. One look at my husband and I want to run him a bath and give him food. Ndondo goes straight to Ndabuko's arms. Snalo is wrapped in Maqhingá's. I'm not romantic like that, not in front of so many eyes, I pull his hand to the bedroom.

I close the door behind and throw my arms around him. He's heavy, spiritually.

"How are you?" I ask.

"I don't know," he says.

I nod, "I'll run you a bath and get you something to eat before you go to everyone."

"Thank you," he sighs and sits on bed.

I rush to the bathroom and run a bath for him. I know they're coming from a war zone. I just hope he's not bringing any bad spirits around my son.

"How is Ma?" he asks when I come out of the bathroom.

"She's a mess," I say.

He nods with a heavy sigh.

"Did you find them?" I ask.

He stares at me, plainly.

"Did you find the killers?" I ask.

"Yes, we got them."

Got means killed.

"Do I have to worry about you going to jail?" I ask.

"No. We always cover our tracks."

Good, because I don't want to sneak cigarettes and brown bread into jail.

Andiswa

I was discharged from the hospital, but I had no one to go home to because Ndondo has to be at the Ngidis. We both agreed that it was better that I go to Nyandeni so that Mam' Jabu can be able to help me through early stages of motherhood. I'll be back after the funeral, Ndondo will take some time off work to help me.

Maqhingga still doesn't know anything about King's early birth. His phone has been off since the day he found his father murdered on the balcony of his house.

I haven't gone this long without talking to him. I thought we'd celebrate King's birth together. He promised to hold my hand throughout delivery. I know he'll be hurt to know that his son was born without him.

I just pray that nothing happened to them, wherever they are.

I receive a call from a number I don't recognize. I hope it's not Prof. I missed my exam and I know that he's not happy. King just woke up. I'm trying to shut him up so that I can speak with the phone.

"Ummm....hello," I answer.

"Andiswa," It's him.

I almost scream.

"Maqhinga." I'm beyond shocked and excited.

"Who's crying?" he asks.

"It's King," I say.

"Andiswa, I'm serious."

"Drop and make a video call."

This is the only way to make people believe that King has been born.

He video-calls, I turn the screen to King.

He breaks into tears.

"When?" he asks.

"The same day that you lost your father."

I stare at the car seat, he's dropped his head,
all I hear is sobs.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

“Happy Birthday King Bayanda Ngidi”

If anyone had told him last year that on this day he'd be running around the backyard with a scorpion-painted face celebrating his son's first birthday, he would've probably spat on their face. He only met King for the first time when he turned three months old. He was the closest to his father, his death hit him harder than anyone. They nearly lost him to alcohol, after the funeral he disappeared the whole week with no trace. Even when everyone wanted to give up on him, Andiswa held him down the same way he did for her.

Their friendship, or whatever they called it at that time, got shaken. She had to grow up fast. Her baby momish days were over,

Nomagugu was gone, she couldn't nag anyone about anything, especially not Ndondo.

She leaves to join ladies in the kitchen. Most kids are outside, except for the Nazareth princess of course, she's snuggled on her mother's hip and sucking her juice bottle. It looks like she walked into the middle of something. Everyone is staring at Nomkhosi like she owes them an explanation.

"Phelo is not even two," Ndondo says.

Nobody looks pleased.

"I swear I was on the pill," Nomkhosi says.

"That's not the point, why did you sleep with him?" Snalo.

"I know you guys haven't accepted it, but I'm getting married to this man, he's not a stranger," she says.

Oh, it's about Phelo's father. No matter what they say or do, Nomkhosi is not getting rid of him.

"You're pregnant again?" Andiswa asks.

"Don't say again as if I'm always pregnant." Twice in less than two years, that's 'always.'

Eyes turn to Andiswa. She's no longer a child, her son is turning one today.

"So you and my twin?" Snalo asks.

"We are good. I grew up, he seems happy with the new Andiswa."

"I saw a snap of the dinner you cooked for him," Khosi says.

"I used Google but it came out perfect. I'm finally the ideal babymama."

They laugh. She's really grown up. There's been some talks of besfriendship bracelet being upgraded to a ring, but that's still being discussed at the taxi ranks in the wee hours of morning.

"So nobody is going to talk about weird noises we heard coming from the guest bedroom earlier?" Thalente asks.

Everyone laughs, but not loud as they usual do.

"How old are they?" Snalo asks.

"Sex has no age limit. Leave MaZungu alone. Yoh, but she cries weirdly, I thought someone had locked a hungry cat in the room," Ndondo says.

They burst into laughter again.

Maqhinga appears and pulls Andiswa aside.

“Don’t gossip about me,” he says.

They break into laughter behind his back.

Nothing annoys like a group of girls in the kitchen.

He sits on the chair and pulls her between his knees.

“So, I’ve been thinking here,” he says.

Andiswa stares at him. She’s changed a lot, for the better. It took her realizing that nobody was responsible for her other than herself.

He smiles nervously.

“We’ve been snacking on each other and saying we’re best friends for far too long now. I think this relationship needs a new title,” he says.

“What do you have in mind?” she asks.

“Wifey; hubby,” he says.

She laughs, “You’re jumping the gun.”

“I’ve been ready since King was snuggled in your womb. I was just waiting for you to stop being baby momish.”

“Okay,” she says.

“You agree?”

“Yes,” she says.

He stands up and hugs her.

“I’m going to buy you the most expensive ring,” he says.

“You proposed before you bought a ring?”

He laughs and nods. Why did she think her life was ever going to be normal?

The End...

From the author:

Once again, thank you for renting a room in my world of fiction. I tried to make the font bearable for everyone.

Discussions of the book may take place in the fan group; Stories By Nelly Page.

For more of Nelly Page's stories visit Visionary Writing.

For published books check Exclusive Books, CNA, Adams Booksellers and Bargain Books.

**Warm Regards
Nelly, aka, Mastende.**